

Providing Impulses for Other Regions, Saxony-Anhalt – a Model?

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1 The Development of Saxony-Anhalt

1.1 The Development of the Region Up to 2000

Since 1989 the German Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt has experienced a population loss of 17 %. At the start of the new millennium the declining population and demographic change presented urban and regional planning in Saxony-Anhalt with almost insurmountable challenges. The vacant building stock was unevenly distributed; the historic inner cities, which had suffered great neglect during the GDR era, were particularly severely affected. Citizens who wanted to remain in their historic houses in the inner cities were hindered from doing this, as the infrastructure services for the inner cities were not maintained and gradually deteriorated. This policy led to an exceptionally high number of vacant dwellings in the city centres and, consequently, to the decay of the historic building fabric. The GDR government's goal was to persuade people to move to newly erected *Plattenbauten* (prefabricated concrete housing blocks). As these developments offered better sanitary facilities and generous amounts of open space most people were willing to move. Since the political changes in 1989 the situation has been further dramatized by a number of factors: the federal government's home-ownership subsidies led to migration from the city centres to peripheral districts. People wanted finally to fulfil a long-term (and previously impossible) dream: to have their own single-family house with garden. From a present-day perspective this was a mistake, as it led to urban sprawl developing in previously green areas and to increasing numbers of empty dwellings in the developed districts. At that time, however, this was regarded as a strong sign of people's newly gained freedom to make their own decisions. In addition back then it was not yet possible to anticipate just how many jobs would eventually be lost. This situation ultimately forced many mobile young people who were looking for work – interestingly predominantly young women – to leave the towns. However, the negative demographic changes and declining population figures were to have a far more serious impact.

A further strategic mistake made in the 1990s was the generous incorporation of the affluent outlying commuter belts in the towns, the aim here being to bring back citizens who had moved to the urban periphery. But this policy failed to take into account the fact that this growth in area not only brought tax-payers back into the urban area, but also meant new obligations for the city as regards maintenance of the traffic and technical infrastructure.

Consequently, through the increase in the number of empty dwellings the previously desirable new-build districts became less attractive, in a number of prefabricated slab buildings only a few apartments were still occupied. For the local authorities maintaining the infrastructure to service these thinly inhabited urban districts proved an almost impossible burden and so, for example, drains not used frequently enough had to be rinsed through with drinking water, or public lighting in entire streets had to be kept operating for just a few remaining residents. Eventually this situation could no longer be financed and so, for example, the public lighting had to be switched off in a number of cases.



Fig. 1.1: Apartment buildings, vacant dwellings and wasteland in Dessau, photos source: Silja Tillner

Educational facilities were particularly severely affected. The shortage of pupils resulting from the declining birth rate meant that many schools had to reduce their classes or in some cases close down entirely. Health and social services were not spared from making painful spending cuts. A further – personal – observation based on conversations with women who were already at work during the GDR era revealed that the support of working mothers through the widespread availability of care services for children of all ages along with moral support (there were no so-called “uncaring mothers”) had alleviated the double burden on working mothers. The situation for women was made more difficult by the adoption of West German social ideas.

As these major problems extended far beyond the areas covered by regional and local politics the persons responsible for taking action, politicians and town planners had to learn how to rethink. Whereas previously all their strategic plans had been based on growth as the motor of all planning, they now had to change into reverse gear, so to speak. The minimal budget in the region and the towns meant that room for manoeuvre was extremely restricted. Public appearances by politicians interested in their media presence had generally focused on ground-breaking or topping-out ceremonies, now, suddenly, demolition became an (unattractive) theme. Minister Daehre was one of the first to recognise the opportunities offered by this dilemma, as he explained in his contribution to Volume 1 of the IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010: *“In order to prevent the inevitable reduction in the size of towns leading to negative development, we must discover and embark upon new approaches to solutions so that, even with a declining population, we can shape a future worth living for, in attractive towns that offer a high quality of life. There is a real chance of achieving this, as a lower population density opens up new opportunities to shape a life with fewer social conflicts and reduced consumption of resources and of nature.”*

1.2 The Development of the IBA since 2000

The concept for the “IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010” was developed against the background outlined above. It was initiated in 2002 and implemented between then and 2010. In the preparatory and initial phase of the IBA Professor Omar Akbar, at the time Director of the Bauhaus Dessau, was largely responsible for convincing the decision-makers about this new kind of IBA – after all this was the first time that an entire German federal state formed the IBA location and 19 different cities the showplaces for very diverse kinds of IBA projects.

Eight years seems a lengthy period from the viewpoint of impatient citizens and those in local positions of responsibility, on the other hand from the perspective of urban and regional planners eight years is a very short time in which to implement far-reaching changes. This innovative planning strategy was developed in close collaboration with the Bauhaus Dessau and regional state development and planning bodies. The new aspect of this IBA

was that a scientific institution played a leading role in providing impulses and functioned as a kind of think-tank. Here the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation joined forces with SALEG (Saxony-Anhalt State Development Company) to form the central body. From the very start the complete support of the political decision-makers could be depended on; this was a vital precondition for the later success.

1.3 Method of Work and Impact

The IBA had an impact at many different levels: at the political level among state and local politicians, at the planning level among regional and local town planning offices in the 19 IBA cities and towns, at the level of those directly affected among all sectors of the population and, not least importantly, at the scientific level among international and interdisciplinary experts whose exchange of experience took place through numerous conferences, excursions, and publications and was to accompany this project throughout. This method of working, which covered a wide spectrum ranging from ambitious scientific aims to intensive public participation, is an important part of the great success of the IBA. The changes that were brought about are expressed not only by the built reality but also conceptually – in people's minds. After participating and getting involved in the IBA process the protagonists themselves have become part of the process of change.

Within the framework of the IBA a variety of innovative concepts for public participation were developed. These covered a wide range, from guided walking tours with hundreds of people in the Lutherstadt Eisleben, joint planting campaigns on the "Claims" in Dessau, new kinds of temporary art exhibitions such as the giant pictures in the Drive Thru Gallery in Aschersleben, to the experiment in Köthen in which the principles of homeopathic treatment were applied to urban planning in general, using Ludwigstraße as a specific case. The experts from the Bauhaus Dessau, above all Dr. Sonja Beeck and Dr. Regina Sonnabend, were responsible for the concept. They were present on site in the cities to help organise the events and implement the many projects. Throughout the duration of the IBA the Bauhaus office and SALEG were in permanent close contact with the town planners and political leaders in the cities.



*Fig. 1.2: Köthen – using homeopathy as an urban planning aid in Ludwigstraße, a street with numerous vacant buildings. Spectacular actions such as “temporary switching-off the street lighting and illuminating the vacant buildings” were instigated as a way of “shaking the residents of Ludwigstraße out of their slumber” and vividly illustrating the problem of vacant buildings.
Photo source: Silja Tillner*



Fig. 1.3: Discussion between Minister Daehre, experts from the Bauhaus and the IBA board of trustees, and citizens in Dessau against the background of the “Claims”. The city of Dessau offered interested citizens the chance to “sponsor” a piece of landscape measuring 400 m² in area. Photo source: Silja Tillner

2 Lessons Learned

The IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010 selected themes whose significance extends far beyond Saxony-Anhalt. The problems of an ageing post-industrial society and the related process of “shrinking” are to be found not only in the eastern part of Germany in the former GDR but also in cities in eastern Europe, Italy, England, Japan, and even in the USA. The causes are much the same as in Saxony-Anhalt: often the loss of the major economic motor in former industrial cities, young people leaving the area, loss of an active work-force and the ageing of the remaining population. Diminishing public and state resources represent a further common factor. As many projects in the framework of the IBA had an immaterial character and aimed at strengthening a sense of community and encouraging participation in decision-making processes, the knowledge gained from such experiences represents a valuable source of information. Many international cities with similar problems have already recognized this fact and so, in addition to its local work, the IBA team accepted many invitations to present reports on the experience gathered. Reciprocally, international experts were regularly invited to exchange knowledge at conferences.

Below a number of the forward-looking working methods of the IBA team, selected from the author’s viewpoint, are related to urban planning themes with a widespread relevance and could also be applied to other places. Selected cities and towns are related to the “Lessons” in points 2.1 to 2.6, briefly described and illustrated. These do not lay any claim to completeness but serve to illustrate the individual themes.

Long-term Thinking

At the IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010 and against the background of demographic and structural change the leitmotif was to develop strategies that ensure cities can remain capable of taking long-term action. The length of time, almost 10 years, meant that the complex situation could be exhaustively analysed before introducing measures. Experiments were allowed, it was possible to leave well-trodden paths and to look for new ones. Each IBA town was called upon to analyse its own strengths and, building on these, to refine its particular profile. This initial process of focussing on and describing existing, although often hidden, advantages represented a change of paradigms. Previously the focus had been on depicting the problem, now positive thinking was introduced. The 19 participating towns interpreted and handled the IBA theme in very different ways. Unusual and creative ideas were developed, even particularly innovative proposals that were initially met with scepticism could be developed further. In the course of time supportive cooperation also grew up and even mergers of individual towns, such as Bitterfeld-Wolfen or Dessau-Roßlau. Halle and Saale had already merged back in 1990 but represented two very different urban forms with many potential areas of conflict. The IBA projects were located in the field of tension created by these differences. The networking of the cities allowed parallel structures to be eliminated and a break to be made with former taboos such as the closure or merger of health and educational services. Projects of this kind, where interventions are made in budgetary sovereignty and the administration, have a chance of being carried out only if a long-term view is taken.

2.1.1 Dessau-Roßlau

Chose the theme “Urban Cores – Landscape Zones”, because it identifies strongly with the historic landscape monuments i.e. the Dessau-Wörlitz Garden Realm, a near-by Unesco world heritage site, or Oranienbaum. The city, which had grown strongly as a result of incorporating outlying communities, was to be broken up again into stable parts, called “urban cores”, with new green spaces, the “landscape zones”, created between them on the sites of demolished buildings. In view of the uneven distribution of empty dwellings and the many different ownership structures with competing property owners it was initially extremely difficult to position this concept in cohesive areas, consensus could not be reached with the housing companies, and for a long time the project remained an abstract graphic figure. Partly vacant and inhabited buildings stood between areas of wasteland, isolated and severed from the urban context (Fig. 1.1). Only after lengthy discussions with different protagonists at an urban redevelopment planning workshop was it possible to arrive at a partial agreement that allowed at least a number of empty buildings to be demolished. (Fig. 2.1) In place of these a green strip was made using minimal means. The city did not have a sufficient budget to completely plant this strip itself. Consequently easily identifiable “landscape modules” were developed. Quincunx groups of oak trees refer to the Dessau-Wörlitz Garden Realm, the “Claims” appeal to people’s sense of responsibility. In the framework of “sponsorships” people were able to take over a piece of land measuring 20 m x 20 m free of charge, if they were willing to accept responsibility for planting and maintaining it. A prohibition of car parking spaces and storage buildings was among the few regulations applied. Hardly any limits were set to design ambitions, a medicinal herb garden was created, a pharmacy, vegetable gardens for own use, an intercultural garden, and there was even an artistic “Claim” with stone sculptures. As for a long time the green strip was not immediately identifiable, its impact was strengthened by a “red thread” (Fig. 2.2). The Swiss office NRS-Team won the design competition set up especially for this in 2006. Since then a red asphalt path with red information signs has guided people through the new landscape.

The green landscape figure had to be flexible and was adapted several times before being accepted. All in all in Dessau-Roßlau a “temporal and spatially flexible development concept” was devised which, it is hoped, can continue to serve as a guiding instrument for urban development in 30 years time.



Fig. 2.1: Urban redevelopment in Dessau – difficult and protracted negotiations with the owners were necessary before it was possible to demolish a number of empty buildings and to make the strip of landscape a reality . Photo source: Silja Tillner

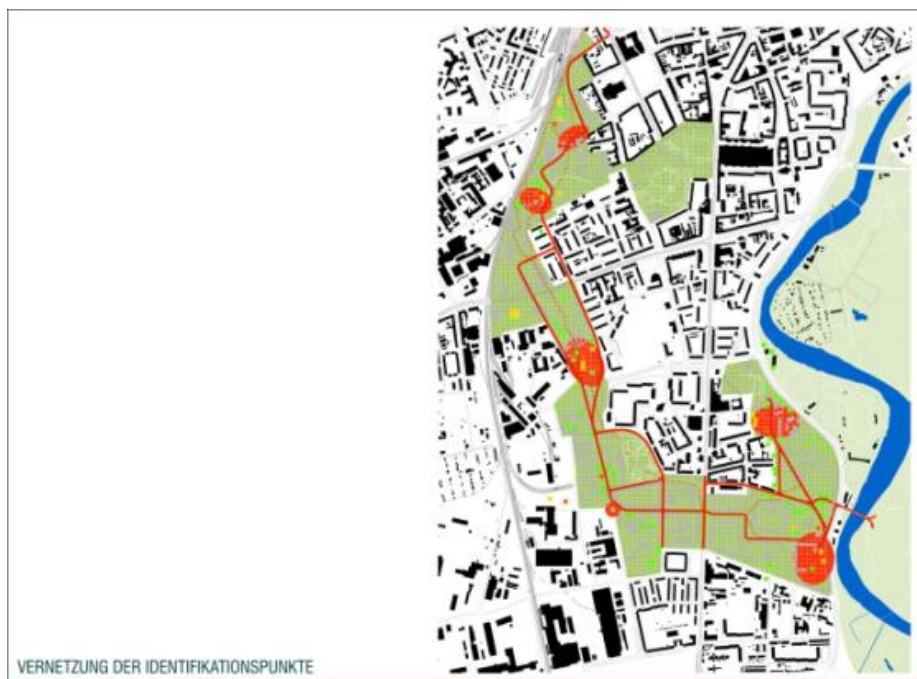


Fig. 2.2: Urban redevelopment in Dessau – following the demolition of vacant buildings on wasteland sites it was possible to create a continuous strip of landscape. Source: Tillner & Willinger

This development, away from “a master plan for demolitions and towards a strategy of small parts based on agreement” was developed for the most part by the urban planners and members of the IBA office, Sonja Beeck and Heike Brückner, in cooperation with the municipal administration. This team is principally responsible for implementing a continuous

green figure that is already identifiable today – the green strip of landscape (Fig. 2.2) – and for introducing life into public space.

2.2 Ensuring Political Backing

The IBA was a unifying shared goal. The politicians responsible, Minister President Boehmer and Minister Daehre, gave the project their complete backing. Minister Daehre in particular displayed a personal interest in the concepts and the progress being made in implementing them. This involvement took place through regular evaluations in the cities at which the planners and politicians responsible presented their projects. From the discussions that followed the presentations they took with them a number of important motivations and suggestions. Annual meetings of the IBA board of trustees and three-monthly meetings of the steering committee presented information on the progress and provided a further forum for exchange of knowledge and ideas. During the work that continued between the regular evaluations the IBA office and SALEG ensured constant contact with the Minister's office. The role that the support of an immensely popular minister played in the success of this undertaking should not be underestimated.



Fig. 2.3: Evaluation in Staßfurt with Minister Daehre, Prof. Akbar and Dr. Beeck from the Bauhaus, IBA board of trustees, photo source: Silja Tillner

2.3 Call for Openness and Tolerance

In a climate of communication that also allowed unusual proposals to be discussed there were no preconceived opinions about content or methods of planning. This allowed innovative and exceptional projects to be developed. The examples described below show how, especially at the start, an unorthodox intervention can break the ice and promote communication with the local people, so that larger projects can be discussed and developed later in an open climate. A change of paradigms from “problem case” to “innovation laboratory” promotes a positive image and leads to an open attitude on the part of all those involved.

2.3.1 Köthen

Chose the theme “*Homeopathy as a Development Force*”. The town of Köthen showed the courage to experiment by developing a new method of urban planning together with homeopathic doctors. A reflection on the town's identity in the context of its history showed that Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, worked in Köthen from 1821 onwards. However this alternative form of medicine was better known outside the borders of Germany and as far away as in India than among the citizens of Saxony-Anhalt. As the Central Association of Homeopathic Doctors was founded here in 1829 the idea arose of concentrating the European Central Library for Homeopathy here. The aim was to make the place where alternative healing methods developed into a magnet for an alternative kind of tourism. This new planning method was employed in Ludwigstraße (Fig. 1.2), which was

severely affected by the problem of vacant buildings – 15 buildings were empty and threatened by decay, while in others people were still living. The owners of the empty buildings were, so to speak, in denial and refused to see this situation as a problem, which meant that standard planning approaches to refurbishment and the introduction of new life could not be implemented. The team made up of urban planners and homeopathic doctors devised an extensive anamnesis, the innovative idea of “intensifying the problem”. This was done by turning off the street lighting for just 15 minutes on an evening in December 2006 and floodlighting the buildings to be demolished. This resulted in a considerable uproar but at the gatherings that followed people began to realise that the urban infrastructure cannot be maintained with such low population density levels. Following this realisation a number of citizens even began to see the advantages in demolishing empty buildings, although previously they had vehemently rejected this idea. Creative ideas for alternative functions, e.g. balconies or parks were suggested. Finally nine sites were newly taken over by residents and local investors and four buildings were preserved from demolition.

2.3.2 *Aschersleben*

Applied to take part in the IBA with the motto “From Outside to Inside”. The 19th century ring road, badly affected by the impact of through-traffic, formed a barrier in the urban organism and restricted the inner city in an unattractive way. Concentration on the well-preserved city core with demolition at the edges was intended to counteract the decline in the number of residents. One of the first measures introduced was the Drive Thru Gallery along the traffic artery enclosing this centre; with its regularly changing art exhibitions and interventions it developed into an attraction that received considerable media coverage and introduced the upgrading and urban redevelopment processes. Furthermore, local art initiatives and artists participated.

2.3.3 *Halberstadt*

The theme was “Cultivating Empty Space”. This theme, which in a sense represents the problems of all the towns and cities in Saxony-Anhalt affected by emigration, was addressed in a variety of ways by means of both temporary and permanent projects.



Fig. 2.4: Halberstadt – cultivating empty space – dance performance in a former swimming pool, photo source: Silja Tillner

80 % of the historic city centre of Halberstadt had been destroyed by bomb attacks in April 1945. The result of this was a fragmented urban structure in which some half-timbered buildings survived on the Domplatz (Cathedral Square), and a number of isolated examples elsewhere. In the GDR era the large amount of war damage allowed the prevalent concepts

of ideal town planning to be implemented in an exemplary way. The negative consequences of this planning are over-dimensioned traffic arteries, isolated new housing developments, and areas of wasteland.

This innovative approach was also reflected in the temporary cultural events. For instance at the concluding IBA event in 2010 a concert and dance performance took place in an empty indoor public swimming pool. The performance was overlaid by projections showing people swimming in the baths, many of them local citizens who were attending the performance – a poetic conclusion that allowed the circle to be completed. (Fig.2.4)



Fig. 2.5: Halberstadt – Domplatz - Cultivating empty space – training track for seeing: members of the board of trustees and the steering committee test the effect. Photo source: Silja Tillner

Visual habits and familiar ways of looking at things block the view of new directions. “Training tracks for seeing” were intended as a way of opening up new perspectives in the altered urban structure and making participants more receptive to new ideas.

2.4 Ensuring Quality

Ideas developed into planning projects that set ambitious goals as regards ensuring quality. This resulted in success at a number of levels, including the perception and consciousness of the local people. After careful deliberations with all involved the limited budget available was reserved for selected projects and distributed to those planning teams that emerged as winners of specially organised competitions. The result is astonishing – in almost all the IBA projects the quality of planning and implementation is clearly higher than in many other municipalities that had larger budgets at their disposal.

2.4.1 Aschersleben

In 2005 a competition was set up to attract proposals from throughout Europe about how to revitalise the former OPTIMA factory site which measures 3 hectares in area. The town decided to invest in education and to implement an innovative school concept for all age levels at this central location. The winners, the architects Lederer, Ragnarsdottir, Oei, retained the old main building and added two new buildings. Together with landscape designer Lohrberg their concept also envisaged connecting the previously fragmented urban mesh. This was achieved in exemplary fashion using attractive outdoor spaces and pedestrian links. (Fig. 2.6)



Fig. 2.6: Aschersleben – new and converted buildings for the educational centre with landscape design in Bestehornpark

2.4.2 Staßfurt – “relinquishing the old centre”

The world’s first potash mines are located in this formerly prosperous town. In the mid-19th century potassium salts were used in agriculture and in the chemical industry. Mining was to alter this town permanently. After closure of the mines the town’s economic decline began, culminating in a dramatic event – the centre of the town began to subside by up to 7 metres as a result of uncontrolled entry of water into the mine shafts and the numerous underground excavations. Numerous historic buildings, including the town hall and church, had ultimately to be demolished. This “sunken centre” left behind it emptiness, it survived in the residents’ memories and there was nothing they desired more than its reconstruction. In the framework of the IBA this “sunken town centre” was reinterpreted. In 2005 a workshop was set up involving the local people and it was jointly decided to flood the area by raising the ground water level in a controlled way. The former centre was transformed into a designed landscape with a lake as a visual focal point. The history of the town is narrated in the park. (Fig. 2.7)

Despite the success of the landscape design, towards the end of the IBA in 2010 the requisite liveliness was still lacking. Unfortunately budgetary shortages meant that plans to build a culture centre, the design for which had emerged from a competition, had to be abandoned. It remains to be hoped that the refurbishment of further residential buildings will be followed by the introduction of functions that can help build up a community.



Fig. 2.7: Staßfurt – Relinquishing the old centre, controlled flooding created a lake in the hollow. The site of the former town centre is now occupied by an attractive park that incorporates the local history.
Photo: Tillner

2.5 Accompanying Processes

The towns were accompanied on a number of levels. Since the 1990s the town planners of the individual IBA towns had been confronted with challenges of an unprecedented kind. Neither their education nor their professional experience had prepared them to deal with such challenges. The IBA offered the unique chance for local planners to network with external experts. In day-to-day business this took place through the support of SALEG and the Bauhaus office. In addition to this there were regular forums in which the people in positions of responsibility in all the IBA towns could network with each other and met members of the board of trustees and the steering committee. Evaluations not only represented an opportunity to check the progress being made by the planned developments, they were also a source of support and motivation. For the town planners in the local authorities this was a welcome expert forum in which they could discuss successes and set-backs. Valuable suggestions were taken up. As use was made of EU grants and state funding it was necessary to introduce certain controls.

2.6 Systemising the Transfer of Knowledge

The exchange of knowledge between external know-how and the local people responsible produced solutions that function and take effect in a sustainable way. All sides profit. The open approach adopted by the local town planners and the keen interest on the part of the international experts created the basis for innovative ideas. The years of the IBA will be remembered as a dynamic and highly instructive period.

However in 2011 the challenge was to preserve the knowledge acquired and to convey the experience gained. There exists a comprehensive documentation of the projects in the towns in the form of numerous publications (see Point 4 References). However the personal experiences and the knowledge stored in the minds of the people involved must also be preserved. This represents a challenge, as a number of those who were involved at the start of the IBA have in the meantime turned to other projects. A network should be established so that, where there is a need, all those originally involved can be linked again.

3 Summary

In 2012 one can summarise by saying that the State of Saxony-Anhalt dealt with this task in an exemplary manner. Thanks to EU support it proved possible to develop a model

programme that can serve as a source of inspiration and practical model for other towns. Even though the problems with which the State of Saxony-Anhalt was confronted in 2000 do not occur so often in such complexity and numbers, certain aspects are regularly encountered.

The potential of a number of exciting future themes was only revealed towards the end of the IBA and could therefore not be dealt with in depth. It is recommended that even after the conclusion of the IBA selected themes should be pursued further.

Building on Minister Daehre's introductory statement (see P.2 Point 1.1.) with regard to exploiting the "new opportunities" a chance is now offered to deal with environmental and social themes in an exemplary and experimental manner. The goal should be to allow innovative ideas to become reality. Saxony-Anhalt could become a future laboratory for questions of environmental protection and autarchy. In the IBA exhibition in 2010 at the Bauhaus Dessau fascinating visions were presented for a future that must face up to climate and energy change.

In the framework of a master's programme the University of Kassel will cooperate with the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation from 2011-2014 and will integrate the knowledge of the experts in this programme. This represents a good basis for further development.

A "Handbook for Planning in Times of Reduction" could translate the generally applicable experiences gained in the course of the IBA into a set of guidelines.

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Meetings of the IBA board of trustees 2002 – 2010

Evaluations and presentations for the board of trustees and the steering committee in IBA towns

Photos 1.1. to 2.7: Silja Tillner

Graphics 2.2: Architekten Tillner & Willinger