HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND THE RENAISSANCE OF THE LIVING IN THE INNER CITY IN GERMANY. RESEARCH RESULTS OF THE GERMAN INSTITUTE OF URBAN AFFAIRS (DIFU)

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Abstract

In recent decades, settlement development in Germany has been determined by suburbanisation, particularly residential suburbanisation. The consequences have been urban sprawl, a growing traffic load, and partial segregation by income, age, and ethnic background. For some years now, there have been signs of a far-reaching trend towards strengthening the residential function in the inner city. This aspect was the focus of a study published by the German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu) in 2005. The purpose of a follow-up study published in 2010 was to develop the key results of the 2005 study by extending investigation to a large number of cities and to explore causes, effects and the development potential that can influence the shift in the importance of inner urban living. Historic city centres and conservation areas and a high portion of historic buildings are among the location factors, besides a favourable economic development, a high proportion of services, a good infrastructure endowment, appropriate building- and housing forms and a scenic urban topography that play a decisive role for the living in the inner city. Cultural heritage ensures the sustainable development of the city. Qualities of squares and streets in historic areas, important sacred and secular buildings, a high frequency of monuments and historic green spaces are adjuvant for the attractiveness of the residential function of the inner city. Heritage conservation benefits from the renaissance of the inner cities.

Key words: cultural heritage, residential function, inner city

1. Objectives, Motive and Subject matter of the Study

In recent decades, settlement development in Germany has been determined by suburbanisation, particularly residential suburbanisation. The family was long regarded as the main driving force in this process. The consequences have been urban sprawl, a growing traffic load, and partial segregation by income, age, and ethnic background.

For some years now, there have been signs of a far-reaching trend towards strengthening the residential function in the inner city. This aspect was the focus of a study published by the Difu in 2005 on living in the inner city. Empirical findings drawing on a poll of residents in two Leipzig and Munich inner city neighbourhoods point to a growing and socio-demographically broadly based interest in inner city housing (Hasso et al. 2005).

Significant societal processes and mega-trends lead to differential development in inner cities. They include demographic change, new framework conditions for housing

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resulting from economic transformation processes, and regulatory changes. The purpose of a follow-up study published in 2010 was therefore to develop the key results of the 2005 study by extending the investigation to a large number of cities, thus broadening the data base. In addition to examining whether and how living in the inner city has taken a favourable turn, the study focuses on causes and effects and the development potential that can influence this shift in the importance of inner urban living (Jekel et al 2010).

The aspect of urban sustainable development and its relevance for the historic city played a decisive role in this investigation. Another central topic of the study has been the aspect of changes in lifestyles and values that have significant impacts on the form and significance of heritage.

2. Problems

2.1 Main questions

The investigation shall give answers to the following questions? Are historic towns and urban areas a model for sustainable development? Is it acceptable to look at Heritage conservation as a way of ensuring sustainability of historic towns and villages in the future? Tradition, history and the cultural heritage are dynamic components of the development of the city which have proved durable in time and which should stand as references to planners and decision makers when reflecting on the policies they need to adopt and implement to guarantee the sustainable development of their city. How can these components serve as models to secure the continuity of the city at a time when development pressures appear to be as much ignorant as irresistible? (CIVVIH 2010) What about the function of dwelling as a core element of sustainability?

2.2 Historic towns, urban areas and sustainable development

In its definition and popularisation of the term sustainable development, the 1987 Brundtlandt Report represented a turning point in raising awareness of the critical challenges facing our planet (CIVVIH 2010a). It was a wake up call to all citizens to take individual as much as joint responsibility for ensuring that patterns of behaviour are adapted to the planet’s ecological limits. This has later been discussed in many international meetings and the concept has been broadened. Most recently, the 2009 Copenhagen Summit on Climate change reinforced the need to take action. At the heart of this debate is the question of non-renewable resources. These include the heritage.

In a wider view sustainable development is good housekeeping: taking care and developing existing resources in the best way. This makes the heritage a starting point for planning and development in a sustainable society (CIVVIH 2010a).

Sustainability encompasses reduce, reuse and recycle: that means minimum intervention, adaptive reuse and recognition of environmental capital. The consequences include that the built environment is valued today as a material, socio-economic and architectural resource.

Sustainable development

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (WCED 1987)
The concept is considered to have four pillars: environmental protection; economic growth; social equity and cultural continuity.

Sustainable development can be regarded as the inter-relationship of environmental, social, economic and cultural issues, in which heritage is recognized as a cumulative material, functional, financial and cultural resource.

This interpretation has since strengthened to embrace quality of life, geo-cultural identity and diversity.

There is a parallel global agenda: Climate Change, and heightened awareness of the spectrum of conservation issues as they effect both the natural and manmade worlds.

The broadening perception and accumulation of parallel agendas involves a new interpretation of heritage. The concept of heritage has changed from something that relates only to the past to the dynamics of social and cultural processes and the evolving aspirations of people and communities.

This represents a step-change from a focus on objects that requires to be preserved to processes that require to be revived and sustained (Rodwell, Denis 2009:9).

Characteristics of the Sustainable City

There are certain key issues that help to define the characteristics of the Sustainable city: efficiency in the use of land; renewable sources for materials and energy; limitation of wastes and a focus on recycling and environmental quality.

There is a general consensus that the Sustainable City is: compact, dense and mixed in use; daily journeys are limited through the proximity of functions; walking and cycling are prioritised and it is polycentric in its expansion and relationship to other cities.

Also historic cities are considered as a material and socio-economic resource as well as a cultural one, thereby considerably enhancing the reasons for their conservation and adaptive reuse.

An alternative model represents the antithesis of the Sustainable City: Urban dispersal and transport dependence; the concentration of volatile redevelopment pressures in sensitive historic centres, the loss of material fabric and socio-economic identity; and inner city neighbourhoods becoming the focus for degradation and socio-economic problems (Rodwell, Denis 2009:3).

The key issues and general consensus suggest that the historic city is a model for the Sustainable City.

The Historic City

Changing perceptions in the field of architectural conservation can be observed from a primarily monumental and aesthetic interpretation of ‘monuments’ and ‘group of buildings’ to ‘inhabited historic towns’. This typifies a broader understanding of historic cities as places of habitation and socio-economic activity, in which cultural objects are recognized as components within their wider settings and human context.

“The historic city is generally built up and closely knit. It is multifunctional, which strong virtues of proximity and accessibility, which limits the need for infrastructure and transport. It is functionally and socially mixed, supporting a wide range of complementary activities. The historic city is vibrant, convivial, and eminently adaptable to incremental and harmonious change. It is human in scale, employs locally sourced materials, and expresses
geo-cultural diversity. This provides a strong sense of tangible and intangible identity.” (Rodwell, Denis 2009)

The urban morphology discipline avoids the heritage and contemporary constructs and is an important tool for the management of change in historic cities.

Key management issues today include

- The role of historic cities/quarters and their relationship to their modern counterparts:
  - harmonious coexistence, through
  - strategic planning

Modern interventions:

- harmonious integration, through
- mutual respect (scale and design)

Scale and proximity of functions: prioritise

- small scale mixed use, through
- detailed planning (including protection of artisan activities)

Housing, generally the dominant historical use:

- protect the function, as well as
- social and cultural mix

Sustainable relationships: strive for

- ecological balance within (wherever possible) and between cities
- “reduce, reuse and recycle” and “stay close to source”

Avoid domination by tourism.

The safeguard of historic towns and urban areas includes the necessary procedures for their protection and rehabilitation, as well as for their coherent development and their harmonious adaptation to contemporary life (CIVVIH 2010b).

Functional changes could lead to the loss of traditional activities which contribute to the identity of places and to the transformation of historic towns and urban areas in monofunctional areas oriented to satisfy leisure needs and not suitable for living. Historic cities run the risk of becoming a consumer product for mass tourism. The introduction of new functions could determine negative effects such as increasing traffic and congestion, which are not sustainable to urban heritage (CIVVIH 2010b).

Any intervention in historic towns and urban areas must aim to improve the quality of life of the local residents and the quality of natural environment. This implicates actions in harmony to the capacity of the urban system for original habitants as well as for those who arrive (either to reside or to use the historic town). It is also important to attenuate the gentrification process due to the increase of urban ground rent (CIVVIH 2010b:11).

The introduction of new activities should not compromise the survival of traditional activities and the outliving of activities useful for daily life of inhabitants. One must always accentuate the fact that the most important function which must survive is the dwelling. This could help preserve the diversity and cultural plurality. The implantation of new functions
must also satisfy the needs for sustainable developments in the concept of the historic town ((CIVVIH 2010b: 18).

3. Method and Structure of the Study

Seven case studies on living in the inner city provide the core element of the study, published by the Difu. The cities selected were Braunschweig, Dresden, Frankfurt on the Main, Kassel, Cologne, Schwäbisch Gmünd, and Wetzlar (Figure 1). They represent a broad range of framework conditions and initial situations, reaching from the small centre in a rural area to the globally integrated city in a dynamic metropolitan region.

Figure 1: Case study cities - Braunschweig, Dresden, Frankfurt on the Main, Kassel, Cologne, Schwäbisch Gmünd, and Wetzlar.

Data and material were examined on resident and household development, the labour market and economic situation, infrastructure endowment, housing market and urban development, heritage conservation and environmental pollutions. In addition, focused interviews were conducted in all cities with experts from municipal administration and politics, conservationists and planners, housing companies and cooperatives, tenant and owner associations, with real estate agents, developers and investors, and with local actors, for example from civic associations.

Data analysis and local interviews were supplemented by further literature and material to the cities and to the overall topics.
4. Outcomes – Main Findings of the Study (Gregor Jekel et al. 2010: 24)

**Broad Acceptance as Residential Location**

The renaissance of living in the inner city is an almost undisputed vision. The inner city is in principle accepted as a place to live. This is particularly apparent in historic towns and urban areas as well as in large cities, while the trend in smaller centres is weaker and less uniform.

**The Impact of an Ageing Society**

Inner cities are generally expected to benefit particularly from demographic change, since the specific advantages they offer, such as a dense web of easy-to-reach social and cultural facilities and the wide range of services available, are especially interesting for less mobile sections of the population. Most case studies confirmed that the “young old” are particularly to the fore in acquiring inner city accommodation for their later life.

**Family life in the Inner City**

Family households, too, benefit from a residential environment with short distances between the place of work, child care facilities, and the home and from infrastructure and social networks providing informal support. All case studies confirmed the suitability of the inner city and also of historic towns and urban areas for families where certain traffic and transport conditions are met and green amenities available.

Moreover, the alleged crime and social tensions often advanced as arguments against inner city neighbourhoods for the family play less and less of a role. On the contrary, inner urban community life has a positive image precisely in the biggest of the cities under study, where social differences are greatest.

**Consequences of Separating Place of Residence and Place of Work**

Over and beyond international labour ties, there are other trends in the separation of the place of residence from the place of work, but no longer in one direction. The flexibility and mobility that the working world demands of the labour force makes moving house with every change a less feasible option. The result is an increase in job-related secondary residences and multi-locality arrangements. Central locations in many historic cities and towns are extremely attractive for such secondary accommodation.

**Ethno-Cultural Housing Location Preferences**

For most cities, statistics show a surplus in supra-regional migration for core areas. The inner cities are also the first port of call for immigrants. Owing to specific ethno-cultural demands in reconciling integration with the preservation of cultural identity, the inner city will continue to be a favoured residential location. In some cities the development towards a multi-minority society where no one ethnic group predominates is already well advanced. Fears about growing social conflicts that could arise from this development have so far remained unfounded.
The “Creative Class” Hope for the Future of Urban Development

The increasing overlap between employment and the private sphere means that big cities and especially historic cities and urban areas are becoming attractive for creative and innovative people because they offer an appropriate setting for their lifestyles.

Economisation of Local Government Policy

The economisation of municipal policy can prove a major obstacle to strengthen the residential function of the inner city. In view of the existential threat to many local authorities posed by the financial crisis since the 1990s fiscal goals have become the focus of municipal policy. Local authority efforts to secure tax revenues have often been accompanied by the one-sided inner development of the inner city as a location for retail and services.

Housing has meanwhile been recognized as an important element of an urban and thus attractive inner city. Whether this complementary function, which is by now an integral component of inner city and historic city concepts, can suffice to secure central locations for residential purposes remains to be seen.

Land-Use Planning

Land-use planning categories pose many problems for the residential function in central areas. One is the function mix in core areas were industrial and commercial uses are given priority and residential use is not secured.

Building and Housing Size Structures

The study sees a major obstacle to greater residential use in the inner city by families in the lack of large dwellings. Housing size structures in the inner city are largely designed for small households. As a result, competition for the few large dwellings available is even more fierce.

Moreover, there are signs that the relatively uniform existing housing structures are less and less in keeping with the requirements of an urban society, which, especially in the inner city, have diversified with respect to housing models, life-styles, and functional demands. In this respect historic cities with different building types offer key benefits.

Supplier and Ownership Structure

Even if investors confirm a growing interest in inner city housing, this development has not yet been reflected in the number of new dwellings built and historic buildings restored and rehabilitated. Commercial supplies and investors have yet to react adequately to the diversification of housing demand.

In less expensive market segments and especially in the field of new forms of housing there is a lack of suitable accommodation. New housing forms are becoming more and more important as society ages and individualises.

Environmental Problems

Road traffic is a serious problem for living in the inner city. Despite far-reaching measures to bundle and calm traffic and reduce air pollution, traffic noise and pollution by fine dust and other atmospheric pollutants continue to have a considerable adverse impact.
on the quality of life in the inner city as well as in the historic towns and urban areas. In residential locations with heavy traffic exposure, the spatial concentration of socially deprived people is evident.

Image Problems

If the image of living in the inner city is negative, this can prove a massive problem for the sustainable development prospects of a city. Nor can such an image be easily changed in the short term by far reaching objective improvements like the expansion and diversification of the housing supply or measures to enhance the residential environment and historic urban areas. As the case studies show, the external image often requires a great deal of concentrated efforts.

Housing is to be seen as a catalyst for successful Inner Urban Sustainable Development (Gregor Jekel et al 2010:28)

There are many arguments in favour of promoting living in the inner city. In view of the obstacles and potential for conflict discussed, however, it should not be assumed that such a development can be taken for granted. It is also apparent that the rediscovery of the inner city as a place to live does not mean the disappearance of suburbanisation, the upgrading of all inner cities, or even the upgrading of all historic inner cities. As in other areas, development can be expected to diversify. Local authorities have considerable scope to influence the attractiveness of inner city living. The core policy issues for local authorities are the prospects for urban, inner city lifestyles in a highly complex and increasingly diverse society and the impact on the development of the city.

The development of the inner urban residential function must be seen as a cross sectional task covering aspects of urban planning, transport, and traffic policy, urban conservation, identity policy, and naturally local authority social policy (as a core task in the classical understanding of urban housing policy). There are six main areas of action.

- **Enhancement of image and identity**: the study showed that the inner city must be kept full of life because it is the focal point for building a city’s image. This can succeed only if the residential function is retained, further developed, and not regarded merely as supplementing retail, recreational, and commercial functions. Identity policy and image building are thus decisively important for the renaissance of living in the inner city, just as the inner urban residential function makes a vital contribution to local authority efforts to attain urbanity and authenticity.

- **From general interest services to supply-side policy**: the developments described make it necessary to expand housing policy in most cities. Greater attention must be paid to fiscal and urban development aspects of housing policy issues, and additional tools need to be developed to address new target groups.

- **Support for new housing forms**: local authority support for new forms of housing aims in particular at supplementing the housing stock with forms not provided by established investors and suppliers.

- **Greater cooperation with housing market actors**: housing industry actors are potential cooperation partners in the pursuit of social and urban development goals.

- **Building land policy and land-use planning**: in expanding and diversifying the housing supply, innovative approaches are needed to activate inner city land resources. In many places, even in fast growing regions, inner urban development can largely or completely satisfy the demand for residential building land.
• Improving the residential environment: improvements to the residential environment that enhance the residential function in the inner city include heritage conservation, local supply facilities and the reduction of environmental pollution. The main focus is on reducing private motorised traffic, in favour of other transport modes. In addition, measures to improve the residential environment must take more consistent and greater account than of the demands of demographic change.

With regard to cooperation and linking within town planning and monument preservation, the urban development, planning related preservation of historic buildings or ensembles retains considerable importance in practice. Monument conservation in urban development is understood to mean activities concerned with the conservation of historic monuments which extend beyond individual objects to the maintenance of historic ensembles and urban structures and local and cultural form of landscape.

Urban development or larger scale preservation of historic monuments developed through recognition of the fact that the sum of maintained individual historic monuments does not guarantee the preservation of the townscape. Its aim is the conservation of historic towns, their ancient structures and spatial qualities.

It is not the aesthetic quality of individual buildings which is the important aspect of ensembles, rather the visual effect and readability of the overall context. This effect is accounted for in the architectural proportions, in the composition of the ground plan and elevation, in the rhythmical sequence of the facades and in the spaces created by streets and squares (Claus-Peter Echter 2001:6).

Within the context of urban conservation planning one should respect and promote cultural diversity of different communities which inhabited during the course of time the historic towns with their traditions (religious, social, economic, etc.).

The various functions that the town or urban area has acquired and its adaptability to new functions without betrayal to its history and without loss of its inhabitants form part of the elements to be preserved.

The interviews of experts in the case studies showed the importance of historic monuments for the attractiveness of the living in the inner cities. Heritage conservation has a great impact on the demand of housing in inner urban areas. Historical architecture is of considerable importance for the image of a place, for the inhabitants as much as for the visitors. A high proportion of historic monuments and urban ensembles fosters the enhancement of image and identity of inner cities. Historic quarters rank in many cities among the preferred residential areas.

The conditions concerning the situation in respect of the monument conservation in the cities selected were heterogeneous. The two smaller cities Schwäbisch Gmünd and Wetzlar have not been devastated during The Second World War. The historic centres of these cities could preserve their urban patterns as defined by lots and streets and their urban fabric. In big cities like Cologne, Frankfurt on the Main and Dresden the historic core has been heavily destroyed and there was little resistance to change in much of the rebuilding.

Conclusions

Historic city centres and conservation areas and a high portion of historic buildings are among the location factors, besides a favourable economic development, a high proportion of services, a good infrastructure endowment, appropriate building- and housing forms and a scenic urban topography that play a decisive role for the living in the inner city. Cultural heritage ensures the sustainable development of the city. Qualities of squares and
streets in historic areas, important sacred and secular buildings, a high frequency of monuments and historic green spaces are adjuvant for the attractiveness of the residential function of the inner city. Heritage conservation benefits from the renaissance of the inner cities.

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