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Contents

The inner city is the spatial, political and cultural centre of a city and is characterised by a high structural density, an intensive mixture of functions and a high concentration of goods and services. Featuring prestigious, often historical buildings and public spaces, the inner city embodies community and shapes its identity. Developing and stabilising inner cities is an ongoing task for municipal planning and features prominently in urban development policy.

1   The term 'inner city': definition and use

The inner city can be described as the spatial, political and cultural centre of a ▷ *City, town*. It is characterised by an above average structural ▷ *Density*, an intensive mixture of functions and a high concentration of goods and services. Other words that are related to the term *inner city*, but which are not necessarily synonyms include: *centre, city centre, urban core* or *town centre*. The terms *downtown* and *central business district* are common in English-speaking areas. In Germany, the English loan word *city* is often used for metropolitan centres, referring to the part of the city with the best accessibility, high-level key facilities and the highest urban density.

Due to its structural unity, the centre of the ▷ *European city* was historically the heart of political power, economic trade and cultural and religious movements. Its functional diversity has been preserved to this day in many small and medium-sized cities. The city formation that took place in large cities can be understood as a selection process rooted in the homogenising effect of rising land rent. The concentration and densification of ▷ *Retail trade* as well as public and private ▷ *Services* leads to a shortage of available building plots and thus a displacement of the resident population. As a result, functional spaces take shape: business districts, banking districts, office districts, university districts, theatre districts, entertainment districts and so on.

In Central European cities, the inner city generally merges with the historical city centre or absorbs it as the 'old town'. In its role as the founding cell, the inner city uses its monuments and urban spaces to give the centuries-old city a face: town churches, town halls and theatres, offices and community centres, squares, boulevards and promenades are a constructed 'archive of memory' ('*Archiv für die Erinnerung*') (Böhme 2006: 18), reflecting political and economic power, culture and wealth. In this way, the inner city represents the city as a whole, becomes the symbolic centre of urban society and shapes the local identity.

The spatial demarcation of the inner city is not clearly defined. While those in ▷ *Urban planning* had long agreed on historical cores or the city, considering the functional interactions and daily spheres of activity (▷ *Action space*) of a mobile urban population, today a broader planning area is preferred. This has led to the historical city centre and the surrounding residential and mixed use areas being seen together as a spatial/functional unit.

2   Development phases

European inner cities can look back on an eventful history, but one that, for centuries, was only characterised by subdued growth and modest changes. Not until industrialisation in the 18th century did a particularly dynamic era of ▷ *Urban development* with far-reaching effects on the character and function of the inner cities begin. This was largely driven by the growth in the production and distribution of goods, which gave rise to new types of retail structures, such as the arcade and later the department store, which came to characterise the cityscape (▷ *Cityscape*). On the cusp of the 20th century, the centres of the modern city loomed as glittering venues for consumption. The new ▷ Transport infrastructure – train stations, bus stations and subways – transported commuters to their workplaces, customers to the shops and visitors to theatres and variety shows.

The pull of central locations, which outlasted the two world wars, was manifested in rising land prices. The increase in spaces for sales and services – known as tertiarisation – triggered by growing prosperity was not limited to the cities, but even spread to the fringes of the Wilhelminian areas in the 1960s. The evolution of city centres to meet functional requirements led to rigorous ▷ *Urban redevelopment* and to the establishment of pedestrian zones in city locations.

Experiencing the echo effects of the European Year of the Conservation of Historic Monuments in 1975 (▷ *Conservation of historic buildings and monuments/heritage management*), historical urban cores and inner city Wilhelminian residential and mixed use areas enjoyed a newfound appreciation. With the support of public funding, a gradual renewal (▷ *Urban regeneration*) of inner city neighbourhoods began (▷ *Neighbourhood/neighbourhood development*), followed by the restoration and modernisation of the building stock and improvement of the residential environment.

The East German inner cities did not undergo the same process as a result of Germany being divided into two states. Between 1950 and 1989, the spatial structure there was largely frozen at the level of the 1920s and 1930s due to neutralised market powers. Accordingly, the complex urban design strategy (▷ *Urban design*) of the GDR's 'places of communicative centrality' ('*Orte der kommunikativen Zentralität*') (Erdmann 2014: 54) with public buildings and squares for marches and parades came to the fore. Following 1989, East German trade opened up, first on the outskirts of the city and then out of town. Inner city shopping areas and residential locations developed slowly (▷ *Peripheries/peripheralisation*) in the shadow of the peripheries. In the process of catching up with the west German inner cities, the municipalities that were successful were predominantly the ones that also experienced positive economic and demographic growth.

3   Trends and forecasting

In the prospering regions of the federal republic, the inner cities – due in large part to regeneration projects and ▷ *Urban development promotion* – experienced a strong magnetic effect, with secure jobs, high-quality cultural and leisure activities and an attractive housing supply. However, desirability has its price in the form of a high cost of living, rising property prices and a shortage of affordable housing in the growth areas. The opposite of the strengthened inner cities in the higher-order centres can be seen in the small- and middle-order centres, mainly in economically underdeveloped areas with shrinking populations (▷ *Shrinking cities*), whether in the old industrial regions or in the new federal states. When the population moves away and investments fail to materialise, erosion processes may culminate in a precarious situation.

3.1   Retail trade

In the last decade, big shifts in sales channels have influenced the development of inner cities. Discount shops, retail warehouses and chains have largely replaced owner-operated retail trade. Competition in brick and mortar retail has become increasingly stiff with retail trade at airports and train stations, specialist retailer agglomerations and factory outlet centres outside of town. Competition for greenfield land has resulted in dwindling turnover from traditional sales channels. The growing interest in inner city retail space is most evident in the number of shopping centres.

Initially branded as an 'attack on the city' ('*Angriff auf die City*') (Brune/Junker 2006), shopping centres have since firmly established themselves as part of the inner city picture not only in higher-order centres but subsequently also in middle-order centres. The burgeoning online trade has put all sales channels in the bricks-and-mortar retail trade under pressure. Academic discourse surrounding the structural consequences of this phenomenon in cities points to the need for integrated strategies that bring together innovative retail trade strategies and urban structural measures (Christ/Pesch 2013).

3.2 Housing

The disparity in terms of the quality of life and the cost of living in the centre versus the periphery resulted in a continuous population decline in inner cities in the post-war decades and beyond into the 1980s. To combat socio-spatial ▷ *Segregation* and stop ▷ *Suburbanisation* , there has long been a demand to upgrade inner city residential areas. Despite the advantages of city living – the central location, proximity to everything, good local services and a wide range of cultural offerings – the renaissance of living in the city has not yet become a ubiquitous trend, despite media perceptions (▷ *Reurbanisation*). According to Brake and Herfert (2012), the growth of cities is driven predominantly by the nationwide influx of young people between the ages of 18 and 29. On the other hand, the number of people moving out into surrounding areas has decreased significantly. It is uncertain whether and to what extent this trend will continue and whether the inner cities will benefit from it in the long term. There is concern that less affordable housing will be available and lower-income residents will be displaced (▷ *Gentrification*). As the new districts are largely created on former commercial plots or land used for infrastructure, the risk of fragmentation and social incompatibility may be overestimated (Wiegandt 2008).

3.3 Mobility

Car access to inner cities may well be one of the most contentious issues of inner city development. The inner city retail trade views well-developed access roads and parking spots as essential for successful business. However, critics argue that increasing traffic (▷ *Mobility;* ▷ *Private motor vehicle transport*) is one of the main reasons for the urban exodus and – in an ensuing vicious circle – that it has led to a further decline in living conditions. Local authorities have implemented noise abatement planning and established environmental zones in an effort to improve the quality of the environment in the affected areas (▷ *Air pollution control and noise abatement planning*). There are also high hopes for the introduction of electromobility as pollution- and noise-reducing drive technology. The construction of car parks on the outskirts of the city and parking-space management have exhausted opportunities to minimise car land take in favour of attractive public spaces (▷ *Public space*).

4 Planning instruments

The particular constellation of problems associated with inner cities has prompted many local authorities to develop new concepts for the inner city. These are an example of ▷ *Informal planning*, but have since taken on greater planning significance in the ▷ *Weighing of interests* in accordance with the Federal Building Code or as a requirement for public funding.

4.1   Urban development and inner city strategies

Just how important the inner city is for the future design of cities is evident in the focal points of municipal urban development strategies. Due to the trends described and risks regarding the key functions of the inner city, the model of a mixed-use inner city is now very popular again (▷ *Guiding principles for urban development*) – not just in terms of updating the tradition of the European city but also to compensate for crises in individual sectors.

4.2   Retail trade and city centre strategies

To control retail trade development in urban areas, local authorities are falling back on the instrument of retail trade and city centre strategies to formulate and instrumentalise the appropriate objectives. As a result of overlapping customer catchment areas, especially for large-scale commercial enterprises, municipalities in closely interconnected regions like the Ruhr area are now developing intermunicipal or regional strategies.

4.3   Marketing strategies

Because the prospects of any inner city retail location depend heavily on a willingness to invest as well as land availability, this is one of the key activities of municipal locational marketing (▷ *Locational policy*). Advertising and other campaigns are meant to increase the awareness and desirability of the inner city in order to guarantee stable demand for businesses. The key aims of such marketing strategies include conveying the strengths and advantages of city centres using the media, writing scripts for slogan-based campaigns and events and organising city or district cultural and leisure offerings (▷ *Festivalisation*).

4.4   Private initiatives and cooperative efforts

In addition to urban planning and city marketing, a third pillar of inner city stabilisation has now been established in the form of coordinated cooperation between inner city stakeholders: on the official side, these include representatives of urban planning, economic development and potentially tourism offices (▷ *Tourism*), while on the neighbourhood side they include residents, business owners and the restaurant trade, property and land owners, project developers and investors. Business Improvement Districts (BID), which are based on the American model, have been a blueprint for and driver of such cooperative endeavours.

4.5   Initiatives and competitions

Several federal states have launched inner city competitions, awarding prizes for urban planning measures as well as for examples of activities and campaigns which strengthen certain functions, while also recommending that they be emulated – one such example is the inner city competition in Brandenburg. One particularly extensive initiative is the *'Ab in die Mitte!'* ('Off to the city centre!') city campaign in North Rhine-Westphalia, which was launched in 1999 in conjunction with large commercial enterprises, the North Rhine-Westphalia trade association (*Handelsverband NRW*) and the association of cities and towns in North Rhine-Westphalia (*Städtetag NRW)*.

5   Government policy and subsidies

The German federal government and the federal states have been supporting the renewal of the city and neighbourhood centres for decades. Government involvement is justified because of the significance for the future of cities and municipalities. The Inner City White Paper (*Weißbuch Innenstadt*), published in 2011 following an extensive public consultation process (*BMVBS* [Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development] 2011a), emphasises the importance of stable inner cities and town centres for the German Federal Government.

In 2008, the German Federal Government launched the urban development promotion programme 'Active City and District Centres' ('*Aktive Stadt- und Ortsteilzentren*') as a means to support their stabilisation (*BMVBS* 2011b). The programme is subsidised by federal financial aid and focuses on six objectives: functional diversity and ensuring the supply of goods and services, social cohesion, the upgrading of public space, the culture of urban design (▷ *High-quality building planning, design and construction*), sustainable urban mobility and cooperation based on partnership.

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