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BRANDING AND THE CITY:
BRANDHUBS AS TRADEMARKS IN URBAN SPACE

WHAT IS A BRANDHUB?

This article reflects on changing paradigms of urban space in today's experience society. The current restructuring of our globalized cities from monotone service and/or shopping centers to multifaceted experiential spaces is one result of this transformation. This retrofitting of urban space is continuing to be less influenced by public authorities and institutions; instead brand-name corporations are taking on the role of urban visionaries by increasingly integrating urban space and of late, the *brandhub* in their global branding strategies.

Brandhubs are comprehensive urban mixed-use environments, developed by large companies together with entrepreneurial cities. Often designed by signature architects and planners, they are utilized as branding instruments with the goal of conveying corporate identities in an urban environment, accessible to a large audience as a public experience or event. By epitomizing specific images or lifestyles, they constitute a veritable spatialization of brand values, whereby the brands themselves become a place, an urban destination. In addition to hosting formerly separate uses such as offices, retail and residential, brandhubs are enhanced by diverse entertainment and cultural offerings, which together form a hub of experiences entirely organized around the host brand and sub-brand identities. The immediate predecessors of this development are the flagship experience stores, such as the worldwide established Niketowns or the singular Prada Epicenters. However, these projects are limited to an architectonic, if not exclusively, interior design scale.

What is new to the brandhub phenomenon is its urban scale, especially when brandhubs are strategically implemented by public-private partnerships on both planning and political levels. With projects such as the DaimlerChrysler District and Sony Center in Berlin, VW ErlebnisWelt in Wolfsburg and Migros WESTside in Berne, the implications of brandhubs become evident; they reveal themselves in the transformation of urban space as well as the image and influence of the global players they represent. Brandhubs are marked by a new identity and urbanity, which are simultaneously commercially as well as socially oriented. Even though this paradoxical model has the potential to (re)activate the city, depending on the strategies that are followed, not necessarily always in a sustainable manner.

BRANDING: THE BRAND AS LIFESTYLE, EXPERIENCE AND CULTURAL PRODUCT

Branding describes the process of linking goods, services, people, and more recently places to a brand, with the goal of distinguishing the own product from the competitors. The brand, whether it is a clothing manufacturer, an artist, or even an entire country serves no longer solely as a seal of approval, but should epitomize values, suggest images, and evoke emotions. In this regard, David Bosshart (1997: 44-45) refers to the "de-materialization" and "emotionalization of consumption", where customers no longer seek material goods, but rather themes, symbols, cults, and experiences. Consequently, brands become ambassadors of images and lifestyles and, as a result, stimulate the purchasing of products that are associated with them. In this sense, the Benetton brand stands, for example, for tolerance, anti-racism and social justice; Joep van Lieshout for anarchy, freedom and autarky; and Switzerland is associated with notions of precision, quality, and neutrality. This trend has been critically confirmed by Naomi Klein (2001: 21) in her revolutionary book "No logo": "The products that will flourish in the future will be the ones not presented as commodities but as concepts: the brand as experience, as lifestyle."

With its symbolic and experiential value, architecture is an appropriate medium for communicating brand images. For the so-called "brandscaping" (Riewoldt 2002) or the design of spatial brand landscapes, various branding strategies have been developed from the standardized franchise chains to individually-designed experience stores, from corporate theme parks to booming brand worlds, such as Volkswagen's Autostadt in Wolfsburg or the Mercedes-Benz World in Stuttgart.

The development from conventional advertising to branding lifestyles has not only more effectively and resiliently bound customer groups to brands, but also encouraged a number of companies to consciously construct such brand landscapes. Like the experience stores, brand worlds are also now being designed as social meeting points, where the promotion of the brand as a cultural product or lifestyle takes priority over direct sales profits. Although these installations are completely integrated into the urban context, they tend to physically remain simple variations of traditional retail, convention or theme park architecture. From an urban perspective, it is more important that companies increasingly intervene in public urban space and our day-to-day environment – even on the global scale. However, the main question remains if these marketing strategies can also react sensitively and sustainably to the environment, or if they simply constitute the commercial exploitation of urban space.

EXAMPLE NIKE: SUBCULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Nike's subculture strategies and urban interventions are especially interesting in this sense of sustainable responsiveness and commercial annexation of urban space. Originally only a sporting article manufacturer, Nike has widened its company development parameters in the past. Today, these include also ecological aspects, sustainable urban strategies and socially responsible standards for developing countries. This attitude reflects an ongoing search for new marketing methods and the ethic standards of Nike's board of directors. The company's change towards supporting

the environmental cause was also an answer to the protests and negative headlines associated with the company, after the exploitative work conditions in its factories in developing countries were revealed by the press.

Today, Nike sets the standard for other companies with its global production and management centers. Housed in carefully planned campuses and furnished with an array of amenities, Nike's developments are comparable with the philanthropic company towns and garden cities of the early 20th century. Around the factories of Shoetown, one of the largest sub-contractor of Nike in Guangzhou, for example, the employees are offered socially-oriented programs; they have the possibility to apply for affordable housing and send their children to school. In contrast, the Nike World Campus in Beaverton (Oregon) is a less exemplary project. Instead of transforming a revitalization area near Portland's city center to an open, urban campus like adidas, the suburban Beaverton Campus is only accessible to Nike's business elite. While the neighborhood friendly adidas Village features a public basketball court and a park as well as bicycle and pedestrian trails, the Nike Campus is more defined by parking lots rather than jogging trails and recreation areas.

In reality, however, Nike has developed a number of sustainability standards. Its "3R Strategy" (reduce, reuse, recycle) prioritizes production methods which "make more with less", use less (environmentally hazardous) materials, save energy, and recycle used shoes and other waste materials. The company has also launched a product with the name "Nike Grind", a material for covering athletic fields that is made out of recycled sneakers.

Nike also uses this material for setting up athletic facilities in underprivileged urban areas. In this manner, the company has also revitalized a number of abandoned football fields in Berlin. Nike's (advertising) engagement is only visible on prohibition signs like "Lead the ball close to the foot" or "Please feed only with leather", which cleverly depict Nike as the emancipator from municipal laws directed against the youth. In Berlin, Nike has even striven to establish itself in the subculture scene by initiating temporary clubs and other activities on the border of legality. Usually Nike chooses to take a very discrete approach in the design of such projects. Its Swoosh logo is hardly noticeable, if at all. In the Presto Club, for example, a casually placed football is the only trace of Nike's involvement. By supporting Berlin's subculture, Nike actively cultivates low budget revitalization, while securing itself a sustainable profit by influencing the lifestyle patterns of its customers through references to Nike products or Nike style. Nike's strategy to take on and imitate subculture trends ultimately allows the company to steer them and simultaneously feed its products into global youth culture. To this end, Nike continues to direct the symbiotic relationship between subculture and fashion that has dominated consumer markets since the 1960s.

THE BRANDHUB AS AN URBAN TRADEMARK IN THE EXPERIENCE SOCIETY

One of the most important contemporary corporate strategies was probably born when the fashion, music and marketing industries appropriated the image world

of Pop Art in the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, investors and real estate developers have also recognized the marketing potential of subculture. Originally purely commercial, this strategy is increasingly developing into a catalyst for high-quality and sustainable urban development projects.

The current reactivation of former industrial, railway and port areas as well as inner-city conversion areas replaces the large-scale monofunctional tabula rasa urbanism of the 1970s with heterogeneous structures and a radical mix of uses. Such projects are explicitly branded under the fashionable lifestyles of loft or event culture. Investors and conglomerates have understood that these mixed use developments in historic or partly historic environments tend to guarantee more sustainable urban centers, more inspiring work environments, higher profitability due to the added value of the property and, above all, a respectable and authentic image for the company. For these reasons, even multinational companies increasingly participate in the current transformation of our cities to multifaceted experience spaces. As a partner to these cities, they contribute to all aspects of the planning, construction, branding, and operation and develop new urban trademarks, the brandhubs.

In times of deregulation and the fusion of firms to powerful monopoles, the brands fight on the front lines for the visual and medial preeminence in public space. The strategically important differences between the brands, however, continue to dissolve due to fusions and the building of monopoles. In light of these globalizing and homogenizing tendencies, the primary intentions of the conglomerates lie in the development of localized brand spaces, so that they can differentiate themselves from the competition by making their brand unique and, as a result, sustain the growth of the company in a global economy.

The emergence of the brandhub also symbolizes the development of a solely service-oriented to an experience society, in which the commercialization of culture and the culturalization of business have become significant factors. According to Pine und Gilmore (1999), in this new economic era companies are forced to facilitate engaging experiences and transformation processes in order to stay competitive, and that is with strategies supporting their identity as popular institutions.

In the shaping of brandhubs, these firms and entrepreneurial cities therefore build on the concept of the themed urban entertainment destination (UED). In order to attract visitors from different market segments, the UEDs integrate three key components, the so-called "Trinity of Synergy" of shopping, entertainment, hotels and gastronomy within a pedestrian-friendly environment. In order that the brands themselves become such an urban destination, brandhubs annex public space and/or make formerly private office spaces public by offering consumption- and culture-oriented UED components for the general public. Together, this modular mix of uses forms an urban point of attraction which allows for a characteristic encounter of the brand and the city.

Potsdamer Platz is a well-known example of a brandhub that was strategically implemented as a branding instrument for both the promotion of the firms as well as the revaluation and image building of the city. Based on the initiative of Daimler-Benz – now DaimlerChrysler – the area was realized by Berlin's Senate with various

conglomerates. Next to the DaimlerChrysler District, it comprises the Sony Center and the Beisheim Center, an area belonging to ABB, as well as Leipziger Platz, which was "critically" reconstructed by the city of Berlin itself. With the goal of evoking long-lasting sympathies, these companies and the city could make their different identities experiential within the backdrop of an attractive environment.

In addition to modular mixed uses and the public experience, companies are increasingly utilizing multimedia marketing strategies, especially the co-branding concept. This strategy, where successful products from individual sub-sectors advertise for other products, was previously used in the media industry. Increasingly co-branding is also employed in architecture. For example, in order to construct its Epicenter in the SoHo Guggenheim-Museum, Prada struck an alliance with Guggenheim and the star architect Rem Koolhaas. The Mercedes-Benz World in Stuttgart can attribute a large part of its media attention and public interest to the museum building's double helix design by Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos. Just like the city of Bilbao with its Guggenheim Museum, Stuttgart intends this new attraction to act a catalyst for the development of structurally weak sites in the inner city's periphery. This generation of synergy effects is used in a similar manner in brandhubs to further increase the brand's visibility and market dominance and finally to create a multi-brand monopoly. Of course in the case of Potsdamer Platz there are synergies between the multinational companies, the city of Berlin and the star architects, who developed the place into a mega-brandhub together. In addition, the company brand and its sub-brands are anchored and co-branded within the own brandhub. In the DaimlerChrysler District, the Potsdamer Platz Arcades, the Boulevard, and the Marlene-Dietrich-Platz with their UED offerings, form a synergetic link between the headquarters of DaimlerChrysler Financial Services AG (formerly Debis); DaimlerChrysler Sales, Real Estate, and Aerospace; a Mercedes-Benz subsidiary; as well as the DaimlerChrysler head office and art collection in the retrofitted Weinhaus Huth.

Based on the green cube of the Debis logo, one would expect that a temple for the modern service society was created here. This, however, is not true. The Debis complex and other buildings of the DaimlerChrysler Group are all hidden in a dense urban district that at first glance exudes the charm of an old, historical city. A closer look, however, reveals only the usual clichés of imaginable urban images, as Werner Sewing (2000) has appropriately described: "A pinch of Italy (Piazza à la Siena, Milan office blocks), a dash of New York (miniaturized skyscrapers), quotations from the architectural history of the thirties to the seventies, a touch of Paris in the abbreviated boulevard with its countless café tables – all of this is gathered here. Only genuine ingredients of Berlin are missing." Indeed, Renzo Piano has created an atmospheric urban area, which on the one hand nostalgically cites the traditional city plan. On the other hand, this romantic albeit not historical-based urban space rather complies with the theme-oriented Disneyland strategies.

Irrespective of whether this place is now staged or authentic, DaimlerChrysler has successfully transformed, with support by the city of Berlin, Potsdamer Platz from a piece of decaying urban wasteland into a lively business, entertainment, and tourist destination and not, as originally planned by the company, into a mono-functional service center. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, its former footprint became part of the central area of the formerly divided city. Under public pressure and ultimately in

order to contribute to the reunification of the city, Daimler-Benz consciously developed its site at the Potsdamer Platz into an urban city district. With this, Daimler-Benz set a new scale for firms to actively participate in the revitalization and identity building of our cities.

With such projects that transform a brand into a physically experiential attraction, the implication of brandhubs in the development of our cities becomes evident. As trademarks in urban space, they reflect all the facets of daily life. As soon as the corporate branding strategy leaves the confines of the single branch or controlled company grounds to occupy whole urban districts or neighborhoods, the urban challenges increase in complexity, and the socioeconomic aspects demand the inclusion of many other stakeholders than the company and property owners in question. In the development of brandhubs, the public sector works with private companies from the very beginning: the project is produced in partnership. This practice is a direct result of the decreasing financial resources of many city governments, who increasingly give up their responsibility for the appropriation of public facilities and spaces to the private sector. As a result, they are increasingly dependent on private initiatives, charitable donations and outright exactions for public buildings. This new form of urban development which links urban planning with market interests and whose images the urban visionaries use in the development of brandhubs can be demonstrated with the example of the Sony Center, the VW ErlebnisWelt, and Migros's WESTside project.

SONY: CULTIVATING BRANDING BY CULTIVATING CULTURE

Sony Center Berlin, designed by Helmut Jahn, is a mixture of an urban entertainment center and flagship architecture. It illustrates an exemplary model of a brandhub, which both functions as public experience and uses the principal of co-branding.

At first, the Sony Center appears to be a traditional closed company headquarters with its huge glass façade. Upon closer look, however, it becomes apparent that the complex is divided into individual buildings which cultivate a heterogeneous quality and unexpectedly house a publicly accessible plaza whose function as public space is admittedly compromised by Sony's own private house rules, security measures and cameras.

Around this plaza, the Sony brand is not obviously communicated, but much rather the illusion of a city is suggested where one promenades and rather accidentally runs into facilities, which almost exclusively present Sony products: Sony's multiplex cinemas (CineStar Original/IMAX 3D), Sony Professional Center and Sony Style Store, where tourists and young people from the neighborhood can enjoy themselves gratis in the Playstation Lounge. Sony also uses the effect of indirect advertising at the diverse events, which take place under the spectacular roof. Events such as the simulcast of the football WM, the popular TV show "Wetten, dass …?" or also the Berlin International Film Festival not only support Sony's positive image on site, but primarily generate generous and free publicity in the media.

In addition, complementary cultural offerings are incorporated in the building complex, for example, ZOON (an interactive Lounge by Volkswagen, where potential customers are also allowed to surf, game or even train for their driver's license free of charge) or the Filmhaus, which houses the German Film Academy, an alternative cinema and diverse media archives. These local cultural offerings are subsidized by Sony to make the center more diverse and anchor it in the local context. The Sony Center also contains apartments as well as the banqueting halls of the former Grand Hotel Esplanade, which was moved 50 meters from its original site and implanted in the new complex. Through these rooms, impeccably conserved behind a glass façade, the Sony Center is supposed to attain a certain sense of timelessness and tradition, in order for it to assume a right to exist on this historically significant site.

Of course all of these urban amenities are surrounded by Sony's own offices: Sony Europe, Sony Pictures und Sony Music Entertainment. In addition, other firms could be attracted as tenants, especially those from the media industries like FujiTV and the HSG film and video production. With such companies and institutions and as co-host of the Berlin International Film Festival, Sony is attempting to conquer the German media market. In this manner, Sony Center not only acts as an urban magnet, but also as a motor for a new center of the European entertainment industry. The subversive consolidation of Sony institutions with entertainment and cultural offerings allows Sony to mirror its dual identity as electronics manufacturer and media producer. An event culture is clearly celebrated in the Sony Center, and the privately owned formerly public space has become a brand space. With this simulated urban space, the Sony Center heightens the identification with the brand to a lifestyle experience, whereby the boundaries between the public space in front of the center and private brand space in the center are consciously eradicated with help of architecture. This event culture also differs tremendously from Berlin's local culture. In order to profit from the creative potential of the subculture, Sony Music Entertainment transferred its music department from the Sony Center to the Edison-Höfe in Berlin-Mitte, a historical factory converted into office lofts. Before, Universal Music and MTV had already intentionally located their European headquarters in renovated warehouses at Ostbahnhof, between Berlin's trendy districts Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg. These are exactly the areas where the cultural scenes of the firms' identified target groups are flourishing and where they recruit their employees. By placing themselves into a historic urban context amidst their target groups, MTV, Universal and Sony Music produce a kind of corporate urbanism, because these firms distinguish themselves as urban catalysts through their architectural identity and philanthropic behavior: their presence and efforts generate an urban transformation of these areas. In contrast to artificial and isolated constructed Potsdamer Platz, these brand spaces have developed rather naturally and have been bound directly to the immediate surroundings from the very beginning.

VOLKSWAGEN: RESPONDING TO THE CONTEXT

On an even larger scale, several firms have even extended their branding efforts to plans which sustainably revitalize entire regions. With its ErlebnisWelt, for example, Volkswagen assumes responsibility for the region around its headquarters in Wolfsburg. Some would claim Volkswagen was obliged to do this as the company was

largely responsible for the region's dire economic crisis in the early 1990s. In the meantime, Volkswagen has made sustainability and social responsibility the focus of its corporate policy and in 1998 launched its Autovision concept in an attempt to transform Wolfsburg from a declining industrial area into an experience and service center. Wolfsburg AG – a joint venture equally supported by the Volkswagen AG and the city of Wolfsburg – was founded in 1999 to implement this vision. Building on the city's existing fields of competence in mobility, Wolfsburg AG has developed new clusters for recreation, information technology, business-oriented health and culture to overhaul Wolfsburg's monostructural, Volkswagen-dominated character and create an existence independent of the automobile industry. An important urban building block of this vision is the ErlebnisWelt, which is subdivided into seven themed clusters (Tradition and Modernity; Sports and Recreation; Autostadt; Shopping Experience and Variety; Discovery and Entertainment, Fun and Fantasy; as well as Art, Culture and Lifestyle) showing in an exemplary way how innovations and synergies between different fields of activity can be generated.

The ErlebnisWelt stretches from the city's northern tip, the historical Wolfsburg Castle, along a historical axis across the Autostadt to Wolfsburg's city center, as well as to the East along the Mittellandkanal until the Allerpark. The Autostadt, designed by Gunter Henn and situated directly next to the Volkswagen's main production plants, connects the castle with the city center and therefore symbolically eliminates the traditional separation between city and factory.

The ErlebnisWelt concept is directly connected to Volkswagen's corporate identity. Within the Autostadt, this is evident in the group forum, at the auto museum (ZeitHaus), in a cleverly designed car distribution centre, in the car towers (which together simultaneously constitute the new landmark of the city), and of course in the cult pavilions, which showcase the range and global diversification of VW brands like Škoda, Seat, Audi, Bugatti, Lamborghini und Bentley in an exemplary manner. With these pavilions, the VW Group can make the contrasty identities of its daughter brands individually experiential.

In this brand park, not only Volkswagen customers but also Wolfsburg residents can participate at a number of different events and activities, for example paddleboat riding, training on an all-terrain track, swim in the summer and ice skating or even skiing in the winter. By animating these attractions with diverse installations that fuse art, learning, entertainment and branding, Volkswagen aims to communicate its four key values: quality, security, social competency, and environmental friendliness. With this strategy, the automaker is hoping to increase the value of its products and differentiate itself from the competitors. The intention is not simply to animate customers to buy a car on the spot, but instead to cultivate lifelong brand loyalty.

Due to Volkswagen's omnipresence in Wolfsburg, the company does not need to directly present itself in other areas of the ErlebnisWelt. The core values of the firm are translated into a lifestyle or an awareness of life (Lebensgefühl). Thus, contrary to the staged Autostadt, the "Sports and Recreation" area is available as a natural and inviting green space surrounding the Allersee. Leisure facilities like the Volkswagen Arena, a mountain bike path, an artificial lake for wakeboarding and a planned skidome offer many possibilities to actively use the park and measure oneself up to

Volkswagen's key values – power, movement, endurance, and comfort. The Allerpark also serves as city park and recreation area.

The company's closeness to the people is thematically adressed in the cluster "Tradition and Modernity" around the old castle and made clear with a new museum on the city's controversial history. In contrast, the area "Discovery and Entertainment" distinguishes itself with the monumental Phaeno Science Center by Zaha Hadid through signature architecture. The Phaeno Experimental Landscape set at the northern end of the Porschestraße provides a counterbalance to the production facilities on the other side and unifies the complex under the name of science with the inner city. Next to the new ICE railway station, which optimally connects Wolfsburg to the European high speed rail network, new urban spaces are being created that integrate a variety of amenities like hotels, restaurants, cinemas and a planned designer outlet center.

In the cluster "Shopping Experience and Variety", the revaluation of the Porschestraße stands in the forefront. This originally four-lane street was retrofitted into a pedestrian zone in the 1980s. With the crisis of Volkswagen in the 1990s, it degraded into a cheap store zone and overflowed with 1-Euro and Pick-Pay stores since then. A 2001 opened City Gallery, developed by ECE like the Potsdamer Platz Arcades and identical in appearance, ought to attract visitors to this street again with over 90 specialty stores and culinary offerings, who, however, mostly linger in the inner part of the shopping mall. Current measures to improve the Porschestraße itself seem to be more promising and, in the meantime, have also encouraged the existing storeowners to reactivate the Promenade on their own initiative.

The ErlebnisWelt culminates in the cluster "Art, Culture and Lifestyle", where existing architectural landmarks such as the Alvar Aalto Cultural Center and a theater by Hans Scharoun are enriched through new cultural facilities like the art museum dedicated in 1994.

The renewal of the city of Wolfsburg illustrates how a company's capital and resources can turn around the decline of a region and generate economic growth. The ErlebnisWelt currently shows itself with its transformation and synergetic potential as a motor for the entire city and recovers itself next to the recreation industry also on scientific and economic levels. With a focus on science and research, the Phaeno, for example, establishes a connection to the newly founded VW Autouni and the MobileLifeCampus and offers Wolfsburg the chance to create a second image and pillar as science city, next to the strong ties to the Volkswagen company. Volkswagen's decision to diversify its own production strategy has encouraged the settlement of subcontractors and also generated a sustainable effect for the company itself, improving cooperation between production and development. The transformation initiated by Volkswagen has revitalized Wolfsburg into a vital urban center and improved the city's bad image. The city's unemployment rate, which had reached more than 15%, was reduced by half through the creation of 6.500 new jobs. According to statistics, Wolfsburg has very high prospects among other German cities and in 2004 was even ranked as the most dynamic city in Germany.

MIGROS: SOCIAL COMMITMENT

The largest retailer in Switzerland, the Migros Cooperative plans to build with WEST-side Europe's most modern leisure and shopping center in Brünnen at the entrance to Berne until October 2008. All 365 days of the year, a complementary mix of shopping, pleasure, work, living and recreation ought to turn customers into visitors and make shopping into an experience. The project aims to set new dimensions in urban development by condensing city with landscape, center with periphery, consumption with recreation, and prêt-à-porter with haute couture. Designed by Daniel Libeskind, WESTside's architecture should also become a unique experience in itself.

The complex lies on the western border of the city of Berne near the highway interchanges of A1, A2 and A6, which connect WESTside to international routes, thereby generating the necessary frequency for such centers. The peripheral location is, on the one hand, economical for the operators, on the other hand, strategically ideal for the city of Berne. Berne is a stagnating city of public officials, which lacks alternatives outside of the city center. WESTside has the potential to become such a suburban point of reference, thereby giving the city new impulses. At the same time, it can help counter the migration of the city, because its innovative concept offers a contrasting enrichment in close proximity to the historic city center. The project forms the gateway to Berne, bridges highway A1 and connects to a residential district developed by the city. As a development motor, WESTside also aspires to reconnect and upgrade the two city districts Bethlehem und Bümpliz, which were formerly separated through the highway.

WESTside is part of Berne's most important urban extension project: the Brünnen Development Plan. Originally, the plan only comprised a residential area. With the initiative of the Migros and the real estate developer Klaus Peter Nüesch to establish an experience paradise adjacent to the planned residential district, the city's monofunctional scheme could be transformed into a comprehensive and financially feasible project. Next to WESTside, which is to create 800 workplaces, and the residential district with approximately 800 apartments for 2,700 people, the plan includes a number of green spaces and convenient transport links. The owner Migros significantly contributes to all infrastructure costs.

WESTside itself is made up of five interwoven complexes: (1) a mall with a Migros shopping center, (2) a Migros experience spa, (3) a mediaplex cinema, (4) two Migros retail parks, the OBI home improvement and garden center, (5) a hotel and convention center that is also to be run by the Migros, as well as a Migros gas station and an old people's home. With its strong brand appearance, the Migros can supplement its various fields of business – retail, recreation and travel, sport and wellness, art and culture, banking – with other co-brands. With the WESTside project, this socially responsible and customer friendly cooperative aims to further increase the quality of life of its clients, thereby strengthening its social image.

According to Libeskind's design, WESTside's interior should evoke the qualities of the historical city. Large public areas should invite visitors to linger. WESTside's original concept builds on the idea of the shopping street, which should snake through the building in the form of a "z". At first, the individual parts were designed as free forms,

similar to the Jewish Museum in Berlin. The idea to design the entire complex in a differentiated manner had to be discarded over the course of the planning process. The involvement of a shopping mall developer as well as economic and functional requirements have led to a significant reduction of the design in formal terms. The differentiated building parts were turned into homogenous boxes, and the generous circulation area was minimized to individual crystallization points.

Today, the architects are only responsible for the design of the circulation, the experience spa, and the façade. The interior design of the individual boxes is left to the tenants. The contrast between the "designed" and "non-designed" areas should strengthen WESTside's identity, whereby the interfaces between these zones acquire special significance. By means of design rules for display windows, signs, and advertisements, the desired atmosphere for the center will be adjusted.

A gigantic public square builds the entrance to WESTside. Although this may make sense from a traffic, functional, and aesthetic point of view, as a district center for the surrounding housing developments, it is disadvantageous due to its dimension and lack of program, as well as its position far from the residential district. Precise solutions are needed to liven up the square, which carefully determine how and where internal uses should turn into external ones such as cafés, a kiosk, and a cinema box office.

Another challenge confronting WESTside as well as other brandhubs is the fact that a piece of the city will be built here which no longer exists after business hours. At least the uses primarily oriented towards shopping will have to close in the evening. Therefore, a well-coordinated placement and distribution of the uses that are open after business hours is necessary so that no dead corners or paths are created.

In conclusion, we can sum up by stating that WESTside will most likely function all the better, the more innovative it is and the more it sets itself apart from the existing context. Due to the size and international prominence of areas like the Potsdamer Platz, where products and identities become interchangeable, it makes sense when companies like Sony anchor its brandhub into the context with local offerings differently from its own comparable centers in San Francisco and Tokyo and in particular to rival projects such as the neighboring DaimlerChrysler District. In the context of Berne one cannot use this argument. There, WESTside only makes sense when it complements the conventional image of the city as a counterpoint.

CHANCES AND RISKS

As already shown, brandhubs are utilized as branding instruments by multinational corporations and entrepreneurial cities. They epitomize commercial strategies which unite economic aspects with social and cultural values in novel private-public spaces. In this manner, they have a direct influence on urban development. On the one hand, they support urban (re)vitalization and bring forth an increased interest for urban design and a heightened awareness for its quality and sustainability. On the other hand, one is confronted with the question as to what extent architecture and urban design are influenced by this intricate integration of commercial mechanisms.

Can one go so far as to suggest that such branding strategies may be capable of generating even more sustainable urban forms and structures?

Homogenization or activation of urban space?

Through the localization of global brands in urban space, brandhubs create places with independent identities and characters. At first glance, these seem to generate an artificial homogeneity that replaces local diversity with international brand spaces. In this manner, brandhubs are seemingly uniform and tend towards the production of "The Generic City" or "Junkspace", as this phenomenon has been passionately described by Rem Koolhaas. However, a closer look reveals that brands can profile themselves through their localization and potentially build up an image as a socially responsible institution. In contrary, the local context can also profit from brandhub developments. For example, Potsdamer Platz gained its new image and success as an urban destination through the presence and efforts of brands like DaimlerChrysler, Sony, and Beisheim. On the other hand, the brands benefit from the uniqueness of the place, its privileged location, its special atmosphere and its historical significance (cf. Klingmann: 2003). This symbiotic relationship is based on the connection of a global brand with a specific place. While brands clearly have the potential to enrich and draw their energy from existing peculiarities of a genius loci with its own identity and culture, one is confronted with the question as to how all-inclusive and advisable this relationship is and how the architecture and urban design of and around the brandhub can react to its presence in urban space.

Corporate urbanism as an urban development and revitalization tool

As an urban actor, the city builds the foundation for geographical space, operating as the identity bearer of urban space. As space producer, the brand projects its own place-independent brand identity in urban space. It can lend a new identity to a place with a weak identity (Brünnen), revitalize the lost identity of an area (Potsdamer Platz), or also transform the existing identity of a city and redefine it (Wolfsburg). In addition, as private-public ventures brandhub developments entail advantages for both corporations and cities. For the brand-name corporations, these partnerships involve diverse incentives, such as the preparation of cheap land on central locations, financial support, simplified construction approval procedures, and above all access to local features and a place-specific brand appearance. For entrepreneurial cities, these (re)vitalization projects bring economic impulses, job creation, additional tax income and direct investments for common facilities. This kind of give and take and the common interest in the creation of an attractive urban destination is what bind the cities and corporations together. Through the architecture, the emotions generated by a place, as well as the programming of the brandhub, which binds consumption with certain ideals and cultural experiences, dilapidated or monotone areas can be revaluated and given a new image. In this manner, the Potsdamer Platz was transformed from a fallow strip of the Berlin Wall into a prestigious city center enjoying a degree of international exposure, which was formerly unheard of since the division of the city. With the VW Autovision's new activities and future-oriented economic strategy, the declining automobile industry location Wolfsburg was revitalized, sustainably strengthening the city and the surrounding region. And WESTside aims to

give the shrinking city of Berne impulses for new growth in the periphery as well as link surrounding neighborhoods with an identity and a center.

Brand archipelagos: ephemeral urbanity or true urban catalysts?

While a number of brandhubs are based on the rather economic-driven entertainment mall and the Disneyland model to create identity and urbanity – like Daimler-Chrysler District or Migros WESTside – others prefer the more ambitious, culture- and context-oriented branding strategies of a Sony Center or VW ErlebnisWelt. These strategies have a direct influence on the urban design, where culture-related or even anti-marketing strategies encourage a typology in which (local) culture itself becomes a brand experience. As a more sustainable alternative to the solely profit-oriented environments, brandhubs allow for new cultural and social spaces. These newly created brand spaces are just as often consumed by society as mirrors of our time like brands satisfying daily needs. This multilayered consumption is the motor for an urbanity that will significantly influence the future of urban space. An essential factor is how these brand spaces integrate themselves within the city, if the city takes possession of them or if they contrariwise take possession of the city.

Although brandhubs have the possibility to create the matching reality for all imaginable requirements, as artificial islands they remain in large part untouched by the local milieu, because these newly emerging and created spaces have not yet connected themselves to the surrounding cities. Due to their foreignness compared to the cities they are located in, they are perceived as solitaires which will only be able to grow into the existing urban fabric over time.

Still they have the potential to contribute to the (re)activation of cities. With their collective experience spaces, brandhubs undeniably create a kind of instant urbanity. Their long-term contribution to the city and actual life expectancy, however, remain questionable as long as their strength is based on the ephemeral, the event – the experience. Can brandhubs become well-rooted in the city, or are they simply the next evolutionary step from the entertainment mall and will soon be replaced, when experience-hungry consumers migrate to new trend places? Do they ultimately have the potential to become catalysts for sustainable urban design? If yes, what can we expect as impacts, and how does this kind of development look like?

Sony's artificial world forms a new kind of complex in the city, where the various Sony brands are exceptionally expressive. The excessive marketing of this new urban center has in the meantime led to the fact that the Sony Center is perceived as an independent brand and a permanent part of the city; it has become a landmark with the name Sony Center, whose attractiveness and influence on the city and the media industry will continue to exist even without Sony's presence on site. In contrast to the Sony Center, the DaimlerChrysler District was consciously not designed as corporate architecture in the company style. With the reunification of the city of Berlin, DaimlerChrysler recognized its responsibility to turn the new center into an urban district and not into an exclusive company complex. As a result, the brands of the DaimlerChrysler Group are only very discretely communicated, which admittedly fits very well to the traditional values of the corporation and as a matter of fact, constitutes a more subtle and authentic form of branding. When the current concept

and offerings no longer matches up to the *zeitgeist*, the generic block structure and neutral character of the district offers numerous conversion possibilities.

While these two urban spaces have established themselves as brands independent of the companies they represent, the Volkswagen city Wolfsburg is currently experiencing a transformation that could finally separate the image of the city from a direct association with Volkswagen. The Volkswagen brand is strongly bound to the identity of the city and the most important factor to its shaping. In the meantime, however, it also functions as a catalyst for the creation of a new identity and consciously steps into the background within this process, in order to secure the city an existence independent from the automobile industry.

Sustainable corporate urban design: integration and differentiation

In light of the rapidly alternating marketing cycles and increasing critique on the ruthless privatization and commercialization of urban space, strategies are needed that question the spatial and temporal forces of brand culture. As intermediaries between private and public realms, architects and planners are called upon to recognize the importance of brand culture and use it to its advantage. Architecture and urban design have to take on an operative role within these economic and political power plays, although the principals of branding and the globalized experience economy must be critically questioned. This requires sustainable design strategies and planning instruments which creatively connect social aspects with pragmatic economic and functional requirements.

A sustainable brandhub is primarily based on the creative integration of two seemingly divergent urban forces. These include the multinational corporations and the public, which on the one hand are represented by the city officials and, on the other hand, by the local neighborhoods, citizen groups, or community organizations. While the companies attempt to increase their market value, thereby maximizing their profits, the public wants to revaluate the local environment as well as satisfy the citizens' increasing demands for social responsibility.

Brandhubs have to exhibit highly differentiated urban design so that private and public interests can interact in a sustainable manner. The sustainability of a brandhub is primarily determined by four urban design factors: The first factor is the creation of meaningful identities, which transport less the global brand culture and much more take into account ethical values and regional distinctions. Second, good transportation connections as well as permeable, accessible and densified public spaces have to be created, in order to further the vitality of the brandhub and ensure passage and lingering places for the general public. Third, a modular program made up of commercial and social spaces should complement instead of replace local offerings, so that the brandhub does not compete with the local environment but rather enriches it. Fourth, a certain tectonic flexibility is necessary so that the brandhub can respond to changing demands as well as allow for identities and a unique mix of uses that can be adopted and experienced in different ways.

Brandhubs are prototypes showing how corporate promotion, the (re)vitalization of cities, and the creation of new social experiences and brand spaces can be connected.

In most cases, it is advantageous when not only global and commercial aspects but also the local ethos and sociocultural values of the project's context can be taken into account. This is useful for both the public as well as the companies, especially since a sensitive and sustainable response to the environment improves the brandhub's singularity and thereby its viability as well as potential impact on the surrounding context.

First published in German in IzR Informationen zur Raumentwicklung: Raumbilder und Stadtentwicklung, Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, Bonn, 12/2007, 705-718

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