

Report

## Smart Growth: Creating New Urban Neighborhoods

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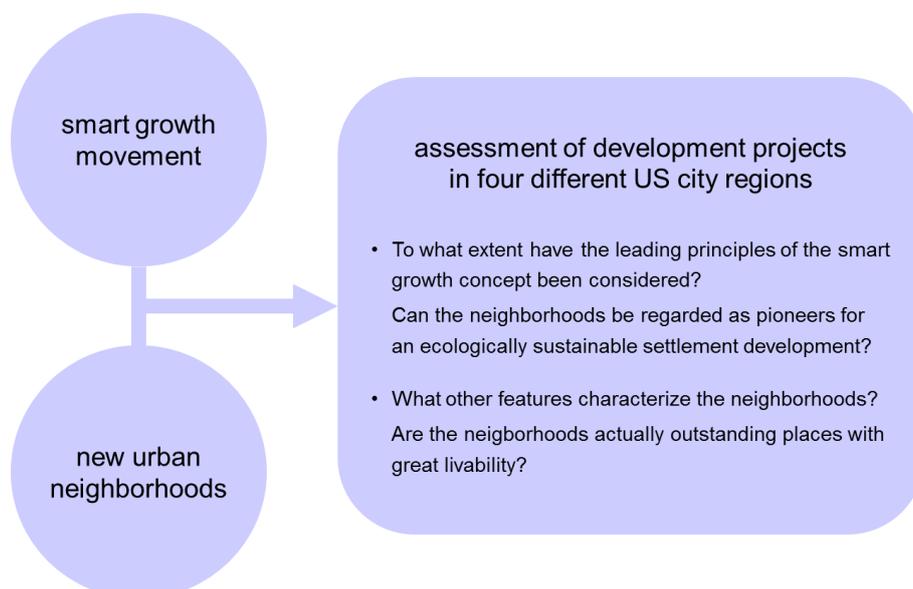
## 1. Project Idea

The examination, which is presented in this report, combines two different goals. Firstly, the aim was to learn more about the smart growth movement in the United States. The movement's concept promises an alternative to the unlimited expansion of settlement areas and to urban sprawl. Urban planners and environmentalists have repeatedly pointed out the negative consequences of such a settlement development: increased traffic, destruction of natural environment, higher infrastructural costs, etc. At least at first glance the catchphrase 'smart growth' seems attractive because it does not give the impression of prohibition or restriction. There is no comparison of 'growth' versus 'no growth'. Instead, it suggests that negative side effects can be avoided with an intelligent type of expansion.

Secondly, the aim was to visit new urban neighborhoods along the east coast of the United States. The term 'neighborhood' is not clearly defined and is used in different ways. In the context of this research neighborhoods were considered as an area whose realization followed a consistent design approach or which developed its own character over time. On the one hand they had to have a certain minimum size, so that a network of streets and paths exists. On the other hand they should only be so large that pedestrian accessibility within the area is given. Completely new and fundamentally restructured neighborhoods were included. Furthermore, existing areas with considerable current construction activities were object of the examination.

Combining these two aims, urban development projects in four American city regions were assessed with regard to the concept of the smart growth movement. The examination highlights the following questions:

- To what extent have the leading principles of the smart growth concept been considered? Can the neighborhoods be regarded as pioneers for an ecologically sustainable settlement development?
- What other features characterize the neighborhoods? Are the neighborhoods actually outstanding places with great livability?



During the research trip four city regions were visited: Washington, D.C., Baltimore (Maryland), Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) and Boston (Massachusetts). As background for the examination of the individual urban development projects current trends of spatial development in the United States were analyzed. In this context, a central topic was the rediscovery of urban areas by the generation of the millennials (see Lachman/Brett 2015 and Nielsen Holdings N.V. 2014) as well as – in weakened form – by the elderly population of the so called ‘empty nesters’. The population development of the four considered core cities has developed differently in the recent past: Washington, D.C. and Boston were two of the fastest growing big cities in the United States between 2010 and 2015. After a long period with a decreasing population, Philadelphia had an appreciable population growth. And in Baltimore, which had an immense population demographic decline in the past, the number of inhabitants has at least stabilized.

## **2. Smart Growth and New Urban Neighborhoods**

To discuss the question if and to what extent a new urban neighborhood is in line with the ideas of the smart growth movement it has to be clarified what smart growth is. The works of the Smart Growth Network are instructive for this clarification. This is a network of private, public and intermediate organizations, which was brought to life by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The network worked out the characteristic features of good examples and took this basis to formulate ten principles of smart growth (Smart Growth Network 2006):

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact building design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

The smart growth concept can be used on different spatial scale levels – from the whole region over the neighborhood and streets up to individual buildings. It develops its full power not before measures at all levels are linked to each other. The level of the neighborhood seems to have a special importance. Duany et al. note in their handbook of implementation of the smart growth idea ‘Neighborhood structure is the very heart of smart growth’ (2010: xiii). After that the authors work out guidelines concerning the development of neighborhoods based on the smart growth concept and take these to concretize the ten fundamental principles of the smart growth movement.

These guidelines were taken up to design an own fact sheet for the evaluation of urban development projects during the research trip. The generated fact sheet was designed in a

way that it was possible to nearly complete it during an intensive site visit. Moreover, a preparation and follow-up work of the on-site elevations were made. The examined urban development projects also played an important role in the expert interviews. Firstly, experts were asked to give their assessment regarding the projects, which were chosen for a site visit in the respective study region. Furthermore, they were asked if they could propose more interesting examples for the study.

The expert interviews helped to find out more about the history and current situation of the smart growth movement in the United States. It became clear that the term 'smart growth' already had its highlight of popularity about ten years ago. Related concepts and terms like 'sustainable development' or even 'resilience' attract much more attention nowadays. Nevertheless, there are huge textual overlaps between the concepts with regard to the ideas on settlement development. In this context, the arguments of the supporters and opponents of the smart growth concepts were discussed. Another focus of the interviews laid on the presentation of planning instruments and their effects. The existing tools for the control of the settlement development obviously show major differences between the federal states and regions. The addressed instruments reach from the well-known 'Urban Growth Boundaries' over funds to purchase worth protecting areas up to the information that the planning of sewer infrastructure is a central key to control settlement development. Considering the variety of interesting approaches, it seems to be worthwhile to examine if some ideas can be transferred to Germany. Due to the brevity of this report, appropriated considerations cannot be described further at this point.

### **3. Development of a Project Typology**

During the research trip 22 urban development projects were intensively examined. One result of the examination was the identification of seven different types of projects, which will be discussed with regard to the principles of the smart growth movement in the following. An overview of the closely studied projects and an classification of the urban development projects according to the typology can be found in the annex of this report.

#### **Transit-oriented Development / Trail-oriented Development**

The type 'Transit-oriented Development' is a neighborhood with an efficient public transport station, which is surrounded by a high-density building development. The development is concentrated in a radius of a quarter up to half a mile around the station in order to ensure pedestrian accessibility. Because of that significant points of the smart growth concept, like the public transport orientation and the walkability, belong to the main characteristics of this project type.

Especially in the Washington, D.C. region a lot of impressive examples of this project type can be found. In the recent past several big housing projects in the surrounding area of the metro station Wheaton were implemented. This includes for instance the high-rise building 'The Exchange' with a big supermarket in the ground floor and 17 levels with apartments, whose renters can use diverse in-house offers from a swimming pool up to areas to take

dogs for a walk. The building also sticks out because of the one- and two-storied shopping street of the historical city center of Wheaton, which is directly on the other side of the road.

Another closely studied example is the project 'Assembly Row' in Somerville. Thanks to a newly built underground station this new urban neighborhood is just seven minutes far from the inner city of Boston. It is also possible to reach the area by bike – through a new bicycle path along the Mystic River. The location 'Assembly Row' with its 30 outlets is an attractive shopping-destination. But this project has nearly nothing in common with a traditional factory outlet center, due to 2.100 residential units and more than 160.000 square meters of office space, which should arise until its completion. Furthermore, leisure and gastronomy facilities should guarantee that there is a lively neighborhood day and night. Despite the good public transport connection a specific traffic volume is expected. To resolve this volume a pilot project with car parks for self-parking cars is planned.

The project 'Owings Mill – Metro Center' in the suburban area of Baltimore shows that a 'Transit-oriented Development' does not automatically lead to a successful development. Weaknesses of the urban design – like a bad access from the metro station – obviously contribute to a sluggish sales and marketing of the newly established area.

Not only public transport stations can constitute an appropriate concentration point of spatial development in terms of the smart growth movement. Lately, the chances of 'Trail-oriented Development' were discussed in the United States (see Urban Land Institute 2016), where pedestrian and cycle trails were treated as urban development corridors.



### **Traditional Neighborhood Development**

The term 'Traditional Neighborhood Development' stands for a comprehensive planning approach, where care and education facilities, public buildings and retail stores are located in walking distance to residential buildings. Such development projects have a network of paths and streets, which enable movements by foot, bike or car. Furthermore, squares, green areas and parks shape the appearance. The projects follow the ideal of the traditional American small town and implement the urban planning ideas of the so called 'New Urbanism'.

One well-known example, which contains many of the outlined qualities, is the project 'King Farm' in the federal state of Maryland, around 20 miles far from Washington, D.C. With regard to the smart growth concept it must be critically stated that the existing metro station is located in the outskirts and that there is no orientation of the settlement development towards a public transport station. Moreover, the pursued accessibility of the neighborhood center by foot is limited at the edges of the area due to the size of 3.200 residential units.

The project 'Concord Riverwalk' near Boston is much smaller and an example of a so-called. 'Pocket Neighborhood'. Such neighborhoods consist of a few residential units, whose arrangement forms a common public space (see Chapin 2011). According to the urban concept of the complex, the parking lots of the residents and visitors are positioned on the edge of the area. Inside a 'Pocket Neighborhood' an intimate atmosphere occurs, but access to the neighborhood is not restricted. Thereby this concept consciously distances itself from 'Gated Communities'.



### Urban Renewal / Gentrification

Projects of the type 'Urban Renewal / Gentrification' are no big new urban development projects. Instead, a rather small-scale development in existing neighborhoods takes place. This development is often observed in areas with a favorable location – for instance in areas close to the city center or near universities. Furthermore, these areas often have an attractive fabric and an interesting cultural environment with a – at least at the beginning of the development cycle – relative low price level.

The neighborhood 'Remington' in Baltimore belongs to this type. It is centrally located in the city, and the well-known John Hopkins University is easily accessible by foot or bike. Currently, it is observed that row houses, which are typical of the area, are fundamentally renovated and some of the numerous warehouses are converted. So the developer of the property 'Remington Row' promises that the complex with more than 100 apartments exudes an industrial charm. At the same time, he points out that an extraordinary gastronomic offer is being implemented on the neighboring property – the 'R.House Food Hall'. Even more obvious are the changes of the neighborhood 'Northern Liberties' in Philadelphia. In this occasion, the largest individual project is the 'Piazza at Schmidt's': Eight buildings were built on the site of a former brewery. These buildings form a public square and provide space for 100 residential units as well as facilities for gastronomy and retail. A park with common gardens, which was developed on a former brownfield, enhances the today's attractiveness of the lively quarter.

Nearly no other project type represents the principles of the smart growth movement better than these urban neighborhoods. They stand for walkability as well as mixed use. In contrast to new building projects, they normally have a special character, which indicates the history and sense



of place. However, in light of the urban location of these neighborhoods it is often difficult to ensure accessibility to parks and natural areas. Moreover, examples of this type are in many cases in the area of tension between desired enhancement and unwanted displacement of population groups.

### **Island of Urbanity**

The projects classified as 'Island of Urbanity' are rarely connected with existing structures, but they rely on their own attractiveness of the newly created neighborhood. They promise all advantages of a mixed use area with attractive leisure and gastronomy facilities as well as a good local supply – combined with modern comfort and service. The project's conception causes significant investments and requires a certain size. It is often striking that the (supposed) authenticity of the projects is emphasized again and again.

The project 'Pike and Rose' is located about seven miles northwest of the inner city of Washington, D.C. along a busy arterial road. The site, which was in the past characterized by an accumulation of big-box stores and extensive parking lots, should be transformed into a compact urban neighborhood. The ambitious project is part of the White Flint Sector Plan, which comprises several major projects of this kind. It also includes the conversion of a 20 hectare area of the former shopping center White Flint Mall, whose demolition ended in early 2016. Only the 'Pike and Rose'-project should include 1.500 residential units after its full completion and should provide also space for office and retail uses. Currently, in the middle of an accumulation of suburban functional buildings and between several main roads it seems to be an island that shows only rare references to the adjacent buildings.



### **University-driven Development**

In times of the knowledge economy and of increasing student numbers, universities are very important for the urban development in many cities. Concerning the fundamental principles of the smart growth concept particular chances can be assumed – at least if the further development of the university sites is not understood as an entirely quantitative task in order to expand the existing capacities. Many students want living space in compact and urban quarters with short distances in the everyday life. They have a strong affinity for public transport and other environmentally friendly means of transport. Furthermore, historical and modern university buildings of high architectural quality can create a distinctive sense of place.

North of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology the neighborhood 'Kendall Square' is located, which was recently labeled as the 'pulsating heart of biotechnology' by the

newspaper Boston Globe. Over the last two decades, the neighborhood developed from a half-industrial characterized area to a center of innovation. The further profiling should follow a master plan, which includes six new buildings for living and research as well as newly-positioned retail uses. Several open spaces with different focuses of use should provide space for recreation and personal exchange. In order to meet the high design requirements all construction projects have to go through a design review process. In competition for the 'best brains' a lively place should be realized, which combines different activities according to the slogan of the project managers: live – work – shop – play – eat at Kendall Square.



### Waterfront Development

The proximity and involvement of the fascinating natural element water can lead to urban development projects with extraordinary qualities. The use of these location-bound advantages corresponds with the smart growth concept. But the special location usually goes along with high prices for residential and office space. The projects are often oriented to financially strong target groups, so that this project type rarely has a high extent of social mixture of residents. As a consequence, the role of public space seems particularly important. The accessibility to the attractive shore areas should be maintained or created for the public so that these areas do not become exclusive places for small parts of the population.

In the last years, the development and rediscovery of inner city shore areas have been a worldwide important topic of urban development. Along the east coast of the United States several examples of this project type can be found. The beginnings of the repositioning of the 'Inner Harbor' in Baltimore started more than half a century ago. Nowadays the project is considered as a model for the post-industrial transformation of a harbor district. The total dimensions of the new designed harbor area are impressive. And still new modules like the current projects 'Harbor Point' and 'Port Covington' are added. By comparison, in the capital city Washington, D.C. the inner city shore areas were discovered relatively late as locations for new urban development projects. After long preparations the project 'The Wharf' is implemented in the Southwest district, which is near the National Mall, since 2014. On a site of around 10 hectares 649 apartments, 241 condominiums and 683 hotel rooms should be built. Clubs, bars, pubs, a cinema and a concert hall should ensure entertainment for the



demanding inhabitants and guests of the waterfront neighborhood. A high walkability is pursued through mixed use, relatively dense buildings and small-scale structures.

### Urbanization of the Suburbs

There are small and large urban development projects, which can be associated with the type 'Urbanization of the Suburbs'. The most famous project is maybe the planned transformation of the edge city 'Tysons Corner': In the middle of the last century Tysons was an inconspicuous farming community at the intersection of two highways. In the following decades the location developed in a breathtaking pace to the nationwide biggest business center outside a large city and to a significant retail center with two big shopping malls. As a result a structure has evolved which was called a 'spectacle of imbalance' by the newspaper The Washington Post. While there are working more than 100.000 people in 'Tysons Corner' today, the place has less than 20.000 inhabitants. Professional and shopping commuters cause an immense traffic volume. Around 160.000 – mostly above-ground – parking lots are provided for them.

But now the character of the area should fundamentally change. By the year 2050 Tysons will transform to a pedestrian friendly, green and urban center according to the Tysons Comprehensive Plan. Due to extensive densification it should then offer space for 100.000 inhabitants and 200.000 workplaces. One important starting point for this development is the extension of the Silver Line, which opened in 2014 and brought four new metro stations to the plan area. On site the planned changes are getting more and more visible. A new entrance area is completed, which connects one of the existing malls with the station Tysons Corner. Around a public square a 22-storey office building, a residential tower with 430 units and a 300-bed hotel were realized. Nevertheless, nowadays it is an open question to what extent the ambitious plans for 'Tysons Corner' can be actually implemented. A successful implementation depends on the engagement of the property owners and the project developers – and last but not least on the future development of the demand for residential and office space in the region.

Concerning the ideas of the smart growth movement the evaluation of this project type is not easy. On the one hand it is argued that it is most effective to reshape the least sustainable structures. On the other hand good arguments can be found for directing investments and demand to integrated neighborhoods, which already meet the principles of the smart growth concept in most parts.



## 4. Conclusions

A research trip is an excellent opportunity to conduct internationally comparative urban research. On the one hand various interesting examples of current urban development projects in the United States could be identified, which are documented in this report. These projects provide valuable suggestions for research and practice in Germany. On the other hand the transatlantic comparison helps to sharpen the view for the existing qualities in the own country and to appreciate these qualities. With this in mind, central conclusions regarding the development of new urban neighborhoods should be presented at this point.

It is impressive to see what strong emphasis is placed on the topic 'mixed use' in the more closely studied urban development projects in the United States. There is nearly no bigger project which does not combine housing, working and leisure space as well as gastronomic and retail uses. Project developers have obviously discovered this topic for their purposes and they offensively promote their properties with the attribute 'mixed use'. There is a significantly different situation in Germany. Although mixed use is an important aim of urban development, in most cases project developers restrain themselves with the implementation. Relevant solutions are often regarded as too complicated and complex; at best a juxtaposition of various uses comes to realization. Against this background, good examples from the United States can be very helpful to further promote the idea of mixed-use development in Germany.

Similar things can be said about the aspect 'walkability'. The examined projects usually took the interests of pedestrians into account and appropriate traffic areas with particular high quality were realized within the new urban neighborhoods. Pedestrian accessibility of restaurants, coffee bars, grocery stores, schools, parks etc. plays a central role for the sales and marketing of new and old project locations. Property offers and neighborhood profiles are often presented together with values for the walkability of an area like the so called 'walk score'. They make strikingly clear to what extent different amenities can be reached by foot. These measured values also exist in Germany, but they have not experienced considerable attention yet. The experiences made in the United States should encourage a stronger highlighting of the walkability as a significant element of a liveable neighborhood.

In this context, it is an interesting idea to understand foot and cycle trails as an important urban development axis, which can be the starting point for the development of residential and office space. 'Trail-oriented Development' (see Urban Land Institute 2016) is the keyword. On the one hand such an approach brings additional users to foot and cycle trails. On the other hand new possibilities of infrastructure financing are created by the verifiable higher property prices. 'Trail-oriented Development' could be a big chance for a better use and the further development of existing path networks in many German cities.

The experiences with the revitalization of old suburban areas, which are gained in the United States, can be highly instructive (see Dunham-Jones/Wilkinson 2009; PlanSmart NJ 2016). According to the statements of the interviewed experts, the transformation of outdated shopping malls, extensive business parks and older single-family housing estates poses enormous challenges. The question arises how suburban areas can develop an authentic character and meet present and future requirements of different target groups (millennials,

empty nesters, elderly people). In Germany the debate about the future of suburban areas is still at the beginning. Public actors place their focus on other types of areas, which are often attributed with higher problem pressure. Far-reaching or radical proposals for the transformation of suburban areas have played no role so far. Therefore, exemplary revitalization projects from the United States can provide valuable and inspiring impulses.

To sum it up, it can be said that – despite some critical points – the intensively examined new urban neighborhoods along the east coast of the United States can be regarded in many respects as good examples of contemporary urban development projects, which correspond with the basic principles of the smart growth movement. Leaving the project areas or neighborhoods and entering other parts of a city, the special qualities come to light in multiple ways. This can be seen in the example of pedestrian and bicycle friendliness: Especially the newly built projects have appropriated traffic areas, which make movements by foot or bike more attractive. But paths in many cases (still) end at the borders of the development area or a multilane street turns out to be an insurmountable barrier. In these situations the added value of superordinate strategies and networked systems, which reach beyond individual projects and which require long-time planning and implementation, are clearly evident.

**Annex I: Overview of the In-Depth Site Visits**

| <b>Project</b>                        | <b>Case Study Region</b>    | <b>Project Type</b>   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Assembly Row                          | Boston (Massachusetts)      | Transit-oriented Development<br>Waterfront Development              |
| Atlantic Wharf and Greenway           | Boston (Massachusetts)      | Waterfront Development<br>Trail-oriented Development                |
| Concord Riverwalk                     | Boston (Massachusetts)      | Traditional Neighborhood Development                                |
| Ink Block                             | Boston (Massachusetts)      | Island of Urbanity  |
| Inner Harbor/Harbor East/Harbor Point | Baltimore (Maryland)        | Waterfront Development  |
| Kendall Square                        | Boston (Massachusetts)      | University-driven Development                                       |
| King Farm                             | Washington, D.C.            | Traditional Neighborhood Development                                |
| Monroe Street Market                  | Washington, D.C.            | Transit-oriented Development  |
| Navy Yard                             | Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) | Waterfront Development  |
| Northern Liberties                    | Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) | Urban Renewal / Gentrification                                      |
| Owings Mills – Metro Center           | Baltimore (Maryland)        | Transit-oriented Development  |
| Pike and Rose                         | Washington, D.C.            | Island of Urbanity<br>Urbanization of the Suburbs                   |
| Port Covington                        | Baltimore (Maryland)        | Waterfront Development  |
| Remington                             | Baltimore (Maryland)        | Urban Renewal / Gentrification                                      |
| Schuylkill River Trail                | Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) | Trail-oriented Development  |
| Shaw                                  | Washington, D.C.            | Urban Renewal / Gentrification                                      |
| The Wharf                             | Washington, D.C.            | Waterfront Development  |
| Tysons Corner                         | Washington, D.C.            | Urbanization of the Suburbs   |
| U Street                              | Washington, D.C.            | Urban Renewal / Gentrification                                      |
| University City                       | Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) | University-driven Development                                       |
| Voorhees Town Center                  | Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) | Urbanization of the Suburbs<br>Traditional Neighborhood Development |
| Wheaton Station                       | Washington, D.C.            | Transit-oriented Development  |

## Annex II: Overview of the Interviews and Conferences

| Date       | Person           | Institution   |
|------------|------------------|---|
| 04/29/2016 | Thomas, John     | US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Sustainable Communities         |
| 05/02/2016 | Avin, Uri        | University of Maryland, National Center for Smart Growth Research & Education |
| 05/03/2016 | Paranilam, Sara  | City of Baltimore, Baltimore Planning Department                              |
| 05/05/2016 | Philipsen, Klaus | 1000 Friends of Maryland, ArchPlan Inc. Philipsen Architects                  |
| 05/06/2016 | Svekla, Andrew   | Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission                                  |
| 05/11/2016 | Leroux, Andre    | Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance   |

| Date       | Conference                                    | Institution                     |
|------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 04/27/2016 | 2016 Washington Real Estate Trends Conference | Urban Land Institute Washington |

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