

Infusing new life into the old town centre of Buchrain

As part of the participation requirements of the 11th European Urban and Regional Planning Awards, Dost Stadtentwicklung presents an urban regeneration concept with the aim of giving new life to the dormant town centre of Buchrain. This concept serves as a framework for future projects in the area and its goal is to guide the growing town towards a sustainable future.

An urban regeneration concept for the town centre of Buchrain

Like many other Swiss towns and cities, Buchrain is currently experiencing a population growth, hence infrastructure is reaching its full capacity and new measures have to be taken to reorganize resources for the town's future sustainability.

An initial study of the town centre of Buchrain immediately revealed that the area which is supposed to be central to the town, is barely being used by its inhabitants and preference is given to the circulation of traffic and parking. The town centre is composed of three neighborhoods, namely the shopping area/elderly peoples' residence, the old part of town and the school/administrative area, none of which associate with one another.

The main goal of the urban regeneration concept for the town centre of Buchrain is to infuse life back to the area and make it an attractive, central place for its inhabitants by accentuating the identity of these three neighborhoods and combining these three identities together into a new town centre which acts as a focal point to the town.

This new town centre can be realized when the authorities, the population and the stakeholders come together to find a compromising solution which would meet all of their needs. The urban regeneration concept helps to put these needs together, analyse the existing situation, risks and possibilities and direct further efforts to reach short term and long term goals. However, the concept should not be seen as an overall permanent solution. Over time, individual elements of the concept might change to reflect the ever changing needs of the community.

Studying the existing situation

To better understand the issues behind the complexity of the place, various properties of the town were analysed:

History: historical analyses show the importance that trade routes had in the past, namely the connection over the river Reuss. These routes influenced the growth of the city from its early years, when the first buildings started to appear around the church and the restaurant „Adler“, down to the settlements of the industrial revolution in the neighborhood „Perlen“. Due to the fact that buildings were built along these routes, the town didn't really have a clear centre but many sparsely smaller centres. This trend continued and today's Buchrain is the result of this type of growth.

Streetscapes: typological and on-site studies show that Buchrain is predominantly made of open type building structures, meaning that the buildings are mainly small, isolated houses (in contrast to large buildings with long

facades) with plenty of space between them. This means that spaces between buildings are of high importance to the appearance and the streetscapes of the town.

Green areas: throughout the whole town and especially in the centre, it is apparent that the green areas created by the small, isolated building typology are of high importance to the image of the city. Green areas in these in-between spaces are of large variety and could potentially offer many opportunities to the inhabitants of the town.

Building typologies: the different building typologies were recognized and catalogued based on their dimensions, functions, landscaping and other factors. These results were then used to group together similar types and understand the overall relationships of the buildings to each other. This is where the concept of the three different neighborhoods came about and further developed into the final concept.

Directional orientation of the buildings: based on the prevalent orientation of the overall form of the buildings, a map was drawn up to understand differences in the overall form of the buildings between neighborhoods. It can be seen that in the old part of town, buildings have homogenic patterns of orientation while in the new parts of town, building orientations are more often based on the topography and street directions.

Public-oriented uses: it can be noticed that in the central part of town, buildings are denser and their ground floors are often oriented towards public uses. This aspect can be further emphasized in the urban regeneration concept in order to create interest in the area and encourage people to frequent the town centre.

Parking facilities: the town centre contains many outdoor parking facilities which dominate the image of the town. Alternative parking solutions have the potential of increasing the overall quality of the space making it more attractive.

Frequented spaces: currently there are a couple of small, sparsely used spaces being actively used as meeting or activity places. Apart from not having a central meeting or activity space, the problem with the current spaces is that they are inadequate for meeting and activity due to the inconvenient nature of the spaces (such as: divided by street, oriented towards parking area and oriented towards the main street).

Development potential: according to local authorities some buildings have the potential to be removed, rebuilt, repurposed or conserved. This information was catalogued and used to come up with implementation measures to give new use to dormant spaces, hence regenerating these spaces.

Dimension comparison: the space to be regenerated is 5,200m² large, circa as large as that of the town square in Horw and double as large as that of the Luzerner Mühleplatz. The overall allotted area, as stated in the contract, is comprised of 22,000m² making it too large for a town centre.

Neighborhood 1, shopping centre and elderly people's residence

This area is composed of the shopping centre, the residences for the elderly and the areas in between them. Their building typology is large scale and complex (in contrast to the small scale, simple historic buildings in the old part of town).

The aim for this area is to be further developed to bring new life inside of it.

In 2012, the town authorities issued a competition for the

extension of the elderly peoples' residence. The winner of this competition was project „Aetas“, having four floors of residences for the elderly and a publicly accessible ground floor including a cafeteria. This project will soon start being implemented and the goal is to ensure that it conforms with the urban regeneration concept, especially in the lower levels of the building where a regeneration of the spaces is necessary to bring more people and interest.

Another goal is to include and orient the shopping area as well as the residences for the elderly towards the town centre and make them an integral part of the liveliness of the place.

Neighborhood 2, old part of town

Along the main road in the old part of town, an accentuation of the local, traditional identity is required to strengthen the town's image. Visual relationships between elements are to be enhanced and the resulting green areas from the small scale, isolated old town building typology are to be defined.

The main element of the old town is the „Adler“ restaurant which today is operating at a financial loss. In order for the restaurant to be financially successful again it is to be renovated, a contemporary extension is to be added to serve its unmet needs and cross-financing opportunities should be explored.

Neighborhood 3, school and administration

School buildings need to be renovated to fit current space requirements and building standards. Studies show that it is safe to assume that in the following years, Buchrain will have a stable amount of 800 pupils. Furthermore, standards are changing and nowadays schools require more components in order to operate at the desired level. Mensas, student care facilities, social aid for primary and secondary school facilities, 1st year kindergarten and 2nd year kindergarten are a necessity at this day and age.

The town's administration building, situated on the main street facing a roundabout, currently hosts the administrations' offices on the ground and first floor while the upper floor is used to host apartments. The needs of the administration are not met, hence solutions will be studied to come to an appropriate result.

Inclusive concept development

The urban regeneration concept for the town of Buchrain was developed using an „inclusive concept development“ method meaning that the authorities, the population and the stakeholders were involved together with the planning team in the decision process.

These people were divided into two groups, namely the „Echo group“ and the „Workshop group“. The Echo group had the task of preparing the workshops together with the planning team and its members included the town mayor, the project leader, three town councillors, property owners, and town administrators. On the other hand, the Workshop group was made up of 60 people coming together from various organisations, parties and committees representing the people of Buchrain. Their task was to take part in the workshops organised by the Echo group to voice decisions, evaluate the planning of the town centre and ensure the quality of the project.

Workshop 1 took place on the 6th of February 2014 during which basic information and analyses were presented. During this workshop, the three neighborhoods were introduced by their respective project leaders and the focal points for future efforts decided.

On the 5th of May 2014, workshop 2 took place. In this workshop different proposals were evaluated including the concept of accentuating the three neighborhoods and combining them through a central point, the additions, extensions and removal of various buildings to fit the users' requirements, and the modification of streets and landscaping to fit the overall concept. The attendees gave feedback on these proposals which was then used to further develop the concept.

After further developing the concept, a third workshop took place on the 21st of August 2014 to finalise the decision process and come to a final proposal. During this workshop, questions about the functions of the new town centre, the relationships of the different parts of the town centre and the framework for future projects were evaluated. The feedback received during these sessions was used to come up with implementation measures to be used as a guideline for future development of the town.



Implementation measures

For the new town centre to materialize, it is important that the relevant authorities and the community take action. The implementation measures are there as an action plan for the town administration to implement. It is divided into stages to be achieved over a long term.

Measure 1, Elderly peoples' residence extension (Project „Aetas“): project Aetas is designed to strengthen the image of the new town centre. The planned Café on the ground floor should further strengthen the liveliness of the area by having a transparent (glazed) front and giving the possibility for people to be able to sit outside in front of the shopping area. Other complementary uses like playing areas, fitness, therapy, health related areas, and administration offices should be explored.

Measure 2, the opening of the shopping area ground floor: within the framework of the urban regeneration concept, the ground floor of the shopping centre is to be opened and oriented towards the new town centre to redirect the flow of shoppers to and from the centre, thus rendering the area more lively. The opening of the shopping centre ground floor was studied and 3 possibilities emerged:

- restructuring the interiors of the shopping centre in a way that provides a connection to the town centre
- extending the ground floor towards the town centre
- adding an annex next to the existing shopping centre next to the town centre

These possibilities were discussed with the relevant stakeholders of the shopping centre and a tendency emerged which pointed towards the possibility of extending the shopping centre. On this idea, the concept was further developed.

Measure 3, interior restructuring of the „Eglihaus“: like in the previous measures, the Eglihaus is also to be opened from its ground floor to relate it more to the centre. This is done by restructuring its interiors and giving the ground floor a new function: a cultural, leisure, commercial or service oriented use. The aim of this restructuring is to appeal to as many age groups as possible and create the most interest. Both the new functions of the Eglihaus as well as those of the project Aetas should complement each other. A study of the best function combination should be performed.

Measure 4, development of the main street: to accentuate the old part of town neighborhood, the main street and the area around it is to be redeveloped to fit today's standards and requirements.

Firstly, the sidewalk is to be elevated by using traditional pavement blocks. Different paving and flooring materials are to be implemented in order to delineate the periphery of the town centre. Other materials like bushes, shrubs, trees and fences are to be used to draw the limits of public, private and semi-private areas.

Buildings of historical value are to be recognised and maintained while new additions are to fit in harmony with their surroundings.

Measure 5, renovation and extension of restaurant „Adler“: for the restaurant Adler to be financially sound, a renovation and extension of its facilities is required. The historic fabric of the restaurant is to be conserved while later additions to the building are to be replaced by a contemporary extension consisting of a two storey building which would host a kitchen, an apartment for the personnel and technical functions. The upper level of the Adler is to be reused into an event hall. Outdoor dining facilities are also to be incorporated into the design.

To fund the financially demanding renovations and extensions of the restaurant, an addition in the new town centre is to be erected: building A. This new building will host commercial and service functions on the ground floor in order to open up flow to the public while integrating apartments on the upper 3 floors of the building.

Measure 6, conservation of main street buildings 28, 30, 32, 34: these four historically valuable buildings are not directly included in the regeneration concept, however, due to their central location, they are an important part of the old part of town as well as the town centre. In case the owners see the need to renovate the buildings, it is important that they are included in the regeneration framework as part of the old town neighborhood and handled as such.

Measure 7, school buildings renovation: the school needs additional spaces to supplement existing curricula, namely an aula, music rooms, a social work room, a headmaster's office, an administration room, group meeting rooms and special purpose rooms. These requirements are to be fitted into a newly renovated and extended school building while the aula is to be situated into the new building G.

Outdoor space requirements include: connection paths between the school and the town centre, attractive recess facilities for pupils without parking spaces on school grounds.

Measure 8, redesign of the town administration building: studies show that the existing administration building does not fulfill current requirements. As a solution, the following possibilities were evaluated:

- interior restructuring of the building to meet current needs (including repurposing existing apartments on the upper floor into administration offices)
- repurposing of the current building into apartments and integrating the town administration into a new building in the town centre
- removal of the current building and integrating the town administration into a new building in the town centre

The evaluation of these possibilities showed that the removal of the existing administration building would not be in the interest of the town due to the urban-historic value the building has. Ideally is the building repurposed into apartments and the administration integrated into a more central part of town.

Measure 9, erection of building G: studies suggest that functional requirements in the town centre are currently not met, namely the aula, administrative rooms for the school, town administration and commercial/service functions. These functions are to be integrated into building G which in turn make it an important new addition in the town centre. It is proposed to keep the building between 3 to 4 floors high so that it relates well to the different levels that make up the town centre.

Measure 10, underground parking facility: a new underground parking facility is to be built to host parking spaces for the school, for the town administration, for clients of the restaurant Adler, for existing residents living within the periphery of the town centre, for the future residents which building A will bring with it and for visitors of the new town centre. Altogether, there should be around 100 underground parking spaces.

The parking entrance is to be accessed between the restaurant Adler and the town administration building. Five pedestrian exits are to be integrated, two on the level of the school, one next to building A and one next to building G and another one in the new town centre directly next to the Adler to encourage the flow of pedestrians directly into the centre. The last exit is to be complemented with a WC.

Underground parking spaces dedicated to the clients of the restaurant Adler will be financed by the restaurant owners while the rest is to be financed by the town authorities.

Measure 11, the new town centre masterplan: the new town centre is to be redesigned to include a new circulation concept as well as new recreation possibilities. This new masterplan stretches from the new square formed by the restaurant Adler down to the shopping area and elderly residence to the east including the area of the Eglihaus. The masterplan includes two new building additions (building A and building G) forming an integral part of the new town centre.

With the use of a continuous leveled ground (without pavement-street level division), the space appears coherent and connected throughout. The street will be converted into a pedestrian area and the previously dividing effect of the street will be broken. Vehicular traffic will still be able to flow, however at a lower speed (20 or 30 km/h). Instead of having typical dividing traffic elements on the street, „soft“ elements like lighting, sunken bollards and landscaping are to be used in order to keep the area as a continuous, borderless area.

The continuous floor will be of asphalt or other similar materials while green islands will divide the homogeneous spaces and provide recreation possibilities for the users. These green islands are a combination of pergolas, groups of potted trees, seating areas, water fountains and playing areas. The largest island will take place in front of the Adler and with a pergola-like structure, form space for a new bus stop, a cafeteria with outdoor tables and chairs and seating possibilities. On the other side, a smaller island will be situated forming a pergola roof over a bus stop and a kiosk.

Measure 12, new square in front of the restaurant „Adler“: this newly formed square should serve as the central square of Buchrain thus connecting the west side to the east side of the town centre together. The largest green island which lies in the square serves to even out the resulting slanted landscape and acts as a platform for activities.

The floor of the island is different to the rest in the sense that it is made of patterned tiles instead of asphalt to encourage the user to spend more time in the area. These spaces have plenty of tree shading and seating possibilities making them perfect for events like flea markets, outdoor concerts and display stands.

Measure 13, new meeting and shopping area: the new project Aetas, the Eglihaus and the shopping centre together should create a new main meeting area for the town of Buchrain. This new meeting area is to be coherent with the square next to the Adler. For this reason, complementary green islands together with pergolas, grouped trees, seating, fountains and playing areas are the main features of this space making it relatable to larger green island on the other side.

One of these green islands is to have an access to the underground parking facilities while another island can include the cafeteria of Aetas to create interest and coherence with the other green islands. An additional island is to host a bus stop and a kiosk grouped together under a pergola.

Measure 14, removal of Unterdorfstrasse 4 building: although the building is a worthy conservation element and could accentuate the old town neighborhood, due to

its central position and conflicting nature with the regeneration masterplan of the new town centre, the building on Unterdorfstrasse 4 is to be removed.

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