



The Hafencity project

Hamburg is growing here: Hafencity – currently Europe’s largest inner-city development project – is a blueprint for the development of a European city on the waterfront



Hafencity is being developed from west to east and from north to south – 57 projects are completed and another 50 under construction or in the planning stage (© Thomas Hampel)

In developing a new city area along the Elbe, Hamburg is setting new standards - at least in Europe. On an area of 157 ha, a lively city with a maritime air is taking shape, bringing together workplace and residential uses, culture and leisure, tourism and retail facilities - quite unlike downtowns dominated by nothing but offices and shops. What sets it apart from other major international urban waterside development projects is the area's very central location and the high expectations of quality reflected, for instance, in its fine-grained mix of uses, standards of urbanity and ecological sustainability, and its innovative development process.

The intensive interaction between land and water can also be regarded as unique, for Hafencity is neither surrounded by dikes, nor cut off from the water. With the exception of the quays and promenades, the whole area will be raised to between 8 and 9 m above sea level. The concept of building on artificial compacted mounds (warfts) lends an area once dominated by port and industrial uses a new, characteristic topography, retaining access to the water and the typical port atmosphere, while guaranteeing protection from floods.

Definition of a completely new urban district

The task in hand is to define a new downtown in both urban planning and architectural terms. Since the site of Hafencity was once largely occupied by single-story sheds and, with the exception of Oberhafen quarter, few existing buildings could be retained or were worth preserving, Hafencity consists almost exclusively of new buildings. Altogether more than 2.32 million sqm gross floor area (GFA) is to be constructed. Nearly 7,000 residential units for over 12,000 residents are being built, as well as business premises offering in excess of 45,000 job opportunities, plus educational institutions, restaurants and bars, retail, cultural and leisure amenities, with parks, plazas and promenades.

The urban planning and architectural reinterpretation of the place, however, centers on established structures. Its milieu is informed by the Speicherstadt, port structures, a few existing buildings and, importantly, its horizontal nature and the visual axes of the inner city. The use of red clinker brick opposite the Speicherstadt and in the center of Hafencity is another defining element.



New core inner-city grows

Development of HafenCity is based essentially on a Masterplan approved by the Hamburg Senate on February 29, 2000, which was developed further for the eastern section of HafenCity after wide-ranging public discussions in 2010. For the previous ten years the Masterplan, with its concept for an urban horizontal and vertical mix of uses and its flexible basic framework of a variety of city quarters, served as a good point of departure for development of old port sites south of the city center. However it initially lacked an adequately detailed planning basis for the three eastern neighborhoods, Oberhafen, Baakenhafen and Elbbrücken.

What is more, circumstances also changed during the first decade. Initially, eastern HafenCity was regarded almost as suburban, yet in the meantime - partly due to new subway connections - it already counts as part of the new city core. Redefinition of the Masterplan was led by HafenCity Hamburg GmbH in conjunction with the Hamburg Urban Development and Housing Ministry as well as the principal authors of the original Masterplan, Kees Christiaanse, with ASTOC. At the same time there was intensive public discussion, with a program of more than 40 events. Since then the reworked draft has been honed increasingly in further phases (urban design competitions, open space competitions, zoning plans and architectural competitions by private building companies).

Eastern districts with distinct identities

Nevertheless, compared with western and central HafenCity, the three eastern neighborhoods (Oberhafen, Baakenhafen and Elbbrücken) are more isolated and less integrated into the existing city. Their proximity to transport routes also calls for special noise protection planning. But this also creates opportunities to give the eastern neighborhoods individuality: Am Baakenhafen will be a neighborhood focusing on living and for leisure, with several thousand job opportunities; Oberhafen will become the creative and cultural quarter, and Elbbrücken an urban location for business and housing.

The revision of the Masterplan resulted in a marked increase of useable area throughout HafenCity. Because of the intense building density and thanks to the relocation of businesses formerly situated in the port area, the total area realizable has been increased from 1.5 million sqm of gross floor area (GFA) to 2.32 million sqm GFA. Partial infilling of the eastern end of Baakenhafen harbor basin also boosts overall land area from 123 to 127 ha.

Many more homes to be built

Reworking of the Masterplan also meant that the number of homes that can be built is much higher. Since around 3,000 housing units will be built in Baakenhafen and Elbbrücken, the total number of homes in HafenCity increased from 5,500 to 6,000-7,000. As a result joint building ventures now also receive more consideration in site tenders and since 2011 one third of residential space developed is publicly subsidized. An additional primary school, two secondary schools, as well as several more kindergartens will also enhance HafenCity's attractions as a place for families to live. The number of potential jobs also rises markedly, with the increase from 40,000 to 45,000 primarily generated in leisure, retail, catering and hotels.

The leafy character of HafenCity was also intensified. Squares, small and large, linked together will underline urban spatial integration. Lohsepark, HafenCity's central public park, extends down to the River Elbe. In the south, an Elbe promenade may encourage people to stroll on to Entenwerder island, and Baakenpark, an artificial green play and leisure peninsula, will enhance Baakenhafen neighborhood. Public open spaces throughout HafenCity now cover an area of more than 28 ha, compared with the initially planned 24 ha (not counting publicly accessible private areas), while the total length of shoreline extends from almost 10 to 10.5 km.

The fact that eastern HafenCity is shaped by major highways does lead to high noise exposure in the north and east, however. Thus



intelligent urban planning and technical concepts are needed to enhance these locations: the main eastern traffic artery Versmannstrasse will be lined primarily with office buildings turning their broad backs toward the road to provide noise-protected areas to the southern side. The semi-enclosed residential ensembles will also form inner courtyards, providing shelter for neighborly coexistence.

The high ecological standards of the western and central neighborhoods will also actually be bettered in the east. As well as establishing an innovative heating energy concept, nearly all buildings will meet the demanding criteria for the gold HafenCity Ecolabel. At the same time, flexible integrated mobility structures will be developed ecologically, with good public subway and bus services, charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, car pool systems overlapping neighborhood boundaries featuring electric mobility, e-bikes, pedelecs and other micro electric vehicles.

The reworking of the Masterplan has thus further expanded and reinforced HafenCity's function as a city. At the same time, the urban development area has been thought through to its easternmost point, to the highest standards.