



Experimentcity (Germany)

Summary

Established in 2003 Experimentcity is an innovative approach to study and promote the innovative and sustainable re-use of vacant land and buildings in Berlin for artistic, cultural or ecological purposes. This initiative unites and promotes hundreds of urban development projects through its annual networking event, EXPERIMENTDAYS, and the participative internet platform WOHNPORTAL.berlin. It is the bottom-up approach to involving civil society and local resources to support sustainable urban development through culture and creativity that makes Experimentcity truly unique. The initiative fosters cooperation among various actors (housing and construction project developers, consultants, enterprises, students, artists and environment activists) resulting in new synergies improving the quality of life and the urban environment of the city. The solutions developed by Experimentcity are timely as the post-industrial city is confronted with shrinking, ageing and diversifying populations as well as the stagnating economy and debts.

The project

Experimentcity was created by the non-profit *id22: Institute for Creative Sustainability* to study and promote the innovative and sustainable re-use of vacant land and buildings in Berlin. Since 2003 this initiative aims to improve the living environment in the post-industrial city confronted with shrinking, ageing and diversifying populations as well as a stagnating economy and debts. Experimentcity constitutes a platform for housing projects, construction initiatives, project developers, consultants, enterprises, students, citizens and supporting partners that encourages networking, offers assistance and promotes approaches and cultures of sustainable urban development. This practice supports the participative, creative and sustainable use of vacant city spaces for ecological, public and cultural purposes thus increasing the quality of city life.

Sector(s) covered

Main sector

Society: Urban regeneration, Urban development, sustainability, youth and quality of life.

Other sectors

Arts & Creative Industries

Among the main activities of Experimentcity is the organisation of the annual networking event, EXPERIMENTDAYS, and the maintenance of the participative internet platform, WOHNPORTAL.berlin.

Approach

By supporting projects ranging from co-operative, ecological housing to a youth education and cultural centre installed in a large, abandoned locomotive train repair hall Experimentcity unleashes the great potential previously unexplored in Berlin's vacant structures. This method enables sustainable development to go from theory to practice. Furthermore, Experimentcity takes advantage of synergies found in bringing "non-used" spaces together with the resourcefulness of civil society. In Berlin such bottom-up efforts are



leading to new urban strategies. Innovative land recycling groups are increasingly being recognized as partners in the City's development.

Each year Experimentcity's EXPERIMENTDAYS organises a forum for discussion, networking and exploring innovative approaches to sustainable and participative urban development. This two-day event features project exchange, workshops, discussions and excursions. Around 200 persons were actively involved in the 2008 EXPERIMENTDAYS, which saw more than 1000 visitors and some 100 project presentation stands. Media and communication activities brought information about this event to over 30 000 people. In addition, the Internet platform, WOHNPORTAL.berlin, is visited by approximately 500 persons per day and presents more than 110 sustainable development projects and initiatives.

Element of innovation

The project aims to generate new and creative forms of sustainable urban development through networking, supporting and publicising innovative and participative urban initiatives. Experimentcity in itself represents a network of hundreds of innovative projects. The aim of this "overarching" structure is to support and strengthen these projects through a creative combination of communication and events. The practice works with open and participative structures.

Apart from promoting the exchange of best practices, networking and cooperation, Experimentcity hosts an online database to support networking between projects and to provide inspiration and examples for alternative uses of vacant urban spaces.

Housing and construction projects, architects, construction companies and supporting partners meet and present their innovative initiatives to the public during the EXPERIMENTDAYS.

Furthermore, they involve the public during their day-to-day activities.

Key successes

Since 2003 hundreds of projects have been promoted with the help of Experimentcity. Intensive media coverage and communication activities related to the events organised by the practice have generated and continue to attract public attention for these projects as well as their new and alternative approaches. In addition to these events, Experimentcity has also been successfully promoted through its websites, newsletter, partner organisations and articles in the local and national press. The initiative has also been successful in:

- Creating promotion, presentation and networking opportunities for creative and sustainable projects as well as contributions to further develop their ideas;
- Producing synergy effects by bringing experienced and inexperienced actors dealing with a participative, artistic, cultural or ecological use of vacant urban spaces together and stimulating their cooperation. These projects and stakeholders have an empowering and developing impact on the neighbourhoods; and,
- Developing learning processes between different groups and projects contributing to sustainable urban development. Experimentcity has contributed to the cooperation and



the transfer of knowledge between different projects helping to overcome any possible rivalry.

Challenges

The main challenge, mostly during the first years of the practice, was securing the funding for the project. Today, due to its success and established image, Experimentcity has a secure financial basis allowing prosperous and continuous work.

Transferability and sustainability

The Experimentcity approach could be transferred and become meaningful in the context of a larger city. The practice already has contacts with various international partners.

It has been sustainable and largely successful for the past six years. In 2007 Experimentcity was included in the federal government's campaign "Land der Ideen" (Land of Ideas). The practice has also been locally recognised as an interesting partner in Berlin's urban development.

Special Highlights

What makes Experimentcity so special is the combination of civil society and local resources to support sustainable development through culture and creativity. Experimentcity has developed an inclusive bottom-up and participative approach to re-using Berlin's vacant land and buildings for artistic, cultural or ecological purposes.

This approach improved the quality of life and environment in the city and also promoted the urban regeneration of Berlin, stimulating cooperation from stakeholders.

Experimentcity has received very positive praise from its participants, national and international partners, local and national media, and local and national governments.

Key characteristics

General purpose of the practice	The practice promotes networking, creativity and innovation with regard to the use of vacant land and buildings in Berlin
Target group	Adults, students, citizens, enterprises
Type of learning	Informal
Level of implementation	Local and regional (networking also on an international level)
Funding	Public and private funding (financial partners include public administrations, foundations, private sponsorship at local and



	national levels)
Time frame	2003 - on going
Leading organisations	id22: Institut für kreative Nachhaltigkeit (id22: Institute for Creative Sustainability)

Further information

Website of the project:

www.experimentcity.net
www.wohnportal-berlin.de

Contact details:

Dr. Michael LaFond (Project Manager)
Email: info@experimentcity.net