

What is an International Building Exhibitions (IBA)?

What can it achieve?

IBA – an innovation generator for sustainable urbanisation

When facing pressing societal and structural transformation, Germany and other European countries successfully employed the experimental urban development approach “IBA”, for over a hundred years.

An *Internationale BauAusstellung* (German for International Building Exhibition) can be an instrument to plan, implement and demonstrate the vision of a sustainable city in tangible projects. Through a guided question or topic, IBAs explore and test new innovative forms of cooperation between public and private stakeholders to implement transformative projects in a specific district, city or region tailored to the specific local needs.

It is a vehicle for urban and regional development with an impact that usually extends far beyond its own time. Over a period of 6 to 10 years, IBAs have developed trend-setting and sustainable solutions to the key question of future development within a city or region. The results expected from IBAs fall into two categories: those that can be called ‘soft’, such as strategic visions, participation processes and other development instruments; and those that can be called ‘hard’, namely the buildings and built environments that constitute the building exhibitions themselves. Hence, an IBA always passes on to the city both built environment as well as adapted urban development processes. The results of an IBA are presented to an international audience at the end of the term, and partly during implementation. While it is not the only approach available for solving challenging urban issues, IBAs have had historical relevance in moments of great transformation and shifting social demands.

The IBA experiences of the past decades linked local challenges with overarching global challenges like climate change, population movements and economic transformation.



Rapid urban growth
(Credits: BWS, Frieden / OLN)



Climate change + Green building
(Credits: IBA Hamburg GmbH / Martin Kunze)



Economic transformation
(Credits: EmscherGenossenschaft / Hans Blossey)

The heart of every IBA is its projects. They generate the answers to the key question of the IBA formulated at the beginning and are its central results. IBAs marry a strategic top-down with a participatory bottom-up approach that taps into and mobilises the energies of diverse actors and cultural communities in the territory considered (see IBA in a nutshell below).

The proclamation and organisation of any IBA depend on its initiators from local and regional government level, civil society and other private actors. There is no committee or similar body that decides, whether, or not an IBA may take place. Therefore, there are no explicit means made available to an IBA. Instead, the initiators who desire to set up an IBA must acquire the means to finance it. The financial contributions usually come from various public and private funds, which are pooled by an IBA agency.



Unconventional multi-stakeholder methods. IBA Hamburg relies on early participation processes in the procedures. (Credits: IBA Hamburg GmbH / Bente Stachowske)



International audience. More than 400 participants attended the IBA kick-off event. (Credits: IBA Wien / Ludwig Schedl)



Exhibition. Visitors could inform themselves at the IBA Hamburg model. (Credits: IBA Hamburg GmbH / Johannes Arlt)

The historical Context Along Examples

The IBAs have been regularly carried out in Germany since the beginning of the 20th century. With the first IBAs, the architectural community presented itself with contributions to contemporary building, industrial culture and industrial design (e.g. compare *IBA Darmstadt* 1901 in IBA Wien 2017, p. 15). In 1957, the character of the IBA changed. At that time, still, the IBA mirrored the prevailing attitude towards modern urban planning and design at the time - presented in the *Hansaviertel* in West Berlin (*IBA Interbau*). A mix of high-rise and low buildings was erected in the *Hansaviertel* completely erasing memories of the old pattern of the urban quarter, which was badly damaged by bombings in the Second World War, (ibid., p. 16). The old housing stock was cleared and deconstructed. It was not until the *West Berlin IBA* in 1984/1987 and the *IBA Emscher Park* in 1999 that the IBAs developed into places of change and transformation. Modern architecture was to go hand in hand with the preservation and renewal of the historical heritage. New forms of urban development with a larger number of projects were realized. Participation as well as co-creation became standard.

IBA Berlin: Inner City as Living Space (1979 - 1984/87)

The *IBA Berlin 1984/87* worked on the rediscovery of the historic city center of Berlin in two groups through- 'critical reconstruction' – New IBA development - and 'careful urban renewal' (*behutsame Stadterneuerung*) as an alternative to clearance strategies and deconstruction of old building stock. At that time 'careful urban renewal' was still an experiment. Today, the instruments and solutions developed are now part of the standards of modern urban development such as citizen participation, ecological building, new forms of housing or the conversion of buildings.



Block 70 on *Fraenkelufer* is an expressive new-built architecture combined with innovative, socially oriented modernisation of old buildings. (Credits: FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum, Lizenz RR-F)



The residential and office building at *Checkpoint Charlie* symbolises a new building that has a critical relationship to the history of its location. (Landesarchiv Berlin, F Rep. 290 Nr. 0284765 / Photographer: Günter Schneider)



Instead of tearing down and newly constructing, a car park was repurposed and converted into a daycare centre for 136 children. (Credits: FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum, Lizenz RR-F)

IBA Emscher Park: The Future of an Industrial Region (1989-1999)

The *IBA Emscher Park* in the federal state of *North Rhine-Westphalia* along the *Ruhr River* followed the approach of the *IBA Berlin* with its locally well adapted course of action. The *IBA Emscher Park* is regarded as a globally acclaimed example of a successful strategy for the renewal of a former scarred industrial region. It included nature-based solutions combining re-cultivating lake and river ecosystems and water management. Coal mines were transformed into modern cultural sites. The region also gained quality through trendsetting contemporary housing.



The Future of an Industrial Region: 10 years to recover a scarred industrial landscape, involving 17 cities along a 70 km route. (Credits: EmscherGenossenschaft)



The former *Zollverein* coal mine was redesigned as a cultural and economic venue for the future. (Credits: Stiftung Zollverein / Jochen Tack)



The *Duisburg-Nord Landscape Park* project is an example of a new type of industrial park. It shows how spaces for green areas, working and living can be reclaimed from wasteland with a high recreational value. (Credits: Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord / Thomas Berns)

IBA Hamburg: Leap Across the Elbe (2006-2013)

The *IBA Hamburg* turned the most neglected districts of the city into laboratories, under an international spotlight. The Building Exhibition focused on the spatial, social, and cultural development of the Wilhelmsburg Islands in the River Elbe - an area characterised by spatial isolation, sensitivity to climatic conditions and challenging socio-economic conditions. Besides showing several innovative architectural approaches (e.g. “active” buildings using construction methods and materials to generate energy), the IBA and its partners aimed, in their 70 projects, to improve local conditions through housing, living environments and so-called “educational landscapes”.



Hamburg Spreehafenviertel: A mixed-use and housing development project with a comparably high density in Germany. (Credits: IBA Hamburg GmbH / moka Studios)



Hamburg Elbinselquartier: A mixed-use neighbourhood with multiple types of housing solutions. The design was chosen by a professional jury and the community. (Credits: IBA Hamburg GmbH / Hosoya Schaefer Architects)



Hamburg Wilhelmsburg Mitte: New types of housing: ‘Smart Material Houses’, ‘Smart Price Houses’, ‘Hybrid Houses’, ‘Water Houses’. (Credits: IBA Hamburg GmbH / Johannes Arlt)

IBA Thüringen: URBANRURAL (2012-2023)

With its rural character and the focus on urban-rural linkages (*STADTLAND* = URBANRURAL) as the central theme, *IBA Thüringen* aims to stimulate a transformation process in the region and to rethink the Federal State *Thuringia* as a place of progress and an experimentation for the future. By developing and supporting common good-oriented and resource-efficient model projects, it addresses qualities beyond the consumption-oriented lifestyle ("How little is enough?") without losing sight of a "building culture". Furthermore, the IBA aims to create regional value and raise international awareness of *Thuringia*. (GIZ, 2021)



Michaeliskirche:

As part of the *IBA Thuringia*, the idea and concept of the first hostel church in the *Thuringian Forest* was born. (Credits: *IBA Thüringen / René Zieger*)



Gesundheitskioske:

20-25sqm large, decentralised "health kiosks" made of wood serve as health care facilities in the surrounding communities. They replace the existing bus stops and have a waiting area, a public toilet and a versatile room where medical consultation hours can be held. (Credits: *IBA Thüringen / Pasel-K Architects*)



Timber Prototype house:

A solid wood box with 15sqm of interior space to test the practicality of this construction method. (Credits: *IBA Thüringen / Thomas Müller*)

The impact of the IBA outside Germany

IBA Basel: 'Au-delà des frontières, ensemble – Growing together across borders' (2010-2020)

The IBA Basel was the first IBA to transfer the German format to other states and to cross national borders, taking place simultaneously in Germany, France and Switzerland. *'The IBA strives to bring together stakeholders from the private and public sector in a core urban area, and establish binding project partnerships across national, cantonal and municipal borders (...). One goal is to promote a sense of belonging to the joint metropolitan region of Basel among the population. Moreover, the cross-border culture of cooperation is to be improved and the international halo effect of the entire IBA environment is to be strengthened.'* (BBSR, n.d.-a) The project demonstrated the ability of IBA approaches to tackle administrative and jurisdictional frontiers and to foster collaboration using innovative governance models like the trinational future conference/council (*Zukunftswerkstatt*).



Today, 32 IBA projects showcase visions for a common future of the three countries. (Credits: *IBA Basel / LIN*)



The Franco-Swiss Rhine bank path from St. Johann, Basel to Huingue was the first IBA Project to earn the IBA Basel label. (BBSR, n.d.). (Credits: *IBA Basel / Daniel Spehr*)



The IBA *Parc des Carrières* transformed the border landscape between *Basel*, *Allschwil* (CH), *Hégenheim* (FR) and *Saint-Louis* (FR) into a recreational and natural space for the metropolitan area. (Credits: *IBA Basel / Les Ateliers Paysagistes*)

IBA Wien (Austria): New Social Housing (2016-2022)

Based on social changes, the establishment of new lifestyles and the increase in cultural diversity, *IBA Vienna* is dedicated to social sustainability in neighborhoods and the affordability of housing. Urban succession processes are to be initiated, designed and accompanied in order to create new social, inclusive neighborhoods. Answers to the differentiation of lifestyles, new forms of work and employment opportunities as well as mobility needs are to be provided. Within the framework of the IBA's theme *New Social Housing*, innovative projects are being developed in the field of new constructions, redevelopment of existing housing and mixed housing ('living together'). (IBA Wien, 2017; BBSR, n.d.-b)



The *Biotope City* for the renaturation of the city. (Credits: ÖSW, Rüdiger Lainer + Partner / SchreinerKastler)



The *Sonnwendviertel* includes 5.500 flats for about 13.000 residents, 20.000 jobs, a school campus, office buildings, shops and a park of about 7 ha. (Credits: ÖBB / Aldinger + Wolf)



The *Sonnwendviertel* is largely traffic-free, has small-scale, diverse building structures, offers various uses and open space design. (Credits: Stadt Wien, MA18 / Christian Fürthner)

Although the historical development of European cities has been completely different from the territorial development of South Africa, it seems useful to examine the extent to which a transfer of experience from IBAs in Germany could be useful for addressing the challenges of urban development in *Cape Town*. Globally common is the insight that in an increasingly complex social, political, economic and environmental context, urban development is a challenge that can no longer be solved mainly with top-down strategies, master plans and algorithms. Integrated strategies, continuous citizens-oriented monitoring and heuristic are pivotal for adapting to the future.

IBA in a nutshell

An IBA is an instrument to plan, realise and present a vision of a sustainable city in concrete projects. Through a guided question or topic, IBAs explore and test new forms of cooperation between public and private stakeholders to implement transformative projects in a specific district, city or region.



Limited timespan: An IBA has a fixed term (6-10 years) that guarantees results – with the pressure to exhibit in the final year.



Focused theme: An IBA focuses resources and capacities on a precise core thematic or spatial question that is key for the future of the district, city or region.



Project-based: An IBA's heart is its projects. Projects give tangible 'answers' to the core question that reflects the ambition for the future of the city.



Multi-stakeholder: An IBA is fully owned by key stakeholders and funders (with the city government always involved). The process is usually carried by experimental and unconventional multi-stakeholder partnerships and co-creational methods to break through rigid and siloed working structures, to mobilise innovation and funding.



Next practice and excellency: An IBA offers 'controlled experiments', and the flexibility in finding solutions, reducing the risk of failure. The results of an IBA are tangible and the quality of the projects reflect the ambitions for the future of the city. With this, it sets and upholds quality benchmarks that are necessary for excellent and transferable results.



IBA Agency as pacesetter: In order to drive the process and to promote integration as well as mobilise various funding sources, a temporary IBA agency outside the existing administrations and structures is established. This IBA agency is the engine of the IBA.



Communication: Progress in an IBA is fuelled by communication. Communication channels between the different sectors and actors (government, business, academia, public) involved are established for the acquisition of resources, the management of projects, awareness raising, the 'festivalisation' of projects and marketing.



Celebration: IBA 'festivalises' the overall process to create an identity for the projects amongst citizens by mobilising local energy to create visibility. An IBA is a happening in the city.



International: An IBA addresses the international public with exemplary and trend-setting projects and innovations of global relevance. The built results of an IBA are presented to an international audience both during and at the end of its term.

What the IBA approach may hold for African cities?

The IBA methodology can induce innovation in rigid institutional settings through its new, experimental modes of implementation and financing to leverage inventive urban projects. The benefit of an IBA for African cities lies in demonstration how sustainable urban transformation can succeed even while facing time pressure, enormous complexity and difficult trade-offs. IBAs aim at delivering future-oriented “next”, not best practice, must be adaptable across the region and “tangible” to a wide audience. In the African context this may entail solutions of how to spatially integrate and structurally enhance informal urban districts, promote energy-efficient and job intensive construction methods, use local and low-emission building materials, test new participation methods as well as new delivery mechanisms for integrated project implementation and financing. International and regional cooperation increasingly focus on the development and promotion of urgently needed solutions for the urban challenges and opportunities in Africa (e.g. managing informality, keeping costs affordable, creating livable spaces). Through its powerful platform, an IBA can contribute to a new, future-oriented planning and building culture in targeted cities. An IBA may serve as a vehicle for new modes of implementation, leveraging innovative urban projects with long-term impacts and scale-up effects. If pursued effectively in *Cape Town*, the city could become a beacon across Africa on how sustainable urban transformation can succeed.

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Annex 1:

cf. The IBA Advisory Board at the BMI (2017)

Memorandum on the Future of International Building Exhibitions

The IBA meets IBA Network has agreed on a Memorandum on the future of International Building Exhibitions. In 2009, the common features that underlie all IBA processes and unite them at high standard were set out in ten recommendations for the implementation of an IBA. Since the IBA have no fixed rules or regulations, the importance of building culture and urban development in the regional, national and international context must be reviewed time and again. In 2017, the [IBA Expert Council](#) (also called the *IBA Advisory Board at the BMI*) revised the memorandum and added guidelines on important topics such as organisation, financing and projects.

The full version of the IBA Memorandum and the accompanying guidelines can be downloaded [here](#).

1

Every IBA focuses on pressing challenges in architecture, urban and regional planning that arise from local and regional problems. IBA are characterised by concentrating future questions of social change on aspects that trigger regional developments and can be influenced by the design of spaces in urban and rural contexts.

2

IBA are more than just architecture exhibitions. They propose social blueprints for future ways of living and provide answers to social problems, not just through the design of buildings, but also through new ways of appropriating urban and rural spaces. It is through the experience of memorable places that the messages of an IBA are made manifest.

3

IBA arise from specific challenges facing urban society: While the central themes of an IBA necessarily are based on occasion and location, their relevance extends far beyond the local context. Every IBA originates from locally or regionally focused initiatives and events that served as stimuli for further programmes, which the IBA in turn refines and formulates as courses of action. Preparatory formal and informal discussions among experts and with the public serve as important tools to help identify and define the topics.

4

IBA strive to develop model solutions for current or future problems in building culture, economy, ecology and society. By demonstrating the relevance of their topics, challenges and concepts at an international scale, they influence the ongoing debate on the future of our cities and regions in the context of wider social developments.

5

All IBA are first and foremost known for their buildings and projects. However, IBA draw attention not only to the buildings, but also to the conditions in which they were created and the quality of the processes that contributed to them. Through the development of instruments and formats, every IBA aims to contribute to a new culture of planning and building that manifests itself in a spirit of cooperation and in the interplay of the quality of the process and its result.

6

IBA must be created in an international dimension from the outset. A building exhibition is made international by the international relevance of its central topics and the resulting model projects, by the involvement of external experts and outstanding contributions from abroad, as well as through international public relations and networking.

7

The concentration of intellectual, artistic and financial resources over a limited period of time makes IBA a unique temporary microcosm. They are experimental research and development laboratories in which intense collaboration between experts and those affected as well as with their experiences and successes can encourage projects elsewhere, have a lasting impact on local planning practices and stimulate personal involvement.

8

IBA require the courage to take risks. They are experiments with open outcomes and, at times, generate new ideas through the means of provocation which may cause contradiction. Contentious issues and productive controversies are important aspects of planning culture. All stakeholders – especially administration and politics as well as the public – must be made aware of this from the outset to enable initiatives to step outside the realms of standard practice and to generate widespread interest in their projects.

9

Every IBA needs sufficient autonomy and appropriate organisational forms to bring about exemplary and generalisable solutions that have the potential to be compelling models. In place of established processes and proven courses of action, IBA need imaginative programmes, designs and organisational approaches coupled with a degree of improvisation and the agility to respond quickly to unforeseen events.

10

IBA need to share their themes, ideas, projects and images of their built results. They are a forum and a stage for their participants to present their contributions and commitment to a national and international audience. Modern communication and presentation strategies are essential for their success. Each IBA must use and develop the latest, most effective communication forms, formats and channels.