

Workshop IV

Community Organizing

Germany as a democratic republic has always been plagued by a lack of practice in democracy. Today it is currently facing a situation of distrust in politics and a lack of accountability of politicians which leads to a distrust in democracy itself and challenges the political system as a whole. With only 1% of the German population – mostly older people – organized in political parties, parties and politicians have lost contact with the people.

Community Organizing (CO) was developed over the course of more than 70 years of practice in the U.S. It starts by building strong public relationships across a variety of social, ethnic, religious, ideological and geographical boundaries to bring people together as groups and individuals. The goal is to develop an independent broad-based community organization which is able to hold politicians and the business sector accountable to issues surfaced within civil society and to work in partnership on local solutions proposed by the community organization for the common good.

Community organizations find and produce local leaders to negotiate with decision makers and offer at least temporary partnerships between organized civil society and the politicians for change in their neighborhoods and cities. Therefore, community organizing invites people who are new to public life or were previously disenchanted by it, to share their experiences and work together politically for structural change. One or two professional organizers support the local organizations and work to produce local leaders. Bringing organized people to decision makers and utilizing democratic structures to the fullest as CO does, is one important way to stabilize democracy.

This workshop will

- provide an overview of community organizing in Germany and
- introduce the work of the German Institute for Community Organizing, as well as the community organizations we founded and work with.

The principal challenges we face are

- how to raise independent money to finance our work and
- how to find and train new professional organizers.

These are the questions that I hope we can deal with together in our discussions.