

Massachusetts Institute of Technology**DRESDEN:****MIT/Société Imaginaire/Saxony Urban Design Studies**

For one year, from the summer of 1998 to that of 1999, the Department of Architecture of MIT conducted urban design studies in an unusually sustaining context made possible by the Société Imaginaire and governmental and educational entities of Saxony and Dresden. After a preliminary trip by faculty and four students in June 1998, the following substantive activities ensued: urban analysis and inquiry through a workshop in the fall of 1998; an urban design studio in the spring of 1999; and two masters theses in the spring and fall of 1999. The work from these activities, under the leadership of Professor Michael Dennis is represented here.

We recognize special benefits from the associations made possible by and in Saxony. Dresden is an unusually rich context in which to work. A great historical city, it is also one that experienced extraordinary events in the bombing at the end of the second World War and in playing a distinctive role in the Cold War. The contemporary city can be appreciated and sustains study, but it is also a city that is reinventing itself. Efforts from the base of several disciplines and the availability of a full year of work promised deeper levels of learning and design projection within this evolving context.

While it was the State of Saxony that made all this possible, it was the agency of the Société Imaginaire and its President Batuz that brought us together. The Société is dedicated to broad goals of increased sympathy and understanding across both disciplinary and cultural lines. Visits to the Société's base at Altzella by the MIT-Saxony team and notables from other disciplines and locales enriched the immediate work. Still more assuredly these contacts add important dimensions — across age groups, cultural areas, and disciplines — to the learning experience of those who meet and exchange there. The Société seeks to provide a model or a laboratory for a future society where virtual community is proliferated yet direct contact and supportive settings remain vital. The Société, in an active stage marked by flexibility and growth, is committed to these goals not only as a matter of ideals, but also through projects with concrete results as measured in both work product and personal development. The MIT/SI/Saxony urban design studies are one vehicle for this more concrete aspect of the Société. However, the Société and Saxony's commitment of resources at Altzella will only thrive if there is a regular flow of persons there who create an engaged intellectual environment for one another.

Projects such as those represented here, in however modest a way, seek to benefit both the cities and the general educational environment of Saxony. The cities of Saxony experienced a tumultuous century: late and energetic industrial development; depression and war with particularly furious destruction; forty years of limited (and often problematic) development; and now development under complex and often disconcerting social and economic change. Both in terms of policy and physical design, this is a fruitful moment for exploratory conjectures. Primed with problem statements and information from state and city officials and agencies in Saxony, teams of bright students offer a resource for such speculative work. Through collaboration with the

Technical University of Dresden, that institution receives learning opportunities similar to those of MIT. Observing the research programs and techniques of others and working across international boundaries is always fruitful. To a limited extent, students of TU Dresden also had contact with MIT through visits to Cambridge.

However, taken alone, the MIT/Dresden project does not, even in its moment, realize the full potential of the Altzella/Société Imaginaire program. Even well-designed and conducted projects have, by definition, their own boundaries and completeness. It is the ambition of the Société also to engender creative, even serendipitous, encounters across disciplines and among people from different cultures. To this end it is necessary that Altzella be used intensely — especially that two or more simultaneous projects bring contributive people into relationship with one another. At a practical level, it is also only with such a more intense set of activities that the resources of Altzella will be adequately engaged.

What should these additional activities be? In the spirit of serendipitous learning and project construction these activities must, of course, engage as many disciplines as possible: not only architecture, but art, writing, politics, scholarship, and more. In our visits in Dresden, I heard locals speak of the greater importance for Saxony of ties to its eastern and southern neighbors than to western Germany. So, new initiatives for Altzella should surely include universities and individuals from central and eastern Europe—Poland and the Czech Republic, in particular. Batuz has special knowledge and valuable relations in South America. This triangulation of North and South America with central Europe is a feature of the Société, and so should it be in the selection of universities and individuals conducting work at Altzella.

The ambitions of the Société would bring not only cultural but also socio-economic exchange among eastern and western Europe and North and South America. These larger goals will only be addressed if there is a successful range of concrete programs that exemplify and contribute to their realization. The MIT program is a small first step; it must be complemented by many other programs representing a broad array of disciplinary issues.

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