

# Aspern, Vienna's Urban Lakeside

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## 1 ABSTRACT

Aspern, Vienna's Urban Lakeside is the largest development area in Vienna/Austria and one of the largest in Europe as well. With its extent of 240 hectares, the former Aspern Airfield corresponds to the combined areas of the 7th and 8th municipal districts of the city. **Aspern** will offer 8.500 residential units for 20.000 people, 15.000 workplaces in office and service segments as well as 5.000 workplaces in sales, scientific, research and educational quarters.

The time frame is vast as well, the urban development area will be gaining shape over the next two decades.

The location must not be understood as a mere urban expansion project – rather, it is to become an independent and multifunctional part of Vienna, whose high-level urban functions will serve the north-east of the Austrian capital.

The key issues are creating attractive public space as well as sustainability and new ways in providing energy and mobility.

The area is situated in the heart of CENTROPE Region, with accessibility to railway stations, airports and the city centres of the twin cities Bratislava and Vienna. This region is a dynamic development area with a strong population and economic growth.



The planned traffic access includes:

- access to two tramway lines (starting in 2012)
- opening of the two metro stations in Aspern, Vienna's Urban Lakeside (2013)
- park and ride facility
- railway station with Intercity connection to Bratislava (2016)
- link up to the A23 Motorway by 2016

In total there will be a gross area of 2.2 million m<sup>2</sup>:

- 850.000 m<sup>2</sup> housing
- 950.000 m<sup>2</sup> offices, retails, R&D, services,..
- 200.000 m<sup>2</sup> business zone (e.g. light production)

- 200.000 m<sup>2</sup> social infrastructure, culture,..



**Aspern** Vienna's Urban Lakeside will be developed in several stages:

Stage 1 (2009 – 2015):

The lake and the area in the south of it will be developed. The first stage includes 2.000 residential units, offices, retail and service companies as well as R&D establishments. The metro will be opened.

Stage 2 (2015 to 2020)

The railway station and the motorway are brought into service. More residential units and other mixed purpose buildings, the railway station, a businesspark will be erected.

Stage 3(from 2020):

The central shopping street will be implemented; improvement of density and the mix of uses.



**Aspern** will combine many issues: business location and recreational area, urban life and nature, modern architecture and alternative energy. Some examples for the general attitude:

- Innovative houses with mixed use instead of anonymous apartment blocks
- Ground floor area with offices and shops instead of monocultural buildings
- Quality of design instead of whateverisms

The main goal is to create a city which is full of living and rich of impressions. The combination of public space, diversity, small-scale units, but also creativity and openness during the development procedure are crucial elements.

To reach these goals it is important to define guiding principles for the development:

- open space with a strong focus on its strategic development (especially as a basement for the attractiveness of the area itself)
- high-quality urban functions for different people with different needs
- sustainable mobility with priority for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport
- variation and small scale developments will support a vivid base zone
- creativity and openness (co-operative planning approach based on clear cut rules)
- joint commitment and participation of different groups
- ecological construction techniques and resource-saving handling of the environment



## 2 WHO IS ASPERN + „HOW TO BUILD A CITY“

The Wien 3420 Aspern Development AG and the coordinator of the target area “U2 Donaustadt/Aspern Seestadt” as representative for the local authority established a very intense atmosphere of cooperation right from the beginning of the development. So they try to create a solid base for the development processes and a platform that invites stakeholders to participate.

Aspern, Vienna’s Urban Lakeside is more than an urban expansion project or just one of many real estate development projects, and it is much more than facts, figures and buildings. Not just because of its dimension and long time horizon it needs to be taken care of in a special and very sensitive way but also of its effects to the society.

A common task force of private investors and public authorities is an important basement for the development. A cooperation between the authority, land owners, potential investors and inhabitants guarantees a more purposeful and realistic planning.

Wien 3420 Aspern Development AG was established specifically for this project. It is a joint subsidiary of the two site owners Vienna Business Agency (WWFF) and Federal Real Estate Agency (BIG).

The object of the company is

- development of Aspern to a vivid centre
- acquisition of partners and valorization of the plots
- building of infrastructure and public space (together with the city)

The most important development partner is the City of Vienna. With the revision of the Viennese City Development Plan in 2005 the local government has decided to choose 13 target areas as hot spots of future city development in Vienna. For each of them a coordinator was installed fulfilling the task of establishing an active link between the administration and the main external stakeholders that are involved in developing the city.

Headlines taken from a short booklet with the title „How to build a city“ (by Wien 3420) shall present the main attitude of the organisations being responsible for the project.

These lines may sound rather simple but taken seriously, they are precious guidelines and - as we know - not always easy to transfer into action:

- Make the human the centre of interest and start from human needs and wants

There can only be one reference point in building a new city: the human being and his/her needs. Therefore it is necessary to always come back to this principle and to reconsider if the development is still following the guidelines.

- Procure a piece of land, ideally a large, whole piece

The whole area is managed by just one development agency which gives some freedom in terms of schedule and economical possibilities.

- Check the wind, take a look around, and lay the foundations

The development started by inviting the citizens, the neighbourhood and local action committees to gain a proper basement for the planning process - also including experts and citizens; the masterplan then passed the City Council in 2007.

- Get connected with the world in many ways

The historical city centres of both – Vienna and Bratislava – can be reached within 30 minutes.

- Get together a team that is up to the task due to its personalities and qualifications

The development agency installed an interdisciplinary team. Together with representatives from the local authority and with many external experts bringing in their experience it is possible to create a very focused but also visionary and enthusiastic working-atmosphere

- Back up and empower the team

Strong company owners like the Federal Real Estate Agency and the Vienna Business Agency as well as the City of Vienna are fully supporting the project

- Develop a radiant and attractive vision that makes every obstacle surmountable

Aspern is a unique opportunity for Vienna to really develop a liveable city that is focused on human needs and sets quality-standards for future developments

- Look for partners who want to build a city with you and who love high standards

Sustainability is no longer a slogan but has become a key issue also for investors to create a solid economical base for the future. This is also true for quality-standards that help to occupy strong positions in the different markets.

- Go from good to better

Improvement is always based on the possibility to go from good to better. Therefore it is important to leave space for future development and to implement as much flexibilities as possible.

See also [www.wien3420.at](http://www.wien3420.at)

### 3 ASPERN + PARTICIPATION

In the Middle Ages, building a city was a project that consisted of a walled stronghold against the natural and social environment. The opposite is true for a contemporary city. It is a hub in a network of diverse relations and dialogues. Compatibility with the natural surroundings and assured sustainability are natural prerequisites. Grown structures, historical landmarks and even geomantic stocktaking provide orientation for the new. Checking the wind is a way to respect the roots and not just to start where we are but first of all to know where we are.

The intention to develop **Aspern** as a modern part of the city has been part of the city development plans for more than 15 years. So the public was somehow prepared and informed about the fact that depending on time and needs something would happen there. But still, as soon as it gets into real action, intense, transparent and open communication has to take place.

For Aspern in fact we did several steps of preparation and communication:

The process of SUPerNOW in 2003, a pilot-project for the strategic environmental assessment focusing on the overall north-eastern region of Vienna, was done in a very open and transparent way and set the ground for both the definition of development-aims and the upcoming process that would transform the whole region.

In 2004, right after the government's decision to develop the former airfield of Aspern, the local authority made contact with the neighbourhood, with the many representatives and inhabitants of the various settlements in the north-east of Vienna, that determined the landscape since the end of World War I and even more after World War II. The authority also got in contact with a large number of local citizen's action committees that focused on very different themes: protection of nature, avoiding a highway, improving public transport and many other things. In communicating with the citizens it is important to be fundamentally open and transparent and to make people development partners instead of passively concerned one. To do this in an authentic way the authority was following two major principles:

- Visiting people in the locations where they live or act and not forcing them to make their way to the authority
- Not trying to palliate what would happen in the future but to ask for their needs so that they would be able to accept the development or maybe experience it as improvement for their lives

During this process the authority asked for people to be part of the very planning process and to function as "local experts" so that we could cooperate with 3 citizens, one of every settlement around the development-site. This was very helpful and in the end we could start to work on a call for tenders in preparation for an international planning-competition that included also the local needs for the neighbourhood and finally lead to the masterplan that passed the City Council in 2007.

Wien 3420, whose employees were already part of the masterplanning-team and therefore are deeply infected by the seed of developing a real City of Tomorrow, then continued the process of open communication and – as the first action of development and change – erected an information-center that would function for meetings, for presenting what is new but also as a viewpoint over the whole area.

The installation of some "early green" that is being planted every year within the borders of the future building-plots and allows to experience the future streets and public space. That makes it possible to invite people to the site, to talk about the aims and to playfully offer some kind of appropriation of that patch of land that was off limits for almost 100 years.



Communication and cooperation with citizens and all the other stakeholders is one of the key issues in developing Aspern, Vienna's Urban Lakeside, and will be supported by Wien 3420 and the City of Vienna until it has succeeded in being a natural part of every day life in **Aspern**.

#### 4 ASPERN + CITY BRANDING

"If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

As planning and developing a new city district has a lot to do with communication, it was important to develop a clear identity for the area beside the masterplan which determines the spatial development.

At the beginning of the development the Wien 3420 Aspern Development AG was confronted with questions like:

- what kind of identities are produced before the city will be built
- how can identities and images produced
- what kind of pictures should be shown during a masterplanning phase
- how can we communicate the vision for Aspern

The larger the development the more important it is to create a vision which gives an idea about the intention and is able to accompany the development over the years.

The development agency decided to contract a professional branding agency and started a process with the involvement of about 200 experts and opinion leader.

The intention was to create a guideline, which includes the basic values for the development and translates them in a way that enables the public to see what Aspern stands for.

The branding process was divided into several steps:

- analysis

- development of brand options
- brand definition
- brand briefing
- design

The analysis focused on the inner perspective of the involved organisations and collected the knowhow and the opinions about the project. The next step was to interview 50 experts, who were not connected to the project. At the same time the “public opinion” about Aspern in the media was analysed. A benchmark-analysis compared Aspern to other city developments and their city branding and marketing, “Hamburg Hafencity” or Örestad. All the results of the analysis were discussed in a so called “critical afternoon” with a wide range of participants.

During the discussion of these results first ideas surfaced and were collected to see what kind of brand options for Aspern could fit. With a special tool a lot of topics were combined and condensed into 15 brand options. These options were further reduced to 8, presented and discussed with different groups. The result of these considerations was “3 times Aspern” which means that 3 options have been selected and developed to visual “brand-worlds”. Each option was described by pictures of inhabitants, events, or other things and by quotes and texts. The goal was to give an impression on the identity of the city (in three options).

These options were presented to experts (workshops, real estate trade fair) and evaluated by them. In the end it was possible to decide which brand would be the best for Aspern and to translate it into a creative concept and communication concept (working title “Enrich your Life”). Specification and visualisation made the vision communicable.

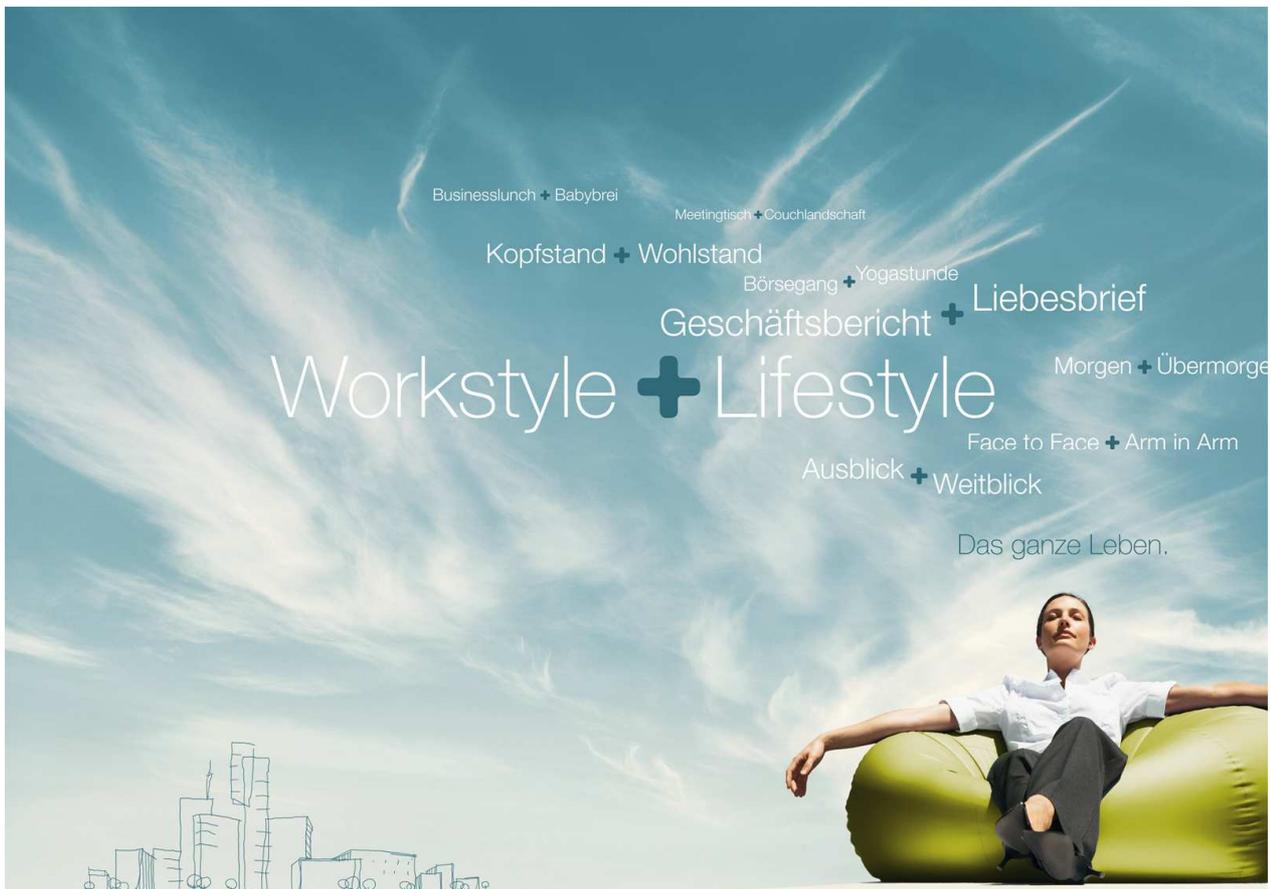
Live in Vienna, work in Europe

The brand promise – “Enrich Your Life”:

The result is “Aspern Vienna’s Urban Lakeside” with declared values.

The inhabitants of Aspern will work and live in a modern city of short distances between housing and work within the new city and rapid links to the “world outside” by short travel times to Vienna Airport, the city of Bratislava, to the Vienna city centre and also to the Danube wetlands and its national park. Vienna-Aspern will offer an ideal combination of urbanism and nature, competitive edge and health, pleasant living and successful business in Vienna.

The market for a city brand results from the way in which our society is developing. The quest to improve life goes on – career, success, health, family, lifestyle, environment. The biggest challenge of a prosperity- and achievement-oriented society lies in how to manage its own interests, ensure social responsibility and support the individual’s quest for a satisfactory life.



The branding process as an important instrument, which helped to focus on the values and qualities that are connected with the project will also make it possible to monitor them.

So, in fact, whether it is developers, business in search of a site or families in search of a liveable city, the brand is a guiding star and a clear communication-tool to lay the general view and to invite others to become a member on this journey.

See also: [www.aspern-seestadt.at](http://www.aspern-seestadt.at)

## 5 ASPERN + INNOVATION

City development is a process that usually goes on for a very long time. Therefore it is extremely important to implement new technologies and models which are fit for the future and can create a sustainable development for future generations. The development of Aspern will go on for more than 20 years, so the process is very rich in innovative statements that cover many different parts of city development. Innovative Elements are for example:

- public transport first
- guidelines for public space and building the green in advance
- production of energy by using geothermal technologies
- sustainable mobility-concepts
- sustainable building-parameters (including office-buildings + light industries)
- and many more ...

Public transport first:

Aspern will be reached by underground U2 that leads directly to the center of the city in 2013, when the first plots of the whole area will be handed over. Therefore from the very beginning everybody will be able to use high-quality public transport and car-use can be reduced in a sustainable way.

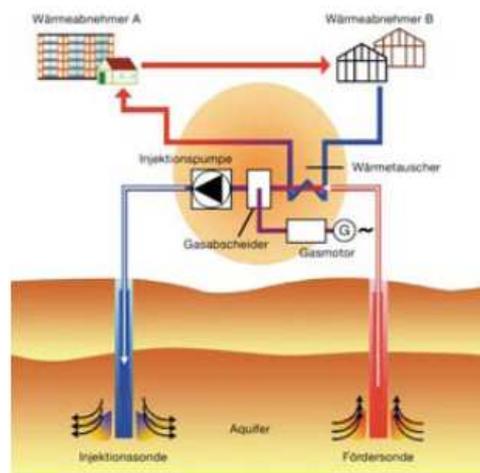
Guidelines for public space/building the green in advance:

The quality of a city is very much dependent on the quality of public space. Therefore it is important to think about it in an early stage and to define standards that can be used in the following development and planning process.

Production of energy by using geothermal technologies:

A geothermal installation will enable the provision of sustainable energy for more than 100% of the heating demands within the development of Aspern Vienna's Urban Lakeside. Hot water (155° C) that is located about 5000 meters below ground can be used for heating and maybe for energy supply as well. At the end of 2009 the exploration bore will be implemented. It is planned to invest about 40 Million Euros.

### PROJEKTPLAN ASPERN



## 6 CONCLUSION

Urbanisation has been the most important cultural project of human mankind ever since the advent of a settled lifestyle. The objective is to provide for people to live together well. And, in doing so, to incorporate all dimensions – social, economic, technological, ecological, cultural, media-based and mobile - so that they find space and form.

A city is a communal house without a roof, but overarched by the idea of cultivating life and work in a fixed place. This idea has thousands of historical precedents. Hence its concretisation has to be reconsidered time and again from the perspective of the here and now.

The new, sustainable city “Aspern, Vienna’s Urban Lakeside” will contribute to the national and international image of the Austrian capital – in particular through its links with Central and Eastern European countries, their people and cultures – and base its own identity on precisely this interface role.

First, it is a piece of land, developed step by step. Eventually, it becomes a piece of joy: a city that lives, a lively and sustainable City of Tomorrow.