

FFORESTER MANSIONS

THE "FFORST" IS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT HOUSING PROJECT IN FRANKFURT AT THE POLISH BORDER

| Klaus Hagen (FRANKFURT/ODER). Concrete slab buildings are no rarity but the norm in Frankfurt at the Oder. These grey ensembles of socialistic architecture from the 80s are mostly in desperate need of paint, overall renewal, and, above all, inhabitants.

There is one concrete slab building, however, that stands out from the rest. It accommodates a colourful mosaic on the front, a green liberty statue on the roof, and with around 35 inhabitants it is booked solid. The "fforst" is an international, self-administrated student's house named after its address: "Forststraße 3-4". Based on the idea of bringing formerly separated people together, the fforst is not only a melting pot of nationalities and different cultures but is also diverse in age, social status, and study background. Alongside a family and three elderly people originally from Frankfurt at the Oder, the fforst houses at least nine nationalities. The residents' home countries range from Serbia, Bulgaria, and Israel to Germany, Poland, Italy, and France.

Launched by the vice president of the Europe University Viadrina in Frankfurt, Janine Nuyken, and supported by the Berlin-based design tank "anschlaege.de", this project started as a regular class in October 2005. After six months of budgeting, public relations, and advertisement for money, the first 14 "fforesters", also known as the residents of the fforst, moved in.

Today, the fforst has become very popular for its international composition, its cultural activities and social events, and even for its low rent of 4.50 Euro per square metre. Monthly rents between 60 and 128 Euro make the flats in Frankfurt at the Oder affordable even for poorer foreign students. No need anymore to move to the usually more reasonable Polish Slubice beyond the river Oder.

Critics may argue the fforst is rather a cheap housing project than a shining model of integration, especially since the family and the retired residents already lived in the building before. The foresters though always emphasise the "everyone's welcome" atmosphere and the climate of mutual help and respect for different life styles reigning throughout the building. Neighbours have shown their support by donating a couch, bookshelf and even a mounted deer antler. In return, the students engaged for the installation of a banister to make sure that an elderly lady could always count on it after having suffered a heart attack. The last big party, by the way, was held out without even one complaining neighbour.

Despite the depressing nature of the typical concrete slab buildings and the assumingly cold winters in the unrenewed flats, it feels warm and cheerful within the fforst, almost like in one big extended family. Daniel Germann, a man of the first hour, says of the fforst: "I like interesting corners and I do not find it miserable or dull at all."

**Jeder kann
tragen, was er
Silberbergwerk
Gold gegre**