



By RALF VON DER HEIDE

The City as Fountain of Youth: less, older, more colorful

How can cities tackle the demographic challenges and remain attractive for all age groups? Upon invitation of the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation, about 550 representatives of cities and municipalities from all over Europe discussed ways to a city development of the future on the Campus of the “Europäisches Energieforum” (EUREF) in Berlin.

The theme of the 13th Foundation Conference was: “The City as a Fountain of Youth – Becoming Old – Being Old – Considering as old. Among the visitors were mayors, ministers, members of the German parliament, members of federal parliaments, members of city and municipal parliaments as well as construction officials, department heads, managers and CEOs of notable companies, architects, artists, and journalists.

“We would like to discuss with you how our cities have to develop regarding the demographic changes so they can offer equally suitable services to younger and older citizens, and how they can harmonize the love for nostalgia with the infrastructure of tomorrow,” said Alexander Otto, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation at the opening of the city conference.

“It has been a good tradition that our conferences take place at special venues,” said Dr. Andreas Mattner, Chairman of the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation and presenter of the conference program. The EUREF-Campus, well-known from Günther Jauch’s talk show, was a model city of tomorrow, he said. Through the exchange of science, research and practical use, a unique test platform was created, Mattner added.

Constructing new residential buildings and restructuring the existing residential buildings to create barrier-free living space was only one of the big challenges for Ephraim Gothe, Permanent Secretary of the Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment of the City of Berlin. Mobility and accessibility had become more important. “We want to become an *inclusive* metropolis,” said Gothe. Berlin was awarded the “Access City Award 2013” for accessibility by the EU, he added.

Counting on the creativity of the citizens

“Count on the creativity of your citizens” – this was the appeal to the conference participants by the journalist and author Margaret Heckel in her speech on the topic “becoming old”. It was all about creating good neighborhoods in which young and old people would feel comfortable. Alliances – also unusual ones – were needed for this. Heckel was on a “Demographic Journey” through Germany and published the results of the journey in the book: “Midlife-Boomer: Warum es nie spannender war, älter zu werden” (“Midlife-Boomers: Why it has never been more fascinating to become old”).

There is no panacea for the demographic challenges. The discussion with Dagmar Mühlenfeld, Mayor of Mülheim an der Ruhr, and the Mayor of Potsdam, Jann Jakobs, confirmed this notion. While the number of Mülheim an der Ruhr’s inhabitants is decreasing, the population of Potsdam has been increasing rapidly year by year since 1999. Furthermore, Potsdam was the third youngest regional capital in Germany, said Jakobs. One instrument to sustain this growth was the demography check which was introduced in Potsdam. It serves to estimate the impacts of political decisions on the demographic changes. This system was transferable – “although every city needs to define its specific criteria”, Jakobs said.

Mülheim is a very attractive city to live in, as more than half of the city area consists of forests and parks, said Mühlenfeld. With concepts such as the “100-Häuser-Programm” (“100 houses program” – young families build inexpensive houses on land belonging to the city) or “Seniorengerechte Stadt” (“senior-focused city”) Mülheim was trying to find its own specific way. The city could as well serve as a blueprint for other cities in the Ruhr area, Mühlenfeld said.

Sigmar Gabriel, Chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) complimented the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation on its pioneer role and its vision. The Foundation was set up at a time when city development was not discussed in public. Today, the country experienced a renaissance of local politics. Cities and municipalities had become places of social integration, Gabriel said. The social society began in a social city which would offer many benefits especially for older people. The role of politics was to fight excessive structural demands.

Fountain of Youth or seniors’ city: How do cities organize the process of becoming old? This was a discussion, presented by Margaret Heckel, Klaus Jensen, Mayor of Trier, Frank Klingebiel, Mayor of Salzgitter, Christoph Arnold and Dr. Benedikt Zacher, founder of Pflege.de, a service portal providing information for living and residing at old age. Social integration and working neighborhoods with mutual support were of prime importance, Zacher said. Christoph Arnold, in his profession as an architect, initiated a residence project “Nürnberger Weg” (“Nuremberg way”), supported by the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation which is aimed at older people and single parents. One crucial challenge in the concept was the arrangement and coordination of services in the quarter, Arnold said.

A humane city

“We should not focus on just one group,” said Klaus Jensen, Mayor of Trier. The objective was a humane city in which everybody could feel comfortable. The mixture in residence projects was very important – from toddlers to 100-year olds, from a prime minister to recipients of social benefits – everyone should be welcome, said Jensen. He lives in a residence project for people with and without physical challenges with his wife, the Prime Minister of Rhineland Palatinate, Malu Dreyer.

The municipalities were not to be left alone with challenges such as inclusion and care, said Frank Klingebiel, Mayor of Salzgitter. The government and the Laender had to have the same responsibility, he demanded.

The second topic block “Being old” was introduced by economist and pension expert Prof. Dr. Bert Rürup. In his opening speech he discussed whether we are facing the breach of the generation contract. There is no guarantee for pension payments, Rürup said, because pensions had to be generated in the future. The former economy expert is convinced that the challenges will be tackled: The pension system stood on a sustainable base for the next 20 years. The demographic development would ease. “At least by 2050, the low birth rate will only play a minor role,” Rürup said. To “age successfully” the labor force participation rate had to increase and the educational system had to become more efficient.

Dr. Burkhard Schwenker, CEO of Roland Berger, and Günter Wältermann, Chairman of the management board of AOK Rheinland/Hamburg, discussed how the cities could organize the care of their citizens. The discussion was presented by Dr. Reiner Klingholz, Director of the Berlin Institute for Population and Development. The fundamental key to success could be a platform for experience exchange, Schwenker said. There should be an open discussion about what works and what does not. In Günter Wältermann’s opinion, it would be easier to maintain care structures in cities than in rural areas. The costs would certainly involve “a great deal of personal contribution,” the AOK Chairman said.

Preventing the need for care

Will “seniors and juniors” cooperate to cope with social changes? Prof. Dr. Ursula Lehr, Former Federal Minister and Chairwoman of the Federal Working Group of Senior Citizens’ Organizations (BAGSO), and Stefan Rottmann, Mayor of Schonungen and youngest Mayor of Germany, responded to this question. The “summit of generations” was presented by Verena Göppert, Councilor for Work, Equalization and Social Affairs of the German Association of Cities.

“Working together is more effective than against each other, said Ursula Lehr, former Minister for Family Affairs. “We need generation-friendly cities. More has to be done to prevent the need for care. It was important that “people age in a healthy way,” Lehr said. The balance of generation is also of great importance for Mayor Rottmann. But it would be difficult to maintain the infrastructure without the younger generation. Therefore, the influx

of young people had to be facilitated in particular. For example, there are 8 kindergartens for 8,000 inhabitants in Schonungen, Rottmann said.

It is an important objective of the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation to present Best Practice projects which help to improve the life quality in cities sustainably. Thus, to conclude the topic block entitled “being old”, Best Practice projects which promote coexistence of the generations in an aging society were presented under the motto: “What can we learn from...”

Jürgen Roters, Mayor of Cologne, presented the project “Wohnen für Hilfe” (“room for help”) which received an acknowledgement from the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation in the competition “the most senior-friendly city” in 2010. The concept is based on the idea to bring together students and senior citizens in a residential partnership. Senior citizens provide free housing space and receive help for cleaning, washing or shopping. Care services were not included, Roters said. In his opinion, the program contributed to the generation exchange.

Young buys old

Ulrich Rolfsmeyer, Mayor of Hiddenhausen, presented the concept “Jung kauft alt” (“young buys old”). The municipality in east Westphalia won the Foundation Award as “Standout City” in 2011. In Hiddenhausen, young people receive advice and financial support when they decide to buy historic buildings. Thus, young people started to move to Hiddenhausen instead of leaving the city, said Rolfsmeyer.

Quarters which enable senior citizens a life in independence were presented by Lutz Basse, CEO of Hamburger SAGA GWG. 300,000 people lived in the municipal residential project – 14 percent of them were older than 65, Basse said. Affordable living space and care in the city quarter were important topics especially for senior citizens. It was the aim to provide for a social balance in the living quarters and sustain a balance between economic performance and social responsibility, Basse said.

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Vogt from Hamburg University held a speech on the demographic change in Japan. The country was experiencing a rapid population decrease since 2005. At

the same time, the population was getting older. 52 percent of the people living in Japan were more than 60 years old. Senior citizens in Japan helped, for example, to clean parks or in nursing services – paid, or for free. The agility facilitated healthy aging, Vogt added.

“Do not forget the culture”

To conclude the first day of the conference, Dr. Lothar de Maizière, the first and last elected Prime Minister of the German Democratic Republic paid homage to the Gasometer and the EUREF-Campus. He appealed to the audience not to forget culture when developing a generation-friendly city. Then de Maizière played the First Movement of Mozart’s “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” accompanied by musicians of the Komische Oper Berlin.

The second day of the conference had the motto “considering as old”. What makes an old city appear young? Why do so many people long for the architecture and urban development from the past? How does this fit into the urban use and infrastructure of tomorrow? Questions like these concluded the final topic block of the conference.

In his introductory speech, Hilmar von Lojewski of the German Association of Cities focused on the perceived age of our cities. In his opinion, cities did not have to depend on event culture. Instead, one should focus on identification and social diversity. Thus, historic buildings and the historic legacy play a particular role. One should not refrain from reconstructions either, Lojewski said. It would be good if these reconstructed buildings had an appropriate function or would “regain space”.

A well-known example for the reconstruction of city history is the DomRömer Projekt in Frankfurt am Main. “We want to recreate the appearance of the old city” – this was the idea behind the project, said Dieter von Lüpke, Head of the City Planning Department Frankfurt am Main. The guiding principle was the “completely refurbished” historic city – without the “smell of poverty”. Moreover, a special experience was associated with it, Lüpke added.

What will be the appearance of the city of tomorrow? This was the issue discussed by the former President of the Association of German Architects (BDA), Kaspar Kraemer, and Hans-Jürgen Best, Mayor of Essen and Head of the City’s Planning Department. Prof. Dr. Willi Alda, Member of the Board of Trustees of the “Lebendige Stadt” Foundation and

Honorary Professor of Stuttgart University, presented the discussion. After the destructions of World War II, the historic city was no longer important, Kraemer said. In a hasty building process, “many buildings were constructed in a reduced form.” Today, many people longed for “identity-creating moments”, Kraemer said. For a long time, there had been a notion of demolition in the Ruhr area with its 200-year old industry tradition, Hans-Jürgen Best, the Mayor of Essen, said. “Clinker bricks” were a synonym for soot and dirt. This changed in the 1980s: “memory relics were to be preserved”. Thus, the “Route der Industriekultur” (industry culture route) came into life. Today, the stones smelled no longer like the past, but convey a positive image, Best said.

Engine for citizen engagement

Oda Scheibelhuber, Head of Department at the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development, held a speech on the urban re-development in East Germany. She reminded the audience of the “starting position” in 1990: decayed inner cities and high-rise concrete blocks. Today, the city centers were revived. The historic legacy could be saved in many places with a development from the inside. Examples were the “Grüne Mitte” (“green center”) in Saalfeld (Thuringia) or the historic city of Görlitz. The re-development of the cities was the engine for citizen engagement, Scheibelhuber said.

“The people have to be the benchmark for the future of the city,” Lutz Lienenkämper, Parliamentary Chairman of the CDU in the Federal Parliament of North Rhine Westphalia, demanded. While the car dominated the city appearance and required a car-friendly city in the 1960s, today’s trend is a people-friendly city. The demolition of the “Tausendfüßler” (“millipede”) parking area in Düsseldorf and the deconstruction of the “Siegplatte” (“Sieg plateau”) parking area in Siegen were examples of this development.

“The city as a brand” was a presentation by Peter Pirck, Shareholder of Brandmeyer Markenberatung. He recommended cities to cultivate their strengths to create a positive image of the city. A brand was something that happened in the heads of people – “a positive opinion,” said Pirck. Marketing could not change a city, “but it can showcase the right factors”.

No life in a museum

“City history between identity and Disney” was the title of a discussion, presented by Oda Scheibelhuber with Peter Pirck, Ralf Claus, Mayor of Ingelheim am Rhein, Dr. Dieter Salomon, Mayor of Freiburg im Breisgau, and Dr. Marc Weinstock, Spokesman of the Management Board of DSK GmbH & Co. KG. The city of Ingelheim received an award from the Foundation as “Standout City” in 2011. The Kaiserpfalz was integrated into the city life without a reconstruction and with citizen participation, Mayor Claus said. It is all about living with a listed monument, but not about “living a museum”. It is not always necessary to rebuild something true to its original, brand expert Pirck added. In the end the response was key – it would be Disney, if there were only facades without living structures, Pirck said.

“A city is always under construction,” said Dr. Dieter Salomon, Mayor of Freiburg. Not everything that is historic has to be preserved. He mentioned the conversion of a former barracks area to the ecological model quarter Vauban in Freiburg as an example.

Marc Weinstock of the DSK wished for more pioneer spirit: “Citizens always like to preserve the status quo”. It was important to “take the citizens on board” for every project. If the people did not support the project there would be a standstill, Weinstock added. Oda Scheibelhuber summed up the discussion with the conclusion that there was a need for a controlling municipality with citizen participation and a construction culture open for discussion.

At the end of the conference, Michael Frielinghaus, President of the Association of German Architects (BDA), gave a “birds-eye view on city development in Germany”.

A city was a “built social attitude,” he said, and called for more courage with regard to city development. It was important that urban areas such as the Stadtschloss (City Palace) in Berlin and the new history city of Frankfurt am Main became meeting places and real living spaces.

The event program of the Foundation Conference consisted of a quarter festival on the EUREF-Campus which was opened by Angelika Schöttler, Mayor of Berlin Schöneberg, Alexander Otto and Reinhard Müller, member of the management board of EUREF. The first guests, schoolchildren from Teltow Primary School, enjoyed amusements such as the historic swing carousel.

For more information and images from the Foundation Conference “The City as Fountain of Youth“, visit our website www.lebendige-stadt.de.