

Creating community spaces: Transformation proposal for the Ebertplatz square in Cologne, Germany

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Introduction

Ebertplatz is the biggest square in the inner city of Cologne. A neglected public space with underground passages that are not functioning properly, a dark and unattractive space, a shelter for drug addicts and dealers. After 2017, the city is implementing a program for the revitalization of the square. At the same time, artists who are based on the square and citizens from the neighborhood are participating in events, activities and exhibitions. The question that arises and is the guide for this research and design is: Are these actions sufficient? How could a new design improve the quality of this public space and make it function as a place where various communities are coming together?

Materials and methods

The methods applied in this research design are historical analysis, mind mapping and behavioral mapping. Ebertplatz is a square in transformation and the historical analysis explains its current shape. At the beginning of the 19th century a harbour was located on the site of Ebertplatz and it was in use until the end of 19th century. At that time Josef Stübgen proposed the semicircular ring boulevard following the shape of the demolished city wall. (Masterplan Köln, 2008)¹ Ebertplatz was a tranquil public space with a fountain and trees offering a park-like feeling. The square maintained its general shape and the bigger change happened with the construction of the big infrastructure line of North-South axis which split the square in two parts. After the Second World War when many cities were ruined there was a wish for progress and prosperity. The 'Car-friendly city' concept was developed and adopted in the reconstruction of many large West German cities including Cologne. The main idea is that different types of transportation are separated to achieve continuous traffic flows that connect better the city and the countryside. (van Es, 2014)² In Ebertplatz, in the 1960s there was an increasing density of traffic and therefore the space had to be re-ordered. Separating cars and pedestrians was the main concept and the underground passages together with the underground metro station were constructed in the 1970s. The architectural style of brutalism was adopted and concrete was the dominant material while a hexagonal design language was used. Mind mapping provides a clear overview of the involved stakeholders (the different communities located on the areas around the square, the artists with their art spaces based on the sub terrain part,

people at their leisure spending their free time at the square and the commuters for whom the square is a crossing point) and the vision for the square which is to create a safe, inclusive, lively and attractive space. A place where the various groups come together. This vision leads to a more general goal which is to make the people feel the square as their home. The methods that can be used to achieve that are the temporary uses and participation processes. In that way users are involved and slowly become engaged with the space. This can be connected with the goal of creating the feeling of home on the square. Regarding the involved stakeholders the city provides the framework in which the citizens from the neighborhood or other parts of the city can participate. Shop owners and artists have an active role and a say in the formation of the design proposal by participating in discussions and expressing their thoughts. In order to examine the way users are moving on the square, a behavioral mapping of people passing through the square was used. The study area is the western part with the underground passages. Most of the users are moving between the metro and bus stop. On the western part, people choose to use the ramp or the small stairs on the south to move towards the sub terrain part. These findings can be helpful for the design and for example make use of the fact that many users are following the route that connects the two mobility stops.

attraction that will invite passengers to visit the rest of the square. The transformed square creates a podium where citizens can express their ideas, participate and in the end make the square part of their daily life. The square becomes a space of interaction, co-creation and is an adaptive part of the urban tissue. It follows the needs of its users, transforms accordingly and reflects the vibe of the city. This a general framework and within that the involved stakeholders can contribute in creating a future proof public space.



Fig 5. Artistic impression of the new cultural hub.

Results

The design proposal transforms the public space of Ebertplatz, densifies the existing functions and brings the several communities together. Therefore, a series of interventions or incidents that create different experiences for the users is proposed. The cultural/art character is strengthened and additional activities are taking place on the square. More specifically, the western part of the square can be described as an urban courtyard, the middle part preserves its natural character and quality and the eastern part towards the Rhine is a park with activities. On the western part two buildings are proposed and function as connectors between the different levels. A bridge is proposed to implement the visual and physical connection between the western and central part. It includes two identical towers with elevators and staircases and a double ramp towards the central natural part. The natural part maintains its character and only small interventions with sitting possibilities are proposed. This part of the square functions as a 'green island' where citizens can enjoy a tranquil atmosphere in the city center. The eastern part, the activities park, includes smaller interventions like playgrounds, flower beds and sitting areas. Finally, the last intervention is a cafe on the eastern corner of the Ebertplatz. It is located on a crucial point, visible for all the pedestrians and car drivers that pass along the river, and aims to function as an

Conclusion

The design proposal attempted to answer the question of how a new design could improve the quality of the neglected public space of Ebertplatz and make it function as a place where various communities are coming together. In other words, the research and design proposal aimed at examining and suggesting conditions that ensure the creation of a community space. The goal was clearly defined from the beginning of the project: make the citizens feel the square as their home. The result is an ensemble of building volumes, smaller interventions and open areas that create a sequence of spaces which provide a variety of experiences for the visitors/users of the square. It is important to recognize the fact that the case study of Ebertplatz is a complex and dynamic location where various stakeholders are involved and the site itself is a composition of many different elements with a great influence on it. Therefore, a suggested design that takes into account all of them and accomplishes a successful result requires a more extensive and elaborate research and proposal. This design can be a good starting point for further development on the site. It is an example that can be followed in similarly neglected public spaces. People living in cities need open public spaces where they can meet and interact with each other. So let's design for people! Let's utilize all the available spaces and make life in cities better!

¹ Masterplan Köln, (2008) Städtebaulicher Masterplan Innenstadt Köln [online]

² Van Es, E. (2014) Atlas of the functional city: CIAM 4 and comparative Urban Analysis, THOTH

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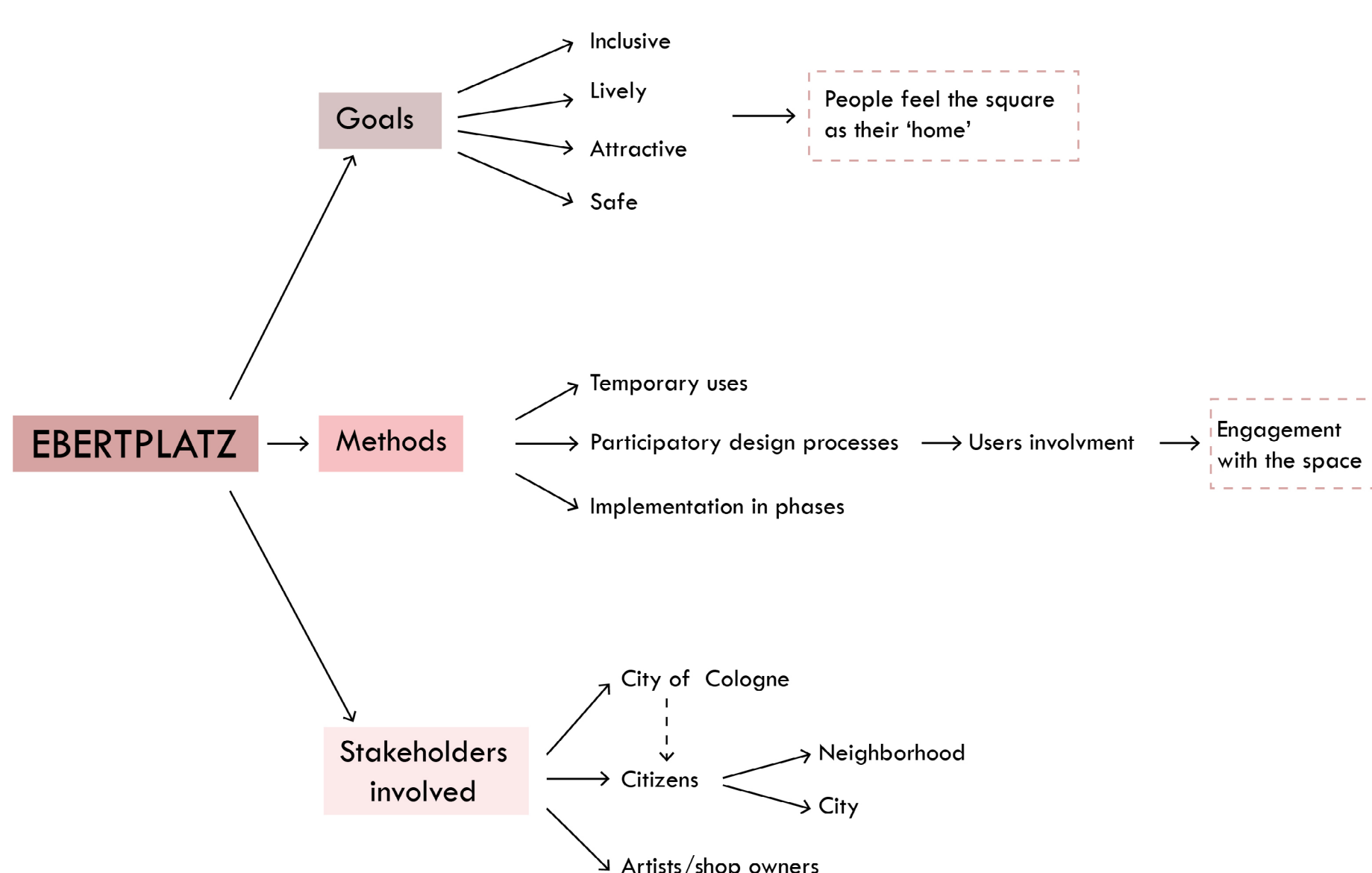


Fig 1. Conclusion mind map.

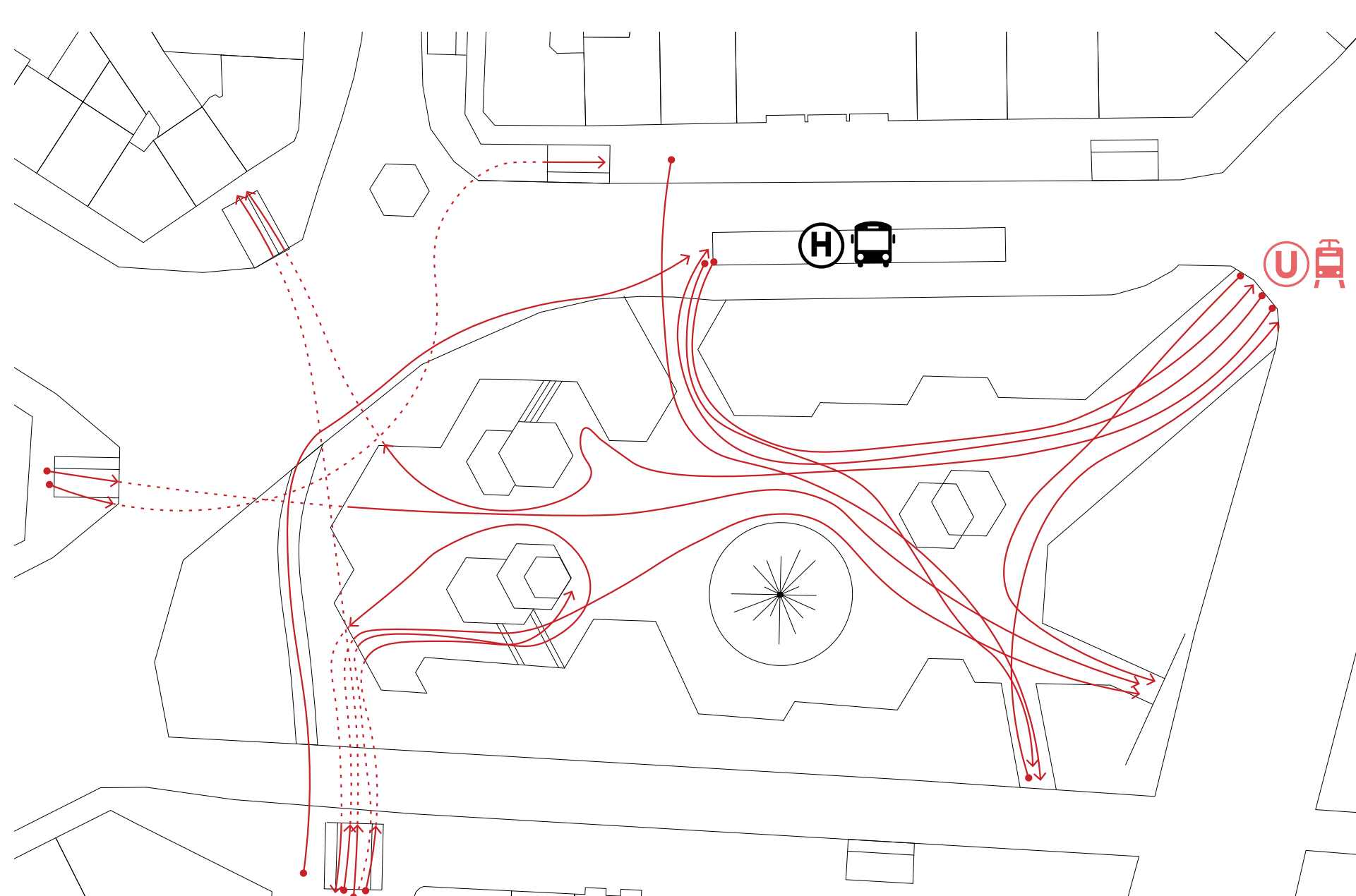


Fig 2. Behavioral mapping showing how users are moving in the western part.

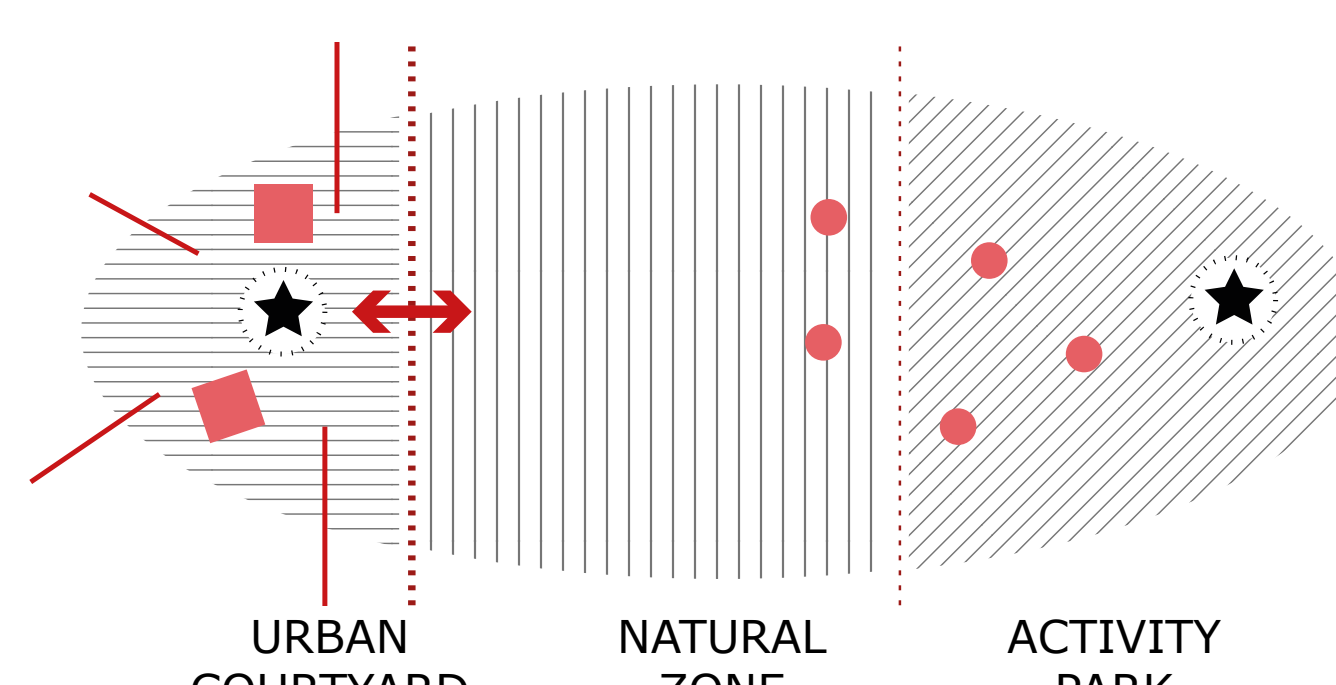


Fig 3. Concept scheme of the three proposed zones.



Fig 4. Masterplan of the design proposal