A spectre has been haunting Europe since US economist Richard Florida predicted that the future belongs to cities in which the "creative class" feels at home. "Cities without gays and rock bands are losing the economic development race," Florida writes. Many European capitals are competing with one another to be the settlement zone for this "creative class". In Hamburg's case, the competition now means that city politics are increasingly subordinated to an "Image City". The idea is to send out a very specific image of the city into the world: the image of the "pulsating capital", which offers a "stimulating atmosphere and the best opportunities for creatives of all stripes". A local marketing company feeds this image to the media as "the brand Hamburg". It is flooding the republic with brochures that turn Hamburg into a consistent, socially passified fantasialand with Elbe Philharmonic and table dancing, Blankenese and Schanzenviertel, agency life and art scenes, local Harley Days, gay parades in St. Georg, alternative art spectacles in the "HafenCity", Reeperbahn festivals, fan miles and Cruise Days. Hardly a week goes by without some tourist mega-event carrying out its "brand-strengthening function."

We say: Ouch, this is painful. Stop this shit. We won't be taken for fools. Dear location politicians: we refuse to talk about this city in marketing categories. We don't want to "position" local neighbourhoods as "colourful, brash, eclectic" parts of town, nor will we think of Hamburg in terms of "water, cosmopolitanism, internationality," or any other "success modules
of the brand Hamburg" that you chose to concoct. We are thinking about other things. About the million-plus square metres of empty office space, for example, or the fact that you continue to line the Elbe with premium glass teeth. We hereby state, that in the western city centre it is almost impossible to rent a room in a shared flat for less than 450 Euro per month, or a flat for under 10 Euro per square meter. That the amount of social housing will be slashed by half within ten years. That the poor, elderly and immigrant inhabitants are being driven to the edge of town by Hartz IV (welfare money) and city housing-distribution policies. We think that your "growing city" is actually a segregated city of the 19th century: promenades for the wealthy, tenements for the rabble.

Which is why we want nothing to do with the ad campaign for "brand Hamburg". Not that you asked us nicely. On the contrary: it has not escaped our attention that cultural funding for artists has been on the decline for years, and is increasingly linked to local political criteria. Look at Wilhelmsburg, Neue Große Bergstraße and Hafencity: artists are expected to follow the funding money and interim-use opportunities like donkeys after carrots – into development areas that need life injecting into them, or investors or new, more solvent residents. You obviously consider it a matter of course that cultural resources should be siphoned "directly into urban development", "to boost the city's image". Culture should be an ornament for turbo-gentrification. St. Pauli and Schanzenviertel are shining examples of what this means: former working class districts become "trendy areas" and, in no time at all, exclusive residential areas with adjoining party and shopping neighbourhoods, where food and clothing chains like H&M milk the amusement-hungry hordes.
Hamburg's cultural politics has long formed an integral component of your eventification strategy. Thirty million Euro was poured into the militaria museum of some reactionary prince collector. Over forty percent of cultural spending is earmarked for the "Elb philhamonic Hall". The cultural authorities have been taken hostage by this 500-million Euro grave which, on completion, will at best be a luxury venue for megastars from the international classical and jazz circus. Quite apart from the fact that the symbolic effect of the Elb Philharmonic Hall is socially cynical to the core: the city is building a "lighthouse project", which offers the moneyed aristocracy a five-star hotel and 47 exclusive freehold apartments, and a draughty viewing platform for the general public. How telling!

And the "growing city" is making it increasingly hard to find halfway affordable studios and rehearsal rooms, or to run clubs and venues, which are not tied to the dictates of turnover. Which is why we say: the last people who should be talking about "pulsating art and music scenes" are city councillors who essentially leave it up to the tax office to decide what should happen on state property. Whenever money is to be made in the inner city, whenever a park can be squeezed, a building slapped onto a patch of green, or a hole filled, the tax office will toss these "prime locations" onto the property market, to the highest bidder with a minimum of conditions. And the result is a history and culture-free investor city of steel and concrete.

We get the picture: We, the music, DJs, art, film and theatre people, the groovy-little-shop owners and anyone who represents a different quality of life, are supposed to function as a counterpoint to the "city of subterranean parking" (Süddeutsche Zeitung). We are meant to take care of the atmosphere, the aura and leisure quality, without which an urban location has little chance in the global competition. We are welcome. In a way. On the one hand. On the other, the blanket development of urban space means that
we - the decoys – are moving out in droves, because it is getting increasingly impossible to afford space here.

In the mean time, dear location politicians, you have noticed that this will have a negative impact on your plans. But then, tragically, your proposed solutions never venture one iota beyond the logic of the corporate city. A freshly printed document from the Senate announces its plan to "develop the future potential of the creative economy by strengthening its competitiveness." It will set up a "creative agency" to function, among other things as "the point of contact for real estate brokerage". If you can't afford to pay the rent, you can get yourself ranked as a "young artist" and consult the creative agency about "temporary usage of empty buildings". You can even get the rent subsidised if you provide proof of "urgent necessity and relevance for Hamburg as a creative location". There could not be a more unequivocal definition of the role that "creativity" is supposed to play: namely of profit centre for the "growing city".

And this is where we draw the line. We don't want any of the quartier developers' strategically placed "creative real estate" or "creative yards". We come from squatted housed, stuffy rehearsal rooms, we started clubs in damp cellars and in empty department stores. Our studios were in abandoned administrative buildings and we preferred un-renovated over renovated buildings because the rent was cheaper. In this city, we have always been on the look out for places that had temporarily fallen off the market – because we could be freer there, more autonomous, more independent. And we don't want to increase their value now. We don't want to discuss "how we want to live" in urban development workshops. As far as we are concerned, everything we do in this city has to to with open spaces, alternative ideas, utopias, with undermining the logic of exploitation and location.

We say: A city is not a brand. A city is not a corporation. A city is a community. We ask the social question which, in cities today, is also about a battle for territory. This is about taking over and defending places that make life worth living in this city, which don't belong to the target group of the "growing city". We claim our right to the city – together with all the residents of Hamburg who refuse to be a location factor.

The Not in our Name manifesto NION now has several thousand signatories including musicians, writers and painters like Ted Gaier Daniel Richter, Rocko Schamoni and Christoph Twickel.

www.nionhh.wordpress.com