

The Dreispitz in Basel / Switzerland: New economy on old sites

1. Introduction

At 50.000m² Dreispitz is currently the largest and most ambitious development project in Basel, the second biggest town in Switzerland with its 200.000 inhabitants. Occupying a central location connected to the railway network, the site maintains its industrial character. From a financial point of view, the site does not possess adequate urban facilities due to the qualities of the location. Therefore the profit of the commercial activities is unsatisfying.

The planning process was implemented in 2003 by the private landowner of Dreispitz. This is a locally based charitable foundation engaged in sustainability and the welfare of Basel inhabitants. The idea arose to transform the former isolated industrial place to a new urban and open district in Basel. The objective is to upgrade the site in terms of economic benefit, land use density, environment and urban image.

This paper outlines the regeneration project. It reflects on the public-private-partnership in this complex process and focuses on the role of planners in an environment of changing economic demands.



2. The site of Dreispitz

The city of Basel is located in the most north-western edge of Switzerland. Due to the national border to France in the western part and the border to Germany in the northern part, the urban dynamic of Basel has been blocked over the centuries.

The city growth originally took place in the southern and eastern part of the town. During the last century this included first industrial sites, the transportation infrastructure of the harbour and railway network. Later from the 1970s vast residential areas were added. As a result of the geographically stunted housing and infrastructure growth, Basel is shaped asymmetrical with a huge agglomeration as appendix on the Swiss side of the town. With the recent activities of cross-border partnership a tri-national agglomeration is more and more established, being advantageous to any urban activities.

In this situation of short land resources, the Dreispitz occupies a central location close to the main railway station 700m away. Shaped as a triangle - the translation of the word "Dreispitz" - the site was founded for materials stock, storage buildings and as a customs check point.

From the beginning the sense of place has been determined by logistics. Over an area of 50.000m² 350 companies have been settled up to now on about 100 lots. The site is equally well connected to the railway network as to the highways and the local public transportation system.

Still maintaining its industrial character, the Dreispitz today is an island amidst residential zones or city functions. Ever more recent commercial building projects at the main station widen the gap between the growing central station area and the industrial land use of Dreispitz.

Due to the low rents of the Dreispitz lots, the financial output is small. Historically the Dreispitz hosts local low budget business enterprises.

The summary of the initial reasons to establish a transformation process were:

- short land resources in Basel
- optimal location of Dreispitz
- development options
- small income for landowner

3. Organisational structure

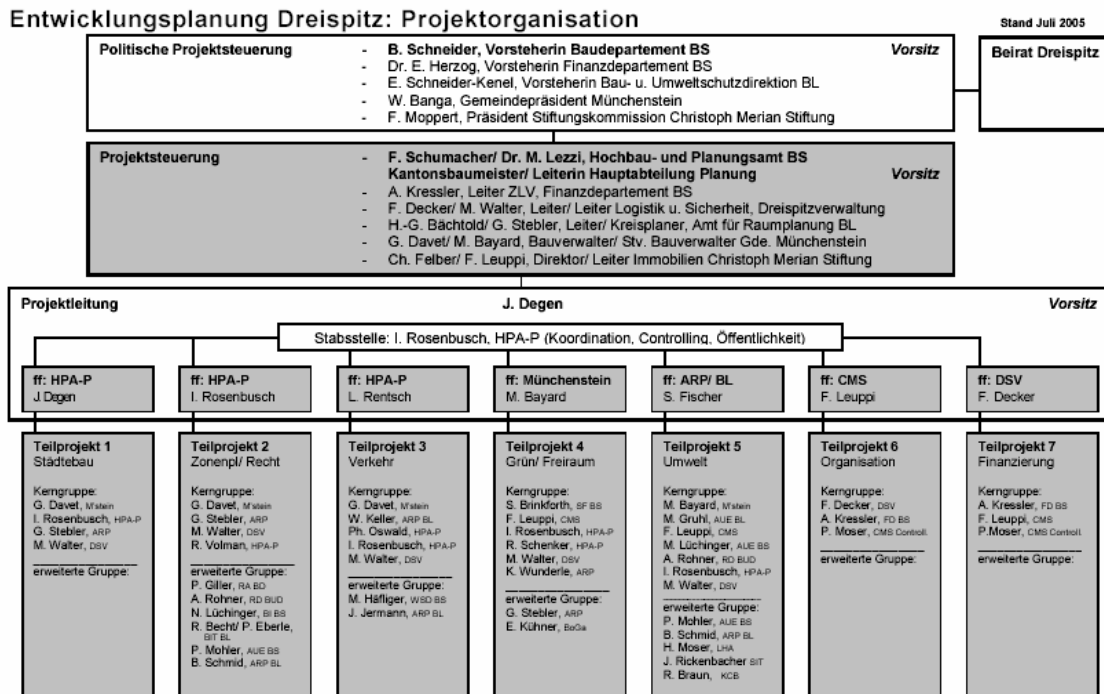
Promoting a new development on Dreispitz, the private landowner proposed a planning association as urban management team. In 2003 a public private partnership was set up to stimulate the development of the site. The initiators were representatives of the CMS-foundation (landowner), as well as the responsible city planners of Basel and the community of Münchenstein. A unique aspect of the new management team is the fact that there is a single landowner, the charitable foundation named CMS, which laid the base for a clear commitment between the planning partners.

The parameters of the Dreispitz site comprise 2 cantons and the municipality of Münchenstein. Therefore the authorities of the political institutions have to be represented in the project organisation, which is created by the following participating groups:

- political steering committee (Ministers of Building and Housing, Minister of Finance, Mayor of Münchenstein, President of Foundation CMS)
- project steering committee (responsible urban planners of Basel and Münchenstein, Director of Foundation CMS, Director of real estates of CMS, Technical Head of Dreispitz)
- 7 project teams (each team with about 8-10 members):
 - settlement development
 - law
 - transportation
 - parks and open space
 - strategic environmental assessment
 - organisation und structure
 - finance

- advisory council (societies, interest groups, political parties)

The organisation mandated the city of Basel with the operative lead and the responsibility for operative tasks, as well as to coordinate and guide the process.



Organisational structure diagram of Dreispitz planning team

The members, teams and committees of the Dreispitz organisation represent a public private partnership between 4 planning partners:

- CMS foundation as landowner
- 2 cantons (Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft) as political authorities
- 1 community (Münchenstein) as local political authority

In 2003 the public private partnership was founded at a very early phase of the project, when the idea of transforming the former industrial site was just born. First, the commitment was made to achieve a phased, flexible regeneration process based on economic viability and sustainable development. Due to the fact that the landowner is engaged in sustainability and welfare of Basel inhabitants, these objectives caused less obstacles than usual in the field of urban planning. The early foundation of the public private partnership and the clear commitment of the planning partners set the organisation on a strong base and facilitated the steering process.

4. Investigations during the 4 year planning phase (2004-2007)

First of all, the project steering committee decided to establish a 4 year planning phase to elaborate a development plan to fix the rules of architecture, settlement structure and transportation. The goal was to achieve a legally valid development plan with new zones by the end of 2007, based on the idea to transform the Dreispitz into a multi-sector economic space which contains prime locations as well as residential or local low budget commercial

enterprises. This means for the planning control instruments to allow as much flexibility as possible. Also, to minimize economic risks, the rebuilding of Dreispitz with third-sector or residential initiatives will take place as part of a broader process to ensure the continuing existence of present companies.

Several investigations were carried out by the project teams to lay the groundwork for the development plan:

- Added-value for the landowner

Although the foundation goals are sustainability and welfare, the CMS foundation as landowner demanded an enlargement of the rentable area (total available floors and floor space). In economic terms double m² are needed by the real estate agency of CMS. By upgrading the whole site, prime locations may be offered as addresses for big companies and expanding companies.

- Transportation capacity

In reality, the rebuilding of Dreispitz is about increasing the density of land-use and concentrating on economic efficiency. As a result, the future number of workplaces on the Dreispitz will be doubled, with an anticipated 2000 new inhabitants.

That means commercial and private traffic volume will be doubled as well, causing an increase of car emissions and higher traffic density. Due to the central location of Dreispitz in the Basel transportation network, the existing capacities are small. The steering committee took the opportunity to set a limit of growth to Dreispitz development. The Dreispitz development was determined by the local traffic model, resulting in a maximum capacity for 50% increase of m² rented area.

- Strategic environmental assessment (SEA)

From the beginning, the project steering committee has managed to set a limit on growth as an objective of their work.

The higher land use density generates more ecological damage from traffic noise and air emissions. A strategic environmental assessment was carried out, firstly, to find an adequate limit of growth from the environmental point of view, secondly, to define the most flexible framework for the existing companies to take part in a phased, long-lasting transformation process. The strategic environmental assessment resulted in a maximum increase of 20% of m² rented area.

The investigations into value-added, transportation capacity and strategic environmental assessment resulted in a necessary compromise by the planning partners. Based on the good working relationship between public and private partners, the compromise to reduce the growth of Dreispitz' available rental area to about 30% (additionally to today) was made possibly by the willingness of the landowner CMS to accept less added-value thus benefiting the environmental situation.

5. New challenges for planners in the Dreispitz project

In order to implement a sustainable urban development on Dreispitz, a complex project organisation was set up to face the ambitious objectives of the project. For the operating

project team, this means carrying out demanding investigations and preparing the results for decision by the project steering committee.

Since the public private partnership is a learning process, all participants including the project leaders are generating insights as the development process continues.

The lessons learnt are of mutual importance:

- On a general level, the partners attempted to set up a public private partnership and find solutions to handle this new form of cooperation for the benefit of all members.
- On a specific level, the project plays an important role in Basel urban development and needs adequate solutions to issue-oriented tasks.

Of great importance was the milestone to limit the growth of Dreispitz site. This decision ensured that purely market led economic development was prevented and paved the way for a strategic, planning led development. A clear definition of desirable site qualities in turn enabled the focus on sustainability for the new district of Dreispitz.

What are the creative aspects of Dreispitz planning?

- a forward looking planning process
- very early foundation of public private partnership
- successful public private partnership
- clear communication between partners of process and the public
- phased, flexible transformation with continuing existence of existing companies
- generous resource allocation

The complex planning process of Dreispitz demanded a lot of the planners involved. On the one hand there were requirements for issue-oriented tasks; on the other hand compromises had to be found in the negotiations by the partners with their different interests. As a result the planners had to play different roles, according to the areas of expertise required:

- the planner as specialist in the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, transportation planning, noise reduction, real estates, urban economy
- the planner as consultant of to a private landowner foundation
- the planner as manager of the development process
- the planner as moderator of a complex planning process

Although the regenerating process is still in its infancy, the skills required of the participating players are demanding. It seems, in future the main emphasis will be put on soft skills with negotiating and communicating abilities to the technical education. The planning profession could be the best example of a multi-tasking professional role in future.

6. Outlook

On the level of a sustainable urban development, it can be concluded from this case study that the decision to limit the development options of centrally located sites has to be proved to be an adequate approach. The objective shaping of an attractive liveable urban region is reflected in the discussion of qualities of the future district. To realise this requires an integrated approach throughout the development period.

Susanne Fischer, The Dreispitz in Basel / Switzerland: New economy on old sites, 41st ISoCaRP Congress 2005

Of great importance is a well working communication platform. The public private partnership organisation of Dreispitz is considered to be the best chance to solve problems together, which cannot be solved by single players or communities.

In order to identify and create common sense for the most important issues out of the whole range of problems perceived for the Dreispitz, the planners involved had to be flexible in their roles. Besides the several and differing demands of the planner's skills, the profession of planning is changing. There is a challenge for participants involved to evolve strong cooperating and communicating skills in future.

Further information in German: www.dreispitz.ch