



In Kaiserslautern, public discussions led to a referendum with a veritable campaign for votes.

GETTING THE CITIZENS ON BOARD

ECE wants to ensure that the public is enthusiastic about its shopping center projects and, therefore, takes care to inform and involve the citizens early on – not only when local referendums are held.



Distributing bread roll bags and flyers, ECE employees canvassed at public transport nodes in Kaiserslautern. There as well as at information desks and events in the city center, they promoted the planned new shopping center “K in Lautern.” They also had independent, active regional supporters in the initiative “Für Lautern e.V.” “Its members were persons who were highly accepted in their own city. They were able to credibly convince people that our project was good for Kaiserslautern,” explains Dr. Jan Röttgers, Director Development at ECE. The

cause of this extensive campaign: The citizens of Kaiserslautern were called upon to decide in a referendum in 2011 whether municipal land should be sold or not. That sale was to kick off the overall project “Neue Stadtmitte Kaiserslautern”, including the construction of a new shopping center.

CONVINCING EFFORTS

Referendums like the one in Kaiserslautern are the exception. Nevertheless, shopping center

developments are critically discussed in many cities because they arouse diverse fears among citizens and retailers. Therefore, it is important first of all to obtain an expert opinion on the impact of new projects. Restrictions of floor space and product ranges that are to protect existing retailers render new developments more difficult for investors. "It is our task to convince the people of something that has not been built yet," Röttgers illustrates the challenge faced by ECE. "We have to present plans and visuals to the people early on to show them what the new quarter or shopping mall will look like. Size and dimensions play a significant role here. We also have to communicate how a project can be integrated into the city and which impetus it can provide to urban development."

Dr. Jan Röttgers considers it an added benefit that many citizens specifically focus on the urban fabric in their city for the first time in these discussion processes. A case in point is Schlosshöfe Oldenburg: There was an unused indoor pool in downtown Oldenburg. The main square degenerated into an eyesore. In developing Schlosshöfe, ECE created a completely new square with new paving, lighting, etc., next to the shopping center. This square is now one of the central meeting places in Oldenburg. "It is not only a matter of solely pushing through our own interests," says Röttgers. "In fact, we build a part of the city."



Bagged arguments: In the referendum a two-thirds majority ultimately voted in favor of "K in Lautern."

A NEW OLD CASTLE

Cooperation with the city also paid off in Brunswick – on an initially highly contentious project. Many citizens longed for the reconstruction of the castle that had been destroyed by war, but this project lacked funding. Other people, however, rejected the reconstruction of the castle in principle. When ECE put forward the idea of a shopping center for this location, this initiative again faced much opposition. In particular, architecture critics did not like the plans of retail usage behind the historical facade. After the project was completed in 2007, however, Schloss-Arkaden Braunschweig turned out to be a stroke of luck for the city. It strengthened the identity and attractiveness of Brunswick, plus the city profited



WHY DOWNTOWN?

Major construction projects trigger lively debates on the pros and cons especially when they are planned for inner-city locations where the number of residents is high. Moreover, new retail properties have a significant impact on the cityscape and affect the interests of established retailers. Nevertheless, downtown sites are the preferred choice for ECE when it comes to the development of new shopping centers: on the one hand, because the catchment area and accessibility are ideal and only top locations ensure sustainable sales – even in economically difficult times; on the other hand, because well integrated inner-city shopping centers re-attract purchasing power from the surrounding region and boost urban retail trade as a whole. Therefore ECE already pioneered the development of inner-city shopping malls in the early 1980s. Ever since, it has paid special attention to integrating centers into existing structures by appealing architecture and a fine-tuned branch mix. ECE demonstrated that this can also work perfectly well in a historic city center, for example, at Stadt-Galerie in Hameln and Altmarkt-Galerie in Dresden.



Schlosshöfe Oldenburg emerged on the premises of an unused indoor swimming pool.



Together with the citizens, ECE gathers ideas for the design and integration of a new shopping center in many cities.



from high follow-on investments in the neighborhood of the castle. ECE had built the facade completely anew and integrated more than 600 original elements that had been preserved. Today the castle houses cultural institutions such as the Castle Museum, the Office of Vital Records, and the City Library, while visitors can enjoy the diverse offering of 150 shops in the adjacent shopping mall.

INVOLVING CITIZENS AND STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

In contrast to Oldenburg and Brunswick, public discussions led to a local referendum in Kaiserslautern. What is important in the “campaign” before

such a vote? Röttgers explains: “At first, critics are very conspicuous in most cases, and much more visible than the supporters. Therefore it is decisive to activate the silent, usually approving majority.” Informative events, promotional campaigns and discussion platforms on the internet serve to involve the citizens. In this context, it is also essential to make the benefits of the project for the entire inner-city development visible to the public. If you fail to do so, you may well end up losing out.

The involvement of diverse stakeholder groups currently runs in an exemplary fashion in Singen am Hohentwiel where ECE also wants to build a shopping center. Numerous working groups, some of which the head mayor chairs himself, have representatives of inner-city retailers and the region’s chambers of industry and commerce among their members in addition to the political groups of the City Council and administration. As a result, concerns as well as suggestions and ideas can directly influence the planning process. Such processes are challenging but worthwhile for cities and investors alike. At any rate, the efforts made in Kaiserslautern were successful: In the referendum, a two-thirds majority voted for “K in Lautern” that has already been completed.

“ 50 years of ECE – that’s a half-century success story. We are overjoyed to congratulate them on that! We are very pleased that we could contribute to this success through several joint projects in recent years, such as the Forum Mittelrhein Koblenz and Milaneo Stuttgart. We are of course also pleased at the prospect of bringing many more successful projects to fruition together in the future. ”



IMAGE: STRABAG REAL ESTATE GMBH

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