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Future strategies for inner-city development: A post-Covid strategy? Resilience as the new paradigm?

Our inner cities face a “bifurcation”, as the futurologist Matthias Horx calls it, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Urbanity and the capacity for encounter appear to be inherently challenged. HafenCity Hamburg GmbH especially, with its responsibility for four major urban development initiatives in Hamburg oriented essentially towards new construction, must address the consequences. What might a post-pandemic orientation of the inner city look like? Can the principles of the Healthy City serve as a guideline? Or, more broadly, is the resilience of the city the new paradigm? Do other principles, such as the “compact city”, now have to be shelved? At any rate, urban development will have to reposition itself while simultaneously continuing to contribute to answering the major social and environmental questions of our age: How do we deal with the consumption of resources and with climate change? What goes to make a livable social city?

The chief principles of urban development must therefore be redefined, discussing them against the backdrop of the crisis and redeveloping project guidelines: in experimental projects on sustainability and extending the social infrastructure in HafenCity; in the form of a multi-dimensional integration strategy for all significant innovation measures in Grasbrook; further developed in Science City Hamburg Bahrenfeld with a focus on knowledge and the generation of knowledge-based innovation (also beyond urban development); and finally in Billebogen, combined with inner-city work locations in a compact and green form.

Prof Jürgen Bruns-Berentelg, CEO of HafenCity Hamburg GmbH: “If we take the case of densification (more city within the city), we can sketch out the further development of our principles as follows: The compact city will not have to be abandoned in the post-Covid world, but will instead form a central goal in sustainable transformation. It will change, though: It will have to become doubly compact, firstly in the form of built structures comprising zero-emissions buildings and infrastructure, and secondly by a densification of green aspects, creating not only new areas but also lots of new street environments, greened facades and roofs and new “nature-based solutions” in general.”

Dr Andreas Kleinau, Managing Director, HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, picks up on the theme of future strategies and points to the exemplary technological and socio-economic innovations that HafenCity has created in its 20 years of development: “Through strategic innovative development and many bold experiments by developers and further stakeholders HafenCity has set new standards in many areas. That is true of the HafenCity Ecolabel as the very first certification system as well as for the establishment of civil society structures or the development of new, integrated competition and planning processes. We now want to continue fostering this innovative strength, linking it more firmly with opportunities posed by digitalisation. With our new company headquarters in a zero-emissions building, we have now ourselves become part of this ongoing learning process of innovation.”

Even though the four urban development initiatives each have their own very specific logic when it comes to location and development, they mirror these guiding perspectives of future-oriented urban development – based on the urban development responsibilities of HafenCity Hamburg GmbH – in all four areas equally.

Grasbrook: large park at the heart of an innovation district

The new Grasbrook district is an impressive example of how a dense, compact inner-city area can have a very green character. The competitive dialog, concluded in April 2020, focuses on strong cityscapes – in a design by von Herzog & de Meuron and Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten – with a five-hectare central park in the middle, a new roof construction giving identity to the district and a striking urban waterfront on the Elbe.

In open space planning, concepts are currently being developed for how the design of public open spaces can take into account water cycles, the urban climate and biodiversity. The port area, which is almost completely sealed today, will be transformed into a green district in the future, with intensive greened roofs and facades, around 10,000 trees and the preservation of ecologically valuable biotopes influenced by the tide. In the future, street environments such as Grasbrook Boulevard will also be more areas for leisure and recreation than roads for vehicular traffic.

One of the biggest challenges is linking Grasbrook with surrounding areas, especially Veddel. The wide “Veddel Bridge” is a convincing proposal in the urban design to overcome the existing barriers caused by the major traffic and railroad corridors. Grasbrook and Veddel are to grow together into a single urban district, with joint facilities for sport and leisure, schools, shopping and cultural uses. The roof, a new construction of the former roof of the “Überseezentrum”, can also become a focal point of neighborly encounters – provided that financing, uses and operator models are successful.

Grasbrook milestones in 2021:

- Completion of functional and open space planning by summer 2021
- First space clearance measures from spring 2021
- Continuation of public participation from summer 2021
- Passing of priority area status and urban development concept
- Implementation plan for open spaces and green areas

Science City Hamburg Bahrenfeld: urban center for the confluence of research, teaching and housing

For the coming decades, Science City Hamburg Bahrenfeld is going to be one of Hamburg’s most ambitious initiatives for the future. It integrates knowledge, research and teaching, business and also urban development, and will see the development of this urban area in close coordination with the Ministry for Urban Development and Housing, the Ministry for Science, Research, Equalities and Districts, the Altona District Administration and the Senate Chancellery. Development is coupled with the implementation of a district concept that links the existing and new science facilities with a residential, urban district with social infrastructure as a further mainstay.

A wide range of housing options in approximately 2,500 newly built apartments with an above-average proportion of subsidized housing, cultural and sports facilities, social amenities and proximity to Altona Volkspark offer a high level of residential convenience for people with a wide range of backgrounds and needs.

Following the 2019 agreement on future perspectives by the Senate and Hamburg’s parliament, a cooperation agreement with Altona District was signed in 2020 and a comprehensive site analysis completed and published in 2021. This extensive knowledge documentation acts as the basis for the upcoming consolidation of planning for the central development areas. The urban design and open spaces of the central development areas of the former trotting track and the allotment garden site south of Schulgartenweg and Holstenkamp will be further elaborated and publicly discussed in a broad communication process. Preliminary planning has also begun on extending the S32 rapid transit line to

provide excellent public transport connections and lay the foundations for the merging of two heterogeneous urban areas.

Science City Hamburg Bahrenfeld milestones in 2021

- Start of “Volksparkquartier” competitive process with intensive public participation from mid-2021
- Revision of urban development planning for Altona Innovation Park
- Opening of SCHB Information Center
- Continuation of relocation process for trotting track
- Preliminary planning for rapid transit (DB, BVM)

Billebogen Elbbrücken city gateway: merging of two heterogeneous neighborhoods

Better connecting heterogeneous urban areas with regard to sustainable mobility and neighborliness is an important topic for Billebogen and the Elbbrücken city gateway, connecting the areas of eastern HafenCity and Billebogen, in Rothenburgsort district, with Veddel and Grasbrook. The concrete first step will be a bridge for cyclists and pedestrians between the green Entenwerder peninsula in southern Rothenburgsort and the Elbbrücken neighborhood in eastern HafenCity. The new bridge, designed by Schlaich Bergermann Partner with Gerkan, Marg und Partner, will open up a direct easy connection for the first time in 2023/24.

Dismantling the cloverleaf expressway junction at Billhorner Brückenstraße, which is oversized for today’s purposes, will free up 170,000 – 220,000 m² GFA of new potential space primarily for office and commercial use, but also for housing in areas better shielded from noise. In this way, a new urban density with an exciting mix of functions can also be created in exposed locations. The future use of the nearby former state spirits monopoly site as the location for a customs academy with possible supplementary functions as a district center will also provide important impetus in this regard.

Following the agreement of the framework plan for the Elbbrücken city gateway, the focus turns in 2021 to the Bille basin to the north. Here the task is to create sites for urban manufacturing, research and development as well as for company headquarters, especially for small and mid-sized enterprises. At the same time, public access to the beautiful waterside locations of the Bille basin will be improved and leisure uses, such as water sports, given fresh perspectives.

Billebogen milestones in 2021:

- Conclusion of framework and functional planning
- Parliamentary clearance and zoning plans
- Urban planning concept for Bille basin
- Exclusive option period
- Participatory formats

HafenCity: “springboard” for the strategies of tomorrow’s city

While the three urban development initiatives of Grasbrook, Billebogen and Science City are still largely at the ideas and planning stages, HafenCity has been a lively reality for many years now. Today about 5,000 people live in HafenCity, and more than 3,000 homes have been built. In addition, there are about 15,000 people working in HafenCity.

But 42 cranes still continue to witness to the construction dynamism in coming years. Construction of the defining major project in the center, Überseequartier, has reached the upper stories, and housing construction begins in spring 2021. The zoning plan has been agreed for the Elbtower, which forms the eastern conclusion to HafenCity, and preliminary building work will begin in spring 2021. The overall appearance of HafenCity will also be significantly determined by the approximately 10,000 m² Amerigo Vespucci Square, to be publicly inaugurated on May 29–30. In 2021, with new promenades at

Kirchenpauerkai and the green Strandkai promontory, HafenCity is proving impressively that, despite its density, the inner-city can also be green.

In addition to the high pace of construction, HafenCity stands above all for the ongoing learning process of central strategies for sustainable urban development. In the eastern Elbbrücken neighborhood, in particular, HafenCity is becoming a test bed for buildings with unusually high sustainability standards. The 18-story wooden high-rise “Roots”, where building started in November 2020, is an impressive example, as is the “Moringa” building project that is being constructed according to the “circular economy” principle. Further initiatives with ambitious sustainability concepts are the two high-tech buildings EDGE HafenCity and Edge Elbseite that are already under way. And the “Future Opportunities Construction Exhibition” in 2021 will continue the process with further architecture competitions and exclusive options on plots.

HafenCity milestones in 2021

- Building starts on community houses, May 2021
- Opening of Amerigo Vespucci Square May 29–30, 2021
- High level of construction in central and eastern HafenCity
- Building of apartments in southern Überseequartier begins
- Continuation of building-related sustainability experiments
- Preliminary construction measures for Elbtower (zoning plan status §33/1)

Media resources:

The complete press pack, films and presentation can be found on our press portal at <https://www.hafencity.com/press/annual-press-conference>

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