New Berlin Brandenburg Airport
Good Things Come to Those Who Wait?

Berlin's airport system is undergoing massive transformation – three airports are being merged into one. The new Berlin Brandenburg Airport BER “Willy Brandt,” blazoned as hub for the capital region, will replace the existing multi-airport system presumably in 2013. Thus, the spatial economic concept pursued by regional and local planning authorities supported by Berlin's airport authority FBB aims at a strategically integrated axis from the new BER airport to Berlin's inner city and its new main train station. But how can sustainable development in the airport vicinity be encouraged in terms of urban quality, connectivity, economic balance, green development and quality of life? The article will give an overview of the airport related development in Berlin Brandenburg and introduce the pilot project “fAIRleben – Sustainable development in close proximity to an infrastructure mega project.”

by: Johanna Schlaack

BER, TXL and THF: Three into One!
Since the reunification of Germany in 1990 and the designation of Berlin as the capital city, ambitious plans have been proposed to bundle Berlin’s air traffic in one single airport which would be strong enough to compete with hubs like Frankfurt, Amsterdam or Paris. Projections for a 40 per cent population growth to more than five million inhabitants and expectations of a strong economic boost, led to expansive plans for Berlin’s residential and office development as well as infrastructure projects. However Berlin’s dreams of exponential growth burst like bubbles in the late 1990s. The financial downturn fuelled by the Berlin banking scandal around the turn of the millennium led to tight public budgets and limited planning policy of public authorities.

Due to Berlin’s history as a divided city, the system of three airports Tempelhof, Tegel and Schönefeld was economically inefficient and transfer connections and intercontinental flights were severely limited in scope of operation. Especially Tempelhof, due to its outdated airport concept and its massive built structure was incapable of generating sufficient revenues in relation to the enormous maintenance costs. Therefore, in the golden era of reunification, the three airport shareholders, the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg and the Federal Republic of Germany, decided in 1996 to expand the existing Schönefeld airport southeast of Berlin into a single-hub for the region (Berlin House of Representatives 1996). The decision was strongly criticised especially by citizens’ initiatives around Schönefeld and was brought to trial because the previous regional planning comparison process of three potential sites for the new airport clearly stated Schönefeld as the least eligible (Berlin Brandenburg Flughafen Holding 1994). Main arguments were the difficulties of further airport expansion with more than two runways and the rather densely populated surrounding area. Against the background of Berlin’s proximity, potential revenues for the capital and public investments in a 100 hectare property close to Schönefeld the consensus shifted away from the two sites situated more remotely in Brandenburg to Schönefeld directly at the city boundary. Following the hub concept, the two inner-city airports Tempelhof and Tegel needed to be closed to allow enough capacity to legitimate the mega-project BER and to mitigate the effects of noise and pollution for about 160,000 Berliners (GL 2006). Tempelhof was closed in 2008 and Tegel will close with the opening of BER, predicted to be in 2013. The investment of 3.2 billion Euros is publicly financed, thereof 2.5 billion Euros for the new airport and 700 million Euros for rail and road access. The current postponement of the BER airport opening will increase the costs estimated over one billion Euros, including 500 million for additional noise abatement and will force Berlin and Brandenburg to dip even deeper into their already empty pockets.
The process of transforming and re-locating Berlin’s airports equals a “castling” within the airport system, with expected winners and losers in the region. On the one hand the northern part of Berlin will win quietness and comfort of living but with Tegel’s closing will lose its important accessibility hub and therefore certain economic weight. In contrast, the south of the city region will gain in economic importance and prosperity but will be confronted with heavy airport noise pollution and its negative impacts on quality of life, above all the stress produced by this noise. Nevertheless, regarding the former tri-polar airport system in the region – the already closed Tempelhof airport, Tegel airport and the future BER – an integrated planning approach for these three important city-regional development poles is still lacking. The conversion and re-use of Tempelhof as a city park with new quarters for living, media, creative industries as well as green economy, and Tegel as business- and industrial park for urban technologies are concepts broached in various plans and under discussion with the general public. Yet despite these plans, the implementation strategy, the profile and the concrete results in terms of urban built form and impacts on the city are still rather vague. Transferring good planning process into a good outcome or “product” with high quality is therefore the current challenge.

Besides the transformation in the air and on the ground in Berlin-Brandenburg, I argue that a kind of growth-triangle “BER – Inner City – Potsdam” with three main spatial-economic regional axes is evolving: First the south-west axis between Berlin’s city centre and Potsdam alongside the Schloßstraße, which has been prospering since the German Empire (see figure 2). Second the south-east axis between the Berlin Hauptbahnhof and BER incorporating Adlershof, Oberschöneweide, North Neukölln and the former Media Spree site which is promoted and planned mainly through Berlin’s political and administrative apparatus. And third, the axis between BER and Potsdam incorporating the municipalities Teltow, Ludwigsfelde and Blankenfelde-Mahlow, which is growing in the absence of planning concepts alongside the B 96a road and north of Berlin’s highway ring. The majority of Berlin-Brandenburg’s economic development is currently already taking place within the depicted triangle and will be further concentrated there in the future. Unfortunately an overarching regional strategy to incorporate and balance the strength of the triangle in the region and to spatially qualify the three different development axes is still missing.

**United We Stand, Divided We Fall?**

The airport BER will radiate out into the region and has already initiated high expectations on economic impulses on several sides. The well-cited study of Herbert Baum for example, predicts 40,000 new jobs will be created by the new airport (Baum/Esser/Kurte 2005/2009). Nevertheless, it neglects the local loss of jobs due to the closure of the two inner-city airports Tegel and Tempelhof. In Tegel alone, approximately 10,000 jobs will be lost or will be shifted towards BER. But the crux is, while BER is
situated in Brandenburg, the main demand and passenger flow will be served from Berlin. This results in conflicts and competition for investments and economic development between the two federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg and on a lower level between the several municipalities around the airport as well as the southern boroughs of Berlin. To prevent an ambivalent development with clear winners and losers of the airport expansion, a variety of plans were developed to address the concerns and to mitigate imbalances. These plans, although exemplary for being planned across borders, still partly interfere with each other, and there remains a distinct air of strain between the large numbers of stakeholders involved.

In the following a brief overview of the related plans will be given. First, the so-called ‘Common Structural Concept’ (GL 2007) is the most complex plan with secondary layers for mobility and transport, business and industrial sites, residential development as well as natural and recreational areas. It was developed by the Joint Spatial Planning Department Berlin Brandenburg together with stakeholders of the ‘Dialogforum’ including the federal states of Berlin, Brandenburg, 12 municipalities in the airport vicinity, three Berlin boroughs and administrative districts as well as the airport authority FBB. The concept, which is not legally binding, designates a total expansion area in the airport vicinity of 2100, thereof 1300 hectares for business and industrial development and 800 hectares for residential uses. Secondly, the ‘Masterplan Gateway’ (Senate Department for Urban Development/Municipality Schönefeld 2007) was jointly developed by Berlin, the airport community Schönefeld and the airport authority Flughafen Berlin Brandenburg (FBB). It contains the three key areas Airport City (FBB), Business Park Berlin (FBB, Berlin) and Waltersdorf (Schönefeld), which aim to function together as prelude for the development axis to Berlin’s Inner City. Thirdly, the jointly developed regional marketing concept ‘Airport Region Berlin-Brandenburg’ by Berlin Partner and ZAB Brandenburg incorporates the general economic clusters like industry, life sciences, clean technologies, media etc., whereas, fourthly, the ‘Stadtforum – Perspectives for Berlin’ (Senate Department for Urban Development 2008) is rather more of a strategic concept for Berlin which clearly shows the designated growth axis Inner City-BER. Fifthly, the ‘Planwerk South-East’ (Senate Department for Urban Development 2008) is Berlin’s overarching district plan which covers the area up to the BER in Brandenburg (Schönefeld). And finally the ‘Land use plan’ (Municipality Schönefeld 2005) with 465 hectares designated area for business/industrial which equals the size of the whole airport site Tegel. Municipalities in Germany have the ‘planning authority/right’ and therefore can hardly be restricted in their planning processes. According to the predicted demand per year in the airport area of BER of 25 hectares, Schönefeld alone has 20 years buffer within the borders of their municipality. Strong economic competition has evolved due to the oversupply of properties in the airport area and the long planning process of two decades. The current delay in opening the airport, postponed by at least nine months, sets new uncertainties for potential investors and planning institutions and will exacerbate real estate competition and land speculation around BER. Hence the stated aim of an overarching urban development recedes into the distance. Although all airport municipalities continue to be organised in the Dialogforum and regularly meet in working groups,
the institutionalised Berlin Brandenburg Area Development Company (BADC), founded as equivalent to Schiphol’s SADC with all 11 municipalities and two districts as shareholders, is restricted to environmental compensation measures instead of also promoting strategic airport area development. In order to foster the vision of a joint sustainable economic development around BER the idea of “First come, first served” should be contrasted with “Good things come to those who wait,” not only in regard to the delayed airport opening, but also in regard to strategic development of economic clusters in the airport vicinity.

**Pilot project “fAIRleben”**

In order to deal with the above mentioned ambivalent threads and challenges as well as the variety of plans and concepts in the airport area, since beginning of 2010 the model project “fAIRleben – Sustainable development in close proximity to an infrastructure mega project” was jointly developed by several experts from the university, research and practise, together with the airport-neighbouring community Blankenfelde-Mahlow. In this regard the municipality Blankenfelde-Mahlow with its 25,000 inhabitants, located directly west to BER, can be understand as prototype for future urban development at the intersection of infrastructure corridors: motorway, railway and airport. The neighbourhood is crossed by all three mobility routes and therefore provides a useful case study to illustrate the major chances and problems of dynamic contemporary mobility hubs. Since the direct airport proximity and each mobility mode already signifies prosperity and urbanisation, the municipality expects rapid economic and urban growth. With the headquarters of Rolls-Royces, a major airport-related company has already settled within the municipality. Directly neighbouring the exhibition centre of the International Aerospace Exhibition (ILA) creates additional profound potentials for economic development. On the one hand, Blankenfelde-Mahlow expects, in accordance to the slogan “mobility means prosperity”, rapid economic and urban development. On the other hand, it will be confronted with major disadvantages related to the infrastructure mega project like spatial fragmentation, heavy noise emissions and exhaust fumes, large-area sealing, uncontrolled urbanisation and environmental damage.

The principle goal of fAIRleben is to turn the transformation process in the airport vicinity to a positive outcome, a process that is to be approached in collaboration with the communities. To achieve this goal, fAIRleben seeks to support the community Blankenfelde-Mahlow with scientific know-how in terms of noise management and handling of noise, green urban design and architecture, exemplary participation and education, sustainable economic development as well as profound evaluation of process and results. In this respect, Blankenfelde-Mahlow could become a kind of model project for the communities around BER and in world-wide learning partnerships with international municipalities in comparable situations. The well-known concept of sustainability with its three pillars - environment, economy and social issues - is complemented with governance/public participation as well as noise issues. The project therefore consists of the following five pillars or guiding principles for a sustainable development in a liveable community:

1. Reduction of noise: Environmental noise in all living and working areas is perceived at least as tolerable.
2. Green community: Ecological efficiency, reflection in community development and daily life.
3. Quality of life: In the municipality and in the community is outstanding.
4. Economy: Development and share of airport benefits support and secure the other goals of the municipality.
5. Governance: Well functioning co-operation of all involved stakeholders in the sense of a joint benefit with an intensive public participation.

The fAIRleben project will be financed equally by the community Blankenfelde-Mahlow, the federal state of Brandenburg and the airport authority FBB. With a budget of 2.2 million Euros and the add-on EU-fund Climate KIC “Neighbourhood Demonstrators – Eurban Labs” as cooperation between London, Paris, Randstad and Zurich the project initially will run for four years (2012-2016). Major local partners besides the financiers are the districts Teltow-Fläming and Dahme-Spreewald, the Technische Universität Berlin as well as a broad variety of academic and non-academic institutions like the Competence Center City and Region in Berlin-Brandenburg (KSR), Leibniz-Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS), Institute for Futures Studies and Technology Assessment (IZT) and Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK).

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The suggestion then, is that patience is worthwhile and integrated airport area development needs time. As we can learn from Schiphol airport in Amsterdam, the efforts invested in coordination and cooperation of the involved stakeholders, in order to foster an internationally competitive and well-organized airport area development could become a kind of model project for the communities around BER in world-wide learning partnerships.
surrounding, are well worth the time and effort. The unfortunate coincidence of further delay of the BER opening and an airport area on its last legs after trembling 20 years regarding the expansion in Schönefeld further intensifies the jostling but also leaves more time to put things on the right track for a sustainable future (Schlaack/Henckel 2011).

Which leads to the second principle implication: Sustainability in the airport area is essential. Conceptualized as Airea (Schlaack 2010), the airport vicinity bundles together the challenges but also potentials of integrated urban development and growth like no other part of contemporary metropolitan region. Therefore, they should be treated as showcase for sustainable development within a complex regional setting. In this context, “AIRleben” the model project for research and implementation, tries to address and incorporate these challenges in a close cooperation with communal, private, public and academic partners in Berlin-Brandenburg.

Another important implication is that the product is as important as the process, especially in airport-related urban development. Due to the variety of stakeholders involved the process needs to be well organized but not at the risk of ignoring or diminishing the quality of output. The Brandenburg Ministry of Infrastructure and Agriculture stated at the beginning of 2011 that “Building culture” should be seen “as a location factor” (MIL 2011) which seems to be good maxim to rethink the airport vicinity itself but also the evolving axes in the region like the airport corridor “BER – Hauptbahnhof”. Thus, the conversion and re-use of the two former airport sites Tempelhof and Tegel need to link more to urban quality and building culture as well as integrating into Berlin’s city fabric.

A final implication concerning the increasing economic imbalances in the region is the necessity of thinking big since the region is the scale. The practical implementation of strategies to counterbalance the regional economic shift from north to south, as well as balancing the benefits in the airport area, need be addressed in politics and administration (Think Berlin! 2011). A further economic downturn in the northern part of Berlin and a division of the region as well as the airport vicinity in obvious winners and losers needs to be prevented so that, in the end, good things can be expected by those who have the patience to wait.

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Photo 3: Re-use of Tempelhof airport “Berlin - Home is where the heart is” at the Bread and Butter tradeshow. Photo by Johanna Schlaack 2009