

Bremen: Good crisis management pays off in times of COVID-19

Adapting operations quickly and efficiently in line with new demands

Overview

For years now, the Bremen-based wastewater utility company hanseWasser has been investing in efficient crisis and emergency management. Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, its preparedness is paying off. The company is able to adapt its operations quickly and efficiently in line with new demands.



Background

hanseWasser is responsible for municipal drainage and wastewater treatment in Bremen where it operates the municipal sewage network. It thus provides a key municipal service. For this reason, hanseWasser with its 400-strong workforce has to maintain its operational resilience in times of crisis, too.

The company has a long-standing commitment to worker health and safety. It aims to avoid work accidents, improve worker safety and thus reduce sickness-related absenteeism. Every year, it organises training on accident avoidance or healthier nutrition. hanseWasser already began rolling out a crisis management strategy for occupational safety and health back in 2004.

Objectives

To remain operational during the COVID-19 pandemic, hanseWasser needs a crisis management plan that can respond swiftly and effectively in the event of a disaster or emergency. At the core of this system – which is built for long-term operability and was already on hand thanks to hanseWasser’s crisis-preparedness drive – is a crisis and emergency management team.

Activities

hanseWasser began expanding its long-standing commitment to occupational health and safety to include crisis management in 2012. Today the company holds annual drills in which it simulates a range of different crisis and emergency scenarios, including serious accidents or a sinking ship. As chance would have it, part of the 2019 simulation involved members of the team suddenly falling ill without warning, rendering them unable to work.

hanseWasser’s approach does not require the generation of a new set of parallel structures but leverages the ones the company already has – an approach that was also rolled out at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Its crisis management during the pandemic provides for various stages of escalation. Depending on the latest infection rate, the crisis management team reassesses the situation and adapts its approach accordingly.

Effects

hanseWasser is a long-time advocate of optimum crisis and emergency management. As a result, its crisis and emergency management practices were already well anchored in the company when the COVID-19 pandemic started. This meant it was possible to use existing rules, handbooks and information to deal with the pandemic and thus radically adapt operations in no time, enabling employees to work in completely separate shifts – both in terms of space and time. Some 300 employees worked from home while a skeleton workforce of 65 staffed the offices on site – the minimum number of in-person workers regarded as essential.



Conclusions

hanseWasser’s strategy of using its standard processes and structures for managing critical situations like COVID-19 rather than rolling out a parallel management system has proved its worth.

A crisis demands flexible action. If the situation changes, crisis management measures must be adapted too. Being able to rely on the expertise of a crisis and emergency management team that is integrally embedded in the company proves highly expedient in this regard.



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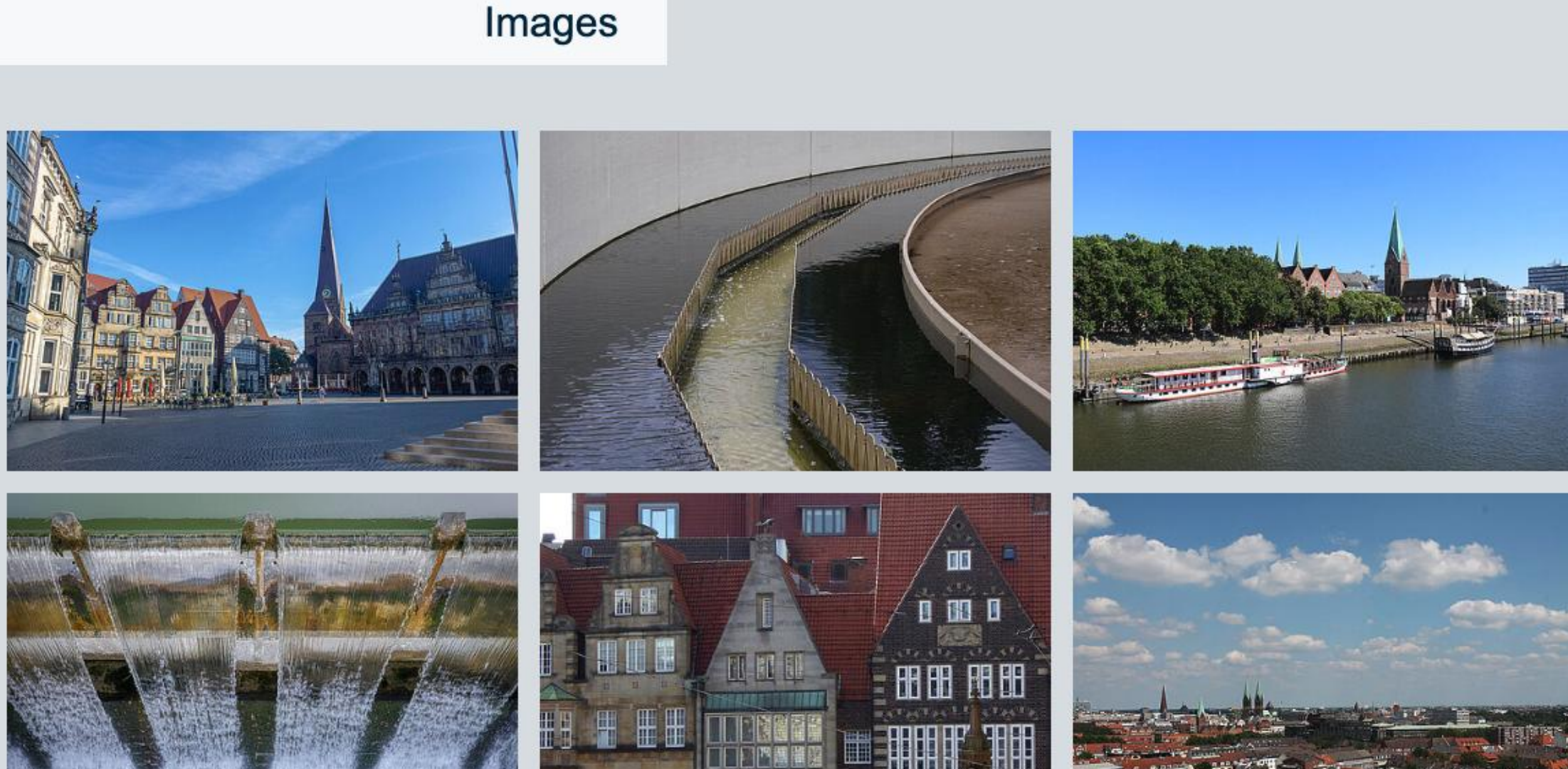
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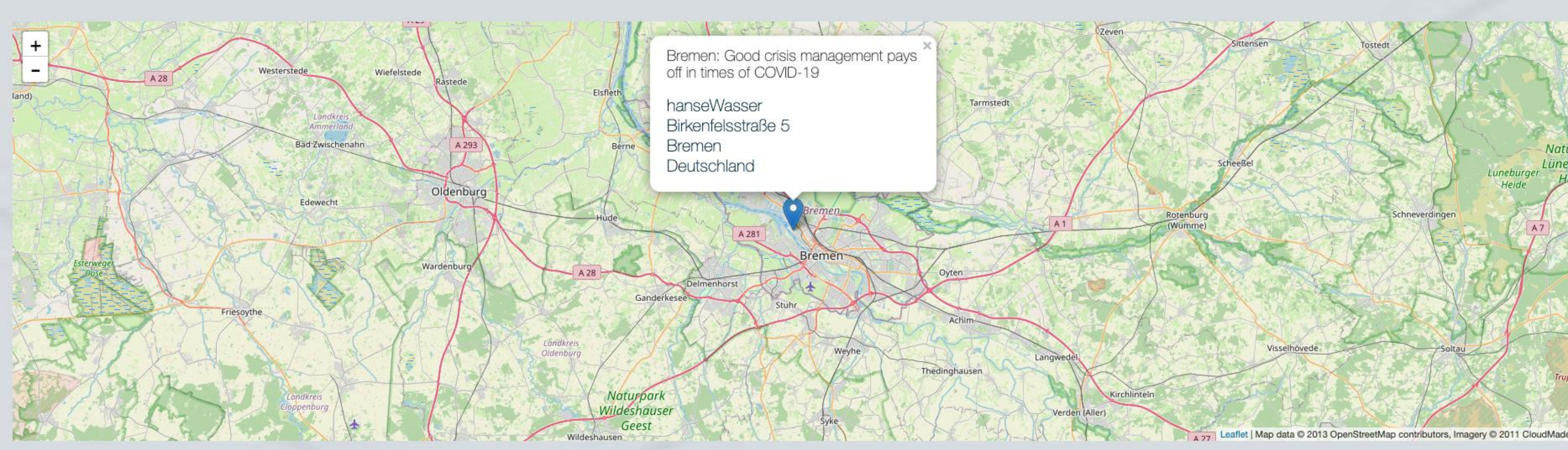
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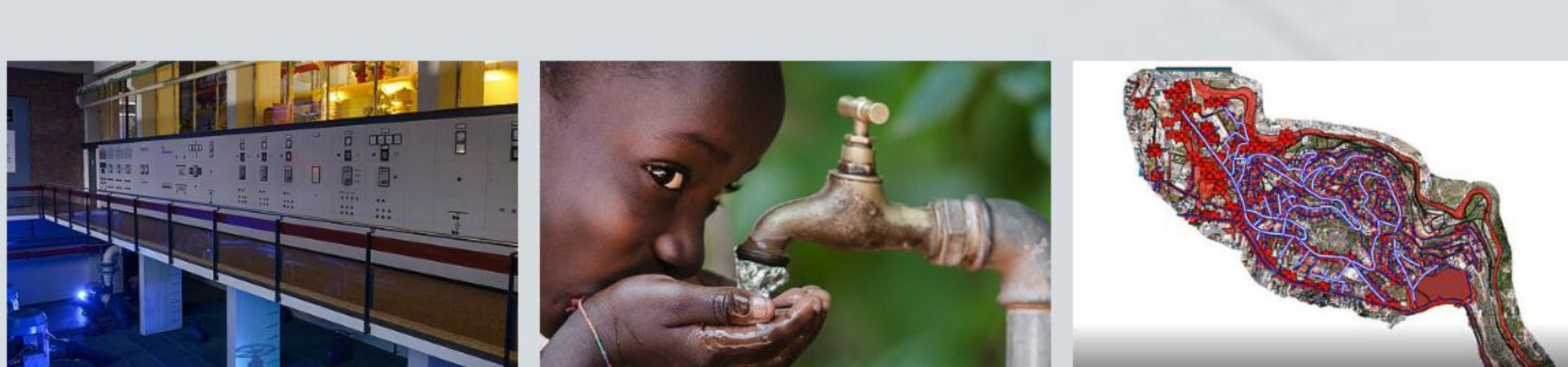
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