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Active cityship in the planning process for the future plan "More Altona"

Ursula Kirschner

Ursula Kirschner is Architect and Ph.D. in Fine Arts, professor and researcher at the Department of Cultural Studies at Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany, she carries research on architecture and digital culture.

Abstract

In this research project seminar students of cultural analysis and a master photographer developed a method of participation as a contribution to the creation of a future plan for Altona. Background is the relocation of the railway station in Hamburg Altona. The reconstruction of the station area provides a commercial and a residential site. The future plan shall help the adjacent to the new town areas to develop at the same time. The idea of preparation citizen portraits was created interdisciplinary. Content as surveys were semi-structured interviews with the citizens as experts, city walks with creating visual portraits of citizens and collective design-sessions for the northern part of the station area and the future planning of Altona-Nord. These portraits were taken from seven citizens from Altona-Nord within five to six hours.

In the results occurred the largest discrepancies in the rating of quality of living in the district. Apparently students and pupils enjoy the low rents and central location and seniors felt comfortable because they can reach important points by bike. Singles and parents between the ages of thirty and sixty however cannot identify with this district. They are looking for a more cultivated and well-off ambience with rich leisure time facilities. The approach for future planning of the participants were similar but each with an individual focus. A female pupil delivered the most innovative concept. She wanted to preserve but at the same time to help weaker people with social institutions to give them perspectives.

Looked at it this way building culture becomes higher culture not only by pomp and architectural quality but also by the people's creative use.

Keynotes: active citizenship, collaborative town planning, interdisciplinary students project.

1. Citizen involvement as a political instrument

This research project takes up a topic dealing with citizen involvement in municipal construction projects that is relevant in Germany right now. "Stuttgart 21" is a current example: A planning process for a new major train station that has gone on for over ten years and has triggered the formation of a citizen protest movement across all party lines. The root of the movement is the failure to include citizens in the planning process.

In addition to two other major construction projects in Hamburg – Hafencity (harbor area) and the IBA Wilhelmsburg (international building exhibition site 2013) – a third, very extensive construction project has been launched: "Mitte Altona," development of the district center. By relocating the current Altona train station to the Diebsteich station about 2 km Nord, a 75 ha area will be free for residential and commercial construction. The central Hamburg government agency for city development and environmental protection is responsible for planning. Parallel to the planning process, the district office of Altona, with input from citizens, is attempting to develop the surrounding areas to meet future needs. The goal is a future plan, "More Altona," for the next 10 - 20 years. The intention is to update the plan over the years and adapt it to evolving conditions. The future plan Altona is to be considered an open planning instrument, in regard to the methods as well as to the contents (Atlas Altona, 2010, p.12). This method reveals city planning deficits and incorporates planning recommendations with citizen involvement. Because both planning procedures are occurring parallel and the citizens do not see an opportunity for their input in planning the area around the old station, there is resentment within the planning procedure "More Altona".

In addition to the citizen involvement procedure initiated by the city council with support from external moderator groups, we developed a qualitative procedure in the sense of citizen involvement as expert involvement.

1.1 Urban geographical significance of research object, Altona District in Hamburg

Hamburg is one of the growing German metropolises that does not seem like it will be affected in the future by the consequences of demographic evolution due to an aging population.

Migration statistics assume that the population of the city of Hamburg will increase by the end of the year 2020 to 1.8 mn., from the current 1.77 inhabitants (Statistische Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2011c). The increasing population, along with the rise in households, means that 5000 - 6000 more residences will be needed each year (Atlas Altona, 2010, p.9).

The growth can be attributed particularly to a steady immigration of young adults training for professions and beginning their careers.

1.1.1 Altona – an evolving district

To serve as the planning basis for the developing district of Altona, a comprehensive fundamental reference work was created, the "Atlas Altona", an inventory with many significant statistics on population development and on existing buildings as well as a scenario analysis. The area for which a future plan is to be created covers three sub-districts of Altona. The area to which the plan applies contains 55,075 inhabitants; it is 5.5 km² in size, meaning that approx. 10,000 people share 1 km² (Atlas Altona, 2010, p.10). It is one of the residential areas near downtown, with good transportation links. The population structure is mixed. The citizens tend to vote for the social democratic and environmentally oriented parties; these parties received a total of about 80% of the votes in the 2011 city election (Statistische Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2011c).

1.1.2 Research object "Altona Nord"

The district *Altona Nord* is in the northern part of the planning area. It is 2.2 km² in size and has 21,305 inhabitants (December 31, 2009) (Statistische Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2011b). This district has been neglected over the last few years in the integrated district development process. This is due to the fact that citizens of this district have rarely protested in public and made their grievances known. In contrast to neighboring districts, there are many people with a migration background and families with children. These segments of the population tend to participate less frequently in public discussions. Also, it is a residential district with a relatively high number of manufacturing companies, such as the Holstenbrauerei (Brewery Holsten). It has little in the way of culture and service industries. Compared to neighboring districts, there are few vacancies and fewer old buildings in need of renovation. *Altona Nord* appears less lively and seems unattractive economically. This is particularly apparent in the lack of physicians and banks nearby. For many of the residents of *Altona Nord*, the inexpensive rental market and the good link to public transportation were decisive in their choice to live in the area.

We selected this part of Altona because of its building culture. It has a balanced everyday building structure, meaning mixed development from all different centuries with different settlement structures, and there have been virtually no studies conducted on this district thus far.

1.1.3 Building culture in Altona Nord

Altona was a separate neighbour town of Hamburg until 1938. Due to World War II bombing and the process of major redeveloping of the area a lot of buildings were destroyed and the urban structure changed severely. Today, Altona is characterised by the partly preserved perimeter block development in Wilhelminian style, mixed with buildings from the postwar period. Seen in this way building culture in *Altona Nord* can be described as a balanced everyday architecture.

1.2 Active citizenship process in Hamburg, background

1. In planning processes in Germany, the responsible administration has to inform the public, according to the Town and Country Planning Code B § 3. This is one of the general development rights to the public within the meaning of the briefing. Simultaneously, the criticisms from the public should be examined and if necessary the planning has to be changed according to the claims. The following citizen participation helps optimizing the planning processes in a more extensive form.

2. In this context, our paper will examine the methods and media that can be applied to the communication between citizens, planners, administrators and investors to promote activation of the creative process. We will attempt to understand those people whose material, social and historic living conditions are affected by the plan, by applying the concept of democracy, internet-based communication, protest movements and participation in an ongoing process. The ultimate goal is to develop a new perspective on life in the city, which these people produce and reproduce through their daily actions. This Participatory Action Research method builds on the critical pedagogy put forward by Paulo Freire (1982) as a response to the traditional formal models of education where the "teacher" stands at the front and "imparts" information to the "students" who are passive recipients.

Digital communication platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, self-organized websites etc. allow like-minded and affected citizens to network and make new plans in grass-roots forums organized in cyberspace.

The citizen involvement process in Altona began in September 2010; it will conclude with a submission to the district assembly in July 2011. The procedure began with walking excursions through the district. Then there were creative workshops, and finally task groups were formed. The criteria and measures contained in the completed plan were recommendations and offer no legal claims. One task group is currently examining how contents can be transferred in a consolidated and sustainable manner to active citizen involvement in future planning.

Our student project group took part in one of the two creative workshops together with around fifty citizens of Altona. Many were representatives of local district government and of public clubs. From our group of surveyed citizens from Altona only one was informed and actively involved in this process at the time. The following illustration shows how the course thus far is evaluated by students of this project.

The mood amongst participating citizens is occasionally very negative, and there are already citizens' initiatives¹ against the process.

¹ "Lux und Konsorten" is an initiative that made use of events taking place in the course of the citizen involvement to express their discontent. The following open letter was sent electronically: "We will attend a new spectacle of failed planning culture this Friday, Feb. 4, 2011 at 3:00 p.m. at the Haubachschule in Altona. Then the Quantum-Immobilien-AG (real estate) will do the homework assigned to them by the district of Altona: The "citizens" must also be involved in planning." (Lux und Konsorten, 2011)

Students Feedback about the Creativ Work Shop



Figure 1. Illustration Feedback to the Course of Creative Workshop in Altona in September 2010 [translation by the author]. Illustration by student Viktoria Mutzek.

1.2.1 Fundamentals of the future plan Altona

A central objective of the city of Hamburg it to promote residential construction and to develop an inner-city, balanced housing market. The intention is not only to keep young families downtown, but rather to create accommodations for all people who wish to live and work in the city.

All three sections of the Altona district – Altona-Altstadt, Altona-Nord and Sternschanze – are popular urban residential areas today. By modifying and relocating the Altona train station to Diebsteich, a vast tract of land becomes available. The land is to be redesigned by the architect and city planner André Poitiers, creating a new urban district center, "Altona-Mitte." The future plan is to be applied to design a concept for the adjacent districts mentioned above, then the concept can serve as a guideline for subsequent planning. The following questions are some of the topics to be covered: Where can new residential space be created? How should green and open spaces be designed? Which businesses should be where? (Atlas Altona, 2010, p.11).

2. Methods of citizen involvement as interdisciplinary student project

In this research project seminar, Cultural Studies students and a master photographer dealt with the topic "Civil-society involvement in the area of tension between the building culture and the gentrification debate", applying a process completely unrelated to the approach explained above. The project accompanied the current involvement process and served as source of inspiration for other initiatives. The idea to create citizen portraits was created interdisciplinary. The contents included surveys, walks through the city and joint draft sessions

on the Northern section of the train station area as well as on future planning for Altona Nord. Each student was in contact with one citizen and designed a portrait of him. Therefore I designed a guideline, which was discussed and refined in the seminar.

The individual contributions will be compiled in a brochure.

2.1 Qualitative social research

The semi-structured or guided expert interview with subsequent experiments in the sense of action research (Freire, 1982) was chosen as the method for the first survey. Seven citizens of the district were selected as experts. The perceptive experiences of each individual are an essential component in being able to judge city quality and to establish paradigms for future plans designed for the long term. It appears that a qualitative procedure is most suitable for taking the ideas derived from their knowledge of local conditions and including it in the current planning process. Quantitative methods enable only the examination of previously presented hypotheses derived from theoretical models. The district office, a group of moderators, an architect, a photographer and students of Cultural Studies with a concentration in Building Culture are involved in the project.

This paper focuses on a culture-related, aesthetic consideration of the city. It concentrates on the everyday building culture, as this is a relevant factor for the quality of life of a normal citizen. Altona Nord, a section of Altona, is a good study subject, because it is so "ordinary" and it has not found much consideration within the current, parallel planning processes. Also, this is the area where there is the most potential to influence the plans for the future.

Surveying experts – in this case, the citizens of Altona Nord – generates information that enriches work with the experiences gained from everyday occurrences and offers revelations regarding relevant criteria for the future plan. The results of the survey are a verified part of facts generated in the Altona Atlas. This is a method that is "intermeshed" in two directions, with an analytical and a creative thought part.

The knowledge gained from meeting with the "experts" is compiled to create citizen portraits and is intended to offer planners and government agencies impulses that confirm, revise or pose new questions (Bungard, Holling and Schultz-Gambard, 1996, p.78).

The goal of this research project is to create a study in a harmonious working environment. The study is intended to reflect the satisfaction of the individual citizen groups and to include the strengths and weaknesses of the district in regard to local physical and socioeconomic circumstances. Ideas and recommendations are also generated together to help to sustainably and positively guide the city development process. The project progression is documented and then, within a final presentation, discussed and evaluated with experts in regard to the applicability of this type of citizen involvement.

2.1.1 Establishment of contacts, information and preparation

The meetings with the test persons required minute preparation and organization. The students had to establish contact, introduce themselves and the university, and concisely describe the project and the cooperation with the current involvement process for the future plan Altona. They also explained the concept we developed for the citizen portraits and the associated intention as well as the integration in the citizen involvement process. The citizens were informed of the construction developments in Altona (various planning processes, competition). And because, as citizens of Altona Nord, we consider them experts, we questioned them about the district and cooperated with them to develop ideas for the future plan. This contribution will be integrated in the second call for tenders for the "New Altona Center" in the Northern part.

2.1.2 Content conception of the interview guideline

The questionnaire begins with general information on the test person and the interviewer, then moves on to a self-portrayal. Finally, there are four blocks of questions regarding the building culture.

The general information and self-portrayal are designed such that the person being questioned is initially confronted with questions that are easy for him/her to answer, that introduce the topic and that facilitate and promote beginning the interview, including in regard to creating a relaxed atmosphere.

The interview proceeds to the first block of questions, titled "Building Culture - Own Residence," which contains questions about how satisfied the person is with his residential micro-location. The first block also covers personal utilization possibilities and qualitative assessments of the nature of the conditions.

The second block of questions focuses on the streets and surroundings. It covers aesthetic design, buying behavior and what the test persons would like to buy. The intention is to garner information on the existing commercial offerings and their deficits. This block also deals with opportunities for recreation, asking about the quality and appeal. The intention is to gain information on whether and to what extent improvement is desired.

Then it was recommended that the interviewer and expert analyzed some statistics from the Atlas Altona. After the interviewer explained the relevant statistics, the test person was asked whether these figures reflect his/her impression of the district. The discrepancies were of particular interest here. They will be pursued in a discussion. The following statistics were used: Pages 41-50 (Atlas Altona, 2010) provide statistics on the structure of the population, which offer insight into the age structure, migration background and income. Pages 59, 61, 64 and 65 (Atlas Altona, 2010) show figures on number of stories, population density, size of residences and subsidized housing. Information on potential discrimination regarding residents of certain streets or buildings was expected here. It was assumed that residents of e.g. high rises would be scorned, because the test persons do not like these structures and feel that they are a disturbance in the district. The access to health care is shown on page 75 (Atlas

Altona, 2010). The shortage in Altona Nord is striking. It was interesting to discover the extent to which the residents were aware of the shortage and to hear how they want the situation remedied. Pages 85 and 86 (Atlas Altona, 2010) describe the playgrounds. Anyone who has studied the population structure statistics will know that many more children live in Altona Nord than in the districts Altona Altstadt and Schanzenviertel. However, as the map indicates, the number of playground in this district is the lowest. The expectation was to find out about the quality of the playgrounds.

The third block of questions focuses on the subject "Building Culture – District". The objective was to determine how interested the citizens are in their district. This information can be used later to reach conclusions about whether the citizens are even interested in construction plans in their district.

Another intention was to gain information on whether citizens are interesting in planning when they are directly affected or whether citizen involvement tends to be motivated more by society. This is also an indication of the extent to which individual persons and their perception habits influence the views of others and of how strongly the individuals identify with their district. The fourth block of questions deals with the topic "General Feeling of Residential Well-being". Working under the assumption that the test persons do not have distinct space perceptions, they are asked about the effects of the city area, including how environmental factors affect individual persons and their relationships to their surroundings and the structural local culture. This offers insight into the current status of local identity and, in the course of structural modifications, into the desired measures and resulting fears related to the changes.

2.1.3 Interview guideline for surveying citizens in Altona Nord

The interview guideline specified the topic and defined the problem, and it ensured that the subjects relevant to research were covered in the course of the conversation.

The information transfer between interviewee and interviewer is in the foreground. It is particularly important that certain topics can be dealt with in detail and that the test person has the opportunity to explain his specific impressions and assessments. Open questions allow space for respective, personal insight. Especially in the last part, common ideas can be developed and the test person can be proud of the resulting product.

The analytical procedure is realized by applying the theoretical analyses from the Atlas Altona and the building culture study that took place before the project began to derive facts that flow into the topics and questions of the interview guideline. The questions are based on the topics dealt with there and form the foundation of the survey.

General information

a) On the interviewer

- Name:
- Semester:

- University:

b) On the citizen

- Name: (optional)
- Address:
- Telephone/fax: (optional)
- E-mail: (optional)
- Occupation:
- Family situation (married, single, family, significant other):
- Migration background:
- Life style (living along, roommates, family etc.):
- Residential situation (rental apartment, condominium, cooperative etc.):
- Age of building:
- Type of building (tenement, high rise, villa etc.):

Key questions

Self-portrayal

- Can you start out by telling me how long you have lived in Altona and where you lived previously?
- Does your life center on Altona Nord? Do you spend at least 50% of your free time there?
- Do you work or train for a profession in Altona?
- Would you like to spend the next 20 years in Altona Nord? Why or why not?

Building culture – own dwelling

- Think about the building you live in. Do you consider the design and functionality to be high quality?
- In your opinion, what should be changed outside of your dwelling: yard/façade/stairwell, etc.?
- How would you describe your personal creative freedom in the building and outside?
- Do you have to get together with others to assert your wishes to the landlord or other residents of the building?
- Can you sleep with the window open without bothersome noise?
- Do you have an open-air space, like a balcony, loggia, patio or yard? If yes, do you spend a lot of time there in the summer?

- Do you visit green spaces near your residence?

Building culture – street

- Do you consider the street where you live to be an attractive home? Why or why not?
- Describe the quality of the environment on your street. Are there enough trees? Are there places to rest, like benches or little squares? Are there playgrounds? Do you consider the design and condition to be satisfactory? Is the street lighting adequate?
- Can you reach parks on foot from your home? Do you visit them, or would you rather use a form of transportation to go to more attractive places?
- Are there streets in Altona where you would rather live? Please name them and describe the advantages over your street.
- Which stores can you reach on foot? Do you frequent them, or would you rather drive or take public transportation to go shopping?
- How do you manage daily shopping in the time available to you? When do you shop to what extent?
- Do you make use of delivery services; e.g. for food or internet purchases? Can you estimate the percentage of your monthly expenses spent on these items?
- Can you reach services such as physicians, hairdressers, post office, restaurants, etc. on foot or by bicycle? Do you make use of these services, or are there reasons you would rather seek out other service providers?

Building culture – district

- Which cultural or athletic offerings do you make use of sporadically or regularly in Altona?
- What do you think of the distances to your work, to day care, school etc.?
- Do you feel that your daily routes, e.g. to the subway, and particularly to day care and school, are safe and attractive?
- Please mark your "sensed" neighborhood on the map. Describe the borders, e.g. busy streets, other building structure, unpleasant environment, unattractive use like commercial, service providers etc.
- Do you feel like an outsider in your building or neighborhood, or do you think that you live amongst like-minded people?

Questions on residential well-being

- During your daily routes through Altona Nord, what percentage of the time do you feel safe, absolutely safe, less safe? Why? Can you name unsafe places?
- Would you choose an attractive, safe route, even if it takes significantly longer?

- Of the public events you have experienced in Altona Nord, which was the nicest? Please describe it briefly.
- Do specific environmental factors in Altona Nord such as noise, exhaust, etc. affect your health? If yes, which factors do you consider disturbing?
- Which city planning qualities, e.g. green areas, parking, etc. do you consider essential to an attractive residential area?
- What is the difference between a good and a bad residential location?

2.2 Conception of draft session on northern section of train station area and on future plan "Altona Nord"

The results of the competition "Altona Mitte" were presented using maps. Then ideas were developed together to improve the residential environment. The recommendation was to determine wishes in the order building, street, district and to create a concept. Finally, ideas regarding the uses of the Northern part of the train station tract were developed. This was done by sketching ideas on a map or compiling a list of priorities regarding measures for various places.

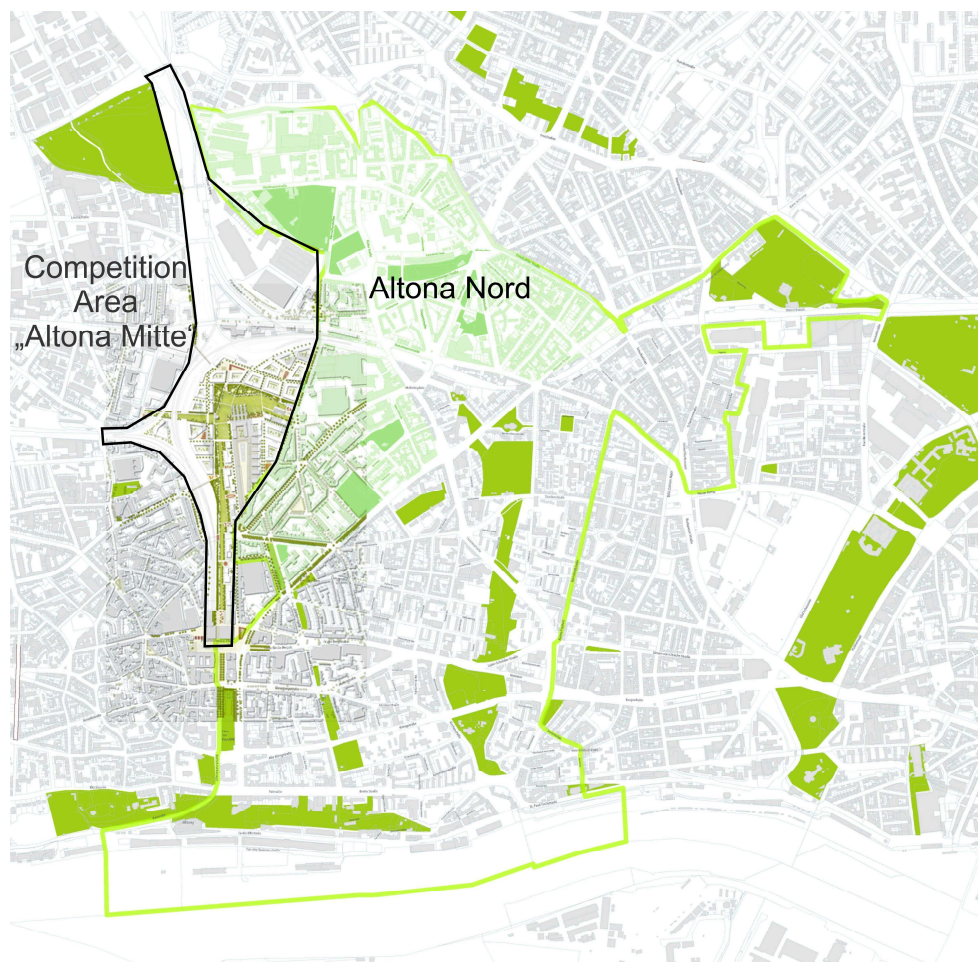


Figure 2. Altona map with the design for the first part of "Altona Mitte", Altona North District, green outline describes the area for the future plan "More Altona". Illustration by the author. Source: Poitiers, 2010.

In conclusion, the people surveyed were asked how they assess the social consequences that may result from the extensive construction project.

This conception bound the questionnaire to the theoretical content of the preliminary plans and can be used to expand it. During the expert conversations, existing theoretical findings were challenged, enriched and expanded, revealing a comprehensive image of the district *Altona Nord* and how it is perceived by individual citizens.

2.3 Walking through the city - photo documentary for visual citizen portrait

The citizen profile was rounded off with a walk through the city. The citizen proceeded along his/her regular routes, ran daily errands and was questioned and photographed. The routes were measured for time. Beforehand, the routes were marked on a map and the steps and time estimated; then the actual values were compared to the estimates. The discrepancy between measured time and perceived distance was identified. It was presumed that attractive routes were perceived as shorter than they really are and vice versa. These results substantiate the value that street design has for individuals, and it indicates which areas need improvement to make them more attractive to pedestrians. The walk captured a piece of everyday life as an image and narrative. At the same time, the walk offered insight into the current moods in different places.

3. Summary of results of citizens portraits

Seven citizens of *Altona Nord* were questioned. They were: two small families with preschoolers, high school student with migration background, two university students, retired couple, single freelancer with physical handicaps. Our students generally spent 5 - 6 hours with their test subjects in *Altona Nord*, either all in one day or split between two days. Only the retired couple and the high school student considered *Altona Nord* to be the long-term center of their lives. The retirees are both from Hamburg and have lived in Altona for many years. They chose *Altona Nord* as the place to grow old. The high school student strongly identifies with the district. She wants the current atmosphere to be maintained, and any changes should be implemented to stabilize the existing structure. She considers it important to avoid a gentrification process. She would like to see a city with a wide range of social services, offering shelter to the socially disadvantaged.

The parents with preschoolers, on the other hand, would like to move away from *Altona Nord*; they feel that their children cannot grow up to be healthy there. They cite reasons such as excessive pollution, traffic noise, danger posed by heavy traffic and neglected parks and playgrounds. All of the parents have lived in the district since they were at university. At the time, they considered the area attractive because of the public transportation and low rent. The popular "Schanze" area, as well as nature and recreation along the Elbe river, can be reached on foot and characterize the inner-city location enjoyed by students. Many of their university friends have moved away, so their friends are no longer close by. They have also

noticed that the nearby infrastructure has deteriorated over the years. The area has lost dramatically in attractiveness for them. The 40-year old freelancer expressed similar sentiments. He considered the quality of life poor, even without a child. He misses all types of gathering places. He thinks that an urban neighborhood should be characterized by landscaped squares, parks, restaurants, cultural offerings and athletic facilities.

The two university students confirmed the current attractiveness of the district for them. However, the male student moved to Hamburg from a small town two years ago and misses well maintained athletic fields, and he perceives some areas, particularly in the Northern part of *Altona Nord*, as dangerous. Although all of those surveyed said that they feel safe in the district, they were all able to name areas that they avoid after the dark and where they would take a longer route for safety reasons.

In regard to traffic, everyone expressed a wish for traffic reduction – however they all stated different through streets. Because of its three major four-lane road axes, the district has excessive traffic for a residential area. This is the reason that the female student emphasized that, in the event that the train station is moved, development should progress from the Nord or east to avoid even more traffic. All of those surveyed would like to see more parks and suggested different park concepts for the Northern train station tract. Keywords that were used to describe the future visions for the district included:

- Colorful Altona
- Family-friendly ecological city
- Parent-child neighborhood
- Altona – a social city for everyone
- Sports town *Altona Nord*
- Multicultural neighborhood with nightlife and daytime

4. Conclusion

From our perspective and considering feedback from the district office, the seven citizens of *Altona Nord* were able to provide representative statements on the quality of residence and life in the district. Two of them had heard about the plans for new construction and had participated to some extent in citizen involvement forums. The others were completely surprised to have heard nothing about the process, despite the many announcements. All of the participants welcomed the efforts of the students and were satisfied with the results. Five of the seven mentioned that the meetings gave them insight into the building culture, and they intend to deal with the topic more in the future. At first we had difficulty finding test subjects, but later we were approached multiple times by residents asking that we create citizen portraits for them. The qualitative method in the sense of surveying citizens as experts was

well received. The students were very careful and sensitive to the test subjects, and they performed the survey in a creative manner. The greatest discrepancies were apparent in the evaluation of the quality of living in the district. The conclusion can be reached that university and high school students enjoy the low rent and central location, as do retirees, who can reach everything important to them by bicycle. However, single people and parents between 30 and 60 years old do not identify with this district. They are looking for a more cultivated and better situated environment with an abundance of leisure activities. All of the test subjects had a similar approach to the future plan, but each offered individual accents. The high school student came up with the most surprising and at the same time most innovative concept for the future plan. She wanted to maintain the status quo on the one hand, while simultaneously supporting the weaker citizens with social services and giving them new perspectives. This demand sounds normal, but its radicalism is actually very innovative.

From this point of view, a city does not possess a "healthy, lively building culture" until it has a colorful mixture of inhabitants. And the greater the well-being of the inhabitants, the better the building culture. Building itself is described by Heidegger as, "an activity and result [is] not only reshaping material, it is life itself in its spiritual-material abundance (Zavarihin, 1998).

Looked at this way, building culture becomes high culture not only with pomp and architectural quality but when it is used by people in a creative manner.

5. Acknowledgements

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