

“Erzählbriefkästen” (memory letterboxes) as a means of strengthening social cohesion

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What does the project want?

Declining social cohesion also has to do with declining interest in and knowledge about each other. This creates room for prejudices and clichés. These in turn create hostile images that alienate us from one another. In order to counteract this, we need to realize what we have in common. With our “memory letterbox” projects, we want to facilitate cohesion between the very different people in a district by evoking their very personal memories and bringing them together to tell a shared story of the district.

How can this be achieved?

A so-called “memory letterbox” will be installed in the district over a period of several months - both on site and digitally, i.e. accessible to all age groups. For several weeks, residents are invited to submit their memories of the location in “letters” (handwritten, digital or in a conversation with the project team) to the mailbox through intensive public relations work and direct contact via existing networks in the district. Following the story-collecting period, the project will develop an exhibition (also together with residents). Excerpts from the collected memories will be presented in this exhibition. It will initially be shown in the district itself, and later in other places in the city and region - to tell others something about the district (an important instrument for creating identity). In addition, a small “story box” book is being created in which all the memoirs can be read in full.

At the opening of the exhibition, the people who have contributed their memories will come together once again - an opportunity to exchange ideas about the district: What do people want to change here together, what should be preserved and therefore protected together? The question of how the collected memories can be permanently present in the district can also be explored.

All visitors who come to the exhibition in the weeks following the opening are then asked to comment on the memories presented - and can also add their own memories.



The project's methodology

The project addresses people in their immediate living environment and asks them about those events and places that have played a special, but at the same time very “tangible” role in the history of the district (i.e. not classic historical sites, but places of togetherness and exchange, etc.): It recalls everyday experiences, asks appreciative questions about biographical experiences and brings these into the shared space for interaction and discussion. It operates with a low threshold (the stories can be told in various ways, with support if desired, and photos etc. are also welcome and can be a starting point for discussion). This allows all groups in the district to feel addressed and included - even those who are more difficult to “activate”: Their perceptions are helped to become visible, the bringing together of memories is made clear as added value for everyone. This positive experience is used as a basis for communication to enable greater cohesion, more intensive participation, strengthening of identity and experiences of self-efficacy in the district.