

The Vienna Charter: Shaping the future together

"Wiener Charta"

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Organisation: Municipality of Vienna

Country: Austria

Level of government: Local government

Sector: General public services

Type: Communication, Digital, Public Service

Launched in: 2012

Overall development time:

14 months

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Vienna Charter provides the framework for good neighbourly relations by actively promoting dialogue between the citizens and building solidarity. It is a written agreement between people who live in Vienna, an agreement they have reached mutually and out of their own conviction. The City of Vienna merely facilitated the process in which people could express their views on how good neighbourly relations should function and what they would do to contribute to them. It was not about what politicians or the city administration should do, but rather about what each individual could do to improve the way people live together in their city.

The Viennese themselves chose the topics for the Charter and actively participated in its development. They were able to participate both online and offline. Based on the input provided, an advisory committee identified what the Charter should address. 325 partner organisations from a diverse range of fields supported the process by holding charter talks and/or using their information channels to spread awareness of the project. The result of each Charter talk was announced by moderators on the website for others to read.

Why the innovation was developed

Large cities are diverse and heterogeneous, and diversity increases with globalisation. Therefore, it is crucial that everyone living in a city be able to deal with this diversity calmly, objectively, and without fear, but also with a critical and open mind. This is indispensable for us to feel comfortable and increases individual quality of life. It is just as important for social cohesion and solidarity. It is against this background that the City of Vienna launched the Vienna Charter project.

Objectives

Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

- Increase individual quality of life for the Viennese.
 - Enhance social cohesion and solidarity in Vienna.
 - Enable people to share opinions about how to shape the future of their city together.
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Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- Inhabitants of Vienna as the Vienna Charter should increase their quality of life by encouraging good neighbourly relations.
- The City of Vienna is an indirect beneficiary as the charter should enhance social cohesion and solidarity.

Results

Service quality

Accessibility:

- For this sort of new online participation with citizens, we developed tools to support the project to make it easy for users to write their suggestions, to discuss the topics and to get an overview of the most current results of all charter talks.
 - We received 2 649 comments during the initial phase during which topics were collected.
 - 651 charter talks were held with some 8 500 participants.
 - Some 10 000 Viennese were actively involved in developing the Vienna Charter online and offline.
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User satisfaction

Users had the possibility to discuss online and to follow the Charter process (with results, items etc.). This made the process transparent and allowed citizens to form an objective perspective, free from political influences.

Evaluation

There was no special evaluation, but here are some facts: in total, 651 charter talks were held in all districts of Vienna and at nearly any kind of venue imaginable (e.g. club houses, pubs, offices, schools, people's flats, parks and public swimming pools). Some 8 500 people participated in them, investing a total of 12 700 hours in discussing good neighbourly living. The participants represented a true cross-section of Vienna's population: children, young people, senior citizens, different socio-economic groups, entrepreneurs, the unemployed, people with different native languages, different nationalities, people with special needs, people with different religious beliefs, worldviews and political opinions, and people with different sexual orientations.

Development

Implementation

Tools used:

- The Municipal Department “Integration and Diversity” developed and implemented the concept together with an external agency who was particularly involved in the moderation during the online phases.
- Implementation took place in several phases:
 - Open invitation letter to anyone interested in participating in the process.
 - Ground rules for the development of the Charter were stated clearly on the homepage from the beginning.
 - Core document describing the indispensable foundations of good neighbourly relations arising from legal norms was developed by a group of experts composed of legal experts and experts of everyday life (residential building caretaker, school student, and school principal).
 - Collecting the topics: All Viennese could suggest topics they considered important for good neighbourly relations either online or by phone. Tools: moderated online forum, “Charter hotline.”
 - Analysis and presentation of topic clusters by an advisory committee (composed of 6 people reflecting the wide range of 325 partner organisations).
 - Charter talks as centrepiece of the process where people met to discuss issues face-to-face. Organised by partner organisations and individuals. Two moderators for each talk from a pool of approximately 300 moderators.
 - Moderated online discussion of group results.
 - Content was assembled into the Vienna Charter and presented to the public in a press conference.

Resources used:

- EUR 450 000 costs for:
 - The development of appropriate tools for online discussions: the firm neu&kühn was contracted for the online implementation. They were involved in the concept development and its technical implementation, and moderated the forum during the online phases.
 - Implementation of these new tools for the City of Vienna by a Municipal Department, MA 14.
 - External moderators.
 - Ads in newspapers.
- Resources from the non-for-profit sector: 325 partner organisations from an impressively diverse range of fields supported the process by holding charter talks and/or using their information channels to spread awareness of the project.

Implementation time: 8 months

Partnerships

Other municipal departments

Other Public Sector

They participated in the Charter talks.

neu&kühn

Private sector

This firm is specialised in online citizens' projects; it was contracted for the online implementation. It was involved in the concept development, its technical implementation, and moderated the forum during the online phases.

Diverse partner organisations

Other

325 partner organisations from an impressively diverse range of fields supported the process by holding Charter talks and/or using their information channels to spread awareness of the project, e.g.:

- Private sector:
 - Big companies like McDonalds, Siemens, IBM as advertisers and participants of the Charter talks.
 - Both sides of industry (Austrian Chamber of Labour, Austrian Economic Chamber, trade unions).
- Civil society: Red Cross, communities of faith (the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches, the Islamic community of Austria, the Jewish community, the Buddhist community), the Freethinker's Association, migrant communities, various cultural and sports associations and clubs, self-help groups of people with special needs, and the Homosexuals' Initiative.
- Service users: About 2 000 postings during the topic selection phase and the final phase.
- Political parties: Three of the four political parties represented in the Vienna City Council (Social Democrats, People's Party, the Greens) and the district organisation Margareten of the Communist Party participated in the talks.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The long preparation period made it possible to engage many citizens in the participation process.
- It was extremely important to find partners who were supportive of these efforts.
- It was essential to use all facets of modern technologies.
- If we were to complete the same project again, we would not change our approach given its success.
- Advice: the project must be suited to the local environment and the partners have to be motivated to help set up and conduct talks.

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