



INTERVIEW

IN CONVERSATION WITH
PETER MANUEL FELDMANN

Harnessing Diversity to Emerge Stronger

Peter Manuel Feldmann, Lord Mayor of Frankfurt, shares how the city has harnessed its diversity to be a liveable and sustainable place for everyone, and what it is doing to emerge stronger in the future.



| *Image: Frank Widmann*



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The city of Frankfurt is known to be culturally and ethnically diverse, with more than half the population having an immigrant background. How has this diversity contributed to the success of Frankfurt as a liveable city?

Frankfurt is one of Germany's most diverse cities, which also characterises how it sees itself. People from 180 countries live here. More than 54% of Frankfurt's residents have an immigrant background, with that figure rising to 70% among those aged under 18. This diversity is reflected on various levels and contributes to the success and well-being of its people.

These different cultural backgrounds, together with the enterprises from all over the world that operate here, give Frankfurt its unique international flair and make the city a leading international business and industrial location. Companies started by immigrants are also playing an increasingly important role. A population as diverse in its composition as ours is a significant factor of economic innovation.

Voices and perspectives that are often neglected or ignored in political and social processes elsewhere are woven into the political fabric of Frankfurt. The composition of our city parliament, for example, is significantly more diverse than the national average. Frankfurt's Kommunale Ausländerinnen- und Ausländervertretung (KAV—Municipal Foreigner Administration Office), the city's political body advocating local integration policy, takes



View of the streets of Altstadt.
Image: Stadt Frankfurt am Main

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action against inequality and discrimination. It actively places the concerns of immigrants at the heart of the city's politics. Such representation in political bodies and processes takes lived realities into account, and results in concrete ways to give people visibility and support in their different life situations.

Our diversity also engenders a general openness to new developments in urban society and cultural creativity. Frankfurt's art and cultural scene is very varied. International communities form an institutional body that has an impact not only on working life, but also on social coexistence, the educational landscape, leisure and shopping opportunities. This body considerably enhances the quality of life for all Frankfurt citizens. The annual International Frankfurt Book Fair—the world's largest book fair—is just one of the many attractions of our city. More than 7,000 exhibitors from around 100 countries present their latest offerings here, with a different "host" country whose book industry and culture is highlighted each year. Also worth mentioning is the "Kulturöffner: Museum" project, which provides museum and exhibition tours in various languages. Literally meaning "open culture", the Kulturöffner is a collaboration between Amt für multikulturelle Angelegenheiten, or AmKA (Frankfurt's Office for Multicultural Affairs), five city museums, and socially committed individuals or groups from various communities.

The population diversity in the different city districts is also a basis for reducing tensions. Studies (including in the Frankfurt urban area) show that greater diversity in a neighbourhood leads to more friendships and acquaintances with people from different cultural backgrounds. The result is a special sense of global connectedness that manifests itself, for example, in a willingness to help each other and to react quickly and creatively to challenges. In March 2022, for example, Frankfurt responded swiftly to support the sudden influx of Ukrainians by setting up a coordination centre to advise and help the arriving refugees as best as possible.

The different cultures, religions and languages of the people living here give Frankfurt its own special charm. Frankfurt is an important location for numerous international religious communities. The Bahá'í European Centre, the German headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the second oldest mosque in Germany, are all here, for example.

Sexual and gender diversity is another living reality in Frankfurt. We have a large queer community that is actively involved in shaping the local cultural and social life. Numerous queer cultural locations are here. For example, the Frankfurt Angel is a memorial in the city centre that commemorates the persecution of homosexuals in Germany and worldwide on each International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.



The Frankfurter Angel which commemorates the persecution of homosexuals stands near St. Peter's church on Kalus-Mann-Platz.

Image: Reinhard Dietrich

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What are some of the factors that have enabled such diversity to flourish in Frankfurt?

Our residents actively contribute to a range of associations and civil society organisations with their wide variety of life goals and perspectives. These include numerous immigrant organisations and associations that act as valuable links between newly arrived immigrants and the established society. Community representatives have also set up projects in education, empowerment and participation, shaping our welcoming culture.

But all this does not happen in a vacuum. It requires significant coordination by the municipality, e.g., by promoting a public culture of welcome and recognition. Diversity needs to be protected by anti-discrimination measures and be underpinned by an appropriate legal basis.

Diversity also needs to be nurtured in organisations. This takes the form of processes for intercultural openness and diversity management, as well as gender equality and steps against discrimination. AmkA was founded in 1989 as an independent office—the first of its kind—to reflect this diversity and positively shape coexistence in our city. It handles all issues related to diversity, anti-discrimination and social cohesion. It provides advice as a cross-sectional office interfacing between the administration and civil society, laying important groundwork.

In a 2019 interview with Mercer, the human resources consultancy that publishes the annual Quality of Living City Ranking, you mentioned that Frankfurt's challenges included "development of affordable housing as well as expansion and improvement of transport and digital infrastructure". Has Frankfurt adopted any innovations to address those challenges, which other cities can learn from?

We have passed a building land resolution, stipulating that larger projects and new building areas must consist of 30% subsidised housing, 15% communal and cooperative housing, 15% privately financed rented apartments and 10% reduced-price, privately owned apartments. This means affordable housing is created in mixed neighbourhoods throughout the city. Public housing associations play an important role in creating and maintaining affordable housing. I am very glad that these organisations have not been privatised, but have continued to offer housing for all in Frankfurt for almost 100 years.



Night View of Frankfurt.
Image: Steven Wei / Unsplash

Frankfurt was recently selected to play a key role in the green finance industry, as the headquarters of the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB), a new body for devising global sustainability disclosure standards. How else is the city leading or supporting this agenda as a financial hub?

Before becoming the head office of the ISSB, Frankfurt and the State of Hesse had already established the Green and Sustainable Finance Cluster Germany at the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management. Together with the ISSB and numerous public and private supporters, we are developing a sustainability network consisting of financial industry members, universities and regulators, in interaction with the non-financial industries. In addition, the new city government elected in 2021 has included many climate-friendly and sustainability measures in its coalition agenda.

Frankfurt has committed to have all its energy needs covered by renewable energy by 2050. Could you share with us where the city currently stands in achieving that goal, and what key lessons have been learned so far in your journey?

Between 1990 and 2017, Frankfurt's final energy consumption increased 1% in absolute terms. In the same period, its population grew 17% to around 741,000 inhabitants. Per capita greenhouse gas emissions fell 32% during this period. Energy consumption also fell in private households (-13%) and

|| A green city is a more liveable city, and a healthier one.



the industrial sectors (-8%), while increasing in the trade, commerce and services sector (+8%) and in transportation in particular (+23%). The reasons cited for the rise in energy consumption in both sectors are a sharp increase in the number of data centres (accounting for one-sixth of electricity consumption in Frankfurt), as well as an increase in transit and delivery traffic in the city area and a general increase in traffic.

This data indicates that although Frankfurt has undeniably made progress in its efforts to achieve climate neutrality, they are still not enough for us to meet our climate targets. The city is thus considerably stepping up its climate protection efforts. To this end, it has passed far-reaching resolutions, such as the Climate Alliance of 2019, and further resolutions are to follow very soon. In addition, climate protection will continue to be supported, with significant increases in the relevant budget items planned.

One lesson we have learned in recent years is that climate protection requires not only continuous effort, often in the form of small-scale measures, but also the allocation of sufficient resources and the implementation of appropriate decision-making processes in the city. Another important lesson for us is that climate protection must be seen as a task for the society as a whole. Only as a team can we achieve success in climate protection. This is also reflected in our “Team Frankfurt Klimaschutz” climate protection brand. This commitment does not stop at the city level. We regard dialogue—with other municipalities in Germany that support climate protection, and also at the international level—as crucial.



Green spaces in Frankfurt for everyone to enjoy.
Image: Jordi / Shutterstock

Cities across the world are facing many shocks and stresses, including the current public health and climate crises. As you reflect upon your time as Mayor of Frankfurt since 2012, what do you think it is about Frankfurt that has been key to its resilience through it all? And as we look into the future, what is Frankfurt doing to emerge stronger from the recent crises?

Frankfurt has a stable foundation—its firm belief in democracy and freedom. We are proud that the first steps towards German democracy were taken in our city in 1848—and we have learned just how fragile democracy and freedom are. This "never again" attitude, this rejection of hatred and extremism, has particularly deep roots in Frankfurt. We know that we must stand together in crises, and not be seduced by those who promise supposedly easy solutions.

This public spirit makes us strong; it keeps us on the right track. We have benefited from this most recently during the pandemic. The overwhelming majority pulled together, including in cases where it disadvantaged them personally. Even those who had to close their businesses knew we would support them when they would be allowed to re-open. We have lowered bureaucratic hurdles, set up support schemes and promoted local trade. There is also broad consensus in our urban society when it comes to climate protection.

In order to meet the challenges of the future, we need to restore a sense of togetherness. The climate crisis cannot be resolved by individuals acting alone. We have to see the bigger picture. We have to consider the conditions in which future generations will live—and this does not only include those who have grown up in Frankfurt. We cannot leave such matters to the market; we have to take them into our own hands. In short, it's less about "I" and more about "we". In my opinion, this represents a huge opportunity.

What would a stronger Frankfurt emerging from these challenging times look like?

Our Frankfurt will become more social and sustainable. And it will be more attractive to investors, even if this might seem a contradiction in terms at first sight. But a secure society is a stable society. A system that places greater emphasis on providing day care and education produces fewer school dropouts and allows parents to return to work more quickly. That is why it was right to make the day-care centres free of charge. There is a similar story when it comes to sustainability. Of course, sustainability costs money. But a green city is also a more liveable city, and a healthier one. And that is something worth fighting for. 📍