This paper examines how architecture is used as contradictory signifier in contemporary urban development strategies in European cities. Drawing on examples from two urban megaprojects (UMPs), Donau City in Vienna and HafenCity in Hamburg I will pay a look at both, the conditions and processes of architectural production as well as the successive meanings attributed to the architecture for the purposes of city marketing and political campaigning.

My aim is to show that despite the asserted “physical similarity” of many UMPs today (Fainstein 2008) the use and interpretation of architecture as a signifier varies greatly depending on the local context and the audience. Given the different urban settings I show how the architecture of the UMPs is used differently with the intention to gain visibility with regard to citizens as well as outsiders. Indeed, the debates around the notions of place-specificity versus global uniformity and their importance in the creation of urbanity follow very different lines in the two examples. However, it is necessary to link these debates which tend to focus on the architectural imagery with the particular urban design frameworks of two projects. Only through the examination of the differing urban design approaches and their rootedness in the underlying political strategies, institutional settings and local planning cultures, differences and similarities in the treatment of architecture as a signifier become comprehensible.

Keywords: architecture, city marketing, urban megaprojects

Introduction
The Urban Mega Projects (UMPs) of the last two decades are characterized by a number of organizational and political aspects (see also the other contributions in this volume). They further the restructuring of urban policy-making through the redistribution of competencies and responsibilities to private and semi-public institutions and development agencies. The “condition of exceptionality” (Moulaert et al. 2003: 264) with which the UMPs are attributed on grounds of their scale and their significance serves as an argument for the circumvention of legal norms and democratic control mechanisms. In sum, UMPs are interpreted as “the very catalysts of urban and political change” (ibid.: 3) and “the mechanisms par excellence through which globalization becomes urbanized” (ibid.: 3).
At the same time, UMPs are also associated with the transformation of urban imagery and representational logic. They seem to be capable of initiating symbolic transformations and of re-defining the image of places and whole cities. The physical transformation of the built environment is thereby seen as the key factor for economic recovery and the strengthening of a city’s competitiveness. Images of decline and decay are substituted by images of growth and prosperity as well as of innovation and creativity (even though the public benefits and broader economic effects of the UMPs are contested). Additionally, the UMPs are very often also associated with the establishment of international economic linkages and the achievement of world city status.

The starting point of my article is that both dimensions of the UMPs as described above rely essentially on their (heightened) visibility. Firstly, UMPs need to be highly visible in order to justify their exceptional status and the high priority given to them by public authorities. This kind of visibility implies a distinctive and often central location within the urban fabric as well as the clear demarcation of the project in relation to the urban surroundings; only then does the project’s exceptionality become comprehensible for citizens and local stakeholders. Secondly, the UMPs have to be visible in order to convey the symbolic meaning with which they are attributed. They need to be visibly new as well as visibly different from existing structures in order to convey images of regeneration and new economic strength. Moreover, this kind of visibility is the precondition for any kind of image-based marketing strategy that tries to promote a city’s advantages by attracting attention or by establishing recognizable icons.

This question of visibility is – apart from the sheer size of many projects – inevitably bound up with the question of the architectural design of the UMP and, as I wish to argue in this paper, with a decision as how to position the project with regard to “place-specific” versus “globalized” design approaches. Apart, possibly, from purely infrastructural projects (which are the exception nowadays), the UMP’s architecture serves as a signifier and provides the imagery that the meaning of the UMPs is constructed on. One of the most obvious ways of making a project visible, both physically as well as in the media, is to employ what has been termed ‘iconic architecture’, designed by celebrity architects; another solution is the erection of always taller buildings competing for height. However, these are not the only options; there are different ways to make use of architecture as a strategic element and signifier for a UMP. It would be far too easy to reduce the question of signifying in the case of the UMP to the question of iconicity or height alone.

My contribution explores how architecture is used as a signifier in the development and promotion of Urban Megaprojects. Based on a reconsideration of related debates from the 1980s and 1990s as well as two case studies of two UMPs currently under development, the HafenCity in Hamburg and the Donau City in Vienna, I will examine how the architecture of
UMPs is used with the intention of gaining visibility with regard to citizens as well as outsiders. My aim is to show how this aspect of visibility is inevitably bound up with debates about the authenticity and/or the uniformity of the design solutions.

In order to present my argument I will take a look at both, namely the conditions and circumstances of architectural production as well as the successive meanings attributed to the architecture and the use of architectural imagery for purposes of marketing. By doing so, I don’t wish to embark on a purely stylistic debate which might easily detract from the fact that these projects are built at all, as Peter Marcuse (1998) once remarked referring to the case of Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. Rather, my interest for architecture as a signifier and for the conditions of its making is explained by the central role architecture has in shaping urban identity – thereby also acting as a prime vehicle for legitimizing the UMPs and defining their success in the eyes of the public. My aim is to show that, despite the asserted “physical similarity” of many UMPs today (Fainstein 2008: 768), the use and interpretation of architecture as a signifier can be very different depending on the context and the audience. “Global” architecture emerges from this discussion as a contradictory and relative concept.

Architecture and UMPs: a Brief Account of the Debates so far
When discussing the role of architecture for the development and the promotion of UMPs, it is worth starting with a review of some of the debates of the late 1980s and 1990s. Certainly, the architectural vocabulary has changed since then; the postmodern aesthetic of those days seems far removed nowadays. The questions, however, of how to establish a sense of place in the development of UMPs and of whether authenticity and place-specificity are suitable tools to enhance the value of a development project or not – questions which were at the core of the debate at that time – continue to be valid. Two prototypical projects to exemplify the pro-growth and property-led regeneration strategies of the 1980s were Battery Park City in New York City and the Docklands in London (Fainstein 1994; Gordon 1997). Both projects made systematic use of a postmodern design idiom for the purpose of urban redevelopment and generated wide discussions which addressed in particular the significance of their architectural design (e.g. Zukin 1992; Crilley 1993).

The explicit intention of the 1979 master plan by Cooper and Eckstut for Battery Park City was to provide continuity with the surrounding urban fabric and the diversity of common New York neighborhoods. It adopted the street grid of adjacent lower Manhattan and established detailed design guidelines which regulated materials and building features (BPCA 1985; Gordon 1993). This approach allowed planners to control the appearance of the whole precinct without designing individual buildings and (because of its eventual commercial success) proved to be of lasting influence for large-scale urban development in North America and Europe because of its adaptive and flexible phasing logic (Love 2006). The master plan of Kees Christiaanse for HafenCity ultimately follows the same principle, as we will see. Canary Wharf in London’s Docklands has had a more prolonged and gradual development process,
with the postmodern phase constituting only one of several attempts to guide private real
estate development in that area and secure cohesiveness (see Carmona 2009 for an extensive
summary).

The postmodern design idiom of Battery Park City and Canary Wharf was criticized for the
simulation of authenticity and the distraction from the exclusionary nature of the project and
its social and economic consequences (Zukin 1991: 28; Crilley 1993: 147; a claim which has
been raised with regard to postmodern architecture in general, most fiercely by David Harvey,
e.g. 1990\(^1\)). In a more recent observation, Tim Love sees the problem of Battery Park City
more in its aesthetic monotony, which he argues is not so much the result of architectural
style but of the monopoly of a single scale of building (Love 2006: 62f.).

The 1990s and 2000s have seen the proliferation of architectural styles; a systematic
consideration of architectural form has certainly become more challenging over the last 15
years. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that office development has clearly been marked by the
shift back towards a Neo-Modernist “non-place internationalization” (Carmona 2009: 113).
Various commentators have noticed how the recent globalization of architectural practice has
contributed to the worldwide adaption of standardized building techniques and aesthetic
uniformity, especially in the field of office architecture (e.g. Olds 2002; Presas 2005; McNeill
2008). After the demise of Olympia & York the consequent phases of Canary Wharf, for
example, have been dominated by “glassy, international style buildings resembling
skyscrapers in major cities the world over” (Fainstein 2005: 16–17; even though,
paradoxically, the earlier dominance of the US architectural practices had been broken up in
favor of the involvement of several British practices).

The high-rise office tower has, in fact, become one of the most cited symbols of globalization.
It provides a vivid argument with which to highlight the increasing conformity of urban
spaces and to illustrate what are often seen as globalization’s homogenizing effects (e.g.
also Grubbauer 2010). Aesthetic uniformity and standardization, however, are also referred to
in affirmative terms in the context of image politics guided by the role-model of Global
Cities. Kris Olds has, in his examination of UMPs in Shanghai and Vancouver in the 1990s
and early 2000s, pointed out how the “global city discourse” (2002: 33) builds on the physical
adaption of local space with the objective of providing “both a real and a symbolic node, a
state of the art command and control centre, to ‘hook’ up to the global economy, thereby
theoretically improving city, regional, and national comparative advantages in a global sense”
(ibid.).

\(^{1}\) However, the direct equation of postmodern styles with entrepreneurial policies was also criticized for its
limited scope (Fainstein 1994) and its lack of attention to the multiple and contested readings of architectural
imagery (Hubbard 1996).
In the light of these processes of standardization and the globalization of architectural practice, recent contributions on the architecture of UMPs stress its continuity with modernist practice and its decontextualized and ahistoric “tabula rasa approach” (Olds 2002: 149).

“In keeping with these modernist approaches to planning and design, GIC architects such as Rogers, Perrault, Piano, and Foster will accept work in cities and nations where they have little understanding of the social, cultural, political and economic context. They are firms that offer ‘universal’ solutions to universal problems – a pure modernist design ethos underlying monumental self-referential architecture...” (ibid.: 150).

Marcuse and van Kempen (2000) make a similar argument in reference to the example of Battery Park City when refuting the term postmodernism. Despite the postmodern imagery, they assert an underlying modernist rationality and argue that the architecture serves to visibly separate the complex from the rest of the city:

“The architectural style remains modern; it was dubbed the international style already in 1932, but has really earned that name now. Postmodern treatment of the edges (or more literally the tops) of such edifices do nothing to alter the modern technical rationality of their construction. Fashions in styles may vary, but the representation of power, of wealth, of luxury, is inherent, as is the isolation, the separation, the distancing from the older urban surrounding” (ibid.: 253).

Similarly, Moulaert, Rodriguez and Swyngedouw (2003) emphasize the often isolated and separated character of UMPs and point out that they acquire symbolic power and iconic status only through their sheer size. They also argue against a ‘post-modern’ turn and state that the last decades have rather seen the reassertion of the process of modernization, albeit no longer in the particular form of post-war modernism (Swyngedouw et al. 2003a: 17f.). At the same time, however, they reprise Harvey’s argument that architecture serves to distract from underlying socio-economic processes and objectives when pointing out that UMPs are used to establish a “hegemony of vision” (ibid.: 23) which secures legitimacy for the new coalitions of public and private stakeholders who are behind UMPs through “the spectacularization of both development perspectives and political programmes, which takes away the focus from the substantive, on-the-ground transformations of the urban-regional socio-economic fabric” (ibid.: 23).

Most recently, Susan Fainstein and the authors of a IJURR-symposium on new UMPs have emphasized that the latest generation of mix-use projects provides high diversity and flexibility in the uses, built forms and financing models, which “is mirrored in the diversity and flexibility of socioeconomic, cultural, aesthetic and environmental arguments advanced to justify the massive public cost and private gain” which often accompany them (Lehrer and
Laidley 2008: 798). At the same time however, Fainstein remarks as already mentioned, “a striking physical similarity among the schemes, irrespective of the city in which they are located” (Fainstein 2008: 768).

What becomes clear from the cited debates is that the architects who design the buildings of UMPs are confronted with multiple requirements: the architecture is required to embody the more inclusive and responsive approach of the new generation of UMPs by creating an accessible and clearly urban environment. At the same time, the architects are confronted with the described standardization of architectural form and the imperatives of global real estate investment, as well as the demand for highly iconic and even spectacular architecture that distinguishes a project from the surrounding city.

I argue that, to be visible, the architecture of UMPs therefore necessarily needs to be positioned in two ways: on the one hand, it has to react to the urban surroundings and find a way of standing out against the existing buildings and place-specific styles and materials. On the other hand, the architects, planners and politicians responsible for the design of the UMP have to find solutions to the problem of how to be visible in comparison with those international role-models and similar projects in competing cities – of which there are plenty. As a consequence, the UMP is inevitably (and this has in my view remained unchanged since the first postmodern designs for Battery Park City and Canary Wharf) challenged to position itself with regard to the adoption or the refusal of local building traditions as well as international standards and typologies – and the much discussed option for iconic architecture a la the Guggenheim in Bilbao is only one among several in this regard. As the case studies will show, this challenge opens a conflicting field of interpretations in which neither ‘global’ nor ‘local’ building elements are certain, nor is there a clear-cut way of how to create urbanity in a UMP by means of architecture.

HafenCity in Hamburg and Donau City in Vienna
The two UMPs that I wish to examine closer are both inner urban, mixed use, brown field development projects, and exemplify a ‘new’ generation of mega-projects (Orueta and Fainstein 2008: 760). They minimize displacement through being located on obsolete industrial and port lands rather than intruding on residential land, and they follow a mixed-use concept with residential uses, office space for service industries and cultural institutions (ibid.).

The HafenCity is the largest urban development project currently under way in the city of Hamburg. Located on a 123 hectare site in the Northern Harbour, HafenCity is also one of the largest projects of its kind in Europe. Situated in walking distance to the city centre between the historic Speicherstadt warehouse district and the River Elbe, the HafenCity will increase the size of Hamburg’s city centre by 40 percent – it has been termed the project of the century for the city. First ideas for the renewal of this port area had been discussed in the 1980s,
although the definitive announcement of the project only followed a decade later in 1997. The then First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Henning Voscherau, presented the plans to the public after having already covertly obtained most of the necessary land for the city in order to prevent speculation. After the City Parliament agreed on the development decision, the whole property package, called “Harbour and City”, was transferred to the GHS Hamburg Port Area Development Corporation (since 2004 HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, a 100% subsidiary of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg), which was charged with the development and the marketing of the HafenCity. The scheme includes the compensation of the Hamburg Harbour and Warehouse Company (today HHHLA Hamburg Harbour and Logistics Company) for conveying the area of the Northern Harbour. Gains from the land sales at HafenCity are used to refinance the construction of new port facilities at Altenwerder (opened in 2002).

In 1999 the GHS commissioned an international urban development competition, which was won by the German-Dutch team “hamburgplan” with Kees Christiaanse/ASTOC. Based on their concept in 2000, a master plan was enacted by the local parliament, which frames the urban development of the project. The master plan divides the area into 12 quarters with a variety of uses and building typologies which are scheduled for step-by-step completion. The uses planned entail apartments, service-sector office space, retail and hospitality outlets, as well as several cultural facilities, among them the Elbphilharmonie concert hall designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron and the Science Center designed by OMA of Rem Koolhaas. Construction started in 2002. In 2005 the first quarter, the Sandtor Quay, and in 2009 the second quarter, the Dalmane Quay, were completed. The envisioned timeframe for the completion of the whole area covers 25 years. It is envisaged that, after finalization in 2020-2025, the area should provide 5,500 apartments with housing for 12,000 people and office and business premises for 40,000 jobs (HafenCity Hamburg GmbH 2010).

Even though Donau City in Vienna is considerably smaller than HafenCity, the importance of the two projects with regard to their high prestige and the strategic value for the two cities is surely comparable. Donau City is located on the left bank of the Danube, next to the UNO-city, the seat of the United Nations in Vienna. It is the most prestigious urban development project of the last two decades in Vienna and is meant to constitute Vienna’s second, modern centre as a counterpart to the historic inner city. The latter is located on the right bank of the river and is, for historic reasons (dating back to the regulation of the river in the 19th century), recessed from the main flow of the Danube. Comprising several high-rise buildings, mainly office towers, on an exposed 18.5 hectare site, Donau City is highly visible and in clear contrast to Vienna’s largely historic urban fabric. At the same time, the project marks a decisive shift in urban planning policies, with the outsourcing of planning capacity to the semi-private development company and the restructuring of city planning procedures (Novy et al. 2001).
After the citizens of Vienna had rejected the plan to host the EXPO of 1995 in Vienna and Budapest in a referendum in 1991, the mixed-use project was developed on the proposed site, a former garbage dumping ground that had already been cleared under high costs. The WED AG, a private development company, was established to facilitate the development. The investors were the main Austrian Banks together with a Japanese investor. Even though the WED has been acting as a private developer, substantial public resources have been spent on the preparation of the site and the infrastructure, as well as subsidized social housing and additional public buildings (Novy et al. 2001; Seiß 2007).

The tedious planning process involved most of the leading Austrian architects and entailed several re-configurations of the layout. On the basis of a master plan by the Austrian architects Krischanitz and Neumann, the land-use plans were finally fixed in 1995 and implementation started. The first building to be completed was the Andromeda Tower designed by Austrian Wilhelm Holzbauer in 1998. At present, Donau City consists of five office towers and a technology centre with about 125,000 m² of office space providing jobs for about 5,000 people currently working there. The office buildings are complemented with residential blocks for 3,500 people as well as public facilities like a primary school and a church. Two more office towers, 170 and 220 meters in height, are currently under way. Based on a master plan by the French architect Dominique Perrault for the remaining parts of Donau City and also designed by Perrault, these two towers are meant to complete the project and add another 145,000 m² of total floor space for a mix of office space, apartments and hotel facilities. The construction of these two towers has, however, already been postponed several times, and the completion of DC Tower 1, the higher of the two towers, is currently scheduled for the end of 2012.

Donau City and Hafen City have several things in common. They share a similar aim, as both envision the UMPs as constituting modern, diversified urban centres which will expand (HafenCity) and complement (Donau City) the existing centres. This ambition to create explicitly urban environments corresponds with a range of other current large-scale European development projects (e.g. Majoor 2008). The background in both cases is the reconversion of derelict industrial areas (even though Hamburg’s port infrastructure is certainly of a different scale and economic importance to the city) in order to foster sectoral transformation, to increase competitiveness and to attract investment. And finally, both projects share the vision of bringing the city ‘back to the water’, as both historic centres are removed from the riverfront. The design solutions, however, differ remarkably: whereas Donau City is trying to attract attention by establishing a new skyline along the waterfront, HafenCity has been planned as a medium-height structure with singular pieces of spectacular architecture. The claim to create ‘urbanity’ (a claim that is also very typically reflected in the naming of the projects with the suffix ‘city’) is thus interpreted very differently.
However, it is not only the formal characteristics of the two projects which clearly differ, but also the organizational and legal frameworks which structure the architectural design process. In the case of Donau City, the WED AG has been operating with a great degree of freedom in its planning and design decisions. The architects have been commissioned freely, sometimes on the basis of informal reviews but ultimately without any binding guidelines for competitions and public involvement in the process. The importance of networks and political influence in the choice of the architects is reflected in the fact that up to now only local architects have been chosen for the design of the buildings; the DC towers by Dominique Perrault which are currently planned are the first buildings of the project designed by a foreign architect. In fact, the WED has been responsible for the greatest part of the design defining building systems and layout, the commissioned architects left with only the “streamlining” of the buildings (WED AG, personal communication).

In contrast, the HafenCity Hamburg GmbH has been taking decisions with regard to urban design and architecture on the basis of much stricter and at the same time more ambitious and time-consuming procedures. The master plan by Kees Christiaanse, instead of providing a deterministic urban planning design, opted for an open concept “in order to define the underlying structures while leaving a certain amount of leeway for various types of building initiatives within the framework of a set of rules” (Christiaanse and Neppl 2008: 75). The specifications of the master plan consisted only in the definition of the various quarters and their building typologies. After the master plan had been adopted by the local parliament, further specifications were developed in the qualification phase on the basis of workshops involving planners, city authorities and project managers and competitive bidding processes. After land plot sizes and buildings volumes have been determined, invitations for tender are issued for individual building areas. The property purchase option which is then awarded obliges the individual developer to start construction within a certain time-frame on the basis of mandatory architectural competitions (ibid.: 75 ff.).

Opinions about the thus far realized urban qualities of the two projects are divided. The critics of Donau City consider the project a failure of urban planning. They criticize the isolated character of the quarter, which is detached from the otherwise dense and compact urban fabric, and the incoherent overall layout, which corresponds only roughly to the original master plan. Indeed, the existing mix of uses with office buildings and apartments does not seem to be sufficient to produce a lively neighbourhood. Donau City lacks amenities that could attract people outside of office hours and the open spaces offer no attractions to the general public (and are in fact almost impossible to use because of the extreme wind generated between the high-rise towers). Thus, the area, so far, remains an enclave for the people living and working there. Various propositions to include cultural institutions (e.g. a Guggenheim Museum) or university facilities have been made from the very beginning of the project; none of these have so far been realized. In response to these claims, the WED AG
states that the development is still not completed and that the two towers currently under way would add uses and bring people to the area.

The situation in the HafenCity is certainly different. Even though only the lesser part of the whole project has been completed so far, some observations are already permitted. The mix of uses has been given high priority in the HafenCity. Together with the density (the average floor space index of 2.5 is relatively high), the preference for small plots along with the diversification of ownership, the subdivision into distinguished quarters as well as the decision not to permit any roofed pedestrian areas and the emphasis placed on the treatment of the open spaces, the creation of a lively urban setting is certainly more probable than in the case of Vienna’s Donau City. This focus on the urban qualities is also explained by the lessons learned in Hamburg’s historic centre. After the successive adaption of floor space for commercial and office use which has mostly eliminated residential space, the city centre is utterly dead after closing hours – a fact the city planners have been aware of for a long time. However, only lately has this led to some changes in the urban planning strategies, as exemplified in the decision to rebuy some of the remaining blocks of historic working-class tenements in the city centre after a citizens’ group had launched protests against their demolition and subsequent replacement with commercial blocks (Briegleb 2009).

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that the HafenCity is a socially exclusive area. Critics argue that it lacks social diversity and that the apartments (despite various models of ownership) are all upscale. Another point of critique has been the transfer of revenues to refinance the new port infrastructure in Altenwerder instead of investing in socially depressed areas. Finally, the awarding of the contract for the commercial heart of HafenCity, the whole quarter around Magdeburger Hafen, to a single consortium of German and Dutch investors has been criticised as representing the privatization of public space. The argument on behalf of the HafenCity Hamburg GmbH was that that in order to avoid an enclosed mall, the contracting of a single developer for the whole area, which is planned to provide 40,000 m² of retail space, had been the only economically viable solution.

As I will discuss in the next section, the different urban planning and design approaches of the two projects reflect not only distinct urban narratives, planning cultures and institutional settings but also differing (and conflicting) interpretations of how to use architecture as an appropriate signifier in the particular local context.

**Architecture as a Signifier**

“Metropolitan but also maritime” (Hamburg Hafen City GmbH 2009: 13) – this can be taken as the guiding theme of the HafenCity. The developers of the project claim that “HafenCity is being designed to have a city centre character, whilst preserving the typical appearance of a port, where land meets water” (HafenCity Hamburg GmbH 2010a). Thus, the requirement for the architecture and the urban design of the new quarters is twofold. The buildings and urban
spaces are meant to be visibly new, even futuristic, in order to represent a “new kind of urbanity” (HafenCity Hamburg GmbH 2010b) and “new forms of inner city coexistence” (ibid.). At the same time, they are meant to contribute to the reinterpretation of the *genius loci* and the area’s authentic port character, as a description of the project by the developing agency states clearly:

“Thus a completely new and futuristic addition to the city center with its own stylistic vocabulary is gradually emerging. Yet the reinterpretation of the place orients itself toward the established city center, its milieu informed by the old Speicherstadt warehouses and historic port structures, as well as a few conserved buildings. HafenCity carries forward Hamburg’s identity as a maritime city; at the same time, a model for European city development in the 21st century” (Hamburg Hafen City GmbH 2009: 4).

The ambivalence of this twofold requirement is visible in the structures completed so far. One the one hand, the overall layout of the master plan is conservative as well as pragmatic in its adoption of the scale and grid patterns of the existing structures in the inner city and the Speicherstadt. The individual buildings of the finished quarters at Sandtor Quay and Dalmane Quay, however, are heterogeneous and use a wide range of materials and formal solutions. Together with the planned landmark buildings of Elbphilharmonie and the Science Center, the HafenCity is thus seen as contributing to the city’s “increasingly global outlook” (Dawson 2006: 70) and as signifying that “Hamburg goes global” (ibid.).

At the same time, it has paradoxically been the heterogeneity of the buildings at Sandtor Quay and Dalmane Quay which has drawn criticism (e.g. Kähler 2008). Even though the quality of most of the buildings is – as critics agree – undoubtedly high, it is claimed that a large number of them overstate the individual architectural statement as opposed to the unity of the whole ensemble. Indeed, even Kees Christiaanse has admitted that this overemphasis of a particularly original impression represents a disadvantage of the competitive bidding process and impairs the overall personality of the neighbourhood (Christiaanse and Neppl 2008: 77ff.). What is interesting is how the criticism makes reference to an alleged *genius loci* and a local ‘Hanseatic’ building tradition characterized by sobriety and understatement – attributes which are usually explained by Hamburg’s past as a trading port and sovereign city-state. This is exemplified in an interview with Hadi Teherani, one of the most successful Hamburg-based architects. He criticizes precisely the heterogeneity of the buildings completed so far as being not place-specific enough:

“To design such a huge, inner-urban area, is a once in the century opportunity. But the buildings at Dalmane Quay are not typical for the location: tightly positioned individual architectural statements, the material very variegated:
yellow brick, red brick, and white plaster. A completely un-hamburg-like mish-mash\(^2\) (Teherani 2008; translation by the author).

To understand this argument, one has to know that Hamburg’s cityscape is indeed visibly shaped by two types of building structures: the ‘white’ neo-classical villas of the bourgeoisie in the affluent quarters around the Alster river from the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) century and the brick-made large housing estates and municipal buildings dating from the era of the city’s legendary building director Fritz Schumacher. In the years from 1908 until his retirement in 1933, Schumacher changed the face of the city through his building programme, which combined urban development objectives with architectural guidelines, the most important being the preference for brick as the local building material. Schumacher was responsible for the design of some of the best known examples of Brick Expressionism of the 1920s in Northern Germany. It is because of him that the specific optic of brick facades has over decades constituted the most typical image of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. Only since the mid 1990s have local architects began to free themselves of this tradition by experimenting with new materials but also by re-interpreting brick in a new and playful manner.

The argument of authenticity and place-specificity has also been raised in criticism of the design of the public spaces. The competition for the landscape design of the first part of HafenCity was won by EMBT of Barcelona in 2002. Benedetta Tagliabue and her team exported the expressive formal idiom which they had used for their projects in Barcelona to this city in north Germany. Their design aims at “creating atmosphere” (Petrow 2008) through a playful treatment of the relationship between water and land, employing piers and pontoons, ramps, stairways and terraces as well as a wide range of sculptural and ornamental elements. Even though EMBT made ample use of brick in their design, the playful and ornamental design idiom was criticized as “un-Hanseatic” (ibid.) and reproached as a “Mediterranean design-disneyland” (Dörting 2008: 73) and not place-specific enough.

At the same time, both the architectural statements as well as the authenticity of HafenCity were seemingly not considered to be distinct enough to be visible to the outsider and to create recognizable images that could secure media attention. Such attention is meant to be achieved by the architectural icons of the Elbphilharmonie and the Science Center. It is argued that the Elbphilharmonie in particular, with its incorporation of a historic warehouse in the design, constitutes “a perfect symbol for Hamburg” (Hafen City Hamburg GmbH 2010c) by “combining port architecture and architectural creativity” (ibid.). The necessity of these iconic buildings is explained by their ability to represent the significance of the HafenCity with regard to outsiders, as the current building director Jörn Walter states clearly:

“HafenCity needs such flagship projects to show what it constitutes for Hamburg also to the outsider. It needs special uses and special architecture for the most prominent locations. This can’t be day-to-day business, because these flagship projects shape the future image of Hamburg." (Walter 2008: 38; translation by the author).

In contrast to the case of HafenCity, the Donau City has, from the beginning, been presented in clear contrast to the existing historic cityscape. The project is explicitly meant to constitute “a 2nd modern city centre for Vienna alongside the historical one” (WED AG 2010a). The high-rise towers in particular have been used as symbols of change and modernity, promising to “make Vienna different” (Unser Wien 1998/14: 1), to establish Vienna’s “most modern quarter” (wien.at 2001/2: 6) and to constitute “the city’s new skyline” (ibid.). More specifically, they have been used to promote Vienna as a modern business location and to visualize the internationalization of Vienna’s urban economy, as these two statements from the city’s official planning documents exemplify:

“Also for the internationalization of the business location Vienna a joining of Vienna-specific identities and innovations with international typologies is important” (Stadt Wien 2004: 15; translation by the author).

“To signal economic competence and cosmopolitanism, several high-rise projects… were realized" (Stadtentwicklung Wien 2005: 54; translation by the author).

This focus on the representation of economic modernity is explained by Vienna’s traditional – and according to the experts of city marketing, up to now one-sided – image as a centre of ‘cultural capital’ and tourist attraction. As former imperial capital and historic centre of cultural and artistic movements, Vienna boasts a plethora of sights and monuments, with the inner city being declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. Large parts of the urban area are made up of historic structures which follow height restrictions that date back to the first formalized zoning plan from 1893. According to this zoning plan, St. Stephen’s cathedral, as the highest building in the city, marks the centre of the Inner District, with the outlying districts following in descending height conforming to a radial layout. High-rise buildings disregarding this scheme were the exception long into the 20th century.
Given the crucial economic importance of the tourist industry for Vienna and the dense fabric of the inner urban area, major physical changes in the inner districts have been the absolute exception in the last decades. The debates surrounding the only major redevelopment project within the historic environment, the MuseumsQuartier, one of the largest cultural complexes in Europe, which opened in 2001, showed clearly how much the preservation of the historic structures and their conventionalized images limit urban planning strategies in Vienna. A proposal for the erection of a new tower as part of the conversion of the former court stables into a centre for art museums and exhibition spaces failed after fierce controversies in the media.

Urban marketing efforts have, on the one hand, continued to focus on the promotion of this image of historic Vienna. On the other hand, the government has been trying to correct this image of it as a mere tourist attraction. The problem is, as a representative of the Federation of Austrian Industry put it bluntly, that:

“Europe undoubtedly sees Vienna as a city with an extremely high quality of life, full of culture, history and music, the Opera Ball and wine taverns. However, this image, which is so important for tourism managers, is extremely dangerous for Vienna as a business location. Europe does not associate Vienna with science, business, industry, added value, high calibre jobs or quality” (Fischmann 2004: 26).

In this situation the main line of argument since the 1990s (and the one that has been promoted most visibly) has been the marketing of Vienna as an international business location and centre for corporate regional headquarters with a unique selling point: the city’s position ‘between east and west’ (Magistrat der Stadt Wien 2004: 47, Stadtentwicklung Wien 2005: 33f; 88; 119f). In the new geopolitical situation after 1989, Vienna has been promoted as the logical gateway to the new markets of the CEE countries because of its central location and the city’s historical, and now re-established, links within the region. Vienna and the eastern region of Austria have, in the words of Mayor Michael Häupl, “regained the geo-political, economic and cultural position that is rightfully theirs – in the heart of Europe” (Häupl 2004: 4).

The use of the Donau City and its architecture to promote this vision of Vienna as regional headquarter-centre and gateway to the CEE markets is conflicting. The office towers provide, as explained above, a sharp contrast to Vienna’s historic urban fabric and serve as a prime motif in the visualization of the economic internationalization it aspires to. The exposed location on the riverside of the Danube River allows for spectacular, wide-angle views that depict Donau City as an urban skyline along the water and make the complex appear bigger than it really is (at the same time the towers are situated in sufficient distance from the
historic Inner District so as not to constitute any kind of threat to the unity of the historic heritage). While the promotion of HafenCity – at least partially – emphasizes the project’s authenticity and its incorporation of original port infrastructure and, in addition, tries to establish iconic elements like the Elbphilharmonie, Donau City is rather promoted through its resemblance to a canonized set of global skylines. These familiar images of the skylines of New York, London and Frankfurt are imprinted into our collective memory and form our ideas of cities as centers of a globalized world economy.

Donau City might be suitable for this kind of depiction because of the non-remarkable and standardized character of the ensemble. The office towers feature very common design solutions, standard all-glass facades, and unremarkable shapes; they ultimately reflect the rationale of profit maximization (which is also manifested in the fact that the towers have continually become taller and wider in order to accommodate more rental space). However, this lack of specificity also creates a fundamental contradiction because the skyline of Donau City is not recognizable the way the skylines of New York or Hong Kong are. It lacks landmark buildings and characteristic scenery. It is, paradoxically, a skyline that is not instantly recognizable. The uniformity and interchangeability of the architecture therefore pose a dilemma for urban marketing efforts, a dilemma that is evident in the promotional material of the Vienna Business Agency (VBA). The agency pointedly did not use Donau City in their advertisements in recent years, as nobody identifies Donau City with Vienna without an explicit reference (VBA, personal communication). Instead, their promotional subjects mostly combined unspecific views of business scenes with place-specific elements in the background, such as St. Stephan's cathedral or the distinctive shape of the UNO-city.

A look at the promotional material from the city’s press office and other departments of the public administration confirms that the single most important motif with which to represent the two sides of Vienna – the historic together with the modern one – in an unmistakable way is St. Stephan’s cathedral together with the Haas Haus, a postmodern building by Austrian architect Hans Hollein, in front. The two towers by Dominique Perrault which are currently planned are certainly meant to counter this lack of place-specificity. On the one hand, they continue the long-established line of argument when they are described as an “emotional statement for a modern interpretation of the business location Vienna” (WED AG 2010b). At the same time the developer tries to promote these towers (which will be higher than any other building in the city) as the definitive icons of Donau City and Vienna, “a new trademark that will define the skyline of this European metropolis” (ibid.). Whether their outstanding height alone will be able to accomplish this is open to discussion, as in the international context height alone is certainly not a distinctive attribute.

**Conclusions**

Visibility is achieved by very different means in the two case studies; whereas Donau City tries to stand out as a cluster of high-rise towers, HafenCity is being developed as a compact,
urban structure with a few iconic elements. Without doubt, the urban design framework of HafenCity in its flexible, phasing logic is certainly more advanced and rather more state-of-the-art than the Vienna project, with its original formalistic master plan from the mid-1990s. Additionally, the question of sustainability and technological innovation ranges disproportionally higher in the development of HafenCity. Nevertheless, the Hamburg master plan is also criticized as being too traditionalistic and lacking innovation by some voices in the planning community and has seemingly not created much enthusiasm among citizens. In contrast, in Vienna, with all the public attention on the architectural spectacle provided by the height of the towers the urban design framework (apart from the initial phase) has not been a matter of discussion at all.

The discussion shows how the debates and interpretations relating to the architecture of the two UMPs are very much centered on the notions of place-specificity versus global uniformity and its links to the creation of urbanity. Interestingly, the lines of argument are not predictable or easily comparable from city to city. Donau City’s architecture certainly lacks originality and conforms to the picture of globally standardized office architecture. Nevertheless, it is widely used in city marketing and political campaigning when referring to Vienna as a business location. In Hamburg, it is – in contrast – the heterogeneity of the architectural statements which draws critique, even though the small plot size and the density were explicitly meant to foster the urban character of the quarter.

At the same time, the case of Vienna also clearly shows how the resemblance to conventionalized global city images is suited for some but clearly not for all purposes of city marketing. Ultimately, there is always the question of how to distinguish the UMP from other projects, and of how to make it uniquely identified with the particular city – this is the reason why in Vienna yet again two even higher towers are projected and why the planners in Hamburg try to retain the authentic port character and even make use of the port infrastructure in the prestige project of Elbphilharmonie. Which architectural elements are interpreted as place-specific or, alternatively, as presenting global standards, and how they are used to criticize or promote UMPs remains, ultimately, very much dependent on the local context and its planning history.

References


HafenCity Hamburg GmbH (2010a):

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH (2010b):

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH (2010c):


