Articles / Aufsätze

Expanding Frankfurt Airport Under Conflict: Social Responsibility on the Growth Path

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Abstract. *At airports, civil aviation meets its permanent companion: civil protest. Airports are under pressure to grow to meet air transport demand and stay competitive. In wide public perception, this interferes with their commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability goals. This article examines the new business environment for airports and proceeds to investigate the past and present of regional expansion conflicts at Frankfurt Airport, Germany. A very violent history of confrontation in the region has changed stakeholder approach culture, but recent years have again seen the rise of a new, well-organized anti-growth protest movement which uses confrontational tactics. The author discusses the operator's strategy to counter the substantial opposition to its expansion by a communication campaign to generate visible public support for the airport, and analyzes broader CSR efforts which may help to avoid potential conflict escalation. The article concludes with eight recommendations for socially responsible airports.*

Keywords: Advocacy campaigns, airport expansion, air transport, community relations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), environment, Frankfurt airport, Germany, growth, materiality assessment, noise, opposition, protest, stakeholder relations, sustainability, violence

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Introduction

Despite many challenges in profitability and harsh competition, the air transport industry is a continuously growing sector. As Figure 1 displays, the world in the past four decades has seen aircraft movements increase to more than 30 million per year, according to World Bank (2013) data of registered airlines departures. In 2012, 3.3 times more planes departed than in 1975, and still 1.4 times more than in the year 2000. It is out of question that this rapid increase has had and will have effects on the surrounding areas of airports. The International Civil Aviation Organization predicts the number to rise to 50

million by the year 2030 (ICAO, 2013). This means many new airport facilities will be needed. While most aviation growth happens outside of Europe, European airports continue to expand after an already impressive period of capacity growth.

A permanent companion of expansion planning has been public controversy, obstructive protest (sometimes quite violent), and a negative public opinion climate. Anti-airport initiatives grew sophisticated in their campaigning and often combined with climate action and anti-globalism groups.

At the heart of conflict is, however, the enormous burden which an expanding airport places on its surrounding resident communities in the name of greater public benefits to the region and national economy. Airports have to deal with these conflicts proactively. Ongoing protests show the need of improving airport expansion strategies and interaction with society.

Figure 1. Globally, more than 30 million planes take off from airports every year. Aircraft departures development 1975-2011, World Bank (2013); author's illustration.

This article will illustrate the positive and negative impacts of airport operations on its social environment. Using the example of Germany's Frankfurt Airport and connected pro- and counter-expansion initiatives, the social responsibility of an airport will be examined. Possible solutions and opportunities to reduce conflicts will be investigated.

Key terms in an airport's relationship with its business environment are sustainability and social responsibility. Sustainability of airports includes fields like economic profitability, operational safety, and ecological-environmental responses to air operation impacts and regional society (BAC, 2009). Social responsibility, often named Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in current business management discourse, can be defined as "the obligation of an organization's management

towards the welfare and interests of the society in which it operates" (Business Dictionary, 2013).

The New Airport Environment

Changing forces in today's airport industry

In general, today's airports are much more commercial and battle-hardened (including conflicts over expansion) than two or three decades ago. Very few people today would characterize an airport simply as a place of transport infrastructure where planes land and take off. After liberalization of aviation markets and steep increases in passenger and cargo volume, airport companies are very different animals now compared to the first century of aerodrome history.

The operators' focus on profits and competitiveness has sharpened, and they look at more strategic approaches to manage their market position and their business environment. One may say that the airport sector has become an industry in its own right, rather than being only an infrastructure annex to the airline and airfreight industries.

Figure 2 shows the main impact factors for airports. External shocks like economic crisis (as in the years following 2008), war, terrorism or pandemic infectious disease (such as SARS and H5N1 Avian Flu in 2003/04) have different natures, scales, scopes and timings. Airports' crisis response planning has evolved with these challenges. External shock preparation had airports further acknowledge the need for flexibility and income-type diversification. It also had repercussions in the planning for expansion in the context of demand recovery after a crisis.

Figure 2. Factors impacting the airport industry, based on Aaronson (2005, pp. 345-359), author's illustration.

Major changes to the structure of the industry made it necessary for airports to find new solutions. They had to adapt to commoditization of air travel, update facilities to accommodate technological changes like the large-size airliner Airbus A380 (which needs larger gates, apron positions, etc.), and find their place in geopolitical negotiations over traffic rights. Smaller airports in Europe had to respond to the unique combination of market niche opportunities and enormous price pressure which made them the preferred anchor for low-cost carriers (LCCs). LCCs differ in key characteristics from traditional flag carrier and network airlines. To keep their hard-bargaining, choosy clients, smaller airports had to learn how to guarantee low-expense and fast turn-around¹ operations.

On the strategic side, many airports have experienced privatization. The traditional government-owned airport operators now compete with rivals owned by private multinational operating companies with increasing focus on good returns.

Most important for the purpose of this article are factors of community integration. The need of greater integration of the local communities airports serve has been significantly increasing. On the one hand, responsibility for environmental impacts (e.g. noise emissions) of all players at an airport is usually the airport's – society takes its expectations and demands mainly to the airport company.

While airlines and aircraft manufacturers do take their own environmental and social responsibility seriously, one may argue that they have, overall, not been very responsive to near-airport resident's *local* complaints.

The imperative of income diversification has also brought up new challenges. Pressure from regional planning and zoning regimes by surrounding townships is going up when airports try to utilize their land assets for non-aviation purposes like retailing or developing commercial logistics areas.

All these factors have changed and continue to change the airport sector as an industry. But two goals remain unchanged: The commitment to a safe and secure aviation operation, and provision of sufficient capacity to serve trade, investment and tourism traffic (Aaronson, 2005, pp. 345-359).

Positive and negative effects on society

This section gives an overview of positive and negative impacts that airports have on their surrounding communities and businesses.

The major argument for growing airports is the positive contribution to the economic welfare of the region in which they are placed. This becomes apparent through increases in created value, private and public income, and employment. While internationalization and globalization cause more demand for air traffic, it is of utmost importance for developed nations to offer effective air services as a pre-condition of participating and competing in this commercially and socially opening world.

Airports trigger investments at the airport such as runway, building, railway and road construction. These automatically lead to direct employment in the region (workers hired for construction and directly related services). They also have indirect or induced effects: Other companies benefit from employment and increased spending power and higher attractiveness of a region for business and tourism (FTM, 2002). The same applies for all persons employed by companies operating at and around the airport. In Frankfurt, for example, 78,000 people work at or around the airport (Ja zu FRA, 2013).

The industry's leading association, Airports Council International (ACI) Europe, estimates that for 1,000 on-site jobs at European airports, 2,100 indirect or induced jobs are supported nationally, 1,100 regionally, or 500 sub-regionally. For one million passengers, 2,950 national, 2,000 regional or 1,425 sub-regional jobs are secured. The overall impact of airports on regional GDP varies between 1.4 and 2.5 percent, excluding tourism effects. In the EU, tourism accounts for five percent of total employment and GDP; of course, not all tourists travel by air, but the catalytic impact is still large (ACI Europe, 2004). These catalytic effects² are created by high-quality air service, productivity gains, cost reduction and increased competitiveness of a region. Companies which frequently use air transport but are not part of the aviation service chain – e.g. banks, consultancies, car manufacturers – may consider good connections as a factor to invest in a region, leading to even more employment due to an available airport.

Public stakeholders such as governments are particularly interested in positive fiscal impacts. Significant amounts of tax revenues (income, trade, value-added sales and fuel taxes from companies, employees and consumers) are collected by the state. Even where government-owned airports hardly

¹ Turn-around time is the time between an aircraft is on-blocks until leaving the parking position.

² Catalytic effect means employment and income generated in the economy by the wider role of the airport in improving the productivity of business and in attracting economic activities, such as inward investment and inbound tourism.

make profits, or are dependent on high subsidies, governments know the airports' tax-generating contribution to the public treasury is making the cash tills ring.

Another advantage of airports is freedom of mobility: offering direct flights to destinations all over the world, convenient and often cheaper travel for people living nearby. Airport regions tend to be over-proportionally multicultural, and international products can be acquired as often as air cargo is being handled. Airports put regions in touch with the world and increase their international standing. This is usually a desirable objective for governments and public stakeholders.

There are many empirical and methodological approaches to measure these effects. For lack of space, this article will not provide a survey here. It may suffice to say that a key argument is an overall high welfare effect of airports, particularly large airports whose overall income can amount to more than €3,000 million annually (Baum, 2005).

The negative effects of airports on the surrounding communities are partly obvious: noise and other emissions leading to pollution, waste, vehicle congestion on the roads, and unwanted land use and urban sprawl. Other impacts may be less well known. For example, congestion and noise may lead some tourists to avoid airport regions. Local residents may see their living costs rise: they are often above those of less connected regions of a country (which may be the flip side of positive economic development).

The most prominent problem is noise. Aircraft noise can lead to serious illness of people who are confronted with it every day. Citizen groups communicate that in the immediate surroundings of airports, continuous decibel levels of around 60 dB are normal. Health troubles can already occur above 45 dB during the night and 55 dB during daytime. Heart problems may occur above 55 dB during the night (BBI, 2013a).

Another critical argument concerns the destruction of and hazards for natural habitat for plants and animals around the airport. On a non-local level of ecology, air traffic carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions have a very negative impact on climate, contributing to global warming and the catastrophic effects which may come with it.

Frankfurt Airport

Overview

Frankfurt Airport (IATA code FRA, operated by Fraport which also holds national and international assets) will serve as the prime example for this investigation. It is the world's 18th-busiest airport, Europe's third-busiest and Germany's busiest by number of passengers (ACI, 2014). It is one of Europe's major hubs and a prime location for air cargo. In terms of cargo volume handled, FRA is the world's 7th largest airport, in Europe second only to Paris (ACI, 2013). Frankfurt Airport is by far the biggest airport in Germany, as it counts almost 50 percent more passengers than at the second-biggest rival, Munich (ADV, 2012).

In 2013, a rather difficult year, Frankfurt Airport handled more than 58 million passengers, a plus of 0.9 percent over the year. Cargo volume increased to 2.1 million tons, which meant plus 1.4 percent (Fraport, 2014b). Today four runways (three of 4,000 m, and one of 2,800m) are available for operations. The largest companies on site are Lufthansa, airport operator Fraport and the Federal Police Office (Fraport, 2013b). With around 78,000 employees, Frankfurt Airport is the biggest single workplace in Germany. The airport is connected to German high-speed train network with its own subsurface rail station: 170 long-distance ICE trains are scheduled per day (Ja zu FRA, 2013).

The city of Frankfurt is known as a global center of finance with hundreds of banks and other financial firms; moreover,

the dominantly metropolitan Rhein-Main region is one of Germany's most important economic and population centers. 5.5 million people live in 470 cities on around 15,000 km². The region's 320,000 firms employ 2.9 million people (Frankfurt, 2012).

A history of expansion conflicts

Since its current-site inception in 1936, Frankfurt Airport has continuously been under growth pressure as both aviation and the regional economy developed. FRA thus has a long history of expansion and, with that, many conflicts with society, environmental activists and local communities in particular.

Figure 3. Frankfurt Airport's past and present expansion projects in aerial overview. Author's labels on Fraport photo (Rebscher, 2013).

The most notorious period was in the 1970s and 1980s when the airport planned and constructed its Runway 18, "Startbahn West." Chiefly because the runway – for lack of other options – destroyed a large patch of original forest, it provoked years of protests.

The operator had officially requested runway construction in 1965. The mid-sixties were the starting point for fast-growing social movements in West Germany. Ecological awareness grew, as did critical views of traditional economic growth, corporate business, and establishment politics. Coincidentally, the heart of social movement activism beat in the city of Frankfurt, then the informal capital of leftist anti-system radicalism and student revolts.

Citizen complaints and legal actions for annulment of runway construction grew to a hundred. Activists, now organized in new-style citizen groups ("Bürgerinitiativen"), delayed building the airport enlargement by a decade. Litigation only ended in 1980 when the Administrative Court of the state of Hesse finally decided to give runway the green light.

The area then was occupied by activists who erected a village of dozens of huts to block cutting the forest. The camp stayed for one and a half years. The nation saw live on TV "civil war-like scenes" when the airport, in the face of 10,000 demonstrators, began to erect a concrete wall to prevent sabotage – ensuing clashes with riot police were remembered as "Bloody Sunday" (Gerth, 2008). Never had the republic seen police operations of this size, with the exception of protests at the Brokdorf nuclear plant in the same period. The high watermark was a 1981 demonstration in Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, the state capital, with 120,000 participants, and 220,000 citizens signing a petition for a referendum on the runway. The runway opened in 1984, but weekly demos ("Sunday walks" at the runway wall) and occasional violence continued (GG, 2014). In 1987, two police officers were shot to death by extremist anti-airport activists right on the runway site (Schultheis, 2009). This incident severely decreased protest levels.

The battles of the “Startbahn West” were not a local affair. They left a deep, painful scar in national political memory. The Frankfurt runway is still one of the most iconic reference points in the past half-century for the German environmental movement. Indeed, April 2014 saw the current anti-airport-growth protest movement dedicate a memorial day to the runway’s 30th anniversary.

“Startbahn West” changed company and political culture and stakeholder relations approaches in subsequent airport expansion planning. The airport and governments had learned sour lessons about conflict escalation in large infrastructure projects. They committed in the 1990s and 2000s to avoiding any such escalation in the future. Major efforts to create consensus by communication and to integrate civil society in an elaborate, time-consuming and expensive mediation scheme were pursued which led, for example, to an “anti-noise pact” with a range of local stakeholders (Geis, 2005; Banthien, 2012).

That did not guarantee peace in our time. New protests arose when in 2003 Fraport requested to build a new A380 hangar for which 21 hectare of protected forest land had to be cleared. Local organizations but also environmental groups like Greenpeace and Robin Wood were strongly opposed. The new facilities were ready for use in 2007. Community resistance came also with extension of Terminal 1 (A-Plus) in 2012 and the new office area Gateway Gardens, a former US Army housing area, since 2006.

The currently most prominent conflicts erupted over construction of a new, fourth Northwest runway in 2009-11. The Hesse state ministry of economy and infrastructure had issued planning permits in 2007. Subsequent protests were less rooted in questions about the site as such but in the controversial decision by which the ministry allowed continuation of 17 night flights from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., instead of the total night flight ban that Fraport had originally requested in the expansion plan. Once again, activists camped out in the forest and were removed by police. Operations on the new runway began in October 2011. Only nine days before opening, the Hessian Administrative Court relayed a verdict to ban all night flights from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Consequences for night operators like Lufthansa Cargo or Condor were severe. They quickly had to reschedule already published flights for the winter period and faced reduced aircraft utilization (dpa-AFX, 2011).

Figure 4. Samples of local citizen groups’ protest posters (Initiative gegen Fluglärm Mainz, 2014; BI Flörsheim-Hochheim, 2014).

The night curfew notwithstanding, new noise emissions in the fourth runway’s approach line brought out new citizen opposition. A campaign against the airport’s growth path commenced not seen before: Every Monday in the past two years, up to 3,000 frustrated, angry citizens have demonstrated in the departure hall of Terminal 1. The 100th “Montagsdemo” was set for May 2014 (Initiative gegen Fluglärm Mainz, 2014).

Citizen initiatives may have various local demands. One major umbrella organization’s main claims are:

- Prohibition of further airport expansion in the whole region, and no Terminal 3;
- an extended absolute night flight ban, 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.;
- lower statutory limits for people’s noise burden;
- reduction of air movements to max. 380,000 p.a.;
- closure of the new Northwestern runway;
- stop of public subsidies, and new sourced-based costs for the aviation industry (BBI, 2013b).

While today’s local conflicts tend to be dominated by litigation and peaceful symbolic demonstrations rather than physical direct action with sabotage, blockades and police confrontations like in the 1980s, a déjà-vu with violent resistance occurred when the airport’s chief planner’s car went up in flames (Rummel & Rippegather, 2009). The public also learned that the Fraport CEO, Stefan Schulte, does not leave the house without a personal security detail of two bodyguards (Schultheis & Rippegather, 2009).

Airport benefits and the “Ja zu FRA” campaign

With protest campaigns stepping up to ever-new levels, airport management and key business stakeholders decided to respond with a communication campaign on their own. The basic idea was to advertise the economic and social benefits of the airport, to connect emotionally, and to encourage people to testify personally in support of the airport in diverse media. The goal was to find an alternative to just listening and reacting to protests, which the campaign’s parents thought to be only a segment of society – and to set an example for the embattled airport industry to fight back, and mobilize supporters.

This communication campaign was assembled in 2012 under the claim, “Ja zu FRA” (yes to Frankfurt Airport). It received the backing and funding of Fraport as the operator, in a coalition with airlines Lufthansa and Condor. The PR agency Burson-Marsteller manages the technical side. As of this writing, the campaign has no timed end.

At the campaign’s heart is a popularized message advocating strength and growth. Fraport CEO Stefan Schulte summarized the pro-growth arguments:

- On a growth course, Frankfurt benefits from airlines and jobs moving to FRA. Without further expansion, the airport will lose existing customers to other airports.
- Airport companies invest high sums in projects. Local construction and service companies benefit.
- The region strengthens its advantages as a business location by greater interconnectivity by air. Both manufacturing (via air cargo) and service sectors (passengers) profit. FRA also strengthens Germany’s economy as a whole.
- Mobility brings great personal contact, for leisure or for business. It contributes to the region’s multicultural flair.
- The airport is already the biggest employer in Germany. More growth will mean more jobs (Schulte, 2012).

The most visible and dramatic show of force was the March 2012 kick-off demonstration in front of Frankfurt’s city hall, which 8,000 participants joined (figure 5).

From personal experience, the author would emphasize that the impressive attendance at this event was possible because the three sponsoring firms – with the help of works councils and labor unions – strongly encouraged their employees to attend and transported them from the workplace to downtown by bus. This is legitimate, since most large demonstrations need logistical backup and get help by well-organized groups. But it would be false to assume that 8,000 Frankfurters spontaneously followed public calls like the ones advertised over broadcast radio.

“Ja zu FRA” uses all kinds of media to drive the message home. It aims at airport passengers and visitors, at local residents in the Frankfurt metro region, the news media, and aviation sympathizers across the Internet. Posters and billboard

ads have been placed throughout the region, and the campaign is visible at public festivals and events. At the airport itself, the campaign has featured superposters on airport buildings, posters and electronic display ads in the airport buildings (for example, at the baggage conveyor belt), and a Condor Boeing 767 painted with the slogan and Internet address.

Figure 5. Campaign kickoff, Frankfurt city center on Römer square, 1 March 2012 (Ja zu FRA, 2014).

The campaign homepage ja-zu-fra.org, which is linked on all sponsors' heavily used websites, provides key arguments of benefits and advantages in a state-of-the-art blog format including videos. Negative aspects of growth are partially discussed, but the message is that solutions are being found. Similar to the opponents, "Ja zu FRA" intensely uses social media to win support (Ja zu FRA, 2014). In one 2014 press release, the airport took pride in having 200,000 "likes" on Facebook, and also stirring substantial interest on YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, Yelp, and Foursquare (Fraport, 2014d).

Figure 6. Campaign website, www.ja-zu-fra.org (2014).

An exhaustive campaign analysis cannot be provided here. Subjectively, the author would suggest that the campaign's upsurge in early 2012 was not followed by a persistently high effort to penetrate media and keep up dynamism – which can only be explained by the initiators' unwillingness to devote serious funds. After more than two years, the campaign is still present, but one would be hard pressed to claim that it has really moved and changed the situation.

To be fair, "Ja zu FRA" is mostly an awareness-raising instrument. The campaign received some positive media presence. It runs on quite transparent communication rules, which had been forgotten for long time. Valuable arguments were brought to attention. Importantly, it is successful in the sense

that individual support from all walks of life is more visible than it used to be, and it is a friendly, sympathetic support.

That, however, leaves the airport's weakest flank open. The campaign's feel-good, easy-to-support approach avoids to engage supporters in political confrontation with active opposition. It cannot be said that "Ja zu FRA" followers are actively fighting for the airport and battling the opposition. No politician or public authority setting out to further restrict airport operations is likely to fear "Ja zu FRA" as a political force.

When using a different set of measurable success criteria, like a reduced anti-FRA protest level, or increasing airport operation time, failure is evident. Despite the very professional set-up and marketing, "Ja zu FRA" has not been able to fundamentally change the trend towards more restricted aircraft operation at Frankfurt.

At any rate, the political context has grown more difficult. Restrictive measures seem fixed in place. In addition, 2013 elections have delivered a new state government coalition which put the Greens party, critical of the airport and linked to anti-FRA environmental activist groups, in charge of the ministry for economy and transport.

Noise emissions have not changed, of course, and opponents are as angry and active as in the past. Monday night protests at Terminal 1 keep on week after week. Except for a number of hostile or satirical responses to "Ja zu FRA," most protest groups have chosen to simply ignore the pro campaign.

The campaign is not a totally isolated effort in the German aviation industry. Its national umbrella associations engage in more popular communication activities, and locally airports sometimes have business and civic groups aiding as a ground-level pro-airport lobby to place arguments and needs in the public and political discourse.

From 2010 to 2012, Lufthansa Cargo, the airfreight subsidiary of the Lufthansa group which heavily depends on night operations, put together its own campaign. Called "Die Fracht braucht die Nacht" (freight needs the night), the campaign collaborated mainly with logistics business partners for events, media, and a petition drive. The campaign fought to secure at least 17 night flights in Frankfurt. After the court-ordered implementation of a total night flight ban the campaign was discontinued (Althaus, 2012). These new initiatives have been very innovative. They have been recognized beyond the aviation industry. They definitely show a suitable way to promote arguments and balance the broader public dialogue in a very emotional environment. So far, their measurable success is rather limited (Althaus, 2014, forthcoming).

Moreover, campaigns and initiatives are by nature limited in scope and duration. They can only be a situation-specific add-on to continuous, permanent efforts. They also focus on communications rather than core airport behavior and decision-making. The next sections will therefore return to the general issues and tools of social responsibility and social conflict resolution.

Social Responsibility in Practice

Airport-specific understanding and impact

The terms sustainability and (corporate) social responsibility (CSR) have been defined at this article's beginning: Sustainability of airports includes fields like economic profitability, operational safety, and ecological-environmental responses to air operation impacts and regional society (BAC, 2009). Social responsibility can be defined as "the obligation of an organization's management towards the welfare and interests of the society in which it operates" (Business Dictionary, 2013). This generic idea needs a closer look from the airport perspective, and specifically from FRA and Fraport's perspective.

Airport operator Fraport seeks to strategically align its CSR objectives with its core business objectives. Its company “Agenda 2015” is a framework with five elements shown in Figure 7. One part of the architecture is sustainability, which Fraport defines as “creatively linking economic, ecological and social goals with our long-term corporate interests.” A sustainability board headed by the CEO takes care of the development. The company publishes an annual “Connecting Sustainably” report of some 250 pages. Additional important parts of the overall sustainability strategy in regards to the society are compartmentalized as “Stakeholder Dialog”, “Air-craft Noise Abatement and Environment”, “Employees” and “Social Responsibility” (Fraport, 2012).

Figure 7. Fraport general strategy chart: Strategic alignment – Agenda 2015 (Fraport, 2013a).

One reason for increasing focus on CSR measures is for sure the pressure by society and politics. Publicly visible pressure such as the many demonstrations Fraport has experienced are one example. They show disapproval of company actions, and they signal low acceptance by citizens to politicians, whose buy-in is important for Fraport’s future investments. After all, Fraport is majority-owned by public shareholders (the state of Hesse and the city of Frankfurt via a utility), and like any airport, it is highly dependent on regulators and government oversight. The stronger anti-airport-growth signals are, the harder it is for politicians to be in favor, as they may risk support among voters (Thießen, 2012, p. 171).

One very obvious finding is that the CSR topic and conflicts with society can have a tremendous impact on Fraport strategy. The company cannot ignore social and political pressure for long, and it cannot make profitability and growth strategies its sole objective. Certainly Fraport, as a firm close to the state, has always been driven to fulfill public, rather than private commercial, expectations; and Germany’s Social Market model puts general constraints on enterprises. But in today’s context, airport management is in need of a fully elaborated CSR pillar in order to pursue economic growth.

Figure 8. Airport CEO Stefan Schulte presenting regional activities in sports, leisure, clubs, charity, youth, education, arts and culture on which the company spent more than €7 million in 2013. Annual press conference (Fraport, 2014).

The CSR investment in terms of time, effort and cost is significant. Its promise is one for sustainable operations and planning horizons, i.e. a form of risk management. It should pay back the investment in the form of keeping new expansion projects less fraught with a chance to delay and derail. Surely

projects should be implemented faster than, for example, the “Startbahn West” runway which took almost a quarter century from planning to operation. CSR may not reduce complexity of large infrastructure project management, and it may not be a speed booster. But it offers the chance to increase the likelihood to keep planning and implementation to schedule.

SWOT analysis

A brief SWOT analysis can be applied to Fraport’s achievements in the area of social responsibility, examining strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Selected examples will be provided to illustrate the general assessment.

As for strengths, Fraport is aware of CSR importance, in terms of CSR attention in company strategy, of concrete action, and of communications. This can be seen in detailed reports and topical information on its website about concrete action. Objectively, Fraport can be assessed as a committed company actively pursuing a great range of concrete projects and measures delivering substantial responsibility results.

At the company level, Fraport is part of the Dow Jones sustainability indices which show measurable performance of the leading 10 percent of the world’s largest 2,500 companies. Fraport takes information to the ground level, e.g. by roadshows in local villages. In terms of active community involvement, donations, charity and philanthropic sponsoring are listed in hundreds of specific projects. On the noise emission side, Fraport implements measures like preferred use of less disturbing runways or angle of approach reduction. 86,000 more households can claim passive noise abatement support for which Fraport comprises a budget of €265 million. Noise is monitored, and charges are dependent on these emissions. On the ground Fraport tests electric vehicles (today around 10 percent of the fleet) to reduce CO₂ emissions (Fraport, 2013).

Weaknesses are partially structural: They lie in the credibility gap between what society expects and what a commercial, profit-orientated company can really do, given the restrictions formed by its shareholders (both private investors and government entities with political interests) and its airline customers.

For many opponents of Fraport growth, CSR activities look unconvincing. They already take it for a fact that Fraport seeks expansion not as a precondition to stay competitive but for maximizing profits. Or in other words, greed. It comes with an uncompromising attitude toward social demands which interfere with expansion. CSR comes across as a conflict-reducing vehicle for unlimited growth, not an earnest attempt to change goals and behavior.

One other major weakness is Fraport’s insistence that it, and the aviation sector as a whole, are the wrong address for global warming concerns. This goes beyond local issues. In an argument typical for the aviation industry, Fraport claims that the CO₂ emissions problem is mainly caused by others, not air traffic, which contributes only 2-5 percent. This argument has been consistently attacked by critics who regularly point out that the aviation sector is one of the fastest-growing contributors to the problem.

Fraport’s defensive positioning may be in line with its sector’s preference but has lost legitimacy. It would be more honest to admit that per person transported, the negative impact is high – which in turn is more consistent with the effort to develop so many measures to address the problem. Furthermore, Fraport discusses industry targets like 30 percent CO₂ reduction for airfreight by 2030, which Fraport certainly connects to but cannot decisively influence. Fraport’s promise to not increase ground handling emissions despite traffic growth does not seem very ambitious.

Opportunities exist in receiving positive interest, sympathy, and support for new projects. The popular opening event on the new runway Northwest showed that people are indeed greatly interested in what is happening at the airport, and what it positively means for the neighborhood. Fraport social media

popularity may signal interests particularly by a younger generation. It is quite obvious that many, if not the majority of opponents are older residents living in the suburbs or rural areas. They are less likely to reach by social media, but Fraport can get in touch and exchange information and arguments by inviting them, or make Fraport physically present in the villages (Airliners, 2011). For example, Fraport has a roadshow concept using a large-size Info-Truck which travels the region (Helbig, 2011). This could be extended. Regular local discussions and weekly information stands in noise-affected communities can grow credibility over time, even if it means constant exposure to difficult conversations, resentment, and citizens venting their displeasure and grievances. Showing presence, returning often, and standing up can at least demonstrate that Fraport is ready to listen – and that Fraport personnel are accessible on the spot and will take the heat.

In the threat category, Fraport's strategy motto "Taking advantage of growth opportunities" is open for negative interpretation. As mentioned above in the weaknesses category, pursuit of growth means trying to serve and attract as many customers to Frankfurt Airport as possible.

The price for growth is continuously more, not less, infrastructural expansion. CSR promises to minimize impacts notwithstanding, social acceptability of unlimited growth is, per se, questionable. If growth never stops in Fraport's world, then there is also no end to negative impacts which society is asked to accept. Protest persistence, and perhaps escalation, is the natural consequence.

One indicator for this are the ongoing Monday demonstrations for the past two years. Any hope that they would be receding over time, or even fall silent out of frustration, has not realized. In this context, new Fraport projects – from Terminal 3 to even another runway in the long-term – will just keep on re-energizing the opposition. If permanent growth is where the company's compass needle is pointing to, the threat is of CSR measures' inability to deliver social peace. Noise may be reduced but not in the same proportion as overall air movements grow. This may constantly undermine CSR believability, and may lead to an impression that CSR puts out general goals without real effects – adding to citizens' frustration level. Growth orientation is also mirrored by Fraport's "Ja zu FRA" promotional activities and its membership in national pro-aviation growth advocacy organizations like "Initiative Luftverkehr," which have their own critics.

In general, one can say that Fraport is in a very difficult situation where the firm has to act between profit-orientated shareholders, growth-orientated airline customers, and surrounding society with demands for less noise and night flight bans. The airport gets an over-proportionate share of the blame for emissions growth. Obviously, it is the airlines which fly, and planes which burn the kerosene and roll the thunder. An airport just enables them to do so in a certain region. Airports can concretely help reduce emissions – one may think of new approach techniques and air traffic control techniques – but this contribution is limited. Airports are unlikely to publicly point fingers at their airline customers' main responsibility. They would be very unwise to do so. But with that option closed, they accept a responsibility for society expectations which they, in reality, cannot fulfill by meaningful action.

Regional conflict resolution: Possible opportunities

For all airports, not just FRA, a key question to be answered is: What (strategic) measures can airport operators take to reduce the risk of conflict escalation, and what opportunities are there to solve conflicts constructively? The following eight recommendations can contribute practical answers.

First of all, a civilized open dialog needs to be secured. Its first mission is to avoid escalation to physical confrontation and violence. As the past has shown, the potential is there. No one should be aggravated to a degree which triggers acceptance to tolerate, support or get involved with assaults on property or persons. Neither demonstrators nor authorities nor police should feel uninformed, unheard, frustrated or provoked. Information flow to the communities needs to be open and transparent.

In order to achieve this, engaging measures must be of a broad range, e.g. doing interviews with unsatisfied people, involvement of NGOs, media presence, satisfying employees, contracting suppliers from the region, and close cooperation with authorities and the government.

Second, "materiality assessment" is becoming important for CSR reporting and guidance for strategy. It is a process of determining how sizable the impact of sustainability topics is on the operator business as well as on the stakeholders. A hierarchy of response needs can be developed. The point is to concentrate on the right topics instead of wasting resources on challenges which are uninteresting for internal and external stakeholders. Materiality assessment is part of fundamentally new guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI-G4); it has become a new standard airport companies need to adapt to. This is a good tool to prioritize issues, i.e. which should be tackled first and with the most effort with the most detailed indicator reporting. Figure 9 gives an overview about Hong Kong Airport's materiality results in the format of a matrix.

Figure 9. Hong Kong Airport's materiality assessment matrix. It plots issues' impact significance along the x axis and issues' impact on the airport business on the y axis. The issues which locate in the upper right corner are seen as "material," i.e. they rank highest on the responsibility and reporting agenda (HKG Airport, 2013, p. 5).

Third, community work: Traditional CSR has a strong component of local community involvement and local philanthropy to prove that the "corporate citizen" is a good neighbor. Although today CSR has many faces, this element should not be neglected. The importance of airports for the surrounding region needs to be illustrated by deeds, and quite publicly so. It can be combined with locally targeted educational programming, for example with schools, and visits and touring (a public relations classic, of course, but often underutilized). Presence at public events is a must. The closer the operator is connected to neighboring communities, generally the higher the acceptance and understanding of what benefits an airport brings to people.

Fourth, environmental protection beyond compliance with the law, and extending to less-prominent action areas is necessary. An example is waste and water management. Instead of just producing waste, which is unavoidable at large airports, the operator should look for smart waste management solutions. Airport treatment and recycling plants can not only save money but also improve the image in the community significantly (Hongkong Airport, 2014).

Fifth, noise management is the central and for sure the most difficult topic with the highest impact on society acceptance of the airport. Although aircraft, even the newer models, are very noisy, and the airport cannot want to reduce the number of aircraft, certain measures can be implemented by airports, as Fraport shows.

An outcome of the long mediation process of the 2000s was the “Anti-Lärm-Pakt” (ALP), or noise abatement alliance, consisting of all stakeholders with the aim to reduce noise emissions. It developed a package of active noise abatement (raising approach angle to $>3^\circ$, route altitude increase, dedicated runway operation with noise breaks over single areas, noise-based charges, continuous decent approach with reduced engine power, push modernization of aircrafts), passive noise abatement at buildings, and creating regular noise studies on impacts and development (Fraport, 2014c).

Sixth, a formal mediation process can mitigate many concerns and conflicts. The use of an independent, impartial, and respected third party in dispute settlement, instead of opting for arbitration or litigation, has shown good success in some infrastructure projects. Each stakeholder has the right to send representatives who discuss various topics and build action packages.

While the 2000-2008 Frankfurt mediation process with the institutionalized Regional Dialog Forum could not prevent the later protest campaigns, it did open a new chapter of cooperation (Geis, 2005; Banthien, 2012). Vienna Airport has also demonstrated mediation can work, producing a signed agreement with all 50 contractual partners after 75 meetings. Of course, a disadvantage is prolongation of planning and construction (Partizipation.at, 2012).

Seventh, compensation is a necessary ingredient, whether voluntary or mandated by law. Where nature is destroyed by construction, airport operators need to ensure that at another place trees are planted to create new forests and animals return to the wild to compensate the loss. This keeps the ecological balance and creates more understanding in the society. Local cultural and historical heritage, if affected by construction, may need likewise measures.

Eighth, airports must commit to new ideas and creativity. They have to start thinking out of the box to avoid and prevent further conflict. People who suffer under the airport operation should at least have some monetary benefit from it. Airport companies could, for example, use discounted tickets for residents by reducing airport charges and airline prices. Employment and apprenticeship opportunities should be communicated well and creatively. Links with local tourism firms (e.g. hotels, restaurants, sightseeing) can channel airport benefits

communication in better organized ways. Resident involvement with the airport can be developed in new formats.

No matter what form it takes, positive involvement contributes to local acceptance. It is a challenge to bundle all possible measures under one roof program or initiative brand so that people always connect positive experience with the airport. Campaign concepts like “Ja zu FRA” are a starting point but holistic integration of all stakeholder interaction and communication is an endeavor which constantly needs to branch out.

Conclusion

This article has shown the changing forces on today’s airports. In the 21st century, the pure focus on profitable growth is no sustainable or acceptable option. Many airports are located in densely populated areas, and protests of surrounding communities have, by and large, increased everywhere. They pose a serious block to future development. Airports like Frankfurt have no choice but to make social conflict awareness and mitigation a key component of all planning.

The examples clearly have shown the importance of CSR as a part of the operator’s strategy with top management focus. Fraport is one of the leading companies in this regard. Recent and current protests tend to overshadow Fraport’s achievements which include many projects to reduce negative impacts of its operations. Fraport is a good benchmark for many airports; it has many best practice examples to offer. However, Fraport’s economic growth path can only be continued if its CSR efforts grow likewise.

These efforts are costly. In the future they will require ever-bigger budgets, and their management will become more complex. The responsibility to care for the community in which an airport operates is not going to shrink.

In the future only airports with successful CSR, embedded in business strategy and with meaningful practical value and scope, can further grow and stay competitive. Otherwise, resistance from society becomes a permanently growth-limiting factor.

In the next decades, no airport can take for granted that growing market demand for air transport automatically legitimizes airport growth. This may happen, on a global scale, only in countries which disregard people’s opinion and rights. In terms of worldwide airport competition, an unlevel playing field is emerging. Social responsibility is a priority for some airports, and for others it is not. It is in the interest of socially responsible airports that competitors receive international pressure to change.

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