

TRANSCRIPTION PODCAST SIEMENSSTADT CALLING #6

- ARCHITECTURE -

Stefan Kögl

We will make decisions for the future and also provide answers.

Sarah Tietze

Welcome to Siemensstadt Calling, the Siemensstadt Podcast. A podcast for everyone who is interested in cities of the future, in smart technologies in the urban environment and in sustainable urban development, and for everyone who is looking forward to the development of Siemensstadt as a place of the future. I am your host Sarah Tietze and together with the general manager of Siemensstadt, Stefan Kögl and other guests we will be presenting you with the background for the Future Place Siemensstadt. Stay tuned! Since the end of November, we know what the first new buildings in our Siemensstadt will look like. But what are the ideas and concepts behind the designs and what do they reveal about future work in Siemensstadt? And what changes will they bring to the neighbourhood? That's what we want to discuss in our new episode with Tom Friedrich and Nils Buschmann. The two of them are the founders of ROBERTNEUN, the architectural firm that won the structural engineering competition to design the new first buildings in Siemensstadt.

Sarah Tietze

Dear Tom, dear Nils, how nice that you are with us in the studio today. And hello Stefan, thank you for joining us again.

Stefan Kögl

Thank you. Hello Sarah.

Sarah Tietze

Tom, Nils. Most Berliners know a piece of Berlin that you designed. The bright red buildings at the park, at Gleisdreieck, at the transition from Schöneberg to Kreuzberg. The buildings look like a red factory, they stand out, but still absolutely fit to the area. Does this architecture describe your style?

Nils Buschmann

Yes, that's at least part of what fascinates us about architecture and the city. We've been in Berlin for 30 years, almost 30 years.

And we always say that we were sort of socialised by those first ten years, by the nineties, in the sense that there was this incredibly free city back then. The city of possibilities and at every point any space was appropriated for other things than it was originally intended. And that has actually always totally inspired us. And at the same time, what fascinated us about Berlin or other European cities was this richness and density of cultural ideas of the cities that had grown. And that's why we always try to apply these two aspects as criteria in all our projects and to look for architecture that is part of something bigger and therefore unmistakable. So, we have no interest at all in these interchangeable international, stylistic questions, but are totally enthusiastic about this question of how you can transform the existing, so to speak, and combine it into a new whole.

Sarah Tietze

Tom, is this something that impressed upon you?

Tom Friedrich

Yes, sure. We've known each other for 30 years, we even started studying together here around the corner at Rohrdamm, because at that time the architecture building was being renovated and that means we spent quite a lot of our first two years in Berlin here at Rohrdamm, because it was also an intensive time. And yes, it was exactly these experiences that shaped us.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, we just heard from Nils that he was inspired by the richness of Berlin, the Berlin of opportunities, does Berlin inspire you too?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, of course. We, Siemens are inspired by Berlin. Of course, everyone knows that it is our largest production location in the world. Nevertheless, there has certainly been less visible development here in the Siemensstadt area in recent years, I would say. And in this respect, this is a sign that Siemens, we say: we are investing a lot in this location, because Berlin inspires, because there is young talent in Berlin, because Berlin is attractive. And that is a good basis for driving developments here.

Sarah Tietze

The development is from a closed industrial site to an open urban district and ROBERTNEUN has now won the building construction competition here. Stefan, what exactly does a building construction competition mean?

Stefan Kögl

Well, we decided on the urban development in January, with Ortner & Ortner as the winner. They have been working on and fine-tuning this master plan for a year now and, in parallel, have drawn up a tender for the first new buildings and also launched this competition a few weeks ago. And this is about the buildings north of the administration building for those who know a bit about it. So, the future main axis will lead from the S-Bahn station at Rohrdamm into the area and these are the entrée buildings that have to exist here in the immediate vicinity of the administration building, to the Schaltwerk high-rise, so also real historical icons, should also show the way into the future.

Sarah Tietze

Nils, Tom, the three buildings that you have developed here in structural engineering are really right in the entrance, virtually on the showcase of Siemensstadt. What was important to you in designing the buildings?

Tom Friedrich

There was one important point, and that is urban development of the city. Now it almost has a backside character. So to speak, the front side is on Nonnendammallee, and the new S-Bahn station will turn that around a bit. In this respect, this entrance situation was already special. And that of course also raised questions about the two buildings, about the two new buildings, how they actually make a second front or entrance on such a back side. In other words, urban planning, how these new buildings can be combined with the existing buildings, which we value very highly and think are great, to create something new, so to speak. And to create spaces where old and new can coexist as a matter of course. In addition, there has always been the question - which now relates more to architecture and expression - of what the right strategy is at this location, in terms of taking what you find one to one, i.e. the brick and the perforated facades and so on. Or is it not rather a matter of adding something new, 100 years later or a bit more, in the sense of 'continuation', but still being bound and speaking to the existing or making something common, without sentimentalising about it, but also without simply putting it in the corner, really creating a strong, common contemporary feeling.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, you just put up the picture of the entrance area, the new entrance area in Siemensstadt. Will it feel different? For the neighbours who can now simply walk in? Will they dare to walk into Siemensstadt, into the new area? Will it become whole?

Stefan Kögl

So, yes, of course it will be. That is the goal, to achieve an opening that integrates the area into the rest of Siemensstadt. This is an intact part of town with life, streets, and in the end, there is an area in the middle with a fence around it. Of course, there are very different sides to the area, but the goal is to open it up in such a way that it becomes a part of the city and a matter of course for the citizens. And what should not happen, with all our ambitions and goals, also in relation to the future city that we have, it should not become a museum or an exhibition, no technology exhibitions. On the contrary, it should become a very lively district, where people feel comfortable, where they like to move, like to work, like to live.

Sarah Tietze

If we only talk about the first part of the site. Office buildings are being built there. How did you still manage to include life in the district in your plans?

Nils Buschmann

Well, the master plan has first of all specified the building sites, which actually already formulate very different and diverse urban spaces. Which is perhaps the most important thing for opening up the neighbourhood in the first step. There is a second axis parallel to Nonnendammallee in the residential areas of Siemensstadt, and the extended so-called "Siemens Strip" will extend parallel to Nonnendammallee into the depths of the neighbourhood. And the two buildings actually both fulfil a kind of articulated function by forming spaces on all sides. On the one hand, the high-rise with its broad side is the entrance face of the quarter, the courtyard building rather mediates between the Schaltwerk high-rise and this green space in between, and on the other hand a space is created at the information pavilion. The result is a kind of fabric of urban spaces that offer very different things and are characterised in different ways. And they don't compete with each other, but complement each other, so that the different uses and possibilities become a lively back and forth. In addition, the first floors are programmed to be completely public, both with general public functions that activate the urban space and with something like the information pavilion that is supposed to programmatically accompany this development process. And finally, Siemens-related public use, such as the employee restaurant or things like that, will also partially activate and play in these spaces, so that in principle this coexistence of Siemens uses in the city represents a very important aspect.

Sarah Tietze

You just mentioned the employee restaurant. You haven't read much about that. Where exactly is this supposed to be located?

Nils Buschmann

In our design, this is currently located on the first floor of the courtyard building, but then facing the Siemens buildings and not the perhaps superordinate public Siemens strip, but actually these internal, somewhat more intimate urban spaces. And facing the Siemens strip and the marketplace, both the high-rise building and the courtyard building contain more or less general public functions such as gastronomy or other services, etc., which appeal not only to the Siemens workforce, but also to the entire neighbourhood.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, let's talk about the canteen again. Will it come as just described?

Stefan Kögl

Yeah, sure, yeah. So sure. It's an essential component here for the employees, and in all new buildings or new areas that we create, there will also be a canteen.

Sarah Tietze

Is it located on the inside?

Stefan Kögl

It's in the building, on the first floor, in the courtyard building. So maybe again on the development. At the moment we have a canteen on the fifth floor or fifth corridor in the administration building, or rather on the third floor in the case of others. And if the administration building is to be transformed in the next few years, there will have to be a canteen somewhere. And that will now take place here in the new buildings.

Sarah Tietze

First floor may sound like an outdoor area. Is that a possibility?

Nils Buschmann

Exactly. The courtyard building, together with the administration building and the Schaltwerk high-rise, forms something like a forecourt or outer courtyard. And it is also on the same level as this employee restaurant or canteen and is intended to provide outdoor areas.

Sarah Tietze

I can imagine that very well. You mentioned the courtyard building and the high-rise. Stefan, do the two differ in the way they are built?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, that is a question I would have to ask the architects. I can only say from the client's point of view that they are of course very different buildings in terms of typology, i.e. simply in terms of structure. And one quality of ROBERTNEUN's design is certainly that both buildings have a very high quality, even though they are conceived differently. Which is certainly not easy with a design like this. Because you simply design two buildings, two very different buildings, but they also have to fit together. After all, they shouldn't be two different designs.

Sarah Tietze

I now pass the question over to you.

Nils Buschmann

Well, the two typologies differ per se in that a high-rise building always benefits more from the external orientation and the view and orientation over the city and so on. Whereas a lower building with 5 to 6 floors naturally also has an external effect, but in the internal orientation perhaps offers much more of a chance to orient itself towards something like a collective center. And that was actually also the idea of these two typologies, that the high-rise building is just so ideally oriented, namely to the east and west, so that the conditions are almost identically high-quality, and then in the center rather the core arrangement. And on the front sides, nevertheless, there is the attempt to create such collective two-story spaces, so that the high-rise building is not exclusively just stacked floors, but the vertical is also still present in the spatial orientation as an additional place. Whereas the courtyard building actually gets a much stronger - we have always called it "core" - central, vertical atrium space, with its galleries, bridges and spiral staircases it also offers an alternative communicative quality to the, let's say, flexible office shelves. That's why, on the one hand, their basic structural assumption makes them very different in expression. On the other hand, each part of this ensemble of four buildings has its own characteristics and its own character and is given an appearance of self-confidence. Such that the ensemble is actually on an equal footing with, in principle, the old buildings or the industrial icons that are also led into the future and not left behind.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, do we know yet for whom the new buildings are. So the courtyard building and the high-rise?

Stefan Kögl

Right. So, the main building will be occupied mainly by the Siemens, the regional Siemens Germany unit. All units are currently mainly in the administration building and there will be a couple of corporate units moving in there as well. And in the high-rise, that will be the new headquarters of Siemens Mobility, with Mr. Michael Peter, our CEO of Mobility. And Cedrik Neike, our Managing Board member here in Berlin, probably also moving in there.

Sarah Tietze

And when will they move in?

Stefan Kögl

Well, according to the current plan, in 2025. We actually want to start building in 2022. I've said this before elsewhere. We have made great progress, great cooperation with the representatives of the Senate and the district. And if we can such a spirit into a project like this, then there's really nothing to stop us from achieving such an ambitious schedule. However, it must also be said that we are in the middle of the Corona pandemic. Many employees in the authorities are now also working on the pandemic. Of course, we support it unconditionally from the Siemens side. That means that we will have to see to what extent there are delays and changes. In case of doubt, we will not be able to influence them. But I can only say that so far all those involved have pulled together and are doing everything possible. In this respect, the schedule remains unchanged at the moment.

Sarah Tietze

That means in 2025 I can drink my cappuccino on the roof terrace of the high-rise building?

Stefan Kögl

Presumably. Whether that cappuccino is on the roof terrace, we will see. The roofs will certainly be put to some use. How public that is, whether only for employees or not, this will become apparent in the next months. In the detailed planning.

Sarah Tietze

But, let's come back down to earth. Will the first floor areas be opened to all?

Stefan Kögl

They should be at least partially open to the public.

Sarah Tietze

The loft spaces are particularly exciting. I also saw the photovoltaic modules in the pictures. What else does sustainability look like in Siemensstadt? Perhaps first the question to ROBERTNEUN. How does your design score in terms of sustainability?

Tom Friedrich

Well, sustainability actually always concerns three areas or maybe more. But one is, we always call it a robust structure, which means that we try to design buildings that do not function specifically for one use, but can also change over time, so that the entire building is not called into question. So, in other words, recyclability. The second thing that came into play here was the load-bearing structure. The courtyard house is designed as a wooden structure with a reinforced concrete core, but the floor slabs and the associated load-bearing structure can be made of wood. And with the high-rise building, there will be an attempt to simply keep the concrete as low as possible via recycled concrete and particularly economical construction methods. And the third point is, of course, building services, which play an important role in sustainability. It starts with the natural utilisation in principle of the compass direction, so that there are so to speak south facades or roof surfaces where photovoltaic cells make sense. The north facades are perhaps used more for cooling and the completely natural thermal, how would you say, conditions in a building. So, for example, in the courtyard house with the large atrium, the heat will always rise upwards. That is, you can use the thermal to generate air naturally and thereby save on mechanical ventilation. And then there is also always the aspect of the warmth of the earth, to go into the earth or 'geothermal energy' on a relatively easy technical level in order to also draw benefit here, to benefit from such a natural occurrence in order to keep overall energy consumption low. But also to perceive the house almost like a power plant, which in the best case perhaps at some point, producing as much energy as it actually consumes or even more, is like a small power plant standing in the city.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, Tom has just mentioned the materials, including wood as a raw material.

I had heard that the Urban Tech Republic, which is just three kilometres away, will also rely heavily on wood construction. Are there any similarities there? Could we perhaps work together on this point?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, of course. We are also in discussion with those involved there and those responsible, also with other large areas such as Gartenstadt, for example, and when you think about wood. After all, this is ultimately an ecological issue. And what better way to build rather than with concrete, which produces a lot of CO₂, needs a lot of water. And in our campus project in Erlangen, for example, we have now also started using wood-hybrid construction in the second construction phase. This is one of the first major projects in Germany. However, as a stand-alone topic in the region, it has been difficult to achieve a good position on the market. That's how I would put it if seen from an economic point of view.

Sarah Tietze

Because wood is more expensive?

Stefan Kögl

It is more expensive because it is of course, well not of course, but it is not an every day building style, and because of this fact the costs are simply higher. In the first stage, in the second, in the future, in its sustainability, it does of course have benefits. That is why we also use it. So, that being said, here the question is how to find new ways that are ecologically improved. And the more people join in, if I can put it flippantly, the better it will be. SO, the market has to change here. And yes, we of course welcome that change.

Sarah Tietze

Even if it doesn't fit in with the topic of structural engineering. Somehow you can't talk about sustainability and yet you have not briefly addressed the topic of mobility. Stefan, I'd like to ask you: What are Siemensstadt's thoughts on mobility? What should happen here in Siemensstadt?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, I would say that it doesn't even necessarily have anything to do with Siemensstadt in the first place. Namely, because anyone who plans a district must of course think very long-term and we are currently in a very strong upheaval as far as mobility is concerned. On the one hand, we're moving toward electro-mobility, which is changing things, and on the other hand, we're moving away from individual transportation.

And in addition, digitalisation means that we have many more possibilities in terms of autonomous means of transportation in the future. And our task together with the architects is of course to interpret the future. But of course we also define it somewhere a little bit. So, you also have to decide what we think is right in the future? And if I now take building construction, then we have regulations today. So and so many parking spaces have to be there according to the laws. And at the same time, the question is: How many will we need in 20 years, I say deliberately. Even if we don't need 20 years, hopefully, to complete the whole thing, it will certainly be different. That's just the task that needs to be solved.

Sarah Tietze

Nils, Tom. Stefan somehow just posed the question: What will mobility look like, but also what will life look like in the future? Perhaps a more personal question for you: How do you imagine life in 2030? What should such a district look like, or what should a district of the future look like that meets your needs or perhaps the needs of your children?

Nils Buschmann

There are cities that are much further along than we are here. Copenhagen or Holland, for example. I think we're all familiar with that. Much, much more bicycles are ridden and much more public transport is used, and in some cases it is already shared much more. So I personally think that cycling in Berlin is still relatively undervalued, even though there have been great efforts in recent years. I think we need to expand this even further over the next few years. And on the other hand, I think that all these sharing aspects of mobility, which not only include what we know as car sharing, but also almost every form of mobility that can be booked digitally and so on, work together. I think there's still a lot of potential for development here. However, I think the concepts already exist for the most part. There are many conceptual approaches to making it possible for conventional individual transportation with private cars to be replaced by more space-saving models. And at best, this will also create opportunities for our public spaces. So this is simply no longer this previously existing, yes quasi privatisation of public space through private parking spaces, or privately used parking spaces, then give way to different publicly usable recreational spaces.

Tom Friedrich

I think another aspect which is also planned for here is this concept of a mixed city.

In other words, we will no longer create large areas that are only for living or only for working or only for culture, but rather mixed areas that perhaps do not cover everyday routes in the same way. So if I can walk to work nearby and do my shopping on the way home, then of course there is, on the whole, much less traffic than there is now, for example, in the residential districts. And then I have to take the subway or the car to work. And that is already a concept that is being considered and pursued here, at least in the course of the master plan.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, is that the idea?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, I think that an essential aspect is that in all urban developments of the last decades, perhaps also, in the final analysis, the car, the privately or individually driven car, is always the determining element, it is the strongest element. All the others are subordinate to it. There are very prominent examples here in Berlin from the post-reunification period, for example, that offer great spatial sequences in terms of urban development if you go there today. I'm just not saying it now, because there are certainly other places. Is one only impressed by the street and where I can cross, and I have my sidewalk and then I have less than a meter which they call a bicycle lane. I can only confirm what Nils Buschmann just said, it is non-existent. And then there's a curb of 25 centimetres and then there's the road. If we imagine that we have fewer cars, that we have cars that drive slowly, that react to the environment. By environment, I mean everyone walking around, so from pedestrians, cyclists, even wanderers, because there are also corresponding networks there. We have 5G technology nowadays, so the car is able to react to everything because it sees everything. Sensors see everything. Then I suddenly have other possibilities, including terms like multimodal use of spaces. So I don't have a curb at all. I don't have a bike lane at all in that sense, because the car fades into the background and reacts to the things around it. Then I get the chance for a completely different urban design. And all of a sudden, spaces also get a different quality. And that. That's the goal that needs to be achieved here.

Sarah Tietze

Tom has just opened the beautiful picture of the mixed city.

In any case, a picture immediately arose in my mind and the question, Stefan, to you: Is that the goal, to really design a district where I can check on my child at daycare during my lunch break and maybe still manage to do the gardening in the evening because it only takes me two minutes to get home?

Stefan Kögl

So, whether the individual who works here will also live here is a good goal or a nice goal. Of course, we can't influence whether that will be the case. To be quite clear about that. But there can be a high degree of diversity or we have the goal here of showing how this works and how it also makes sense. That is the basic idea of this project. And, of course, it gives rise to a life that we, where we assume that this must be organised in the future in very many cities. This is how I would put it. In many megacities around the world this is just simply happening because people are reacting to it. We are trying to design something with foresight, with many answers that we want to give and that will of course change again over the years. So we are also clear about that. There is no answer today that will be valid in 10 years. But we will make decisions for the future and also provide answers.

Sarah Tietze

Nils, Tom. We haven't talked about the information pavilion yet. It will be located directly in the entrance area. What did you have in mind?

Nils Buschmann

The idea is basically that it serves to represent this opening up of the area as a sign, so to speak. And in this respect it was important that this pavilion also transports the same demands and themes. On the one hand, it is about formulating this opening and this public space. That's why there's actually a kind of covered public space and entrance situation on the first floor. And secondly, above that, the actual event and exhibition space. This pavilion is constructed from steel elements that are always the same, so that in principle it can be dismantled and reassembled elsewhere without any losses. And thereby transports at least one aspect of such a sustainable construction method and such a new building perhaps. Of course, it also has the advantage that, as a temporary building, it does not have to meet all the technical, building services requirements, as the other two buildings do now. But it transports these themes in a way and thematises them as an entrance to the new quarter.

Sarah Tietze

We are now almost at the end of our discussion, but I still have one question for the three of you. What are you most looking forward to in the new Siemensstadt? Stefan, what are you looking forward to?

Stefan Kögl

I'm looking forward to seeing life move in there.

Sarah Tietze

Tom and Nils? What are you excited about?

Tom Friedrich

A good cooperation in terms of leading the first construction phase of the old Siemensstadt into the future, so to speak. And if we are part of that, that would be pretty great.

Sarah Tietze

Thank you very much to the three of you. It was exciting to talk to you. I learned a lot about building construction and about the new buildings in Siemensstadt. See you soon in our Siemensstadt. If you want to learn more about Siemensstadt, the people who live and work there, or the projects that are happening around Siemensstadt. Then tune in again next time. Bye and see you soon.

S-Bahn announcement

Next Stop: Siemensstadt.