

The hard factor: towards an integrated regional policy for airport development at Frankfurt Rhine-Main airport

Ute Knippenberger, Frankfurt, February 2006

From airport to airport-city

The French Ethnologist Marc Augé has subsumed the airport terminal under the denotation of a non-place. Just like shopping malls, supermarkets and hotel chains, the terminal is not involved in an urban context; it is de-historical and therefore unable to develop in contrast to the identity of its antipode - the place or the city.

Today, the marketing strategies of many European airports speak a different language: What was once a mere transport node should become the airport city. ¹Observing the *pacified-by-cappuccino* shopping sections with the ever equal arrangements of check-in booths, high-grade business clothing and wannabe-historical tea-shops from Bremen, one could think about it as a brilliant marketing gag developed at the world's elite real-estate schools – The Airport City. However, upon further consideration, the discussion as to whether or not the airport can develop a form of urbanity is almost irrelevant. The growing number of facilities not directly related to actual transport functions makes many airports today agglomerations that could at least be called spatial, if not urban. Acknowledging the historical development of the city as a crossroad joining trade paths, recent literature names airports the new city nuclei, using the term aerotropolis. If airports are developing an urban character and are agglomerating uses associated with the old city center, a closer look has to be taken into this expansion.

This paper examines the reasons for the spatial structure of airport regions and raises questions regarding the consequences of these structures. The focus of this paper will be hubs and large airports as they, for the most part, clearly illustrate the structures of airport cities. It is based on the work-in-progress of my doctoral thesis and reflects the case study of Frankfurt Rhine-Main airport.

Aviation business

The amount of global air traffic has grown 70 % from 1980 to 1995 onto 1,3 Mrd. Passengers around the world. What was once reserved for the privileged groups able to afford, has become an almost regular means of mobility and future prognosis suppose further accelerations². In Europe the deregulation of the aviation business has changed the situation for airport management and airlines thoroughly in the past 15 years. Though many airport management firms are still partly state-owned, they show an entrepreneurial market oriented attitude. Factors deriving from the aviation network are affecting their policies and are as externalities influencing the airport and its impact on the region.

Through deregulation the concurrence between the airports has accelerated, fuelled by the upcoming low-fare airlines. Especially a hub as Frankfurt airport stands in concurrence for international flights to Europe and as a transfer hub. One of the effects is that policies are supporting intermodal traffic exchange with high-speed railway at the airport. Thus short term and national connection flights can be taken over by train giving way for more international slots in the airport schedule, a driving factor in this concurrence. With the new airport train station the Frankfurt airport is extremely well connected with the region and has extended its catchment area severely. This also leads to a shift in the region's centrality structure. The accessibility of places within the same radius around the airport is depending on their position in the regional traffic network. Thus places that are further away by kilometers can be easier accessible than others closer to the airport (see image).

Image 1: Time-space shift through intermodality (left: real spatial distances, right: distances by timecircles)



Airport business is highly affected by volatility, best seen after September 11th, and the main income source, the landing and starting fees, are subject to change. These external economic factors force airport management firms to diversify their sources of income.

From the many varieties of this diversification like airport consulting and exporting knowledge for airport development the focus in this paper is laid on these with a direct and local effect on the spatial structure. [A large part of income of the Frankfurt Airport Management GmbH, the Fraport AG, comes from real-estate business on the airport-site and airport area³.](#) This leads to an agglomeration of uses not basically necessary to maintain the traffic function of the airport. But serving the expectations of the traveling customer is an asset to maintain the position of the airport within the aviation network. Conference facilities on the airport site make meetings easier, restaurant and shopping facilities provide for a comfortable stay for business travelers. Still the amount of these facilities supposedly extends the needs of the traveling customer and reports show that they are aiming at and attracting customers that are not primarily aviation related.

Agglomerations at airports

Thus we can speak of non-aviation agglomerations at airports. Intermodal facilities enhance this development, as commuters from the region changing trains at the airport make use of the amenities offered. Some of the positive effects of this development are a partial economical independency of the airport from the aviation business and a potential benefit for the surrounding communities through the offered services. At the same time it can be a threat for exactly these communities, as the perfectly connected airport site draws away local costumers from local services. Also the immense conference facilities at Fraport (around 100.000m²) might with further enlargement affect the offerings in the city center of Frankfurt and other locations. On the other hand the economically driven building development at the airport site and airport area can in the future be a threat for the traffic function, as new enlargements might be exacerbated through agglomerations favored today.

Recent examinations show that airport companies will supposedly enhance their non-aviation developments and that there will be a market for these through further growth in the airline traffic sector. It is quite likely that the development of "The Airport City" is not only a marketing instrument but also a fact and what we see is only the beginning. If that is so, regions need to develop strategies to work with these trends. The agglomerations of non-aviation uses have an effect on several spatial layers: the actual airport site, the airport area with directly surrounding spaces and the airport region, which can most likely be drawn as an area accessible from the airport within one hour. These spatial levels are in the case of Frankfurt Rhine-Main absolutely independent from what the political structures show. A coherent planning should subsequently build up on these levels, but in fact completely different institutions and shareholders handle them.

Political structures

The concepts for the airport-city in the case of Frankfurt Rhine-Main show a limitation to the airport site and the airport area. The vision of the Fraport management is narrowed to the spaces, which are under their authority. The political structure of the zone affected by the airport is complex and the definition of the region is unclear. No institution responsible for planning within the airport region exists. The only regional institution is the Planning Association Frankfurt Rhine-Main Conurbation (Planungsverband Ballungsraum Frankfurt Rhein-Main - PVFRM), which is responsible for the Regional Zoning Plan (Regionaler Flächennutzungsplan - RFNP). In the new RFNP the airport as a space is excluded, because

the PVFRM is not responsible for it – the airport is extraterritorial. In fact the region lacks an institution, which provides coherent concepts.

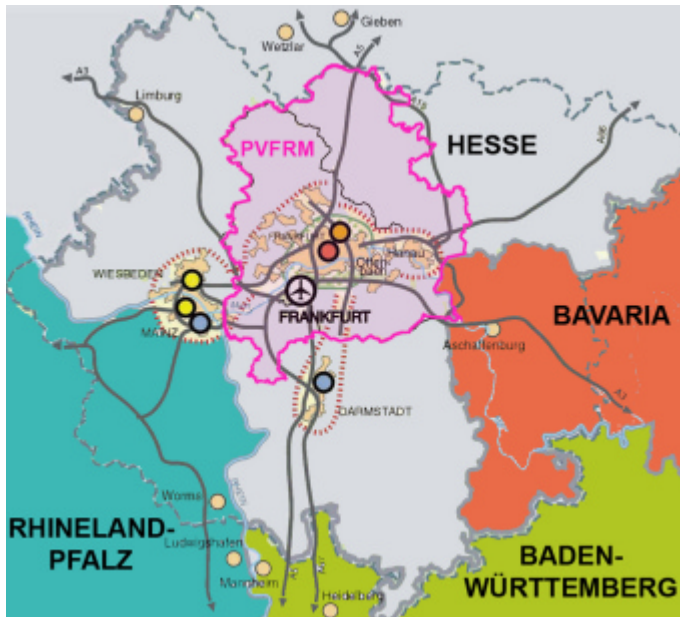
Image 2: Political Planning System

Institution	Official planning document
Federal Level (National Level)	
Bundesregierung (Federal Government):	? Flughafenkonzept der Bundesregierung (Airport Concept by Federal Government - Draft 30 August 2000)
Federal State Level	
Land Hessen	? Landesentwicklungsplan , approved in November 2000
Regional Level	
Planungsverband Ballungsraum Frankfurt Rhein-Main (PVFRM)	? Flächennutzungsplan (Land use plan) 1985 (1 :10 000 ; updated currently) - Landschaftsplan (plan for developing the Open Spaces, Dec. 2000) - Generalverkehrsplan (strategic transportation plan, Dec. 2000)
Region Südhessen	? Regionalplan (Regional Plan - approved in November 2000)
Local Level	
City of Frankfurt Am Main	? Bebauungspläne (Local Zoning Plans)
Negotiation structures	
? Airport mediation group (1998-2000) ? Regional Dialogue Forum (founded 2000 - continuous process)	? Final Report, February 2000

If an enlargement at the airport is planned, the traffic ministry at the federal state level is the one in charge. There has been installed a negotiation structure for the current procedure, which is primarily busy with the noise, the pollution and security issues; there are also real-estate topics discussed, especially if land prices decrease in the noise-affected areas. The actual agglomeration of non-aviation uses seems not to be discussed deeply. In the interviews the topic was mentioned as “hot” but in fact it doesn’t appear in the papers of the Regional Dialogue Forum (Regionales Dialogforum). In the procedure at the Federal State the footprint for buildings is marked, but no further consideration regarding spatial development is made. The next instance when it comes to the construction is then the municipal department for building law (Bauordnungsamt) in Frankfurt, where finally the building application is given. The region influenced by the airport even crosses the state

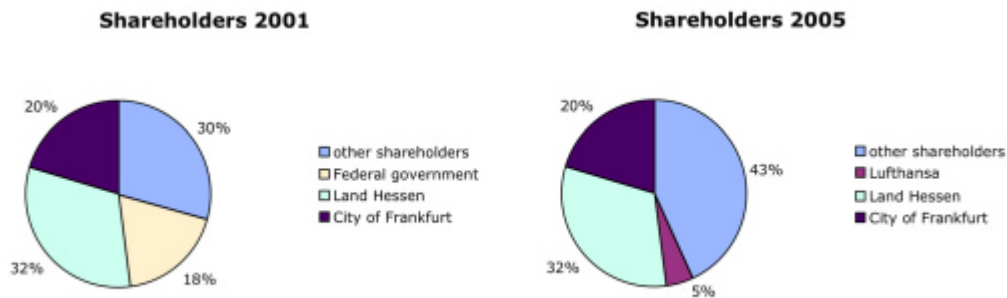
borders towards Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Pfalz. This makes a coherent approach even harder, as for example Bavaria is shareholder of the Munich airport, which is aiming to become the second German hub and trying hard to take over slots for which Frankfurt Rhine-Main yet lacks capacity. Altogether there is no intermediate level to discuss non-aviation agglomerations in the Rhine-Main region.

Image 3: Political borders Frankfurt Rhine-Main Region



Besides the political, the sphere of aviation is very important but most players are not involved in the regional context and are strongly influenced by global economical developments. Not without any reason has the main German carrier, Lufthansa, taken over 5% of Fraport's stock share from the part, which the Federal Government sold in 2005. Two very complex systems with very different interests are influencing each other and hardly a commitment will be made, which satisfies all players. Thus the idea of the airport region displays many of the factors inherent in the global versus local conflict. A crucial point is that the global influences affecting an airport have severe impacts on the local region, in which the airport is embedded.

Image 4: Shareholders Fraport 2001 and 2005



From airport city to airport region?

In this complex situation a coherent vision for the region considering the actual and the future development at the airport seems necessary. This means widening the viewpoint from the airport city to the airport region. But considering the obstacles for a regional and - in a political sense - trans-regional concept for an airport region a consistent approach seems almost impossible. But in fact other regions are ahead of Frankfurt Rhine-Main. In the Netherlands for example the Schiphol Area Development Company as a PPP has been established already in 1987 to coherently promote spaces around the airport, having also some of the municipalities as members. It is now partner of Amsterdam Airport Area” (AAA), together with the Schiphol Group, the Cities of Amsterdam and Almere, the Amsterdam Port Authority, the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer and the Province of North Holland, the main carrier KLM and, as real estate companies, KFN, ING real estate, Schiphol Real Estate and AM Vastgoed. It has to be examined, whether this structure enhances a coherent planning attitude, even though the main focus of the AAA is developing land around the airport. At least Schiphol Amsterdam airport is in Europe the follower of Frankfurt regarding the number of passengers and has higher growth rates. Another follower is Madrid, where these days a new Terminal has been opened, proposed to increase the number of passengers up around 60 Million, thus moving before Frankfurt in the European rankings.

Image 5: Airports in Europe: passenger volume and growth rates since 2004

1. London Heathrow	67,9 Mio.	+ 8% since 2004
2. Paris Charles de Gaulle	53,8 Mio.	+ 4,9%
3. Frankfurt	52,2 Mio.	+ 2,2%
4. Amsterdam	44,2 Mio.	+ 3,8%
5. Madrid	41,9 Mio.	+ 8,4%
6. London-Gatwick	32,8 Mio.	+ 4,2%
7. Rom-Fiumichino	28,6 Mio.	+ 2,0%
8. München	28,6 Mio.	+ 6,7%
9. Barcelona	27,1 Mio.	+ 10,5%
10. Paris-Orly	24,9 Mio.	+ 3,3%

The political situation is of course a different one in Germany than in the Netherlands, but it should be more deeply observed, whether it can also give a guideline for future policies in Frankfurt Rhine-Main.

Again aiming at the installation of an airport region trying to find the least common denominator of all the players involved would be a start. A common interest of all players should be a successful region. But what is a successful region? The Frankfurt chamber of commerce has initiated an expertise in 2004⁴ to examine the potentials and shortcomings of Frankfurt Rhine-Main. In our case interesting is the main asset of accessibility, which will also in the future preserve the region's position in the international concurrence. A major lack though is the rather bad or at least indifferent image the region and especially the city have. Now even though the airport has a share of around 50% of transfer passengers, we are

talking of about 25 Million passengers using the airport as a start or end of a journey. The attractiveness of the region as a destination should not be underestimated here. What we are facing is then the reciprocity of soft factors as image or quality of life and hard factors like infrastructure and accessibility. Though their potential influence on localization decisions is for sure not equal, their interdependence ought to be examined more deeply. What a regional planning view therefore should consider is a coherent vision for the future of the airport and the region. If there is a crucial point where the negative impact of the airport will overshadow its positive economical effects, the region and thus the airport will lose its position in the global economy. The great chance a consistent planning attitude offers is its possibility to develop a vision rather than only dealing with the negative side effects of an economically important factor – the airport and the region. It can build up an idea serving the management's need for diversification at the same time as the region's need for a comprehensive approach. Thus the airport can take over the role of a uniting rather than a dividing force. But the awareness of the topic has to be strengthened in the packed agenda of the effects the airport has on its region. Then the vision can shift from the airport city towards the airport region.

¹ See new Website of Frankfurt Airport www.airportcity-frankfurt.de

² www.icao.int

³ Geschäftsbericht der Fraport AG

⁴ IHK Frankfurt am Main, 2004: Wirtschaftsstandort Frankfurt am Main Zentrale Ergebnisse des Gutachtens von Prof. Dr. Peter Ring

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