

## 9. Architecture and the “Right to the City”: The IBA Hamburg as a Case for Critical Urban Studies

Frank Eckardt<sup>1</sup> 

(1) Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Weimar, Germany

 **Frank Eckardt**

**Email:** [Frank.Eckardt@uni-weimar.de](mailto:Frank.Eckardt@uni-weimar.de)

**Keywords** Gentrification – Hamburg – IBA – Architecture – Social science

### 9.1 Introduction

As a proud city with a Hanseatic tradition, Hamburg maintains the image of a port city and a place of prosperity. While demographic changes have led to considerable reconsiderations of the very basis of urban planning by questioning the idea of growth, Hamburg continued to express self-esteem and reconfirmed the idea that the city will continue to grow economically and in terms of inhabitants. This has led to a kind of growth coalition which crosses the lines of political parties and which has been expressed in a variety of iconic new buildings. The most well-known developed area is the HafenCity (HarbourCity).

This orientation in urban planning has been the consequence of a more profound societal change. As Hamburg was a stronghold for the Social Democratic Party up to the 2000s, the focus on social integration had been the key orientation for public planning and policies after the Second World War. However, as many observers have been recognizing, the general line of politics in Hamburg shifted towards a different set of priorities in the beginning of the 1980s. In the years of Mayor Dohnanyi (SPD), major projects for the “growing city” were initiated and the key concept of an entrepreneurial approach to urban planning was introduced. In a speech in 1982, Dohnanyi proposed the “Sprung über die Elbe” (Jump over the river Elbe), intending to connect the disfavored South with the Northern parts which are divided by the river. When the conservative party took over the magistrate, these concepts were brought to life and urban planning had been given a new framework: the International Building Exhibition (IBA) and related the International Garden Show (igs). Both formats were highly appreciated by German architects and were regarded as progressive tools for urban development.

Local initiatives in Hamburg immensely criticize these formats, motivated by their experience with social problems in Hamburg, which can be summarized as consequences of gentrification. Moreover, the critics refer to a broader analysis stemming from urban sociology by making reference to the work of Henri Lefebvre and his theoretical writing on the “right to the city”. In critics’ view, the IBA and the igs need to be analyzed with regard to their impact on the profound rights of the inhabitants and on social equality. Interestingly, the protagonists of the IBA also refer to a theoretical argument to legitimize their actions. In their self-proclamations, the positioning of the IBA in the socially changing city plays an important role.

In the following, a closer look at the situation in the neighborhood of Wilhelmsburg will be presented. This will be done with regard to the social position that this neighborhood holds in the city and in the context of the changed political agenda of Hamburg since the 1980s. Secondly, the ideas, plans and program of the IBA will be recapitulated. The focus lies on the architectural view of the IBA as it is documented in the reviews by the main commentators of the German architectural discourse. Thirdly, the criticism coming from the “right to the city” movement addressed to the IBA will be presented. Here the analysis will enter the debate on the social role that architecture is expected to have in the eyes of the critics. Fourthly, the intellectual position of architects

and academics of the IBA on the role of architecture in a fragmented city like Hamburg will be unfolded. By doing so, the more general question about the relationship between architecture and social science in this book will be answered, by framing them in a concrete local context.

## 9.2 Wilhelmsburg as a Place of Stigmatization

It is commonly known, even beyond the borders of Hamburg, that the southern parts of the city of Hamburg are suffering from less favorable living conditions than the rest of the city. In national news, the place has become “famous” because of deadly attacks of dogs on children, seen as a sign of the lawlessness of the area. Again and again, even serious journals like “Der Spiegel” (Barth 2000) or “Die Zeit” (Willeke 2005) reported about Wilhelmsburg in a dark and sinister way. One can say that the neighborhood functions as a representation for more symbolic debates on the failure of integration and social policies. As a place of larger social housing settlements, Wilhelmsburg and the nearby Veddel exhibit the fundamental error of architecture as a tool of social policy in general.

A closer look, however, reveals a more nuanced and differentiated picture. Firstly, the neighborhood has to be understood as a product of its dynamic and contradictory post-war history. Wilhelmsburg is the largest inhabited river island in Europe. It consists of housing, farming and industrial estates which are each of the same size. The neighborhood functions furthermore as a pass-through area, as the established motorways and the harbor are important functions for the whole city. These lines of mobility predominate the character of the neighborhood and the life in the high rise estates as well as in the single family houses in Wilhelmsburg. In its built morphology, the contrasts of the neighborhood are eye striking. The northern Reihertstieg offers those Jugendstil-facade houses from the turn of the 20th century which now are so attractive for gentrifiers, but which were originally built for the working class. Furthermore, there are parts of Wilhelmsburg which were erected in the 1930s and house middle class families. Close to these single family houses, the large scale settlements of Kirchdorf-Süd, Korallusviertel or Schwentnerring from the 1970s were situated in the old villages of Moorwerder and Georgswerder. In an analysis of the neighborhood, these areas constitute different social spaces.

Destroyed by the allied forces during the Second World War, Wilhelmsburg was mainly reestablished as a place for the harbor infrastructure. When in 1962, the city was heavily flooded, the idea of using the area solely for industrial purposes was seriously discussed. With the influx of foreign guest workers only a few years later, the need for more and low-rent housing became urgent, but only in 1977 was the formal decision taken to use Wilhelmsburg as a place for social housing. As a consequence, a higher percentage of those social groups have settled here which have difficulties to find adequate housing in the private sector. One in three of the ca. 50,000 inhabitants living in Wilhelmsburg has a foreign passport. Considering the fact that a large group of people were nationalized following the reform of the national citizenship law in 2000, the majority of inhabitants has to be regarded as having a migration background. The establishment of social housing has furthermore led to an above-average representation of young people. The number of people under 20 years of age is twice as high as in the rest of Hamburg. Both the high number of migrants and youth require policies that pay extra attention to social support, especially with regard to educational institutions.

Social policies in Hamburg have, however, ignored the particular needs of the neighborhood. Wilhelmsburg has a higher need for social housing than the rest of Hamburg. Estimations by social organizations like the Paritätischer Gesamtverband indicated that poverty rises in Hamburg as fast as in no other German city, and that half of the population would need low cost housing, which normally is only available in the social housing estates. In reality, however, in 2013, only 6463 apartments were available and the tendency over the last 15 years showed that the number is ten percent lower now than before. Moreover, there is no hope that the total amount of social housing will be increasing in the near future. Rather, the opposite has to be feared. A main reason for concern is that the legal obligation for owners to continue to uphold favorable conditions for poor tenants will end in 2017. Then apartments will be prone to the forces of the housing market which implies higher rents. While mention of the problem was tabooed during the years of the CDU reign, during which no official reports on poverty were published, the SPD, since the election of 2008, has addressed the general need for more housing in Hamburg, but restricts the building of new social housing estates. In sum, the social-democratic plans will not outbalance the loss of affordable housing in Wilhelmsburg.

The social profile of the neighborhood shows the impact of a changed urban economy, where the

destabilization of working conditions does not allow the mainly less educated population to participate in the general economic growth of the city. This can be linked to technological changes in the harbor where containerization has replaced most manual work and thereby left many industrially skilled workers without many possibilities. This has led to the acceptance of work in the more flexible service and low-wage sectors. Even this option is not available for many inhabitants of Wilhelmsburg, leaving ten percent jobless. As a consequence, the social monitoring indicates that the majority of residents has to be classified as having the lowest social status. When looking at the youth, the percentages are even considerably higher. Poverty is the main aspect of social life in Wilhelmsburg. When the ‘Sprung über die Elbe’ was again promoted in the early 2000s, the political agenda behind it did not explicitly address this problem but rather suggestively formulated goals that were—if at all—indirectly targeting the real life conditions of the inhabitants. Any reflection on the consequences of the ongoing de-investment in social housing and the inadequate public infrastructure has not taken place. The problems with the disinvestment management of the publically owned housing association GAGWAH has becoming apparent with numerous complaints by tenants, and in a survey where unhealthy living conditions in the housing estates has been brought to light.

### 9.3 The IBA Perspective

More than one billion Euro have been invested in the context of the IBA, which was organized from 2007 to 2013. The IBA is a particular form of architectural exhibition which can be understood as an organization of in vivo architectural experiments. The idea of the IBA is thereby linked to the intention to contribute in one way or another to social progress (cp. Deutsches Architektenblatt 2013). Famous examples are the Berlin IBA and probably most well-known, the IBA Emscher Park. The latter was realized in the Rhine-Ruhr area and achieved overwhelmingly positive reviews, as it attempted to change the negative image of this old industrial region by recognizing its cultural and natural potentials. The Hamburg IBA can be seen as in line with this approach. The hosting of the International Garden Show (igs) also uses nature as a tool for creating a positive image of the Elbe island. In light of the described stigmatization, this approach appears to be transferable also to the situation in Wilhelmsburg. The main difference, however, remains that the IBA Emscher Park did not address a particular neighborhood but different places in a large conurbation. Moreover, the stigma of the Rhine Ruhr relates merely to the dirty and run-down industrial landscape, while the stigmatization of Wilhelmsburg is part of a segregated social geography where the better-off neighborhoods are blaming the poor for their own misery.

The IBA Wilhelmsburg could not avoid directly addressing potential criticism that skeptically sees architectural projects as contributing to gentrification, as has been documented as happening in other parts of Hamburg (Breckner 2013). This is why the central slogan in the self-description of the IBA was “Upgrading without expulsion” and by this the management signaled a reflection on the growing concern that the investment in architecture could lead to the undesired effect of increasing the pressure on poor tenants. From the perspective of the IBA authorities, the main objective is to create or to sustain the existing social mix. In their analysis, the neighborhood suffers from a lack of housing opportunities for the middle class, which then motivates them to leave Wilhelmsburg. This perspective is argued for by the fact that still more people are moving out than into the neighborhood. No evidence, however, is given that the outward mobility is dominated by better-off inhabitants.

A crucial conclusion that is drawn from this argument is the support for the educational infrastructure in Wilhelmsburg. Among the more than 60 projects that have been taken under the umbrella of the IBA, the “Bildungszentrum Tor zur Welt” (Educational Center ‘Gate to the World’) stands out in scope and ambition. This Center integrates the local secondary school and a primary school, offers counseling and education for adults, a café for parents and more educational activities. The IBA protagonists pride themselves on this project as it demonstrates lasting effects for the neighborhood, sustainably created with massive investment into the built environment. More places have been shaped which are intended to increase extra-scholarly facilities for education and leisure. The initiation of a relocation of a Basketball team which plays in the National League onto the island is one of the examples which are mentioned to demonstrate the successful strategy of the IBA. The sports hall is planned for 3500 spectators and is to be opened up to the local youth for different sport and educational activities. With Marvin Willoughby the IBA has found a local professional basketball player who embodies and promotes this project. This example demonstrates the general principle of the IBA concept. The IBA itself understands its role as bringing together different actors, resources, ideas and organizations to bundle

their efforts in a limited time frame, so major steps can be taken in a concentrated manner. It therefore works as a “catalyst” and allows local actors to play a prominent role. Apparently, the IBA integrates different parts of Hamburg and local society by offering different kinds of rewards, such as working contracts, public attention or long awaited recognition. “You can criticize IBA in many ways, but without it, we would not have achieved so many places for education”, says Beatrix Nimphy who is the director of the “Media Dock” (quoted in Laufer 2014: 35). In the newly built media dock, pupils can learn how to navigate the internet and more, so “they can go back to school and show it to the others”. Without the IBA, Nimphy explains, she would have only one computer available for a group of 15 pupils, which they can use for their afternoon stay. The “Dock” also has two rooms for music lessons and one for dancing classes. With the same satisfaction, Jürgen Hensen, the director of the Mügge youth center states that thanks to IBA he now has rooms for teenagers to practice with handcraft. The “Mügge” is located close to the water and allows the youth direct contact with the river, which is otherwise nearly impossible in Veddel. Hensen was formerly the director of the “House of the Youth” which for a long period of time was not frequented by the local youth as it had nothing more to offer than some furniture to sit on and a billiard table.

In the program rhetoric, three key phrases were promoted to describe the intentions of the IBA: “Cosmopolis: New chances for the city”, “Metrozones: New spaces for the city”, and “City and climate change: New energies for the city.” All three slogans were meant to testify to the overall theme of “Designing the Future of the City in the 21st century”. The list of the projects included can hardly be categorized in a strict way. Besides the “Tor zur Welt”, there is a new building for urban planning and environment, an integrative housing complex called “Veringeck” hosting Turkish and other senior citizens, the “Energy mountain Goergswerder” (a waste recycling station), a “Forest House” (green architecture, restaurant, hotel, exhibition space), the so-called hybrid houses, a language and meeting center in the Reiherstiegviertel and a public bath. Most noticed in architectural audiences, the so called “World Quarter” was set up and realized housing with modernized and energy-friendly design (Ehrlinger 2014).

Especially the concept of the “cosmopolis” has been set into the frame of a socially-oriented approach to urban development. It claims that social and cultural barriers can be overcome by a holistic planning approach with the means of urban design and architecture but also with education, culture and local economy. While opportunities for senior citizens, like the Veringeck project, can be counted as proof of this intention, the most attention went to education. Education is defined as one key subject of urban planning in the future city. Related to this idea and incorporated into a vaguer description, the IBA proclaims that culture is a key factor for the further development of Wilhelmsburg, which has thereby become the object of cultural industries. Cultural and artistic projects were meant to show the potentials of Wilhelmsburg as a future place for the hosting of cultural industries. The holistic vision of the IBA, to sum up, is that these architectural projects and the investments into the built environment should contribute to a change of image which should be already visible in the principles with which the projects are undertaken. The projects are regarded not as aiming to substantially solve the actual social problems of Wilhelmsburg, but to give hints as to how the area can develop in the long run. With this argumentation, the expectations about the IBA are paradoxically high and low at the same time. They are ambitious because the IBA intends to promote an image of the wishful future for Hamburg and Wilhelmsburg in particular, but they are also defensive and narrow, as they respond to criticism on the real output by stating that architecture cannot solve the problems of social inequality.

This ambivalence becomes especially visible in the discussion on the hard facts-oriented projects which are mainly the built houses. Publically, the most serious criticism launched related to the failed realization of the “New Center of Wilhelmsburg”, which embodied the idea of a total reshaping of the central places in the neighborhood (a goal which was never advertized by the IBA but which the general public expected nevertheless). The “World Quarter” was an answer to this criticism and was heavily supported by the architectural discipline in Germany. This “resistance” was prominently undermined with the 2014 German Award for Urban Design. According to the jury, the project successfully realized “on the social, participatory and design level to find an adequate language, so the World Quarter offers for many a new Heimat” (quoted in Gefroi 2014: 12). The quarter was once the living area of the classical harbor worker and was suffering from disinvestment as a consequence of political deadlock and neglect. With the IBA investment, 300 apartments have been “carefully renewed”, so that 1700 inhabitants “from more than 30 nations” now have a place with which they can identify. The houses were owned by the SAGA corporations, which is in the hands of the city of Hamburg. Participation in this project was realized by a “door-to-door” survey. The survey was emphatically



called “Heimat research” and “much of it was taken over into the design of the houses” (Gefroi 2014: 14). In total, the impression was created that these houses appear rather as newly built than renewed. Attention to many small design aspects and the addition of balconies enhanced the living space for many inhabitants. Furthermore, the surrounding spaces have been reshaped and are more inviting for people to stay. It has been confirmed, however, that many inhabitants who had to leave the houses during the renovation have not returned and that mostly new tenants are now benefiting from the changes. The higher rent following renovations as a reason for the failed return of tenants is downplayed by the architects and the IBA. What makes this estate then attractive for newcomers? While the project praises itself for its participatory approach, no information is available so we can understand the reasons for a residency change. It can only be speculated as to why old inhabitants do not return and why new people choose to come to the stigmatized Wilhelmsburg (Hamburg 2014).

What is known, however, is that a residency change is intended. As IBA officials repeatedly made clear, they want to stop the middle class from leaving by ensuring opportunities—especially with regard to education – that enable this. As in the analysis about the social composition of Wilhelmsburg in the first part made clear, the assumption of a fleeing middle class holds little ground. There is a social space (single family housing) where the established middle class is settled. The IBA creates rather more stimulus for the attraction of better-off people. The World Quarter as the main success of the architectural part of the IBA has exactly counteracted the intention of “Upgrading without expulsion”. Even if the effects of the renovation might not be considered in *sensu strictu* as “expulsion”, the narrative that embeds the project can be seen estranging the old inhabitants. The survey undertaken might be regarded as very progressive, as everybody was included. However, it has to be considered that especially low-skilled persons are not socialized for this kind of communication. It needs to be taken into account that most surveyors do not share the life world of the inhabitants and are now confronted with questions unrelated to their life situation. An indication for this interpretation can be seen in the language of the “Heimat” and the “identity of the place”. This is a narrative which leaves no space for other perspectives recapturing the social problems most older inhabitants in Wilhelmsburg are suffering from. Participation in this sense means a legitimation of a concept that in itself is not familiar to many old inhabitants. “You would rub your eyes if you could see the change achieved”, wrote architectural critic Gefroi (2014: 15). In the eyes of the middle class socialized architect, this is a compliment. It seems beyond imagination that people might have liked their apartments as they always had been and that they might interpret the new style as an implicit and subtle devalorization of their lifestyle. In the laudation of the jury, the before and after situation is described as from “garbage” to “identity”. Before, this was a place of graffiti and waste, now people take care of their own environment. This attitude does not acknowledge that this was also a place where people have their memories of growing up, small things of happiness and good days. Their traces of life are made invisible, became garbage.

The awarded design proposal has no rational reason but appeals to the socialized disgust against the life situation of poor people. With much self-esteem, the housing area is cleaned up and reshaped for the tastes of the middle class. As earlier analysis on the process of gentrification in the Hamburg neighborhood of St. Pauli has shown (Eckardt 2013), the emotionalization of the concept of design plays a crucial role in feeling at home in an area, and that there is a conflict of different emotional norms on what is “nice”. In most processes of gentrification in German cities, gentrifiers are seeking Jugendstil design as facades for their new houses. In Wilhelmsburg, this is only available in a limited scope at the Reiherstiegviertel. It is thus no coincidence that the World Quarter replicates the same look with the gabled roofs and the brick layered facades as these much-loved Jugendstil houses. As it is explained by the Gerber architects, the design should signal a powerful entrée into the area. That is to say that the feeling of connection to the nearby Reiherstieg is the crucial idea for the shaping of an atmosphere where new norms of behavior—cleaning up, meeting together in public space and post-modern valorization of energy awareness—are embodied. The SAGA cooperation argues that the character of these estates has been retained, as the typical clinker architecture that has characterized working class estates was reused (Ehrlinger 2014: 18), and thus reduces the language of the whole design to a detail that now solely functions as a reference to a world gone by.

Consequently, in the architectural description of the World Quarter, the neighborhood is permanently coined as “formerly working class” area. When it comes to the details of design, the shape of the apartments—with a classical division between a bigger living room where the family meets and smaller bedrooms—is seen as “anachronistic”. The reshaping of the social housing estates also brought “order” into the “chaos” of the attached small workshops where mostly migrants offered low-paid services like car repair, cheap trade or scrap

metal recycling. With the new concept designed by Dalpiaz and Giannetti architects, there is now space for “adequate” buildings consisting of a flexible box structure which “now allows social exchange”.

## 9.4 Right to the City

The most profound and prominent criticism of the IBA was formulated by activists related to the right to the city movement in Hamburg (cp. Vrenegor 2014; Birke 2011). Although sometimes described as a social movement, there are obviously differences between this concept and well-researched cases like the feminist or ecological movements. The right to the city activism does not claim to represent any social group. There is an idea of advocacy attached to many of their activities, but that often relates to a larger and more profound idea of a more direct and radical form of democracy than might be found in groups that advocate for underprivileged citizens. In this respect, the activists of the right to the city movement do not understand themselves as radical social workers. Instead, their actions presume a certain self-concept of inhabitants as being citizens. Along these lines, the political actions undertaken require a certain level knowledge about the social and political situation in Hamburg.

The activities of the “right to the city” movement can be seen as the most prominent example in Germany of a type of international activism that mobilizes more prominent people in countries like the United States. Although groups all over Germany have been using this slogan to organize themselves, the Hamburg activists are a comparatively big group of people. In fact, the right to the city movement is a network of more than seventy different associations and organizations from all kind of political fields. Most important to mention is their early engagement for refugees which intensified in 2015. It started with the arrival of a group of refugees from Lampedusa who were supposed to return to Italy because of the Dublin treaty (Benigni 2014). The activism in favor of asylum for these refugees in Hamburg escalated to massive protest, but the initiative succeeded in linking with the unions and the churches in their protest. Besides their activism for refugees, activities against the closure of social and cultural institutions, especially those which are autonomously organized, is a major aspect of the movement. However, the protest against gentrification might be regarded as the most characteristic work of the movement. The basic idea behind the different activities and partners in the network is the egalitarian approach that has been referenced from the work of Henri Lefebvre (cp. Kipfer et al. 2012). In the run of the last twenty years, Lefebvre has been interpreted in many different ways and to serve a wide range of action and analysis. The “flexibility” of the original text might help to include different subjects like refugee integration and anti-gentrification protest. The right to the city appears to be mainly motivated by a sense of belonging, which refuses any closer definition of what citizenship in times of globalized cities might mean. The right to access, which is often also included in the reading of Lefebvre, also leaves much room for interpretation. Put into an architectural debate, access is seen as physical accessibility and a barrier free environment. Activists from social science, however, emphasize that “access” requires a more political accessibility and self-governance. Mullis (2014) has worked out the most important features of the “right to the city” movement in Germany and emphasizes this political reading and its focus on radical democratic reforms which center around the creation of spaces of self-realization and self-governance. Mullis thereby formulates that the city as such is not the primary dimension for the necessary political changes. It is rather one arena of political conflict next to others. In this way, the “Right to the City” activists do not see themselves as socially oriented urban planners or something similar. Obviously, the conflicts about space cannot be understood without the analysis of more profound conflicts in society. In this regard, this movement would not accept the given institutional and policy settings upon which singular projects and strategies of urban planning are based.

The question of accessibility for these political groups is not a mere question of realizing wishful improvements as such. The creation of a more emancipated and autonomous city is, according to them, the main goal which does not allow compromise for the sake of an achievement of arbitrary project objectives. Self-critically, many activists, who are often students or academics, acknowledge that this politicization hinders a broader anchorage amongst citizens, as hands-on and application-oriented concepts are traditionally preferred by a larger part of German society and the intellectual capital for understanding such a theoretically motivated slogan overburdens potentially low-skilled persons. The most powerful actions of the network therefore can be found in those protests which are related to processes of expulsion, like in the case of the ESSO houses of St.

Pauli, where affected tenants can make direct sense of the slogan. However, working with affected citizens endangers the movement, as protest activities can collapse when another fight is lost or in cases where nobody is directly affected.

The latter is true for the IBA Wilhelmsburg at first sight. With the “Arbeitskreis Umstrukturierung Wilhelmsburg” (AKU/Workgroup Restructuring Wilhelmsburg) some local activists from Wilhelmsburg and some of the network have worked out their criticism on the IBA by reviewing some of their main projects (AKU 2013). In the first place, however, the criticism goes beyond the narrowed down view of particular projects. Criticism of projects rather creates a critical awareness of general lines of political changes. The main point of departure is the assumption that political decisions are the core of the problem that will enhance gentrification and the expulsion of the poorer inhabitants of Wilhelmsburg. The core analysis thus does not start with the interpretation of the IBA projects and does not follow their perspective which takes for granted that creating social mix is a socially desirable goal.

The criticism points to the changed societal and political context that initiated and motivated the IBA. In the frame of a neo-liberal idea of city, planning and politics, the IBA signifies the paradigmatic shift from a city that has a (housing and planning) policy aiming at affordable housing for all, realized by the social housing programs on the 1970s, to a city which is subdued to the entrepreneurial norms of a market-oriented planning by reducing planning to project management. This entrepreneurial city pays lip service to social intentions and fakes participation where decision-making power is replaced by surveys. Aesthetization, in this perspective, becomes the major principle for urban design, fostering a good atmosphere for the middle and upper class which are being catered to. The IBA, one can conclude, does not reflect on the societal reasons for the existing social problems in Wilhelmsburg, which are not caused by the neighborhood and its built environment, but which express themselves in the urban space and architectural deficits. Wilhelmsburg is not—as it is called in many IBA related publications—a “socially difficult” neighborhood, but in the first place an area where a higher percentage of people live who have social and financial problems. Stigmatization and the consequently following negative attitude of the city towards Wilhelmsburg have then increased the downward spiral of social and built devastation.

The more profound criticism on the IBA therefore not only argues that the effect of this urban planning process has increased the social difficulties of the already disfavored inhabitants of Wilhelmsburg (as they are prone to suffer from the consequences of gentrification). The impact of the IBA goes beyond the local and neighborhood related social context. Criticism points at the redefinition of the social and of politics in general which is a result of a long-term development of the post-Fordist economy and society which produce the IBA and at the same time were reconfirmed by the IBA. In the general set up, the IBA functions as a kind of festivalization of urban planning (Hohenstatt and Rinn 2013), resulting first in a changed landscape of imagination, where Wilhelmsburg becomes a visible place for investment and an attractive property market for real estate of all kinds. The effects of gentrification thus only become secondarily evident and shape a new social geography forcing the poor inhabitants to the margins. In the first phase of imaginative reinterpretation, the temporary inclusiveness is realized by cultural projects, which however will close when the IBA show is over. A famous example is the cinematic project of the progressive Hamburg film maker Fatih Akin whose Workshop “Soul Kitchen” closed very soon after the official end of the IBA. Akin is only the most prominent example on how culture is instrumentalized to create intellectual support for the intrinsic political agenda of the IBA.

Impressively, the IBA has been able to organize a five year long firework in Wilhelmsburg that included a long list of involved artists, fashion designers, slam poets, musicians, and other key persons of the Hamburg cultural life. The IBA was successful in selling itself as a good thing that is worth being supported, so that many people voluntarily worked with the IBA, mostly for little pay or even unpaid. Cooperating with the IBA apparently produced symbolic capital that has to be related to the underfinanced subculture of Hamburg. As the IBA combined “big names” and subculture, the involved free local artists sought benefits by placing themselves close to the successful ones. As a result, the artists and many academics have been integrated into a project which they might have otherwise criticized because of its gentrifying impact, as they have been doing in the case of the Gängeviertel. (Helten 2015).

The IBA follows a logic of product promotion as it is crucially embedded into the approach to the city in which each part has to be lifted up to be attractive for potential buyers. Wilhelmsburg did not yet have the proper promotion so that a takeover by the middle class could be motivated. Culture is reduced to the essential

support for this “development” of the area. The extraordinary high number of events and density of the cultural calendar of the IBA presents a “city of the future” that is oriented around events, happenings, and short-lived activities and thereby replaces other concepts of urban life and culture. It is striking that the neighborhood itself barely appears in this concept of culture. Culture is a resource but not a particular way of living your life, in this festivalized urban planning strategy. The existing cultural activities are either treated as not being present at all—and in this way are devalued—or transformed into mere façade. This particularly true in the case of the repeatedly quoted “more than 30 nations” living in Wilhelmsburg. Cultural diversity is coined as a positive attribute but does not appear as being allowed to have a say in what the cultural needs of the neighborhood might be. A striking example of this kind of kitschy multiculturalism is the attempt to make the cultural diversity visible as part of the first thematic focus (“cosmopolis”). The migratory history of many people in Wilhelmsburg paradoxically is made invisible in this approach, as it pins the inhabitants to their origins. It subtly carries a socially deterministic perspective, denying the fact that many of those “from more than 30 nations” have been living in Germany since birth. If the IBA had not treated Wilhelmsburg as a cultural terra incognita, they could have brought into view what it really means to live in different cultural worlds and showed the contradictions, sufferings and ambiguities of cultural diversity. In contrast, the project took photographs of people with a migratory background and posted them on oversized billboards so as to make them “visible”. The IBA furthermore categorized this as participation.

---

## 9.5 Architecture Versus Social Science?

The effect of the IBA on the social fragmentation of Hamburg has not been discussed much in the urban planning and architectural scene in Germany. The criticism from the AKU gathered voices of protest which have barely been noticed in the professional field. Their key argument, however, is not new and reconfirms earlier analysis about the profound transformation of urban planning and the affirmative character of architecture in the context of this kind of “events”. Already in 1993, prominent social scientists pointed out the “festivalization” of urban politics (Häußermann and Siebel 1993). Compared to the debate then, there are important differences to be discussed. First of all, the question of why social criticism (even when it refers to urban sociology as the “Right to the City” movement is doing) is disconnected from social science today, needs to be addressed.

Prominent critical voices towards the IBA are not present anymore. The analysis by Häußermann and Siebel has found a fruitful earth in the movement “Right to the City” long after the sociologists had formulated their insights. One can say that the general opinion on big planning projects has become more critical in Germany. This has especially found expression in the massive protest against the rebuilding of the Stuttgart train station (“Stuttgart 21”) and with the recent rejection of the Hamburg bid for the Olympic Games by a referendum. The widespread criticism of these kind of long-term projects coincides with profound changes in society in the last two decades. Although an adequate analysis would exceed the scope of this chapter, a few important tendencies might be pointed out. In a very general way, one can say that the festivalization, which projects at the beginning of the 1990s started to introduce as an innovative form of urban planning, have now become the norm. While in the last years some authors have been refocusing on the “ordinary city” and “vernacular architecture”, the principal logic of urban development seems to follow the imperative of selling the city by implementing and following new narratives on spaces like in Wilhelmsburg (cp. Bourdin et al. 2014).

Most prominent and influential has been the discourse on the “creative class” in the run of the work of Richard Florida. As is also true for other analytical terms intending to introduce a new perspective on urban development, like “Global City” or “Postmodern Urbanism”, the terminology was observed to legitimize certain approaches to urban planning that intellectually promote entrepreneurial urbanism like the IBA. In the case of the IBA Wilhelmsburg, the elaborated version of this sophistication of neoliberal urban politics and planning is worked out most prominently by Klotz (2014), who formulated a PhD in cultural studies and was the project coordinator of the “Creative Quarter Elbe Island” of the IBA for 6 years. In her methodological chapter, she argues that participating in the project at the same time that she does research on the area is an advantage. The acceptance of her academic reflections shows the dilemma that a critical mass of, for example, artists or academics who could formulate counter-narratives, has gone. The effects of university reforms, by implementing excellency and sponsorship as a main criteria for the evaluation of academics, have led to the cancellation of most academic positions in the field of urban studies in the social sciences.



The case of Hamburg is emblematic for this change. The newly built Hafencity University has also been a “partner” of the IBA and motivated students to develop activities like the “University of the Neighborhood” in Wilhelmsburg. With nearly no financial support, the students tried to realize projects in a run-down building which they were kindly allowed to use temporarily. Of course, after the end of the IBA it was closed. The narrative of the creative city implies hard work, little payment, short-term perspectives and a priority for a distinguished taste for beautiful appearances. Planning is seen as enabling, framing and steering creative processes that are upgrading the area.

The enthronization of the narrative of creativeness is not positioned in the IBA rhetoric as a new master discourse. It is one of at least three narrative options on how to read the intentions of this planning policy. By throwing buzzwords into the air, the IBA absorbs all possible interpretations and thereby mentally includes most diverse actors. Initiated and linked to the local elites, the IBA offers symbolic capital for those who were considered to be linked to them like artists and intellectuals. In 1993, the main criticism of festivalization was that the promise of a trickle down effect—everybody will profit from these investments—does not pan out. Often, critics calculated how much money could have been spent on social expenditure if it had not been invested in the architecture of spectacles. Now, such a counter-narrative is made conceptually impossible, as the IBA can fall back on its ambivalent position of the social meaning of their program. It will demonstrate some direct outcome with comparably simple and small investments like the above-mentioned sport facilities. The social intentions are reduced to the ambition to enable social interaction and education. In fact, these investments into social infrastructure would have been needed anyway and were offered by public authorities in other parts of Hamburg without any “support” by the IBA.

Spending public money on the IBA to promote private investment nevertheless needs some kind of legitimation in the eyes of the general public. Against the background of ongoing turbulences with even violent demonstrations against gentrification, the subject of expulsion was the Achilles heel in the case of Hamburg, and the political elites of the ruling Social Democrats had to find a way to demonstrate their sensitivity regarding the expulsion of poor inhabitants. The only direct answer given to critics of the IBA was therefore concerning the fear of expulsion. In a 14-page paper (IBA Hamburg 2013), the IBA tried to demonstrate that no gentrification is observable in Wilhelmsburg. The figures presented were interpreted in a rather astonishing manner. Over the duration of the IBA, rents rose by 35%. The IBA relativizes this fact by saying that the average rise in rents in Hamburg was 46%. Moreover, the paper argues that this figure only stems from newly rented apartments and that people who were already living in Wilhelmsburg were not affected. This means that the rise of rents in the free market sector was even higher. In general, many neighborhoods in Hamburg underwent less dramatic rent increases. What the IBA is not talking about is what this development means for the youth of Wilhelmsburg who want to leave their parents’ homes. For the children of the overwhelmingly poor people, the neighborhood is no longer affordable. While there had been empty lots prior to the IBA, which young people could easily afford, now there is no space left for them anymore and consequently, internal mobility in the neighborhood has totally stopped. New vacancies will be filled with richer external candidates, while the only option for the established inhabitants to move to another apartment is to leave the neighborhood (Kiehn 2013: 192).

The stories of the poor are not part of the master narrative of the IBA, and as intellectuals like social and cultural scientists share the mindset of success with powerful actors in a vain attempt to save their role in the festivalized politics of planning, the distinguishing discourse about “social science” and “architecture” misses the point. As the example of the IBA shows, the shared societal position currently proliferating intellectually for the implementation of entrepreneurial politics has overcome the dichotomy of social scientists as the critics of architecture and architects as the pragmatics of social ideas. With the narrative on creativity, both professions have agreed on a loose narrative, which is hard to attack because of its ambivalence. A narrative that obscures social problems.

---

## References

AKU Arbeitskreis Umstrukturierung Wilhelmsburg. (2013). *Unternehmen Wilhelmsburg: Stadtentwicklung im Zeichen von IBA und igs*. Berlin/Hamburg: Assoziation A.

Architektenblatt, Deutsches. (2013). IBA-Geschichte: Immer weniger Bau-Ästhetik, immer mehr Soziales und Ökologie: ein Rückblick auf 110 Jahre. *Deutsches Architektenblatt*, 45(2), 26–31.

Barth, A. (2000). "Ein ungeheuer belastendes Klima": Wilhelmsburg - das ist im Volksmund der "Balkan des Nordens", ein Alptraum von Stadtplanung. *Der Spiegel* 54/44: 114–126.

Benigni, F. (2014). Migrationspolitik made in Italy: Aspekte von Souveränität und Bürger\*innenschaft anhand von Lampedusa in Hamburg. In M. Miriam Aced, T. Tamer Düzyol, A. Rüzgar, & C. Schaft (Eds.), *Migration, Asyl und (post-)migrantische Lebenswelten in Deutschland*, (cp. 29–46). Berlin: LIT.

Birke, P. (2011). Im "Raum der Gegensätze": Die Bedeutung der Auseinandersetzungen um Wohn- und Mietverhältnisse im Hamburger "Recht auf Stadt"-Netzwerk. *Widersprüche*, 31, 67–79.

Bourdin, A, Eckardt, F., & Wood, A. (2014). *Die ortlose Stadt: über die Virtualisierung des Urbanen*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Breckner, I. (2013). Urban poverty and gentrification: A comparative view on different areas in Hamburg. In H.-C. Petersen (Ed.), *Spaces of the poor: Perspectives of cultural sciences on urban slum areas and their inhabitants*, ed., (cp. 193–207). Bielefeld: Transcript.

Eckardt, F. (2013). Die Emotionalisierung der Stadt. In K. Harm (Ed.), *Die subjektive Seite der Stadt: Neue politische Herausforderungen und die Bedeutung von Eliten im lokalen Bereich*, (cp pp. 37–57). Wiesbaden: Springer.

[CrossRef]

Ehrlinger, S. (2014). *Das Weltquartier in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg. Die Wohnungswirtschaft*, 67(9), 26–29.

Gefroi, C. (2014). Weite Welt Wilhelmsburg: Ein Hamburger Problemviertel reift zum Stadtquartier. *Deutsches Architektenblatt*, 46(11), 12–17.

Hamburg, I. B. A. (2013). *Gentrifizierung in Wilhelmsburg?*. Hamburg: IBA.

Hamburg, Stadt. (2014). *Sozialraumbeschreibung Wilhelmsburg*. Hamburg: Bezirksamt Hamburg-Mitte.

Häußermann, H., & Siebel, W. (1993). *Festivalisierung der Stadtpolitik: Stadtentwicklung durch große Projekte*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

[CrossRef]

Helten, M. (2015). Heterotopia and cultural activism—The case of Hamburg's Gängeviertel. *Die Erde*, 146(2/3): 165–174.

Hohenstatt, F., & Rinn, M. (2013). Festivalisierte Problembearbeitung: Die bevölkerungspolitische Strategie der IBA Hamburg, die Abwesenheit Sozialer Arbeit in Stadtentwicklungspolitik und die Effekte auf Wohnverhältnisse in Wilhelmsburg. *Widersprüche*, 33(127), 23–41.

Kiehn, B. (2013). Aufwertung ohne Verdrängung in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg durch IBA und ig. *Forum Wohnen und Stadtentwicklung*, 5(4), 190–195.

Kipfer, S., Saberi P., & Wieditz, T. (2012). Henri Lefebvre. In F. Eckardt (Ed.), *Handbuch Stadtsoziologie*, (cp. 167–184). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Klotz, C. (2014). *Vom Versuch, Kreativität in der Stadt zu planen. Die Internationale Bauausstellung IBA Hamburg*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Laufer, B. (2014). Orte, die bleiben: IBA und Gartenschau in Wilhelmsburg sind vorbei. *Hintz & Kunz*, 258, 32–37.

Mullis, D. (2014). *Recht auf die Stadt. Von Selbstverwaltung und radikaler Demokratie*. Münster: Unrast.

Vrenegor, N. (2014). Die Stadt von den Rändern gedacht: drei Jahre Recht-auf-Stadt-Bewegung in Hamburg; ein Zwischenstopp. In N. Gestring, R. Ruhne & J. Wehrheim (Eds.), *Stadt und soziale Bewegungen*, (cp. 99–109.) Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Willeke, S. (2005). Hier waren wir noch nie": Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg ist ein Stadtteil der sozialen Gegensätze; Arm und Reich leben hier in Sichtweite, doch sie begegnen sich nicht mehr. *Die Zeit* 60/17: 24–25.