



District Work Elsewhere –
Excursion to the city of Hamburg, 6th to 8th July 2011

Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung im 12. Bezirk,
Mandlgasse 21, 1120 Wien

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ABSTRACT

Together with the Executive City Councillor for Housing, Housing Construction and Urban Renewal, Dr. Michael Ludwig, and representatives from the Vienna City Administration, the team of the Local Urban Renewal Office for District 12 (GB*12) visited various urban renewal projects in Hamburg. The following excursion report shall provide a short insight into the approaches to different issues of urban renewal and district work that despite similar aims are quite different.

The GB*12 organized a three-day excursion programme named “District Work Elsewhere” that centred around key fields of activity and current questions of the Vienna Local Urban Renewal Offices. Together with representatives of the contracting entity, we attempted to compare two cities that are similar in terms of population number and size as well as purchasing power and political orientation and to additionally get new impulses for the thematic orientation of the Vienna Local Urban Renewal Offices.

Besides the issues of demographic change, intercultural housing and upgrading of entire urban neighbourhoods, questions regarding the refurbishment of large housing estates, resident protests in the course of the upgrading of urban neighbourhoods and the development and encouragement of alternative forms of housing in Hamburg were discussed.

The diverse approaches of the visited institutions and their differing positioning within the urban renewal scene of Hamburg allowed the excursion participants to take a multi-faceted look at the daily challenges in the field of urban renewal in Hamburg.

It turned out that district work but also social housing in Hamburg is very much shaped by bottom-up processes, and that developments and changes rather originate from reacting to protests, occupations and citizens’ movements than from the political will of the Hamburg town hall. We observed the promotion of ownership as the preferred organizational form of housing to be a very striking feature, while the classical rent is even being questioned in communal housing. The city of Hamburg sells its landed property to the highest bidding property developer and investor that then serve the luxury segment in inner-city locations, while low-priced housing estates are primarily developed in infrastructurally disadvantaged and unattractive locations.

* Overview on the agenda

The activities of the first day centred on the International Building Exhibition Hamburg (IBA Hamburg 2007-2013): Besides the interactive multimedia exhibition IBA AT WORK, we visited the residential area WELTQUARTIER paying special attention to the applied participation procedure for the residents from 30 nations in the course of the refurbishment of the area. We then visited VERINGECK – a project of intercultural housing for the elderly.

The International Building Exhibition (IBA) is an instrument of urban planning. Since the beginning of the 20th century the IBA provides German cities with the opportunity to investigate relevant questions of urban planning and architecture as well as relevant social questions over years through the practical implementation of innovative concepts. Hamburg has set itself the goal to overcome the barrier of the Elbe River by means of the current International Building Exhibition. Historically and geographically this endeavour amounts to a Herculean task, but from the perspective of urban planning in Hamburg it is nevertheless of crucial importance for the development of the city and the settlement area respectively. At the same time the undertaking provokes worries and resistance among the old-established residents because they fear – with good reason – mechanisms of replacement that despite high organizational and financial efforts have already begun.

In the morning of the second day we took a closer look at the MARTINIERLEBEN district office in Eppendorf and investigated the challenges and expectations of the persons involved regarding an urban neighbourhood that meets the requirements of all generations. Eppendorf is a bourgeois district characterized by *Stiftungshäuser* (houses with very little flats built for the retirement years of domestic workers and servants and other elderly people with a most minimal pension) built on behalf of the upper-class of Hamburg. An initiative – that among others originated from an existing cultural centre – was established in this district trying to prevent the development of no longer needed premises of a former hospital into the usual high-priced owner-occupied flats. The initiative did not only try to prevent the plans of others but also started its own process of planning and networking that took the local requirements and singularities into consideration. The involvement of as many residents as possible into the integrated process of urban development and the legal realisation of the resulting land-use plan are the aims of this entire process. About a hundred persons actively participated in the realised planning workshops and developed proposals based on an intergenerational and very democratic approach. The approval of the Senate of Hamburg to the hereby developed plans is still outstanding and is being awaited with optimism.

After lunch, we took a tour through the urban neighbourhood of St. Pauli focussing on the negative impacts of neighbourhood upgrading – gentrification. Residents of inner-city neighbourhoods in Hamburg are much more affected on different levels by speculation and valorisation than in Vienna: Housing construction in Hamburg is preferentially left over to private entities; landed property is contracted to the highest bidding investors that build horrendously priced luxury flats and offices on the most attractive areas. At the same time the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg builds few low-priced flats: In comparison to Vienna (6,000 subsidized housing units/year) only 300 subsidized flats are newly constructed in Hamburg. Together with a system that allows rent control for a maximum of 15 years, this leads to a multiplication of rents in the entire city and to existence-threatening processes of replacement on the level of the urban neighbourhoods.

The day ended with the memories of an activist and organizer of “Park Fiction”, an example of a participation project in the public space that resulted from a massive protest movement – an entire neighbourhood was occupied and barricaded – against the construction of a high-rise building on the edge of St. Pauli to the Elbe River.

The last day was dedicated to building associations and housing projects. Together with a representative of the responsible authority, a project developer and a resident of a housing project, the group discussed the single steps necessary for the realisation of such projects. The legal organizational provisions were discussed starting from introductory information to the question "What is a housing project altogether?" to the availability of landed property and the daily routine of living together in a community. In the afternoon we visited a realised project at Stresemannstraße 100. By means of a self-governing housing project, it was illustrated how the building association model even offers financially very weak building contractors possibilities to get access to high-quality housing. A resident showed us his private flat and the communal room and talked about the collective planning process that was led by an architect who also participated in the housing project. His reflections ranged from the construction phase – property developer was a young cooperative – to housing and living together which was outlined as a separate project in the project. Thus the visit in Hamburg ended with a very personal approach to the questions of housing and also therefore left a lasting impression.

Additional information was included in this report and the tours, presentations, meetings and discussion were documented on behalf of the GB*12 in order to be able to discuss the gained insight on the Vienna Housing Research Day.

The fact that negotiation processes and also advances in the field of living together are very often demanded and organized by private initiatives was a striking significant cultural difference between the cities of Vienna and Hamburg. These initiatives range from simple petitions and participation in planning processes to revolt-like uprisings if (nearly) everything is at stake for disadvantaged population groups. Hamburg neither has a citywide institutionalized urban renewal or neighbourhood management as existing in Vienna in form of the Local Urban Renewal Offices. In an exaggerated way, one could say that politics and public administration in Vienna provide plenty of low-threshold services for the residents, whereas in Hamburg they assume the role of fire fighters and try to extinguish the fires left behind by the arising social conflicts. In other words, Vienna rather follows the typical Austrian way of cooperation, whereas in Hamburg the different interests do often clash intensively in confrontation.