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Forum 07 Urban Development in the Democratic Planning Process

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City seeks dialogue

From the Stadtforum [City Forum] to cooperative development planning

In the mid-90s, on the initiative of the Mayor Josef Estermann, preparations began for the Zurich Stadtforum. At this point in time, the opinions of administration and real estate owners diverged with regard to the implementation of building proposals. The legal route proved to be less than promising. The “contrast between the conflicting interests” had “become caught up in issues of legal proceedings to such an extent” that the “material problems faded into the background to the point of losing their focus altogether,” explained the preparatory paper on the Stadtforum from 1996/97. The Stadtforum formed the prelude to a new “Culture of Communication” between the City Administration, the business community and the public in planning proposals. Using “open and public discussion” an attempt was made to achieve a “better understanding between those individuals involved or affected from all sections of the community”. Added to this, interested representatives from the business community and the general public, from the authorities, councils, the field of science and private organisations were invited to discussions. The result of the Stadtforum was the basic conclusion that the image of Zurich West would have to be enhanced from the point of view of town planning. The aim of this enhancement is to “bring benefits to all in general”. The participants in the forum established the following guiding principles for raising the image of the city through urban planning:

- Zurich is to be made more competitive and attractive in the European and global context between cities.
- The marketing of locations is to be improved for real estate owners.
- A climate should exist for investors that encourages them to realise projects.
- For the general population, the environment, and thus the quality of their homes and lives should improve.
- Attractive districts should contribute to retaining or winning back higher earners to the city.

Cooperative Planning Zurich West

In 1998, Zurich West took up cooperative planning. Under the overall control of the Office of Urban Development, representatives of the city, the canton, the districts and the real estate owners worked out a development concept. A fundamental part of the planning process was that people got to know one another and built up trust. Using concrete plans, city proposals could be discussed and common goals and wishes could be developed. OMA (Rotterdam), Emswiler Partner, Max Dudler and Morger & Dege submitted various approaches, which took into account links with the city as a whole, the expansion and the meaning of increased infrastructure and the planning itself. On the basis of these contributions, the city and real estate owners were able to put their own ideas in concrete terms in the following phases. A decision was taken not to follow any of the approaches, but to work out an individual development concept.

In February 1999, landowners and the city unanimously adopted a letter of intent. In this, among others, criteria for sustainable development and the development concept were defined. The sustainability should take into account three areas:

- **Economic sustainability** (Investment should have a long-term effect, guarantee yields compatible with market conditions, improve the financial support of infrastructure through taxes and contribute to international competitiveness)

- **Social sustainability** (the development of Zurich West is to be transparent for those involved and include the affected persons, create high quality with regard to living space, health and safety and promote the integration of different sections of the population)
- **Environmental sustainability** (statutory levels for emissions and the effects of pollution and noise etc should be bettered if possible, non-renewable resources should be used sparingly, the land protected in quantitative and qualitative terms and the rich flora and fauna encouraged).

The letter of intent saw sustainable effects as a chance and emphasised that the effects of the development on the economy, society and the natural environment must be comprehensively taken into account.

General aims of the development concept are

- To turn Zurich West into an attractive area of the city
- To target the planning to stages and flexibility
- To emphasise the cocktail of benefits (living, culture, industry, services) and setting trends with regard to town planning for both buildings and open spaces.

Quantitative standards of values for ground usage establish the requirements for exploitation, living areas and free spaces.

Under the 'quality demands', among others, the emphasis will be placed on preserving the specific character of the area: the high density of buildings, the need for a significant residential area, the establishment of culture, services, research, trade and industry, the creation of new green areas and a marked expansion of public transport.

The process of bringing people together and the creation of trust between the city and real estate owners was the basis for a successful urban development strategy. After this first step, the administration, together with Pierre Feddersen, used a kind of workshop concept to work out where open spaces, such as squares, paths and green areas, should be sited. For the district can be reached on foot and is to be experienced, and that is the key requirement for the linking and networking the private buildings. A comprehensive plan is needed for this network of streets and paths.

Added to this, the industrial areas were looked at and carefully analysed. The aim was to identify the spatial qualities such as large halls, which are separated by small lanes. The right-angled arrangement is also typical, but it is broken up by railway lines, resulting in diagonally cut-off areas. A further example is the second urban level, i.e. the bridges from which you can get a view into the area from above.

On the one hand, the area next to the river Limmat is good for relaxation, whilst the tracks give the area a pleasant feeling of space. At the same time, important transport arteries and radial axes cut through the area.

The planning in this area of the city is currently at completely different stages. For example, in the Sulzer-Escher Wyss area, planning had begun, but at the same time the company was still in production. Parallel to the planning, existing buildings have been put to a different use or refurbished. So, less developed areas are only to be found under the railway viaduct.

To plan a city area that is already built up, and which will change in a process over many years through individual demolitions and new buildings, is a contradiction in itself. A development process which is characterised by the juxtaposition of forward thinking, planning, projects, building and breaking up requires different ideas of a city than the re-building of a district from soot and ashes, a *tabula rasa* process.

The position of squares and parks is secured in that we are setting them down in a model. The design quality of these open spaces guarantees competitive procedures. Tomorrow there will be good architecture, in that established architects will build together with construction professionals. That is our wish!

The new should create a link to what exists, in order to give what's new a sense of belonging, uniqueness and distinctiveness, in order to give the oft-quoted authenticity. For, at the beginning of the development of Zurich West, there were niche uses, alternative culture which could occupy spaces thanks to the low rents. These people made Zurich West well known, the cultural scene began to establish itself. And to a large extent that was thanks to the atmosphere in the old factory halls.