

Every city needs creative hubs:

EMMA Pforzheim's Creative Centre

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Pforzheim is a city of 120,000 in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, the industrial hub in the southwest of Germany. Known for its jewellery and watch-making industry it gained the nickname "Goldstadt" ("Gold City"). But bombing in the war meant the historic part of the city was destroyed and over time with foreign competition its role as Germany's 'Gold City' declined. Now it is in search of a new role.

Every city needs an EMMA and at least one and especially Pforzheim. EMMA is Pforzheim's creative centre and opened its doors in summer 2014.

It is based in a wonderful historic building which used to house a complex of public baths and wellness facilities that were converted. Because of safety issues the *art nouveau* Emma-Jaeger-Bad in the building was closed down after it was found that it would be prohibitively expensive to rectify the spa's problems. Instead, the decision was taken to convert the historic 3 000 m² building into a business centre for start-ups, young entrepreneurs and people working in the creative industries, especially in the fields of advertising, jewellery and design.

EMMA offers workshops and co-working workplaces, ateliers, offices and exhibitions spaces event areas. A highlight is the roof terrace, which can also be used for events.

There is more to EMMA than meets the eye

Why is this so? Waves of change have swept over Pforzheim threatening its traditional position as a centre of gold and the spin-off economic strengths that flowed from that. In addition, much of its post-war and more recent redevelopment has not been as good as it could be. Stichwort Zerrennerstrasse and how the new library is lost in space.

Like many places Pforzheim has had to reinvent its role and purpose in the face of competition and the pull of nearby cities that have attracted its young and ambitious. The central challenge for Pforzheim is to maintain its vigour and vibrancy and especially to keep its younger entrepreneurial, creative and artistic people. These are the people who can guarantee Pforzheim's future prosperity. For that you need a place to connect, to exchange, to explore, to create, to innovate, to showcase and exhibit. Great places have hubs where people of differing backgrounds can meet, where chance encounter can happen, where you can learn, develop ideas and be in a supportive co-working environment that also acts as an incubator centre.

This forms part of the start-up culture where people can transition from university education and try out their ideas as increasingly the young are choosing to work for themselves rather than moving to a big company. They want to learn by doing and to see where that takes them and they need inspiration from outsiders who can act as mentors.

When, like with EMMA these places work well, they become a magnet and its focus on contemporary creativity has helped achieved that goal.

To make this work requires curation, programming, activation, networking and good management and together this creates the careful balance of both being structured and letting things grow organically. This requires too an element of freedom both for the organizers of EMMA as well as those who work there and interact with it.

The power of EMMA comes from the possibilities within the Kreativzentrum itself, the spaces, the opportunities to meet, the roof and the possibilities for the Schwimmbad, but equally important is its physical setting and the idea of EMMA being the centre of a creative quarter is crucial. The Schwimmbad is iconic, but you need to overcome the threshold entering the building from the street before its liveliness reveals itself inside. This is why public programming is essential so that people get used to using the building. Important too is that EMMA spills out into the public space outside so that the inside and outside are seen as one and here EMMA's link to the Alfons-Kern Turm is vital as is the open space in between. By activating this cluster EMMA is beginning to establish a creative quarter and here its position in the town alongside the river and across from design Hochschule is vital. Important too is that its location is slightly off centre away from the Zerrennerstrasse that fragments Pforzheim's heart.

It is special that EMMA is orchestrating both the Schwimmbad and the Turm as the former feels more private and the latter more public as you can see what is going on from the outside. The space in between is crucial too as it creates a link. Activating the open spaces in the summer is easy the challenge for EMMA is the winter when cold and wind dominate and here the use of temporary structures is a good solution that EMMA has tried out.

It helps that EMMA could work with a historical building as heritage and creativity are great partners. The one inspires the other. This can then create an interesting quintet – the old structures provide a sense of anchorage, rich in memory. Then the activities present in EMMA suggest possibilities and potential. Third its networking enables connections within and beyond Pforzheim. The caring, inclusive spirit and atmosphere provides confidence for people to be and become the best they can be. And finally pulling this all together creates the overall inspiration that gives the quarter life.

Taking the broader horizon EMMA's role for the city becomes more evident. Its focus on the design, fashion, music, performing, craft and arts industries increasingly driven by digital possibilities is crucial for Pforzheim as these are the activities that shape how we experience the world. They are significant parts of the industries of the future both as individual sectors in their own right, but also in how they add value to other economic activities. Their spin-off effects are substantial.

Everything around us and how things work is designed. Consider design's intrinsic role in product development, consider too design thinking's impact on reassessing processes and overall planning. Look at how aesthetics is important to how we experience the world and the effect it has on our emotional life and psychological well-being. Ugliness deflates and beauty uplifts, even though we can argue about what beauty is. And then without the artistic imagination our sense of the world would be more shallow. It challenges us to see things differently, to question and to be alert and awake. It is these creative sectors that lie at the core of EMMA's concerns and it is why EMMA is important to the future of Pforzheim. Remember too that these combined sectors are one of the fastest growing sectors in the world economy, without them the economy as we know could not function.

But life is more than economics, crucial as that is to our survival. We are driven too by deeper yearnings: The desire to belong, to feel at ease with our identity, to feel empowered, to believe we can be shapers, makers and co-creators of our evolving environment. It is here that EMMA through its inclusive approach shapes the culture of Pforzheim. The cultural impact of the creative economy sectors is significant as is the fact that EMMA fosters and provides an enabling environment. Here people can try things out, here they can fail - mostly a necessary journey on the route to having more success, here they can express themselves.

This supportive context then also has a social impact as it engenders trust. Trust is an under-explored resource in thinking through how places develop. With trust people of difference can meet and that dialogue reduces the fear of the other and the misunderstandings that evolve from that. No one is saying we need to love each other, but at least we should learn to appreciate the value of our differences. Crucially communicating across boundaries and the openness that this implies lies at the core of any innovative process. So, at EMMA we see the link between the economic, the cultural and the social. I wonder whether Pforzheim decision makers understand this power. It is a problem in other cities too, but some cities get the idea and so become places that attract and retain their talents.

There is an even broader context that Pforzheim should consider, which is the challenge that we are in the midst of redesigning the world and all its systems – politically, ethically, economically, culturally and socially - for 21st century conditions. This is changing the dynamics of cities in Germany, Europe and beyond with certain places sucking in opportunities, resources, expertise and talent whilst others are drained of potential. Thus, regionally Stuttgart and Karlsruhe are strengthening and we hope that Pforzheim is not weakening too much.

Pforzheim then needs to treasure its assets like EMMA. It will remain fragile unless its role and potential are acknowledged by all stakeholders in the city – business, the public administration as well as the civic world. EMMA already has some recognition, but it could be valued even more. It is an essential part of the eco-system that could give Pforzheim opportunities to show itself in its best light. This consists of mainstream businesses and those working more at the alternative edge. It plays its part both in developing new skills as well as working with traditional industries in the city.

It is connected to the wider world of Kreativzentren across Germany and beyond and so brings interesting people and organizations into the city who then can see Pforzheim in a new light – a place that is fresh, that has vibrancy, that fosters creativity. A place that wants to move ahead and be part of the new economy. Perhaps most importantly it helps encourage a culture of creativity that can spread across the city

What this needs too is a public administration organization that is open and a simple mantra could be to move from a **'no, because culture'** to a **'yes, if culture'**. EMMA needs many people and organizations to say 'yes' and to allow fulfil its enormous potential which EMMA has already begun to do.