Changing Places

Urbanity, Citizenship, & Ideology in New European Neighbourhoods

Changing Frankfurt:
Niederrad at the gates of globalisation

Frank Eckardt and Janoš Klocke

Frankfurt has been undergoing substantial changes in the last few decades. For thirty years, the German city has been envisioning a kind of American style of urban life. Providing the only skyline with high rise office buildings, housing one of the largest airports in Europe and taking pride in its multicultural atmosphere – its comparison with examples from the Anglo-Saxon debates on global cities and the problem of gentrification seems to be well legitimized. In this chapter, the development of Frankfurt will be used to reconsider this debate in light of Frankfurt's particular situation, as well as Germany's societal development.

When the social implications of the changing urban fabric are taken into consideration, we claim, Frankfurt can be regarded as only partially understandable in terms of the 'global city'. We will argue that the changing social landscape of Frankfurt must be seen against the changing societal framework of Germany in general, where the welfare state seems no longer to be sufficiently creating security, and where consequently fear of social exclusion has become widespread.

The case of Frankfurt will be developed to show the close interrelationship between the more general change of German society in the run of major developments towards a post-industrial and post-fordist economy and the mode of urban development. We will argue that these changes are not just producing more social problems for those who are vulnerable to the ups and downs of economy, but are changing the general logic of urban inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. In line with theories of Robert Castel (2000) and others, the perspective is shared that the very logic of social integration of cities and societies is now in a state of transformation. While the old system of social integration, based on full-time employment, social welfare and neighbourhood life, is vanishing rapidly, it is unclear what the new logic of social cohesion might look like. Profound changes are assumed to characterize the social geography of Frankfurt as a result of the processes of advanced fragmentation, gentrification, social disembedding and the globalisation of local spaces.

This chapter will provide a discussion of these changes on the different levels of the Frankfurt's local society. It will sketch a picture of the overall trends of the city's changing social geography. In the tradition of classical area studies, these developments will be traced within a case study of Niederrad, a former working class neighbourhood close to the inner city of Frankfurt. Based on empirical findings of research projects from 2008-2010 and a series of interviews with local actors and inhabitants, this area has been chosen as an

example for the ongoing transformation of a neighbourhood into a place of social insecurity and a loss of social coherence.

In contrast to studies on 'deprived areas', the case study is not meant to give insights into the life of disadvantaged people and how they are unprivileged by living in a 'hot spot'. Niederrad is not regarded here as a 'potential ghetto'. As the analysis will show, the quarter is rather diverse, and it is especially because of this still functioning social peace and relative stability that we may observe the changes worked out for post-fordist society in particular, as well as the general transformation of the social landscape. The discussion of Niederrad therefore is not motivated by the fear of an upcoming deprivation and it does not simply confirm the assumptions on gentrification prevalent in the international literature. It aims instead at discussing the transformation of a neighbourhood that is now characterized by ambivalent, contradictory and multilayered developments, for which neither the term 'gentrification' nor 'ghettoisation' seem to be adequate at all.

1 Frankfurt as integrative city

Frankfurt is seen in the international research literature as a city marked to a large extent by globalisation (Sassen 1997). It has developed as a global city, competing for mobile capital and other resources, although there are important local differences shaped by regional economic and spatial conditions of global integration (see Hoppe, 2006). Globalisation has shaped Frankfurt in a complex way that includes many, if not all, aspects of its urban life. Before turning our attention to the spatial dimension and social geography of globalizing Frankfurt, the key factors of change must be worked out, so that the main logic of its development may be understood.

Frankfurt has followed the general trend of the world markets, moving in the direction of a service sector led economy. Though profoundly transformed by the process of industrialization, Frankfurt never became as one-sided as the cities of the Ruhr area did in the late 19th and early 20th century. When, in the eighties of the 20th century, the crisis of fordist industries became sensible in Frankfurt, with its high number of unemployed low-skill workers and related social problems, the city had a longer lasting tradition to fall back on. Having once been the place of inauguration for German kings and emperors, the city had developed an uninterrupted function as a place for national markets and fairs. This was embedded into a social framework where trade, craftsmanship and intellectual and cultural competences still held sway. Throughout the Middle Age, Frankfurt hosted the largest Jewish ghetto before its gates, while the inner city remained, until its stormy takeover by workers in the 19th century, a dense living and working space for all sorts of guilds and handicraft.

Close in typological description to that attributed by Max Weber to the Medieval European City, Frankfurt can be portrayed as a city that has been struggling for local autonomy, and which has developed a social group of local administrators, self aware citizens and economic urban elite. This has led to a specific local political culture, which has enabled a certain entrepreneurial freedom, intellectual openness and cosmopolitan

attitude, allowing Frankfurt to become advanced in industrial production and trade within Germany and Europe (Gessner, 1996). On the other hand, this culture has also created a particular form of social integration based on the engagement of the local elites and closeness to the city.

This 'Frankfurt liberalism' (Wolf, 1987) has been important both with regard to the process of industrialisation, and for the analysis of the city's entrance into the post-industrial world. At the beginning of industrialisation in the 18th century, the local elites were intensively captured by the question of how to cope with the social consequences of the city's vast growth. It was obvious that the city in its century old structure was not capable of addressing challenges relating to housing, medical services, education, social care and urban planning. In fact, this time marked the birth of modern city planning, which enabled an approach to 'size' (Köhler, 1995) that may still be seen today in the building of the Hauptbahnhof (Central Station) – the largest of its kind in Germany. Together with the entrepreneurial local elite and bourgeoisie, the inner city was transformed into a place of representation, exchange, cultural institutions and cafés that resulted in a liberal urban sphere (Hansert, 1992).

Guided by the idea of a hygienic city, the obvious social problems like overcrowding and pure living circumstances were tackled with a building programme focussing on canals, water lines and other hygienic and medial measurements (Bauer, 1998). In this way, the local elites reacted to the changing social landscape by transforming the institutions of self-governance as far as was possible under the conditions and limitations of the German Reich. This led to a new view on the existing support services for the poor (Moritz 1981), and to the professionalisation of urban planning.

The latter became even more prominent during the Weimar Republic, under the auspices of Ernst May, who held a powerful position as a planner. Despite liberal intentions to cope with the prevalent social problems, the main issues related to severe poverty, such as hunger, unemployment and disastrous housing conditions, remained little addressed. As many observers point out, the Frankfurt elite became increasingly powerless, since it did not find a suitable way of integrating the workers and socialist movements in the city (Eichler, 1983). The general failure of the Weimar Republic to handle this social dynamite led to the erosion of the local elite in Frankfurt as it did elsewhere, and to the establishing of the Nazi dictatorship.

The total destruction of the inner city by the allied bombing, and the social consequences that followed, overshadowed the reconstruction of the central areas for a long period, and remain an unsolved and hotly debated subject until now. It is notable, however, that this open built and psychological 'wound' remained so long and indicates the little significance the inner-city had in the post-war years. Frankfurt then became the 'Capital of the Wirtschaftswunder' (the so called 'Economic Miracle') (Bendix, 2002) as it was able to reconstruct a social fabric that embedded different social groups, i.e. entrepreneurs as well as workers. Under the guidance of social-democratic politicians or with a social-liberal attitude, the city rushed to become the leading trade and service city in West-Germany.

In contrast to the pre-war years, Frankfurt has been seemingly successful in socially and politically integrating the class of the employed labourer (and its representatives, the social democratic parties and the union organisations). Urban planning tried to recapitulate ideas for common housing projects, for which the so-called Nordweststadt and social housing estates in the areas close to the inner city are still testimony (like the Mainfeld in Niederrad or Bonames). Since the early eighties, it has become clear that the 'integration machine' has started to stumble and malfunction, especially in those areas where until then zones of transition had enabled migrants to find their first accommodation. As the manufacturing industries required a decreasing number of unskilled 'guest workers', many newly arriving immigrants were stranded in the Central Station area, the Gallus quarter or Bornheim. In contrast to former years, they could not use money earned in the manufacturing industries to find more decent housing elsewhere, and the concentration of poor people in the inner city created an ecology of crime, prostitution, low wage services, drugs dealing, and spatial decay.

1.1 The globalized social geography

Frankfurt has been transformed into a place of global flows by an intrinsic development, occurring simultaneously with the progression of a political project (Keil, 2006, Eckardt 2002). Intrinsically, as shown above, the urban society has generated a position in the German national urban system that provided a social embedding for the development of a high skill service sector, especially for the financial industries. The political agenda was much influenced by the wish of important local actors to use this position for a more intensive integration into the networking economies of the liberalized world markets. The ground was preferred by gentrification processes already in the seventies, when the Westend area was transformed into an upper class housing and office location. While widespread protest against this process ('Häuserkampf') led to a new form of political integration with the Green party as the voice of protest was heard, the social deprivation of the rest of the inner city continued uncontested.
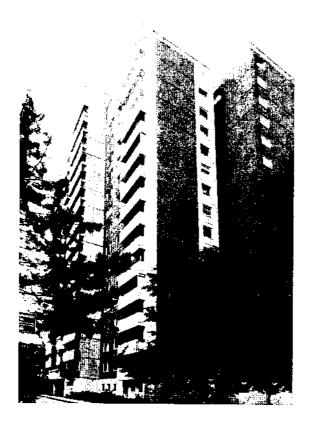
Many early observers of the globalisation of Frankfurt formulated the fear that the city would develop as a more 'dual city,' with sharper contrast between rich and poor (Noller, 1999; Noller, Prigge and Ronneberger 1994). Empirical research showed, however, that a simple transformation of the city with the emergence of new or more deprived areas did not take place (Hennig et al. 1997; Hennig, Lohde-Reiff and Schmeling 1997). A deeper analysis shows that it is the socio-psychological dimension of uncertainty that links the perceived or experienced changes in the globalized life-world with the spatial perception and habits. As was common at that time (Jaschke 1997), the fear of crime became the main focus of this social reaction. Fear and the feeling of lacking security have overshadowed discourses on the city's political and economical changes, ranking higher than unemployment in surveys about the citizens' concern. Research undertaken by Hubert Beste (2000) came, however, to the conclusion that the real crime rate in Frankfurt was rather declining,

and did not show patterns parallel to those of the US-American city. A critical review of people's opinion of their city showed, moreover, that the attitude is more complex and characterized by a flexible and positive attitude to the overall changes of globalisation (Lohde-Reiff 2003). Also, the fear indicated in the surveys is to be understood as a result of learning processes, and part of a self-repetition of Frankfurt stereotypes (Eckardt, Hennig and Lohde-Reiff, 2005).

The changed social geography that is present today, in comparison to the eighties, has not transformed the already existing and contiguous social segregation. Many parts of Frankfurt consist of relatively stable social characteristics like Fechenheim, which for decades has housed seven times as many poor people than the richest neighbourhoods. But important changes have occurred in the last five to ten years too (Klagge, 2005). Some areas like Bonames show clear signs of decline (Kütemeyer, 2008) while processes of spatial and social upgrading can be traced in others. A good example is the case of Bornheim, which no longer functions in the geography of the city as a place for newly arriving people to come to and, sooner or later, to go from – that is to say as a kind of classical zone of transition (Halisch, 2008). While the percentage of inhabitants with a migratory background in Frankfurt has generally speaking increased over the last two decades, in Bornheim it has dropped significantly. At the same time, rent prices have gone up and the gastronomic infrastructure has upgraded slowly and offers more high quality food.

The area next to the Central Railway Station (Bahnhofsviertel) shows all the signs of a gentle form of gentrification, where the public space is now simultaneously used by tourists, bank clerks, and the inhabitants and users of this area (Kütemeyer, 2008). What Sharon Zukin once described as 'domestication by cappuccino' for some parts of the gentrified neighbourhoods of New York, can also be said about the Kaiserstraße and related places. The adjacent quarters of Gutleut and Gallus have undergone substantial social and physical changes too, but in a quiet and different form. Here, large housing estates for the better off have been implemented and have thereby shaped a social contrast that is felt on both sides, in the homes of the homeless and the inhabitants of the rich enclave of the new West Harbour.

As a result of these changes, the overall feeling in the inner city and even beyond is surveyed as positive and attractive. It is clear that the city is now home primarily to people who do like this kind of gentrified urban sphere. Politics and planning have totally taken over a perspective that furthers the upgrading of the physical and social infrastructure. The preparation of the master plan for 'Frankfurt 2030', foresees the further intensification of the city's density with added high quality housing. 10,000 apartments for the socially disadvantaged are planned and already decided upon – to be constructed outside the inner city. With the new building of the central office of the European Central Bank at the old working class area of the East Harbour, the fear of losing – as the online platform of the urban planning department of Frankfurt had been able to show in their survey – a place to be and to recognize yourself in the city, has become widespread. Analysis of the real estate market indicates that the expected and feared further rise of rent prices is real (Hille, 2009, Behrend, 2008).

1.2 The example of Niederrad

Niederrad is located on the South side of the river Main, which divides the city into two parts. Historically, the villages on the Southern part of the river have for centuries served as a source of supplies for the northern part. Niederrad (Mayenheim and Uhlig, 1987) was a village at the gates of Frankfurt, where some fishing and trade generated the basis for a small community to survive. Despite some remaining traces of this village-like character, the Niederrad of today should be seen mainly as a product of industrialisation, starting in the 19th century. In 1865 this place was still being regarded more as an area outside town, when the horse race stadium – still in use today – was opened up by the Frankfurt gentry. A major change occurred in the 1880s, when Niederrad was connected to the railway lines by a nearby bridge.

The industrialisation of Frankfurt required a new geographical order, in which Niederrad continued to fulfil a function as an external post. This became clear when the water sewage plant for the whole city was established there, as well as parts of the hospital. When Niederrad was formally integrated into the city of Frankfurt in 1900, the expectation was that the community would benefit more from its economic and social wealth. In fact, the

rich milieu established itself close to the horse racing area and even today the neighbour-hood includes a few small streets with the most privileged families of Frankfurt.

Early industrial production only entered Niederrad in a minor way, most significantly with the cotton fabrics of Anton Kirchner. Furthermore, the workers of all parts of the town could find rather economical accommodation in this area, which Goethe already described as poor. Based at the banks of the river and conveniently close to the inner city, Niederrad also became a place for entertainment, gastronomy and for services like laundry, roofing and tiling, dressmaking and tailoring of all sorts. This diversification of social and economic functions resulted in an immense growth of population, from 1,604 inhabitants in 1840 to 8,877 in 1900. With communal housing organised by private associations, housing shortag-es were confronted to some extent. In the Weimar Republic, the so called 'Zick-Zackhausen' estate, a famous example of modern architecture and a symbol of the New Frankfurt of Ernst May, were realised here.

In a later stage of industrialisation, the small sweat shops became more small enter-prises. Larger machines for washing clothes were installed in larger buildings and served to clean the clothes of working men all over town. A most important change came to Nieder-rad with the establishment of the Röver plants, which were to become one of the largest asbestos producers of Europe. Only later, other leather and shoe production companies settled down in Niederrad, chosen for this mainly because of its still available land for extension. With the destruction of Frankfurt in the Second World War, Niederrad lost this industrial basis and became a place with a particular mix of functions for the city. As only few clusters of houses remained untouched by allied bombing, Niederrad was rebuilt in the typical modern style of the fifties, and the area was planned as a host for more infrastruc-tural projects like the power house, and for an enlargement of the clinical institutions.

In the sixties, Frankfurt turned into the leading trading city of West Germany, and as protest against more office buildings in the inner city found an open ear in the planning department, Niederrad was chosen as a new site for offices. More than 40,000 square meters were dedicated to form the 'Bürostadt Niederrad' housing companies of different branches. The transformation of urban economy became symbolically visible when at the same time the highly awarded office tower designed by Egon Eiermann was opened up in 1972. This was the day the old asbestos fabric was demolished.

The Bürostadt is indeed a good symbol for the post-industrial city, as it shows the fragmentation of a place by the dynamics of economic transformation. The Bürostadt is literally cut off from the rest of the neighbourhood by the railroad and the adjacent river bridge. This physical barrier makes the social distinction sharply sensible. Neither a walking nor a driving connection is provided and from the platform of the Niederrad station, the left and the right side of it show a totally different picture.

While the Bürostadt is mainly active in the daytime, when the office clerks drop in and out from 9 to 5, the rest of Niederrad is primarily a place for people working elsewhere, and those people visible on the daytime streets consist mainly of the old and the unemployed. There are three old family-run hotels here that are struggling to survive. Only during

fairs taking place in Frankfurt are these kind of low quality hotels also frequented. In the Bürostadt, there are special hotels for business people and for people wanting to spend a weekend in Frankfurt, with organized tours to the clubs in the region. What can be said about the hotels is also true for shopping, housing and recreation, which are strictly separated. Nobody from Niederrad works in the Bürostadt, nobody in the Bürostadt lives in Niederrad.

As a result of the post-fordist development of Niederrad, the social and cultural profile of its population has changed. Once a site in which to raise your children, today aging has become a prominent feature here. While in the sixties many guest-workers came to settle down in this area, especially Portuguese, today the spectrum of cultural diversity has been enlarged immensely and the percentage of people with a migratory background is 29.5%, hailing from 115 different countries (Frankfurter Statistische Berichte 2/3' 2006).

Foto 2 The Mainfeld Planning Process

The city of Frankfurt has addressed one part of Niederrad with its special programme intended to foster social cohesion in the neighbourhood. This is the Mainfeld settlement, a six block social housing estate from the seventies, with each building comprising 13 floors. A living space for ca. 5,000 people. Once attractive for young families, today housing elderly residents, young migrants and people with social problems (mainly young men). These estates were once in the hands of the AGB Holding, a private enterprise, weakly steered by the Frankfurt municipality. When this area was included within Frankfurt's social city

programme, a large survey was undertaken and the Mainfeld inhabitants could express their needs and desires for the 'aging' housing estate. The holding promised in a contract to renovate one block every year, but until today no major investment has been undertaken.

Shortly after these promises were made, the Frankfurt planning department started an initiative with the churches of Niederrad to prepare for a participatory planning workshop called 'Future Forum Niederrad'. Frankfurt has established some sort of neighbourhood planning forums, but the status of these participatory opportunities is debatable. Despite the fact that the Frankfurt urban planning authorities are dedicating much time and interest to these meetings with the concerned citizens, neither the accountability of the results nor the start or process of these kinds of participation are transparent, and they are decided on a rather ad hoc basis by the planners. Based on a two-year-long observation of the process in the neighbourhood of Niederrad, the limitations and difficulties of these processes are evident.

Niederrad is an example of the ongoing transformation of a neighbourhood into a place of social insecurity and a loss of social coherence. It is not a 'hot spot' of social problems, a 'potential ghetto' or the like. Ethnically, culturally and socially, the quarter is rather diverse, and, located as it is at the edge of the inner city and in sight of the upper class housing of the West Harbour, it has caught the interest of real estate investors.

The broader public of the neighbourhood was invited by the Frankfurt Planning Department to take part in meetings and working groups. From the beginning, however, the question of the further development of the Mainfeld was explicitly excluded. While the problems of the built and social environment in the rest of the neighbourhood seem to legitimize this thematic exclusion, it became suspicious when the AGB Holding director said in an interview that he would prefer the total demolition of Mainfeld in favour of a newly constructed high quality housing estate. When some inhabitants started to protest against not even being informed of his plans in any way, planners, politicians and holding authorities tried to calm the local anger by opening up a new 'Neighbourhood Mainfeld Talk'. These meetings, however, have been more a venue for keeping the inhabitants informed, rather than a means for any kind of participation in the decision making. In 2010, the city officially announced a design competition for the New Mainfeld, which should leave open the question of what is the best solution (renovation or new buildings). There are, however, serious signs to suggest that the decision has already been made. Informal interviews with authorities ('Can you please not quote this'), but also a bus tour organized by the planning department to show the Mainfeld inhabitants 'attractive alternatives' of places to live somewhere else, all support the widespread fear of long residing inhabitants that they will be forced out, even if this is done in the most genteel and participatory way.

Meanwhile, the 'Mainfeld renters association' has started to organize protests against the feared demolition of the housing estates. In a petition signed by the majority of the inhabitants, the city council is asked to renovate but not destroy the Mainfeld settlement. The planning department has started to join a 'neighbourhood talk,' which the social worker of the Mainfeld has initiated. Apparently, however, the proliferated idea of demoli-

tion has made many inhabitants suspicious towards both the planners and the social worker. Meetings so far have ended in dissatisfaction for the concerned citizens.

The Mainfeld settlement represents a good showcase for the problematic reconstruction of a social space in a shifting political culture. Once the proudly presented result of a social peace between a working class related system of political protagonists (social democrats) and modernist planners, the settlement was socially appreciated by all parts of society. During the last ten years, social democrats have made way for a conservative-green majority in the city council with a changed agenda ('global city', 'ecology'). The changed political culture has found another attitude towards social problems, which were no longer addressed by political programmes with heavy investments like the Mainfeld community. Instead, control and mediation are the main instruments for coping with accelerated social change. While policing has been requested by the long term residents themselves in the last years, the establishment of a social city project with a meditative character was mainly an idea from the social department and the main social actors of the city, namely the Catholic social organisation Caritas.

After a phase of de-investment and carelessness towards the Mainfeld, the social and physical problems of the area became evident, leading to a local outcry. In interpreting the problems as stated by the inhabitants, however, these have been totally misunderstood, and this has led to the stigmatisation of the once so modern housing estates. Local news reports jumped on the activities of the renters association and their claim for more care and security. After a series of violent acts and suicides, the Mainfeld was the easy target for the creation of a 'hot spot' and seemed to present a place that is merely inhabited by young men with drug and alcohol problems or with immigrant families. The renters association appeared as a small minority that is not representing anybody, and which may be regarded as a 'dying breed'.

Although the establishment of the 'Frankfurt social city' programme might have been well intended, it is obvious that the selection of this area is already an expression of this selective perception on the Mainfeld. The widespread support and participation at the beginning of this project are signs that these housing estates are not merely occupied by persons unable to communicate and take responsibility. The attitude of the inhabitants was therefore ambivalent towards this project, though many appreciated small investments, such as the improved playgrounds. It was felt from the beginning that the project could also cement the negative image that was the initial reason for the integration of the Mainfeld into this programme. In fact, the stigmatising perception was not challenged much, and news reports and interviews with decision makers revealed a widespread ignorance about the fact that the conditions are neither as bad as they have been made out to be, nor necessarily leading to alarming situations. Crime reports in the area do not show any figures above average.

Many observers of the planning process are surprised that the option of demolishing social housing estates on this scale is even being seriously thought of by both the AGB directory and the responsible members of the city council. It is obvious that there will be fierce resistance to moving out on the part of the long term residents. As one of the blocks consists of a senior citizens' home, it should have been clear from the beginning that these plans will mainly be affecting old (native German) people. But ignorance of this fact has not prevented decision makers from overlooking the consequences of their decision-making also.

The case of Niederrad therefore shows the dangerous effects of long lasting stigmatisation on the one hand, and the delinkage of urban politics from areas weakly represented in the political system and culture on the other. Paradoxically, there is only one political representative hailing from Niederrad who is a member of the city council. Being member of the liberal party (FDP), he needs to be supportive to his party politics, which favour the total end of social housing. As a concerned resident, he is deeply shocked by the negative attitude towards the Mainfeld. As a son of Turkish parents, his disagreement with the plans derives mainly from the subtle racism that goes together with the demolition plans, as these have been motivated by the erroneous perception that only immigrants would have to move and they would not dare to resist. His party, then, did not nominate him as representative for the concerned commission for evaluating proposals for a better Mainfeld, but rather nominated another politician living next to the Mainfeld in a single family house. She is well-known for complaining about the low property value that her house holds because of the nearness to a 'ghetto'. Her pro-demolition attitude is assured.

Political representation of the Mainfeld is nearly nonexistent, because of a local system that consists of a sub-city level divided into districts. They play a major informative and decision preparing role in the city council, as well as having a major say in planning affairs. Although they have limited capacities and competences of their own, they fulfil a 'contact' function for many people by virtue of their being present and open for direct communication. For the political parties, these intermediate structures between neighbourhood and city council allow the self-representation of politicians, and if they are 'embedded' into their

local neighbourhood, this means both a good chance of being elected and a strong position in local politics.

In the case of the Mainfeld, these housing estates are part of the Niederrad neighbourhood and already in the neighbourhood council they are nearly absent. Again the stereotypical perception of a place with mainly immigrants discourages Niederrad's politicians from investing much time into being present and seeking the support of these inhabitants. The main intermediate level of neighbourhood planning, however, remains the Bezirk, where Niederrad is joined into the 'Frankfurt South Sachsenhausen' district. Here, the area of Sachsenhausen dominates the agenda. Being situated right across the river from the city centre and with some main planning projects and a heavy process of gentrification going on, Sachsenhausen commandeers all the attention during council meetings.

When the city council asks for expertise, opinion or representation for discussion of the Mainfeld, a party proportion delegation is sent to the concerned city council working groups. In practice, this means that local politicians are asked to express an opinion, politicians who mainly live in and represent the opinion of Sachsenhausen. However, Sachsenhausen is different from the life world of the Mainfeld, and the problems of Sachsenhausen appear to be of another sort, produced by a high rent housing market and a diversity of lifestyles that is based on high income and short term residency. In need of more and easier-access high quality housing, these social groups are supportive of plans to use the Mainfeld territory for total rebuilding like the West Harbour.

A shift in political agenda is often difficult to uncover by means of social research, and the limitations of this study, undertaken mainly with interviews, surveys and media analysis, cannot support a stronger statement on the hidden decision making underlying the formal procedure. Indications, however, of a longer lasting plan to gentrify this area 'from above' do not appear unlikely to the authors. Apparently, the proponents of demolition and high price rebuilding have simply underestimated the possible resistance of the senior residents, having had no real picture of the social conditions of the Niederrad settlement.

In an additional, not unrelated error, the costs for the plans have been significantly underestimated as well. If the city council insists on repayment for the benefits to the AGB, which received state money to ensure long time social housing, the costs will be even higher. If political will supports the demolition plans, however, a cheaper option could enable them, especially when alternative social housing can be offered. Coincidence or not, Frankfurt's mayor announced in 2009 plans to build 10,000 new social dwellings, nota bene: at the city fringe. But even in the worst case, the AGB seems capable of financially realizing a project like this against all odds. The director holds a reputation as a person not afraid of juridical claims and as a true believer in neo-liberal ideas. It has been said that he sees the Niederrad case as a 'test'.

2 Discussion

The sense of places is bound to a complex process of shaping, building, construction, perception, adaptation and constant redefinition. The iconic form of a built settlement fits into a particular social and historical context, which in one situation can be modern and integrative, but in another period and socio-political setting can signify and produce another function of the urban geography. The transformation process that can be witnessed in many cities of Europe is apparently represented by these iconographic dimensions of space, but is at the same time the motor of social change. The terminology of places, which is often characterised by social or architectural typologies, is not only insufficient to understand the transformation addressed in this case study – the concepts of urban and architectural discourse are part of it. The complexity of the changing cities in a post-modern and post-industrial life world, with its highly flexible work and private arrangements, is 'taking place' in a very literal way, but at the same time it is more invisible than ever.

The social geography of Frankfurt in times of globalisation and diversification is being transformed into new neighbourhoods, public places, housing estates, consumption spaces, patterns of mobility and new infrastructural lines. It is, however, not enough to look at the outcomes of these spatial innovations, since the very meanings of these concepts are undergoing a change of their societal embedding. In this chapter, the examples of Niederrad, and in particular of the Mainfeld, have been presented as a look at some of the considered profound changes.

As a first conclusion, the context of the development of the Niederrad neighbourhood must be considered as an expression of a changed social geography that in itself is the result of a different mode of urban development. Considering the latter, Frankfurt has been identified as being shaped and reshaped by a general trend towards a post-industrial city and another form of social integration. While this process is overshadowed by the negative effects of decline, like in the old industrial areas of the Ruhr or East Germany, a different picture may be found in Frankfurt. As part of a long lasting line of tradition, the city entered into the post-industrial era with a certain kind of political, economical and social arrangement that allowed it to 'locate' globalisation in a particular manner: Frankfurt has rearranged its political agenda towards a more powerful representation of those social groups which are today in a position to actively invest and support the booming cultural and service led industries. The commitment to the socially disfavoured groups has not been waved away, but due to the philosophy of the new middle class, the general attitude is now rather characterized by the objectification of those citizens who are unable to find political representation.

Against this background, the planning process of the rebuilding of the Mainfeld estates appears in another light. While it seems obvious that the participatory approach that has been followed so far is limited in many ways, a rather technical or formal evaluation would not make much sense either. As it is not a matter of mediation, information, and participation at all, the more profound question leads to the equality of rights in a city of apparently

different social capital. In this sense, the example given here shows the neat link between citizenship, urban transformation and the role of local planning. The case of Niederrad, as the authors believe, is a good illustration that a planning approach for a neighbourhood in an old fashioned style, even when it enables forms of participation, misses the crucial point of relevance in times of a globalized social geography. In short, urban planning cannot undo the politicisation of planning that comes from a diversity of lifestyles unseen before, and coupled as never before with unequal representation.

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