

Up to the worldwide standard? HafenCity in the international perspective

by Brian Baker (London)

The City of Hamburg is situated between the Alster lakes to the north and the River Elbe (foreground). The new downtown HafenCity stretches along the riverside for 3.1 kilometres. The western part with the Elbphilharmonie concert hall (far left) has been largely completed, the central part is largely under construction or secured by sales and obligations to build. The eastern quarters will go into development from 2012

HafenCity is one of the biggest ambitious and high-profile inner-city schemes in the world. In Hamburg's year as European Green Capital its performance is even more in the spotlight

Since HafenCity Hamburg's beginnings a decade ago, international observers have been following its development closely. The sheer size of this large-scale development (157 hectares) and its location both directly in the city centre and on the edges of the River Elbe have certainly contributed to this. But it is the unique conception of HafenCity that seems to attract urban experts – investors, developers, scholars and city dwellers – around the globe: a careful mix of many different uses, a highly urban atmosphere, a good public transport system and an effective public administration of the whole process. In recent times, investors from abroad have started to take an active part in the development.

Amongst several international investors already present in HafenCity is Swedish pension funds owned Norrporten which has acquired three adjacent buildings in the Am Sandtorpark/Grasbrook neighbourhood. Business Manager Foreign Affairs Bo Henriksson says they plan more acquisitions in Hamburg and, if the deal is right, some may be in HafenCity. So far, Norrporten owns 32,000 m², including

the red S-KAI building situated between Am Sandtorkai street and HafenCity's first green park, the Sandtorpark. The neighbouring buildings, including the Hamburg America Center, also belong to Norrporten. "We have told the brokers throughout that we can wait for the right tenants and the right values. We are a long-term investor. We think that the relationships with tenants are important. They may be for 30 years. And the mix of tenants and the image of the buildings are also important," he says. Two of the three buildings are now let well, he adds. He expects the S-KAI building to be fully occupied by the end of 2011.

Having chosen Hamburg for their expansion into Germany because of its commercial market stability, the Swedish investor felt specifically attracted to HafenCity for its lively mix of users: "We were drawn to HafenCity because of its city centre position close to the existing central business district. It's not separate in the way many new business districts are. It's already a part of the city and it is close to water. People like to live and work close to the water. The mix of

uses is important. We like the city areas where we own assets being mixed and alive throughout the day and evening. We know it will take a little time, but quite soon HafenCity will become a nice, integrated part of Hamburg. We are also pleased there is a lot of good architecture and once the underground opens the connectivity will be very good there," Mr Henriksson says.

Mr Henriksson also says that the way public spaces are done in HafenCity is a case in point and that the avoidance of very large public spaces in the HafenCity Masterplan has been beneficial. The smaller connected spaces which have been conceived are more likely to be appreciated and well-used. "Many of these large-scale schemes have a sterile feel to them. HafenCity has planned carefully to prevent that," he says.

When Hamburg started to develop its former harbour area in 2000, many international waterfront projects were already well under way or completed. The advantage of taking up the challenge of urban renewal rather late was that lessons could be drawn from those previous developments. ▶

EDITORIAL



Contemporary witnesses describe the way that HafenCity came into being thus: after the division of Germany ended the City of Hamburg received a chance – it was an imperative – to reinvent itself. It needed a special something in order to battle competition between global port cities and in the renaissance taking place throughout Germany's major cities. And the answer was HafenCity. Some would add that it was a unique stroke of luck in the history of Hamburg. And perhaps that spirit of optimism, the courage to take a risk, was actually typical of those post-reunification years. The decision to go ahead with a HafenCity would certainly not have been taken so lightly during the latest financial crisis.

So much the better, then, that politics and the population were able to recognise the signs of the times. Now Hamburg has a project that is exciting an international public. Particularly positive applause goes to its diversity, attracting the widest possible range of uses and groups. HafenCity Hamburg GmbH actively encourages this mix by giving preference to special concepts at the stage of assigning building plots. As a new city's place of encounter, HafenCity fulfils one particularly important aspect of the city's future viability which – in spite of the importance of housing – does not define itself solely through the range of inner-city homes it offers.

The spirit of optimism and the courage to take a risk are still present in HafenCity. The new neighbourhoods in the east are in the planning stage, concepts for sustainability as well as homes and workplaces suited to modern needs are being developed and tried out. In response to these concepts, developers are putting projects into motion, companies opening branches and premises, artists seeking confrontation. The fact that HafenCity is a place which not only generates a multiplicity of uses but also discourse and ideas is another one of its qualities. We hope you enjoy reading.

Jürgen Bruns-Berentelg,
Chief Executive Officer HafenCity Hamburg GmbH



HafenCity is situated just a few hundred metres from the city centre. The tall towers of churches and Town Hall are the hallmarks of Hamburg's skyline

► And it seems that the Free and Hanseatic City was a good student. In 2009 a report by global real estate services provider CBRE assessed redevelopment efforts in port cities. CBRE found that Hafencity scored well on the two most important attributes for success – strong public sector support and good transport connectivity.

CBRE Senior Analyst Helen Gray says getting transport right is key. “It is obvious if it is done badly or there is an obstacle such as the highways at Toronto’s waterfront and Liverpool’s Albert Dock. If it is done well, it is less noticeable but very important to bring people into the area.”

As for public sector support, the development process of Hafencity is administered with great care to benefit the whole of the city (e.g. by conceiving public spaces with great quality). At the same time, participation and competition of private developers and users has always been encouraged. For Helen Gray, early successes in place-making were another important result of the process. The public sector support stimulated actively the mix of uses and public realm attractions to go in early on, she says. “They have also used architecture to good effect with a range of styles which creates interest amongst the local population.”

CBRE have applied the approach more widely and produced ten top essential place making elements in a 2011 report called “The Essential Link Between Design and Profit”. All of these elements have been important in Hafencity’s Masterplan and delivery. “To maximise value in large schemes, particularly in challenging locations, the fundamental aim for developers must be to make a place in which people want to live,” says Helen Gray. At the beginning of 2011, another report by the market research and analysis firm BulwienGesa evaluated the performance of inner city areas in Germany with regard to their capacity as core locations for long-term real estate investment. Hafencity was rated the best new inner-city development location and scored as high as the traditional city centres of Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich and Hamburg. Recent deals include the



The neighbourhood Am Sandtorpark/Grasbrook is the second quarter to be completed in 2011. It is situated between the historic Sandtorhafen harbour basin and Hafencity’s first green park, the Sandtorpark



tioning as a prestigious office address. The Centurion Center thus represents a highly promising investment for Union Investment and its Unilmmo:Europa open-ended real estate fund.”

The benefits of the organisational and policy approach taken by Hamburg’s Hafencity were recognised in a 2010 OECD report on Organising Local Economic Development. It said that as a consequence of its diverse structure and flexible capabilities Hafencity was as well prepared for a market down-turn as it was possible to be – and much more so than many large-scale international projects. In fact, Hafencity managed to get well through the recent global crisis in the financial and real estate

markets. In the international perspective, it thus stands as one of the most promising inner-city waterfront projects to be found. This has also been reflected by leading international media such as the New York Times and CNN. In the series “Future cities”, CNN aired four films about Hamburg in 2010. Covering Hafencity extensively, it pointed out the significance of landmark architecture like the Elbphilharmonie concert hall as well as the highly sustainable development strategies. “Hafencity has the potential to reinvent Hamburg on the world stage,” the report concluded.

INTERVIEW

“A 21st century test case for planned urbanity”

Loretta Lees is Professor of Human Geography at King’s College, University of London. She has published extensively on public space, architecture, gentrification and social mixing. She is co-organiser of the Urban Salon, a London-based forum for architecture, cities and international urbanism

Hafencity News: Highlight the principal strengths of the Hafencity process so far?

Loretta Lees: Notable strengths to date include the complex juxtaposition of residential, retail, commercial and leisure, both horizontally across the neighbourhoods and vertically within individual buildings, and the close attention to not just mixed-use but social mixing of people of different ages and stage of life and of people from different ethnic groups and sexual orientation.

Hafencity News: Is Hafencity more likely to succeed than some of the other current large master-planned new districts around the world?

Loretta Lees: The CEO Jürgen Bruns-Berentelg is a trained urban geographer with a depth of knowledge about critical urban theory. He is familiar with the work of many leading academics in this field including Iris Marion Young and Henri Lefebvre. This is unusual, perhaps unique, amongst top executives in development schemes. The process in Hafencity is taking account of complaints from critical urbanists about sanitised, privatised, uni-cultural and anti-social developments. We have an intellectual at the helm. I think that’s why it might potentially succeed.

Hafencity News: You have said urbanity is “an ambivalent and contradictory” process. Why do you think that “planned urbanity” might work in Hafencity?

Loretta Lees: Until a population has been embedded for some time it is

impossible to make a judgment. In many ways Hafencity will be a 21st century test case for planned urbanity. My gut feeling has always been that socially engineering urbanity will not work down the line but there has been such great attention to detail in Hafencity that it may prove me and others wrong ... the risk now is that the effect of the financial crisis on developers and investors may lead to the disappearance of some of the conceptual ideas down the line. If all the residents are middle class or upper class, you won’t get mixing in the true sense.

Hafencity News: Hafencity tries to make sure that diverse uses and people co-exist in the area with very comprehensive schemes including the complex issues of social mixing. But perhaps exceptionally good U-Bahn connectivity is more likely to be a key driver towards an evolving urban feel than more direct social engineering interventions. What do you think?

Loretta Lees: Residents in Hafencity will automatically gain spatial capital due to the location so close to the existing city centre and the doorstep availability of sustainable mobility in the form of U-Bahn, walking and cycling. The U-Bahn will bring in more people from other parts of Hamburg and visitors to the city and further stimulate social mixing. The mobility is up there with the design as a hopeful element for the new district.

Hafencity News: What are the weaknesses in the development process in Hafencity?

Loretta Lees: The issue of social class. There is very little discussion of this in Germany by policy makers and academics. Social class issues would have been raised more quickly in France, the Netherlands and the UK. The inclusion of the very poorest sections of society in the district is the principal challenge. Given the charges about gentrification from anti-gentrification activists in Hamburg and elsewhere, the development needs to be more upfront about the ideas from critical urbanism which underpin it and very clear about giving everyone their place in Hafencity.



Loretta Lees is currently Professor of Human Geography at King’s College, University of London

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The historic harbour basin Sandtorhafen with traditional ship harbour and the Elbphilharmonie concert hall at the far end

acquisition of the Centurion Center, a building for mid-size firms, shops and restaurants in the Am Sandtorpark/Grasbrook neighbourhood, by the big German investment fund Union Investment. Union Investment Real Estate GmbH Senior Manager Dr Frank Billand says, “Hafencity is one of Europe’s most striking urban developments, featuring a vibrant mix of business, living, leisure and culture. The quality and architectural variety of the new buildings underline the development’s posi-

NEWS

Hotel location Hafencity

Hafencity is developing into an important hotel location that truly enhances the exclusive selection Hamburg City has to offer. First to open is the 25 Hours Hotel Hafencity in May 2011. Situated in the Überseequartier neighbourhood near the Elbe, this “different kind of seafarer’s hostel” offers 170 “bunks” and numerous additional extras with a jaunty maritime design. Taking an integrative approach, the Hotel Stadthaus Hafencity will provide 90 rooms and conference facilities specially equipped to comfortably accommodate people with disabilities. Construction of the three-star hotel will begin in 2011. Scheduled to open its doors in 2013 and located in the Elbphilharmonie complex, the 240-room Westin Grand Hamburg will also feature wellness and conference areas. Two further hotel projects are also in the pipeline, one in the Cruise Center at the Elbe and the other in the central Lohsepark quarter. Hafencity has long been one of the maritime tourist attractions in Hamburg, where the number of hotel guests has been rising for years.