

Heightened Conversations: Impacts of Building Heights in Capital Cities

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Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. I will be talking from the German perspective, from Berlin and Hamburg and so I will talk about two cities within the same time and will have to rush a little bit through the different issues.

The interesting point, comparing Berlin, as capital city, and Hamburg as a merchant city, will be quite obvious when we go through the slides. On the one-hand side, Berlin has basically, in the last 20 years, had a history where it was a history of reconstruction of the old existing city, according to modern technologies, but using the horizontal scheme of the city again.

Hamburg, on the other hand, has been trying also based on a horizontal view of the city, actually to modernize and to grow far more than Berlin did, and so it might be quite interesting to compare those two cities.

This is only for you to see the location, roughly 300 kilometers apart. One is very much also characterized by a maritime location, also 110 kilometers away from the North Sea.

Let's start with Berlin, the capital city. I want to talk about the core area of the city, only to indicate the size of the city, within the city boundaries, roughly 3.2 million people live today. The economic drivers, as London are, for example, to certain degree, tourism,

but also creative industries, but also state employment which is naturally the case and that's a core area of which they're horizontally, the city is basically determined.

Hamburg, on the other hand, is very much a half of the size, in terms of population. The second largest city in Germany, but to certain degree more dynamic than Berlin. The per capita income of the city is almost double that of Berlin and it is one of the richest cities in Europe at the present moment. And therefore it is interesting to look at the question; how to deal with it. And what we're talking about actually is an extension of the core of the inner city and the issue in terms of height related to that question.

As Gary Hack already explained the heights historically in the 19th century were very similar in central Europe. In Berlin it was 72 feet. I'm very happy that I found the same figure. And Hamburg is 79 feet in terms of the height it has been in the 19th century.

Basically both cities are seven to eight stories high, a little bit lower than Washington at present without any federal height regulation. So let's come first take a look towards Berlin.

Berlin has been reconstructed after the city was united in '89 and very specific developments have been taking place in the core area which can be seen characterizes with these three dots and I will explain them a little bit more.

What has been introduced into the city center again was a lot of federal buildings, for example, the federal chancellery which hadn't been there. And there was this significant discussion about the location of the German parliament which actually moved into the

existing Reichstag building again, which was modernized and basically got alleviated in terms of height.

As you can see, for example, the major importance of the excess Unter den Linden as, I will today say, it has a certain importance in Berlin, like the Mall, also it has a completely different character, but it is a central east-west axis.

You see a number of other major developments on the south part. You see Potsdamer Platz, which was basically a new invention within the historical structure of the city and on the right hand side you see the former Prussian building that is the city castle which was basically destroyed during GDR times, which will probably be rebuilt now for cultural purposes.

In order not to show a film, I will show these images, a little bit better indicating the height characters of Berlin. You see now, starting in from Brandenburg gate and looking east, according along Unter Den Linden, that basically the reconstruction of Berlin has been done within the height limits of the existing city.

In front there are all the major embassies, for example. This is not working anymore, at least for you. This is the American embassy just next to the Brandenburg gate, and you see some remnants of the GDR history which are little bit further in the background, which are disturbing, basically, the urban landscape. For example, the International Trade Center, but after all it is very horizontal place, which had been rebuilt and reconstructed. The Reichstag, which was very close to it, also had very big impact because it expanded ,basically, this east-west axis to the north.

And relating to other locations we can also see here , for example, the German and the French dome, with no other major public buildings in the area that this character of the city has also been preserved, not based on federal buildings but on major church buildings which are 300, 400 years old.

In the middle, a concert building and far right, there is a foreign ministry, but except that is a completely civilian area, civilian building. So the extension of the city within the inner core has been done also completely based on a horizontal system.

The only exception is, today, still Potsdamer Platz. There was one other major project, Alexanderplatz with high-rise buildings, 150 meters, more than 500 feet, but at the end of the day, no building actually was built because there was no market demand.

So be careful when thinking about high buildings in a city and in the core of a city. At least in Berlin, there was no sufficient demand for these buildings to be developed since the last 16 or 17 years.

But Potsdamer Platz, you can see this from the left-hand side still is in the vicinity of the Reichstag building, you can see from Reichstag Potsdamer Platz and vice versa, so the proximity is still rather given, but it is the inner periphery.

And these are the cool buildings of Potsdamer Platz, and you can see still from the central building, which is the Sony Center, that the city still tried to preserve the horizontal character, but the idea was to implant three nodes, so to say, three spikes within the city, actually where no churches are available anymore.

These are more spikes than major office buildings. The floor plate of those buildings is not more than a thousand square meters. So no one in America would ever build an office building so slim today anymore. And that naturally makes these buildings also integrative into an urban skyline because, looking from that side of the central building is one from Helmut Jahn.

These buildings look from many vistas, very slim, almost like historical church buildings. When we are talking about heights, we also talk about the height in terms of the floor plate, the extension of the buildings beyond the location of the buildings we are talking about.

Let's now move to Hamburg, how the city dealt with height issues within the historical area of Hamburg. And you see the core of the inner city. This is City Hall. I might say Germany had even more capital cities than the United States at the state-level, at least in the 18th century, before it was united, except Hamburg. With regard to that, Hamburg was also at the time a Republican city, so it was a city for itself, so it has only a city hall and not a major castle or other aristocratic remnants.

When we are talking about the central importance of water locations, and that is something that I would like to reflect on for a few minutes, because it could be of importance with regard to Washington.

It is the inner lakes in Hamburg which play a very important role, which have played a very important role. And the vistas are actually defined from the cool lakes which have been artificially created centuries ago.

This is the historical inner city, which is basically horizontal. I will show you that a little bit later. And this is the expansion area. I'm responsible for it at the present moment.

The interesting issue is how to deal with the height issues in terms of a very fast-growing city. Hamburg, in the last 15 years, has gained, at least in terms of population, at least 200,000, which is very unusual for a German city, and only very few increase in terms of population.

This is a picture from the core area of the inner city, the historical city. And here you see that is not a federal place, but it is dominated by the history of the churches. These are almost 800 years old. They have been partly destroyed. They have been rebuilt since then quite often. But it is a historical city, basically horizontally developed.

And when you see the deviations in the urban landscape, it's basically the 60s and 70s. And that the consensus -- building horizontally -- was basically over strong to a certain degree by a brutal modernism.

That consensus to build horizontally was recouped later times, and actually when we're talking about those buildings as intermediate buildings, they will not get planning permission again if they ever have to be rebuilt or torn down.

So the issue of dealing with HafenCity within this context, immediately south of the city core has been to identify, not clusters, but to identify certain nodes at which a certain height could be developed. So, to identify strategic points at which the city should generate a very specific identity.

And the question was since Churches are not built to that height anymore, what kind of buildings could that be? And what type of buildings and what type of locations? And you can see from this sketch which is, well a sketch from the master plan of Kees Christiaansen, who is today professor at ETH Zurich, that there is an external triangle, and the left and the right one are roughly three kilometers apart.

And the North and South one are roughly 800 meters apart, and then there is an inner triangle. And you see probably that the buildings associated with it had not been predefined but have been defined within the development process of HafenCity within the last 10 years.

The left one is a big concert hall on top of an existing storage building. The other is the headquarters of a media company Der Spiegel, you might also have heard of. And the other one are university buildings and science center, and on the far right hand side this would be buildings of 150 meters height but out of this central side corridor there is the view towards the Elbe.

And if you look now, this is a winter photo from the Alistair Lake towards the Elbe river. You can see the spiky appearance of the city core of Hamburg, which will be definitely preserved. So, the growth will take place outside this corridor within the next years.

This you've seen, now, we look so to say from the waterfront outside. From the Elbe river waterfront at the height development. And the interesting issue is in order to preserve also some of the views, which you can see from the inner lake, it's also is an important question how to develop the waterfront?

And the interesting point is that although, the waterfront as the sketch shows there will be a horizontal development, there are certain spikes within this waterfront with 3 kilometers set in order to provide actually a modulation, so to say an interesting tension in the space, to indicate certain location, to indicate certain distances.

These are not only office buildings. Most are residential buildings for example and of course 70 meters high. So, 220, 230 feet, and most of others are ones which are lower, around 170 feet high.

So, the six or seven story building height is actually is the basis of the normal development as you can see here but on the right hand side you can see one of those residential towers which is the spike.

So, our solution, when we're talking about a new development, is not necessarily clustering the higher buildings, but actually to define the city within indication in terms of the historical characters, the distribution of Churches anew.

And when we're looking from the inside of HafenCity, you see no major higher building except the churches in the background. But actually within HafenCity, the interesting issue is naturally how we deal with the culture of buildings in the background you see buildings which will actually be World Heritage sites within the few years. They're now on the tentative list. And on the left side these are new buildings.

So, these are intermediate heights we develop carefully 12 or 13 stories high, which could use so to say local vistas, neighborhood vistas. Local integration not for the whole scale of the city but actually for the local integration of the area.

And if we look in East-West direction for example. On the left hand side this is part of an office building which is 50,000 square meters so to say some of the blocks, the major blocks here Washington of that size.

But to make them less clumsy actually these buildings have three towers. The first one you see three or four stories higher, which allows, for example as still as streetlight but after all actually does not give the impression that all the buildings have the same size.

You can accommodate big companies and still have a distinct and differentiated character of the buildings. The next one is residential buildings and then 600 meters you've a horizontal space and then you've this concert hall building now from as a prospective, it is done by Herzog & de Meuron.

So I will come to my conclusions. We appreciate without having a Federal Law, not in Berlin and definitely not in Hamburg, that we can grow a city in a horizontal way. That has major advantages and I think these advantages are very much also urban design and architectural qualities. And I think that concluding from the experience of Hamburg and also from Berlin, but Hamburg experience in building new is probably more important, that it is not sufficient to determine a uniform height benchmark for major parts of the city but all along street use.

The modern idea would be to come out with a more differentiated concept, viewpoints of major corridors, but not from one prospective or maybe two perspectives, not only from the Mall but definitely also from the waterfront as I've shown.

And the interesting questions and is one of content. What should be done with these landmarks and within these landmarks? What are these important buildings, when it is an office building, can it be a public building? Can it be, so to say, a public character? Then it could be a landmark building.

When it is naturally a public building like a concert hall the viewing platform, say 35 meters, then it has an importance, when it has a certain height.

But it is also important to create micro landmark locations within the city core, as I explained showing one or two examples, at the neighborhood level, but not very big buildings but more or less spiky buildings.

And let the other minor points for the forthcoming discussion. I hope it provides a little bit of inspiration for when building a city anew in 21st century how one can deal with heights. Thank you very much.