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Planning and Building according to the needs of teenagers – Enhancing the quality of residential areas

Teenagers are not being represented in the process of planning and house building

Public and semi-public space functions as a room for representation, profiling, communication and interaction of teenagers. These functions are very important for the socialisation of teenagers. They need to act in undefined rolesystems in front of others to learn about their strengths and weaknesses. Thus they are confronted with the adults` world which they often do not understand but in which in the end they are to be integrated.

On the one hand certain socio-economic developments increase the importance of residential areas for the whereabouts of teenagers. Longer periods of education, high youth unemployment and low incomes of families and young people push teenagers in informal spaces near their homes.

On the other hand there are only few places for teenager activities, due to the current planning and housing policy. According to the Vienna land division playgrounds for children up to 12 years have to be provided, but there are no statements concerning teenager-friendly urban and landscape design.

The strong regulations of most urban spaces make it difficult for young people to learn informally by acquiring space and to experience participation by taking part in the shaping of public space.

Recommendations from an interdisciplinary experts` team

In April 2005 an interdisciplinary experts` team was commissioned to work out recommendations on how to meet the needs of teenagers in urban design and housing policy. They were also asked for precise guidelines on how to implement the recommendations.

The report is divided in three sections with different focuses:

Part 1: socio-scientific basis (worked out by Dr. Reinhard Zuba, Österreichisches Institut für Jugendforschung)

Part 2: design guidelines (worked out by Dipl.-Ing. Brigitte Lacina, landscape architect)

Part 3: housing policy, statutory framework (worked out by Dr. Robert Korab, raum & kommunikation Korab KEG)

Teenager-friendly urban and landscape design

Teenager-friendly open space can be described as a space in which teenagers can test their courage and their skilfulness by overcoming obstacles. This is only possible when these spaces are not mostly controlled by adults. To get occupied by teenagers space should not have adult-made teenager-friendly furnishing, mostly some simple, moveable seats will do. Adequate rooms should not be underground or extra dark, so that especially girls will feel safer. By helping teenagers with professional competence and small amounts of money they can design and administrate those spaces according to their ideas. The identification with the environment is strengthened, they develop their

individual competencies, their social ability to integrate into society, their self-confidence and in the end also their performance at school.

Measures to increase public space in residential areas according to the needs of teenagers

The expert's recommendations concern the economic realisation of housing estates and measures of urban renewal, the housing subsidies system and the building law. Furthermore there are guidelines for teenager-friendly architecture, landscape and urban design. In detail the measures are divided into the following groups:

- Reserve space in land-use and zoning plan
- Create spaces and places for teenagers in residential districts
- Reserve space for teenagers when planning housing estates
- Check whether teenager-needs are taken into consideration in the planning process of housing estates
- Offer rooms for teenagers in the communal building stock
- Mixed-use facilities
- Participation of teenagers

In December 2005 three teams have been installed to implement the recommendations on cityplanning, land-use planning and housing.