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# PLANNING OUTSIDE THE BOX OF PLANNING CULTURES. THE VIRTUE OF DESIGNING URBAN LANDSCAPES IN BREMEN BLUMENTHAL AND HEMELINGEN WITHIN THE EUROPEAN URBAN SUMMER SCHOOL

This chapter gives an introduction to the planning and working phase of the EUSS summer school. The central approaches of the concept development are introduced and the group work reflected. Therefore it is important not to think only about the how and what of the process but also about the why and what for. Besides the positive learning effects of the participants through the challenge of designing a project in a new and unfamiliar context there are also virtues for the targeted city which could lie in the new and independent thinking outside of the local culture of planning.

## THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX OF LOCAL PLANNING CULTURE

Planning always acts in a specific local context. This context influences the way how planning is done in an explicit as well as an implicit way. Finally, it also decides whether planning and urban development can achieve its goals or not. Current Research on the subject of 'planning culture' focuses on this impact on urban development and its specific parameters. In addition to the social context and the influence of the planning instruments and institutional structures mainly the stakeholder involved in planning processes and their collective routines and traditions, common beliefs and values as well as their specific organizational forms play an important role. (Knieling & Othengrafen 2015; Othengrafen & Sondermann 2015)

Due to these underlying structures urban development is highly influenced by path dependencies. If the planning culture and the given challenges are compatible, urban development and planning project can function in an effective and successful way. But: Sometimes innovations are hard to establish. Challenges and Setting may have changed, while the planning culture and its stakeholder still apply their

common way of development. This can lead to interruptions and constraints within the urban development system. The worst case scenario would be the emergence of a lock-in effect, when old habits sabotage future success. So it is important for urban development to break out of these contexts every once in a while, to think outside the box of the local planning culture. This of course can only work with people who are not themselves part of these implicit underlying structure.

The peculiarity of an urban design project within a summer school for urban development is precisely the fact that it arises from outside the usual planning culture and their practices. The participating planners and planning students do not know the local conditions and contexts. They were trained to be planners in their own planning culture and bring it with them as unconscious background in addition to their individual professional knowledge.

The designs drafted in a summer school are supposed to work outside the local planning culture, it though does not mean to ignore the local context and the specific circumstances. It is therefore all the more important to embed the plans and designs into a profound analysis of the area and its needs.

## THE CHALLENGE: WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT IN TWO DEPRIVED AREAS IN THE HANSEATIC CITY OF BREMEN

The task of the EUSS was to develop urban designs for two specific sites in Bremen. Bremen as city with a history of port industry and also of its decline offers specific challenges to urban developers. Although the city is rich of urban qualities in its center and inner city neighborhoods, the structural change and its economic and social effects have left the city with an inheritance of deprivation and industrial

brownfields in the old industrial areas. This set of problems is accompanied by a severe budget crisis of public administrations, which complicates every effort to change the situation with strategic public investment.

While the old port of Bremen has been transformed into a mixed use, high-class development project called 'Übersee-Stadt' with great public effort within the last twenty years, there are still small waterfront sites which could not yet have been brought back into a new use. In regard of the qualities and opportunities of such a waterfront site for urban living and housing and the amenity values a designed waterfront with public spaces can offer an area, this offers great potential for the city of Bremen.

Blumenthal in the very north of Bremen with a distance of more than 20 km to the city center is one of the most deprived areas in Bremen. Blumenthal and the whole North of Bremen suffered a serious loss of industry and employment in the shipbuilding and textile industry in the 1990s and 2000s. Population losses, high unemployment-rates and poverty, social flashpoints and a very high vacancy rate especially in what used to be the district center characterize this area and shape the negative image of Blumenthal. An extensive investment backlog has led to decay and areas with poor amenity values. Although the problems are widely known, due to different reasons of which a lack of money is surely one the most important ones, there have been only small scale interventions on a social level and the redevelopment of an old industrial site for new industries so far (IAW 2016).

[Karte von Bremen mit Verortung? Oder habt ihr das schon woanders?]

At exactly the other end of Bremen in the South lies the district of Hemelingen. Similar to Blumenthal it had to recover from factory closings and industrial decline, but new Industries

could have been established in the area. Today Hemelingen is shaped by large manufacturing enterprises like Mercedes Benz Factory, Coca Cola, Mondelez and other industrial companies. During the last 15 to 20 years it has been targeted by urban regeneration schemes to address vacancy rates and urban deficiencies. Although investment and social projects have been placed, Hemelingen still belongs to Bremens deprived areas with a negative development trend (Website Soziale Stadt Bremen).

### FROM SCRATCH: SEE – ANALYSE – CONCEPTUALISE – DESIGN

Under the heading of „city and water” the participants were free to develop their own idea for the given sites. In a short time it was to get an idea of the site and its specific needs and develop a concept and design in a motley group of students and professionals from different countries from the Netherlands to China with different university background from architecture to urban planning.

At the beginning of the working phase the participants received an introduction to the sites and areas by the responsible agents of the planning authority of Bremen, who also took them on-site and showed them around. This was very important to get an impression of the site and its challenges. Especially the task of getting there and getting around there on their own after the introduction conveyed an impression of distances and barriers to the participants. They could also experience the public transport and the pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. Relating to the given topic of the EUSS the focus of the analysis was set on the waterfront area and its surroundings. Main questions to ask were therefore for example: How does the water refer and relate to the landscape and structure? How does the water contribute to the city?

After the site visit the participants started to work and began with the phase of the inventory and analysis. Target of this analysis were for example specific structures, barriers, qualities, needs, surroundings and atmosphere of the site. In this phase communication and the visualization of individual impressions was very important. The individual impressions led to an understanding of the place shared by the group and was expressed in different analysis and plans. Tools for that were a SWOT Analysis, in which the localized strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the planning site were drawn together. Afterwards those findings could be set in place with their spatial location in a plan. The spatial analysis also included an understanding of the important elements of the space, like elements of area (building areas, open spaces), linear elements (streets, traintracks, the river) and punctual elements (social facilities, cultural facilities) which build together the spatial unit. Also things like density and structures and connections are important in that stage of the analysis. (Reicher 2012)

The creation of a mental map provided opportunities to visualize obvious and non-obvious characteristics of place. The drawing of first impressions of an area can provide important information to a planner about the local features, limits and peculiarities of an area. The method was devised by Kevin Lynch in the late 1950s and is gaining popularity in participation processes in the recent years. (Lynch 1960; Kranepuhl & Ziervogel 2007)

On this basis the phase of conceptualizing could follow. The findings of the different analysis-steps were widely discussed by the participants and led to ideas and first drafts. The first ideas of the Brainstorming were supported and supplemented with Best-Practice-Analyses. Key Finding of this Phase was a general vision for the area, a direction for development based

on the findings of the analysis. With this vision the translation into urban design could follow. Detailed Plans and Concepts were developed, in which the different skills of the participants drew together in a very special, productive and inspiring manner.

The results of this work are presented by their authors in the following chapters. The final discussion with local and foreign experts showed, that thinking outside the box of the local can provide useful and welcomed inspirations and ways of thinking to urban planning.

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