

Housing project Sargfabrik, Vienna, Austria

1. Overview

The "Sargfabrik" in Vienna is an innovative form of accommodation. In 1996, an old coffin factory was revitalised into a residential area with about 100 housing units. The autonomous housing and cultural project consists of several communal facilities like a restaurant, swimming pool, community hall or a laundry.

Officially, the Sargfabrik is registered as a hostel, so that many building regulations do not count. For this reason, the operators were allowed to build parking facilities in the proportion of 1:10, thus, one car park for ten households. Three car parks are now used for car-sharing, the rest is filled with bicycles.

Furthermore, the Sargfabrik is the biggest self-administrated housing and cultural project in Austria.

2. Activity description

Background and Objectives

In the 80's, a couple of people were dissatisfied with the housing situation which was on an expensive level and mainly regarded the requirements of childless or only small families. For this reason they set up a registered association for integrative living in cooperation with two architects. Their aim was to create a community and leisure based housing estate and to design the new living quarters according to their own ideas. Living, culture and integration were their philosophy in this intention. To fulfill these objectives the association was and is still engaged in the following areas:

- corporate planning, construction and control of the project
- common habitation and simultaneous frankness for individual formation in single or family apartments and flat shares
- common living without peer pressure: all people *can* participate, nobody *has to*
- integration of disabled persons and other socially disadvantaged population groups, mixture in age and origin
- consideration of ecological aspects: optimized energy consumption, green electricity, composting, solar water heating, etc.
- operation of a cultural centre for residential area, district and city, establishment of a forcing house, a seminar room, a bath house, a kindergarten and a restaurant

The house should also be suitable for free time activities and disperse a friendly atmosphere for the community. Due to this innovative and unorthodox housing philosophy of the architects the project provoked an unexpected big publicity.

Integration was fulfilled in two different ways. On the one hand, parts of the old factory like the chimney were integrated in the new building, and on the other hand a social integration took part. 15% of all housing units are reserved for elderly, disabled or displaced persons.

To save money for communal facilities, the landlord abandoned to build an underground car park and allowed a reduced number of car parks, only.

Implementation

After a ten-year planning process and a three-year construction period the new living quarter could be finally opened up in 1996. After the renovation of the old coffin factory had been finished and 112 housing units could be rented. The non-profit association has realised a housing project as a “village in the city” with all the important facilities for daily life. The social experiment became a pulsative urban alternative with an advanced cultural policy.

Because of the autonomous status, occupants could take over a lot of responsibilities and were allowed to participate in the planning process. For instance, they could take influence on the floor plan, so that each flat was looking in its own style.

The organisation form of the living quarter is quite simple: the members of the association are the occupants of the apartments, their responsibilities and rights are arranged in an internal contract. In case of moving out, the apartment belongs to the association itself, which is landlord, constructor and operator at the same time. Central decisions are made in general assemblies of the association. Voluntary cooperation of the residents makes several events in the housing estate possible.

A dense, but at the same time very green architecture was realised. There is a biotope in the inner courtyard and a garden on top of the roofs. In general, the method of construction uses energy saving technologies. A high living quality was received without pressuring the existing buildings or causing additional land consumption. The building regulations weren't a problem for the architects because they designed all the new buildings in a creative way, so that diversified apartment and room types could be added.

Beside the function as a habitation quarter the Sargfabrik offers public buildings for cultural events, especially for a concert programme. The weekly programme contains music concerts arranged by different cultural groups of the world. Dancing and theatre events are further examples how the facilities can be used for. The bath house offers different attractions like a Finnish sauna, whirlpools as well as some swimming and diving pools that are accessible not only for the people living in the Sargfabrik but for all in the surroundings. A seminar room for all kind of meetings and workshops, which is flexible for different events and accessible for disabled persons, can also be found in the complex. For children there exists a child house, where they are cared for by trained pedagogues who speak their mother tongues. Last but not least a restaurant has been built up in the new quarter which is now a favourite meeting place among inhabitants and other people.

To finance these facilities, the landlord registered the house as a hostel, so that many regulations of the building law did not count for him. On this way, special financial aids of the Vienna City Council could be occupied. Instead of the normal 1:1 rule, which dictates that each housing unit has to have an own parking area, he could construct parking facilities in the proportion of 1:10. Three out of 11 car parks

are now used for car-sharing vehicles, the remaining space is used to park bicycles. The abdication of an underground car park saved a lot of money which could be used for other community buildings instead. However, the inhabitants have to finance the collective establishments through a defined proportion of their rent. Furthermore, they pay for a social capital that helps other residents who have financial problems. The Sargfabrik has got some special trademarks which are the many balconies and especially the colour orange. Particularly, the whole construction was made to grant access for the disabled inhabitants.

Conclusions:

The "Sargfabrik" is a role model for urban (social) housing. It meets every demands of future development: it is ecological, social and brings forward an inner-city density instead of urban sprawl. Its success can be proofed by very long waiting lists. Even at the beginning of the construction work, 50% of all flats have been let.

Already in 1996, the year of opening, the Sargfabrik got the "Adolf-Loos-Architekturpreis", an architecture award. To meet the demands of the people, in 2000 a project in the neighbourhood was extended. The new building, the "Miss Sargfabrik" was constructed. Now the total land size amounts about 5500 m².

The cultural events and the above-mentioned communal facilities in the Sargfabrik turned out to be very popular attractions in the Vienna district and vitalise the surroundings. It was made possible that all population groups can participate, what shows the fact that about 15% of the apartments are occupied by elderly and disabled persons but also by students.

For this reason, Franz Sumnitsch (one of the architects) regards the Sargfabrik project(s) not as buildings for living, but rather as open communication and meeting sites which is a trendsetting model for an urban and modern way of living.

3. Additional documents/ links

<http://www.taz.de/index.php?id=archivseite&dig=2003/08/20/a0137>

<http://www.autofrei-wohnen.de/ProjekteAusland.html#Austria>

<http://www.sargfabrik.at/>

<http://www.urbanes-wohnen.de/typo3/uw/index.php?id=251>

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6. Data origin

see additional documents

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