

“House Wanted!”

Model for a social solution in youth work in Neukölln

Youth Work Does Business

How do you develop a run down part of a bankrupt city where immigration and unemployment cast shadows of prejudice and low self-esteem? What hope can youth workers give young kids of Neukölln?

Fusion, a self-organized experimental youth project, suggests that the answer is to create their own markets! They offer to set up commercial projects, which employs youth and to develops the skills they need. In time, this will also fulfill Fusion’s wish to be economically self-sufficient.

The ‘Jugend Hotel Fusion’ is a project with the potential to go beyond skill building, and community organizing – it has the potential to create a self-reliant system that has the power to transform the youth and the area.

The History of Fusion Association

Fusion is the story of a self-organized effort to create self-respect, tolerance and ways of expression for youth where the council of Neukölln have given up. The founders Marta Galvis de Janzer and Wolfgang Janzer began with the idea of using carnival as a concept to create, communicate and infuse vitality. This has so far lead to Manege, a youth centre in ‘Reuterkiez’ in Neukölln and Jugendstraße which is now closed off for traffic. The Jugend Hotel Fusion is a further progress in their effort to infuse new ideas in youth work into Neukölln.

Project Jugendstraße

When Fusion suggested to close off a whole street from traffic, the first reaction was that they must be mad. But the idea won and Rütlistraße was ‘reclaimed’ as a public space for the people. Besides hosting ‘Manege’ Fusion’s youth center there are two schools, a kindergarten, and allotment gardens. In the summer, Fusion hosts summer parties and summer is where the youth club Manege contributes to the carnival.

The street is flanked with two big frog figures — at the same time inviting and guarding! When building and painting the frogs, Fusion just started their work in the street and as people came by they joined in making it an intercultural neighborhood event.

Art as a social facilitator

For Fusion art is not an end in itself but a certain process that infuses vitality and creativity into peoples lives and creates dialogue. In their work with youngsters, they use this approach to build self-confidence and as a way of suggesting a meaningful use of spare time. By making youth work and create together in a respectful environment, and asking them direct personal questions, Fusion manages to redirect energy that could have been used ‘in the street’ into a constructive identity forming process.

Art as defined here can open up centers of creativity and potential that is necessary to create ones’ own will and purpose in life.

Market and Tourism

The capital Berlin attracts many people and is renown for offering a vibrant culture life to its visitors. The tourism sector is important for the city’s income, and is alone employing almost 70.000 people. Neukölln is in this context a potential area for new lucrative markets. In Berlin, there are many hostels

that all have in common that they offer inexpensive lodging. None of them are today located in Neukölln.

Neukölln

Neukölln has 300.000 inhabitants, and is famous for its variety of cultures in all of Berlin, and can offer numerous interesting experiences for tasteful and inexpensive kitchens. In Neukölln, you can make some of the greatest offers and deals by shopping, and there are many good facilities for leisure and there are nature walks by some of the many beautiful canals of Berlin. Neukölln neighbors Kreuzberg where you will find some of Berlin's most vibrant nightlife.

Geography and Infrastructure

The Jugend Hotel Fusion is located on a quiet and green street in Neukölln – within 5 minutes walk to the nearest subway. Here you easily connect from Hermann-Platz on a 10 minute subway ride to the legendary Alexanderplatz in the heart of old and new Berlin. From Bahnhof Zoo there is a direct bus connection day and night that takes you almost to the front door of the Hotel.

History of the Building

The affectionate empty house on Rütlistrasse 31-36 was built in 1914 for the purpose of administration. In 1925 it was remodeled into a pension hotel, and used mainly by truck drivers. Sometime in the 60s there was a 165-m² annex added to this characteristic building. The house was recently used for the purpose of a homeless shelter, and has partly been abandoned for the last 6 -7 years. The lack of care and maintenance of the building today causes deterioration. The owner is the Council of Neukölln.

Facade Decoration of Hotel

The building has not been kept these last years and needs renovation. The architectural partner of Fusion estimates this to cost app. € 1 million for a complete renovation of the house.

The general idea for Fusion is to infuse colors of vitality into a gray neighborhood; this will also determine the decoration of the hotel. It will be full of vivid colors, life and energy and will represent a fully expressed wish to communicate and say, 'here I am!' The face of Carnival.

Facilities of Hotel

The Jugend Hotel Fusion is 1,207 m² with various sizes of rooms and number of beds. Some few rooms offer their own bathrooms; otherwise there are common bathrooms in the hallways. The Hotel staff consists of youth from Neukölln that easily and with pleasure navigate and guide guests through their visit in Berlin. The hotel offers a dining room, kitchen for guests, and kiosk at the reception. It welcomes larger groups.

Education and Work

When Wolfgang and Marta began to build carnivalesque sculptures, the youngsters did not see a purpose for it. Slowly they began to show interest and today it is an integral part of their spare time. To work together towards carnival and to produce sculptures for public spaces, e.g. schoolyards, has given the youth skills! Not to forget the self-confidence and feeling of purpose it gives the young.

When the youngsters of Manege made an exhibition at the Neukölln City Council some suddenly felt ownership or attachment to their City Council and also felt a newly found sense of pride.

This coupled with the reality of unemployment in a troubled part of Berlin has lead Fusion to consider how to create their own markets. The Jugend Hotel Fusion is one such idea – to educate and train those that make an effort and provide them with education and employment opportunities.

The greatest importance of this idea is to secure the shift from teenager to adult, laying the ground to the feeling of purpose and a role in society.

Network and Sociality

The concept of the Youth Hotel Fusion is in combination with the Youth Street (Jugendstraße) to create possibilities for exchange of ideas and networking between residential youth and visiting youth. It is a concrete opportunity for the youth of Neukölln to adapt to an international atmosphere that can facilitate new ideas and teach the youth to deal with others and build long-term friendships.

Political Strategy for Neukölln

The council of Neukölln under the leadership of Thomas Blesing – who is politically in charge of the youth work in Neukölln – is in the process of adapting a new concept into their youth work. The term is social-space-orientation, which can be translated into generating foundations for using the residential point of view and needs, breaking down borders of professions, and encouraging people to be self-sufficient. In this context it seems positive that the Jugend Hotel Fusion offers an innovative perspective of what social work can accomplish.