

Public Dome Talks on Care and Community in Austria

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Abstract

In cooperation with the European Public Sphere initiative by the IG-EuroVision, the Open Innovation in Science (OIS) Center of the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft organized public Dome Talks as part of the Care Tour. Under the roof of the European Public Sphere Dome, a mobile geodesic cupola, various challenges relating to community health and care were discussed in public conversations. The Care Tour took place at five locations in Austria between June and September 2023. Each stop was hosted by one of the five projects of the OIS Impact Lab “Caring Communities for Future”, a transdisciplinary research hub that promotes participatory projects at the intersection of health promotion, urban and regional development, and social sciences.

The aim of the Dome Talks was to better understand the needs of different caring communities by creating opportunities for participation as well as dialogue and interaction between civil society initiatives, municipal administrations, health care services, and research. The open nature of the Dome Talks proved to be an ideal format for exchange between different actors in society. The Dome Talks brought up various ideas for caring communities and highlighted inherent needs, including improving the precarious working conditions of migrant care workers, creating opportunities for family caregivers to connect with each other, experimenting with creative participatory methods, and adapting rural and urban public spaces for citizens and people with disabilities. In the long run, encouraging the dialogue between community members may indirectly foster sustainable caring communities that contribute to improving the wellbeing and health of citizens.

Keywords

public debate, urban space, participatory science, health promotion, social care, caring communities.

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it. (Arundhati Roy, 2020, last paragraph).

1. Introduction

The gradual aging of the population as well as current socio-economic developments are leading to an increasing demand for quality health care and nursing, which poses complex challenges for society and particularly the health care system. In times of the care crisis (Dowling, 2021), creative solutions are needed to meet the complex challenges of community health and care in both urban and rural places. In cooperation with the European Public Sphere initiative¹

1 - The European Public Sphere initiative was launched in 2017 by the Vienna-based association IG-EuroVision (see below) in collaboration with the German association Democracy International e.V. (<https://democracy-international.org>): <https://www.publicsphere.eu/?lang=en>

by the IG-EuroVision², the Open Innovation in Science (OIS) Center³ of the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft organised a series of Dome Talks in public space. The European Public Sphere initiative organises Dome Talks in public space all over Europe with citizens, representatives of organisations, administrations, and decision-makers to contribute to the development of a stronger European public sphere and to bring socially relevant issues to public spaces and the streets. Under the roof of the European Public Sphere dome, a geodesic and mobile cupola, various challenges relating to community health and care were addressed in public conversations as part of the Care Tour 2023 at five locations in Austria. Each of the five participatory research projects of the OIS Impact Lab “Caring Communities for Future”⁴, a transdisciplinary research hub that promotes and facilitates participatory research at the intersection of health promotion, urban and regional development, and the social sciences, hosted one stop of the Care Tour.

This article provides insight into a series of conversations and open debates about different topics relating to care, health, and caring communities that involved people from different caring communities’ projects sharing their ideas. The various topics that were discussed and the format of the Dome Talks that took place in public space as part of the Care Tour will be considered in terms of their relevance for the transformation of society in the field of care, in urban as well as rural contexts. We assume that the current environmental crisis and related social and technological challenges will once again fundamentally change our lives and livelihoods. We have strong reasons to believe that the world will be different in many respects after the current passage through the environmental crisis and other social transformations - for the better or for the worse. The topic of care and community, and its collective negotiation can contribute to a socially sustainable transformation of society. With the Dome Talks, we propose that public, open

debates in which everyone in the community can participate can help to understand the needs for building resilient and sustainable caring communities from different perspectives and to embrace societal change.

1.1. Open Innovation in Science Impact Lab: Caring Communities for Future

The Open Innovation in Science (OIS) Impact Lab “Caring Communities for Future” aims to meet the challenges in the field of care by supporting innovative transdisciplinary approaches and ideas for addressing community health needs. The OIS Impact Lab provides funding and room for improving the collaboration between science, civil society initiatives, municipal administrations, and professional healthcare services integral for the promotion of well-being and health in a community.

The OIS Impact Lab “Caring Communities for Future”, a strategic partnership between the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft (LBG) and the Austrian National Public Health Institute (GÖG), was founded in 2022 and was established as a laboratory to apply Open Innovation in Science (Beck et al., 2020) in the field of health and community care. The OIS Impact Lab funds five transdisciplinary research projects addressing complex societal challenges - such as demographic change - at the interface of health promotion, urban and regional development, and social and care sciences. The project participants and project partners meet regularly to reflect and exchange ideas on successful approaches and obstacles for developing and implementing sustainable Caring Communities in our society by involving different actors from research, civil society, and practice. Moreover, the OIS Impact Lab provides opportunities for training project members in the fields of transdisciplinary research, participatory methods, and collaborative practices with stakeholders from society, science, and practice. The cooperation of the LBG OIS Center with the Austrian

2 - The IG-EuroVision was founded in 1999 as a civil initiative to promote European integration through new ideas and projects on democracy. In addition to the European Public Sphere dome initiative, IG-EuroVision conducts several projects to strengthen democracy or rethink approaches related to money and the economy: <https://www.ig-eurovision.eu>

3 - The Open Innovation in Science Center of the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft (LBG OIS Center) was founded in 2016 with funding from the Austrian National Foundation for Research, Technology and Development as a research and competence centre for open and collaborative science practices: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/>

4 - Website Caring Communities for Future OIS Impact Lab: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/foerderungen/caring-communities-for-future/>

National Public Health Institute within the framework of the OIS Impact Lab aims to support knowledge transfer between research projects and innovative municipal practice projects.

1.2. Public Dome Talks at the Care Tour 2023

As part of the OIS Impact Lab Caring Communities for Future, we organized the Care Tour with five public Dome Talks taking place from June to September 2023 in Vienna, Linz, Sankt Barbara/Wartberg im Mürztal, Litschau, and Graz⁵. The Dome Talks addressed various challenges in the field of health, care, and caring communities but focused on specific topics related to the thematic frameworks of the five OIS Impact Lab projects including precarious working conditions of migrant care workers, opportunities for family caregivers to share and connect with each other, experimenting with creative participatory methods, and adapting rural and urban public spaces for citizens and people with disabilities. At the heart of these talks were participants' personal stories related to transdisciplinary research and lived experiences.

During the Dome Talks citizens, different community groups, and researchers sat beneath the dome and engaged in an open, public dialogue. The debates were moderated by Gerhard Schuster from IG-EuroVision, Laura Soyer, the coordinator of the Caring Communities for Future OIS Impact Lab, and each hosting partner organisation. The Dome Talks started with opening questions from the moderator and hosting projects partners and lasted for about 1,5 - 2 hours. The moderation was open and dynamic and left room for different directions of argumentation. Thus, there was no script or envisioned outcome of the Dome Talks. The situation, participants, and interaction dynamics shaped the thematic direction of the conversation.

Part of the Dome Talk concept is to collaboratively set up and take down the dome with the respective partner organisations (see Figures 1-5). Together, a temporary and ephemeral space within a space is constructed that conquers public space and creates an inspiring framework for dialogue and exchange. The geodesic wooden dome provides a clearly defined yet open and transparent setting. The structure

of the dome creates the imaginary of a democratic and pluralistic society with the roof resting on many branches and the statics relying on the interaction and connection of all elements.

1.3 Talking about Care: Toward a Common Understanding of Caring Communities and the Role of Public Spaces

Across the world, there are efforts to develop new social spaces, supportive neighbourhoods, community-oriented models of care and support networks that foster health and social cohesion amidst the increasingly precarious situation of our planet⁶. Moreover, social support and supportive social relationships have been associated with well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and lower all-cause mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

Caring communities promote social participation, and help cities and municipalities meet the increasing demands for care (Kellehear, 2005; Wegleitner et al., 2016). Moreover, they create socially supportive environments that contribute to mental health and wellbeing. It is an emerging concept especially in German-speaking countries including Austria, Switzerland, and Germany that focuses on (mental) health promotion and community empowerment. At the heart of debates surrounding the idea of caring communities lies the idea that we need better cooperation and integration within neighbourhoods as well as between civil society initiatives, municipal administrations, and the health and care system (Wegleitner and Schuchter, 2018). In fact, we need to foster and strengthen links between formal and informal care, supporting community nursing, social prescribing, and community-oriented approaches, both in urban as well as rural areas. Doing so will require us to stop off-loading the cost of care onto the shoulders of underpaid workers and unpaid areas of society and to understand how logics and rules of commodification and marketisation shape our way of life and our communities (Dowling 2021).

There is well-established evidence on social participation and inclusion and their impact on health and improving health status and vice versa (Klein et al. 2021). For example,

5 - For more information about the Care Tour, see: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/news/best-of-care-tour-2023-oeffentliche-gespraech-zu-pflege-und-gemeinschaft/>.

6 - Healthy streets concept: <https://www.healthystreets.com/>

patients with chronic illness experiencing pain are less likely to socially participate, which in turn has negative effects on their health and well-being, therefore increasing health disparities and inequities even further. Limited mobility and culturally influenced emotions such as shame also play a vital role in enabling or hindering social participation as do policies that ignore the needs and perspectives of vulnerable groups.

To support communities including a wide range of vulnerable populations resilient social support networks and communities are important to experience connectivity, trust, and solidarity. These experiences together with a sense of being heard and taken seriously in terms of personal perspectives and needs can improve health outcomes by enabling individuals to experience a sense of belonging, intimacy, and reciprocity.

Care must be at the heart of the state and the economy, making it the organising principle of our lives - from childcare, healthcare, elderly care to planetary health. Most care work is still done by women or migrant workers in the invisible sphere of the “private” world. The great share of care provided by informal caregivers and female family relatives result in a high burden for these individuals. Interventions need to directly address this precarious situation and provide adequate care and support for those who care for others. Besides being a central aspect in our relationships with each other, care should also be at the centre of our relationship to the natural world. This will also require a reclamation of public space and an expansion of our understanding of kinship, community, and planetary health (Care Collective, 2020).

2. Care Tour 2023: Five stopovers and Dome Talks in Austria

Providing an opportunity to engage in open conversations in public space within specific communities, the Dome Talks of the Care Tour 2023 revolved around creating a better understanding for the needs of resilient and caring communities from different care-related perspectives – from

the elderly to family caregivers to 24h migrant care workers to people with disabilities and local citizens. Different actors and stakeholders from society, research, health promotion practice, policy and local initiatives were directly invited to the Dome Talks by the OIS Center, its cooperation partners as well as the projects themselves. There was no need for registration, which allowed voluntary participation in the Dome Talks and enabled organically evolving conversations. For example, passers-by were actively invited to join the Dome Talks spontaneously, so that the open, unrehearsed nature of discussions was ensured.

2.1. Stopover #1 in Vienna with CareAct: “Talk about Care and Worries”

The first Dome Talk was hosted by the OIS impact Lab project CareAct⁷ on the Day of Care and Mindfulness (“Tag der ACHTsamkeit“) in Vienna’s 8th District (Figure 1).

CareAct uses theatre actions and performative interventions to address questions of access, inclusion, and social participation in the field of care. Through creative methods and interventions, the project investigates how participants can be actively reached, engaged, and empowered in caring communities and how they can contribute to shaping their surroundings and communities. For the opening of the Dome Talk, Klaus Wegleitner, one of the project leads of CareAct, raised key questions relating to societal transformations in the field of care work.

How can a perspective that recognises the socio-political dimension of care work change and impact the ways in which we organise care in our societies? We need to develop imaginaries of a caring society of the future! (translated and paraphrased statement from Klaus Wegleitner, Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Ageing and Care, University of Graz and chairman of the Sorgenetz association, see video documentation from Dome Talk 1, minute 4:42)⁸

7 - CareAct Website: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/projekte/careact-in-communities/>

8 - For the entire discussion and paraphrased statements, see the video documentation of Dome Talk 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo-qUDRf9zA>.



Figure 1. Dome Talk in Vienna in the 8th District on June 10, 2023, with the project CareAct. Photos: G. Schuster.

During the Dome Talk, the participants highlighted the value of theatre actions and performative interventions that are accompanied by an improvisation theatre company⁹ and introduced other participatory formats including storytelling cafés, and other creative methods and strategies for inducing change and fostering care. One participant added that the lack of public caring spaces beyond the private sphere was an everyday reality, which triggered a sense of indignation followed by a desire among the participants to change the status quo.

The majority opinion of the participants clearly showed that they were unhappy about being pushed out of public space by cars and parking spaces. They brought forward different ideas about how this space could be used differently for the benefits of local citizens, both old and young. Prof.

Heimerl (Institute for Nursing Science, University of Vienna) suggested turning parking spaces into “Schanigärten” (street gardens) and, in her case, inviting people to talk about “end-of-life”/palliative care. At the same time, the head of the 8th district Martin Fabisch referred to existing „Grätzloasen“ (neighbourhood oases) that are already in place, very popular, and highly frequented by citizens across different districts in Vienna. According to him, the main task here was to bring different civil society organisations together and to communicate well between the different initiatives and actors. Another pressing issue in the context of care-orientated design of public spaces was the establishment of consumption free zones as well as local climate-adaptation plans combined with cooling strategies for Viennese neighbourhoods. Also, public toilets were highlighted as an important issue for both young families and the elderly,

⁹ - InterAct Website: <https://www.interact-online.org/interact/theateransatz>

especially when planning dementia-friendly communities. While the maintenance and construction of public toilets is costly and time-consuming, as reported by the head of district, (free and easy) access to them in public spaces is often desired - even demanded - by citizens.

It became quite clear that many of the topics and local debates are in fact not entirely separable from larger concerns and social issues relating to contemporary societal challenges. Many of the questions, concerns, and issues are interlinked, which raises the idea that developing solutions might require the involvement of additional actors and an interplay of different disciplines, highlighting the need for a transdisciplinary mindset. Moreover, interests within a community are not always balanced but might be played off against each other with the risk of ultimately intensifying rather than averting precarious situations. Caring communities must therefore always focus on perspectives that take socio-economic determinants and larger economic and labour policies into account that may impact how we are able to care for each other in local settings.

2.2. Stopover #2 in Linz with MigraCare: “Who actually Cares for Us? The Role of 24-hour Informal Care-workers in the Austrian Care System”

The second Dome Talk in Linz (Figure 2) together with the MigraCare¹⁰ project addressed a highly controversial yet often ignored topic in public discourse about care: the situation of female migrant workers, who are taking care of mostly elderly persons across Austria. The work of 24-hour informal care-workers enables people who need care to remain in their homes. Despite this important work, the care-workers themselves and their efforts are often rendered invisible in public space and are also often withdrawn from public and administrative responsibilities as well as governmental protection.

The researchers, activists, and 24-hour care-workers from universities, non-profit interest groups, or civil society organisations involved in the MigraCare project are dedicated

to raising public awareness for the work and life conditions of 24-hour informal care workers and to fighting against these serious injustices. Another aim of the MigraCare project is to integrate 24-hour informal care-workers into the formal Austrian care network and to thereby increase their visibility and public recognition. Silvia Wojczewski, the project lead of MigraCare, opened the Dome Talk addressing these injustices.

Almost all 24-hour care-workers in Austria do not have Austrian citizenship. They are from foreign countries and while they do important work here, they are often not even connected to the Austrian care network. They thus have few opportunities to learn about their rights or to educate themselves further, take language courses, or share their own history and culture. (translated and paraphrased statement from Silvia Wojczewski, Center for Public Health, Medical University of Vienna, see video documentation from Dome Talk 2, minute 3:33)¹¹

During the Dome Talk, the participants discussed the precarious situation of migrant care-workers that is often referred to as the global care chain, which has dramatic effects on female migrant workers around the globe. While these women carry most of the care burden in western societies, they are often leaving behind their own families and gendered roles as major family caretakers and yet are too often excluded from political participation and social life in the country in which they work. However, as Silvia Wojczewski, a social anthropologist and the project lead of MigraCare, explains that without their work and service the Austrian care system would collapse. The project member Ingrid Sitter presented the idea of a *Betreuer:innen-Cafe* in Leonstein, which aims to connect 24-hour care-workers to enable and encourage exchange and mutual support between them. This initiative set a precedent and inspired other similar projects. Moreover, Anna and Simona Durisova

10 - MigraCare Website: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/projekte/migra-care/>

11 - For the entire discussion and the paraphrased statements, see the video documentation of Dome Talk 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAZcpqvx7M>



Figure 2. Dome Talk in Linz on June 17, 2023, with the project MigraCare. Photos: G. Schuster and P. Frank.

from IG24¹² - an established interest group for the rights of migrant 24-hour care-workers - provided hands-on insights into the working conditions and the lack of social security rights of informal female migrant care-workers in Austria. Participants also had a controversial discussion with a representative of a recruitment agency who was bringing up the mediating role of his company, saying that someone had to negotiate between the care-workers and carers on the one hand and families in need of care and support on the other hand. A representative of the CuraFAIR project¹³, a contact point for 24-hour care workers at Volkshilfe Oberösterreich, introduced their legal advice service and emphasized the importance of knowing their rights and opportunities concerning legal and financial entitlements for 24-hour care-workers.

Throughout the discussion it became apparent that there was a desire to think about the care economy differently and to go beyond a mere commodity approach to care and health. Care is more than a commodity and hence a different logic needs to be applied. How can we organise and finance care in ways that truly meet people's needs? Some participants argued that we needed a more cooperative economy that acknowledges its public responsibility and ensures that care and health were publicly financed and accessible for all people, no matter their financial background. Market logics would not work well in the care sector and as was regularly pointed out by Silvia Wojczewski, it was mostly women who were disadvantaged and carry these burdens. In general, the participants agreed that we, therefore, need an economy that accounts for these needs and realities and goes beyond

12 - <https://ig24.at/en/>

13 - <https://www.volkshilfe-ooe.at/dienstleistung/curafair-beratung/>

a simplistic market logic. At the end several participants emphasised how motivating and empowering it would be to have open debates and share stories in public space with people directly - albeit differently - affected by these precarious care realities.

2.3. Stopover #3 in Wartberg in Mürztal with Healthy Streets and Squares: “Places of Encounter - Places for People”

Leaving urban areas behind and travelling through the picturesque Styrian Mürztal, the question of how to design streets and squares to foster a thriving community remained central. In Wartberg, a district of the market town St. Barbara, the project Healthy Streets and Squares¹⁴ involves a diverse group of citizens that contributes their experiences and ideas to re-designing the village centre and close surroundings as part of a co-creation process. The citizens involved in this co-creation process are so-called “co-researchers”. The aim of the project is to make the village more liveable and to create a lively village with local suppliers and services that directly meet people’s needs.

The Dome Talk took place as part of the “Freitagstratscherl” (Friday chitchat) during a village festival organised by the local fire brigade (Figure 3). It was hosted by Silvia Marchl and Christian Fadengruber (Styria vitalis), the project leads, who are supporting and coordinating the co-creation process with co-researchers as well as the involvement of mayor Jochen Jance and additional citizens from Wartberg. Several experts from the fields of health promotion as well as regional and spatial planning joined the event too.

In the lively discussion, participants discussed various challenges for a liveable communal village: the absence of water points in the village, a lack of places to sit, the desire for a more beautiful townscape, and the death of inns. At one point in the conversation, an insightful discussion developed around participation itself. The starting point was the question of whether citizens should be “educated” about their behaviour in traffic. There was great opposition to the

idea that such top-down approaches - framed as “educating adults” - could ever work. A regional and spatial planner argued that people's imagination often did not go far enough regarding participatory processes to find good solutions. However, the redesign of spaces by spatial planning experts was then often accepted by the public once implemented, as many examples from Mariahilferstrasse in Vienna to small villages show.

Can we influence traffic behaviour by raising awareness, educating people and talking to each other? From many years of experience, I can say: Intervention in the design of the space works better. Once it’s built, once you’ve changed something in favour of pedestrians, cyclists, and the quality of life, satisfaction comes very quickly. If you try to discuss it beforehand, it almost always never works. (translated and paraphrased statement from a regional and spatial planner supporting the project, see video documentation from Dome Talk 3, from minute 40:03)¹⁵

Another regional and spatial planner (Project “Starke Zentren in der Steiermark”) voiced the question whether participation – at the levels of information, consultation, and co-decision – should no longer play a role. How far can and should participation go? Was it enough to “listen” to lay citizens and then let the experts develop the solutions? Or could citizens play a greater role in shaping their neighbourhood, as is the case in Wartberg, where eleven residents - representing different age groups, genders, professional backgrounds, and political affiliations - meet monthly to exchange ideas? How could we learn to develop and express creative visions and solutions to wicked questions?

There was some kind of agreement, people would be more innovative when they worked together and could bring in their perspectives. Silvia Marchl pointed out the need to

14 - Website Healthy Streets and Squares: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/projekte/gesunde-strassen-und-plaetze/>

15 - For the discussion and the paraphrased statements, see the video documentation of Dome Talk 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivYYI2WC9W4>



Figure 3. Dome Talk in Wartberg on July 28, 2023, with the project Healthy Streets and Squares. Photos: G. Schuster.

use different methods to really find out what was needed in the community. She gave the example of walks that she organised together with citizens through town. Other methods included taking photos together or drawing drafts into maps with co-researchers. A researcher from the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Aging and Care (University of Graz) described a project in Graz where solutions were developed in regular joint meetings through physical experimentation. This example showed how people needed to experience suggestions also with their senses and bodies, not only using their cognitive abilities. The conclusion was that different participatory methods for experiencing and planning public space appealed to different groups of people suggesting that a variety of participatory methods was helpful in co-creation processes with lay persons for generating relevant and meaningful ideas. The controversy

of participation vs. prescriptive intervention was resolved in the Dome Talk when the involved co-researchers were given the ability to describe how different methods (e.g., communal walks, photo documentation, drawing on maps) improved their imagination of potential changes in their village.

A takeaway for the Dome Talk format from Wartberg was that the participants valued the Art of Talking under the dome. Specifically, they emphasised how valuable it was that the open structure of the dome and the open discussion encouraged people standing outside of the dome to participate in the discussion, so that other perspectives from the community could be gathered (see, left/bottom corner of Figure 3).

2.4. Stopover #4 in Litschau with Care4Caregivers: “Community Health”

In September, we travelled to Litschau, the most northern city in Austria, located in the region called Waldviertel. The host project was the project Care4Caregivers¹⁶, which focuses on family caregivers and their needs. The central idea of the Care4Caregivers project is to create synergies between existing support structures for family caregivers, whose needs are often overlooked in daily life. Like informal migrant care-workers, family caregivers, typically women, juggle elderly care, childcare, and formal employment, leading to a triple burden (Dowling, 2021). The project aims to develop a community space and network in which family caregivers experience the support and care they need to continue caring for others, essential elements for health and well-being. Another idea of the project is to raise awareness among local suppliers of the community to identify those in need of help.

In a somewhat smaller group this time, the participants discussed relevant topics for family caregivers with project leaders and participants from the Mitanaunda¹⁷ association including Doris Maurer and Günther Schalko alongside several people from nearby villages. Two participants of the Dome Talk, Anna Kössner from the Neighbourhood Help (“Nachbarschaftshilfe plus”) and Lisa Schlee from Fonds Gesundes Österreich, helped building the geodesic dome overlooking the idyllic lake “Herrensee” (Figure 4).

Central questions for this Dome Talk were: How can people be encouraged to talk to each other rather than about each other? How can we foster healthy villages and healthy regions in the context of demographic change and rural migration to cities? In addition to discussing the interconnectivity of health and community, a researcher from JKU Linz introduced a rights-based approach and posed the question of legislation and legal entitlements with regards to health and care. This led to a controversial debate about family-oriented vs. institutional community-oriented care models.

Some participants of the Dome Talk advocated for a family-oriented approach, in which individuals - mostly women - were expected to assume responsibilities of organising and realising care in a private setting.

The question of responsibility within society as a whole is very difficult. The people who are often spoken of in the abstract are not a homogeneous mass and we as a society have to distance ourselves from this ‘all-risk insurance mentality’ that somehow you will always be helped by someone. (translated and paraphrased statement from Günther Schalko, farmer and mayor of Eisgarn, see video documentation from Dome Talk 4, minute 33:16)¹⁸

Other participants, however, supported a stronger societal responsibility, where the community and welfare institutions were obliged to provide care and support systems at the communal, regional, and national levels. The compelling issue at hand during this Dome Talk remained, how to envision a rights-based approach to care at an institutional level that still encourages personal responsibility and initiative and enables self-organisation and citizen engagement at all levels. Here, an approach that relies more distinctly on institutional organization could help to alleviate the psychological burden of family and community members who feel responsible for organizing care for their loved ones and friends but forget to take care of themselves along the way - an important theme of the Care4Caregivers project. The Dome Talk in Litschau was also an example par excellence of the value of listening and of an open debate beyond ideological divisions and polarization.

2.5. Stopover #5 in Graz with Inclusive Caring Communities: “We live diversity in the neighbourhood”

For the last stop of the Care Tour, we built the dome between apartment blocks in the “Messequartier” in Graz (Figure 5),

16 - Website Care4Caregivers: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/projekte/care4caregivers>

17 - Austrian dialect word for “together”

18 - For the entire discussion and the paraphrased statements, see the video documentation of Dome Talk 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0M0E7T9Bbc4>



Figure 4. Dome Talk in Litschau on September 9, 2023, with the project Care4Caregivers. Photos: G. Schuster and P. Frank.

a neighbourhood built in 2011 that is today home to around 1,000 people living with and without disabilities and to several social-service organizations.

The project Inclusive Caring Communities¹⁹ aims to better understand factors that contribute to the inclusion of people with disabilities in social urban spaces and to adapt these spaces to their needs. Therefore, researchers with and without disabilities from different social and research organisations carry out research focused on two social spaces in Graz: 1. Messequartier, a housing complex that grew over the years into a best practice for inclusive housing and a caring community, 2. Reininghaus, a newly built neighbourhood that was designed with inclusion in mind but that is still lacking a supportive community. Through a collaborative research process, the project works towards

identifying new impulses for creating and maintaining inclusive social spaces that can inform a more diverse and condensed concept of caring communities.

The Dome Talk was hosted by Mark Staskiewicz, who manages one of the facilities in Messequartier and serves as the chairman and community manager of the neighbourhood association, Sophie Augustin, a researcher from queraum. cultural and social research, and Kurt Feldhofer from Forschungsbüro Menschenrechte (research office for human rights). Several residents, members, clients, and workers from local social-service organisations, including the property manager of the neighbourhood and a resident who runs a community workshop and repair café, attended the Dome Talk. In the beginning, Mark Staskiewicz described the background of Messequartier that was built

19 - Website Inclusive Caring Communities: <https://ois.lbg.ac.at/projekte/inklusive-caring-communities/>

by a not-for-profit housing association. Originally only the kindergarten was planned, but then other social-service organisations added social facilities one at a time, bringing in great diversity rather by chance, as it was reported in the conversation. The buildings of Messequartier were not built with diversity and inclusion in mind but had to be adapted afterwards, e.g., by adding barrier-free and accessible apartments. Nevertheless, the architecture offered many possibilities for creating a diverse inclusive community, for example by connecting buildings and designing communal spaces. In addition to the organisation Lebensgroß²⁰ and its residents living with disabilities, there is an assisted living facility for senior citizens, a student residence, a residential facility for young people living with learning disabilities and mental health problems, a social psychiatric day clinic and a shared flat for young people. Over the years these diverse groups grew into a caring community that regularly hosts community events and street festivals.

The Dome Talk revolved around the inclusion of people with different needs in social spaces. Many topics were addressed: conflicts between senior citizens and students and how they could be resolved, challenging encounters between people with and without disabilities, issues of accessibility and the use of plain language, which was also used in the Dome Talk itself. At some point of the discussion, Mark Staskiewicz emphasised that in the organisation Forschungsbüro Menschenrechte²¹ people with and without disabilities successfully collaborated to conduct research projects together, for example as part of the Inclusive Caring Community project. In this context, Sophie Augustin stressed that interaction and communication at eye-level were pre-requisites for participation across different groups and how important it was that everyone could be part of such a collaborative process and contribute equally with their knowledge and skills.

Inclusion also involves seeing not only what people with disabilities need, but also what they can do for others. (translated and paraphrased statement from Sophie Augustin, queraum. cultural and social research, see video documentation from Dome Talk 5 from, 45:05)²²

Kurt Feldhofer highlighted the power of participatory research methods, such as inclusive walks or focus group discussions with different participants to gather different and new perspectives by talking to each other. The inspiring discussion of the participants reflected diverse experiences of residents, members, clients, and workers from local social-service organisations in Messequartier. Many participants and residents with and without disabilities concluded at the end of the Dome Talk that they felt empowered and encouraged to work, communicate, and collaborate in such a respectful atmosphere and that it was worth embarking on journeys of discovery in the community.

3. Discussion

As part of the Care Tour 2023, we conducted five Dome Talks in urban and rural public places in Austria that were hosted and thematically curated by the five OIS Impact Lab “Caring Communities for Future” projects. The Dome Talks addressed various topics relating to care, health, and caring communities including the precarious social situation of 24-hour informal migrant care workers, the role of family caregivers, the design of public spaces in a rural context, the structural necessities for building health-promoting and inclusive caring communities for persons living with disabilities in urban social spaces, as well as experiments with novel creative approaches such as theatre interventions for achieving a deeper understanding of caring communities.

20 - Lebensgroß is a social organisation dedicated to inclusion and social justice, which accompanies people with disabilities in their residential homes in the above-mentioned two urban areas: Messequartier and Reininghaus, see footnote 20 for the weblink.

21 - In “Forschungsbüro Menschenrechte” researchers with and without disabilities conduct research together, in particular related to topics that are of importance for people with disabilities: <https://www.lebengross.at/arbeit-und-begleitung/ateliers-und-werkstaetten/forschungsbuero/>.

22 - For the entire discussion and the paraphrased statements, see the video documentation of Dome Talk 5: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ff_zVEOFGI8



Figure 5. Dome Talk in Graz on September 15, 2023, with the project Inclusive Caring Communities. Photos: G. Schuster and P. Frank.

During the Dome Talks diverse groups of people from the respective hosting communities engaged in public conversations including citizens, researchers, care workers, family care givers, activists, elderly people, patients, mayors, administrative staff from municipalities, and experts. We want to stress here again that the Dome Talks were characterized by an open, dynamic format. Thus, each of the five Dome Talks turned out differently depending on the directions of the discussions, some keeping the focus on the initially proposed thematic frame of the hosting projects (e.g. stop #2 with Migra Care, stop #4 with Care4Caregivers), some adjusting the focus to other communal challenges or overarching topics related to care or participatory processes during the discussions (e.g., stop #1 with CareAct, stop #3 with Healthy Streets and Places, stop #5 with Inclusive Caring Communities). We strongly believe that this situational dynamic is part of the charm and significance of the public Dome Talks.

Despite different thematic starting points, the Dome Talks brought out common ideas across the projects, such as the need for transdisciplinary action to bring about change in communities around the topic of care and to gain an understanding of the different needs of different groups involved in caring communities. For example, there was a need for greater connection, exchange, and inclusion between different groups in communities, especially vulnerable or overlooked groups such as people with disabilities, 24-hour migrant care workers living and working in precarious situations, as well as isolated family caregivers. Another point that came up repeatedly across the Dome Talks was the insight that different participatory methods could be helpful to reach different community groups and to understand their perspectives (e.g., theater interventions, inclusive walks, photo documentation). While consensus built across the Dome Talks that participation could support people in valuing other persons' opinions and strengthen

commitment to change, critical voices suggested that participation of lay persons could also slow down potentially beneficial change in communities, for example in the field of spatial planning, where local residents often initially resist changes to public space. An important learning of the Care Tour was that changing the status quo in the care sector also requires the involvement of decision and policy makers as well as politicians, for example the mayors of municipalities. In this context, rights-based approaches related to care were discussed and compared to the personal and individual responsibility to care for family and community members.

Overall, the Dome Talks provided an inspiring framework for exchange between different actors such as citizens, healthcare practitioners, representatives of the municipal administration, and researchers. The participants especially emphasized the art of conversation including the open nature of the moderation and the inclusive discussions that contributed to revealing diverse opinions and realities of participants, while supporting a respectful sharing of different experiences and perspectives. Hence, across the Dome Talks, participants felt empowered and encouraged to share their opinions.

The open geodesic structure of the dome points to the transformative potential that can be realised through collaboration. Here, we want to highlight that the design of the dome even allows participation in the debates by people standing outside the dome, who may just walk by or listen to the conversation. The highly visible presence of the dome in the streets and squares of our cities and communities is intended to attract attention and to evoke the values of an essential social dialogue needed for a successful transition to a more inclusive society. All in all, the Dome Talks can be considered an ideal format for social exchange and community dialogue between different actors in society, sharing their respective perspectives and ideas on sensitive topics.

4. Conclusions

Open innovation methods and transdisciplinary approaches are viable strategies to address and to develop ideas to solve wicked problems such as demographic change and the care crisis. Involving citizens and different actors from society,

research, practice, and policy in innovation processes can lead to the design of appropriate, legitimate, and desirable outcomes for communities. Collaborative cultures of care and meaningful participation beyond tokenism are thus increasingly needed to deal with multiple crises we are facing today and with their socio-political manifestations on local as well as intimate levels.

For achieving meaningful and successful participation, we need to learn how to talk to and to work with each other, and to involve those communities and individuals, which are directly affected by precarious situations, and which would directly benefit from potential solutions. Participation can be understood as a transformative process which facilitates social change that benefits communities and enhances the capacity of individuals to improve their own lives and feel heard, for example marginalized groups who are generally excluded from debates. The practices of participation as well as public debate must be learned and trained as a continuous democratic and civil exercise. Failures, limitations, and conflicting interests are part of the game of any learning and development process and should be regularly and openly reflected throughout the community involvement process.

These and other transformative potentials of democratic and creative empowerment were felt and expressed in many of the conversations with citizens, carers, social workers, community nurses, and families during our Care Tour. Telling personal and political stories of care and community challenges revealed a strong interrelatedness of diverse aspects such as communities, health, climate justice, and wellbeing. The insights derived from the Dome Talks made apparent that the art of conversation and public debate will be central components of any transformative and progressive endeavours and that this can only result from bringing different needs, realities, and ideas for change to the surface.

Exchange of ideas and dialogue are uniquely human practices that distil complexity and exhibit infinite varieties of ideas and experiences that have the potential to excite, connect, and fulfil us. In fact, more than ever, we are required to find new horizons of hope and confidence (“horizon d’espérance”; Pelluchon, 2023). Engaging in public conversations and

participating in transdisciplinary research can thus make us feel and experience democratic empowerment and enable us to collectively formulate and grasp future imaginaries for social change. Creating opportunities for participation and initiating the dialogue between different actors in communities, for example through Dome Talks in public space, may thus contribute to improving the quality of life and health of citizens in the long-term by increasing the engagement and mutual social support in resilient and sustainable caring communities.

Conflict of Interests and Ethics

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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