

## Person-Centered Thinking as a Fundamental Approach to Improve Quality of Life

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**Abstract :** The UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Germany also ratified, postulates the necessity of user-centred design, especially when it comes to evaluating the individual needs and wishes of all citizens. Therefore, a multidimensional approach is required. Based on this insight, the structure of the town-like centre in Schönbrunn - a large residential complex and service provider for persons with disabilities in the outskirts of Munich - will be remodelled to open up the community to all people as well as transform social space. This strategy should lead to more equal opportunities and open the way for a much more diverse community. The research project "Index for participation development and quality of life for persons with disabilities" (TeLe-Index, 2014-2016), which is anchored at the Technische Universität München in Munich and at the Franziskuswerk Schönbrunn supports this transformation process called "Vision 2030". In this context, we have provided academic supervision and support for three projects (the construction of a new school, inclusive housing for children and teenagers with disabilities and the professionalization of employees using person-centred planning). Since we cannot present all the issues of the umbrella-project within the conference framework, we will be focusing on one sub-project more in-depth, namely "The Person-Centred Think Tank" [Arbeitskreis Personenzentriertes Denken, PZD]. In the context of person-centred thinking (PCT), persons with disabilities are encouraged to (re)gain or retain control of their lives through the development of new choice options and the validation of individual lifestyles. PCT should thus foster and support both participation and quality of life. The project aims to establish PCT as a fundamental approach for both employees and persons with disabilities in the institution through in-house training for the staff and, subsequently, training for users. Hence, for the academic support and supervision team, the questions arising from this venture can be summed up as follows: (1) has PCT already gained a foothold at the Franziskuswerk Schönbrunn? And (2) how does it affect the interaction with persons with disabilities and how does it influence the latter's everyday life? According to the holistic approach described above, the target groups for this study are both the staff and the users of the institution. Initially, we planned to implement the group discussion method for both target-groups. However, in the course of a pretest with persons with intellectual disabilities, it became clear that this type of interview, with hardly any external structuring, provided only limited feedback. In contrast, when the discussions were moderated, there was more interaction and dialogue between the interlocutors. Therefore, for this target-group, we introduced structured group interviews. The insights we have obtained until now will enable us to present the intermediary results of our evaluation. We analysed and evaluated the group interviews and discussions with the help of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring in order to obtain information about users' quality of life. We sorted out the statements relating to quality of life obtained during the group interviews into three dimensions: subjective wellbeing, self-determination and participation. Nevertheless, the majority of statements were related to subjective wellbeing and self-determination. Thus, especially the limited feedback on participation clearly demonstrates that the lives of most users do not take place beyond the confines of the institution. A number of statements highlighted the fact that PCT is anchored in the everyday interactions within the groups. However, the implementation and fostering of PCT on a broader level could not be detected and thus remain further aims of the project. The additional interviews we have planned should validate the results obtained until now and open up new perspectives.

**Keywords :** person-centered thinking, research with persons with disabilities, residential complex and service provider, participation, self-determination.

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