Senones dans les Vosges & acar2

In 2002, the Institute for Postindustrial Design HyperWerk HGK FHNW was looking for a seminar venue in France that would be suitable for a project-oriented form of instruction. A brief search led to the Senones Abbey, a building that had been vacant since 1996 after having been used as a textile mill since the French Revolution. The 8,000 m² monastery is located in a small town that is as charming as its situation at the time was desperate, since the collapse of the local textile industry had left extremely high unemployment in its wake.

Postindustrial Design
HyperWerk deals with the transition from Industrial Society to a postindustrial reality. There are social, economic and technological aspects as well as educational policymaking considerations involved in the effort to cautiously shape this transformation. The framework circumstances in place in Senones confronted our planned undertaking with a prototypical challenge, a situation similar to what can be encountered in hundreds of hard-pressed towns throughout Europe at the end of the Industrial Age.

A Project Takes Shape
In the fall of 2002, HyperWerk developed a general project outline that included seven modules, and presented it to the Town Council as a proposal for a way in which Senones could, in the medium term, recover from its state of shock and generate momentum on its own in order to develop into a research platform.

City Lab and Lab City
An initial test run took place during the winter semester 2003–04, when five university departments from Basel, Muttenz, Aargau and Karlsruhe launched a project designed to investigate Senones' problems and potential with respect to urban planning, architecture and interior design, and to come up with a course of action. What emerged from this collaborative effort was an association named salm2, which was granted a 20-year lease on the abbey for a token rental. 75% of the costs of the renovation work involved in turning the former monks' cells into a seminar hotel were covered by French government subsidies; IKEA and the Hotel Les Trois Rois in Basel sponsored the interior furnishings.
A government feasibility study ultimately recommended investing 16.8 million euros in the project. We're pleased about that, of course, but we don't put as much stock in big promises as we do in unremitting work to develop our project. For instance, the fact that 10 jobs have already been created in Senones in conjunction with *acar2* is what we consider an initial success. And likewise that the Internet café set up by *D'Jeuns2* is being used intensively.

Framework Activities and Modules
salm2, as lessee of the Senones Abbey, has assumed responsibility for dealings with government agencies, and has also taken over the job of coordinating the framework activities being carried out by the project's semi-autonomous modules. Particularly active at present are the theater group, scène2, the youth association *D'Jeuns2* and the *acar2* module that has developed the "neoanalog" theme and operates a constantly growing lab/workshop in Senones.

The D'Jeuns2 Association

In January 2007 in the context of these salm2 framework activities, streetworker Philippe Meyer set up an association to empower unemployed young people, which, among other approaches, involves the use of new technologies. One of this group's initiatives is to develop a fashion label focused on wearable computing as a youth-run enterprise. And it took only a few weeks to organize a workshop bringing together interested youngsters and experts in the field.

Since this workshop, four individuals have been working intensively on product development. This research is proceeding parallel to the set-up of the free Internet café. *D'Jeuns2* is also currently working on renovating a youth center and setting up a travel and sports program, whereby most of these activities are being financed by the young people who have been offered project-oriented jobs by the city to carry out these plans.

D'Jeuns2's participation in Ars Electronica is meant to show how unemployed young people, who lack financial means and relevant training and who live in peripheral areas that have been written off by the economic powers that be, actually can pull off a successful business start-up in the context of new technologies.

Bernard Vauthier, Secrétaire Général de la Mairie de Senones

Because purely commercial utilization of our monastery buildings doesn't seem to make economic sense, we decided to use the facility indirectly in order to serve as the nucleus of an effort to bring about sustainable improvement to social, economic and cultural life in Senones.

Such utilization of our historical works of architecture complies with the provisions of Article 5 of the Venice Charter of 1964, the internationally recognized statement of principles of the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites: "The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose. Such use is therefore desirable but it must not change the lay-out or decoration of the building."

Thanks to the way it's currently being used, the abbey can once again assume its historical role as pacemaker in the region. It also constitutes a basis for tourism and cultural activities, as well as for maintaining employment and continuing education in media technology.

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