Habitat International Coalition

HIC - Sustainable Urban District Freiburg-Vauban

Sustainable Urban District Freiburg-Vauban

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1.- General identification

Location: D-79100 Freiburg, Germany

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2.- History, background and context

Key Dates:

- 1993 - the project starts on December 14th:
  - the decision is made by the Freiburg City Council to develop the new Vauban residential area
- 1995 - the start of participation:
  - the NGO Forum Vauban is founded and is recognized as legal body of the broad participation process
  - 10 old army barracks buildings are refurbished for social housing and student dormitories
- 1996 - the most important year getting the project going:
  - main discussion about the master plan takes place, with major influence from Forum Vauban which runs its first project: “Scientific Support for the Extended Participation Process,” funded by the German Environment Foundation (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt)
  - main publicity campaigns mobilizing the first future inhabitants, and formation of the first co-building groups
  - Freiburg-Vauban is a German Best Practice at the Habitat II conference in Istanbul
- 1997 - the concepts are taking shape:
  - the EU-funded project advances implementation of sustainability concepts in the fields of mobility, energy, and social/ecological building
  - the first building plots become available for co-building groups, cooperative building initiatives, private builders, and a limited number of commercial builders
- 1999/2000 - the “turning point” of the Forum's work:
  - closing of the EU LIFE project with the international conference "Urban Visions" in Freiburg (pre-event to Urban 21 conference in Berlin), concept and scientific work is completed and documented with a number of publications
  - a new focus: social work
- since 2000: the new neighborhood is taking shape:
  - social workers help form neighborhood structures
  - "Optimization of the Traffic Concept during Implementation" project funded by the German Environment Foundation (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt) (report published in June 2003)
  - the former "casino" is refurbished to become the district's neighborhood center
  - Freiburg-Vauban is selected as Best Practice in the UN-HABITAT process and nominated for the 2002 Dubai Award
- 2003/2004: new conflicts and economic pressure:
  - it's becoming clear that the aim of the city of Freiburg to finance all planning and infrastructure through sale of the district's building plots will not be achieved
  - the city of Freiburg destroys the last three remaining old buildings and rejects the offer of the cooperative building initiative "Drei5Viertel" to buy the houses to offer low cost housing in the district; participation structures seem not to function any more
  - Forum Vauban and the city continue their cooperation in specific cases (e.g. design of the new market place)
- May 2004: nearly 4,000 people are living in Vauban
- 2006: by December, all building plots will be sold and the residential area will be completed

3.- Objectives, strategies and reaches
Vauban was used as an army base since the 1930s. After the peace treaty in 1991, the city of Freiburg bought the area from the German government, making it available for civilian use. The decision was made to develop a new residential area due to serious shortage of housing areas in Freiburg.

Priorities, Objectives and Strategies

1. The first objective of the city of Freiburg has been to offer high quality building spaces for young families within the city's territory and to counteract urban sprawl.

A dense urban design concept, low energy standard for all houses, green spaces, good public access (including a new tram) and further infrastructure (kindergartens and a primary school) were elements of the plan from the beginning.

2. Further objectives were developed during the participation process organized by Forum Vauban. The most important are:

   "the car-free project combined with the specific traffic concept and the special offer of alternative mobility,
   "promotion and support of building within self-appointed groups (co-building groups),
   "the design of special areas for passive-houses,
   "the decision for a central market place and a community center.

The Forum’s priority is to develop a sustainable city district in a participatory way which could become a model for further initiatives.

The main strategic steps to achieve these goals were: the announcement of broad citizen participation within the principle of "Planning that Learns," implementation of the organizing structures (see below), and citizen involvement through workshops, newsletters, and general public activism.

4. Actors involved and their roles
(see also 10.- Contacts)

Mobilizing Resources

The project’s strongest asset is the involvement of the people who are forming the district. The major resources are the ideas, creativity and commitment of the people involved in the common goal of creating their own neighborhood.

Process

The official start of planning was in December 1993. The NGO "Forum Vauban" was founded in late 1994, became official body of the broad citizen participation in 1995, and has been responsible for the social work since 1999. The city of Freiburg formed a special committee from the City Council concerning Vauban. In this committee, representatives from political parties discuss the main Vauban issues together with representatives from the administration and other consultative members such as Forum Vauban. Besides many other political, administrative, economic, and social contributors, three main acting bodies or institutions connected with Vauban can be identified:

- Project Group Vauban (the administrative coordination of local authorities dealing with the Vauban project),
- City Council Vauban Committee (the main platform for information exchange, discussion, and decision preparation; decisions are ultimately made by the City Council);
- Forum Vauban (the local citizens’ association, being the legal body of the participation process, as well as responsible for the social work within the district).

Meetings between Forum Vauban and members of the city administration take place periodically. If necessary, further common initiatives such as round tables and workshops are organized (for example for planning the open green spaces).

In the case of Vauban, this process has been framed and supported by some rather “moderate regulations” fixed in the master plan, by the city's marketing guidelines, and by the consultation offered by Forum Vauban. Moderate regulations refer to a few major stipulations, such as the general structure of the development site, the fixed height of buildings, the low-energy standard, the traffic concept, and some regulations concerning rainwater filtration and the greening of facades and roofs. Other elements are flexible. Commercial investors were restricted to some limited areas of the building site. The formation of co-building groups (see above) provided a specific structure and identity within the community and made it quite easy to get in contact with the people. In the field of marketing, the city works closely with its trustees, the company of Kommunalentwicklung LEG Baden-Württemberg GmbH.

For social work within the district, further special committees were founded which collaborate with other establishments such as the city's welfare institutions. The social work includes offers for specific target groups (children, youth, families, and others), the initiation and support of grassroots initiatives, and conflict...
management.

Within such a process of course many problems occur even between the main acting bodies. Until 2003 most conflicts were resolved in a cooperative, participative way. In some cases, differences of opinions were taken to the city council to be decided by majority vote (see 7.- Achievements and lessons learned).

5.- Program or project components (brief description of how they link)

The city's main objective to develop an attractive neighborhood for young families was achieved perfectly. By January 2002 more than 20% of inhabitants were children under age ten. The public demand, especially for co-building projects, was stronger than the amount of plots which could be offered.

In reference to the objective of developing a sustainable city district in a participatory way, the Vauban project also achieved major success. It truly can be said that the project's structure integrates legal, political, social, and economic participants from the grassroots-level up to the city administration (see above). Project components are further described under 7.- Achievements and main lessons learned.

6.- Primary tools used
(also see: 4.- Actors and their roles)

Within the city administration, between five and seven people are working for the Vauban project as employed staff.

The NGO initiative started with a handful of volunteers, mainly students and people from the environmental movement. As soon as Forum Vauban received some funding, the NGO created a few moderately paid jobs for young graduates. This combination of idealism, knowledge, and economical structures led to a breakthrough for the Forum's work. The participation process combined with a publicity campaign then mobilized the first future inhabitants to meet, contribute their ideas, form co-building groups, and from there become active "Vauban-citizens." Forum Vauban brought together citizens, architects, engineers, financial experts, experienced managers of co-building projects, and other partners. Various tools were and are used such as project workshops, all kinds of working groups, residential meetings, "on-site" meetings, "planning for real" social events (district festival, "culture caf," etc., see 4.- Actors involved and their roles), Technical resources were available in Freiburg due to the environmental movement and the city's environmental approach incorporated since the 1970s.

Financial resources:
The project has a special status as "development site" and its own budget (US $85,000,000) controlled by Project Group Vauban (see above). The money to clean the area and develop the infrastructure (neighborhood center, kindergartens and primary school included) comes from the Redevelopment Fund of the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg (US $5,000,000 = 5.9 %) and from credits raised by the city of Freiburg. All credits have to be repaid through sale of the building plots. New analyses indicate this will not be possible, so the project will close with a deficit of about US $1,000,000. This puts serious pressure on the administration and involved initiatives. As a whole, the project receives no further subsidies. (Single builders and co-building groups receive the usual support and tax reductions granted by the Federal Republic of Germany and the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg).

For the participation process and the social work organized by Forum Vauban, approximately US $200,000 has been allocated for from the above described budget. Further financial support for the Forum's work came from the German Environment Foundation (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, DBU) (1996-2002: US $200,000), the European Union's LIF program (1997-1999: US $700,000) and some other institutions. Adding membership fees, donations, and moderate economic activities (sponsoring, exhibitions, publications, etc.), the NGO's overall 1995-2001 budget was approximately US $2,000,000. All these figures are dominated by Vauban-related projects. The fixed income of Forum Vauban from membership fees is US $10,000 per year. The annual budget decreases year by year and financial pressure is increasing (see above).

7.- Achievements and main lessons learned

Main Achievements Concerning Ecology

- All houses are built at least with improved low energy standard (65 kWh/m²a, calculated similar to the Swiss SIA 380/1 standard), and about 150 units will have "passive house" (15 kWh/m²a) or "plus energy"
standard (houses which produce more energy than they need).

- A highly efficient co-generation plant (CHP) operating with woodchips is connected to the district’s heating grid. The estimated CO2-savings through good insulation and efficient heat supply is 80-90%.
- The number of solar installations (solar collectors and photovoltaic modules) is constantly increasing. Sixty-five percent of the electricity needed in Vauban is produced on site through CHP and photovoltaic.
- The ecological traffic/mobility concept was implemented with a reduced number of private cars to be parked in the periphery, good public transport, and a convenient car sharing system providing a higher quality of life.
- About 45% of households agreed to live without an owned car and receive financial benefits in exchange for not needing to participate in the public car park. The car-ownership rate in Vauban is only 150 per 1000 inhabitants (the car density in a similar district is 270 per 1000 inhabitants, and in Freiburg as a whole the density is 430 per 1000 inhabitants).
- The new residential area was built around conserved old trees. These precious gifts of nature introduce the aspect of mature life into the young district. Public green spaces are developed together with local inhabitants.
- Rainwater is collected separately to be used in houses or filtered into the ground and a new sanitary concept using vacuum toilets and a biogas plant was introduced by the co-building project “Wohnen und Arbeiten.”

Main Achievements Concerning Social and Economic Requirements

- Due to the traffic concept, streets and other public areas become playgrounds for kids and places for social interaction.
- About 45 groups of building owners (co-building, co-housing), the Genova cooperative (Wohn-Genossenschaft Vauban - Genova), and the self-organized S.U.S.I. settlement initiative (Selbstorganisierte Unabhängige Siedlungsinitiative - S.U.S.I.) were established. People with moderate income levels also got a chance to participate within these groups because building groups, as opposed to individual builders, can receive several discounts so that homes become cheaper. These co-building groups also provide fertile ground for a stable district community to advance ecological awareness.
- Some co-building groups made building available even for people with rather low incomes. S.U.S.I. and Genova also offer apartments and rooms for people with low incomes.
- With the implementation of broad citizen participation in 1995 and social work in 1999, people were able to use this as a platform to express their needs, receive support, and start own initiatives. Some examples are activities in the community's district center, the community festivals, events at the market place, as well as the magazine “Vauban actuel” (also available online: http://www.vauban.de/vauban-actuel) and the internet discussion forum http://www.vauban.de/forum, as well as many others. The recently published “Vauban-guide” lists about 30 non-commercial initiatives or institutions active within Vauban.
- Social and commercial infrastructure in Vauban is quite excellent and includes a primary school, four kindergartens, playgrounds, public green spaces, small shops, a food cooperative, a supermarket, and much more.

Problems

- The majority of Vauban residents are young middle class people with children. The city aims to build about 200 new apartments for social housing, sponsored by Federal and State programs. In additional to this and to the S.U.S.I. and some co-building projects described above, more efforts should be made to increase the mix of social groups and ages.
- The “Drei5Viertel” cooperative applied to buy and refurbish the three remaining old buildings in the district to convert them to low cost housing, but the proposal was rejected by the city in December 2003 due to financial problems. One of the houses was then occupied by squatters and a few days later cleared by the police (the first police action against squatting in Freiburg in more than 10 years).
- The increasing economic pressure (see 6.-) forces the city to demand good prices for building plots. This counteracts the social objectives.

Lessons Learned

- A real participatory process needs extra resources and must include both planning and implementation. It is not enough just to offer suggestions to official planners. Although city officials were open to considering people’s suggestions, the specific traffic concept of Vauban, for example, would not have been
established due to major legal obstacles. However, Forum Vauban, as the official body of the participation process and using creative ideas with legal expertise, was able convince planners otherwise. This was probably the NGO's most important role. In retrospect, the "outsourcing" of participation was a major benefit for the project. The parallel working structures of Forum Vauban prevented collaborators from getting trapped in old thinking patterns and made new solutions available. Participation needs a long-term perspective!

- Small is possible. The most productive way to let citizens participate in creating their neighborhood is to offer them possibilities to plan and build their homes by themselves - either as single builders or within groups. This means that they maintain the responsibility for planning and building their immediate neighborhood. These groups need support from official planning (co-building groups need more time to work out their concept and apply for building plots) and from independent consultants such as NGOs, experienced architects, private enterprises and others.
- The balance of social groups is most important. On the one hand, federal support is needed to include more low-income people: apartments offered especially for low-income groups remained limited because federal and state subsidies for such projects were almost cancelled. Private initiatives such as S.U.S.I and Genova (see above) lack resources to fill the gap. On the other hand, it is the group of well-educated, ecologically-oriented middle-class people who introduce the new lifestyle and give Vauban its specific shape. These people are absolutely crucial for the success of such a pilot project!
- Recycling of old military and industrial areas slows down urban sprawl. People's wishes to live in a healthy environment can be fulfilled by recycling older inner-city areas. In Germany at least it should no longer be necessary to convert green areas for housing purposes.
- The "development site status" is an opportunity and a burden. This status allows the city to take responsibility for the entire planning and marketing process without becoming dependent on private developers. However, the pressure to repay loans (see above) within a limited timeframe quite often runs counter to the best possible solution.
- Political actions are necessary too. The above described project structure provides a good platform to exchange information and negotiate different concepts and viewpoints in order to find the best common solution. However, this was not always possible. Forum Vauban also needed to learn how to use lobbying and publicity work to achieve its goals.
- More funding resources for small, independent groups are needed. For a small local NGO like Forum Vauban it is difficult to handle bigger projects economically. When funding rates are paid with a rather long delay, liquidity of the project is sometimes in real danger.
- New districts are "young districts." This seems to be natural because usually it is young families looking for new homes. To counteract a monolithic age structure, more effort needs to be made to attract older people to move into new districts.
- The meaning of "density" is relative to an individual's viewpoint. In Freiburg, Vauban is known by some as a seemingly dense housing area. People see this as probably the district's biggest disadvantage. However, in comparison, visitors from Japan experience Vauban to be a rather desolate area!
- New districts also need to preserve their history. What happened in the area before? Which signs of history can still be found? What is "the district story?" The answers to these questions are also important to create an identity for the new community.

8.- Key words
co-housing, co-building, cooperative, broad participation, cooperative planning, sustainable development, social work, social infrastructure, solar energy, low energy house, passive house, plus energy house, CHP, rainwater filtration, new mobility concepts, car-free living, public transport, car-sharing, social infrastructure, food cooperative, community center, planning that learns, NGO, grassroots initiative, scientific support, publicity campaign, best practice

9.- Sources
Assorted References (with a focus on books and English publications)

Mobility management at district level - The impact of car-reduced districts on mobility behaviour
Claudia Nobis, Janina Welsch, Institute of Transport Research, Germany. Presented at the 7th European Conference on Mobility Management, Karlstad, Sweden, 21-23 May 2003.
Der Freiburger Stadtteil Vauban (The District Freiburg-Vauban)
CD ROM containing almost all documents by Forum Vauban (most documents in German but also some English documents e.g. the above mentioned report, a slide show, etc.).
Homepage of Forum Vauban: http://www.forum-vauban.de (German/English)
Forum Vauban Freiburg - Nachhaltiges Stadtquartier - Sustainable City Quarter
Best Practices Newsletter No. 9, 4/2001, Hub/Vienna, UNCHS, pages 5-6
"Owning the road - Right of way - When roads become an extension of living rooms"
"Bridges to Utopia? A Sustainable Urban District in Freiburg, Germany"
Germany's city of the future Vauban offers urban living with an eco-friendly approach
Land-efficient Freiburg - Relief of Car Subsidies in Vauban

10. - Contacts
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For more information please consult http://www.forum-vauban.de (German/English) and http://www.vauban.de (the "district homepage" and main internet platform for all activities concerning Freiburg-Vauban, in German only).