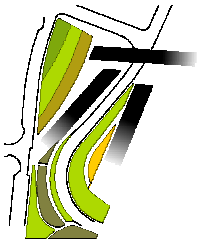


## Waking up the dormitory town

### *Visions for Vienna-Atzgersdorf.*



### **Framework: Reasons for Urban Functional Segregation**

In the 20th century, the western countries saw an increasing tendency to functional segregation of urban structures. Cities are now made up of quite clearly distinct shopping, office, housing, manufacturing and leisure areas. This development has been described in numerous publications. (e.g. Jessen, 1995)

There are some basic reasons for this development.

- Functionally homogenous areas fit very well in the logics of the estate market, which became the basic engine for functional segregation. Through equal level of prices in one area, the real estate market leads to the separation of buildings for services, housing, manufacturing and leisure, dependent on the land value. (Jessen, 1995)
- Processes of rationalisation and concentration in all areas of the economy have led to big building entities. This process is not restricted to industry. In retail, for example, the economic minimum size of a food store salesroom has increased from 50m<sup>2</sup> to 700m<sup>2</sup>. Through the commercialisation of leisure, a development of big monofunctional entities (shopping- and entertainment-centres, sports facilities etc.) is being perceived also in this field. (Hatzfeld, 1995) Rationalisation in building industries itself also supports monofunctional structures, because structures that are open to more than one kind of use are more sophisticated to plan, build and market. (Hilpert, 1984)
- A majority of the population dreams of living in a single family house in a “green” area – more or less inevitably far away from the “big entities” of business described above. (Moser and Stocker, 2001)
- The availability of the car to a broad layer of society made such monofunctional structures possible and supports a further intensification of the process. Who lives in a monofunctional area and needs to go to work by car anyway, is more likely to use monofunctional shopping and leisure areas (Jessen, 1995). In sociology, this process is called (in German) “Verinselung” (“islandification”). The living environment is not longer appropriated in concentric circles, but life is concentrated on different “islands” that are connected by rapid transit routes (Riege and Schubert, 2002, Sieverts, 1997).
- Administrative reasons support functionally separated quarters. As a result of the urbanist concepts of the early 20th century, zoning laws are often oriented on a functionally organized city. This is the factor that can be overcome most easily. New schemes of zoning laws have been tested in many places (Jessen, 1995).

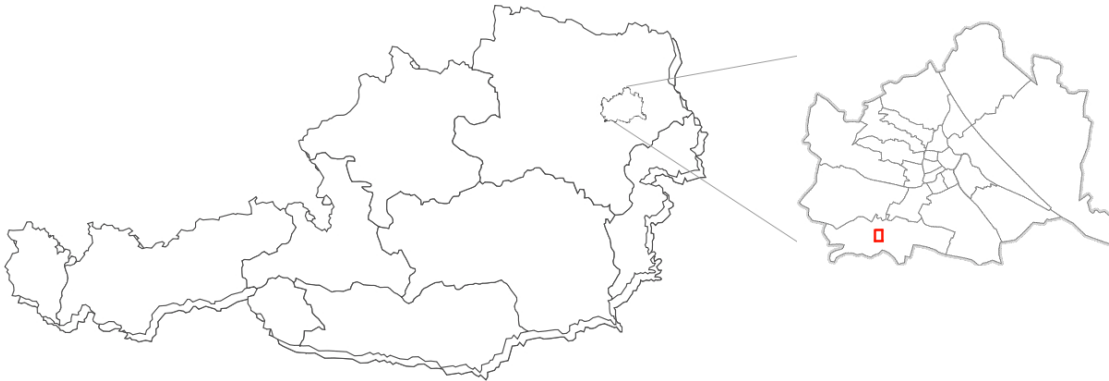
Additionally, the change in lifestyles affects perception of the urban tissue. Functionalist architecture, designed to fulfil a certain set of uses, is no longer used in this way. The rules for “multifunctional” housing areas set up a few decades ago were oriented on a consumer with his or her shopping bag, who was supposed to have a certain set of needs and to use a specific set of facilities. It was presumed that the average inhabitant is bound strongly to his or her living environment. This simple approach to urbanism was connected to a traditional society, with

standard habits and strict systems of order. The development of a pluralist society with rapid diversification of lifestyles and high mobility has changed expectations on urban environment. These areas are now regarded as monofunctional, because its infrastructure does no longer meet the needs of our consumption, leisure and communication society (Mayer and Gollner, 2006).

Starting with the discussion about “urbanity” in the 1960s (see e.g. Kuder, 2004) there have been and are still being developed numerous projects for multifunctional urban quarters. Since the forces mentioned above work in favour of monofunctional structures, all these concepts had to be pushed through against these trends (Hatzfeld, 1995). But planners hope that mixed areas lower the increase of traffic, reduce the consumption of land because they are an attractive alternative to single-family houses and improve social development and stability through parallel development of housing and workplaces for different layers of society. (Feldtkeller, 2001)

This idea has been applied to newly built housing areas and to the adaption of industrial areas for residential use in many places (e.g. Tübingen, Germany, adaption of former barracks, see Feldtkeller 2001). There are few examples, where similar strategies have been applied to existing housing areas of the 60s and 70s.

### Project Area Atzgersdorf-West



The project area is located in Atzgersdorf, a quarter of Vienna's 23<sup>rd</sup> district. It consists of municipality built housing blocks from the 60s and 70s, that surround a big park – the Fridtjof-Nansen-Park. To the east of the area, there is the “southern railway line” that connects Vienna with Italy and former

Yugoslavia and offers also commuter train services. The railway line is a sharp barrier that separates the area from a stripe of partly disused industrial buildings along the tracks, and behind that, the historic village of Atzgersdorf. On the other sides the quarter is surrounded by lower housing typologies. The project area is quite a distinct zone in the urban pattern with about 5.000 inhabitants, but does not have a publicly known name. "Atzgersdorf-West" is the name used by the census, and it has been adopted in this project (StatistikAustria, 2003).

This place was chosen as a study area for several reasons:

- The extraordinarily big park gives emphasis to one quality that is typical to urban tissues of that era: extensive open spaces.
- The absence of a bad reputation avoids diverting the analysis from urban qualities to media impact on a quarter.
- There are different typologies from both 60s and 70s to observe
- Good access to public transport through the railway line adds additional potential to the location.

These arguments make the place prospective for developing an interesting concept.

## History



Historic drawing (taken from Brandstätter et al., 1986)

Atzgersdorf went through a number of transformations in its history. 200 years ago, it was a village where viniculture dominated. Until the housing blocks were built big parts of the site had been a vineyard. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the "southern railway line" ("Südbahn") was built passing to the west of Atzgersdorfs historic centre. This infrastructure made Atzgersdorf attractive to industry. Subsequently an industrial area developed along the eastern side of the tracks, between the railway line and the village. For example, there was the Osram/Westinghouse factory for light bulbs. (Trinker and Strand, 2002) Today the industrial zone has lost its importance, most industries have closed down or gone away, some medium-size businesses remain. Some industrial buildings have been replaced by housing, but still a number of disused factories are found along the east side of the railway.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the whole Vienna region grew and industrialized at a very high speed. The number of inhabitants of the city itself raised from 842.951 in 1869 to 2.215.000 in 1915. Atzgersdorf was not part of the municipality of Vienna at the time, but it underwent the same process, that led to a massive housing shortage and terrible conditions in housing.

Housing construction boomed, but was completely controlled by private capital that offered squalid houses at exaggerated prices. When the social democratic party won the first democratic elections after the end of monarchy in 1918, housing was their main point on the political agenda. They started a massive housing programme, building 65.000 municipality owned homes in 15 years, all financed by wealth and luxury taxes. Since Atzgersdorf was not part of Vienna, it did not benefit from that programme. It was included in the borders of the capital of Austria during the period of National Socialism, that lasted until 1945. (Weihsman, 2002)

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, the administration of Vienna continued on the idea that providing decent housing for the population was a public duty. It did not continue to finance it through wealth and luxury taxes, but with general taxpayer's money.

In the 1950s, repairing the buildings that were damaged in war was on the first place in the agenda. Starting from the 60s, bigger projects aroused. These new housing areas incorporated the ideas of modern urbanism, and the new technologies, namely on the field of prefabricated concrete elements. This technology promised cheap and quick production, to meet the urgent needs. The municipality commissioned a standard floor plan scheme that was developed by architects Oskar and Peter Payer. This scheme offers two- and three-room apartments in four to nine storey high buildings. Each staircase served two to three apartments on each floor. During the 60s thousands of these homes were built, mainly at the edges of the city in distinct, newly erected quarters of some thousand inhabitants. (Marchart, 1984)

In that time, the first buildings of the project area in Atzgersdorf were erected. On the western side of the railway line, where up to then there had been a vineyard and a waste dump, municipal planners first defined a zone for business buildings, and then, separated from the railway line by the new business zone, a big residential zone. While the business zone could not attract any building activity until today, the municipality built houses in the residential zone. As you can see from the images below, floor plans of the first buildings in the area are very similar to the standardized floor schemes by Oskar and Peter Payer, but differ in some minor points that decrease the quality of the flats.

MONTAGEBAU — TYPENGRUNDRISS



ARCHITEKTEN: OSKAR UND PETER PAYER



Standard floor plan scheme, O. and P. Payer (Mayer, 2006)

Functionally, the buildings lack from possibilities to being adapted to other use as they were designed for. Since family structures change, the flats for mum, dad, son and daughter are often not perfect for the inhabitants. On the other hand, the floor plans by Oskar and Peter Payer have qualities that most residential buildings that are built in Vienna today are missing. They avoided long corridors by accessing only three apartments per staircase and floor. All rooms including the bathroom have windows and most of the homes have a room with windows on both sides of the building, allowing to look "through" the building. This was a novelty that was only possible through the prefabricated elements. Previous Housing blocks in Vienna were all built around a central wall, that went through the middle of the building and made such a room impossible. Today, for economic reasons, such rooms are rarely built either.

Throughout the 1960s, this kind of housing developments was criticised for being monotonous. When demand started to shift to higher housing standards and the technology of prefabrication became better, architects started to vary floor plan and urban forms again, often recalling to the typical Viennese Block forms. This is also visible in the map of the project area above.

Technical problems are not dealt with here. In one sentence, there is a program going on by the administration of the buildings in Atzgersdorf-West, that has renovated most of them by improving insulation and adding elevators. (Stadtentwicklung Wien, 2005)





Buildings from the 60s in Atzgersdorf

### Social Composition

In many western European countries similar housing estates have been built to accommodate only the underprivileged who could not satisfy their needs on the market. This was not the case in Vienna, where the municipal housing programme dominated the whole housing production from 1920 to 1934 and from 1945 to 1990. Today the city owns one quarter of all houses in Vienna. This fact alone made it impossible that only the weakest layers of society would live in these estates, even if there are some social conditions for being eligible to get a municipal home. Despite this, in the last decades, some public housing estates have suffered from concentration of fringe groups (Gollner, 2006). This is not the case in Atzgersdorf-West. Here, unemployment is slightly lower than the average of Vienna (9,3% instead of 10,7%), the age structure is nearly the same as the average. The number of immigrants is much lower than in the whole of Vienna – 11,2% compared to 23,6% (StatistikAustria, 2003). This is not surprising, because until recently the municipality accepted only Austrian nationals to have a renting contract. This policy led to a strong concentration of immigrant communities in old, over-priced low-quality housing neighbourhoods.



### Urban Structure

In terms of urban structure, Atzgersdorf-West is a typical housing area of the period. It is functionally totally homogenous, there are only housing buildings. All other facilities can be summed up in one simple diagram: some supermarkets, a hairdresser, a china-restaurant, the necessary schools and kindergartens.

From the analysis, a set of guidelines for the redevelopment project was drawn. The concept should concentrate on

- Bringing new functions to the area, in order to achieve a more multifunctional, manifold quarter
- Creating places that invite to meet and stay
- Proposing measures in different sizes in order to guarantee that the plan will remain flexible in terms of time and money
- Extending and supporting the existing activities in the area

- Moving the focus to the public transport
- Presenting new typologies that integrate the open space and allow a better use of it.

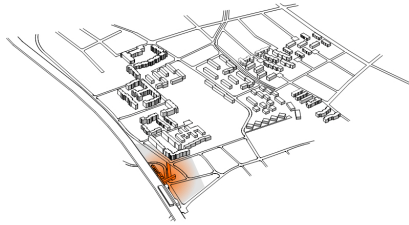
### Zone A: Nature



In the heart of the housing complex, there is Fridtjof-Nansen-Park. With approximately 70.000 m<sup>2</sup> it is an extraordinarily big park for urban housing areas. Local community managers say that visitors come from the whole district.

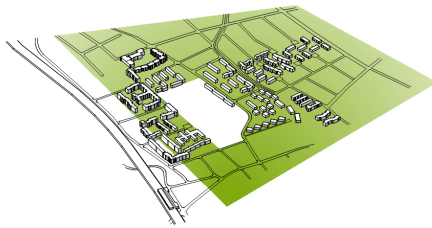
The park was subject to a structured observation. The method has been adopted from the so-called Burano-Method (see Riege and Schubert, 2002). On three different days and daytimes all activities in the park were recorded. The analysis brought the result that the area around the playground and the adjacent skater park is heavily used when weather is good. Through the amount of visitors, conflicts between different groups of users – children and youth – have been observed. Additionally, a number of interviews with teenagers of the area have been undertaken to find out which places they frequent most. Only open-air spaces have been mentioned in the interviews, mainly the park, particularly a small hut in the middle of the park, and the sports facilities (soccer field, soccer cage). The park is obviously a very attractive point in summer. (Fleischmann, 2007)

### Measure: District Centre



The development of a new district centre, that links both new open space qualities with indoor meeting places, would complement the qualities of the park. Especially indoor meeting possibilities are rare at the moment. There should be different spaces for different groups of users.

### Zone B: Silent



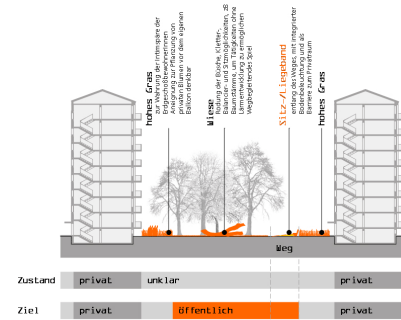
Between the housing blocks there is abundant green, meadows with some bushes and trees. This is not uncommon. Housing areas of the period have abundant public open spaces. Never before and after, urban structures with such luxurious open spaces have been built. Most of these spaces are used very little or not at all. The sojourn quality is very low in most cases. The open spaces between and around the buildings are neither clearly public (lack of anonymity), nor clearly private (lack of privacy and connection to a particular unit). (Seyfang, 1980) The amount of neighbours makes individual appropriation difficult, because too many different interests meet each other. This leads to a situation where only the maximum of silence and order is accepted.

Most green spaces are therefore disused. Only where a limited number of defined renters share a common space, appropriation is easier. (Schrader, 2005)

Interviews with local community managers brought the result that there is a noise problem. Even the equipment of the playgrounds has been removed due to neighbour complaints. The parallel, tall buildings amplify the noise. Additionally, residents have been reported to become more and more sensitive to noise in general. (Fleischmann, 2007)

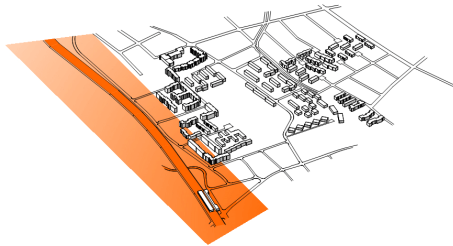
Since the open spaces are disused and not populated, the open spaces tend to become spaces of fear at night.

### Measure: Landscape Concept



A new landscape concept could develop the qualities of the open spaces. This concept should define layers of different privacy levels, with a very private zone close to the buildings that works as a buffer, and a clearly public zone at the centre, that is perceivable as open to the residents, where outsiders feel as guests. Here some – silent - neighbourhood activities could take place.

### Zone C - Loud



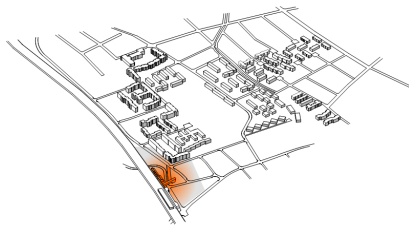
Along the railway line, there is a stripe that is heavily affected by the railway noise. The land use plan dedicates the area primarily to business and industry. But due to the process of de-industrialisation that took place in Atzgersdorf in the last decades, most of the land is disused. The most attractive part of the zone would be the one next to the Atzgersdorf railway station. Since its proximity to both the housing area and the station, there is already a supermarket and



a Chinese restaurant.

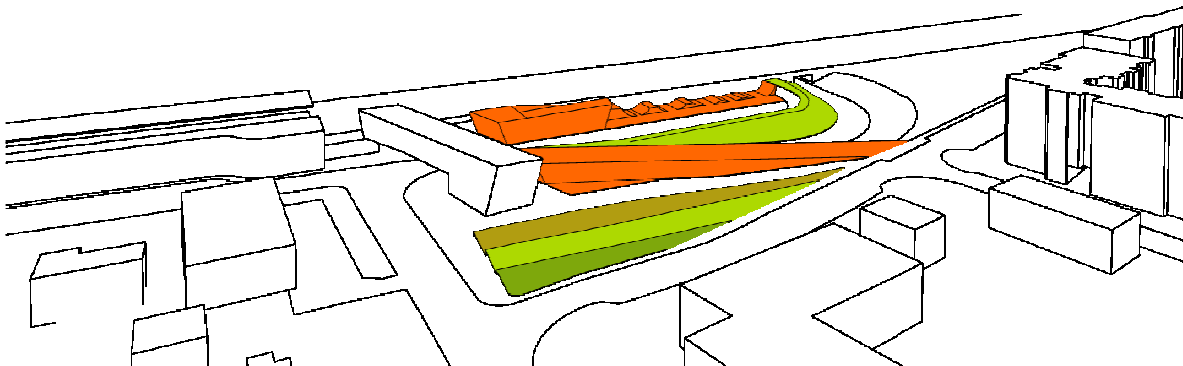
1. In a structured observation, all activities in front of the railway station were recorded on three different days and daytimes. This observation had a clear result. The area between the railway station and the housing area is not used as a place to stay – despite a high frequency of pedestrians passing through it (topping at 430 persons/hour). (Fleischmann, 2007)

### Measure: District Centre



Between the housing area and the railway station, a new district centre could develop. Noise-generating activities can take place here, such as youth centre, café, skating etc., with the advantage of a good connection to public transport. The frequency of pedestrians is already at a reasonably high level and could raise when the place gets more attractive.

### Urban and Architectonical Concept

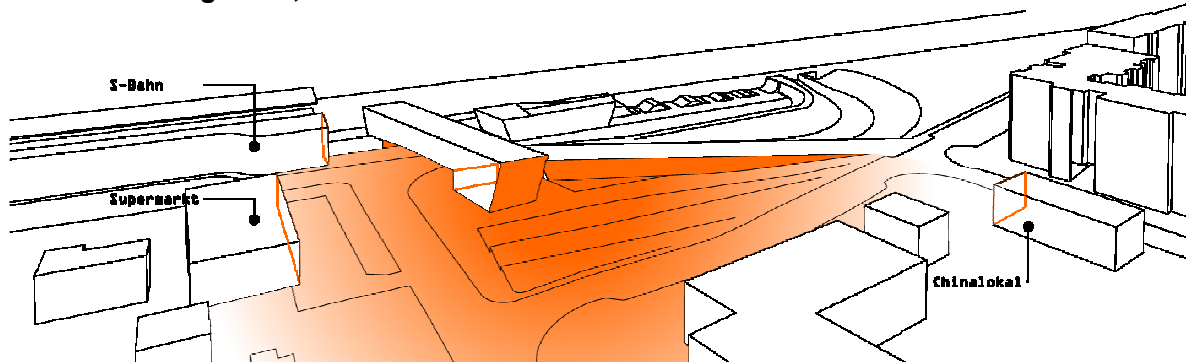


The biggest measure proposed in the plan, that was also elaborated to detail, is the concept of the district centre.

The space in front of the Atzgersdorf railway station already accommodates a supermarket, a

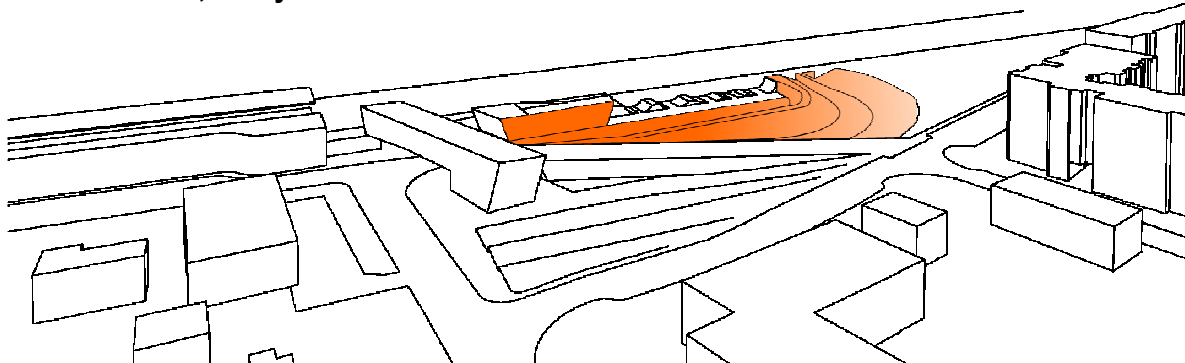
Chinese restaurant and a bus stop. It is in slight slope towards the station. The concept for the district centre consists of three wedges that link and separate different spaces.

### Central Meeting Point, Protected from Noise



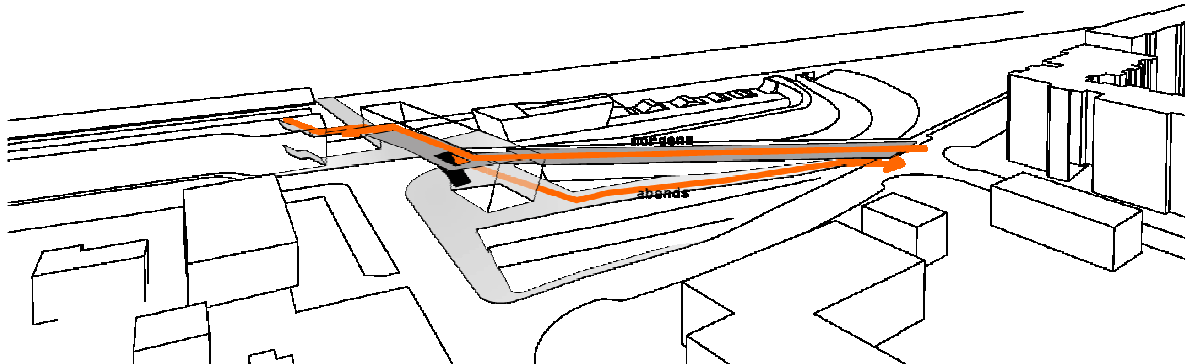
The wedges separate one side of the place from the noise of the railway line and the main road. This newly defined space unifies the railway station, the supermarket, the Chinese restaurant and the green space in between with an additional urban front. This front should add new indoor meeting places to the new square. These places would develop a strong relationship with the green in front and make this green more attractive to boost appropriation of these spaces.

### Secluded Area, Noisy Zone



Additionally, the structure forms an area that is separated from the housing complex, where a youth centre could develop as a haven for youth without disturbing neighbours or being disturbed. The appropriation of open spaces is encouraged through reservation for a particular user group.

### Pedestrian Routes



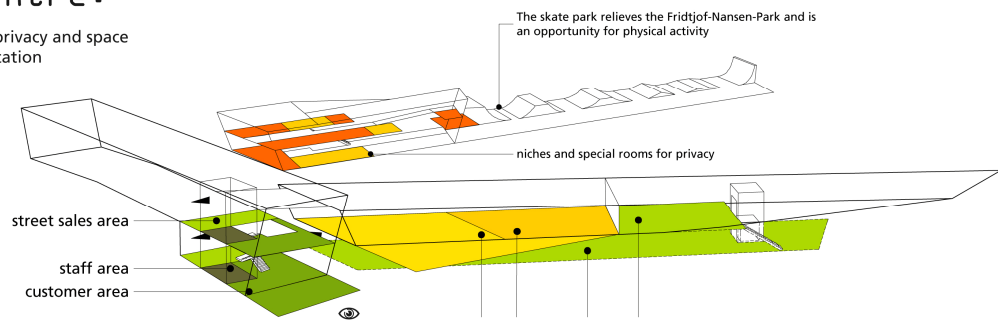
Using the slight slope of the site, two of the wedges form a stepless, nearly even access to the

railway line that goes to the centre of Vienna. Thus, there is a differentiation of time and pedestrian routes: In the morning you go the fastest way directly to the track that goes to the centre. In the evening, you pass by the restaurants downstairs.



## Functional Concept Youth Centre:

physical activity, privacy and space  
for public presentation



## Café/Pastry Shop: Restaurant: Hobby Workshop:

sale upstairs and downstairs,  
view on the green area

direct access to the  
green area

customer area

service area

storage rooms

workshop

Club members use the tools, facilities  
and the storage rooms.



The functional aims for the district centre are:

- creation of a meeting point that is useable in winter as well as in summer
- integration of the open spaces in front of the railway station
- improvement of the access to the railway station
- relief of noisy activities for the housing area
- provision of a separate space for youth

The district centre shall contain three different functional units. In the head of the bridge, turned to the green area, there is a pastry and bread shop/café. You can access it from the bridge level

as well as from ground floor. There is no bakery in the whole area at the moment, and a high frequency of pedestrians in peak hours, so there is a good chance that it would be successful. The combination with a café works well in other places, and would form a new indoor meeting point.

The restaurant is located in the front wedge and connects directly with the open spaces in front. On its top, where the pedestrian route leads to the bridge, there are seats and botanical beds. Also in the front wedge, a hobby workshop is planned. Who lives in a flat often misses the opportunity to have a workshop. Therefore the project contains a workshop that could be run by an association of inhabitants.

The wedge at the side of the railway line hosts a youth centre. It incorporates a skater park and therefore works as a solution to the user conflict around the skater park in the Fridtjof-Nansen-Park. Two ideas were at the front of the concept of the youth centre: To give the opportunity for motion, and the opportunities for seclusion in separate rooms (e.g. LAN-Party-room, bands room, children's room..) The roof of the youth centre works also as a space for seclusion, while the bank that separates the skater park from the street forms a natural arena, making the skater park a space for exposure. This combination of spaces for privacy and for public presentation is essential for the design of youth centres, alongside with the offer of opportunities for sports and physical movement. (Deinet and Krisch, 2002)

### Conclusion and Outlook



Economic and social reasons lead to a trend to functionally separated quarters. As widely known, this development has got negative side effects: It generates traffic problems. At the same time, streets are empty of pedestrians, lacking social interaction and control. The call for functionally mixed neighbourhoods is therefore growing louder. As shown in the present project, such ideas can be projected also on monofunctional housing zones of the 60s and 70s. To make such developments possible, interventions that counter the described trend are necessary. One basic approach could be to assign an urban quarter manager that encourages local initiatives, works as a catalyst to start a development process, finds the right project partners and leads the project to the desired direction.

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