

New city districts for Berlin

“Wachsende Stadt” [Growing City] – Berlin’s housing and urban development programme

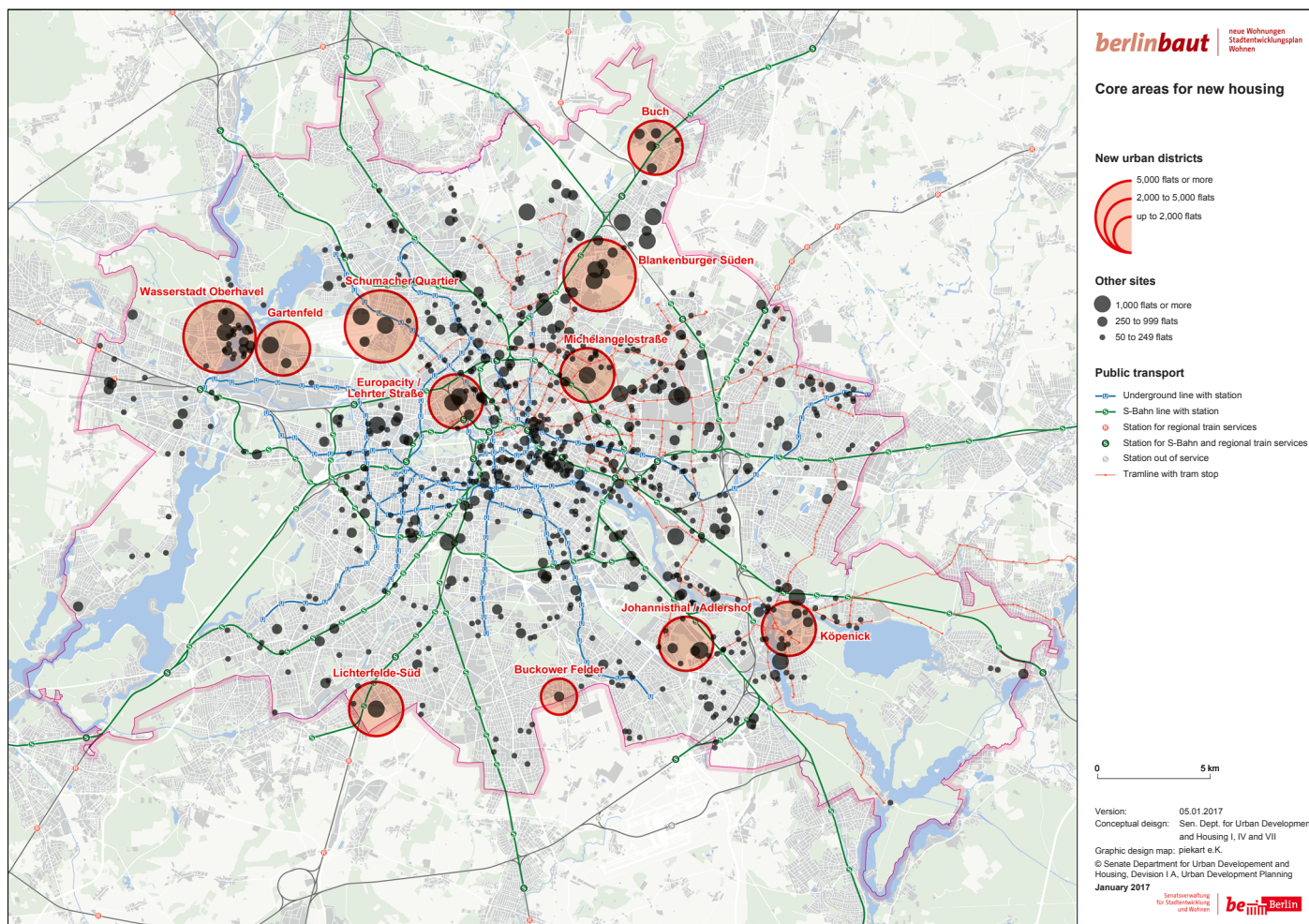
Starting point

After 1989, it was expected that Berlin would experience substantial growth. But this was too optimistic. Just a few years later, disillusionment set in the face of falling population numbers, an exodus of people into the city’s hinterland and empty flats. Some of the growth projects at that time turned out to be too ambitious and put pressure on the city’s financial resources.

Berlin has successfully come through the structural crisis of the 15 years following the fall of the wall. In 2005, it began to grow slowly – indeed this growth was almost unnoticed at first. However, from 2011 the growth in population accelerated noticeably – to its current rate of 40,000 people a year. The reason for this is that a constant and disproportionately high growth in employment opportunities combined with a relatively affordable cost of living – compared to other large cities – attracted and continues to attract people who are mobile and qualified. This influx of people is being intensified by people fleeing from wars and crises. At the end of 2015, there were approximately 270,000 more people living in Berlin than 10 years before. Over the same period, the city added 290,000 jobs.

This rapid growth meant that a few years ago the last, remaining reserves in the housing market had been used up. As a result, the housing market became noticeably tighter – at first in central areas of the city, but now in all areas of the city. Similarly, social and technical infrastructures are increasingly being put under pressure and in part they are already suffering from overload.

Today, Berlin is a highly attractive city that will continue to grow. For this reason, Berlin must create affordable housing and effective social and technical infrastructure very quickly. In view of rising land prices and rents, as well as growing volumes of traffic on the one hand, and limited financial resources on the other hand, the particular challenge is to manage growth meaningfully in terms of both space and quality and to develop the city over the long term in a way that is sustainable and socially just. This requires not only that housing and infrastructure development is affordable and economically viable but also that commercial districts are given a secure future whilst, more broadly, negative environmental impacts are avoided.



Activating developed locations – continuing to build the city within the city

Growth gives Berlin the opportunity to continue to build the city consistently. Of course, this applies especially to gaps between buildings and unused spaces. But it also applies to spaces that have been developed but are under-exploited and to the potential that can be realised through attic conversions and additional storeys on existing buildings. However, it is often difficult to realise such potential and, if so, mostly only on a very small scale. Above all, this potential is insufficient in

view of the enormous level of need. Whether or not this potential is realised is mostly a decision for private landlords. Moreover, speculation with regard to land prevents a whole range of projects from being realised. In view of this situation and these general circumstances, a house-building strategy that relies solely on these classic internal developments within existing housing structures cannot be sufficient.

Growth through interior development: potential, conflicts, limits

It already became clear during the past few years of strong growth that the potential for interior growth (attic conversions, closing gaps between buildings, land consolidation and general redensification measures) would not in itself be sufficient to be able to build the necessary housing quickly enough and at an appropriate cost.

Up till now, sustainable development has been seen as meaning the interior or further development of a city that had already been developed. Such interior development could generate around 150,000 flats, of which a third would be within the S-Bahn ring. However, approximately 80% of these sites belong to private owners, so it will only be possible to build on just some of the sites in the next 10 years.

At this point in time, the population forecasts in 2016 for the city go far beyond the land and building resources that can be made available for interior development. Even in the (unrealistic) event that all these interior resources could be used, there would still be unmet demand. Simply in order to meet acute housing needs in the city, 20,000 flats have to be built every year over the coming years.

So, the quantity and quality of flats needed cannot be created solely by interior development measures and small-scale land consolidation.

Of course, this potential must continue to be made use of as quickly and intensively as possible. However, a great deal of work tends to be involved and the processes for bringing these projects to fruition are long and difficult. Furthermore, these flats are often then offered for sale and usually at relatively high prices. Consequently, this is not a viable strategy for most of the population of Berlin.

Only occasionally does the ideal example actually work out, namely replacing a single-storey supermarket that has a large car park with a mixed-use building consisting of flats, the supermarket on the ground floor and a new basement garage. Equally, interior development can be associated with the displacement of interim uses of buildings, where these uses are economically less resilient. In addition, there can be conflicts (e.g. loss of light, increased pressure on parking spaces, loss of open spaces etc.) with residents on adjoining plots of land.

Berlin's model of cooperative building land development has created a tool for enforcing a social mix in the case of larger scale interior spaces for which development rights still have to be awarded. With the help of urban development contracts, social housing is created on 30% of the floor space that is envisaged for housing. Moreover, a good quality of urban design as well as a social infrastructure are ensured.

Brandenburg alone is not a solution either: effective, coordinated regional planning

Available housing in the areas surrounding Berlin is growing (relative to the number of inhabitants) more quickly than in Berlin itself. Accordingly, approximately 5,700 flats were built in these areas in 2015 in relation to 0.93 million inhabitants. In Berlin, approximately 10,900 flats were built in relation to around 3.5 million inhabitants. In both these areas, the number of inhabitants rose markedly. In the other parts of Brandenburg, by contrast, only 3,500 flats were built in relation to 1.53 million inhabitants and the tendency here is falling. At the same time, the number of jobs is growing, particularly in Berlin and in a few growth hot spots in the surrounding areas. This is leading to an increase in traffic.

This situation has to be looked at from a number of angles. There are some economically meaningful constellations in the integrated parts of Berlin's surroundings. They take some of the pressure off Berlin and

provide favourable commuting options by S-Bahn and regional train services. At the same time, some developments in non-integrated locations should be viewed more critically, especially where houses have been built in such a way as to use available space inefficiently and where there is a clear focus on the kind of mobility that puts pressure on the environment.

The growing numbers of commuters also show that the job market does not pay any attention to the borders between Berlin and Brandenburg either. What is necessary here is coordinated and effective regional planning. However, the surrounding areas of Berlin cannot solve the problems created by the city's growth. At most, they can mitigate these problems.

Sustainable and resilient: development on a more modest scale

We must avoid the mistakes of the past. This means that we mustn't build excessively large residential estates with a single, defining structure. It is important to avoid the risks inherent in every large-scale new development by proceeding carefully and strategically.

- The social and urban design quality of the city districts – particularly the combination of a good location within the city as a whole and the city district's interior qualities – is the decisive pre-condition for long-term success.
- The new city districts should be easily accessible by public transport, provide attractive cycle path networks and support new forms of mobility (e.g. car sharing).
- It is important that integrated and high-quality planning together with reliability in the achievement of planning goals ensure that residents have good access to Berlin's job market, to established shopping facilities, to education and the arts as well as to the smaller-scale attractions and amenities that can be reached on foot in the city district itself. Berlin's particular quality is its combination of the "local" and the "metropolitan". This has to be in evidence in these new city districts too.
- The new city districts will only offer added value to their immediate neighbours if they are planned in such a way as to be well integrated. In addition, particularly in the parts of the city that are growing fastest, the social infrastructure and public spaces should be developed and expanded in neighbouring areas as well, e.g. through urban development subsidies. This kind of integration is decisive for acceptance and social cohesion in a growing city.
- The, in part, high economic expense involved in the very lengthy start phases of such projects is justified if the locational qualities that have been developed make it possible for the city district to develop independently even if demand falls or the housing market eases.
- Provision should also be made in these city districts for retail activity, tradesmen and -women and local services.
- So, it is important to avoid mono-structures that may appear in the short term to be economically viable and, at an early stage, to integrate long-lasting "attractors" into the development of these city districts, i.e. to design high-quality city districts that are sustainable in every respect.

Ensuring the quality of city districts: quality criteria in urban design

The Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing intends to strengthen awareness of quality issues on an ongoing basis. The reinterpretation of the reform-minded "garden city" idea provides a good basis for the new city districts in the outlying parts of the city. This concept was formulated by, amongst other things, a specialist conference in December 2015 and with the help of guidelines. This ongoing discussion about quality is being continued with regard to other topics like innovative mobility concepts or achieving a social mix in new city districts.

(www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/wohnen/wohnungsbau/de/gartenstadt/)

At the same time, it is intended to evaluate the urban design projects or development strategies of recent decades in order to draw on and make use of past experience. The key elements in this focus on urban design quality are:

- Mixed city districts are the building blocks of a sustainable city. For this reason, it is important to involve a variety of partners as developers and actors in this process. The city district should appeal to different target and demographic groups but also to different styles of living and forms of ownership. The key goal is to have a stable social structure. This is why private and publicly owned housing companies are involved as developers. A share of 30% of social housing in the case of private developers and 50% in the case of publicly owned housing associations contributes to the typical Berlin social mix.
- New city districts need a properly designed centre. This can be created by social facilities or by retail outlets and cafés/restaurants. An attractive open space can also have this function. Particular attention should be paid to schools and the way in which they are integrated into the residential area in terms of urban design. Nowadays, schools are important local centres and places for intercultural exchange.
- City districts need jobs. Integrating them will be a particular challenge since it is important to follow determinedly the idea of a social mix and to overcome legal and also mental hurdles that are standing in the way of this. The precise nature of the social mix must relate specifically to each individual situation and can turn out differently depending on, for example, the location. Local trades and commerce are important. Not just the local baker – but offices, local services, craftsmen and -women in their own stores or specialist workshops – should be setting up in business in these city districts. In all of this, particular attention should be paid to how ground floor spaces are used.
- The interior of these city districts should be manageable on foot. This requires relatively high-density building but also open spaces that are inviting. The central facilities are points at which the "local" feel of the district finds its expression. The basic supporting structure of the district is its public space with streets and open

spaces of high quality. For open spaces too, the watchword is quality before quantity. Of key importance are attractive networks of green areas linking up with neighbouring areas and the city centre. These green areas will take on additional functions for water management, cycling or as informal sports facilities etc. The guiding principle is the integration of functions not the addition of autonomous claims to open spaces.

- Not everything can be planned in advance because all kinds of needs, insights and options only take shape in the course of the development process. For this reason, it is necessary to have a permanent institution that monitors, adjusts and manages the develop-

ment process of these city districts. To be effective, this institution needs sufficient influence and resources.

- Particular attention must be paid to the local educational institutions and their spatial and functional integration into the city district. On this point, the new city districts are picking up on the reforming educational ambitions of the garden city movement.
- The quality of the new city districts should also be ensured in economic terms. It is important here to keep an eye on the economic viability of the city districts whilst they are being built, on affordable provision for economically less affluent sections of the population and on the long-term cost of these city districts for the city.

Systematic way of proceeding

In view of the intense pressure to act and, at the same time, the high requirements in terms of quality, the development of these new districts must be approached systematically.

- In the outlying parts of the city, there is a particular focus on the “garden city of the 21st century”, on sustainable transport concepts and high standards in terms of ecology and energy efficiency. In new city districts in the inner city, the mix of living and working in close proximity plays a particular role.
- With all city districts, appropriate architectural and urban design standards must be pursued. This requires inter-disciplinary approaches and suitable competitive procedures for achieving good urban design.
- Integrated urban development concepts are being compiled for the new districts to ensure that they are embedded into the surrounding areas.
- The internal and external development costs are identified and calculated soundly. This also means analysing and taking into consideration consequential costs. An ongoing evaluation of how the project is being implemented is guaranteed.
- Before all major decisions, sufficient investigation and analysis of all relevant aspects is necessary.

- The neighbouring areas of the future districts and – as far as possible – future residents are involved in the development of the district through broad-based participation measures. The pre-condition for this is prompt and transparent information. Equally, it is important for all parties involved to articulate their particular interests honestly.
- It is possible to ensure an integrated, overall responsibility for the new city districts via development agents managed by the senate administration. They are responsible for the entire chain of development from the integrated planning of the first phase to the specific project development work and the implementation of the planning laws, from managing the development of the plot of land to marketing activities and the coordinated realisation of the project.

The Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing has produced “Wachsende Stadt”, its housing and urban development plan, not just to meet the high demand for additional housing. Rather, the idea is to promote the – in every sense of the word – sustainable development of the entire city and its boroughs and local areas. This requires careful planning, broad-based participation processes, a high degree of transparency, clearly defined areas of responsibility and, not least, high levels of public and private investment. For this reason, high standards of quality of a sustainable nature are necessary in all steps towards implementing this programme.