

The Wiesencafé

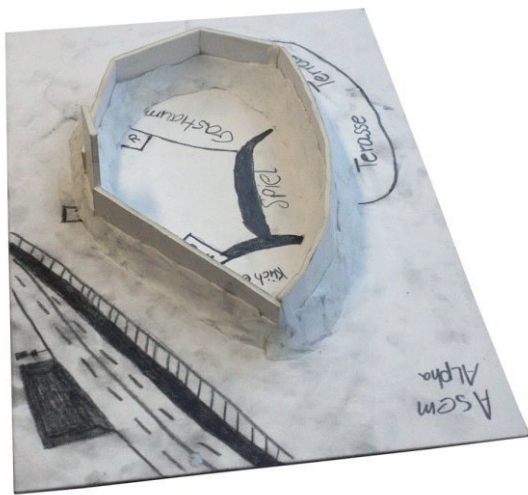
The Wiesencafé platform is located on the border between the quarters of Garath and Benrath in Düsseldorf. Across the street from the platform is a huge steelwork wasteland of 22 hectares, on which a new neighbourhood is planned to be built within the next 10 years.

Children and young people from the neighbourhood on Wittenberger Weg provided the ideas for the building. They are involved in all phases of the design and planning process together with Düsseldorf architecture students and various professionals. The collaborative work also includes detailed planning and practical implementation work such as the conception of the operation, the construction of furniture and the floor slab, which was erected in 2017. It is remarkable that a quality emerged in the cooperation at eye level that would not have been achieved through usual planning processes.



Lively meeting place and fine arts

Since October 2017, the ground plate has been full of life and at the same time a sculpture in public space. It is a meeting point, a place for social encounters, an exchange of constructive ideas for the city and artists whose work involves processes.



Model by Asem and Alpha for the street café



Wooden model of the final design for the Wiesencafé, here without the roof. The design was developed from initial sketches by the children.



Top: Design of a 5-legged stool for the Wiesencafé; bottom: 7-legged stool for the café made jointly by pupils and students in the wood workshop of the FH Düsseldorf, based on the model above.

Origin and development

The neighbourhood on Wittenberger Weg is located in a triangle between a motorway, the Düsseldorf-Cologne high-speed railway line, the A59 autobahn and an industrial area, isolated from the rest of the city.

The project is based on the experience of the pupils of the Alfred Herrhausen School with the construction of the terrace that they themselves devised and planned. The terrace was awarded the School Building Prize 2013. With the resulting self-confidence, a result of this success, the young people realised that their neighbourhood lacked a self-designed, common centre: a café, an open place that would be a meeting place, including for people “from the outside”.

With this idea at the core, a long process began with the children and young people. Through them, their families were invited just as much as the social institutions, which in part take over family functions. The core is the idea of multiple authorship. Besides children, their families, local residents, neighbouring businesses, also artists, students and teachers from universities, craftsmen, and employees of the municipal housing company participate in the project. The view of others helps to see one’s own abilities more clearly.



Construction of a full-size model of the planned Wiesencafé to get a realistic impression of the spatial conditions.

Together with the students, the plans and ideas were translated into a buildable and special architecture. Children, young people and students helped to build it themselves. In the “builder’s hut weeks”, a period of various workshops, furniture and crockery for the café were designed and built by the students themselves. This approach benefits both sides. The courage of the children inspires students and specialists.

Café and urban lab

Not only as an uncommon architectural item and because of its building material, but also in terms of its location and use, the Wiesencafé represents a showcase project.

Many families have been living in the former homeless settlement for generations. The implementation of the project will open up perspectives for the young people and other residents that were previously not available to them in this manner. Here, a place is created that one has helped to create, that one can use together with others and in which one can get an internship. The prospect of helping to plan an operation yourself, from design to function and structure, is the cultural but also long-term economic potential of the project.

The Wiesencafé is more than a café: it is an academic, public and ecological urban laboratory, a place for local and international communication, experimental art and culture, a space for shared learning, social and cross-societal encounters.



An event on the Wiesencafé platform

Prototype for climate-friendly building, resource conservation, CO₂ neutrality, 100 % recyclable building material

The Wiesencafé is designed as a research building. The walls will be built using new cob technology and finished with a roof timber construction developed by the Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences.

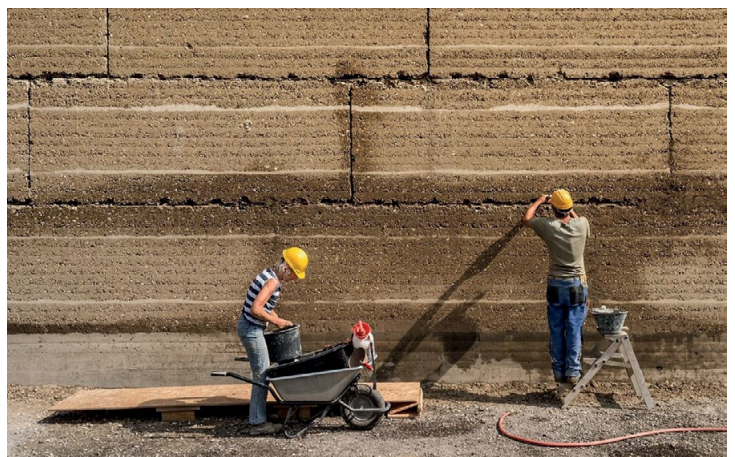
Cob, which was displaced by concrete in the 20th century, can be shaped into any form for vertical structures – similarly to concrete. It is self-supporting and erosion-resistant without plaster. “Cob is the building material of the future.” (Reiner Nagel, Bundesstiftung Baukultur and co-operation partner of the research project on cob building technology of the Zentrum für Peripherie).

The Wiesencafé would become Europe’s first new public cob building and thus an ecological lighthouse project.

Because only regional natural materials are used in the production of the CO₂-neutral cob material, the energy input is limited to mixing and delivery and reduces the overall “grey energy” in construction several times over. Regional and recycled materials are used for other components (windows, doors, roof and finishing).

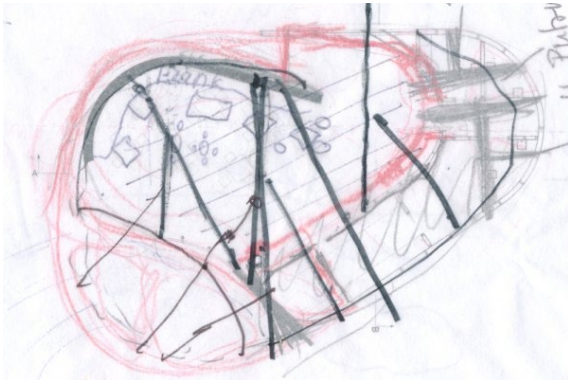
Unlike all other amorphous building materials, clay is 100% recyclable. Unlike concrete, clay can simply be levelled on site in the event of deconstruction or reused for the next building project. Furthermore, earthen buildings have a much longer lifespan than conventional buildings. Furthermore, buildings with solid earth walls, such as cob, stand out in terms of moisture and heat regulation and their pleasant indoor climate.

Example of a rammed earth wall. The picture shows the jointing of an 11 m high wall built of prefabricated rammed earth elements (Herzog de Meuron/Martin Rauch)





Tableware for the café: prototype of an ergonomic cup (left) serving as a basis for the cups of the Wiesencafé (right)



Planning sketch for the roof beams of the café



A student of the FH Düsseldorf (department of architecture) and pupils of the Alfred-Herrhausen School work out an idea together.



State Secretary von der Mühlen of the Ministry for Building, Housing, Urban Development and Transport of North Rhine-Westphalia, children and students look at and discuss the project ideas for the basic form and roof of the Wiesencafé

Working method

Every project and every part of a project originates from an open question of a seemingly unsolvable challenge.

Each step begins from within - by listening to one's own intuition and making it visible, then shaping it, recording it, writing it down, for example object-like with modelling clay or as a drawing, a note with pen and paper.

These sketches, unbiased observations, semi-conscious ideas are being described attentively. Using the question: „What do I like?“ as a guiding thread, inspiring ideas are sought in each individual object, in each drawing. By looking at and describing the other contributions, own ideas are mixed with those of the others. In this way, the ideas condense into a common vision. The physical presence of the lines or objects enables earnest communication between people from completely different backgrounds.

In the further course, every step of planning and implementation is used to review the ideas, to expand them, to simplify them, to make them more precise and concrete.

This open-ended work enables the development of specific solutions. The path itself, the means, the goals found and the solutions are always further specified and adapted. The “idea givers” remain involved at every step. Experts are brought in. Since the resulting ideas are often uncommon, the cooperation is profitable for both sides and leads to collaboratively growing results of high quality.

Every single detail of the project has been developed in this way. The shape of the café, the way it opens up to the street and to the neighbourhood, the exact location in the available space, the shape of its furniture, but also details of the operation, ideas about financing and the implementation itself.

This transdisciplinary approach leads to surprisingly simple results of high accuracy and quality. It enables the development of specific solutions that also address major social issues.

Links

PROJECT FILM (Video 30 Minutes)

<http://www.schulkunst.org/arm-oder-reich/artikel.php?kap=60&art=326>

The construction site Wiesencafé in the Kunstsammlung NRW art museum

<http://www.schulkunst.org/arm-oder-reich/artikel.php?kap=58&art=279>

ART (Diagram of the Wiesencafé 2019)

<https://zentrum-fuer-peripherie.org/startseite-test/projekte/artists-in-wittenberger-weg/kunstpunkte-september-2019/>

RESEARCH

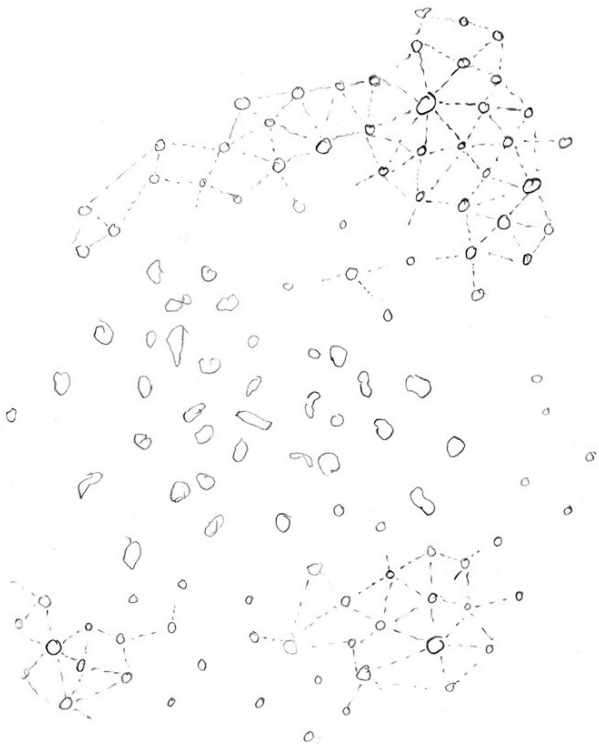
(Large-scale applicability of cob)

<https://zentrum-fuer-peripherie.org/en/startseite-test/projekte/brandenburgs-alhambra/wellerlehm-technologie/>

Sponsorship

The pilot project "Schulkunst zu Kunst am Bau als Prozess" and the projects that followed it have been enabled by

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- the Environmental Agency of Düsseldorf,
- the Office for Facility Management of the State Capital Düsseldorf,
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- the German Children and Youth Foundation,
- the Education and Youth Foundation,
- StadtBauKultur NRW,
- Aktion Mensch
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- the Youth Welfare Office of Düsseldorf.



City and public space (Drawing by Ute Reeh)