

MANIFESTO: FOR A HUMANE AND SUSTAINABLE HABITAT

Within the framework of BASEhabitat's EARTH WORKS, the international summer school for modern earthen structures and sustainable architecture held in September 2010 in Gmunden (Austria), specialists from 17 different nations met for a three-week symposium.

Forty participants, most of them architects, exchanged their experiences with earth building, tested various methods of building with earth, and deepened the theoretical basis for this work.

EARTH WORKS was organised and directed by BASEhabitat at the University for Art Design (Kunstuniversität) Linz, in cooperation with the Technische Universität München (University of Technology Munich), Grenoble School of Architecture (CRATERre-ENSAG), the International Union of Architects (UIA), the brickworks EDER/Peuerbach (A) and the town of Gmunden, and was financially supported by the Erasmus "Lifelong Learning" programme of the EU.

On the basis of this broad experience the following jointly formulated manifesto was produced at the end of the symposium:

At present roughly one billion of people, most of them in developing countries, live in rudimentary accommodation that cannot satisfy even the most elementary basic needs. Only a minority of the world's population can afford a healthy and safe living environment. The built environment is generally constructed with materials (for instance cement and steel) which, for their production, require raw materials and enormous amounts of energy that are not available to seven billion people.

Building with natural construction materials offers a convincing alternative to such methods. Among the most economic of the resources that occur naturally throughout the world is cohesive earth.

As a result of their research work, experience and projects throughout the world the signatories have been able to prove that earth building is a sustainable answer to ecological and social problems encountered globally.

Thanks to its insignificant consumption of energy and its excellent potential for providing comfort a building made of earth is the ecologically, socially and economically most sustainable contribution to housing mankind, to climate protection and to activating labour forces, above all in the most densely populated countries on our planet.

In order to exploit this potential certain challenges must be faced and tasks undertaken, these include:

- strengthening the social and political support for building with natural materials;
- promoting research (into materials, construction and building methods);
- carrying out pilot projects and evaluating them;
- examining and disseminating existing knowledge;
- depicting the strengths, possibilities and limits of building with natural materials;
- increased training and further education;
- effective public relations work.

The goal of the signatories is to significantly improve the image of earth and natural materials as building materials and of earth building in general. To achieve this handed-down experience must be combined with efficient modern technologies while maintaining high design and creative standards.

This is where the joint answer lies to meeting the legitimate need of people in developing countries for a living environment fit for human beings and of those in industrialised countries for ensured comfort.

The signatories came together with these intentions and goals in order to make this experience accessible to as many people as possible through the world-wide network of BASEhabitat.

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The next steps necessary include an in-depth exchange of experience and knowledge, the implementation of pilot projects, the dissemination of knowledge, and the formation of an image through national and international means of communication and media.

In the interest of achieving these goals the network BASEhabitat is looking for pilot projects, tasks, partnerships, organisations (business and industrial firms, universities, research institutions, political and development associations) and, naturally, financial means for research and development as well as for training and further education. Important are, above all, the people – within and outside the institutions – who support and promote the goal of a humane, liveable and sustainable housing and living environment according to their possibilities.

Gmunden, September 2010

Signees

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