

Makunaima – the adobe village and seasonal training camp for cultural heritage on earthbuilding, located in Berlin

Abstract

Interglotz eARThworks erects playgrounds and sculptures made of adobe and natural structures (using wood, bamboo, stone) since 1990 in Berlin, Germany. In self-built ensembles of village-like structures (author) interacts with children of all ages, playing and building with earth and serving a practical kind of service toward Cultural Heritage.

Beneath a given description of the educational aspect of his action with children of all ages, (author) is emphasising the importance of the heritage of earth-architecture. Broad reinvention of the material earth into the building process is a demand (author) points out, asking for a combination of traditional building principles and local soil as a reinvented source with modern building technology.

Keywords: education, reinvention, keeping the heritage alive, architectural culture, colours of the earth, recycling

1 Keeping the heritage of the natural alive!

1.1 Cooperating with the next generations

Our group of artist, united in the eARThworks network and Interglotz-team erects playgrounds and sculptures made of adobe and natural structures (using wood, bamboo, stone) since 1990. We are located in Berlin's beautiful park area Britzer Garden from that time, spreading our activities into northern and southern Europe.

In self-built ensembles of village-like structures we interact with children of all ages, playing and building with earth and serving a magical kind of service toward cultural heritage. This work is important in our big cities, where so many inhabitants have lost their connection to the soil.

Our standard earth-construction-workshop - open to anyone - lasts six weeks during summer school holidays and has continued since 1990.

We started with simple sticks and mud constructions. We continued with archaic huts, like people might have constructed, when they started to live outside of caves. Quickly we developed our own style of sculpture, our buildings resembled large animals, earthen heads, as the Maya created, and native igloo type of huts.

Actually our village is reconnecting to the roots and heritage of architecture in its development. We use something, very old, pure earth, the most likely first building material, always from local sources.

As in history, the time between sketching and discussing an idea toward a completed building or sculpture is quite close. Children also have the chance to erect something quite large, not the usual matchbox level that is reserved for them in most cases. Now they experience, that building is a natural process, and that many hands have to work together to build a hut or house. Our kind of teamwork brings a spirit of community and identification with the structure in the process of building a hut or house. Teamwork brings a spirit of community to the participants and develops identification to the...made my own hands...process. In this way a playground is created with those that are going to use it later.

But also the adults engaged in this process learn a lot about how to work in a creative and joyful atmosphere, lost in so many of our normal working-worlds.

So by touching a genuine heritage of mankind, we regain something partially lost: community, help and brotherhood. And

some...do it yourself spirit... may be taken home, after having worked some hours or days with our creative team. Even architects are astonished and convinced of the qualities, that simple building with clay can serve. The important impulse is...simplicity! I can do it myself! We are so far from that point, in the complex world of today.

1.2. Sensual and aesthetic values of a basic substance

Beneath that communicative, psychological and social experiences the specific sensual attractions of clay are deterring. Often I heard that children called *Lehm* in their own words as *Leben*, which means „live“. In fact a central truth of the material and element earth that we deal with.

Makunaima is a symbolic hero and figure out of a south-American religion and philosophy, stating, that children are ‚elder spirits‘, bringing in their own viewpoints, a heritage of beyond, when they come to birth. They have magical abilities, as each of us, as parents themselves will agree.

Clay is an unformed basic substance. EVERYONE can get it for free at no costs, or only costs for transporting it. This also is part of our human heritage. Hopefully we can maintain this, as we all should have the freedom to breath fresh air and drink pure water. Surely - until now - our work with clay is more an example, a model of continued heritage and the joy of experiencing something new. The effort to maintain a building and making it last over decades is another point. Although, we have already begun to survey and service the space we have created, this garden and village like setting has been growing into shape through one and a half decades in Berlins Britzer Garden'. And it will be maintained, as we service it through the seasons.

Often we are asked whether we emulate African traditions or tribal architecture. In fact we know about them, continuing a certain approach, pointing out community and togetherness, traditional skills and handicrafts. The concept guiding us may be of course related to native philosophies, as it is based on the

believe, that every creation has a spirit living within it. This is, why many of our works have faces showing „imbedded souls“. In this way we touch the fantasy of children, reconnecting to the past and the spirit of traditional native art of African, the Maya, Aborigine, Indian roots. Beyond the TV-legends, that are consumed daily, we travel forward looking backward from time to time, seriously. We are also trying to reconnect joy and playing into the process of work, not just separating it!

Interglotz - art network erects adobe playgrounds, single structures, sculptures made of clay and natural materials, primarily wood, clay and stone.

During the building process we touch the past, review related building-styles of ancient ancestors, but we also teach a perspective into the future ...

2 Importance of the heritage of earth building and outlook

2.1 Reinventing the building material ‘earth’

Thesis:

Reinventing the material earth into the building process on a common scale is an important task in our future and should become part of a global agenda.

How do we come to that conclusion? Why is it important to forward the experience of building techniques with the simple element earth to our next generations? Is it all about maintaining these sites and settlements, which are regarded as important in the sense of historic cultural heritage – or is it something more we have to recover? Is there a history to write on?

The simplicity and reward of building with concrete as well as its architectural power and possibilities given by ironed concrete and a wide range of standard type products make that technique

the first choice in our days. Architects of the modern world only think in concrete, steel and glass, it seems...

But as we gain a lot of durability, speeding up building processes all along the seasons by using concrete, we also are losing the mere ability to work with the ancient adobe-techniques, rammed earth and more of those traditional building abilities, crafts and skills. Not only that. These traditional styles of building are no longer on a scale of invention, the focus of developing better building technologies is moving away from its cradle (straining McLuhan's opinion also in this regard, *that we enhance or extend certain kinds of practice or experience whilst inhibiting, restricting or reducing other kinds*, which stay no longer in the focus...) and this might be seen as unavoidable, but could be a big mistake we make.

Moving in that direction we will find and already do find ourselves being slaves of the choice, we made. To built concrete, and omit the possibilities of an intelligent mix of building materials by including and making profit from one of the most available sources – pure earth – is, to my opinion, far from intelligence. Each concrete building we erect today is in fact burying an enormous amount of steel, and we have big problems to recycle this valuable resource, that is going to become scarce as we have extending prosperity and growth, especially in the former regions of traditional building, big parts of India, Asia and Africa. The rising steel prices are related to pricing of other big values, like oil and gas...a situation that already affects poorer countries a lot.

But we are going to have more big problems with the 'heritage of concrete':

Our present times are far from perfection, in regards of design, energy-efficiency health and social aspects in housing. What a mess, we can see! Huge areas of our only holy planet are savaged and devastated by the poor oddness, we call temporary architecture.

Does anybody really believe, that future generations will like to

live like we agree to do? Does anybody see a perspective of housing and building beyond the only aspect of what we call economic efficiency. How interesting is it now, developing an architecture that can easily be recycled, and reshaped, without leaving a lot of ugly scrap behind?

2.3. Upcoming period of a new building culture

This will be much more related to the positive heritage, much more aware of what has been discovered and developed throughout centuries and our common – at large – 3 millennia of building culture.

Here we touch the first aspect of the digital age, and its perspectives for the future. World wide web – as a global growing think-tank – widely opening the collected knowledge to any student and presented in available-to-everybody media, will make a real difference and bring forward the good ideas much faster to a bigger audience!

Already today a lot of experiences, made in general architecture, but also in archaeology, is collected and examined in teams that share their results on the Internet, in forums and workgroups across the globe. People from different countries share the results of research on the Cuneiform script, and astonishing again: those ‘hard-discs’ found in Babylon, made of pure burnt earth give an immense insight into daily live, 2500 years ago. Hopefully our hardware systems will be able to remain, as long as those obviously did.

A second impact resulting from digital revolution may be more evaluated models, more precise calculation, enhanced logistics and a wider awareness of the impact, our solutions in architecture will have on the microclimate and the planet as an entity.

But what we will have to fight tomorrow too, is the heritage of our days, a huge amount of scrap – lots of concrete amongst that –, the waste we did not care to avoid, the poison, we have set free. An awesome job, to clean up, that will take patience, and wisdom.

2.3 Colours of the earth

What astonishes an artist, tuned more into vision, than into so-to-do habits or moods of indifference:

The beauty of earth, the beauty of regional architecture, the colour of the soil, the stone, the mud and the sand. Why don't we relate to those given elements, as a unique value?

Concrete has covered the face of the Earth, concrete has shaped and infected the appearance of buildings worldwide. On a global perspective we have gained a standard type house, a standard type grey of concrete supermarket, a standard type of road and room. The reasons for that un-reversible development, are widely known, and shall not be part of my thoughts. What we have to care about, is whether the situation, we've created is comfortable and in balance with our natural heritage and aesthetic feel.

Surely, we have left over some holy places, for sure we try to secure some of the extraordinary achievements in art and architectural culture. But this does not change the main view.

On a wide range of experience, everybody will agree: While travelling this planet, we will observe that we have established a dangerous kind of global monoculture. We are very much into the process of spreading standard technologies and brands. We are loosing species, bringing down forests and digging down hills. Human culture is growing, fighting back the reservations and habitats of some rare species, not only in nature. We are loosing variety and beauty daily, building a world along the mere commercial oversight, it seems. We can see this process of change in many ways. But we should have in mind: This world might collapse some day, as its inhabitants do not feel free, healthy and save inside of these 'home-made' prisons once achieved...

3 Solutions and resulting thoughts:

1. As we reinvent local building culture, we can help to keep a world of variety alive. We have to study local traditions, and ask ourselves, which qualities of the buildings our ancestors have made, we have to maintain for our and our next generations sake.
2. As we use the local soil, we will prevent from globalised patterns, labels, and brands ruling our visual worlds and may gain back the beauty, delivered by the local soil.
3. As we use earth, which we can rebuild and reuse eternally, we are wasting non of our elementary resources and avoid the further devastation of landscape; we may get ahead of the upcoming problems in global settlement policy and housing and reduce the rise of costs in building processes. (Nader Khalili, *Visions for the Future, Ceramic Houses and Earth Architecture: How to Build Your Own, 1990*; Building Research Institute FEB at the Department of Architecture of the University of Kassel, Germany)
4. As we reconnect traditions in building to modern styles and techniques, we will be able to combine the wisdom of our fathers and grandfathers with our achievements, inventions and perspective of needs (in architecture) in the future.
5. Positive impact on the climate-change, by deliberating ourselves back to natural resources and a traditional heritage in architecture, combined with modern invention and material mixes may be big.
6. General education should always respect local aspects, specific aspects of its home territory and be largely in contact with the local heritage. There is a global truth and knowledge (necessary to be told) on one hand, a 'local truth' and knowledge on the other, which has to be respected, reported, collected and brought into a vital balance with so called irrefutably facts.
7. Any fields of research, scholarship and apprenticeship should be (free and) open to a broad majority of people – finally to everybody, therefore the financial substitution of elementary knowledge including the access to sources

in the internet have to be achieved; any strong financial corporations, private or part of governments should feel the obligation to achieve and support that basic aim of the 3rd millennium.

4 Conclusion

In Berlin, we are working on a small 'habitat', foremost in collaboration with children, our fellow next generations. Teaching those children to reconnect to the natural, to esteem the beauty of the earth, is an important part of the bigger perspective: To keep the natural heritage alive!

Part of a common dream, it can be, to respect the earth, and from that respect rise it – the mud, the clay, the pure earth, as a chosen and regained material – to the most beautiful forms, form it into the most extraordinary and intelligent buildings we can imagine.

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