



The redevelopment of the site of the SongShan airport, Taipei

The redevelopment process of the soon to-be-closed airfield of SongShan, a 200 ha site in the north of Taipei City, was reviewed at a join INTA - City of Taipei workshop 26-27 April 2016 at the Taipei 2050 Centre.

There is not yet a definite plan for the transformation of SongShan, however consultation with experts and population started as early indication that a clear vocation of the site is crucial for such a substantial development scheme.

The metropolitan ambition

Ensuring the right development of the space liberated by Songshan Airport is a real chance for Taipei to consolidate its ambition to be a global urban metropolis with a real international appeal. The release of the airport' space makes it possible to create a strong symbolic image, to produce a vibrant urban narrative and make the site a demonstration place of the Taiwanese modernity. The economy model of the future development of this site is based on the right management of public land as nearly all the land belongs to the State. The creation of urban value will be attained by the progressive development of the site in parallel with a controlled release of the land in order to avoid speculation and real estate bubble. Investment in public infrastructure or for major public facilities, must be financed in a fairly large extent by long term land lease rather than selling, or by recurring, land tax.

The transport infrastructure is already built, in particular a metro line serving the site, and demand for affordable housing is a permanent feature in Taipei. However, the site is in need of

- a clear definition of functions that show enough robustness and flexibility to attract large anchors

- to create a critical mass and attractiveness on this site from the outset, ready to welcome people and businesses moving onto the site.

- a clarification of the links between the possible built areas, the runway and the riverfront.

- preserving an R&D function seemed important for the development potential of the site as well as for the image of Taipei.

Options included

- cooperation with the techno parks of Naihau and Nangang on the North and East, convincing Taiwanese Universities to locate some of their R&D on the site could attract private laboratories and anchor international companies in Taipei.

New housing could accommodate part of the workforce employed nearby (Neihou, Nangang, Xinyi...). Others workers could be persuaded to use the metro, especially if the underground line provides an easy connection to the Central Station, New Taipei City and the Taoyuan airport.

Alternative R&D functions could take advantage of hospitals and medical facilities. The size of the site, its vicinity and potential for expansion are a real attractor for such large undertakings.

Development ideas include the conversion of this core site into a destination that would provide the necessary density and diversity of activities and movements for the relatively large-scale metro end station and provide sufficient life to make travellers feel safe.

Considering that attracting such major anchors would require negotiation time, creative activities in temporary structures could act as destinations in the meantime. Like in Aspen (Austria) the scale of the site and its flatness would lend itself to large scale events, experimental buildings and intense 'action' recreation, such as racing cars or motorbikes, ballooning, flying zeppelins, training quarters for circuses... The Arena in London Docklands comes to mind, which was a conversion of an existing shed-like dock warehouse and hosted hugely successful events, ranging from boxing matches to pop concerts. Similarly, in Canary Wharf in London, a range of existing, solidly built warehouses were converted into television studios which attracted a host of smaller creative activities in their vicinity and made the area on the quay between the water basins interesting in advance of the large scale financial city which succeeded them.

The type of companies which will settle on this core site of SongShan will be instrumental for the identity of the whole development, a long process, undergoing inevitable and unforeseeable changes over the time span of a generation until the site will be filled.

Regardless of 'hard' solutions, what is essential is that the SongShan development will become an integrated part of its surroundings and its image an additional asset for the city of Taipei. It can achieve this by providing all the assets of 21st century city life: liveability, sustainability, and above all openness.

French (Sandra Flouest Denerier and Elodie Chadel Amanou from the RATP), English (Kerri Farnsworth, Placemaking and Growth, Circle Housing) and Danish (Helle Juul from Juul & Frost) members participated to these review sessions with illustrative cases of large scale regeneration