

# Tackling municipal growth dependencies through the ‘common good’. Municipal-led collaborative housing in Freiburg’s Kleineschholz development

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## Abstract

This paper examines the potential of centering the common good in urban development as a way to address municipal growth dependencies – the structural link between market performance and municipalities’ capacity to fulfil their responsibilities. It builds on growing evidence of the contradictions and limits inherent in marketization and financialization. Using a practice-theoretical approach, the paper develops a perspective for tracing how municipal growth dependencies are enacted and negotiated in everyday practice. In doing so, it highlights the partial agency of local authorities as they navigate between market-driven and common-good-oriented forms of development. Empirically, the paper analyses Kleineschholz, an ongoing district development project in Freiburg, Germany, that explicitly departs from short-term calculation in favour of long-term, strategic planning. Through concept-based tendering, the local authority exclusively addresses actors it deems oriented toward the common good, such as collaborative housing groups. The findings show that a strong – though imperfect – culture of communication, combined with flexible use of planning and building law instruments, enables permanent rent reductions below market rates and supports the emergence of a needs-oriented neighbourhood economy. These developments point toward

more equitable provisioning systems that increase resilience from economic cycles. At the same time, persistent barriers to participation, the creation of new building stock, and the context-specific nature of Kleineschholz raise critical questions regarding overall sustainability impacts and the broader transferability of the model.

**Keywords:** Urban planning ■ common good ■ growth dependency ■ concept-based tendering ■ collaborative housing ■ Freiburg

## Gemeinwohlorientierung zur Überwindung kommunaler Wachstumsabhängigkeiten: Kommunale Steuerung gemeinschaftlicher Wohnraumentwicklung in Freiburg-Kleineschholz

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag untersucht das Potenzial einer gemeinwohlorientierten Stadtentwicklung zur Bewältigung kommunaler Wachstumsabhängigkeiten – jener strukturellen Verknüpfung zwischen wirtschaftlicher Performance und der Fähigkeit von Kommunen, ihre Aufgaben zu erfüllen. Er baut auf wachsender Evidenz zu den Widersprüchen und Grenzen von Marktlogiken und Finanzialisierungsprozessen auf. Unter Rückgriff auf einen praxistheoretischen Ansatz zeichnet der Beitrag nach, wie kommunale Wachstumsabhängigkeiten in alltäglichen Praktiken hergestellt und verhandelt werden. Dadurch wird die partielle Handlungsfähigkeit kommunaler Akteure sichtbar, die zwischen marktorientierten und gemeinwohlorientierten Entwicklungslogiken navigieren. Empirisch analysiert der Beitrag das Quartiersentwicklungsprojekt Kleineschholz in Freiburg, das bewusst von kurzfristigen Kalkulationen Abstand nimmt und stattdessen auf strategische, langfristige Planung setzt.

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Mittels einer Konzeptvergabe adressiert die Kommune ausschließlich Akteure, die sie als gemeinwohlorientiert einstuft, etwa gemeinschaftliche Wohnprojekte. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass eine ausgeprägte – wenn auch nicht lückenlose – Kommunikationskultur in Verbindung mit einem flexiblen Einsatz planungs- und baurechtlicher Instrumente dauerhafte Mietreduzierungen unter Marktniveau ermöglicht und die Entstehung einer bedarfsorientierten Nachbarschaftsökonomie begünstigt. Diese Entwicklungen deuten auf gerechtere Versorgungssysteme hin, die größere Resilienz gegenüber konjunkturellen Schwankungen aufweisen. Zugleich werfen fortbestehende Teilhabebarrrieren, die Schaffung neuen Wohnraums sowie der kontextspezifische Charakter von Kleineschholz kritische Fragen hinsichtlich der Nachhaltigkeitswirkungen und Übertragbarkeit des Modells auf.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Stadtplanung ■ Gemeinwohl ■ Wachstumsabhängigkeit ■ Konzeptvergabe ■ gemeinschaftliche Wohnprojekte ■ Freiburg

## 1 Introduction

The limits to growth in land consumption have been firmly established in spatial research and planning as both an analytical category and as a normative principle (Ritzinger 2018). In contrast, discussions around the limits to economic growth are much less prevalent among spatial researchers and planners (for important exceptions see Rydin 2013; Lange/Hülz/Schmid et al. 2022; Savini/Ferreira/von Schönfeld 2022; Lamker/Terfrüchte 2024). Economic growth refers to the increase in the total market value of all final goods and services produced in a given area over time. Mounting evidence shows insufficient rates of decoupling economic growth from energy and resource consumption – including land – and deepening social inequalities despite economic growth (Fanning/Raworth 2025; Kallis/Hickel/O'Neill et al. 2025). These findings underscore the importance of a more critical engagement with the role of economic growth in spatial development, as championed by approaches under the banner of post-growth planning (Lamker/Schulze Dieckhoff 2022).

The pressures exerted by economic-growth-based frameworks and their link to spatial development become particularly visible in cities, especially in the context of housing (Aalbers 2017). In the German federal system, local authorities hold strong powers and responsibilities in spatial planning and the provision of public services yet face chronic structural underfunding (Freier/Geißler/Raffer et al. 2025). Trapped between rigid expenditure obligations and insufficient revenue, many local authorities prioritise short-term budgetary balancing at the expense of strategic, long-term

planning. This can manifest in deferred infrastructural maintenance, the sale of municipal assets for immediate financial relief, or a general retreat from active urban governance by forgoing planning instruments such as pre-emption rights, detailed local development plans, strategic land allocation, or prohibitions on residential misappropriation. Simultaneously, taxation structures incentivise local authorities to attract businesses and residents, for instance through partnerships with solvent private developers and the designation of new land for development (Knak 2021). The limited viability of marketisation and financialisation for shaping cities in the public interest has been extensively documented across diverse contexts in both the Global North and South (Baffoe 2023; Kallert/Dudek 2025).

Low or zero economic growth further intensifies fiscal constraints, reinforcing short-term monetary considerations, privatisation and market competition in municipal planning and decision-making. Yet it is precisely this deepening marketisation and financialisation – critically discussed in scholarly debates on neoliberal and austerity urbanism (Peck/Theodore/Brenner 2013; Theodore 2020) – that entrenches local authorities' dependence on economic cycles by generating expectations and mechanisms that rely on continuous revenue streams. I refer to these dynamics as 'municipal growth dependencies' to describe how local authorities' capacity to fulfil their responsibilities is profoundly tied to economic performance. These dependencies must be understood within their broader spatial context. Local authorities operate within multi-level governance systems where higher authorities shape the conditions for local decision-making, for instance through taxation structures, regulations governing land availability and development priorities, or policies such as the commuter tax deduction that incentivise sprawl (Münter 2024).

The paper advances the thesis that local authorities nevertheless possess the agency to navigate growth dependencies. From this premise, it examines visions and pathways towards greater municipal autonomy from economic growth. Empirically, I turn to an ongoing district development project, Kleineschholz, that explicitly breaks with a focus on short-term monetary considerations, privatisation and market competition. Kleineschholz is a densification project in a central district in Freiburg, Germany, which until recently served as allotment gardens and is currently being developed to provide some 500 affordable housing units. Notably, this is to be achieved 'exclusively with common good-oriented actors [...] whose philosophy must prioritise the promotion of the common good as a key motivation for their actions' (Stadt Freiburg 2021: 4, my translation). To this end, the city of Freiburg implemented two policy instruments: concept-based tendering (*Konzeptvergabe*), in which land is allocated based on social, ecological, and ar-

chitectural criteria rather than highest bid, and a leasehold model (*Erbbaurecht*), in which land remains in public ownership while buildings can be privately owned and used. The first largely succeeded, with a significant number of collaborative housing groups – housing developed by and for its residents (Czischke/Carriou/Lang 2020) – obtaining access to plots in Kleineschholz. The leasehold model, however, failed due to the financial burden it imposed.

In an attempt to draw lessons from Kleineschholz's explicit turn towards the notion of the common good, this paper addresses three related research questions. First, how are different elements assembled to centre 'the common good' in the Kleineschholz development? I argue that this occurs through two overlapping dynamics: a low-threshold and open process of concept-based tendering and a trans-stakeholder culture of communication. Second, what notion of common good is implemented? Here, I argue that a rather formalistic definition based on organisational typology prevails over the more substantive approaches that collaborative housing groups embed in their practices. Third, what are the potential implications of the Kleineschholz development for countering municipal growth dependencies? In response to question three, I outline housing specific and broader tendencies that are likely to decentre the role of growth for neighbourhoods' wellbeing and functioning.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 establishes the context by outlining the principles of urban transformations beyond growth, focusing on growth dependencies and how they might be addressed in practice. Section 3 presents the paper's research methodology. Section 4 introduces the Kleineschholz urban development project and details the instruments and processes that anchor the project's common good orientation. Finally, Section 5 explores Kleineschholz's potential to decentre municipal growth dependencies, while also reflecting on the specificities of the Kleineschholz development and distilling the lessons learned.

## 2 Urban transformations beyond growth

### 2.1 Municipal growth dependencies in practice

The role of economic growth for urban development has become a contested question among transformation and transition scholars (Feola 2020; Döring/Zimmermann 2025). This disagreement stems from both analytical differences regarding the role of existing institutional arrangements – such as capitalist markets and states – and strategic considerations about which changes are feasible and where

incremental efforts may inadvertently deepen rather than resolve socio-ecological crises (Eckersley 2021). Empirical evidence increasingly suggests that growth-based development cannot be reconciled with a 'good life for all' within planetary boundaries in the long term (Haberl/Wiedenhofer/Virág et al. 2020; Fanning/Raworth 2025). Despite inevitable uncertainty about the potential of future technological advances, the imperative of a precautionary decoupling of public provisioning from economic growth thus emerges as common ground among growth-critical scholars (Petschow/aus dem Moore/Hofmann et al. 2022). This raises the question of how overcoming growth dependencies would translate into practical measures – both in general and for local authorities specifically.

This question can be approached through different conceptual entry avenues. While some scholars take a structural perspective to explore the underlying dynamics and broader contours of social transformations (Kallis/Hickel/O'Neill et al. 2025), others pursue more fine-grained, context-specific perspectives on how societal change unfolds in everyday practice (Beveridge/Naumann 2023). The latter approaches focus on how incumbent relations are reproduced, challenged, and reshaped – within and outside of formal institutions. Both structural and practice-oriented perspectives are valuable for understanding municipal growth dependencies: the ways in which local authorities' proper functioning is linked to economic performance.

Structural approaches identify several systemic pressures, 'drivers' or 'imperatives' that describe how economic growth becomes inscribed into institutional arrangements. These include: (1) monetary systems, credit and interest; (2) competition and capital; (3) property relations; (4) technological progress and productivity increases; (5) state institutions and systems of taxation; (6) globalisation and international value chains; as well as (7) individual aspirations, corporate objectives and social pressure (Binswanger 2019; Richters/Siemoneit 2019; Petschow/aus dem Moore/Hofmann et al. 2022). When applied to local authorities, this structural perspective helps explain their reliance on cyclically sensitive taxes, such as business tax and municipal shares of income tax that constitute crucial income sources for German municipalities (Bogumil/Holtkamp 2023: 31).

A practice-oriented perspective examines how growth dependencies are actualised, reproduced and negotiated on the ground – for instance through economic promotion programmes, struggles over privatisation, or land use planning processes. Such a perspective helps to highlight diversity and hybridity. That is, how economic growth informs or compels decisions and practices differently, indirectly and partially. This perspective is also attuned to the diverse but often minor ways in which growth dependencies can poten-

tially be reduced through incremental shifts in local policy and everyday practice.

This paper follows a practice-oriented approach for three reasons. First, by allowing for more nuanced analysis, an orientation toward practices captures the ambiguous and even contradictory nature of real-world examples such as the case explored in this paper. Second, since the primary focus is on the municipal level of governance – where many structural changes lie beyond local authority powers – the emphasis is on identifying smaller, more feasible shifts in practice. Third, a practice-oriented perspective reveals how institutional boundaries become blurred through everyday activities, transcending simple inside/outside distinctions. In the following, I outline a practice-oriented perspective on municipal growth dependencies by proposing three principles that translate growth dependencies into practice: (1) monetary calculations and profitability, (2) market mechanisms and competitiveness, and (3) private economic interests and appropriation. How practices embody and reproduce these principles ultimately shapes the extent to which municipalities are bound to economic performance.

First, monetary calculations and profitability emphasise immediate returns on investment in terms of financial gains. This means prioritising short-term savings and profits over longer-term benefits associated with preventative actions, such as social and environmental health, mitigation and adaptation measures, and infrastructure maintenance. A focus on monetary calculations and immediate profitability drives growth in two ways: first, growth potential becomes a pivotal consideration in negotiations and decision-making; second, neglecting long-term effects requires disproportionately more resources to address the resulting costs in the long run. Under the current logic, obtaining these primarily financial means would require further economic growth to generate municipal revenues, deepening the cycle of growth dependency.

For instance, local authorities often prioritise high-end residential projects because they promise immediate increases in property tax revenue and attract affluent residents (Götze/Hartmann 2021). This monetary calculation focuses on short-term financial gains while neglecting the longer-term social costs such as the displacement of existing residents, increased housing inequality and infrastructure strain (Dewilde 2018). The social problems created – such as housing affordability crises and community displacement – require expensive public interventions and services. Addressing these accumulated social costs necessitates even more revenue, which – within a growth mindset – pushes local authorities to pursue additional growth.

Secondly, market mechanisms and competitiveness are key principles in organising urban systems, including access to housing and commercial spaces, services and the award-

ing of public contracts. Financial resources and the ability to compete – enhanced through cost externalisation and reduced expenses (Patel/Moore 2018) – are critical determinants of opportunities within urban environments. This dynamic perpetuates growth dependencies, as entities that focus on lucrative aspects are prioritised for providing services and shaping urban spaces. Operating under a profit motive also means that costs and issues not immediately necessary for service delivery are often curtailed or neglected, necessitating public financial support and leading to long-term costs (Paul/Cumbers 2023).

For instance, when addressing housing shortages, local authorities often partner with private developers rather than strengthening municipal housing companies or turning to housing cooperatives. This choice reflects a market logic: private developers appear more financially viable and able to provide (social) housing more cost-efficiently. However, after the mandated affordability period expires – typically after 10 to 30 years – privately developed flats revert to market-rate housing, whereas municipal or cooperative housing generally retains its affordability mandate permanently. As the affordable stock shrinks, public institutions must continuously offer new financial incentives to attract private developers to build replacement units.

Thirdly, private economic interests exert significant control over and appropriate the value generated in urban environments (Farmer/Poulos 2019). For instance, when private investors pursue developments that significantly affect the layout and use of entire districts, or when urban spaces – ranging from parking areas to restaurants – are designed primarily for visitors rather than residents. Although this creates short-term monetary returns through property sales and business taxes, it undermines local participation and the deterioration of resident-focused infrastructure, such as public transport, affordable food options and spaces for encounter and community. The social and environmental costs, such as high rents, displacement, community disruption and increased living costs, further require funding borne by public institutions, likely resulting from the same cycle of growth-oriented development perpetuated by urban growth coalitions (Harding 1991; Boeth/Kühn 2022).

## 2.2 The common good as counter-orientation?

Tracing how municipal growth dependencies might be reduced requires a positive counter-orientation to financialisation and marketisation. This paper takes the notion of the common good – understood as practices, decisions, and instruments that aim to benefit collective welfare rather than serving primarily private or particular interests – as a starting point. The common good is a notoriously difficult term,

diverse in meaning and subject to contestation, as well as to both historical and contemporary populist misuse (Blum 2015). At the same time, its openness can be understood as a profoundly democratic function, where collective negotiation produces a shared understanding of what serves more than specific individual interests alone (Schuppert 2002). To open up such spaces for negotiation about urban coexistence, the constraints of municipal growth dependencies must be addressed. This section begins to explore how practices oriented towards the common good might decentre – or even begin to tackle – municipal growth dependencies. I outline three practice-based dynamics that contrast with those discussed in the previous section: (1) foregrounding non-monetary and longer-term costs and minimising negative externalities; (2) establishing needs-based and equitable provisioning systems; and (3) enhancing democratic steering and the collective generation and retention of surplus value. How practices embody and advance these principles shapes the extent to which municipalities can loosen, redirect, or transform their growth dependencies.

First, focusing on non-monetary and longer-term costs, as well as negative externalities, circumvents the logic of narrow monetary calculus. Acknowledging non-monetary and long-term values fosters a preventative approach that prioritises healthy urban environments, stable communities and resilient provisioning. For instance, while withdrawing land from market-rate development might reduce the immediate revenue from land sales, non-profit-oriented and collaborative housing projects can simultaneously decrease future costs stemming from social isolation or displacement by fostering mutual support networks and community ties (Dang/Seemann 2021).

Similarly, focusing on needs-based and equitable provisioning systems rather than market competitiveness decentres the role of profit-oriented actors by directly supporting organisations and enhancing arrangements that address social needs (Guinan/O'Neill 2020). For instance, instead of relying on market-rate housing development, local authorities can support non-profit housing providers and community land trusts (Meehan 2014; Jeske/Hagbert/Engström 2024) that ensure long-term affordability and stability. While the effort, expenditure and risk might be higher, this shift reduces the need to cover costs for emergency housing, social services for displaced populations, and infrastructure for peripheral developments that result from gentrification and housing shortages in central areas.

Third, enhancing democratic steering and the collective generation and retention of surplus value shifts the focus away from profit-driven motives towards community-oriented governance and participatory decision-making. This approach ensures that the benefits generated within cities are retained for wider social use rather than appropriated

by private actors. It follows a preventative and direct logic, mitigating the pressure to constantly pursue growth for revenue generation. For example, when collaborative housing groups have a say in designing their neighbourhoods – determining shared spaces, services and communal approaches – they can ensure these assets remain accessible and beneficial to all residents, meeting their actual needs rather than succumbing to the profit-maximisation interests of private developers.

Moving away from market- and growth-centred practices thus entails a shift towards different alliances, metrics and forms of valuation on the part of local authorities. While most initiatives in this direction remain nascent, partial and fragile, two tentative shifts are becoming visible in some municipalities. First, some local authorities are adopting economic and political frameworks that turn away from market- and growth-centred development, such as Doughnut Economics (Schmid 2025), the Economy for the Common Good (Weck/Ritzinger 2021) and new municipalism (Thompson 2021). These are accompanied by policy instruments including the remunicipalisation of infrastructures (Paul/Cumbers 2023) or community land trusts (Meehan 2014). Yet in all of this, community-led initiatives – 'emancipatory movements working towards and through socially, economically, and environmentally just relations' (Schmid/Smith/Aiken 2021: 155) – play a central role. Second, local authorities are thus forging new alliances with actor groups that pursue non-monetary values, focus on needs-based provisioning and practise collective decision-making and surplus retention, for instance through public-commons partnerships (Bianchi 2023).

Municipal initiatives on both fronts, often going hand-in-hand, are inevitably ambiguous. They take place in real-world contexts where growth-based development remains a crucial force – ideologically, institutionally and with respect to resources and interests. With this in mind, the next sections turn to the case of Kleineschholz – a district development project purportedly oriented 'towards the common good'. After outlining the study's methodology, I present its findings and discuss my research questions: How are different elements assembled to centre 'the common good' in the Kleineschholz development? Whose notion of common good is implemented? And what are the potential implications of the Kleineschholz development for countering municipal growth dependencies?

### 3 Methodology

The present study is methodologically grounded in three main pillars. The primary pillar is ethnographic research, involving the author's participation in 43 documented obser-

variations between July 2022 and August 2025, spanning various formal and informal settings. This included public information events ( $n = 4$ ), meetings amongst different stakeholders (including civil servants, members of collaborative housing groups, political representatives, researchers, and housing company representatives) ( $n = 14$ ), workshops for collaborative housing groups ( $n = 9$ ), and meetings within and between collaborative housing groups ( $n = 16$ ).

The second pillar consists of 13 semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders involved in the Kleineschholz development project, conducted between February 2022 and July 2025. These include six interviews with city representatives in leading roles concerning financing, the procurement process and the legal framework, as well as seven interviews with representatives from housing groups or umbrella organisations.

The third pillar encompasses public and official documentation related to Kleineschholz, including land-use plans, public tenders, city council decisions, newspaper articles, records from public events and materials from community-led housing groups. The systematic document analysis focused particularly on official documents from Freiburg city council between 2016 and 2025 ( $n = 12$ ) alongside other local authority documents on housing policy and public participation ( $n = 6$ ).

Interview transcripts, field notes from participant observations, and documents were coded using MAXQDA. An inductive coding strategy was initially employed to identify emerging themes, which informed subsequent rounds of interviews and observation. This includes the validation of preliminary findings during follow-up interviews with key stakeholders from both municipal and collaborative housing contexts. As the project progressed, later rounds of coding built on established themes while remaining open to new emergent patterns.

I assumed an active role in the research process, including networking among stakeholders, reflecting research results back to participants, and participating in collaborative housing initiatives. Throughout the study, I maintained transparency with different stakeholders about my research objectives while consciously navigating between my roles as researcher, participant and facilitator. Regular reflection on my positionality and the potential influence of my involvement on both the research process and the development itself became a crucial part of the methodology. I validated emerging findings with different stakeholders to ensure the analysis remained grounded in their diverse perspectives and experiences.

## 4 Findings

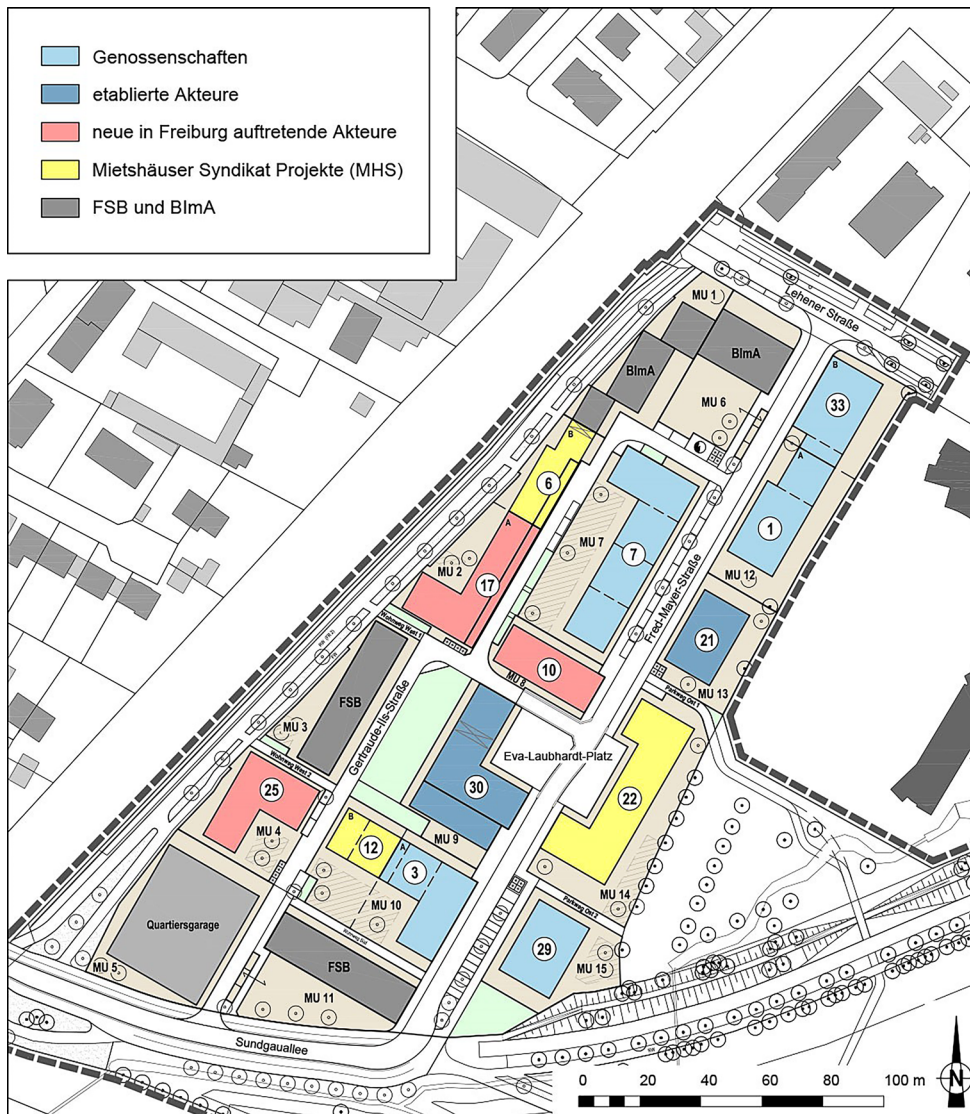
### 4.1 Kleineschholz in the context of Freiburg's housing policy

Kleineschholz is a 77,500 m<sup>2</sup> site close to Freiburg's centre that is being prepared for development, with construction of the first residential buildings planned to commence in early 2026. In the summer of 2025, the last two plots were allocated, bringing the total to 13 organisations that the local authority classifies as oriented towards the common good, all holding plot reservations at the time of writing (see Figure 1). This decision by the city of Freiburg to develop the district without profit-oriented investors must be understood against the background of the local housing market, Freiburg's municipal housing strategy and its collaborative housing landscape.

Similar to other urban centres, Freiburg's housing market has experienced a steep increase in property prices and rents. As a liveable "Green City" (Fastenrath/Preller 2018), with a high proportion of jobs in higher education and research, the city has seen significant population growth. At the same time, the general perception of housing as an investment and a growth market (Aalbers 2017) has also affected Freiburg. Yet, an important turn against the financialisation and neoliberalisation of housing was marked in 2006 when a public vote decided that the city of Freiburg would remain the sole owner of Freiburg Stadtbau GmbH (FSB) and the municipal apartments (Stadt Freiburg 2006). By this time, Freiburg already had an active community-led housing landscape. Most famously, the Mietshäuser Syndikat which emerged in the 1980s at a brownfield site near Freiburg's city centre, has become an internationally renowned organisation for decommodifying housing.<sup>1</sup> Locally, the Mietshäuser Syndikat is a key part of Freiburg's lively collaborative housing landscape that encompasses a range of larger and smaller cooperatives alongside 'infrastructural' housing organisations such as the Mietshäuser Syndikat and the Dachgenossenschaft (umbrella cooperative).

In 2013, Freiburg adopted a housing programme that gradually shifted the emphasis towards new housing developments, the promotion of affordable housing, land allocation through concept-based tendering and active property management (Stadt Freiburg 2013). Although the relationship between public and civil society actors in housing is not without its tensions, this strategy testifies to emerging convergences (Schmid/Fricke/Zengerling

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.syndikat.org/broschuere-nr-8-2021/> (accessed 14.10.2025).



**Figure 1** Overview of housing projects with confirmed plots reserved for them, including four small cooperatives (1, 3, 29, 33), three projects associated with the Mietshäuser Syndikat (6, 12, 22), one larger cooperative (7), two foundations (10, 17), one association (25), one church-affiliated organisation (21) and one investor-driven project (30). Source: Stadt Freiburg

2024). The Kleineschholz development emerged within this context of institutional opening towards non-market housing provision. Freiburg's revised housing strategy in 2020 (Stadt Freiburg 2020) reinforced this direction, demonstrating a growing appreciation for collaborative housing organisations.

## 4.2 Collaboration for the common good in urban planning

In 2018, the newly elected Mayor Martin Horn made a significant announcement about Kleineschholz during his inaugural address: To address the issue of affordable housing,

the district would be developed without profit-oriented investors. This exclusion was later reframed as development solely focused on the common good. However, the specific meaning of the common good and its translation into practice remain contested. This section explores how different elements are assembled to foreground 'the common good' in the Kleineschholz development, and whose notion of the common good is ultimately realised. To examine this, it traces two related dynamics: a low-threshold, open process of concept-based tendering, and a trans-stakeholder culture of communication.

#### 4.2.1 Concept-based tendering

Freiburg's key instrument to translate the notion of the common good into practice is the instrument of concept-based tendering. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to highlight three aspects of the concept-based tendering process: (1) the local authority's definition of the 'common good'; (2) the multi-step design of the tendering process, which aims to lower the entry barriers for participation; and (3) its open nature, which allows for a comprehensive assessment of the future district as a whole (for further details, see Schmid/Fricke/Zengerling 2024).

The local authority deliberately operates with the notion of *Gemeinwohl* (common good) instead of *Gemeinnützigkeit* (non-profit, charitable status). While the former foregrounds an orientation towards public interests, the latter has a more technical meaning, referring to specific legal forms and tax status. A narrow orientation focused solely on legal form would exclude actors that clearly align with the local authority's aim to develop Kleineschholz 'with actors [...] whose philosophy places the common good at the forefront, who are tenant-oriented and who retain the properties in the long term' (Stadt Freiburg 2023b: 2; my translation). Most prominently among these is the Mietshäuser Syndikat, which consists of a complex legal structure of limited companies (GmbH) and associations.

At the same time, the municipality acknowledges that there is no 'universally valid, binding definition of common good orientation' (Stadt Freiburg 2023b: 23; my translation). As a consequence, it has developed clear requirements as entry prerequisites. Organisations must fall into one of four categories: (1) companies with models of tenant participation in asset value, such as cooperative shares; (2) companies with a state, municipal or church mandate to provide public services in residential contexts; (3) companies whose purpose includes the promotion of social, ecological, cultural or similar community-oriented projects (reference projects are required); or (4) companies providing housing for their own employees in roles crucial to the functioning of the state or social system, e.g. key workers (Stadt Freiburg 2023b: 23; see also Schmid/Fricke/Zengerling 2024). However, once these entry prerequisites are met, considerations regarding the extent of common good orientation have proved less relevant in the selection process.

The concept-based tendering process itself consists of two main phases, each with intermediary steps. Upon submitting an initial proposal, all applicants who met the municipality's criteria for common-good orientation were invited to a discussion that facilitated the clarification of uncertainties and the refinement of their strategies to enhance coherence, plausibility and commitment. Based on the final submissions, the local authority committed to reserve plots

for selected projects (see selection process below). In the second phase, projects have one year to secure planning permission and confirm their funding. During this period, the reservation is upheld through a reservation agreement that outlines the requirements based on the submitted proposals. This phase also involves periodic discussions between the municipal representatives and the projects, allowing the municipality to monitor progress and intervene if certain conditions cannot be realistically met.

The primary function of this multi-stage process is to enable broad participation, especially among collaborative housing groups that often struggle with the initial costs, such as architectural fees, without a guaranteed plot allocation. Additionally, the early identification of projects and actors, including many future residents of Kleineschholz, allows for a unique approach to developing and coordinating use and economic strategies for the neighbourhood.

At this point, it is important to discuss the third aspect: the design of the concept-based tendering process as an open process. This means that instead of using a predetermined scoring system, the quality of the proposals is assessed on the basis of a 'comparative holistic evaluation' (Stadt Freiburg 2024: 4; my translation) using three criteria: (1) the projects' contribution to the neighbourhood, district and/or entire city; (2) the quality of the project proposals; and (3) the projects' assessed reliability in implementation. This approach allows for a full consideration of complementarity in the selection process, ensuring a variety of uses and target groups, as well as synergistic effects between projects. Furthermore, it inspires applicants to collaborate on their use concepts early in the process and to cultivate distinct profiles.

The actual decision on plot allocation was made by a selection committee consisting of the Mayor, the Building Mayor, one representative from each block of parties on the city council, and advisory members from the local authority. A first allocation proposal to issue reservations to eleven organisations was approved by the city council in December 2024. Two remaining plots were allocated in June 2025, following the same procedure. Additionally, four plots in the district were directly allocated to two public actors: two to Freiburger Stadtbau (FSB), the city's municipal housing company, and two to the Federal Agency for Government Property (Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben, BImA) – one of the former property owners.

The selected organisations included four small cooperatives, three projects associated with the Mietshäuser Syndikat, one larger cooperative, two foundations, one association, one church-affiliated organisation and one investor-driven project (see Figure 1). The latter is particularly noteworthy and exemplifies the aforementioned use of the common good as an inclusion or exclusion criterion: one of the

city's more controversial investors entered into a collaboration with a local retailer to form a project that includes both tenant participation mechanisms and employee housing, thus falling within the scope of the local authority's common good definition. The unease over this could be seen in the city council's decision to hold a separate vote on the project, which it ultimately approved.

#### 4.2.2 Communication and mutual understanding

Both public officials and collaborative housing representatives described how cross-stakeholder communication and mutual understanding emerged before, during and after the open concept-based tendering process. These factors, they explained, were central to the process's largely successful implementation. Two partially overlapping examples illustrate this dialogical approach. First, the local authority of Freiburg hosted a regular discussion format for ongoing dialogue among stakeholders. Second, established and new collaborative housing groups met regularly at a permanent physical space – the Pavillon für Alle (Pavilion for Everyone) – which was created specifically to facilitate these interactions.

In preparation for the concept-based tender, the Freiburg local authority established a regular dialogue between municipal representatives and representatives from collaborative housing groups. Reportedly, these conversations fostered 'relations of mutual trust and understanding' (Interview with city representatives), helping the local authority to 'gain a sense of what motivates housing groups and what their obstacles are' and enabling housing projects to express their viewpoints and needs.

One of the most significant outcomes was the shift away from leasehold principles. Leasing rather than selling plots in Kleineschholz was envisioned as a way to maintain long-term municipal control over the land. Kleineschholz's financing structure as an urban development scheme operates as a separate account outside the municipality's regular budget, requiring annual balancing. To avoid further increasing the deficit of this separate account, the full lease payment would have to be made upfront, equivalent to the full purchase price. State funding programmes, meanwhile, would recognise only 60 % of that upfront payment in their subsidy calculations.

As interest rates rose in 2022, this became a pressing issue, since subsidised, low-interest credit suddenly became crucial for financing many housing projects. The established dialogue format and the mutual understanding it had fostered enabled stakeholders to address this challenge collaboratively. As a result, the city implemented a land-purchase model with contractual limitations on resale and a municipal pre-emption right – a solution that preserved public control while easing financial pressure on housing projects.

As city representatives noted, this approach took into account 'the interests of both sides' (interview with city representatives). Nevertheless, it remained within the confines of incumbent financial structures, whereas a conventional leasehold model with continuous payments would have considerably reduced the financial burden for the projects. Such a model would have required a fundamental revision of the financing structures of the entire scheme.

Among the housing groups themselves the need for coordination was also significant. In this context, the Pavillon für Alle was built on the grounds of the future Kleineschholz district to harness the 'incredible potential to bring together and connect the housing groups to collaboratively explore how we want to live in the neighbourhood. It is not just about each housing project operating in isolation with its own use concept; it is about finding ways to integrate these approaches across the neighbourhood' (Interview with one initiator). The Pavillon für Alle functions as a meeting space for housing groups, an event venue for public events, and a hub for information sharing. One notable initiative was a professionalisation programme initiated and financed by the municipality of Freiburg and implemented together with the Social Innovation Lab. The programme aimed to support collaborative housing groups to navigate the challenging tendering process by providing expert input on financing, legal structures, group formation, architecture and sustainable materials. While contributing to the groups' 'professionalisation' the programme was only a stepping stone for laypeople to master the complex process. In the end, most groups still had to rely on professionals within their networks and on the established expertise within the community, such as that of the Mietshäuser Syndikat.

Even prior to the establishment of the Pavilion, a structured dialogue format – the Delegiertentreffen (Delegates Meetings) – had been developed. Initially emerging as advisory meetings amongst Mietshäuser Syndikat groups, these gatherings grew to include other small cooperatives. Over time, their focus shifted towards coordinating efforts across groups – discussing which plots to apply for, as well as potential uses and target groups. This coordination helped to navigate the inevitable competition for plots while fostering the complementarity of uses – further detailed in the next section.

### 4.3 Prospective outcomes

Kleineschholz is still under development, so any indications regarding the future shape and form of the district are necessarily provisional. Yet, the contours of affordable housing provisioning are comparatively straightforward, as all plot reservations include contractually binding commitments (see Table 1). Many initiatives guarantee substantial

**Table 1** List of projects including information on contractually binding commitments for affordable housing, communal concepts and collaborations

| Plot <sup>a</sup> | Project <sup>b</sup>                              | Contractually binding commitments for affordable housing and specific target groups <sup>c</sup>                                                                                                        | Use concepts and collaborations in the context of Kleineschholz <sup>d</sup>                                                                                                                   | Resident-driven <sup>e</sup> | Inter-project collaborations <sup>f</sup> |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| MU2 (A)           | Gemeinschaftsstiftung Kolpingwerk Deutschland     | 100% of living space for apprentices and trainees, including minors; supported by a social pedagogical strategy                                                                                         | Communal space                                                                                                                                                                                 | –                            | –                                         |
| MU2 (B)           | Velohaven (MHS)                                   | 50% floor area with rents 40% below LRR for 40 years; rent control for 15 years for all privately financed rental flats; two flats reserved for social purposes                                         | Community building, sharing, bicycle mobility and urban green spaces; Collaborations include Foodsharing (F), Lasten Velo Freiburg (M), Bike Bridge (M/I)                                      | +                            | +                                         |
| MU4               | Urbanova Club e.V.                                | 65% floor area with rents 33% below LRR for 30 years; two flats reserved for social purposes                                                                                                            | –                                                                                                                                                                                              | 0                            | –                                         |
| MU7               | Oekogeno eG                                       | 50% floor area with rents 33% below LRR for 30 years; rent control for 20 years for 25% of privately financed rental flats; inclusive housing                                                           | Co-working space; communal space; inclusion management; Collaborations: Aktion Mensch e. V. (C/I)                                                                                              | 0                            | 0                                         |
| MU8               | Aktion Mensch e.V.                                | 50% floor area with rents 33% below LRR for 30 years; inclusive housing for students and people with disabilities                                                                                       | Inclusion management; inclusion café; office space for care and health service providers; rehearsal room                                                                                       | –                            | 0                                         |
| MU9               | Stadt I Land I Gut GmbH & Co. KG                  | 100% floor area with rents 40% below LRR for 40 years; 40% of the flats reserved for staff of Beckesepp KG; two flats for co-living for trainees of Beckesepp KG and Umlüssig GmbH                      | Food retailer (Beckesepp KG); café; food rescue restaurant                                                                                                                                     | –                            | –                                         |
| MU10 (A)          | Lifelab e.V. (DG)                                 | 65% floor area with rents 40% below LRR for 40 years                                                                                                                                                    | 'Creative hub' for community-led organisations; community kitchen; Collaborations including Foodsharing Café (F); Experinauten (E); repurpose collective (R)                                   | +                            | +                                         |
| MU10 (B)          | Birnbaum e.V. (MHS)                               | 50% floor area with rents 33% below LRR for 30 years; two flats reserved for social purposes                                                                                                            | Communal space; everyday support and care concept                                                                                                                                              | +                            | +                                         |
| MU12 (A)          | WOLKE e.V. (DG)                                   | 50% floor area with rents 33% below LRR for 40 years; rent control for 10 years for all privately financed rental flats at €3/m <sup>2</sup> below LRR; shared apartment for care recipients or seniors | Communal spaces; rehearsal room; Collaborations including D-Care Lab (C), SAGES eG (C)                                                                                                         | +                            | +                                         |
| MU12 (B)          | Grünhaus eG                                       | 50% floor area with rents 40% below LRR for 40 years; rent control for 20 years for 20% of privately financed rental flats                                                                              | Initiative for multilingualism and intercultural education (MIB e.V.); upcycling workshop, communal space; guest apartment; rooftop farming; Collaborations: IMIB (E), Upcycling WERTstatt (R) | +                            | +                                         |
| MU13              | Siedlungswerk GmbH                                | 100% floor area with rents 33% below LRR for 30 years                                                                                                                                                   | –                                                                                                                                                                                              | –                            | –                                         |
| MU14              | Elino-r-Ostrom-Siedlungsprojekt Haus 1 e.V. (MHS) | 60% floor area with rents 40% below LRR for 40 years; rent control for 15 years for all privately financed rental flats; five flats reserved for social purposes                                        | Inclusive living; large communal space with community kitchen; local production; education; Collaborations including FreiLab (R); Werkstatt Schule (E/I)                                       | +                            | +                                         |
| MU15              | Wir machen Raum eG                                | 75% floor area with rents 40% below LRR for 40 years; rent control for 20 years at €15/m <sup>2</sup> for all privately financed rental flats; two flats reserved for social purposes                   | Sharing; communal spaces                                                                                                                                                                       | +                            | 0                                         |

<sup>a</sup> MU refers to a property classified as urban area after § 6a BauNVO (Federal Land Use Ordinance)

<sup>b</sup> Some housing groups are members of umbrella organisations such as the Mietshäuser Syndikat (MHS) or the Dachgenossenschaft (DG); other abbreviations indicate the legal form including registered cooperative (eG), registered association (e.V.), limited company (GmbH), limited partnership (KG)

<sup>c</sup> LRR refers to the local reference rent; 'social purpose' refers to apartments that are reserved for operation by social organisations and/or set aside for particular socially disadvantaged target groups, such as the homeless and refugees

<sup>d</sup> The abbreviations indicate one or more fields of activity of external partners, including Food (F), Mobility (M), Education (E), Care (C), Inclusion (I), or Resources, including local production, repair and upcycling (R); underlining indicates contractually binding commitments

<sup>e</sup> '0' indicates as yet unrealised potentials to become (more) resident driven

<sup>f</sup> 'o' indicates as yet unrealised potentials to participate (more) in inter-project collaborations

Sources: Stadt Freiburg (2023a), Pavillon für Alle (2024), Stadt Freiburg (2024)

rent reductions beyond the legally required 50 % of the floor area with rents that are 33 % below the local reference rent for a period of 30 years. In addition, most housing groups incorporate sufficiency principles by implementing the upper limits of living space per person: shared facilities including guest rooms, laundry facilities, community gardens and multifunctional rooms with kitchens – which are also open to non-residents – as well as the implementation of sharing schemes and the general encouragement of communal lifestyles.

A more complex picture emerges when looking beyond the housing itself. While only a few projects have detailed requirements on architecture and use written into the contractually binding reservation agreements (see Table 1), two key dynamics stand out: First, active coordination among collaborative housing groups – particularly through the delegate meetings and events organised by the Pavilion, as outlined in Section 4.2 – has significantly shaped their individual approaches. Second, the collaborative housing groups engage in extensive collaboration with other civil society actors in Freiburg (see Table 1).

As part of coordinating plot applications, the delegates' meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the complementarity of use concepts. This coordination was important for two reasons: First, the binding land use plan mandates commercial use in the urban district category. Second, groups needed to sharpen their profiles in the competitive tendering process – in particular against the background of the open, comparative assessment of concepts.

The projects aligned their efforts around various focus areas, including mobility, food, local production and repair workshops, culture and events, education, and inclusion. Most resident-driven projects incorporate one or more of these themes as central components of their vision and identity. Corresponding physical spaces – such as workshop facilities, flexible areas dedicated to cultural events, educational purposes or community meetings, distribution points for food and goods (e.g., 'Fairteiler'), and bike repair stations – are integrated into the architectural designs. Furthermore, most housing groups have partnered with one or several organizations working in these respective fields (see Table 1).

However, collaborative housing groups face two challenges in this process. First, aligning with both the district's overall common-good orientation and their own pro-social and pro-environmental values, they predominantly partner with non-profit organizations who cannot contribute to the construction costs. This requires substantial upfront financing on the part of housing groups, further straining their financial calculations. Second, negotiations over the distribution of these focus areas among the different groups – essentially 'who does what' – were not always conflict-free, re-

sulting in ongoing tensions between groups (Schröer 2024). A major factor fuelling these conflicts was the competitive environment created by the limited availability of plots, which inevitably pitted organisations against each other. Consequently, collaborative housing groups were pressured to develop a distinct profile, anticipating what resonates with the evaluation committee's vision for the district. Ultimately, strong networking among the groups enabled them to navigate the tension between cooperation and competition.

## 5 From common good orientation to reducing growth dependencies

### 5.1 Contesting the common good

Designing and implementing a concept-based tendering process to allocate plots to organisations that explicitly do not follow profit motives is a sharp turn away from the market primacy of neoliberal urbanism (Peck/Theodore/Brenner 2013). Such a turn to stronger involvement of the local state, however, does not automatically mean that the social harms of neoliberal and austerity urbanism are reversed. While the common good is mobilised in contrast to a free-market housing policy – which is recognised as having failed by the local authority – the notion remains contested. For the local authority, the common good is largely viewed as a binary decision required as a prerequisite for participating in the tender process. Once the boxes of pre-established organisational categories are ticked, further enquiries regarding an organisation's general suitability are waived.

However, some of the addressees of Kleineschholz's orientation towards 'the common good' adopt the principle more profoundly than others, as a guiding force for their organisational and economic efforts. Although collaborative housing groups do not necessarily use the term 'common good', their practices, decisions and instruments largely align with collective welfare rather than individual interests. This can be seen in the fact that they exceed the local authority's standards for qualifying as common good-oriented, for instance by developing voluntary measures to limit per capita living space. Beyond a focus on housing affordability and sufficiency, these groups demonstrate a tapestry of collaborations with external partners – largely from the non-profit sector (see Table 1).

While these efforts are strongly motivated, they align with the first evaluation criterion established by the local authority, which assesses projects' contribution to the neighbourhood, the district and/or the entire city (Stadt Freiburg 2024). However, due to constraints such as financial inse-

curity and the instability of (some) civil society partners, many of these collaborations have not been formalised as binding commitments and thus were not included in the evaluation. Once the box for qualifying as oriented towards the common good is ticked, established developers such as foundations, public companies or larger cooperatives were likely to fare better on the second and third evaluation criteria: the quality of the proposals, which must include a realistic financing plan, and their reliability as projects that will ultimately bear the promised fruit. All in all, this has resulted in a greater number of non-resident-driven projects than many participants had anticipated. Despite the local authority's significant opening up towards collaborative housing actors (Czischke/Carriou/Lang 2020), the organisational alignment with established partners continues to play a significant role. Especially in times of strained municipal budgets, predictability and solvency are crucial. Delays and inter-stakeholder disagreements – especially major conflicts which may arise through different world views (Torfing/Payandeh/Jalili et al. 2025) – can have severe consequences. While the local authority has tried to mitigate this issue by maintaining a close dialogue with the participants, it has also partially succumbed to institutional pressure by preferring solvent players over resident-driven projects.

Beyond institutional pressures, the plot allocation outcomes also reflect existing power relations and potential lobbying influence. Research on urban growth coalitions has extensively documented how established developers and influential investors shape urban development processes, often gaining preferential treatment through informal networks and political connections (Harding 1991; Götz/Hartmann 2021). In Kleineschholz, the inclusion of a project clearly associated with an influential investor raises questions about the consistency of the common good framework. Despite the lack of clear empirical evidence of direct interference, this decision highlights two key aspects. First, the local authority itself is composed of heterogeneous actors with varying priorities and perspectives. Kleineschholz is thus not a homogeneous, fully harmonised effort towards a singular vision of the common good, but an ambiguous process shaped by competing interests and constraints. Second, rather than reflecting a purely idealistic motivation to reorient urban development, Kleineschholz, for some, represents a flagship project aligning with Freiburg's 'green city' branding (Fastenrath/Preller 2018). While this does not diminish Kleineschholz's potential effects on housing affordability, it simultaneously fits within the logics of inter-urban competition.

## 5.2 Tackling growth dependencies

Despite these challenges, the Kleineschholz development marks a potential shift away from growth-based development. In terms of housing, this is reflected in a long-term strategy to create and secure affordable living spaces, rather than a focus on short-term profitability (see Section 2). Located in a prime area of Freiburg, the valuable plots in Kleineschholz are withdrawn from property speculation instead of being marketed to the highest bidder. By excluding profit-oriented investors from most plots, rents can be expected to remain considerably below the local reference rent even after the expiry of social housing agreements, particularly as long-term affordability is a core value for most housing groups and is embedded in their statutes. This means that most flats in Kleineschholz will not revert to market-rate housing. Projects further support long-term affordability by targeting various groups (such as trainees, refugees or retirees) and offering various, often flexible, flat sizes.

Beyond these predictable and formally secured aspects surrounding affordable housing, Kleineschholz presents further potential for reducing growth dependencies. The gradual approach towards the upcoming construction in Kleineschholz has resulted in community-building – amongst future residents and between housing projects and other civil society groups. Despite some constraints as outlined above, this demonstrates a pronounced turn away from private economic interests and surplus appropriation in neighbourhood development.

First, the involvement of (some) future residents in the development from a very early stage enables dialogue, coordination and negotiation about how Kleineschholz should be and how its residents will live together. This ranges from developing shared visions for individual housing developments to coordination amongst groups over communal approaches and use concepts. Future residents of the district are involved much earlier, much more deeply and in much greater numbers in designing their neighbourhood than would be the case in ordinary urban developments. Beyond these observable collaborative processes, this early involvement also has the potential to lay the groundwork for lasting relationships of mutual support, whether in relation to repairing everyday items, assisting with official correspondence, sharing leftover food, or simply providing companionship. These networks can help prevent numerous social costs and issues. Cultivating a residential community and building trusting relationships can further promote more sustainable lifestyles through the sharing of communal spaces such as offices, guest rooms, community gardens, laundry rooms and everyday items – ideas that are embedded in most housing concepts.

On a more structural level, the proposed use concepts and collaborations with community-led initiatives (Schmid/Smith/Aiken 2021) are likely to foster needs-based, local supply structures including food, shared means of transport, local production and repair, care and education, integration, arts and community development. Of course, this will not result in a closed-off or self-sufficient neighbourhood economy – the desirability of which remains questionable. However, in addition to shorter distances being required for everyday needs, this would imply proximity between owners, workers, users and their social context, alongside a low level of external value appropriation. Based on collaborative structures, grounded in collectively owned and operated spaces, and focused on needs-based provisioning, such a local economy would operate to some extent outside the pressures of a growth-based economy. While not insulated from broader economic relations – such as those connected to supply chains and labour markets – such a community-based economy lowers the pressures from rent and value extraction.

### 5.3 Limitations and lessons

Resident-driven projects, however, face an important limitation common to community-led initiatives, including from the housing sector: they are characterised by a disproportionate number of privileged individuals – often middle-class and male (Grossmann/Creamer 2017; Scheller/Thörn 2018). Although Kleineschholz presents a unique opportunity to realise resident-driven housing projects, it requires immense investments of resources and time. Unless housing projects deliberately address these challenges, individuals without the necessary capacities tend to be excluded. Some housing groups have implemented countermeasures. For instance, one project in Kleineschholz deliberately keeps its initial size below a certain limit to allow those with fewer capacities to join at a later stage. However, such strategies come with their own challenges, including additional efforts to address diverse participants and fewer resources such as lower deposits.

The main challenge here is structural: Despite the lowering of the entrance barrier through a two-step tendering process, the projects must navigate a complex landscape of planning and building regulations, funding programmes, architectural specifications, self-management, decision-making, conflict resolution and much more. Additionally, the projects face significant upfront costs, requiring a broad base of funding or wealthy individuals willing to provide substantial financial support. The professionalisation programme initiated by the local authority fell short of addressing this issue as it targeted the applicants' capabilities rather than simplifying the underlying processes.

A much more promising avenue would be further simplification of the process itself, for instance through fewer regulatory requirements. Further research is needed to explore how this could facilitate broader participation while maintaining legal standards.

A second factor driving the high financial costs for initiatives is the failed implementation of a leasehold model. Sequential payments as is the norm for heritable building rights would have considerably lowered the initial costs and thus the entrance barrier. Here a number of structural barriers – including Kleineschholz's financing structure as an urban development scheme with a separate account and the costing methods used by state subsidy programmes – have significantly limited the room for manoeuvre for both housing groups and municipal actors. Critical research on the potentials of more productive uses of leasehold models is needed to support future efforts.

In addition to these challenges, two critical notes are in order. First, Kleineschholz relies on new building stock, making this approach potentially resource-intensive and at least questionable from an ecological viewpoint. While most projects aim to use sustainable materials including wood, clay and straw, a long-term material impact assessment is beyond the scope of this paper and would merit future research. Regardless, the construction of new building stock avoids distributive conflicts over existing housing at the expense of land consumption, which presents a significant challenge for a growing city like Freiburg.

Second, Freiburg's long-standing tradition of collaborative housing merits highlighting. Ongoing capacity-building efforts over several decades have laid the groundwork for successful resident-driven projects with considerable expertise. This strongly limits the transferability of findings to other cities without a strong collaborative housing landscape.

## 6 Conclusion

As social and ecological crises continue to deepen, a critical exploration of the role of growth-based economies therein becomes necessary (Kallis/Hickel/O'Neill et al. 2025). This includes the critical engagement of spatial research and planning with how growth is entangled and imbricated in their assumptions, instruments and practices (Lange/Hülz/Schmid et al. 2022) – as begun under the notion of post-growth planning (Lamker/Schulze Dieckhoff 2022). Taking a constructive yet cautionary approach, this paper has explored how the notion of common good has been mobilised in a specific district development project – Kleineschholz. Despite enabling the involvement of collaborative housing groups – housing provided by and for residents (Czischke/

Carriou/Lang 2020) – the common good remains a contested concept: variously interpreted, oversimplistically operationalised and limited in its practical effects. At the same time, it has enabled the Kleineschholz project to clearly turn away from the neoliberal urbanism of marketisation and financialisation (Aalbers 2017), spurring and moderating practices that counter the logics of growth-based urbanism.

Taking a practice-oriented perspective, this paper has proposed three principles that continuously actualise and reproduce local authorities' orientation towards and dependence on economic growth: (1) monetary calculations and profitability, (2) market mechanisms and competitiveness, and (3) private economic interests and appropriation. Local authorities are, of course, woven into complex multi-level government arrangements providing a structural underpinning that largely eludes practices at the municipal level. This paper argues that local authorities still have partial agency over the depth of growth dependencies. Against this background, the paper has proposed three principles that counter the entrenchment of growth dependencies in municipal relations: (1) foregrounding non-monetary and longer-term costs and minimising negative externalities; (2) establishing needs-based and equitable provisioning systems; and (3) enhancing democratic steering and the collective generation and retention of surplus value. Despite notable issues and shortcomings regarding the diversity of collaborative housing, their resource needs, the depth of the notion of common good, and the material costs of new building stock, the Kleineschholz development speaks to each of these aspects.

Opting for concept-based tendering that explicitly addresses collaborative housing groups, flanked by regular dialogue, trust-building measures and an incipient if insufficient support programme, the local authority undertook considerable efforts to address a developer segment that pursues motives other than short-term monetary profit. This exhibits a clear valuation of non-monetary and long-term outcomes: permanently affordable housing, social cohesion, community-driven local provisioning and sustainable building. Although the long-term outcomes remain to be seen, the close involvement of future residents has significant effects on generating needs-based and equitable provisioning systems: Aside from a considerable volume of social housing, various and flexible flat sizes, and housing targeted at specific social groups, this also entails the emergence of a non-market neighbourhood economy. Various schemes such as a bike repair facility, food sharing, neighbourhood care and much more project a high density of non-commercial services in the district.

Kleineschholz thus exemplifies a more democratic mode of urban development and collective surplus appropriation. Counter to many examples where green, creative neighbourhoods fuel gentrification (Gould/Lewis 2017), the safe-

guard mechanisms and decommodification of housing in Kleineschholz prevent such effects. However, this is also where the greatest foreseeable shortcomings are evident: the barriers for participation remain high and prevent genuinely inclusive engagement. The efforts by housing groups to counter this can only address the symptoms of a growth logic that advantages those with high social and financial capital. Yet, despite its imperfections, Kleineschholz gnaws at the urban growth machine.

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