A bookmark for Salbke

The district Salbke in Magdeburg is characterized by shrinkage abandoned industrial plants and brownfields. A post-industrial city landscape with high unemployment and vacancy up to 80%. The spatially intact city centre stands almost completely empty.

The Open-Air-Library started with a public intervention, using beer cases as building material. On the former site of the former district library a 1:1 model of a possible Open-Air-Library has been erected for two days. The shelves have been filled with book-donations. The residents took over the energy of the temporary project and opened up an informal district library near the site which now offers more than 35,000 books. The outdoor space as an addition has been designed together with the residents and opened in June 2009. The bookshelves are never closed: you can take a book when ever you want. There is no bureaucracy: it is a library of confidence.

The project was observed right from the beginning as a SOCIAL SCULPTURE. The design and the functions were planned in a very close and open participation process.
Recycling of post-war modernism

Besides the aspect of SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY, the architectural highlight of the project is the reuse of the residential facade of the abandoned HORTEN warehouse of the City of Hannover. The warehouses of the entrepreneur Horst, built in numerous German cities - with a more or less similar facade - have soon roost as targets of fundamental modernist critics. Today, there is a re-evaluation of these kinds of facades, which are in principle based on Edward Durrell Stone’s facade-design of the US ambassador’s residence in Brussels. In this series, the project stands beside energetic aspects for a SUSTAINABILITY OF SIGNS of the post-war period.

During the participation process several citizens demanded to construct the facade out of recycling materials. It was a fruitful coincidence that in the same period the 1950s structure modernist warehouse facade was available for very cheap conditions and in an astonishing proper maintenance. Besides the renewal of the colour of the aluminium modules the facade was reused including its sub-construction without any structural change. Today the proposal is celebrated enthusiastically by all citizens of Haleeke. With its retro-futuristic design the Open-Air Library is seen as a new VILLAGE ICON and as sign towards a brighter future. As another communal function a stage is included. This is used by the elementary school for theatre plays, as well as for public readings, for concert-gigs of local youth bands and other cultural and communal events.

The location is quite new and still in a rough environment. Nevertheless the first houses in the surrounding have been sold and it looks as if they would be renovated. The residents who take care of the site and the library tell that it feels like an exiting new toy and one can be curious for the program of the next years. For judging the success of the project, it is way too early. It is since the beginning an experiment with an open end.

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