

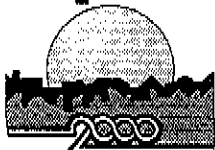


European Sustainable Cities
and Towns Campaign

Case studies in
Sustainable Development and Health: 3

The clay walling technique as an aid to integration in living and working

Dresden
Germany



Healthy Cities Network

Abstract

This project uses the clay walling technique to assist in integrating unemployed people into living and working in Dresden, Germany. Unemployed people are trained in construction techniques using low-energy clay walling and constructing flats for homeless people. The project is designed to assist people suffering social discrimination, including homelessness or the threat of homelessness. The project is a model scheme linking social work and housing construction. The project uses and activates the self-help potential of the people affected by social discrimination and exclusion. The construction method has been selected to reduce energy use and thereby reduce environmental strain.



Keywords

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The clay walling technique

as an aid to integration in living and working

Objectives

- The participants have the opportunity to tackle their housing problems actively and constructively and to improve their self-esteem and living conditions.
- The ecologically benign construction techniques contribute to reducing environmental damage and support Dresden's aims of achieving more sustainable development.
- In addition to practical activity, a purposeful educational qualification is provided. Unemployment in the construction industry is high but job opportunities in the ecological sector of construction are increasing. Training in this niche improves the chances of re-employment. Social components, such as the ability to engage in teamwork and to cope with conflicts, are of prime importance on the increasingly narrow labour market. This will also be part of the qualification provided by the project.

Background information

Population: 465 000

Land area: 225.75 km²

Environmental activities: Energy production based on cleaner fuels; improving water quality; constructing a bicycle path along the Elbe.

Main economic activities: Development to an advanced European location for high technology (a Siemens chip factory and the AMD micro-processor company); the city is being promoted as a centre of science.

research and technology (the Max Planck Institute, Fraunhofer Gesellschaft and multimedia software).

The unmet demand for rented flats is increasing, especially among people receiving public assistance. Efforts to promote the social integration of socially disadvantaged people often fail if adequate housing is not available. One way of meeting these challenges is to involve socially disadvantaged people in solving their housing problems. This project attempts to do this within the framework of a local strategy for sustainable development by directly involving the people subject to social discrimination in constructing flats using a timber frame-clay walling technique.

Clay is a healthy, natural and reasonably priced material. It is available almost everywhere; preparing it for use as a building material requires negligible energy, and clay is completely recyclable. Clay has excellent biological and physical properties. It ensures healthy room air conditions and has a high capacity for heat insulation and storage and sound insulation. This type of construction allows a great deal of self-help and is easy to learn under appropriate guidance. One third of humanity lives in clay houses. They are traditionally constructed using teamwork – often with the communal help of friends, families or villagers. Many people in the target group have had experience in the building trades. Hence, the project and its potential for participation is directly related to the experience of the target group.

Implementation

Strategy

A three-stage project is designed to be a model scheme for allowing the participants to help themselves.

Activities

The first stage of the project has determined its basic principles, including preliminary projects such as reconstructing a traditional half-timbered house and constructing a house using the clay walling

technique and constructing a clay oven with the help of inhabitants of a hostel for the homeless. The experience and results of this stage of the project lead up to the second stage.

The second stage of the project is starting in spring 1997 with the actual construction. The first house comprising 250 m² will be built in cooperation with the target group.

The third stage involves the construction of a housing estate with a minimum of 20 flats using the timber frame-clay walling technique. This stage directly involves people suffering social discrimination. One third of these flats will be offered on the normal housing market to promote social integration.

Partners

During the development stage, the project was supported by a coordinating committee including grassroots representatives, representatives of the Evangelische Fachhochschule für Sozialarbeit Dresden (Protestant College of Social Work in Dresden), scientific branch, other supporting organizations (Diakonisches Werk – Stadtmission Dresden (Charitable Service, Dresden City Mission)) and the City of Dresden. This coordinating committee is advising on how to facilitate the integration of the work stages in an uncomplicated manner, thus realizing a cooperative approach.

The second stage of the project involves 12 participants applying to a scheme to promote work instead of public assistance paid for by the regional social security office in accordance with the Federal Social Security Act. The participants get a one-year employment contract. The construction activities will take up 3.5 days per week; 0.5 days is allocated to social education and reflection and 1 day to theoretical training.

One full-time and one part-time social education worker are supporting the project. They will also participate in the construction project to solve any conflicts arising on the construction site or to give individual

guidance if needed. The post of a technical teacher will be applied for and filled through measures to create jobs for long-term unemployed people. The post of a project manager is also planned.

Other partners include the Ministries of Social Affairs and the Interior, Free State of Saxony; the regional labour office; and the European Social Fund. A foundation will be requested to provide support.

Finances and resources used

The Stadtmission Dresden is financing this project using the money raised during the 1993 street fundraising of the Diakonisches Werk in Saxony. The City of Dresden is supporting the construction of the housing estate and finances the staff of the scheme to promote work instead of public assistance. Talks with the Free State of Saxony are under way to acknowledge the project as a model scheme and to promote it accordingly.

The regional labour office is a partner in promoting job-creating measures. Since the project as a whole is designed to educate people and improve their qualifications, the European Social Fund is financing social education workers, project managers and non-inventory costs for the implementation of the educational scheme.

Results and impact

As the project is in its initial stage, only the results on the preliminary projects are available. In some cases the homeless people were well acquainted with construction jobs and felt accepted as equals, which in turn influenced their motivation. Demanding jobs that produce a sense of achievement through systematic instruction positively influence people's self-confidence, which can continue through the subsequent construction project. The long period of construction enables the participants to adapt gradually to the rhythm of work. Participation is motivated at various levels: the resources necessary for living and working are redeveloped or facilitated by offers of education. Social respect based on participation in gainful employment is of major significance.

Last but not least, the greater socioeconomic stability of the people affected will ease the pressure on municipal budgets.

Barriers and conflicts

Financing plan

It is difficult to draw up a practicable financing plan for the target group. This group of people does not have any equity capital, which means that a supporting organization to provide credit and advance financing has to be found.

The project constitutes an intermediate stage between dependence on various forms of social support and being an independent tenant of a flat. The current system of social welfare provision and social support is not oriented towards this kind of social education and guidance into independence.

Scheduling the various stages of the project has also turned out to be difficult. Planning the construction work and undertaking the education have taken considerably longer than expected.

Conflicts are expected during construction

This project concentrates on underprivileged people, including homeless people or those threatened by homelessness and immigrants. Physical and mental problems frequently result from social discrimination. In many cases the people affected have very low self-image and self-confidence, especially because of social stigmatization. Their belief that they can have a more successful life may be weakened. These challenges need to be taken into account in planning as well as on the construction site.

Conflicts, such as work stoppages, are expected to arise during construction because of the personal, social and economic challenges facing the target group. Some may be dependent on alcohol, and others have mental and physical problems. Such conflicts slow down the construction process and, in turn, may result in conflicts with those financing the project.

The challenges after construction

The experience of a similar housing estate (at Bous near Saarbrücken, Germany) is useful in anticipating the likely challenges after construction. After construction was completed, the co-builders moved in. They had precise knowledge of their mutual biographies and origins and found it difficult to transcend their past. Housing estates always present the danger of stigmatization. The new tenants did not consider the houses to be of especially great value despite their attractiveness. The close vicinity and confinement of the housing estate resulted social segregation.

The architectural concept should take these factors into consideration. Social integration is intended by including families who finance the flats privately but want to take advantage of this construction process.

Transferability

It is hoped that this scheme can be extended and used more widely. Easy learning and applicability and the economic and ecological advantages make this model scheme potentially interesting for a wider target group. Others who are willing to build their own house under beneficial conditions can learn from this project.

Lessons learned

Individual challenges such as work, education and living together need to be integrated with the social challenges presented by politics, economics and ecology. The systematic integration of the individual and social levels is useful in helping people to solve their complex problems. Housing is often considered separately from addict counselling, education from practical work, economy from ecology, and social competence from competition on the labour market. This project is designed to integrate the individual and social levels.

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This case study was prepared by Friedemann Dietzel and Kathrin Wallrabe, social educators, Diakonisches Werk – Stadtmission Dresden e.V.

Further information

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