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FIVE PLANNING PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL URBAN DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT - RECENT EXAMPLES FROM GERMANY

MICHAEL PETEREK

My contribution to this Second International Forum will focus on contemporary challenges for the planning and development of integrated urban districts. I am going to illustrate these issues with some recent examples of district development in Germany.

In the last years, in many projects in Germany the urban district has been re-centered as a major focus of urban development and policies raising amongst others the following questions:

How do we want to live as social communities in our cities of future?

Which are the perspectives and potentials of an integrated urban district development?

How can urban development create the foundations for a social and democratic city with equal opportunities for everyone?

Obviously, the context and background of planning and typologies of urban district development differs in Chile and Germany. Nevertheless, it seems interesting to discuss some basic principles of contemporary planning in an international and intercultural comparison here at this conference.

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The starting point: a disintegrated city

For a long time, almost all cities in Germany have been determined by a merely quantitative expansion of their urbanised areas. These developments were related to an important change of scale: from delimited cityscapes to almost unlimited city-regions.

The effects are widely known: suburbanisation and extensive urban sprawl, mono-functional zoning of our cities, leading to a physical, functional and social separation of their single constitutive parts. On the one hand, there are mono-functional residential zones, strictly divided under the terms of the specific socio-economical status of their inhabitants, and on the other hand, there are equally mono-functional areas zoned for business and industries, too. The result is a disintegrated city that falls apart into different zones, sectors and partitions, creating an increasing necessity of connecting individual automobile mobility to make the city work at least. To sum up, this disintegrated city is not a sustainable form of urban living at all.

At the same time, urban societies are subject to enormous changes today, facing novel and so far unbeknown demographic, social, ecological and economic challenges – like the ageing of society, smaller and much more diversified household typologies – well beyond the traditional nuclear families –, an increasing immigration and with it cultural differentiation in our cities, severe ecological and economic constraints and others. These transformations make the enhancement of new forms and models of collective living in urban societies necessary. The scale of urban districts can be helpful for these purposes.

Objectives for an integrated and sustainable urban district development

Hence the development and recovery of attractive and integrated city districts has become a central objective of national urban development policies in Germany. Strengthening and stabilisation of decentralised, poly-nuclear city districts and integrated neighbourhoods offering all necessary facilities for our everyday life – including housing, jobs, services, culture, education – can consolidate the cities as a whole. In doing so, integrated district development ties in with the qualities of the traditional “European City”¹, like urban density, functional mix, and social integration.

In recent years, a variety of projects and diverse district typologies have been involved in such programmes of active district renewal and development. The

1. City in which more than 80% of the population living urban area.

national programme “Social City” focusing on unprivileged districts with a combined spatial, social and economic approach is very important in this context and will be dealt with in another contribution at this conference. Generally speaking, the majority of today’s projects of district development can be classified according to the following three categories:

- Renewal of old and historical districts and neighbourhoods, in many cases dating from the industrial period of the second half of the 19th century.
- Regeneration and modernisation of large social housing estates of the second half of the 20th century, an increasingly important challenge of current urban development,
- Contemporary brownfield developments, i.e. areas which have lost their previous role and functions (for example previous industrial or military sites) and require a fundamental regeneration – probably the largest potentials for a sustainable and integrated urban development in the future.

In all cases, the local authorities are a major stakeholder in the development processes, together with the actors from the professional domain as well as relevant groups from the local residents. In the following, I want to illustrate five basic planning principles that are constitutive for successful and sustainable urban district development.

First: Successful urban districts are physically and functionally diversified and mixed-use

One of the primary targets of successful district development today is to achieve a diversity of urban and architectural typologies and a mix of urban functions within the neighbourhood. This includes a variety of housing options in form and typology, of services and jobs, of infrastructure and open spaces within the district and for a wide range of different sociocultural groups. Existing districts that are homogeneous and mono-structured nowadays should be enriched by complementary functions and a diversification of the housing stock. Typological and functional diversity can then act as a potential prerequisite for social diversity and integration as well.

The development of the Vauban district in Freiburg in Southern Germany is a successful example in this sense (fig. 1). Vauban is the result of an extensive brownfield development, covering an area of 38 hectares, situated at a distance of about 3 km from the city centre. The area was used for military purposes until the year 1994. After the city had taken possession of the property, Vauban was developed as a model district with prospected 5,000 inhabitants.

Today in the district of Vauban, we find a deliberate plurality of housing forms and units, of occupancies, of plot sizes, of architectural typologies and appearances, of open and collective spaces etc. (fig. 2). The housing models include among others options for collective building-groups, for cooperatives, for alternative and self-organised housing initiatives, for student housing.

Another prominent example is the development of the Südstadt in Tübingen, situated in Southern Germany, too. Just as Vauban, the Südstadt Tübingen is a former military barracks' site. After the French army had left Tübingen at the beginning of the 1990ties, the city took possession of the area. Südstadt is planned to provide residences for 5,000 inhabitants and about 2,000 jobs until the year 2012.

The intention is to develop an integrated "district of short distances", which should allow its inhabitants to satisfy all needs of everyday life within the boundaries of the district itself. This implies the provision of sufficient jobs, necessary services and attractive public spaces within a walking or cycling distance to make automobile circulation obsolete, wherever possible.

Like the developments in Freiburg, Südstadt Tübingen is characterized by small-scale plot developments, intended for collective building-groups and an individualised architecture (fig. 3). A special feature is the legal obligation to provide a mix of functions on each single plot: a combination of residential use, usually on the upper floors, and of commercial or office space, typically on the ground floor.

A third example of revitalisation of an existing inner-city area is the very recent transformation project of Lyoner Straße district in Frankfurt am Main. In this case, a till this day completely mono-functional office quarter is going to be converted into an integrated and mixed-use urban district for 3,000 new residents. The measures of the scheme will include the destruction of office blocks, the transformation of offices into apartment buildings, the construction and integration of new housing facilities, the developments of social and cultural infrastructure, of open spaces and parkland.

Second: Successful urban districts provide their inhabitants with attractive public spaces for social interaction and communication

Attractive public spaces can be regarded as the urban backbone of a district. They are the places where people of a neighbourhood meet and spend a better part of their spare time. Public spaces are the mastic that ties the district up. They promote social interaction and integration, and contribute in a significant way to the identity of an urban district.

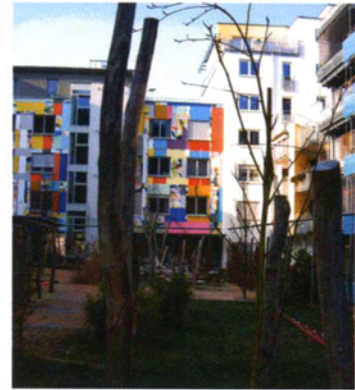


Figura 3:
Desarrollo habitacional en Tübingen.
Housing development in Tübingen.

For a long time, the public spaces in-between the buildings of our cities have just been residual spaces, leftover spaces, incidental results of the urban development. Nowadays, the upgrading of public spaces and the improvement of their physical and social qualities has become a major concern for sustainable district development. Public spaces are those areas that can effectively be developed and controlled by public authorities, as they are not subject to private discretion or property.

The design, management, and maintenance of public spaces can be regarded as an important field of action for public participation of the neighbouring residents. With respect to public spaces, such kind of civil commitment is a great potential for developing local responsibility to make a district safer and more attractive.

In Freiburg-Vauban, the newly created market square with contiguous community centre acts as a district centre and focal point for a multitude of collective activities, including local events, food and flea markets, formal and informal performances etc. In the Vauban neighbourhoods, a network of green areas creates an attractive residential environment for leisure and social interchange (fig. 4).

In Tübingen, old and new developments are combined around a new public district square which is car-free and surrounded by gastronomic and commercial infrastructure on the ground floor (fig. 5).

In Wuppertal, the 19th century Schusterplatz has been refurbished in a participatory planning and implementation process. The involved stakeholders included local residents, local associations and local authorities, all led and monitored by a professional planning team. The whole process led to an increased identification of the inhabitants with "their" square under the motto "a place for all".

Third: Successful urban districts are "districts of short distances"

The development of a "city of short distances" is one of the crucial objectives of current urban planning in Germany. A successful district development, based on the qualities and potentials of the local, has to promote a strengthening of non-motorised "local mobility", and therewith the implementation of pedestrian and cyclist mobility.

By creating dense, diversified and mixed-use urban facilities (see above, planning principle 1) as well as attractive public spaces (see principle 2), we can

reduce the effects of an “enforced” mobility (to other places and districts). This will support the development of “districts of short distances”.

By doing so, individual automobile mobility will not have any longer sole priority in the planning and development of urban districts. Instead of that, traffic-calmed public spaces will be created in which all traffic participants (pedestrians, cyclists, and car-users) have the same rights. At the same time, an efficient public transport network has to be established to link the “districts of short distances” with the centre and other places of urban relevance.

Under the lines of the motto “Streets are for people, not for cars”, in Freiburg-Vauban most of the residential streets have been traffic-calmed, cars are allowed to enter for loading and unloading, but not to park (fig. 6). Within the overall district, centralised parking garages are provided as well as car sharing facilities and a new tramway to the centre, with a five to ten minutes’ frequency (fig. 7).

The streets can thus become an environment for social contacts and communication again, for children, for neighbours, improving the quality of living. At the same, the reduced standard of road development saves on the overall amount of land and settlement area consumption.

A comparable concept of “shared space” has been realised in many cities in Germany and in the Netherlands. In the medium-sized city of Bohmte, there is not any longer a functional separation of spaces for cars and for pedestrians in many parts of the city, former privileges are cut back, automobiles have to adapt to walking speed, a really usable public space has been created (fig. 8).

In the city of Frankfurt a pilot project on “Local Mobility” has been started in the 19th century Nordend district. The intention is to create a better environment for local mobility (pedestrians and cyclists) by a participatory approach where local residents are involved in site visits, field mapping, identification of deficiencies and potentials as well the development and implementation of a first set of experimental traffic-calming measures.

Fourth: Successful urban districts are based on up-to-date ecological standards

In the light of the increasing climate change, sustainable district development has to integrate up-to-date ecological targets and to implement trend-setting environmental standards. These have to include:



Figura 6:
Calles con poco tráfico en Friburgo -
Vauban.
Traffic-calmed streets in Freiburg-Vauban

- Sustainable energy concepts, such as improved thermal insulation, low and zero-energy houses, even plus-energy houses (producing more energy they need, for instance by solar roof panels), decentralised block heat and power plants.
- Ecological building materials.
- Extensive green areas, minimal soil sealing.
- Rainwater and surface water infiltration systems.
- Waste reduction and separation.
- Innovative and efficient mobility concepts, including car sharing options and an attractive public transport.

In the Vauban district in Freiburg, a considerable number of these ecological measures have been implemented so far (fig. 13 and 14).

Fifth: Successful districts rest upon an active participation of their inhabitants in all decision-making

An important precondition for successful and sustainable district development is an extensive involvement of the district's residents in all the local decisions. Local participation can create a sense of responsibility and identity with the collective built environment.

On the one hand, for such purposes well-organised residents' groups and civil associations are of primordial importance. On the other hand, the local municipality has to play a major role in activating and coordinating such participatory initiatives, which often is a quite new role for local authorities: to support civil groups and initiatives, to moderate processes, and at the same time, to monitor the compliance with primal quality standards. For both sides, the citizens and the authorities, an absolute reliability on stipulated regulations and agreements is a crucial element of the process.

Freiburg is a positive example on that score, too. In Vauban, a residents' district association – Stadtteilverein Vauban – provides the institutional basis for an enlarged participatory process for the development of a common socio-ecological model district. Elements of this process include among others:

- Working groups on different topics, for instance built environment, mobility, energy, public spaces, green areas, public and social affairs.



Figura 8:
Espacio compartido en Bohmte.
Shared space in Bohmte.
fuente / source: www.shared-space.org

- Marketing and public relations.
- Cultural events.
- External representation of the district on a city level or beyond.

The physical reference point for all these activities has since long been the community centre at the central district square. At times, the initiatives have been supported by a full-time office team, which was externally financed by the city of Freiburg and some additional national and European funding. Such a support by local politics and administration is essential for an effective public participation.

Successful urban districts are districts for all

Successful and sustainable urban districts are by no means districts for just one single social, economic or cultural section or group of society. Successful districts are districts for all: for old and young, for women and men, for native and migrants. As exposed at the beginning, the principles of a precise separation of different needs, functions, or zones within the city and the districts are a thing of the past. Instead of that, integration and multidimensionality are requested today. And that is what the here presented districts and case studies try to implement.

Hence a successful district of the future will be an urban district for all groups and all generations. The illustrated principles of sustainable planning inure to the benefit of all groups within our cities.

Successful urban districts can so become a major integrating factor of urban development. They produce identity and facilitate identification with social and built environment. Integrated and attractive districts are important preconditions for an overall democratic and socially integrative city.



Figura 10:
Infiltración de aguas pluviales en
Vauban.
*Rainwater and surface water infiltration
in Vauban.*