

# **OBERHAUSEN "CENTER" — MARKETSTREET UNDER ONE ROOF**

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## **STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Oberhausen/Germany is said to be the birth place of the Ruhr industry. At present we can witness a unique structural change in the history of this city. Well into the sixties still an internationally renowned industrial location for coal and steel Oberhausen shall, according to the plans of local and regional governments, be developed into a center of service industries of top European niveau within the next three years.

This development was and is the logical consequence of its salient position in the nexus of important European traffic routes. If one includes nearby Holland which is situated to the northwest Oberhausen can draw on the resources of a substantial market area. Attractive services provided, it can and shall be developed into an international center of attraction for more than 13 million people within a travel time radius of only 60 minutes.

In its present borders, the town comprises the communities of Sterkrade, Osterfeld and old Oberhausen which had been independent up to 1929. On their joint boundaries a competitive metropolis of coal related and heavy industry developed, and that particularly after the Second World War. Oberhausen had excellent connections on water, rail and road with all the supraregional transportation networks. The continuous economic power of the settlement area could, apparently, not be questioned.

At the beginning of the sixties Oberhausen was hit the harder by the downfall of this seemingly safe economic branch. Up to 1992 almost 40 000 jobs were lost in the city. Within 30 years Oberhausen lost everything it had

gained in the years since its foundation. In the heart of the city a huge industrial wasteland was left.

## **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

The irrevocable loss of its traditional industries forced the town planners, at the end of the eighties, to face two important objectives. First, how could the focus of Oberhausen, from a functional as well as a town planning perspective, be activated, be convincingly reclaimed? Second, how and in which of their functions can the various historically grown suburban centers be protected and strengthened, how can the special local attractiveness be promoted or developed?

As a solution to the first objective the future center of Oberhausen will be constructed until 1996 within this planning area. A wide range of uses shall take on a pacemaker function. It comprises predominantly private services in cultural activities, entertainment, sports and other leisure industries, in business and commerce, restaurants and hotels, shopping and living areas. Its own local railway link is as necessary as the construction of huge multi-storey car parks and other parking facilities. Buildings under conservation within the industrial wasteland area will, albeit in different functions, form an integral part of the "New Focus". In this way, the former center of industrial production Oberhausen wants to regain its international position in its future function as a center of service industries.

The project will compensate, thus the prognosis, for the loss of attractiveness compared to its neighbouring cities which the inhabitants complain about. In addition the outflow of purchasing power will be stopped and functions will be taken over by the project which the historically grown suburban centers could never really fulfill.

Thus the present city-"center" in old Oberhausen will again be able to focus on its supply functions for the approximately 100 000 inhabitants of its immediate catchment area. A unique fact facilitates this objective: com-

pared to the negative development in other big cities, no substantial loss of inhabitants to the suburban (fringe) areas has taken place. Even the destructions of the Second World War have not changed this fact; this can be illustrated by a comparison of this aerial photograph with an official plan of 1920. Apart from an increased building density of the streets north and south of the Marketstreet the old and the new ground plan of the city are identical.

In addition this means that the earlier mentioned loss of attractiveness and its atmosphere as a place of communication are essentially connected with its present outward appearance.

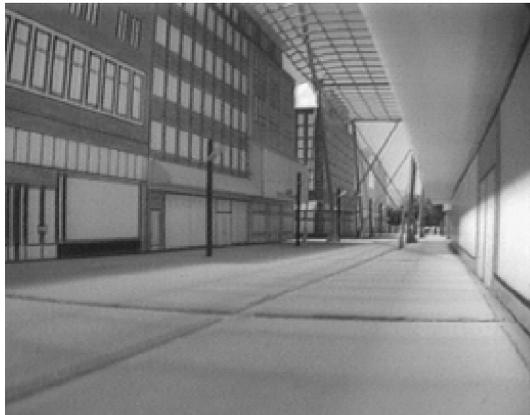
An architectural competition of 1989 has, by taking the described conditions into account, focused areas of conflict and has, in the meantime, also offered possible solutions. According to these solutions, the "Marketstreet"-project is to stand up to a comparison with the "New Focus" by developing out of the historically grown structures, so one hopes, a unique ambiente.

The present concept envisages the subdivision of the street into three sections: In the western part an ensemble of columns symbolises the topic *green* in this section of the Marketstreet. Then follow two rows of trees. This part of the street can, as before, be used by cars. The pedestrian area begins where Marketstreet meets Friedrich-Karl-Street. This section is characterized by a two-row avenue, includes the old market and ends at the Eduard-Berg-Platz.

In the eastern part, one enters the pedestrian area from Mühlheimer-Staße, at the gate of columns which can be seen on the left hand side. Then *water*, in conjunction with an irregularly rhythmatised row of trees, will characterise the atmosphere of this section of the street. It ends at the City-forum and this sketch is to provide a superficial impression of the situation from the town planning aspect.

Thus being prepared by demanding topics at both ends, this is the beginning of that part of Marketstreet which reminds us most of its pre-war appearance. Its width and its height of buildings correspond to the

*Figures 1 a, b and c  
Comparison between  
reality (a), the model (c),  
and the superimposement  
of both (b).*



original cross section of the street. Occasionally we can still find historic buildings which preserve some of the original atmosphere.

This middle section is accompanied by a free-swinging roof. It spans the entire space up to the Eduard-Berg-Platz in four sections of approximately 100 meters each.

The Marketstreet thus also receives its "New Focus". The realisation of this courageous and trend-setting idea of the Berlin architects Kossel&Quick shall provide the character of an up-market shopping arcade. Whether their idea is realistic, has already been examined from its legal, technical and climatic perspectives. The urban space perspective is to supplement the various examinations which, in part, are still going on.

## **ANALYSIS OF URBAN SPACE**

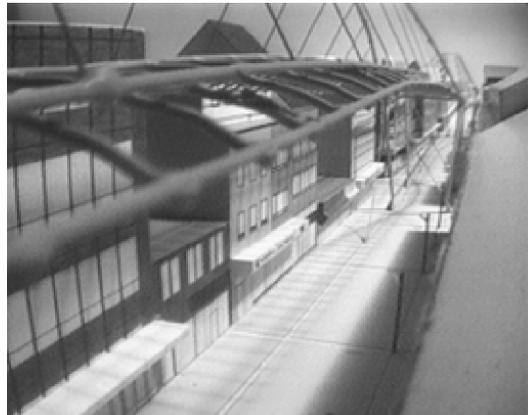
The investigation focuses on the urban section between Wörthstraße and Eduard-Berg-Platz.

These points mark seven positions altogether, which are to topicalise the questions which arise at each of these points. The film material, based on reality and model, makes an atmospheric comparison between the present and the future situation possible, by using the technique of superimposing reality and model. Nine takes shall be analysed and compared in this way.

1: In the given line of vision the first location characterises the basic idea of the roof from the central position, the street space opening up on both sides into side streets frequented by cars. In the depth of the space, the free swinging roof gains its effect independent of height and type of front of the accompanying buildings. The shopping arcade conveys an independent, unique flair. A slight reduction of this positive impression is caused, depending on the sun position, by the more or less direct emphasis of the supporting construction.

2: Location 2 (figures 1 a,b,c) characterises in a diagonal line of vision the lateral position in the area of weather protection devices which are differently shaped in each case: Although the roof of the arcade is only partly

*Figures 2 a, b and c*



visible, the impression gained in Location 1 is intensified. The space seems enclosed, yet very airy and provides a pleasant and shady atmosphere. The effect of the particular lightness of the roof construction rests on the specific daylight conditions: the supporting system will hardly be noticed in its real function.

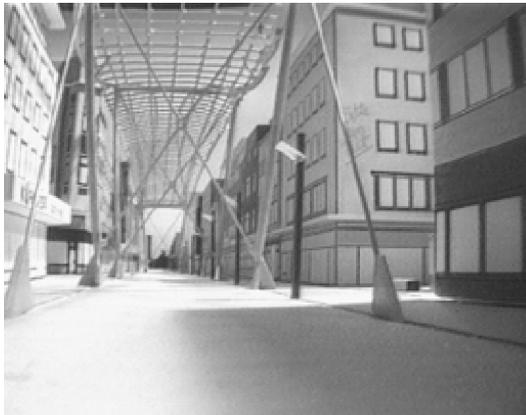
3: If we move upwards in the street space it becomes evident why weather protection in the shop front area cannot be dispensed with. On the one hand, this zone is the main place for visitors; on the other hand, the roof of the arcade loses here, at this point, an important part of its function, for instance when it rains, by abandoning the two meter wide side-strip. As the quality of the basic idea depends on this particular feature, a solution of the weather protection zone which is in line with the main roof construction is absolutely necessary. This solution could possibly provide a basis of formal rules as regards shapes and applied materials. Transparency is desirable for the canopy zone. This also applies to the view from top to bottom. Finally, the utmost under-roof-position illustrates that the atmosphere of the flats and offices on the upper floors which face the street is by no means impaired.

4: The last remark also applies in principle to the position above the roof. The technical and aesthetic attractiveness of the apparently free-swinging construction faces an unimpaired in-sight into the depth of the "never-ending" street space. An evaluation of these diverse qualities of "views" can be left to the onlooker: a question of perception, mood, and taste ( figures 2 a,b,c).

5: The same holds true for the view into the opposite direction, towards the end of the roof.

6: This location describes the central position in front of the entrance to the arcade at the Eduard-Berg-Platz and confirms again the basic impression, but this time into the opposite direction of the first perspective. The depth of the roofed space which is twice as big here literally creates the effect of suction and thus strengthens the attractive appeal. Light conditions make the perception of the wave-like vibrations of the roof possible and,

*Figures 3 a,b and c*



according to the time of the day, allow for very different sentiments within the space which, however, can hardly be caught by simulation.

7: A different situation prevails in the central position vertical to the arcade from one of the pedestrian side streets. This area could easily benefit from the inviting gesture of the previous location. This — literally — "running" roof and the more casually set up support construction display no connection with the sometimes particularly attractive branches of the wider shopping area. A devaluation of these sections of the streets cannot be ruled out. Perhaps the mutual relationship in conjunction with a solution of the canopy problems will succeed. Despite this reservation, one can add that the pre-simulation fear that the roof might have an adverse effect on the side entrances could not be verified by the film material as can clearly be seen.

8: The evaluation of this side street from a diagonally shifted position is similar. In addition, the conviction of the onlooker is increased that the roof has rather a positive effect on the relation of the two streets.

9: The last location, situated directly in the nexus of the arcade and the previously investigated side streets, characterises the situation at the support quadrangle (figures 3 a,b,c).

Despite the lean support construction one cannot feel but a slight confusion, caused by the multitude of single elements and their arrangement which, for a layman, is difficult to comprehend. This fact is increased by an unpleasant overlap with the prospective lighting system and deflects from the extraordinary effect of the roof proper. One can but hope that the dimensions of the elements of support and tension as well as their anchoring are realistic as otherwise this could easily lead to a dinosaur effect.

In line with this last impression, it seems obvious to suggest that the system of supports be reconsidered under the beforementioned aspects of formal shape. The coordination of weather protection zone and main roof and a solution of the lighting problems which can possibly be

combined with it are to be included in the recommendation.

This, however, does not mean to relativise the extraordinary impression of a fascinating and comprehensive idea.