
Das Schulprojekt in Qudsaya im Bau. Nordpanorama.

The Joy of Learning for Refugee-Children in a foreign Country

Years of conflict had in particular significant consequences for the children and youth. In school they can hardly concentrate. However, school operations were able to continue despite the damage to school infrastructure caused by the conflict and the restrictions on mobility. However, in many cases school buildings are damaged, old or strongly in need of renovation. Often classes must be held in unsuitable buildings, or lessons must be given in two or even three shifts – with negative consequences for the learning performance of the children. In addition, the passed-down knowledge on climate-adapted construction and the efficient use of resources has often been forgotten, resulting in soulless concrete boxes on formless concrete surfaces without any green. That such surroundings will not create learning-friendly environments and may promote aggressive behaviour is obvious.

No More Bloack Barracks

Earlier, the building plans followed a uniform teaching concept: frontal teaching approach. Either children were not practiced – also due to a lack of available space. Therefore, the construction or renovation of school buildings for small group lessons or individual study was established. However, in many cases schools must have appropriate specialist rooms, e.g. for chemistry or art lessons. The following building concepts were integrated under the theme of having separate halls and auditoriums now offer space for playing and meetings, in addition to classrooms for teacher conferences. Previously, some schools did not have such rooms and all and they have been added to the existing buildings. But last but not least, the sanitary facilities will be freed from their shadowy existence and attractively designed.

School life is not just limited to the buildings, particularly important outdoor facilities will be redesigned for sports and fun, but also for outdoor lessons and more.

Resorting to Local Traditions

The basic principle of the new planning approach involves resorting to local building experiences and proven traditions, primarily in terms of creating jobs and using locally available materials as a visible and tangible quality in construction. Materials, craftsmanship and rooms promote a personal willingness for development as well as positive behavior, self-esteem and social integration. Furthermore, teachers can implement appropriate, modern, didactic concepts using good instructional materials to increase the desire of learning. In such a school space becomes the third educator.

Sustainable Energy Construction

The existing local traditions for energy-efficient building design have partly been forgotten. However, energy efficiency mainly means consuming less energy. The reduction is achieved primarily through building construction measures. In practice, this means improving the thermal insulation of the walls and roofs and replacing leaky old windows with single-glazed glass with thick, insulated glass and tilt and turn windows. Along with these technical improvements, measures for façades shading the ability of design concepts to save energy and collecting energy in winter have to be implemented. In fact, climate-adapted and sustainable design, as exemplified in this school building, also means available energy architecture. Unfortunately, today such elements are often mistakenly viewed as useless in urban and industrial areas. However, the same basic principles hold true for current architecture and they must now penetrate current architecture.

Taking Cage of Their Own Schools

A school building must be maintained and kept in good condition. Previously, this assessment had been largely limited in the region, and correspondingly, almost no funding was available, resulting in a need to develop appropriate concepts. The focus here is on promoting responsibility and the appreciation of the building property. As a result, not only caretakers and other technical personnel actively working in the schools, but also schoolchildren, teachers and parents are being involved and given practical instructions. They care for the outdoor furniture, paint the walls of cleaning work and conduct repairs – in this way the school becomes ‘their’ school.

Outlook

Much has been achieved. This was made possible through the willingness of the responsible parties in the local administration to make use of international experiences and reconsider previous approaches to planning and implementation. The experiences again confirm that advising and support can only be successful if there is time. What was already possible must still be developed. Local standards for building construction cannot simply be applied even if today the usual support systems are substantially better. A 2008 study commissioned by KfW compared the learning behaviour and learning success of children in the pre-war schools with those in the new schools. The result was significant: the architecture of school buildings is in accordance with their quality, a clear positive influence on the learning ability. This proves success justified in terms of the evident and no value an international architectural adviser to ensure the sustainable transfer of knowledge in the future.