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8 Building Community Through Transforming 17th Century Barns in Kirchzarten, Germany

Abstract: The renovated barns of Talvogtei, a former moated castle, in Kirchzarten in south-western Germany constitute compelling examples of the value of transforming historic buildings no longer in use for their original purposes to new meaningful public use. In the view of both users and visitors, the tension generated between the modern and the historic structural elements creates a strong aesthetic impact. The chapter discusses the conversion of the one-time barns into the Mediathek/Multimedia Centre/Library in Kirchzarten as one way in which municipalities deal effectively with their architectural heritage. The concept brief developed for the Kirchzarten Mediathek/Multimedia Centre/Library describes it as a third place (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982) in a community of 10,000 inhabitants.

Keywords: Public libraries – Germany; Library buildings – Design and construction; Barns – Remodelling for other use; Multimedia library services

Introduction

The issue of how to treat the built heritage in its entirety, particularly in rural areas, is more fundamental and more pressing today than it was only a few years ago. Climate change, incipient demographic changes, demands for affordable housing and the provision of sustainable local employment, to name just some of the challenges, are leading to rethinking the approach to the built heritage and innovative strategies for the future. Everyone bearing any responsibility for the architectural environment has a part to play. Conceptualising, developing and constructing an appropriate community for the future involve optimising the use of existing buildings, understanding their past and present uses and anticipating potential alternatives for the future. Protecting and celebrating heritage in a modern context and undertaking municipal development take dedication, diligence and passion.

A more sophisticated approach to developing the existing heritage is crucial if sustainable development decisions are to be taken. The cultural aspects of buildings need to be preserved along with the building materials themselves, bearing in mind the vital importance of grey energy considerations in managing



Fig. 1: The transformed Talvogtei barns viewed from the north with the Multimedia Centre on the right and administration centre and community hall on the left. © Willi Loba.

Facts and Figures

Name: Mediathek Kirchzarten

Address: Talvogteistraße 5, 79199 Kirchzarten, Germany

Website: <https://www.mediathek-kirchzarten.de/>

Opening: May 2017

Builder: Gemeinde Kirchzarten

Architects: Sutter KG³ <https://sutter3kg.com/>;

UKW-Innenarchitekten <https://ukw-innenarchitekten.de/>

Gross floor area: 501 m²

Main floor space: 420 m²

Collection size: 18,000

Staff: 2.5

Workstations: 5

Building costs: €2,800,000

responses to climate change. The term grey energy is variously used to refer to: the energy produced from fossil fuels; embodied energy, the total energy used to make something; energy produced from polluting sources in contrast to green energy from renewable, non-polluting sources; (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gray_energy); the energy hidden in a product, that is, the amount of energy re-

quired to extract that product from nature, or to cultivate, manufacture, package and transport it (<https://www.unescwa.org/grey-energy>); and the primary energy necessary to construct a building including energy used to extract materials, manufacture and process components, transport people, machines, components and materials to the construction site, install building components and dispose of them (<https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/grey-energy/74537>).

Existing buildings deserve to be appreciated. They express regional building traditions and styles. They give character to towns and villages. They constitute design landmarks and through present and past use are woven into the fabric of the community.



Fig. 2: The barn before its restoration; view from the south.
© Sutter KG³ Kirchzarten.

Background

In September 2007, the Bundesstiftung Baukultur/Federal Foundation for Building Culture (<https://www.bundesstiftung-baukultur.de>) began as an independent organisation to pursue the goals of ensuring high quality and sustainable construction planning and implementation and raising the standard of building culture throughout Germany. Numerous networks and centres for improving building culture established at all levels, federally, state, supraregionally, regionally and locally, collaborate on issues and promote the over-arching goals.

The Initiative Baukultur/Building Culture Initiative operates as informal grouping of various initiatives and associations across Germany to emphasise the significance of an appropriately build environment as a valuable social and economic asset. In villages and rural areas, however, the initiative has made less headway than in the cities. It is essential to communicate more effectively and

publicly promote and discuss approaches to structures and sites worth preserving in villages and country areas. Why are historical buildings worth preserving, even if they are not listed? What makes buildings special for the community, and which features should be identified as important and how?

Documentary maker and author Dieter Wieland addressed the issue in his brochure, *Bauen und Bewahren auf dem Lande*/Building and Preserving in the Countryside, for the Deutsches Nationalkomitee für Denkmalschutz/German National Committee for Monument Preservation (<http://www.dnk.de>). Wieland pointed out that no building is eternal; all must be renovated at some point and need to be well maintained. Rather than large-scale elaborate makeovers, individual elements should be replaced as necessary.

And the old farmhouses are made for that. Those who built them were brought up to think providently and economically. Do not interfere with the structural elements. That will make it expensive! Above all, do not destroy your old house's greatest advantage, its age. Nothing can replace age. You don't adulterate old wine with young wine. Do not adorn your house with new building materials. An old house made to look young is a fraud. And it looks like one, too. (Wieland 2003, translated from German by Mara Huber)

Wieland went on to recommend that the scale and proportions of an old building be retained along with the window openings, sashes, glazing bars, shutters and doors. He concludes with an impassioned plea to retain everything that gives a building its irreplaceable character and enhances its contribution to its region.

Try to preserve as much as possible of the old material. A lot can be reused, even small details, carved door panels, handles, door and window fittings, maybe even the old, hand-blown glass. All of these are treasures you cannot buy anywhere. That no craftsman today can produce to such a high quality. Neither can you pay for it. But these are things that give the house its charm and its face. Nobody but you has a house like that. And that should be worth your effort. (Wieland 2003, translated from German by Mara Huber)

The Special Character of Talvogtei

Agriculture has long ceased in the centre of Kirchzarten, a small town of about 10,000 inhabitants in the heart of the Dreisam River valley, eleven kilometres east of Freiburg im Breisgau, on the edge of the Black Forest in south-western Germany. Some barns in the area survived and until recently were the venue of the annual village get-together. Talvogtei is a former moated castle and today serves as the town hall. Its barns are located in Kirchzarten's early settlement of Schalampi and are contained in two farm estates. Schurhammi comprised the former mill

with a farmhouse and barn and now houses a municipal administration centre of which the building authority is a part on the ground floor and a community hall on the upper floor for celebrations and cultural and official events. The second farm estate was Stöcklemühle which included the house at Talvogteistraße 4 and now houses the Mediathek or multimedia centre/library.

Since their construction around 1830, the barns remained largely unchanged in the centre of the scattered settlement or Haufendorf/enclosed village. When agriculture was discontinued in the Talvogtei area, the barns lost their purpose. They became storage buildings, left to decay (Figure 2). The architecture of the barns is an important example of the local building culture but they lay empty for some time. New life, new uses and a viable future were needed. In the 1960s, the municipality of Kirchzarten bought the barn which is now the multimedia library, and after discussion about other potential projects in the area, the second barn now containing the administration centre and the community hall was purchased (Figure 1).

Delivering the Desired Outcomes

In 2012, the municipality of Kirchzarten decided to adapt and renovate the two Talvogtei barns with the joint aims of preserving significant buildings of importance to the identity of the town and rejuvenating its village centre. Given the enormity of the ambitious task, one question that arose at the very beginning was how future users, architects, administrators and municipal authorities could cooperate to develop a successful project. How should a future-oriented project be designed? In Kirchzarten, the decision was taken to establish a project steering group with representatives of all stakeholders to obtain community views, input on needs and requirements and feedback on the various proposals and suggestions. All would work towards one shared goal.

The work undertaken on the Talvogtei barns provides an example of best practice in restoring historic buildings for an appropriate new public use. The view of both users and visitors is that the interplay between the modern and the historic structural elements creates the main dramatic aesthetic effect. Many ideas for new ventures in the historical area were considered during the collaborative process. Possibilities canvassed included tourism with a hotel and catering facilities, a museum and general community use, which is what has now been realised. Attention to the historical context was a key factor in all considerations. The site was, and is, a jewel in Kirchzarten; it embodies the town's history and identity and tracks the development and the decline of local agriculture. With all

potential projects, a primary focus of any new use was that the historical character had to be retained.

New uses and architectural design features had to be accommodated within the context of the former buildings and their structures. Interventions were to be kept to a minimum and the overall appearance changed as little as possible, presenting a significant challenge for a completely new and public use given the original function as an agricultural building.

The central question was not how the buildings should be changed to adapt to a new use but rather how could the architectural design focus on innovative outcomes with as little change as possible. Such an objective requires a high level of communication among all parties involved and the involvement of a public contractor made the process even more complex. Many factors had to be considered in addition to the functional requirements of the brief. Building conservation, structural engineering, fire protection, social inclusion, development funding and budget constraints had to be considered. Undertaking construction work in an existing context is always a journey into the unknown.

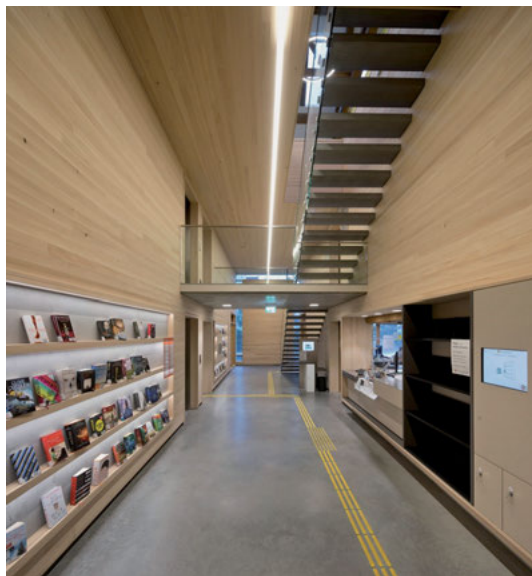


Fig. 3: New addition inserted with exhibition, cloakroom and information desk. © Jürgen Gocke.

In the case of the multimedia library, the various considerations triggered intense discussion. It was imperative to create an attractive entrance area with a staircase and elevator that could handle visitor traffic. The first idea of providing an extension to the barn was rejected because of its impact on the original structure and the accompanying alterations. Instead, the solution was to insert a new addition clearly differentiated by its exposed steel shell into the double-height part of the

barn where the hay carts used to enter (Figure 3). The addition projects beyond the original entrance and leaves the historical shape of the barn intact. The only change

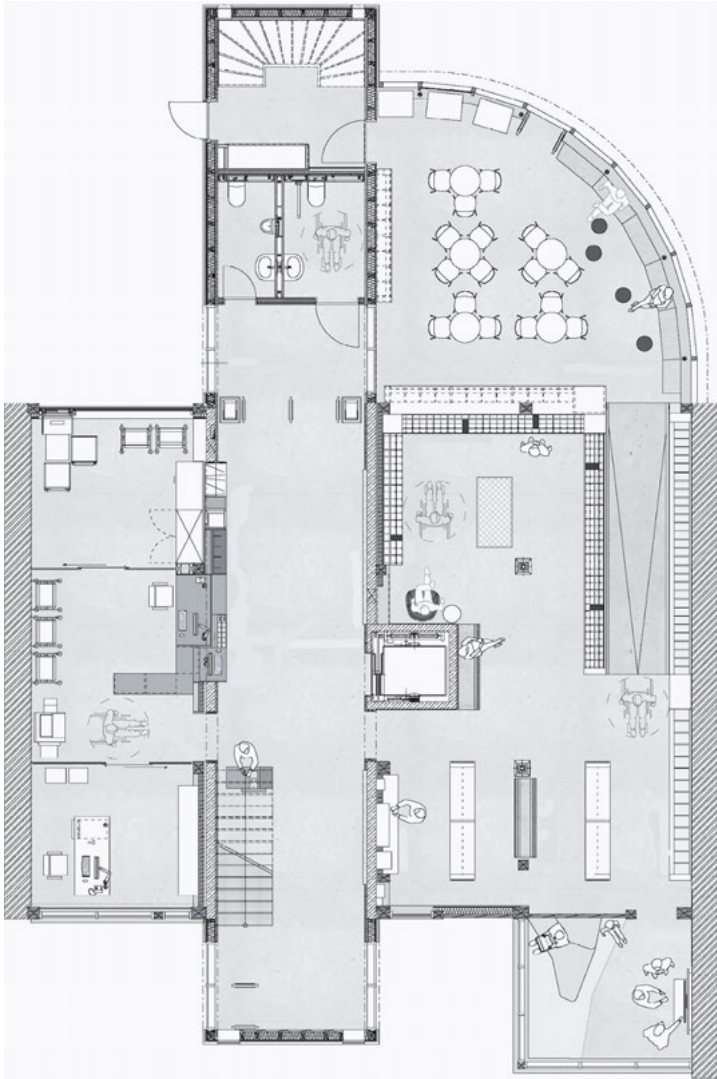


Fig. 4: Mediathek Kirchzarten, ground floor. © Sutter KG³ Kirchzarten.

to the structure of the building was the removal of the old doors at the entranceway. From the central entrance area, the visitor moves into the former stables and the hay storage areas with views of the original roof trusses, all preserved intact. And

thanks to the raw steel composition of the shell, the inserted addition itself will age and with time blend in effectively with the historical elements.

The issue of barrier-free access to the buildings was a particular challenge. Installing an elevator was not enough. Barriers had to be removed. If possible, there should be few, or no, doors that must be opened or which restrict access to areas. How do you guide visually impaired people, and how do you respond to the fact that many people are hard of hearing? The Talvogtei barns exemplify how these problems can be solved in an ideal way. Thanks to an intelligent fire protection concept connecting the two barns with a glass footbridge, the library was able to be designed as an open building, without internal doors, thereby allowing barrier-free movement between spaces. A second fire escape route was created across the glass footbridge between the two barns on the top floor.

Inside the buildings, the interplay between old and new is striking. Historical woodwork, worm-eaten and worn-down by the centuries, combines effectively with an exciting new interior design and exposed concrete. Drystone walls contrast with smooth open screed that replaces the old natural flooring. History and modernity are present together, complementing each other, accepting each other's value, standing side by side in friendly and respectful companionship. The visitor experiences the combination of things old and new not as a contradiction, but as a synthesis. The atmosphere is both stimulating and harmonious resulting in a space that is pleasurable, enjoyable and easy to experience. The space unites modern design and historical charm and authenticity.

The concept and the mood permeate the two barns as a recurring theme. Old historical doors, weathered plastering, antique transmission wheels, historical wall constructions, drystone walls and historical sandstone embrasures contrast with exposed concrete, glass and steel, as if the elements inevitably belonged together. The result is not awkward but harmonious. The old is not subservient to the new. It is where it always was, unchanged and aged, just the way it ought to be.

The Public Library as Third Place

The decision to convert one of the two barns of the Talvogtei into a modern multimedia library provided the opportunity to update the existing library service model to meet the present-day requirements of a modern public library.

Libraries which have been traditionally, places of learning, culture and information have acquired new functions. In addition to borrowing books, magazines, CDs, games and films, sometimes for a small annual fee, and to obtain informa-

tion, local residents visit the library for other purposes. As early as 1982, American sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term, third place, for a place where a person can spend time away from the home or work environment (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982). The library at Talvogtei fulfils this increasingly important function for its community.

Although Kirchzarten is a small community at the edge of the Black Forest, housing is expensive. The proximity to the university city of Freiburg and excellent transport connections make housing a scarce commodity, so that some students, families and senior citizens live in cramped conditions. The opportunity to spend time in a high quality, non-commercial environment close to home and the workplace quickly received a positive response from the local population.



Fig. 5: Youth lounge, ground floor. © Jürgen Gocke.

With new premises in the renovated barn, the library obtained its own building with 500 m² in the centre of town, barrier-free, and equipped with state-of-the-art library technology. An automatic check-out terminal and return shelf and the ability to return material outside the library's opening hours via an external book return slot speeds up borrowing procedures for library users and frees up library staff from routine procedures so that they can concentrate on customers' needs and offer personal consultation.

RFID technology provides access control as well as the self-service facilities outlined. One of the highlights is the library's *eCircle*, the library's online offer with digital media such as e-books and e-audios. Wi-Fi is available everywhere

in the building and can be used free of charge. The library is called a Mediathek, reflected on the website as Medi@thek because of its hybrid nature including both traditional library services and digital media along with online services. The term in French becomes médiathèque and is translated into English as multimedia/media centre/library. The concepts identified in the name emphasise the digital media being made available through the library and impinge on its design (Figure 6).

The building's structure, with spaces of various sizes on three levels, was considered in determining the collection and seating arrangement. 20,000 items had to be stored in shelves and display areas, organised by subjects and target groups. It is important that the presentation of the stock is flexible enough to accommodate future changes in activity without jeopardising the overall aesthetic impression.

The furnishing and design of the various areas were intended to enable users to navigate the building and find intuitively the services and spaces needed. There are spaces for concentrated reading and learning (Figure 7), such as the Lernkabinett/Learning Cabinet on the middle floor, places for relaxing and being with people, such as the Lesecafé/reading café and the Jugendlounge/youth lounge (Figure 5) on the ground floor and the Lesehöhle/reading den for the youngest children on the top floor. In addition to an experienced architectural design firm, interior planners were involved in the furniture layout and selection (Figure 4) which was extremely helpful and is evident in the end result.



Fig. 6: Audio-station in the digital media section.
© Jürgen Gocke.

The timelessness of the materials used, stone, wood and concrete, the masterly craftsmanship of their use, and the restrained use of colour in the entire building delight the visitors. From all three levels there are fascinating views: from the ground floor to the murmuring village stream; from the middle floor to the historical neighbouring buildings and squares; and from the top floor through the skylights to the church and the surrounding Black Forest hills. Carefully chosen seating with

a total of 94 seats invites visitors in all areas to stay awhile. There is room for spontaneous encounters or short conversations everywhere. For people who live alone, in particular, the Mediathek spaces become a home away from home.

Specialist equipment is provided for differently-abled users. For visually impaired persons, tactile guides were installed on the floor, and a personal computer with specific hardware and software is available. In the community hall, audio induction loops were integrated into the floor, allowing hearing-impaired people to listen directly via headphones. Finally, the outdoor surfaces are designed to be easy to use by people with wheelchairs or walkers, and the entrance doors open automatically. None of these measures detracts from the atmospheric quality of the building and it was not necessary to sacrifice historical details to introduce them.

The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a central issue in Baden-Württemberg. The Impulse Inklusion/ Impulse Inclusion programme of the Ministerium für Soziales und Integration Baden-Württemberg/ Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration supports projects to promote inclusion in an innovative way, including work undertaken at the Mediathek Kirchzarten for the provision of a wide-ranging programme of events. Lebenshilfe (<https://www.lebenshilfe.de/>) one of Germany's largest organisations providing facilities for the disabled recognised Kirchzarten's outstanding outreach with an award in 2018.

Meeting people, enjoying the relaxed and informal atmosphere of the restored building or spontaneously having a cup of tea, coffee or hot chocolate, all make a visit to Kirchzarten's multimedia library a pleasant interlude and an opportunity to take time out from the everyday life of the community. Through a continuous emphasis on public relations work and a strong presence in the local press and on the Internet, the town's citizens are regularly updated on the services, programmes, events and activities of their new multimedia library.



Fig. 7: Reading lounge, ground floor. © Jürgen Gocke.

Conclusion

As Mayor Andreas Hall stressed at the opening ceremony for the building in early 2017, the Mediathek/multimedia library was designed not only as a central place of education in the community but also as a meeting point for all citizens and a vibrant event venue. The community has responded extremely positively to its new library. Designing the provision of services within the existing barns proved worth the effort! In addition to preserving the historical building characteristic of the town, a special atmospheric space has been created for a Mediathek/multimedia library in the town centre (Süppel 2019). The interplay of open-beam ceilings with drystone walls and open screed floors of silver fir makes the building, through its simplicity, an expression of authentic building culture in the region.

It is no wonder that the new facility in historical Talvogtei has been well received by Kirchzarten's citizens, and that it is popular among residents and visitors throughout the Dreisam River valley. Since the opening in May 2017, many readers have enthusiastically used the new spaces and services. Lending figures increased from 50,000 items in the former school centre location of the library to 64,500 items in 2019. The number of active users has almost doubled, from 960 to 1,700 with 25,000 yearly visits. A successful restoration project of the former barns has revitalised the town centre and provided an innovative Mediathek much appreciated by its users.

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