

# STUDYING THE PLANNING PROCESS OF THE MARKETPLACE OF HAMBURG-SASEL AS AN ASSEMBLAGE

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The marketplace in Sasel, called ›Saseler Markt‹, is to be rebuilt. The district is part of the City of Hamburg, close to its external border in the northeast. It harbors almost 24,000 residents and has a population density of 2,840 people per square kilometer.<sup>1</sup> While, on the one hand, it can be understood as a village with traditional narratives<sup>2</sup> and a thin public transport infrastructure<sup>3</sup>, it is on the other hand a well populated outskirts of the metropole. The market area is located at the center of this partly village-like and partly urban district. What used to be a central village square is now surrounded by shops and service providers for daily needs as well as by some local institutions.<sup>4</sup> Once a week, a market for food and other goods takes place. Over the course of the year, fairs and other district events also take place here. The first attempt at rebuilding the marketplace in the late 1980s was answered by residents with protests against the enlargement of the main road and the demolition of historic structures. The plan to renovate the market was taken up several times. A long process of negotiation ensued that continues to this day.<sup>5</sup> This process was initiated by authorities in 2007<sup>6</sup> because the street furniture and infrastructure is outdated and because sidewalks, green spaces and other areas are old, broken or not up to date any more. Widely differing interests had to be combined, negotiated and transferred to the planning process, which caused conflicts and even fractures over time. In January 2020, the planning authority introduced the planning status to the public in an event with high attendance.

This article examines first how this planning process occurred and second considers the benefits of ›assemblage theory‹. Therefore, the central question of this text is: How can this planning process be studied through the lens of assemblage theory, and what does this mean for urban anthropology? In other words, what are the parts of this assemblage, what are the relations between them and how does it work? This leads to questions of what interests

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1 Statistikamt Nord, 2019, <http://region.statistik-nord.de/detail/10000000000000/2/1719/227742/> (19.12.2020).

2 Döhler, Informal Talk ›Heimatfest in Sasel‹, interview by Bianka Schaffus, 26.2.2019.

3 *Bianka Schaffus*: Participant Observation ›Heimatfest‹ (12.–15.9.2019).

4 Werner Lipka, E-Mail (30.11.2019).

5 Mp: Entwicklung des Saseler Marktplatzes: Gefunden im Hanse Journal aus 7.9.2001. Zwanzig Jahre ›Rettet den Saseler Markt e.V.‹, SaselHeft 1, no. 4 (2013). URL: [https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF\\_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft\\_2013.pdf](https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft_2013.pdf) (25.12.2020).

6 Bianka Schaffus, Participant Observation Information Event (11.2.2020).

regarding the market become visible, how they are bundled up and how they are negotiated. How do discourses and debates impact the process? Finally, I would like to ask what stakes authorities hold and how they achieve these.

In the following, the field access and (resulting) methods as well as selected materials will be presented. Afterwards, assemblage theory will be explained. Subsequently, the trouble around planning the marketplace of Sassel will be traced and analyzed. After a short interim conclusion, research results and the usability of assemblage theory will be discussed before this work concludes with an outlook to future ethnographies.

To approach the questions listed above, I will use a variety of methods. As I was working in a part-time position in the very context I was studying, observing the tense planning process presented me with a multitude of challenges.<sup>7</sup> For instance, my employment had an impact on taking field notes. During working hours, it is hardly possible to take separate notes. Hence, notes are taken in working logs which also become fieldnotes, except in time slots when there are conversations about the research itself. When I participated in events as a representative of the district management, I took notes afterwards as a memory log.<sup>8</sup> In addition, participant observation during the information event makes up a large part of my material. As a cultural analysis through thick description, observations are noted in the research journal. Additionally, topic-oriented interviews, interviews in motion as well as informal talks were used as a source. Finally, online and print documentary material completes this research, such as some of the annually published »SaselHeft«<sup>9</sup> which focuses, among other things, on the remodeling of the marketplace, as well as mailings, statistic material or other web sources for a better contextualization. In this text, I will point out which elements play a role, describe the connections between these and so »assemble« the field.

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7 First, there is the dual role of being an employee as well as a researcher. On the one hand, there is the mission of being engaged in work, on the other there is the aspiration of doing deep research. As these two tasks cannot be separated, both were connected, so that every work stay was simultaneously a research stay, and vice versa, every research stay was therefore inseparable from work. Even more difficult was the personal role in the district and the problem of not having the research tainted by my work role. It is essential to demarcate dependence from work in interpreting results. During the entire research process, I always revealed my dual intention. Apart from that, the outcome will be forwarded to working processes of the district management. However, being professionally active also offers advantages. The access to the field with its personalities, organisations, and events just like the knowledge about relationships between actors proved to be highly productive.

8 This practice contains a great amount of memory work and bears a risk of losing information. That is why notes were taken directly afterwards whenever possible.

9 A district booklet by the district management that treats local topics such as history, current building projects, social engagement, points of interests, possible activities in the district etc.

## *Assemblage as a perspective on ›the urban‹*

This work is situated in the field of urban anthropology, specifically in the field of urban planning.<sup>10</sup> This paper follows the claim of critical consideration and reflection of planning practices in the field of planning culture research.<sup>11</sup> It can be seen as a short practical example of how to operate with assemblage theory in contexts of urban planning. For this purpose, I will refer to, among others, the anthropologist Ignacio Fariás who has done extensive work on assemblage theory in urban studies.<sup>12</sup>

According to Fariás, analyzing urban formation processes has the potential of making complex entanglements visible. For him, ›the urban‹ is not something fixed. He pleads to

»... grasp the city anew, as an object which is relentlessly being assembled at concrete sites of urban practice or, to put it differently, as a multiplicity of processes of becoming, affixing sociotechnical networks, hybrid collectives and alternative topologies.«<sup>13</sup>

This also applies to the built environment in my case study – the marketplace. But the planning process happens at different sites, both inside and outside of Sasel. With the aspect of time, it is similar: processes do not, of course, happen all at once and not even in a simple timeline. Actors of each assemblage come together in a certain way: at certain sites and certain times, with situated relations between them. This causes individual dynamics for each assemblage on different scales.<sup>14</sup> The focus should be on the relations between radically symmetrical elements of the assemblage.<sup>15</sup> To uncover these elements in particular, I assemble related elements of the planning process in Sasel. I will describe the kinds of relations between the human and non-human elements around the planning process below. Regarding agency, I will show the capacities of this assemblage and its inherent opportunities for the improvement of planning processes.

The urban geographer McFarlane refers to Fariás when he uses assemblage theory as an approach in urban research as well. In examining the agency of the elements, especially the materiality, it becomes apparent how

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10 Although the district is on the outskirts, an urban focus should be taken here, as Sasel is part of the city of Hamburg.

11 Frank Othengrafen/Jan Lange/Jonas Müller: Planungskultur als Brille und Forschungsinstrument: Ein E-Mail-Interview mit Frank Othengrafen, geführt von Jan Lange und Jonas Müller. In: Jan Lange/Jonas Müller (eds.): *Wie plant die Planung? Kultur- und planungswissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf die Praxis räumlicher Planungen*. Berlin: Panama Verlag, 2016, pp. 46–53, here p. 49.

12 For further details on assemblage theory, see Hansen/Koch in this issue.

13 Ignacio Fariás: Introduction: Decentring the Object of Urban Studies. In: Ignacio Fariás/Thomas Bender (eds.): *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies*. London 2011, pp. 1–14, here p. 2.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

conditions emerge. Following McFarlane, urban formation processes will be traced in the following. The kind of interaction – if protests take place or conflicts are managed – is significant. What is particularly interesting is where the unexpected occurs. This reveals the stabilization or de-stabilization of the whole assemblage. These incidents contain the potentials for change insofar as they highlight where differences are made or can be made.<sup>16</sup>

To follow the formation processes more easily, I will put a special focus on conflicts. This is interesting for me because I became aware of the field through interruptions in the long process of remodeling the market. Several authors explicitly put similar notions in the foreground, irrespective of their professional perspective, but they are all concerned with assemblage theory.<sup>17</sup> Assemblages bear potentials that become visible through conflicts. Especially in shared spaces such as the market of Sasel, they grasp different interests and offer possibilities for intervention.<sup>18</sup> Assemblage theory points into the direction of new politics via re-assembling the field after knowing the critique. This can serve to bridge »irresolvable differences« in certain issues by examining different wishes and the opportunity for change.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, conflicts and resulting fractures in the process play a big role in approaching my field and in starting the description of relations in my analysis. Taken together, these points make assemblage theory highly suitable for analyzing the planning process of the market area in Sasel.

To make the description of the formation easier, it makes sense to analyze which kind of assemblage is in the foreground. Thomas Nail is a philosopher who works with assemblage theory in the school of Deleuze und Guattari, two central actors in the genealogy of assemblage theory.<sup>20</sup> Nail depicts four kinds of assemblages (territorial, state, capitalist, nomadic) that always exist in different intensities.<sup>21</sup> In this work, the state assemblage is useful for marking out how the kind of relations between the elements centralizes control in one concrete element – authorities in the planning process. It thus helps to describe the quality of the relations in this assemblage. Surrounding centers, as for instance local organized groups, are endowed with power, too, but are subsidiary compared to authorities. All concrete elements, in turn, are subject to the connections between them. »State assemblages are arranged in such a way that the conditioning relations attempt to unify or total-

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16 Colin McFarlane: *Assemblage and Critical Urbanism*. In: *City* 15, no. 2 (2011), pp. 204–224, here p. 211 f., 215 ff.

17 Stephen J. Collier/Andrew Lakoff: *On Regimes of Living*. In: Aihwa Ong/Stephen Collier (eds.): *Global Assemblages. Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Malden, Mass. 2005, pp. 22–39, here p. 31 ff.; Tania Murray Li: *Practices of Assemblage and Community Forest Management*. In: *Economy and Society* 36, no. 2 (2007), pp. 263–293, here pp. 264–268.

18 McFarlane, as in fn. 16, pp. 211–220.

19 Ibid., p. 211 f.

20 Thomas Nail: *What is an Assemblage?* In: *SubStance* 46/1 (2017), pp. 21–37, here p. 21.

21 Ibid., p. 28, 33.

ise all the concrete elements and agencies in the assemblage.«<sup>22</sup> This means that the abstract machine (the abstract relations between the elements of an assemblage<sup>23</sup>) stands hierarchical over concrete elements of the assemblage that are combined (concrete assemblage<sup>24</sup>) and tries to homogenize them.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Trouble about Planning: Breaks and Resumptions as Preconditions*

A crucial factor for renovating the market is its outdated state, especially in terms of street furniture and accessibility. Because it leads to renovation, the outdated state makes up the first element in this constructed assemblage.<sup>26</sup> The pavement is bleached out and defective. Walls around the raised planting beds have sunk, the sidewalk width is too narrow and the lack of space in the once practical design is a general problem. The size of cars, for example, has increased so that parking lots as well as driving lanes have become too narrow. As authorities themselves say, the market area is problematic in terms of traffic and confusing in its structure.<sup>27</sup> As McFarlane says, the agency of the elements, especially their materiality, is to be examined.<sup>28</sup> There are (material) reasons that make renovation important, and as we will see below, the current market does no longer match today's needs. The outdated state as an entity is what caused the planning process and is thus where this assemblage ›begins‹.

The planning process has been rife with fractures from the beginning. A community of long-established residents seems to play an elemental role. The settlement movement of 1919<sup>29</sup> and the following founding of local clubs laid the foundation for today's established and maintained culture of engagement in Sasel<sup>30</sup>. This network of engaged initiatives that I call community was already significant concerning past planning process in the district. When the market area was to be extensively remodeled in the 1980s through urban development measures, the networked residents resisted. Through the intervention they avoided the initial redesign ideas of the market.<sup>31</sup> This constituted a first fracture in a planning process that put the assemblage on hold for a long time. In 2007, planning was taken up again by the city authorities.

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22 Ibid., p. 30.

23 Ibid., p. 24 ff.

24 Ibid., p. 26 f.

25 Ibid., p. 30 ff.

26 Schaffus, as in fn. 6.

27 *Bezirksamt Wandsbek*: Straßenbaustelle Saseler Markt (Stadtteil: Sasel), 2022, URL: <https://www.hamburg.de/wandsbek/strassenbaustellen/15555824/saseler-markt/> (3.4.2022).

28 McFarlane, as in fn. 16, p. 215.

29 Cf. *Thomas Kolb/Julius Gilcher*: Lebenslauf von Julius Gilcher aus St. Julian – Hamburg. Hattingen: Kolb 2004.

30 Schaffus, as in fn. 6.

31 Mp, as in fn. 5.

In 2012, they presented the development prospects. After this, further conflicts between local clubs, organizations and engaged private actors emerged regarding different imaginations about how the future market should be designed in terms of ecology, preservation, accessibility, economy and others. This disagreement led authorities to again pause further planning. The engaged communities seem to be a kind of representatives of Sasel. Therefore, they receive a certain consideration by authorities, for they cannot simply bypass the communities. This makes them an actor with special agency and with the power to interrupt the planning process.

To forward the process again, the engaged groups negotiated these different interests and bundled them in a consensus paper, the so called ›Saseler Konsens‹ or consensus of Sasel in 2014. On the basis of this consensus, planning was taken up again by authorities.<sup>32</sup> Different conditions of relations between engaged actors caused conflicts between them. After these conflicts inside the networks, this consensus paper became a further element because it helped to solve them. It is a materialized agreement that condenses imaginations to a stable foundation for the alteration and enabled authorities to carry on planning. The community's interventions have the agency to cause the assemblage to succumb. However, with their unification and negotiation, they have produced the consensus paper that has the agency to overcome fractures and to continue the assemblage again. It even stabilizes the assemblage because authorities refer to the paper in their future argumentation with residents, as we will see later. Here, the state assemblage becomes visible for the first time. Communities are equipped with power and are therefore able to cause planning to be aborted, which makes them powerful actors with special agency. Seen with Nail, they are one center in this assemblage due to their power.<sup>33</sup> The element ›authorities‹ is the managing actor. The communities are unable to take up planning again by themselves. The kick-off is to be made by authorities which are therefore superior compared to communities. This makes authorities the central element of this assemblage, as we will also see in the following.

### *Amalgamation of Competing Elements in the Planning Process*

The older population still has the former appearance of this central place in mind.<sup>34</sup> A few decades ago, the market was the center of the village with all facilities of everyday needs.<sup>35</sup> Due to this, a traditionally characterized imaginary of a memorized former village of Sasel overlays today's more urban

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32 Werner Lipka: Saseler Markt: Einigung: Und wie geht es weiter? In: SaselHeft, no. 5 (2014), URL: [https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF\\_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft\\_2014.pdf](https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft_2014.pdf) (25.12.2020).

33 Nail, as in fn. 20, p. 30 f.

34 Beate Kaestner-Sies: Bicycle Tour around Meaningful Places of Hamburg-Sasel. Interview by Bianka Schaffus 24.10.2019.

35 Werner Lipka, E-Mail (30.11.2019).

state. This, beneath the economic facet, reveals one imaginary of a meaningful place<sup>36</sup> which includes functions that might collide with the needs of newcomers and younger residents. Bearing this in mind, it becomes relevant that processes cannot be random and depend on different influences such as traditional imaginaries.

The access to this specific field of alteration of the market results from attending an information event<sup>37</sup> where responsible authorities presented the current state of planning. In this event, the assemblage revealed itself for me. It took place at a local school. The auditorium offers space for many participants. Maps and other information materials were pinned to the wall on the left hand side next to the stage. On the podium, a representative of the authorities was waiting to start with a PowerPoint presentation. A range of participants was present: authority representatives, planners, district management, entrepreneurs, local civic associations, hometown clubs and citizens. The event was organized to start with a description of the process so far, followed by the latest state of planning and then by a Q&A of the audience. Microphone stands had been prepared for that purpose. Two persons with metaplan cards and a pinboard for knowledge collection were seated to the right of the podium. The will for exchange became clear through the arrangement. The representative of the planning office explained the main innovations: higher quality of life and stay, with a promenade for pedestrians that emerges as well as a bigger pre-area in front of the shops, sheltered seating around a lounge area, while traffic in the nearby street will be reduced, there will be minimally fewer parking lots than before and much more bicycle parking, the area for the weekly market will be enlarged, a part of the area will be reserved for leisure time activities, better accessibility for disabled and elderly individuals, better connection between the market area and the surroundings through uniform flooring, and lots of green will be planted, just to name the main points. Already before the discussion, the first heckling occurred about the width of the promenade, which caused the planning representative to note that not all expectations could be considered to everyone's satisfaction in this area. After presenting the state of planning, participants were called on to comment and it was promised that all remarks would be noted and attempts would be made to include them in the planning process.

As mentioned above, authorities are the central element of state assemblages. They are able to limit and de-limit: They promise to try to take all comments into account, but they also say that not all can be taken into account. Even if the planning is based on the consensus paper, authorities as those responsible make the final decisions. They try to integrate as many interests as possible but at the same time they set limits. We see that authorities attempt to unify other elements, for example the communities and partici-

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36 *McFarlane*, as in ft. 16, p. 207 f.

37 *Schaffus*, as in fn. 3.

pants, in order to fulfil the assemblage by encouraging these groups to overcome hurdles and keep the planning process going.

The discussed topics show the variety of imaginations about the future market and how different interests clash: the type of bicycle stands was discussed as well as the distance between them. Using them should be gentle for the bicycle and comfortable for the users. Another concern was about their placement: It should be positioned diagonally to the footpath to keep the pathway as wide as possible and at the same time to integrate as many bike parking spaces as possible. Another highly discussed matter was the traffic around the market, parking lots in particular. Entrepreneurs stated the importance this has for their business and the vitality of the market. In different maps, one could see the compactness of business around the center of the market.<sup>38</sup> They were afraid that a lack of parking lots would lead to less customers and therefore would make both the market area and the district as a whole less meaningful. Even if it had already been agreed to have 90 parking lots in the consensus paper, this matter was discussed again and questions about the actual quantity were raised. After the audible displeasure of some people, the planning representative clarified that the process was based on the consensus paper and every attempt had been made to integrate as many parking lots as possible. Different parts of the audience clapped at different points. What became visible here are competing positions in questions of mobility. This also shows the heterogeneity of the city and the multiplicity of interests, and thus a high variety of needs.<sup>39</sup> Different interests require a certain design, material or street furniture. These have varying amounts of maintenance and dissimilar resilience against external influences such as the weather. Also, they take up different amounts of space.

What makes the negotiations more difficult is that the marketplace is spatially limited. The area of the market was already threatened when the adjacent main road was expanded. Downsizing could be avoided but sound emissions are high. The frequency of visits is particularly high on market days, but the high visit rate becomes visible also on the other days. The utilization of the parking areas is high, the driveways are narrow. Even cyclists and pedestrians notice this. With the increasing population, the usage rate of the market continues to rise. Simultaneously, the variety of interests is high, and due to the limited space, they are partly in competition with each other. Even if the planners try to accommodate these interests with clever solutions in the smallest of spaces, there are limits. The restricted space becomes a crucial element, too, as it increases the diverging interests that occur, merge and compete with each other. It limits the scope for action of planners and it in- or excludes other elements of the process, as we see in the examples.

The multitude of different interests in questions of infrastructure, leisure, business, accessibility and environmental issues became clear at this event.

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38 Bianka Schaffus, Web Search via Google-Maps »Geschäfte Sasel« (2020).

39 *McFarlane*, as in fn. 16, p. 219 ff.



The number of interests alone caused hurdles in integrating them in the limited market area, and this makes these and the conflicts elements of this assemblage. There were arguments about the required space, shape and size of things, as well as the meaning of objects and of the market as a whole. Questions of economy and livelihood as well as of inclusion and health are also part of the conflicts. On the one hand, the conflicts that repeatedly arise in the course of planning disturb the process. On the other, they serve as a burning glass that sharpens the focus on which main functions are to be realized. Authorities manage this process by opening the process for negotiation with such events (de-limiting), or by closing it with restricting negotiations on the basis of the consensus paper or other actions (limiting).

### *Superordinate Discourses and Debates as Unexpected Potentials*

Other debates arose about environmental concerns. It was questioned which kind of material would be used, and if it was permeable to avoid surface sealing and to assure rainwater reaches the ground. The planning representative told the audience that it was not worth the effort since after a short period of time the effect of permeability would be lost as the gaps between the stones would become clogged. The planting was another point: Some asked for the maintenance of the current tree population, namely tall, old poplars. Because of the poplar dying all over the country, it was recommended to use other species of trees. Due to climate change, so the representative, traditional local species such as oaks have to be replaced by more resilient ones. Also, the trees should be insect friendly. Types of trees were mentioned that neither the audience nor me had heard before. Likewise, the size of the new planting was discussed. It seemed to be a concern that bigger trees were needed to, if possible, represent the meaning of the market as soon as they were planted. As we see here, international discourses are reflected too, in this case dealing with climate change. Also, more local debates and other discourses are connected to this assemblage. They take place at this very local spot. As was pointed out above, more local debates such as mobility take place here, too. Like in other urban areas, it is hardly ever discussed to overcome motorized vehicles for different reasons. In Sasel, this matter was mostly discussed in the contexts of the lack of parking lots, sometimes in connection to climate change and health. Also, very local controversies happen: When poplars are cut down because of the reasons named above, an outcry happened in Sasel. People expressed their outrage in the comment column of a social media post and could not understand for what reason authorities cut those trees down even though this had been made clear at the information event and actors like the district management had tried to explain the reasons.<sup>40</sup>

All these discourses and debates are linked with very specific questions of materials or methods of construction. At the same time, they are strongly

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<sup>40</sup> *Sasel.de*: Baumarbeiten am Saseler Markt. District Management of Hamburg-Sasel. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/Stadtteilmanagement/posts/3837342452956698>, (5.4.2022).

connected with questions of meaning and usability, leading up to how measures are makable at all. They have a direct influence on different elements of this assemblage such as interests and conflicts and thus force authorities to act. Discourses as well as local debates thus become further elements of the assemblage. They can emerge unexpectedly and have the potential to endanger the planning process. In other words: a cut tree can severely disrupt the planning process if it entails bigger protests. But at least they bring in a (new) dynamic that has a concrete effect on planning. Seen through the lens of Farías, these unexpected relations bear the potential for change. Regardless of the scope of such effects (whether they are disruptions or not), they come to light and can disclose larger matters. If it arises that climate crisis is a bigger issue than assumed or citizens are outraged because of lacks in communication, authorities have the chance to take this into account and to adjust their planning practices. These unexpected relations have again the potential to destabilize the assemblage but also, when considered, to stabilize it. In this case, planners and audience negotiated a more resilient design in terms of the climate crisis, and a more sustainable marketplace will be built. Questions of mobility are discussed in detail and, in reference to the consensus paper, converted into a balanced manner, understandable for affected individuals. Concerning communication gaps regarding the felled trees, a big disruption of the planning process did not occur. At least for the direct neighbors of the market, a transparent communication occurred.<sup>41</sup> The mentioned outrage seemed to subside, which is why authorities did not act in those contexts. In the future, authorities might use broader communication: more participative events or signs informing about renovation steps for instance.

#### *Authorities, Laws and Other Central Elements in the Planning Process*

In 2016, there was once again a lag in the planning process. The authorities justified this with challenges caused by refugee arrivals in 2015 and the related workload and expenses. Seemingly independent challenges for authorities become relevant, as they have an impact on human resources or funds in authority offices. Through this interruption of the process, this external challenge (external in so far as whether this is a specific topic of Sasel, nor it is a topic that one would have thought had an impact on construction projects) becomes a further element with its agency to destabilize the assemblage. The population declared this break an excuse and called for at least bridging measures in problematic areas of the market.<sup>42</sup> The inhabitants encouraged authorities to carry on with the planning process. In 2018,

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41 *Bezirksamt Wandsbek: Anliegerinformation*, 2022. URL: <https://www.hamburg.de/content/blob/15838858/c03c2271dc6338a21fa1ba23fa56889b/data/pdf-saseler-markt-projekt-124-anliegerinfo.pdf> (05.04.2022).

42 N.a.: *Umgestaltung des Saseler Marktplatzes*. In: *SaselHeft*, no. 7 (2016). URL: [https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF\\_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft\\_2016.pdf](https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft_2016.pdf) (25.12.2020).

the planning process continued when the draft plan for 2019 was set.<sup>43</sup> It can be seen as a materialized promise that the planning process goes on and bears a certain similarity to the consensus paper since an assuring document has the agency to stabilize the planning process. The difference is that in this paper, the authorities are the actors producing the paper. It is a commitment of authorities to seriously pursue the planning process.

Inside the market manager's lodge, there is a public toilet. It is regularly open on market days and public events. It is claimed that it should be opened more often and that it should also be renovated. The authority's representative stated that this is another matter of concern, so that it cannot be addressed in this process due to authority regulation. In this planning process, there were no resources to finance staff or renovation of such objects. The only possibility would be to include a further party by placing a kiosk in that building whose owner would maintain the installations. However, finding somebody for that issue would be problematic. The state authority's internal rules limit options for actions and at the same time enable possibilities for further participants. For example: While there are no funds available that could be allocated to the renovation of sanitary installations, there do not seem to be any cost caps for providing uniform flooring because this undertaking is part of the planned budget. Instead of financing the renovation of this building, where broad interest of the audience became apparent, it was pushed to compensate gaps by further parties who care for renovations and workload. Authorities' rules limit and de-limit actions as we see in these examples. They can include further actors, give options by providing budgets, or restrict them in crucial actions. Rules and laws are hence elements that open or close the assemblage for further elements. In this context, rules and authorities are in a mutually dependent due to authorities set rules and rules frame authorities' agency. Opposite the element ›authorities‹, rules are subordinate, because they are made by authorities themselves or by the state.

### *The Fragile Planning Process Unlocked:*

#### *Related Elements of the State Assemblage and the Potential of Conflicts*

Urban planning is a highly complex process with a great number of elements. It does not occur only locally, but it includes superior issues of different places, range and time. Authorities are not located in Sasel, where planning affects the most. Decisions are made both on site and elsewhere. Additionally, discourses do not only happen locally, they are scaled up to multi-dimensional and even global levels.<sup>44</sup> The planning process becomes a projector, combining different kinds of elements of varying scale in one area. All the listed elements are parts of the assemblage because they are

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43 N.a.: Mit dem Saseler Marktplatz soll es vorangehen. In: SaselHeft, no. 9 (2018). URL: [https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF\\_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft\\_2018.pdf](https://www.sasel.de/fileadmin/PDF_Dateien/Sasel-Hefte/Sasel-Heft_2018.pdf) (25.12.2020).

44 *Fariás*, as in fn. 13, p. 6.

connected in the planning process and make a difference in it. Using assemblage theory to learn how elements relate in a planning process in Sasel, a multiscaled social reality comes to light.<sup>45</sup> I bring together the assemblage with highly diverse<sup>46</sup> and even abstract elements<sup>47</sup>: The outdated state of the market and its limited space, connected to persistent imaginaries of established networks, causes conflicts, just as all the other diverging interests of how the market should be planned. Authorities overcame conflicts by encouraging a consensus paper and by organizing information events, while local networks caused authorities to leave out external challenges (that are not as external as supposed, as the analysis showed) and go on with planning. Superordinate discourses such as climate change or questions of mobility have an impact on planning, and their connection between all these elements becomes clear through their agency.<sup>48</sup>

In analyzing the kind of assemblage (state assemblage), I have showed the following: Elements such as interests, limited space and the information event have effects on planning but have a softer influence because they are not able to cause fractures in the process. Compared to these, communities, external challenges, the consensus paper or the draft plan as well as discourses and debates play a more crucial role. They have a special agency because they were able to stop or promote the fragile planning process. Seen through the eyes of Nail, they are subordinate centers. The most powerful element is ›authorities‹. Authorities are the governing element, especially engaged to fulfil the planning process. In organizing information events, encouraging agreements between engaged actors in Sasel, enabling and limiting access and in other administrative tasks, authorities become a special actor with agency<sup>49</sup> in such a way that they can significantly influence the planning process. They have the capacity to change the assemblage and to fulfil it in a way that they do not only influence the planning process but take care of finishing it. The governing processes can be seen here as the abstract machine that has more power than all other elements, even though they all have agency. The abstract machine – the kind of connections the elements produce through their acting – is more crucial than single elements around the authorities (concrete assemblage).<sup>50</sup> It constantly tries to homogenize or totalize the planning process and therefore stands above other elements.<sup>51</sup>

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45 *Manuel DeLanda*: A New Philosophy of Society. Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity. London 2006, p. 34.

46 *Martin Müller/Carolin Schurr*: Assemblage Thinking and Actor-Network Theory: Conjunctions, Disjunctions, Cross-Fertilisations. In: Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 41, no. 3 (2016), pp. 217–229, here p. 220.

47 *Murray Li*, as in fn. 17, p. 266.

48 *Farias*, as in fn. 13, p. 15.

49 *Murray Li*, as in fn. 17, p. 265.

50 *Nail*, as in fn. 20, p. 24 ff.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 30 ff.

In setting a special focus on conflicts, as McFarlane says, potentials become visible.<sup>52</sup> I traced where planning aborts happened and where planning is taken up again. A successful implementation of this planning is by no means a given. It is a dynamic, open-ended process. The fragility of this planning process as well as its potentials becomes clear in the following: I marked out the central elements with special agency. All of them were surprising: the power of established communities in stopping and forwarding the process, the effects of documents as materialized promises, the impact of external challenges that caused a planning abort as well as the potential of discourses to endanger planning or bring new dynamics into the process can be seen as unexpected. The potential of these lies in their handling. In this case, authorities are responsible for action. Including them in a purposeful manner in the planning process, as happened in dealing with the community or climate change for example, stabilizes the planning. A lack of consideration can cause destabilization, as happened with external challenges that caused a longer break. Insufficient communication also has the potential to cause further conflicts. As we see, it is the domain of the central element, the authorities, to include or overcome even the unexpected, so that the assemblage can be fulfilled. They do not only have the power to govern the process, they are also responsible for the maintenance of the planning process. Not everything can be considered in advance. Therefore, authorities need to be flexible enough to react in an appropriate and a prompt way. But the subordinate centers (compared to authorities) also contribute to the process, as we have seen. Thus, the potential for the planning process lies not only in the manner of how authorities cope with the unexpected. Rather, it depends on the ability of the governing process as a whole (the abstract machine) to compensate emerging fractures. Hence, with the right sensitivity, authorities in combination with a flexible governing process in general have the potential to stabilize and fulfil the fragile planning process in a sustainable way. When the building measures started in February 2022, the assemblage seemed to be completed.<sup>53</sup> Although there can still be disruptions, the remodeling itself is negotiated and the marketplace is being completely remodeled.

### *What Assemblage Theory Contributes for Understanding the Planning Process in Sasel and for Urban Anthropology*

At the start of this paper, I asked how this planning process can be studied through the lens of assemblage theory. I outlined the network behind the planning process by describing the agency of the related elements with a special view on where the process comes to flow or where it is interrupted.<sup>54</sup> This helped me to demonstrate which elements had a significant effect on the process. I analyzed which kind of assemblage is in the foreground, in

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52 *McFarlane*, as in fn. 16, p. 211 ff., 218.

53 *Bezirksamt Wandsbek*: Straßenbaustelle Saseler Markt (Stadtteil: Sasel). URL: <https://www.hamburg.de/wandsbek/strassenbaustellen/15555824/saseler-markt/>, (5. 4. 2022).

54 *DeLanda*, as in fn. 45, p. 15 ff.

this case the state assemblage. In doing so, I was able to explain that some elements have more agency than others, and that especially the element ›authorities‹ is powerful. Subsequently, I was able to point out that the abstract machine (the relations of the planning process) presides over the concrete assemblage (the elements). By tracking fractures, I showed where the hurdles are and what the opportunities for improvement<sup>55</sup> of planning processes are. This fragile process is subject to unexpected influences that can endanger the planning process. At the same time, there are elements that have the capacity to stabilize the assemblage. The potential lies in handling impacts – by authorities and in the question of how resilient the planning process is as a whole. In conclusion, assemblage theory is a useful tool for analyzing how complex planning processes occur.

Second, I wanted to answer what analyzing planning processes with assemblage theory means for urban anthropology. Since assemblage theory is suitable for revealing fractures and stabilizing moments, it helps us to better understand how these emerge and how they can be overcome. They are not automatically problematic, and they can be useful to highlight gaps in planning and to stabilize planning processes. I would like to examine in which other ways urban anthropology can be seen as a possible source of advice for planning processes, and also for bigger questions concerning the shaping of future cities. Even if these findings are not fundamentally new, they can underline the value of taking such an approach.

This leads me to the importance of participatory planning processes. Urban anthropology uncovers a discrepancy between planning processes and everyday life.<sup>56</sup> It makes sense to collect not only interests but also imaginaries about the marketplace and to make them part of the negotiation right from the beginning of the process<sup>57</sup> because these imaginaries make visible how the market is seen by the people.<sup>58</sup> Discourses and debates are parts of it because they have a direct impact on people's ideas of how the market should be designed. According to Frank Othengrafen, values are long-lasting and stable components and worth building on in planning.<sup>59</sup> The potential for sustainable planning lies in engaging with locals from the beginning of a planning process and evaluating what matters of concern are. Furthermore, it is important not only to ascertain imaginaries held by highly motivated residents or engaged actors, but to elicit a broad panoply of meanings.<sup>60</sup> As-

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55 *McFarlane*, as in fn. 16, p. 211 ff.

56 *Barbara Lang*: Zur Ethnographie der Stadtplanung. Die planerische Perspektive auf die Stadt. In: Waltraud Kokot/Thomas Hengartner/Kathrin Wildner (eds.): *Kulturwissenschaftliche Stadtforschung: Eine Bestandsaufnahme*. Berlin 2000, pp. 55–68, here p. 60 ff.

57 *Collier/Lakoff*, as in fn. 17.

58 *Rolf Lindner*: *Textur, imaginaire*. Habitus: Schlüsselbegriffe der kulturalistischen Stadtforschung. In: Helmuth Berking/Martina Löw (eds.): *Die Eigenlogik der Städte*. Neue Wege für die Stadtforschung. Frankfurt/New York 2008, pp. 83–94, here p. 86.

59 *Othengrafen/Lange/Müller*, as in fn. 11, p. 50.

60 *Lang*, as in fn. 56, p. 66.

semblage theory allows us to take into focus what planners might not yet be aware of and thus enables sustainable planning. The future-oriented perspective ensures that such an intention does not only work for today but also in the long run. Authorities and planning offices need to learn from exchange, and they have to work in a dynamic, flexible way. Laws are important for sure, and external challenges cannot be avoided, but a good staff planning for times of higher workload in offices as well as preventive communication can help to secure planning. When planning goes on in a traditional way that does not react very well to new challenges, planning processes are endangered or delayed. This is what McFarlane means when he speaks of new politics: to see where the potential of an effective planning process lies and how to overcome yesterday's handling of such processes.<sup>61</sup>

Following these considerations, questions about opportunities of assemblage theory in district management arise. What can this theory contribute to everyday life in Sasel? How can conflicts become visible and with them opportunities for change? Which groups and interests are not integrated yet, and why? I hope to examine these matters in the future.



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61 *McFarlane*, as in fn. 16, p. 208 ff.