

The Case of Zschornewitz – Renovation of a Garden City of the 1920's under the New Societal Situation

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The subject of this article is housing estates dating from the first half of the 20th century which are located in the region of Dessau. Housing estates can, in the first analysis, be defined as being civic constructions, living areas that are coherent and, for the most part, built following unified planning and having complementary facilities that meet the community's requirements. The roots of the estate movement in Germany at the beginning of the century are to be found in:

- the paternalistic building of accommodation by factories;
- the self-help and co-operative or mutual benefit association movement;
- the garden city and land reform movement.

The different roots of the estates themselves suffice to show that a housing estate is more than just a large number of dwellings. I will enlarge upon this using as examples the numerous works' housing estates to be found in the region. These estates, put up either by large scale industrial undertakings or by housing associations, served initially to accommodate the workers and staff members necessary for new industrial plants. Most of the sites, laid out according to the requirements of the civic garden city ideal, consisted of various types of houses, differing in size and amenities. The apartment blocks and detached houses were integrated within gardens, whilst the streets were themselves grouped around centralized institutions such as activities centre/restaurant, church, kindergarten, school and shops. As a result a quality of living was achieved which showed itself to be both very flexible and durable. The fact that the structure of the utilization and design of most housing estates has been little changed up to the present day speaks for this claim to the same extent as do the often mature and stable social structures.

As a result of initial experiences with estate renovation in this area during the past three years, I would characterize housing estates as being an amalgam of:

- civic architectural design,
- social milieu and,
- economic-legal relationships.

These three basic structures present a specific equilibrium in each estate. When one of these structures is changed, then further change occurs thereafter. For instance, structural modernisation leads to increased rents. As a result, a section of the residents is motivated to search for new, budget-priced accommodation. Modernisation means, at the very least, more financial outlay. If modernisation concerns the facades of the houses, then in most instances the architectural configuration and the historical worth of the estate is involved. When accommodation that previously belonged to a housing association or a factory is privatised, this normally leads to the displacement of certain groups amongst the residents. The functional provisions of an estate will themselves then meet the requirements of a new group of residents and therefore tend to displace further accustomed residents from other social groups.

Zschornewitz as a Housing Estate

Using the example of the "*Kolonie*" at Zschornewitz, a factory estate in one of the region's small communities, I should now like to put forward the grounds for and the approaches to the revival/restoration of a housing estate. Zschornewitz is a community of 3,700 and consists of the nucleus provided by the old village, the *Kolonie* to the west of this, a works' estate from the 1930s in the north east and some post-war additions. Since the beginning of the century, brown (or soft) coal has been mined in the surrounding area.

Since 1890, the area to the south around Bitterfeld has been developed into a centre of the coal mining and chemical industries. In 1915, a power station utilising brown coal was erected to the west of the old village of Zschornewitz, an undertaking that was representative of a new generation of technology. In 1915 too, work started on the Zschornewitz *Kolonie*, which was to house the personnel from the power station as well as from the expanding Golpa open-cast mine. Corresponding to the spasmodic development (First World War, post-war period, the 1920s) the *Kolonie* was built in several stages up to 1930. The master plan drawn up in 1919 was, however, realised only to some extent. Up to the present day there have been additions and changes to the power station. The mining operations for brown coal encircled the site so that today Zschornewitz is like an island in the middle of surrounding dumps, residual pits and tips.

Today approximately 1,500 people live in the detached houses and apartment blocks of the *Kolonie*. The brown coal workings have been closed down and the power station ceased operations on July 1st 1992. In its place, the power station owners and both the communal and district authorities want to see a centre for waste disposal, an undertaking that will include an incinerator installation.

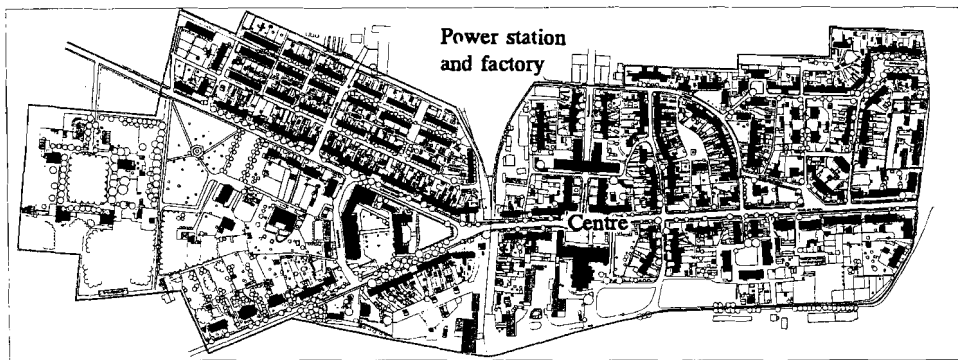


Figure 1: *The City Plan of Zschornowitz*

The two largest companies each own about 40 per cent of the accommodation in the *Kolonie*, whilst the local authority has about 5 per cent. The rest were sold during the course of the year to the residents. School, kindergarten and church serve the whole community. The large activities centre was sold by MIBRAG, (the coal company) to a firm in the field of re-training and its use is now denied the residents. The stores have achieved the customary adoption of western standards.

The structural condition of the houses varies. Some were renovated in the 70s and 80s. Nevertheless a fundamental renovation of the whole *Kolonie* is clearly required. Many residents have installed bath and WC on their own initiative and undertaking the necessary maintenance work. Garden city conceptions of architecture and streets are still to be found in large measure in the *Kolonie* but are in a poor state of repair. This still extant appearance of the *Kolonie* and the particularly close spatial, functional, social and design connexion between it and the power station was the reason for designating the whole of the former and part of the latter together as a "*preservation area*" in 1991.

By far the majority of the residents of the *Kolonie* worked in the power station, the coal field or the chemical industry centred on Bitterfeld. The economic collapse of the region has led to a loss of jobs on a massive scale in Zschornowitz. Exact figures are available neither from the municipality itself nor the labour exchange responsible for the area. The age structure of the *Kolonie* residents is that of the regional average, whilst the suggested tendency towards a rise in the ratio of old people to total population has not been confirmed. Overall, it presents the picture of an estate in a location which finds itself in an economical, ecological and cultural crisis. And when nothing is done, it will in all probability slowly die.

The Strategy

Why then, in this situation, preserve this estate and even renovate it?

First of all there are the *Kolonie's* residents. For the most part they have lived the whole of their lives in the *Kolonie*, grew up there or went there as a result of their work in the power station. For these the *Kolonie* provides their accommodation, their place of domicile, their home. It provides the framework for neighbourliness, social contact and ties. Social connexions in the *Kolonie* have increased in importance with the disappearance of other factors such as work, social and personal value systems and the social position and recognition linked to these. In a society that has broken apart, with the crisis of upheaval and following the loss of work, for many the home provides a "final security".

The preservation of the residential area, value for money as it is, is a key object for housing policy at a time when the privatisation of municipally and factory-owned accommodation provides the sole concept for the transforming of East German housing into the market economy. Above all, the high rates of unemployment and early retirement plus the substantially lower incomes of GDR citizens, make it appear expedient to apply new methods as far as housing policy is concerned.

The placing of the *Kolonie* and the power station under a preservation order has brought their cultural and historical value into the open. The value of the *Kolonie* from the viewpoint of the history of architecture and its importance architecturally as bearing testament to industrial culture speak out on behalf of the estate's preservation. Such preservation is necessarily bound up with structural renovation and reconstruction.

The *Kolonie*, as an example of the everyday history of the industrialised region and its inhabitants, represents an important pillar of the cultural identity of the residents. This will be true above all when the power station to a large extent would have been demolished and when the chimneys, the symbol of Zschornewitz, would have disappeared. All the old industrial areas in Europe have had the experience that the history of a region and its inhabitants and the sense of identity that is based on this are indispensable for restructuring and for a new beginning. The evidence of architecture, as the bearer of the collective memory, and individual histories, hereby play a central role. The preservation order is an instrument whereby this thought process can be initiated and provoked further.

The renovation of the *Kolonie* also involves an economic aspect. It can create jobs and study places and can provide a positive stimulus for new economic development in the community. It raises the value of the *Kolonie* as a place to live.

When one takes all these aspects together, so can the revival of the *Kolonie* provide the starting point for a new development of the community as a whole. But in

particular the conflict as to how and why. Since 1915 the history of both the *Kolonie* and the village has been dominated by the power station. Social, economic and juridical dependency has characterised the residents up to the present day. The *Kolonie* also bears witness to this dependency. The priority of economic/industrial development brought the community to the extremity of a form of industrial development, a form which is hallmarked by economic, ecological, social and cultural crisis. A new beginning is possible only through a turn around in strategy. Coming to terms with one's own history is the first precondition and discussion concerning renovation of the *Kolonie* the initial impetus for this.

The "Actors" and Their Strategies

The Planners

We, and here I refer to our planning bureau, are trying to deal with the complexities of the estate and its renovation and revival process impartially. Our purpose here, was to supplement the classic planning task through additional activities. This was, on the one hand, in order to promote the discussion process in the *Kolonie* dealing with questions concerning renovation and development, and, on the other, to ensure preparations for and execution of, a process of renovation that would do justice to the complexity of the problem. Taking into consideration that the economic basis of the *Kolonie* and the village had broken apart, as an initial starting point for a renewal of the estate there remained the extant architectural inventory and the social milieu of the estate, its residents. Therefore, as the first stage towards creating a new equilibrium in the *Kolonie* (economic, architectural, social), we examined a revival and renovation orientated towards the residents and the housing stocks.

Translated into Zschornewitz terms, this meant a renovation of the *Kolonie* that was acceptable both socially and from the aspect of the preservation order and at the same time a search for approaches towards a new economic definition for the location. The fact that the majority of dwellings still remained in the hands of the firms, offered a good chance of success. The first step was to make a concept for a housing policy in which the establishment of an estate association involving the different owners was suggested, thus providing the basis for developing a complex renovation process. This was rejected by the property owners. It was also the intention to view renovation against the background of the existing situation:

- securing of right of habitation for the existing occupants,
- renovation of the *Kolonie* compatible with the preservation order,

- active involvement of the residents in the renovation process,
- consideration of the economic possibilities of owners and tenants,
- socially acceptable rents even after the completion of renovation.

As a result of the discussion that followed, the community's representatives decided upon these aims as a declaration of intent and the three largest property owners, VEAG, MIBRAG¹ and the municipality formed a joint working group in which together with ourselves, the Bauhaus Dessau and the authorities responsible for the preservation of monuments a jointly agreed renovation concept would be prepared. We employed other work methods in addition to this working group. These took the form of publicity work, planning, scientific research and institutions. Amongst the latter there was, apart from the working group, an on-site office, where we offered advice to residents and owners on a regular basis and where small exhibitions and discussions were held.

Assessing Our Role

According to the task we were given by the municipality and defined in a classical planning sense, our role was unequivocally that of agent or authorised representative of that body. Because of the municipality's lack of a concept and its disinterest in a strategy for revival in the sense outlined earlier, we found ourselves having extensive room for manoeuvre. We made use of this for the strategy already described, which next to planning, rests above all on activities in the fields of negotiation and mediation, advice and moderation as well as cultural and publicity work.

Therein lay a fundamental problem. This role, which we had assumed as a result of our activities in Zschornowitz, required independence from other participants. In spite of the freedom of manoeuvre given us by the municipality we remained their agent. Furthermore, our role was used as being that "*between two stools*", sometimes in order to make us answerable to the "*other side*". We found ourselves as representing the preservation authorities in place of the appropriate officials, the residents made us answerable for the decisions of the owners, as these were not present and so on. The intermediary role that we had intended for ourselves in the process was not accepted as such by others taking part, rather we were downgraded as being deputies as compared to the other partners. Only in certain situations, e.g. between officials and the municipality or between the preservation authorities, municipality and residents was it possible to achieve positive results.

¹ VEAG: Vereinigte Energiewerke AG = the local energy producer MIBRAG: Mitteldeutsche Braunkohlewerke AG = lignite coal mining firm.

As a consequence it must be said that those necessarily mediating between those participating in the renovation process required an independent position, one that would be accepted by all involved. Our dual role as planner and moderator set this aim within limits. This problem was exacerbated by the lack of independent partners for part or the whole of the mediation work and of representatives of the interests of the residents and the municipality. Nevertheless, we do have some initial findings and some ideas for approaching a complex and comprehensive renewal process. The planning results are to hand and above all have furthered discussion concerning technical details concerning building and financing. The preservation order and the positive stop in privatisation by the owners' working group have opened the possibility of and conditions for a socially bearable renovation of the *Kolonie*, one that would be acceptable environmentally. The discussions are continuing.

The Owners and Their Interests

The outlook regarding the two large owners, VEAG and MIBRAG, will be determined by the structural crisis of the region and the situation in the East German states as a whole. Both are "*Treuhand*" firms² and in essence have ceased production operations in Zschornewitz. Both will therefore pull out of the village in the near future. All that will remain will be their works' housing stocks, these being of historical importance. Corresponding to the Federal policy on housing, both companies have decided upon the privatisation of their detached and semi-detached houses. The *Zschornewitz Kolonie* is for both but a small part of their overall stocks of accommodation.

The need to renovate the *Kolonie* houses has to be seen in the context of this overall situation, especially in the form of the enormous congestion in the undertaking of maintenance work during the last year. Part of the framework of requirements are rent increases made according to the regulating of basic rents, which on average are lower in the new Federal states than those in the old but which when the condition of the house or individual apartment is taken into consideration and more particularly when one considers East German incomes are undifferentiated and without relation. As in the past there is a wide disparity between the financial requirements for the renovation of the housing, income from rents to achieve this and the residents' ability to pay.

² The MIBRAG was sold by the "Treuhand" at the end of 1993 to an English-American consortium. The Treuhand is a central FRG-state office in Berlin to privatize the former GDR-state owned property. The housing association of the MIBRAG is still the agent for the housing stock which is now owned by an estate company of the Treuhand.

In this situation, the owners of the *Kolonie*, the municipality too, see a growing contradiction between what is possible financially and economically vis-a-vis the requirements of maintenance and modernisation in the estate. The growth in demands caused by preservation status appear to exacerbate this discrepancy. For the firms there are, in addition, the Treuhand's ongoing privatisation negotiations. Both the firms and the municipality attempt to keep the conflict in check, inasmuch as they sell more properties and real estate. Private funding and initiative is to assume responsibility for renovating the houses from the large owners.

This intention to privatise was put into practice in varying degrees. MIBRAG initially concentrated on the modernisation of its properties and a gradual selling off of suitable units. MIBRAG's negotiations regarding a sale to an international consortium are at present almost concluded. The housing stock will then be handed over to the Treuhand's real estate company whose task is to privatise the dwellings. The MIBRAG housing company reacted to this development by quickly selling the detached houses in the *Kolonie* to the residents. The still unresolved problem of the financing of renovation by the residents and the future of the residents of the blocks of apartments played no role in MIBRAG's actions, although we had offered our assistance on this question.

The VEAG initially favoured quick privatisation to the resident and on the initial ascertaining of reactions there was a high rate of interest in purchasing. Our offer of discussions concerning a housing policy concept led to discussion within VEAG with



Figure 2: *Housing near the factory in Zschornowitz (Photo: B. Schmidt)*

the offer being made to MIBRAG and the municipality to agree on a moratorium on privatisation, using the time gained to prepare a joint concept for the renovation of the *Kolonie*. The offer was taken up and the basis for a concept prepared.

VEAG now considered how they should proceed further with their properties. Here the difficulty lay in constructional and funding questions. Until now a socially acceptable and comprehensive renovation process had been secured only verbally. A situation of stalemate. The VEAG proposal to prepare a joint renovation concept determined the future course of the discussions. Thereby existed a good chance for alternative developments towards achieving "normal" ownership policies. MIBRAG and the municipality have not used the opportunity offered. The still awaited decision of VEAG will have a decisive influence on future developments in the *Kolonie*.

The Municipality and Its Strategy

As a community they do little regarding a strategy towards solving the catastrophic situation of the village. Seen in basic terms, the municipality's actions can be best described as following: to place as few barriers as possible in the path of investors. When investors come, the community will have work and receive income from taxes; then everything will be o.k. The municipality's actions correspond accordingly. For the planned incinerator installation on the power station site, the *Kolonie* will be declared a mixed area, statutes for the preservation of its buildings and caring for its inhabitants will be rejected on grounds of being a barrier to investment, there is no individual consideration of policies for the social, housing or economic problems.

The municipality's own lack of concepts will only be exacerbated by its dependency upon stereotype state policies, state finances and the power station in its role as "squire" or "Lord of the Manor". Nevertheless, Zschornowitz is not an exception amongst East German communities in regard to this question. The clinging to apparently simple solutions such as the incinerator providing new jobs and the privatisation of the houses blocks efforts at and help for alternative development. Allusions to socio-political and financial consequences for the community when the right of tenure of the residents is not secured through active policies are rejected with the arguments that only the "anti-social" elements would be so threatened, and the municipality would gladly see the back of these anyway.

With this passive attitude and subservient actions that are to the benefit of the "economically stronger", we lack partners with whom we could work towards a comprehensive revival strategy that would be to the good of and for the benefit of the community as a whole. Our activities were conceived as representing fictitious interests, which the municipal authorities regarded as unwanted "disturbing of the peace". The

quintessence of the municipality's attitude with regard to the *Kolonie* ran as follows: if we could only rescind this preservation order then we would not have any more problems. The municipality was unable to grasp the fact that the preservation provided the community with an opportunity of finding alternatives to extinction, including the financial means that could be reaped from it.

The Residents and Their Interests

In order to understand the interests of the residents one must be familiar with the situation in which they find themselves. The village has grown with the coal and energy provision industries into an industrial community, life as a whole being characterised by a close connexion between company, work and home, today this being expressed in the form of a judicial, economic and spiritual-cultural dependency on the firms. With the closing down of the works, employment has disappeared, but the firms still own the housing. With the upheaval in the community, the legal position of the residents has deteriorated, the uncertainty as to whether one can and may remain in the accommodation stands, in consideration of the upheaval all around, in flagrant contradiction to the enormously important psychological need of a secure "*roof over one's head*". On top of this, the majority of residents have undertaken maintenance work on the houses on their own initiative, in GDR times having had a quasi owner-like right to usage. In this situation the owners prepared and initiated privatisation, thereby corresponding to official policies concerning housing.

The residents would like to purchase their houses, above all in order to ensure their right of tenure, so as to own property, as well as to secure unlimited right of usage of the accommodation and the form it takes. Speaking in favour of this, apart from the legal and psychological arguments, are the very low purchasing prices being asked for the non-renovated houses and for real estate (ca. 20.000 DM for a detached house with 77 square metres living area and 500 square metres ground). The desire to purchase the house is also an act of "*maturity*". The residents hope that as a result of purchasing their homes they will break free of their dependency upon the firms.

Following the owner's moratorium on privatisation, residents collected signatures supporting the selling of the houses, 80 per cent of the residents adding their names. Speaking on behalf of the initiative were residents who had already purchased their properties and those of the "*third generation*" (40-60 years old). Here a mixture of social anxiety, the desire to acquire property as a form of investment and the securing of tenure made attempts at discussion of alternative legal models of social security a non-starter.



Figure 3: *One typical house type in Zschornowitz (Photo: T. Tanninen)*

However, this "*majority*" interest of the residents has to be differentiated. Interest in purchase does not automatically mean that one is able to do so. Following the experiences of other estates, one third purchase with secure finances, one third with anxiety concerning loss of the house whilst the other third cannot buy. For the two latter groups in particular, legal and financial alternatives have to be ensured, in order to prevent social displacement. Discussions with and between the residents were, however, dominated by the representatives of the first group. The residents with the most problems are the most insecure, uninformed and inactive. Offers over discussions with the citizens' action committee and representatives of the municipality to try to find solutions for these groups were not taken up. The interests of the residents were thus exhibited, which for the majority were neither realistic nor financially secure.

Overall, one has the impression that the particular interest of the immediate participants (residents, owners, municipality) in Zschornowitz meet at the point of individual privatisation of the houses. This consensus of interests, however, does not correspond with the complexity of the problems in the *Kolonie*. It does not take into consideration important factors such as:

- the social security of every resident,
- the securing of finances for renovation work,
- renewal of the preservation order,
- the securing of social relationships and the social net,

- preservation of the estate as a unit with the power station and the revival of the "culture" of the estate,
- the use of historical potential for new on-site development as well as economic and ecological revival.

Emerging from this is the danger that the social and economic disintegration of the *Kolonie* has merely been postponed. On the other side, as owners of their houses, the residents are more consciously aware of their interests, become more active and are more aware of what the discussion over the future development of the *Kolonie* and the village as a whole can bring forth. Decisive for future developments will be VEAG's decision as to their next move and the question of whether if (and then how) to involve complex, overlapping interests in the decision making process.

What Steps are Possible and Desirable in the Future?

The attempt to develop a comprehensive joint model for a socially acceptable renovation policy (and one compatible with the preservation order) was without success. The result was the holding of discussions to decide on the fundamentals of the form of renovation corresponding to the preservation order and agreement, either by house or by family, over the legal and financial details. The privatisation schemes carried out by MIBRAG and the municipality clearly contradict this model. Here it has to be established that it is above all the social problems which remain unresolved.

Therefore, the next step must be consultation with and support for the tenants, with the aim of finding together with them new models whereby the right of tenure and a new, fundamental renovation of the houses is secured on a socially acceptable basis. One possible way is to use individual "*kitchen table*" discussions in order to ascertain the social situation, the differentiated maintenance and modernisation requirements, as well as self-help and funding potential. In addition, an attempt must be made to find tenants willing to become engaged in new communal, supportive models, e.g. a residents' association or a tenants' administrative association. If this were to be achieved, then new concepts for solutions to the problems could be developed.

Another idea is the formation of a renovation association by the individual property owners, in order to promote a form of renovation that relates to the estate as a whole, to advise individual owners and to make both the preparation and execution of renovation more effective. This could also lead to financial advantages. This renovation association would provide a new instrument whereby the social relationships and the community aspect of the *Kolonie* residents could be strengthened. Both methods require a fresh, independent moderating influence and advisor for the residents who can act as

mediator between them and the owners, firms, authorities and so on. Now that our planning task has expired there is no one to undertake this work on-site.

This is a task that the Bauhaus Dessau could assume. Other alternatives do not as yet exist in the region and they too would be dependent upon client and financier.

New Participants in Urban Renewal – Who Shall Support New Concepts?

As yet there are no bodies responsible for the safeguarding of overlapping interests. Our experiences indicate that a classic planning task collides with the neutrality necessary in such an activity. On the other hand a new role could develop out of our work to date if those involved in the renovation process (residents, property owners, municipality) would accept this intermediary work and legitimise our role in such. On top of this there is no acceptance of this development task as an expanded and fresh insight into planning.

The question remains as to who should and who could take over this mediating role "between two stools" under existing circumstances and thus introduce a comprehensive method of looking at things concerning the revival process. To my mind any such new participants would have the following tasks:

- moderation, advising, mediation between those involved the process;
- support for advising weaker interest groups in order to ensure the equality of the partners;
- formulating of overlapping, comprehensive methods for looking at things and in so doing involve communal interest in the process;
- development and realisation of new work methods which will correspond to the aims of the renovation process;
- community work, cultural and publicity work;
- ensuring the transparency of the process for all involved.

It will not be possible to realise all of these tasks in every project. Probably they will be realised on more than one level or through a network of different new participants and intermediary institutions.

Intermediary activities, consultations and moderation, as well as the development of projects, represent a self-contained activity for which there are already examples in the old Federal states and in Western Europe. These institutions, which can be characterised as intermediary organisations, do not yet exist here. The Bauhaus exhibits features of such an organisation but one that works on a regional level.

For the revival and renovation of housing estates and in other areas of urban renewal such support in the sense of intermediary organisations or persons is, according to our experiences, necessary. Their tasks would involve work connected with the estate or city quarter and through consensus of interests the searching for solutions to development problems of the particular location. Those currently involved – community, residents and the owners – are, for different reasons, either not prepared or not able to safeguard these overlapping interests. In normal instances in a market economy the economically stronger interests come out on top. As a result, the social, economic, cultural and ecological consequences are off-loaded into the weakest or pushed aside and in the final analysis it is the community that has to bear them.

This must be countered by development that corresponds to the complexity of every civic building resource, orientated towards the extant social, constructional, economic and cultural circumstances. This must also correspond to a fresh understanding of planning. Thereby, planning must be prepared to take on more strongly the functions of an intermediary organisation. A training of planners that corresponds to this is also necessary.

The second essential problem is the acceptance of such a work task as being a necessary and meaningful activity between the state, residents and the market. Part of this acceptance is also the recognition financially of such work, as well as the corresponding placing of contracts through residents and their institutions, communities and companies. One can quote successful examples in Western Europe.

In East Germany there are the first indications, fainthearted though they may be, of such activities. It is necessary that their efforts and their experiences be quickly seized upon and that their findings be given the widest possible publicity in order to create the basis for future projects and encourage the involvement of other participants. The Bauhaus Dessau can play an essential role here.