

## Welcome Address by the Ministry of Culture, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg

Members of the Hamburg Parliament, Mr. Lahr,  
Prof. Dr. Petzet, Dr. Pelka, Mr. Schoch, Mr. Hesse,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg I would like to cordially welcome you to the International UNESCO Expert Conference on „Urbanization to Modernism – Formation of Metropolitan Harbour and Commercial Districts“. I would particularly like to welcome speakers and guests from across the Atlantic. We are happy to have you and very much appreciate the fact that you have taken the trouble of travelling this far. It is of great value to us that you should be lending us your support by giving us your knowledgeable input and insights. This will help us in our endeavour to nominate the *Speicherstadt* (warehouse district) and the *Kontorhausviertel* with the famous *Chilehaus* as UNESCO World Heritage.

In addition to our famous *Michel* (St. Michael’s Church), *Chilehaus* and the *Speicherstadt* continue to be the best-known tourist sites of our city. A large proportion of those who come and visit our city – and we are indeed talking about a sizeable number of tourists – come here specially to see those sites. Many Hamburg citizens enjoy showing them to their guests, even more so since the *Speicherstadt* is no longer part of a freeport and now acts as a nexus to the *HafenCity*. You may be aware that we are in the process of building yet another landmark in Hamburg, namely the *Elbphilharmonie*. This latest addition to the cityscape of Hamburg will, if anything, further boost the attractiveness of existing tourist sites: I am very confident that, because all of these sites are situated in each other’s vicinity, they will attract even more visitors to our city.

But quite apart from their significance as landmarks these buildings and districts carry historical meaning. They bear witness to our architectural history, the history of architectural styles in Germany as a whole and to city development. At the end of the day, these development processes were the result of radical economic changes and the corresponding political watershed decisions all of which had a wider significance far beyond the city of Hamburg.

Over the next two days, you will discuss in some detail the historical context of the *Speicherstadt*, *Chilehaus* and the surrounding office buildings, the *Kontorhausviertel*, and you will compare them to other similar buildings elsewhere in the world. The way we relate to Hamburg and its cityscape and perhaps even your emotional connection with it, too, will thus be given a new and fascinating scientific dimension. We greatly prize Hamburg’s looks – the face of the city that is our home.

Right from its erection, the *Chilehaus* became world famous and it is now one of the most important candidates for the World Heritage List. The *Chilehaus* was built by the architect Fritz Höger and is today considered the greatest achievement within German red-brick expressionist building design. Not only is it one of the first high-rise buildings in Germany, but it also ranges among the most important *Kontorhäuser* (office buildings) of the world because it is this type of design and construction that evidences how the inner city areas of many metropolises changed at the time: Whereas before they used to be characterised by a mix of people who lived there and others who came for work, inner cities exclusively became the place for commerce. The *Kontorhausviertel* around *Meßberg* is one of the most impressive cityscapes from the 1920s in Germany. It can rightly claim to be the first multi-functional district of office buildings on the European continent. The *Speicherstadt* is the world’s largest integrated complex of warehouses in a definable area and with a uniform appearance, planned and built by municipal authorities dating back to the period between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Both *ensembles* to this day convey the historical and functional connections between warehouses, the handling and transshipment of goods and trade. Written and oral communication which were the organisational backbones of trade and commerce were no longer conducted in the old *Kaufmannshäuser* (merchants’ houses), but moved to the central part of town turning it into the city. This is where the economic foundations were laid for the city’s later prosperity and for many of the things that make Hamburg special and have characterized it over time. I am thinking particularly of the sense of responsibility among Hamburg’s citizens who have consistently contributed both culturally and socially to the well-being of their community.

The buildings and complexes mentioned, with their uniform appearance and their many details, are cultural treasures which need to be preserved and require a great deal of responsibility on the part of the city. So let me underscore here that Hamburg is throwing its full weight behind the nomination of the two ensembles as World Heritage sites and will do justice to the responsibilities connected with that status. We are aware of the serious commitment that any federal state and city in Germany is making vis-à-vis the world when applying. Any new city development in relation to *Chilehaus*, the *Kontorhausviertel* or the *Speicherstadt* and any new piece of architecture within these districts or in their immediate vicinity will have to be checked against their compatibility with the historical heritage. Hamburg has firmly committed itself to respecting this. Both districts have

long been listed, but the requirements of the World Heritage Convention still need to be enshrined in our Listed Buildings Act (Denkmalschutzgesetz).

We are both happy and proud to commence our expert conference today in the presence of so many international speakers who have come from the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Great Britain and even the US and Argentina. It is you, honoured speakers, who will contribute the international perspective to our deliberations at this conference by informing us about other port and warehouse districts as well as office architectures of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and their historical contexts elsewhere in the world. You will thus be making sure that we get *outside of the box* of our Hanseatic viewpoints and approaches. Such an international perspective will sharpen our senses and make us view our local heritage even more discerningly. This, in turn, will further heighten the quality of our nominations and thereby contribute to their chances of success.

One of our big theaters, the *Thalia-Theater*, is putting on Goethe's *Faust* right now so let me quote from the seven hour marathon version being put on stage there:

*What you have inherited from your fathers  
Work on, that you may possess it.  
That which you do not use will prove a burden  
Only what is created by the moment will be profitable*

These are words that we readily adhere to and so do the owners of the listed buildings: A few years ago, the *Chilehaus* was restored. It is in good hands and all of its office space is fully rented – the same is the case with the *Kontorhäuser* around it. The *Speicherstadt* is being used less and less for storing. Instead, by creative people and providers of cultural activities are arriving on the scene. As can be seen right here in this building, offices and catering companies, too, have

moved in. In this way we are making sure that the heritage sites of *Kontorhausviertel* and the *Speicherstadt* continue to be in operation and remain alive. This will secure their future existence which I believe is one of the best guarantees for obtaining World Heritage status.

Let me conclude by thanking the Hafencity-University for their support of this conference both in terms of designing its structure and content, but also when it comes to contacting speakers and contributing their own expertise. I would particularly like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Schubert. Through his excellent international contacts he has been instrumental in securing the participation of so many high-ranking scientists and researchers. Similarly, Dr. Lange has given us his full support. He will be making two presentations himself and will act as our guide through the *Speicherstadt*.

Also, I would like to thank Mr. Petzet and the German National Committee of ICOMOS for their willingness to organise this conference together with us and to publish its results. Furthermore, my thanks go to the Sutor Foundation which, through its financial support, has made it possible for us to meet and which has accompanied the entire preparation process for this conference.

As usual in a conference held jointly by several organisers you will have to endure several more introductory statements and greetings before you can delve into the scientific subject matter. I would like to anticipate my thanks for your patience in this regard and for your attention. For the coming two days I wish you a conference full of suspense, insights and good ideas!

Prof. Barbara Kisseler  
Ministry of Culture, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg