Preserving cultural heritage - revitalizing cities

Theme/Approach

Making historic old towns an asset to their citizens and integrating them into modern urban development through careful restoration.

1. The challenge

With their often thousands of years of history, old towns bear living witness to the process of civilisation. They grant their inhabitants identity and social and cultural cohesion. If old, historical urban districts are destroyed by slum development or ruthless modernisation, urban identity is lost. Housing and living areas of the often poor inhabitants and the social and economic potential of whole districts are threatened or destroyed.

2. Our approach

With our integrated advisory approach we aim to link modern urban living with preservation and further development of cultural heritage and cultural traditions and thus preserve the face and history of the cities.

3. Service packages

GTZ's service packages in this module comprise strategies, instruments and methods from various segments of our product. Highlights include above all:

- Information, sensitisation and mobilisation of citizens for the requirements of old towns and the value of rehabilitating them;
- Determining the causes of the decline of historical districts and developing problem-oriented action strategies combining improvement of the physical housing environment and the social and economic conditions of the inhabitants;
- Implementing these strategies including all actors (municipalities; inhabitants and local associations; crafts-people, business-people, traders and tourism entrepreneurs);
- Planning/implementing sustainable conservation concepts and instruments for promoting rehabilitation;
- Adapting transport systems and transport management to the needs in the old towns (slowing down motorised traffic in some zones, attractive pedestrian precincts);
- Promoting local businesses and craft enterprises that contribute to economic life and to preserving old town districts and their housing;
- Technical advisory services to inhabitants, building up/mediating access to earmarked subsidy and loan programmes for rehabilitation;
- Improvement of the institutional framework conditions for sustainability of regeneration programmes (building up rehabilitation executing organisations, cross-subsidising mechanisms), integrating conservation strategies into overall urban, regional and national development;
- Promoting aesthetic, monument-friendly regeneration concepts for careful urban restoration.

4. Benefits

Careful restoration of historical districts by urban administrations and housing owners enhances living and life quality for the inhabitants, in the districts and ultimately throughout the city. It helps traditional crafts and trade to achieve new income and as a tourist attraction it can stimulate the local and regional economy. A restored old city contributes to shaping the identity of the inhabitants of an entire town and region.

5. An example from practice

Careful restoration of the old town of Sibiu/Hermannstadt in Romania

GTZ advises municipal offices on improving administrative, legal, institutional and financial frameworks and procedures. It also upgrades building craftsmen, architects and structural engineers. Owners and tenants are informed and advised comprehensively on the restoration plans – not least with regard to favourable opportunities for co-financing.
A foundation established acts as executing organisation for the restoration. A “Charter for Restoration of the Historic Old City” and the “Municipal Action Programme Sibiu 2001-2005” oriented to the entire city have been worked out.
The foundation offers free advisory services on restoration which are used intensively by the citizens. More than a dozen local architects and structural engineers have been trained for this task. They continuously process applications and draw up planning documents as well as supporting construction measures for restoration.
In demonstration projects on careful restoration – subsidised by the KfW-Entwicklungsbank since July 2004 – restoration measures for some 100 buildings have been promoted. This work includes structural shoring measures for endangered buildings, housing modernisation by installing sanitation, drying out of damp buildings and restoration of gateways that contribute to the city image. In these measures, cost-saving solutions in small steps have been preferred to the previously practised and expensive “complete restorations”.