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## **The MiKa Project in Karlsruhe, Germany: Conversion of a Military Area into a Community-Based Residential Area**

### **I. Introductory information**

#### **I.1. Introductory information about the study framework**

The following study describes the outcome of a survey conducted in the course of the European research project ReNew Town (ReNew Town, 2011). ReNew Town seeks to reduce territorial inequalities within Central European cities and is therefore searching for good practice examples of urban regeneration activities in various European countries. For the following market research study a good practice example in Karlsruhe in the southwest of Germany was chosen to illustrate how a former military area can be transformed into a residential area of high social value.

The following text describes the history of the so called 'MiKa' project:

In 1994 four housing initiatives decided to develop a community oriented housing project on a former military base in the north of Karlsruhe, about 2,5 km away from the inner city (MiKa.

MieterInneninitiative Karlsruhe eG, n.d.). The barracks were originally built in 1937 by the German Armed Forces and were occupied by the American Army after the World War II. in 1945

(Bundesinstituts für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR) im Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (BBR) , 2003). The area covers an area of approximately 16,5 acre (MiKa.

MieterInneninitiative Karlsruhe eG, n.d.).

In 1990 the American Army left Karlsruhe and the barrack area lay derelict for a couple of years except one building, the former library of the American Army which was adopted by the municipal library in Karlsruhe and made publicly available in 1996 through the help of many volunteers.

In 1997, housing initiatives founded a tenant initiative called 'MiKa' and after several negotiations with the owner of the area, a municipal housing association, the MiKa started to convert four barrack buildings into apartment houses with 86 apartments and living space for more than 150 people (MiKa. MieterInneninitiative Karlsruhe eG, n.d.). The MiKa project is a completely self-financed project and was funded neither by the national programmes 'Urban Renewal West' and 'Socially Integrative City' nor by any other funding programme for urban regeneration<sup>1</sup>.

The MiKa initiative is a cooperative and the buildings belong to the community since 2003. Every resident buys cooperative shares and the capital resources are used to implement renovation works or community projects. The cooperative is basically democratically organised and the organs consist of an executive board, a supervisory board and the general assembly (MiKa. MieterInneninitiative Karlsruhe eG, 2011). These organisational mechanisms are supported by four housing communities and within them working groups plan and implement particular activities.

The particular character of the MiKa tenant initiative lies in its community oriented aspect: The MiKa is a basically democratically organised community and the whole conversion of the buildings was planned by the people themselves (with the help of an architectural office). The MiKa project aimed to bring people with various backgrounds - for example different nationalities, disabled people, old as well as young residents - together to create a new form of housing where everyone is equally respected and the living space is collaboratively designed. In addition to the apartment buildings, an arts centre and a restaurant were established, so that the area offers a wide range of leisure, cultural and educational activities.

The present survey on the 'MiKa' started in December 2011 and within three weeks, six individuals were interviewed. The interviewees were identified according to the project guideline provided by the ReNew Town project partners: The first interview was conducted with an architect who was responsible for the conversion of the barrack buildings into housing apartments. Furthermore, instead of an urban planner an inhabitant of the housing initiative was chosen. As the MiKa project was completely self-organised and no professional urban planner was involved, every inhabitant can be regarded as an urban planner. In addition, a member of the local authority of Karlsruhe was interviewed as well as a journalist who attended the project in the past, especially in the beginning of its planning and implementation phase. The last two individuals were selected from cultural institutions which are located in the MiKa project area.

As survey mode, face-to-face interviews were chosen and the interviews were conducted at the particular workplace of each interviewee. The interview partners were contacted by phone and further

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<sup>1</sup> The MiKa initiative received loans from the federal state government and from a bank for the start-up financing of the project.

information was provided to them by e-mail. All of the interviewees immediately agreed to the interviewing process and the interviews were conducted at the end of the working day.

## **I.2. Introductory information about Germany's national policy on urban regeneration**

The reunification was not only an endurance test for East German states; it was also a challenge for the Western cities which suddenly had to deal with an increase of population and several social problems (e.g. high unemployment rate, demand for housing etc.). While the Western countries expected a loss of population during the 1980s, the opening of the East German states and other East European countries led to the revival of urban extension projects (Harlander, 1998).

At the same time the East German states were confronted with the loss of population and high vacancy rates. Because of this a committee for 'Structural Changes in the Housing Sector of the States of the Former East Germany' ('Wohnungswirtschaftlicher Strukturwandel in den neuen Bundesländern') was founded by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development. The committee investigated the dimension of housing vacancy in East Germany and asserted that 13 % of the housing stocks (approximately one million apartments) were affected by the loss of residents (Pfeiffer, Simons, & Porsch, 2000). Therefore, the committee recommended to establish a new demolition programme and to strengthen ownership development (Pfeiffer, Simons, & Porsch, 2000). In 2002 the commission's recommendations were realised in Germany's largest housing programme 'Urban Renewal East' ('Stadtumbau Ost')<sup>2</sup>. In an early stage of the programme a competition was held for municipalities to develop an 'Integrated Urban Development Concept' ('Integrierte Stadtentwicklungskonzepte' (ISEK)) for getting financial support out of the 'Urban Renewal East' programme. From 2002 till 2009 2,5 billion euros were provided to approximately 400 municipalities for the demolition of their vacant housing stocks and for development strategies to revitalise districts and city quarters (Bundestransferstelle Stadtumbau Ost, 2004-2011). The programme will continue until 2016 (Bundestransferstelle Stadtumbau Ost, 2004-2011).

After the establishment of the 'Urban Renewal' programme in East Germany, the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development (BMVBS) started a research programme called 'Experimental Housing and Urban Development (ExWoSt)' in West Germany in 2002 to analyse the dimension of urban development processes in West Germany and therefore to get more knowledge about the need for support measures for West German municipalities (Bundestransferstelle Stadtumbau West, 2002). The research project resulted in the setting up of the programme 'Urban Renewal West' ('Stadtumbau West')<sup>3</sup> in 2004 which is similar to the programme in East Germany, but while the latter focuses more on the demolition of the housing stock, the Western programme refrained from

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stadtumbau-ost.info/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.stadtumbauwest.de/>

placing emphasis on any kind of development or regeneration strategies (Liebmann & Karsten, 2009). The programme existed until 2009 and more than 300 municipalities benefited from the overall financial support of 342 billion euros (Bundestransferstelle Stadtumbau West, 2002).

While the large urban renewal programmes 'Urban Renewal East' and 'Urban Renewal West' focus more on the spatial development trends another funding programme was established in 1999 which aimed to set a focal point on the social changes that came along with the reunification. Therefore the 'Socially Integrative City' programme ('Programm Soziale Stadt')<sup>4</sup> was established to stop deterioration processes in selected city quarters in both East and West Germany. The idea of the 'Socially Integrative City' programme is simple: The improvement of the quality of life of local residents in certain city quarters. Even though the programme has a much broader scope and acts on various levels of district development such as improvement of employment, education, district culture, environment and public spaces (Bundestransferstelle Soziale Stadt, 2000-2011)<sup>5</sup>. What unites the various fields of activity is the fact that the 'Socially Integrative City' programme supports smaller urban regeneration projects on the neighbourhood scale. All these projects are characterised by a high stakeholder involvement especially with regards to local residents. To the present day, hundreds of smaller projects have been realised with support of the 'Socially Integrative City' and a lot of cities established a so called 'Neighbourhood Management System' in urban areas with (socialist) burden. The 'Neighbourhood Management System' is important to strengthen the information flow between local residents and municipalities. Therefore in most of the municipalities which were funded by the 'Socially Integrative City' programme, a neighbourhood management office or a neighbourhood management team was established which is responsible for the communication between municipal representatives and the local community.

In 2010 the German Bundestag decided to shorten the national budget for the programme extremely, so that the funding for socially integrative measures ended up in 2010 (Bundestransferstelle Soziale Stadt, 2000-2011).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sozialestadt.de/en/programm/>

<sup>5</sup> See the detailed description of the 13 fields of action on <http://www.sozialestadt.de/en/programm/>

### **I.3. Introductory information about the regional policy on urban regeneration in Baden-Wuerttemberg**

Baden-Wuerttemberg is the third largest state within the 16 states of the Federal Republic of Germany. Having been divided into three states for ages, Baden-Wuerttemberg was founded in 1952 and can be regarded as a state with a high quality of life with regard to the satisfaction of the population, a high economic capability and a low unemployment rate (Huschka, 2002).

After the World War II the state was governed both by the French and the American occupying forces. Therefore Baden-Wuerttemberg does not possess socialist heritage, however there are a lot former military sites that were laid waste after the removal of the occupying forces.

Baden-Wuerttemberg is not affected by the loss of population so far and demographical changes are also relatively low compared with other German states. From 1990 to 2010 the population increased from 9,822,027 to 10,753,880 people (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Wuerttemberg, 2011a)<sup>6</sup>. This may also be traced back to the fact that the economy is relatively strong and the unemployment rate is currently the second lowest among the German states (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Wuerttemberg, 2011b)<sup>7</sup>. Its economic activity is dominated by the automotive industry and a lot of research and development, especially in the technology sector, is carried out as well. Apart from that 38% of the people in employment work in small and medium-sized companies of the manufacturing industry, which is a high rate in comparison to the other German states (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2010).

Due to the fact that Baden-Wuerttemberg is relatively strong with regard to demographical or urban changes in comparison to other German states, urban development activities concentrate more on the conversion of former military areas and on the revitalisation of inner cities (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2010)<sup>8</sup>, especially the projects within the 'Urban Renewal West' programme. Apart from that, Baden-Wuerttemberg also participated in the 'Socially Integrative City' programme and implemented projects on the neighbourhood scale.

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<sup>6</sup> For further information and more statistical data see <http://www.statistik-bw.de/>

<sup>7</sup> 4,9% in Baden-Wuerttemberg. Bavaria has the lowest unemployment rate with 4,5% and the average rate for Germany is 7,7%

<sup>8</sup> Only one area can be regarded as problematical with regard to urban shrinkage and the loss of population, the so called Swabian Alp which is located in the southwest of Baden-Wuerttemberg. The area's location apart from large towns like Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Heidelberg and the decline of the textile industry during the 1980s caused the removal of population and housing vacancies.

## II. Characteristics of Karlsruhe – A city of science and education, new technologies and innovation

### II.1 Socio-demographic development

The city of Karlsruhe was founded in 1715 and is referred to as the ‘City of Justice’ due to the fact that the two highest German courts, the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany (‘Bundesverfassungsgericht’) and the Federal Court of Justice of Germany (‘Bundesgerichtshof’) are located within the city. Karlsruhe lies in the northwest of Baden-Wuerttemberg, near the upper Rhine and has therefore a prominent position nearby the Black Forest, the state of Rhineland-Palatinate and the neighbouring France. Karlsruhe is divided into 27 urban districts and the main districts are named according to the points of the compass. With a population of 283,048 people in 2010, Karlsruhe is the third largest city in Baden-Wuerttemberg and since 1999 the population is steadily growing.

This growth cannot be traced back to the natural population movement but rather to the migration balance (see table 1).

		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
town	migration balance	3699	488	1274	1262	2968
	natural growth	-596	-718	-504	-166	-250
	total growth	3013	-230	770	1096	2718

Source (SISKA, 2011)<sup>9</sup>

Although the average age of the inhabitants is between 41.0 and 42.8 years (see table 2), Karlsruhe becomes more and more attractive to younger people between 16 and 26. Most of the people that immigrated to Karlsruhe since 1999 were young adolescences seeking for an excellent environment to study or to begin an apprenticeship (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2009b).

		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
town	men	n/a	39.0	39.8	40.6	41.1
	women	n/a	43.9	44.1	44.3	44.5
	total	n/a	41.5	42.0	42.5	42.8

Source (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Wuerttemberg, 2012)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Data as per 31<sup>st</sup> of December in each year

<sup>10</sup> Data as per 31<sup>st</sup> of December in each year

## II.2 Economic development

Karlsruhe is an economically strong municipality within Baden-Wuerttemberg and can be regarded as one of the most economically powerful areas within the European Union. The gross domestic product comes up to 128% of the EU average (Thalheimer, 2005) and Karlsruhe has made an extensive progress with regard to its economic development during the last 20 years. The city and its surroundings are attractive locations for innovation businesses and research institutions today. Furthermore the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)<sup>11</sup> was nominated to be a part of the 'Excellence Initiative of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research' ('Exzellenzinitiative'), a funding programme to support excellent research institutions and to strengthen Germany's competitiveness in science and innovation. The proximity of economy and science as well as the ambition of science and business to cooperate with each other strengthens Karlsruhe's capacity as a location for innovation and also as an attractive place to work especially for younger and high educated people.

The unemployment rate of Karlsruhe is relatively low compared to Baden-Wuerttemberg and Germany as a whole (see table 3). The most important employers with over 10.000 employees are EnBW AG (energy industry), Dm (retail industry, drugstore products), Michelin (tyres manufacturing industry) and Stora Enso (paper manufacturing industry). Nevertheless and apart from the big companies it is also interesting to state that Karlsruhe has got a lot of small and medium-sized companies which benefit from the technology and innovation environment.

unemployment level	1990	1991	1995	2000	2005	2010
absolute	n/a	5.600	9.571	9.153	13.045	8.973
in per-cents	n/a	5.3	8.4	6.5	9.1	6.1

Source (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Wuerttemberg, 2012)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In 2006 the University of Karlsruhe merged together with the 'Forschungszentrum', a research centre within the Helmholtz Association, Germany's largest scientific organisation

<sup>12</sup> From 1991 until 1995 data as per 30<sup>th</sup> of June, from 1996 until 2010 data as per 30<sup>th</sup> of September

### II.3 Urban development

When Karlsruhe was founded in 1715, it was planned with a castle in its centre. To the present day, the castle is Karlsruhe's visual flagship, due the fact that 32 streets spread out from the castle into the city like the ribs of a fan. Therefore Karlsruhe is also called the 'Fan City' ('Fächerstadt'). Karlsruhe is characterised by classicistic buildings in the inner city as well as by later art nouveau buildings, but one can also find a lot of structures built of concrete that were constructed after the World War II as an answer to the destruction it had caused.

Until 1936 urban planning in Karlsruhe focused on the technical construction of buildings due to the fact that there was no independent institution for urban development and several municipal departments were responsible for the spatial planning (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2009a). In 1936 an independent department for urban planning was founded which still exists and focuses on a more integrative strategy of urban development on the basis of three pillars: Economy, Ecology and Social Life (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2009a). The department for urban planning has taken over various functions in urban planning and is responsible for land-use plan, traffic planning, shaping of the public domain, urban renewal activities and for the communication with and the involvement of local residents, institutions and other municipal departments (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2009a). After the World War II and on the initiative of Karlsruhe's mayor, Günther Klotz, the city soon began to discuss restructuring plans. Karlsruhe soon faced the situation that the birth and immigrant rates started to increase after the end of the war and it was necessary to discuss new housing opportunities for the inhabitants. In this course, as in many other German states, the first housing estates for several thousand people were built, often separated from each other by greenbelts. In 1952 an architectural competition was held for the construction of large housing estates and in 1954 42 newly built houses with more than 1.000 apartments were completed. One of the main interesting projects between the end of the World War and the late 50's was the transformation of a part of a former forest land at the Northern city edge of Karlsruhe into a residential area ('Hardtwald'). Until 1958 250 apartments were constructed for Karlsruhe's inhabitants, and the US Army decided to develop an American housing area for the members of the military right next to it. These two interventions supported the expansion of Karlsruhe and a completely new district was created (Hinkel, 2002). Interestingly, this area became again important for Karlsruhe after the departure of the American occupying forces when the military area and the American housing barracks became vacant. The present study describes the project initiative 'MiKa' as a part of the transformation of the former military area into a residential area for inhabitants of Karlsruhe. Although the Mika project was realised in West Germany, it is not only an interesting project for Western countries but also for East European states. Both, in East and West Europe, similar urban development strategies took place right after the end of the World War II: large, peripherally located housing estates were constructed and military areas were established.



Even until today, these areas fall vacant and both parts of Germany, East and West, had to develop projects and activities to regenerate vacancy affected housing or military areas.

In the contrast to the expansion projects after the World War II, Karlsruhe's urban planning focuses more on the inner development of the city than on the outer development today, which means that already existing places should be used for re-development activities before new land is being developed (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2009a).

Especially in urban regeneration activities or in the field of shaping public domains, the urban planning department tries to motivate local residents to participate in the modification processes for districts where residents live. Regarding this, Karlsruhe is also one of the 375 German municipalities that participated in the 'Socially Integrative City' programme (see chapter 1.2). The eastern part of Karlsruhe, called 'Oststadt' ('East City'), is such an example within the 'Socially Integrative City' programme where local residents were highly involved in the decision making about regeneration activities on the neighbourhood scale. This project focused on four fields of activity: 'Children and Youth', 'Social and Cultural Cooperation', 'Places, Green Areas and Traffic' as well as on 'Living and Living Areas' (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2011a). To plan and implement various projects within these fields of activity, a steering committee consisting of representatives from local authorities and various citizens groups was founded and planning and moderation workshops were held to involve the local community. Finally more than 25 projects were realised between 2001 and 2003, for example project days on art interventions, women's breakfast for women with migration background, citizen's appraisal to improve the road network, and the regeneration of courtyards (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2011a).

At present Karlsruhe focuses more on the development and implementation of a large-scale project called 'Masterplan 2015', an integrative strategy to make Karlsruhe more attractive with regard to the city's 300<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2015<sup>13</sup>. The 'Masterplan' project has twelve fields of activity, for example 'City Scape and Town Planning', 'Traffic Planning', 'University, Science, Research, Innovative Technologies', 'Culture' and 'Cooperation' etc. (Stadt Karlsruhe, 2011b). These twelve fields of activity were identified in an extensive process where municipal departments as well as citizens were involved. The implementation of various projects within the twelve fields of the 'Masterplan 2015' requires a large number of actors from various sectors, such as local companies, research institutions, local authorities, associations, business development departments and local residents.

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly projects that were funded by the national programme 'Urban Renewal West' played a tangential role in the urban development activities in Karlsruhe.

### **III. Results from the survey – The MiKa project: Conversion of a former military base into a residential area**

The housing area consists of four apartment buildings formerly used as military barracks. A further building with a restaurant, a cultural association and an American library is located within the area. In the public space, one can find gardens as well as an animal barn and a playground for children.

All of the interview partners rated the quality of life in the project area as very good. Interestingly all interviewees reported that in 1994, when four housing initiatives identified the former military area for the establishment of a self-governed housing project, the city's public institutions were very sceptical. All of the six responders stated that the vision behind the MiKa project was to develop an alternative way of living, a self-organised and self-governed housing type with the community aspect as the basis for all development and living-together activities. Only two interview partners, including the inhabitant, mentioned that the MiKa provides cheap living space as a part of the vision.

One interview partner emphasised the fact that the MiKa residents define the term 'community' in its original way, not in the sense of modern cooperatives but more associated with social values like equality and participation. With regard to this, two interview partners noted that it is an irony of fate, that the MiKa initiative acquired a former military base of all development areas.

Some of the interviewees explained the reason for the criticism by public institutions and quoted that the local authorities were afraid of getting a left oriented political enclave within the City of Karlsruhe. One interview partner remembered that this fear came from existing problems with people who lived in caravans as well as from the existence of squatters in Karlsruhe during the 1990s. Another one said that the MiKa project was exploited for political battles between the ruling parties. Furthermore it was planned to develop wasteland areas, that lay around the military area, into residential areas and the local authorities were afraid of not getting their newly built apartments sold or rented. On the other hand the local authorities did not know what to do with the former military area and it was discussed to demolish the military buildings before the MiKa initiative had the idea to establish their housing community there.

Those involved in the project planning were the people from the MiKa initiative themselves, the municipal housing cooperative as the area owner, as well as the local government. Support came from individuals and particular political parties or projects, for example from the Greens, similar projects in the Cities of Tuebingen and Freiburg, as well as from single persons. It is unclear what local residents thought about the project but one of the interviewees stated that the people living around the area did not take note of the project much in the beginning. This might be traced back to the fact that the area around the former military base was undeveloped when the MiKa project started.

All of the interview partners, except one who noted that she does not live in Karlsruhe, agreed that the public perception of the project is very good today and that the opinions concerning the project changed from negative to positive. Four interviewees argued that the project has won a lot of prizes and that the residents who live within the initiative try to involve other citizens of the city: the area is publicly accessible, people can go to the restaurant, the library or the cultural association and the people from the MiKa initiative organise street festivals as well as concerts or other events.

Most of the interview partners were not able to note particular development activities, except one, but most of them knew that the existing housing stock is mostly preserved, especially the housing facades while the inside of the barracks were divided into several apartments. One interview partner noted that the buildings were in a very good condition due to the fact that they were used as housing barracks for the US soldiers. This impression seems to be true, especially with regard to the costs which were only 1,000 euros per square metre. One interview partner said that the development activities could only be on budget because of the good project management of the housing initiative and the fact that all the residents agreed to accept compromises. Certainly, improvements were made in each flat, for example the installation of big windows, but on the other hand it was agreed to leave the internal walls in their raw condition. Because of these compromises, costs remained low and while local authorities did not believe in the budget plan, the MiKa people met the planned costs.

Apart from the housing development the interviewees quoted several measures to mobilise the social and cultural life of the area: On the initiative of the MiKa people, both a cultural association to offer various cultural activities (concerts, performances, readings etc.), as well as a restaurant were established. In addition, street festivals were organised, a food-cooperation with local farmers who provide fruits and vegetables was established, playgrounds and a barn for chickens and goats was constructed. Nearly all of the interview partners stated that all social activities are based on the organisation of the community and on the fact that people are willing to participate in the project and to bear responsibility. The force of the local community together with the proximity of the MiKa area to the inner city is the main argument for people to move to the MiKa area which is currently not possible because of the low removal rate and the high demand. Apart from that, one interviewee emphasised that the MiKa project benefited from the development of the areas around the MiKa district, which were also developed into residential areas. Because of this, the whole infrastructure was improved, including the establishment of schools and the construction of a tram stop.

None of the interview partners was able to specify grievances and the requested problems (for example defects on buildings, crime and drug rate, waste, lack of leisure activities as well as lack of schools or poor traffic connection) were mostly rated as 'not serious at all' or 'serious to a lower ex-

tent'. Only one interviewee criticised the lack of shopping facilities while another judged the traffic volume on the road which goes through the area as 'serious to a medium extent'.

The conditions for the small business operators or institutions that are located within the housing area of the MiKa initiative were viewed contradictorily. On the one hand, the settled institutions benefit from each other while on the other hand it was criticised that there is a lack of passing customers. It is interesting that a lot of residents from the adjoining residential areas participate in the cultural association although it was established by the Mika people.

Every interview partner predicted a good future to the MiKa project and all of the interviewees emphasised that other people and projects can learn a lot from the MiKa project, especially that it is possible to establish a project as a community even against criticism and scepticism from politicians. Moreover, the six interview partners agreed that the success of the project is due to the well organised and professional nature of its established community structure which based on the steering committee, the supervisory board and the housing groups. The interviewees hesitated to answer to the questions about what will happen next and about who supports the project today because the community was and is still the driver of the project. Only three interview partners had an idea about future challenges and noted that activity planning must be extended to the requirements of older people due to the fact that the community is collectively ageing. Another one stated that the MiKa project is a project of continuing development and that the project will become more popular due to the fact that societies in general become more and more standardised and therefore alternative ways of living will be of increased attractiveness in the future.

#### **IV. Final summary - Lessons learnt for urban regeneration**

The present study examined the conversion of four former military barracks into residential apartments for around 180 citizens of Karlsruhe. The buildings were originally constructed by the German Armed forces in 1937. After the end of the World War II Germany was divided into four occupying zones and the American Army was positioned in Karlsruhe. During this time, the former military barracks had been used as apartment buildings for the members of the US Army. After the departure of the US Army in 1990, the buildings became vacant until the MiKa tenant initiative was founded and the buildings were transformed into apartments for people who want to live an alternative way of living. According to the interviewees that were surveyed in the current study, the MiKa project is still successful and the plan for the future is to continue with the tenant initiative as long as possible. The future of the tenant initiative is depends upon the people living there and their strong will to work for an alternative and sustainable lifestyle together as a community.

The legacy of the MiKa project lays in the opportunities to design and build an alternative way of living in the cities providing that two important conditions are met: The interest of the community is considered and an appropriate organisational structure is established to support this. Particularly, every part of the local community is willing to participate in the decision-making process and the corresponding activities based on good governance principles and organisation. As a result, the MiKa project can be qualified as a bottom-up urban regeneration project that gave a former military area, built in the 1930s, a new purpose and meaning for the local community, as a place to live and enjoy, together. Interestingly, although the project was not funded by any German funding programme, it closely resembles one of the most important priorities of the 'Urban Renewal West' programme which also focuses on the conversion of former military bases into communal places.

With regard to the urban development strategies in Karlsruhe, which concentrate more on the development of existing urban spaces, the MiKa project is a good example for the revitalisation of an existing housing stock. Although the project was not supported by the local authority at the beginning, the success of MiKa let opinions change and the municipal housing association attempted to establish a similar project on another former military base in Karlsruhe. Moreover, as one of the interview partners noted, the MiKa project rightfully fits into Karlsruhe's image as a city of science and technology in the way that Karlsruhe is characterised by natural scientists and students who also search for alternative ways of living apart from mainstream urban living practice. It was also said, that MiKa was important for Karlsruhe because other cities have developed similar projects earlier, so Karlsruhe was able to both learn from and catch up with them as well.

Though the MiKa project did not lead to profound changes in municipal urban development strategies, it brought a new perspective and made the local authorities realise that bottom-up projects on the neighbourhood level can also work well, apart from formal institutional planning and decision-making. Therefore, the MiKa project can be a good example for others to follow, when the citizens' potential is utilised for the right and shared cause.

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