



ZEGG

Forschungs- und Bildungszentrum GmbH

– Intentional Community and Seminar Centre –



Profile



ZEGG – Center for Experimental Culture Design

The ZEGG community comprises almost 100 different people who have made a decision to live and work together. They see themselves as a project where new, cooperative ways of living and working can be tried out. Many of the questions which arise in the course of daily life here also have a significance for the wider society of which the project is part. What does everyday life look like if priority is given to cooperation instead of competition? How can the basic human need for contact and connection be satisfied? How do we achieve non-violent conflict resolution? And inseparable from all the above is the issue of how to live in harmony with nature. The ZEGG community sees itself as a research project exploring socially and ecologically sustainable ways of living. Experiences and insights gained are then passed on to the public during the events organised here.

Seminar Business

Four large festivals and numerous seminars take place in ZEGG each year. A particular focus of these events is the field of human relationships, in such forms as communication training or seminars on the issues of love and sexuality. The range of events on offer also covers artistic expression, information relating to communities, and music. Additionally, the community offers guests the chance to come and work alongside its members, providing a direct and tangible experience of community in action.

Community Life

An important basis of the ZEGG community is communal work. Many of the community members work within the seminar business, in the garden or in the site maintenance team. They come together on a daily basis, making the decisions together which concern their areas of work. The community has adopted a

sociocratic model, allowing for the flexible and adaptable operating structures needed for this type of organisation. There are three elements to this model: the organisational structure, the decision-making structure and dynamic control. Self-governing 'circles' cover particular work areas or other aspects of the community, and two representatives from each circle sit in a superordinate circle representing the whole organisation.

Ecology

One of the main concerns of the ZEGG community is to ensure an ecological way of living and working. Practical examples include the CO₂-neutral energy supply, a closed water cycle with its own constructed wetland sewage treatment system, and a garden growing fruits and vegetables according to the standards of organic agriculture. Catering at ZEGG is vegetarian, with ingredients being sourced either directly from the ZEGG garden or from the region or fair-trade and organic suppliers.

ZEGG is actively engaged in activities to develop the surrounding Fläming region into an example of a sustainable regional economy. It works together with other people and projects in the area to establish regional business and raw material cycles.

Finances

ZEGG is financially independent, supporting itself with the income from its conference and seminar business and rents paid by residents and the enterprises based on the site. The limited company ZEGG GmbH is the body responsible for the seminar business and also the owner of the whole site. In order to implement pending construction projects, ZEGG is looking for external funding.



Learning and Exploring Together – the ZEGG Seminar Centre

The idea of passing on insights and experiences from community life to other interested people was one of the motivations for founding ZEGG. So even while conditions were still very makeshift in the first year on site, an Autumn Camp for 150 people was organised. Many years and successful camps later, the community is even more convinced that this knowledge about cooperative life and work is urgently needed if our society is to develop more sustainable ways of living.

Seminars and Festivals

The seminars and festivals taking place in ZEGG benefit both guests and community members, with an exchange taking place that enriches the thoughts and values guiding the community. The main issues covered in these events are: new forms of communication, such as the ZEGG Forum; finding a vital expression for our creativity; and open ways of loving. A direct experience of community life is possible by coming to work in ZEGG. The seminar business also serves the further development of ZEGG in a very practical way: it is the economic foundation of the community.

Today, ZEGG organises four festivals of its own and plays host to some 120 other seminars. With over 10,000 overnight stays, the seminar guests make ZEGG the second largest accommodation provider in Bad Belzig, as measured in terms of spa tax paid.

ZEGG offers the right surroundings for a whole range of different events, from small workshops to large festivals. The seminar centre has seven seminar rooms from 50-200 sq.m. During the summer season, there are also shelters and tents providing group space outside.

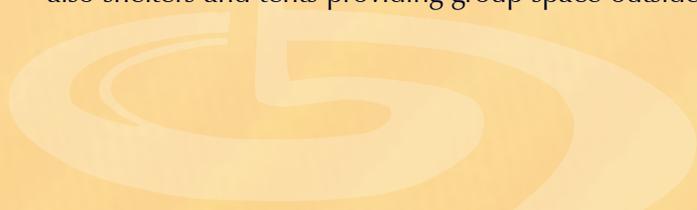
There are two camp kitchens and a popular beach volleyball court. And throughout the year guests can take advantage of a sauna with a beautifully designed rest area. ZEGG also has a village pub and another bar which regularly hosts disco evenings for the seminar guests.

Food and Board

The restaurant provides vegetarian full board every day. Vegan options are also on offer. ZEGG members cook for the community and for their guests. A large proportion of the fruit and vegetables for the kitchen come from ZEGG's own organic garden. Bought-in ingredients are sourced from farmers in the region, and from other fair-trade and organic suppliers. Careful attention is paid to the social and ecological production conditions of the food used.

ZEGG offers a range of accommodation for its seminar guests. The guest house has a total of 17 rooms, with single and double rooms as well as small dormitories. There are larger dormitories in the other seminar centre buildings; this is the standard option for guest accommodation. To increase capacity in summer months (especially for the larger festivals), there are larger dormitory tents and a small woodland camping area for private tents. In winter ZEGG has a capacity of 140 guests, in summer it is 400.

There is an increasing demand among the seminar guests for accommodation in single and double rooms. In order to meet this demand, ZEGG GmbH is planning a new building: a hotel meeting organic certification standards.





Living in Connection – Community as a Model Project

ZEGG is a project where new models for a future way of sustainable living and working can be tried out. With this in mind, the community follows the basic principles of truth, self-responsibility and mutual support. At the heart of the community are the very human desires to live together in trust and deal openly with the issues around love. What sort of social framework is needed to allow the best conditions for loving relationships – whether among friends, family or sexual partners? In order to make it possible to deal with internal conflicts in a constructive way, one of the focal issues here is research into forms of communication. ZEGG developed its own form of transparent communication, which is now being adopted worldwide by various social networks: the ZEGG Forum. The ZEGG Forum benefits from over 30 years of experience in group dynamics and conflict resolution. This experience has also shown that other opportunities to come together socially are also very important for community life. Examples here include: discos, lectures, music and cultural events.

Work in the Community

Many of the community members work within the seminar business (incl. kitchen, guest house and organisation), in the garden or in the site maintenance team. Others are self-employed or have jobs outside of ZEGG. Communal work is an important part of living together.

Decision-making

Financial and planning decisions are made within each working area. These are organised as 'circles' within a sociocratic model which the community has adopted. Each of the individual working areas then sends two representatives to the management circle, where wider-ranging financial decisions are made, current developments are reflected upon and strategic decisions are prepared. The most significant decisions are then taken by the full community on a consensus basis.

Living with Children

ZEGG wants to support parents and children in the best way possible. Here, adults other than the direct parents can be a reference person, mentor or friend for the children. In the Children's House there is a parents' initiative which provides childcare when the children come back from school or kindergarten. The whole community shares the costs of maintaining this building and providing accommodation, food and care for the children. And the large, sheltered site provides them ample opportunity for their own forays, sport and other games.

Spiritual Paths

There is no single religious direction followed in ZEGG, but many community members are on spiritual paths. These may be different in many aspects, but common to them all is the desire to learn responsibility for one's own happiness and to understand oneself as part of something greater. In this sense, spirituality is not a withdrawal from the world, but rather the conscious application of one's own qualities for the benefit of all.





ZEGG Eco-Village

The desire in ZEGG to live a life of connection encompasses nature, too, so the community considers it very important to live and work ecologically. Natural resources should only be consumed to the extent that they can be regenerated. And ZEGG also wants to be a pilot project showing how even more can be done with a lifestyle that makes an active contribution to ecological regeneration. Everywhere in the community there are examples of ecological ideas and their implementation: from the reuse of yoghurt containers through the conscious purchasing of renewable resources to the transformation of a pine-tree monoculture into mixed woodland. Perhaps the best chance for guests to gain an impression of life in the ZEGG Eco-Village is by working in the community.

Ecology is not something that can be separated from daily life. The changes that are necessary in society require changes in individuals' lives. Becoming aware of this connection is part of ZEGG's work. And: Contrary to popular belief, sustainability does not imply making uncomfortable sacrifices. Rather, it can enrich everyday life.

ZEGG is in active contact with other eco-villages around the world within GEN (Global Ecovillage Network).

Valuable Water – Sustainable Resource Use

*“The regional climate is largely determined by the water balance at ground level, so there is a particular need for action in the forestry, agriculture and water management sectors. This includes the return of biologically purified wastewater into the soil.”**

It has become common practice to channel water drained from streets and roofs directly into the sewerage mains or rivers, which means that decreasing quantities of water enter the groundwater. On the ZEGG site measures have been taken to ensure that water can seep directly into the soil. For example, all roof runoff now percolates back into the ground, and large areas of the site have been desealed. Installation of green roofs has also further slowed down the runoff.

A constructed wetland sewerage system has been in operation since 1992. It purifies all the wastewater from the site in a specially planted marshy area, which also provides a new habitat for animals. This plant-based sewage treatment plant uses much less energy and requires much less maintenance than a conventional system, and it also saves CO₂. The purified wastewater is fed back into the groundwater cycle via a maturation pond.

This completes a closed regional water cycle for ZEGG: the water comes from the groundwater via three wells, is treated in a filter, used, cleaned naturally and then seeps back into the ground.

* from: Sustainable Brandenburg: “Implementing the vision of sustainable development” (April 2004) from the Council on Environment and Land Use





Electricity and Heat from Renewable Energies

The Council on Environment and Land Use in Brandenburg: *"... demands a fundamental change in energy policy towards renewable energies while also consistently exploiting all the potential to save energy."**

Shortly after moving onto the site in 1991, the community modernised the site's aging lignite-fired power station and converted it to run on wood chips. The wood is sourced from forests in the surrounding region. The trees in the forests absorb CO₂ (carbon dioxide) from the atmosphere and emit O₂ (oxygen) as they grow, producing wood – this completes the CO₂ cycle. This heating plant was the first of its kind in the region and, together with the plant-based sewage treatment system, in 2004 it won ZEGG the second prize in the Agenda 21 competition organised by the Potsdam-Mittelmark district.

Further modernisation measures are currently (2011) being planned and implemented as part of ZEGG's new energy concept: a new woodchip-fired boiler and a log-fired boiler will replace the old boiler; and 200m² of solar heating panels and an exhaust gas heat exchanger will also be installed. Each of these individual components can be switched on and off according to demand, making the overall system much more responsive and efficient. At the same time, the community will renew and insulate the old heating pipes around the site – this measure alone should save energy equivalent to the heat supply for two normal residential houses.

A photovoltaic system was installed in 2005, which generates approx. 15% of the electricity used in ZEGG.

In 2011, a new 200m² solar roof for the woodchip store will produce hot water. And three gas-powered combined heat and power plants now produce 50% of the community's electricity consumption.

In total, when the energy concept is fully implemented towards the end of 2011, ZEGG will produce 100% of its heating requirements and 65% of its electricity consumption on-site – almost exclusively from renewable energies or surplus heat. This demonstrates ZEGG's commitment to an innovative, regional and CO₂-neutral energy supply.

Saving Energy - Building Insulation

The best and most sustainable energy policy is saving energy. So parallel to the conversion to renewable energy sources, ZEGG has continually worked on the reduction of its energy consumption. Thermal insulation alone has brought savings of some 40% since 1991. This was achieved by completely insulating two buildings with cork and loose-fill cellulose fibre, as well as insulating many roofs. Additionally, all replacement or renovation work is carried out with energy conservation in mind.

Further measures are being planned and implemented here. In 2011, hot water for the kitchen will be pre-heated with the exhaust heat from the food cold store. And old equipment with high energy consumption will be steadily replaced. However, these efforts have their limits, especially with regard to the desolate condition of some buildings, which means it is not worth insulating them. Therefore, the plans foresee demolishing and rebuilding them – which should bring energy savings of up to 85%.

* from: Sustainable Brandenburg: "Implementing the vision of sustainable development" (April 2004) from the Council on Environment and Land Use



Harvesting in Harmony with Nature - the Garden

*“Sustainability means we have to produce everyday goods from our own soil. This includes food... This can be achieved by operating a closed-cycle and low-loss economy.”**

The ZEGG garden supplies the community and the seminar guests with fruit and vegetables for 6 months each year. The produce is harvested daily and comes straight into the kitchen, where it is prepared and served in the restaurant. So the meals on offer are cooked using seasonal ingredients that have been grown ecologically. Scraps are taken to the compost heap and come back into the garden. Directly experiencing this food cycle helps to feel connected to the land and it is also a reminder of how dependent we humans are on nature. The ZEGG community wants to increase this awareness among its guests and contribute to environmental education in this way.

The garden is slightly larger than 1 hectare (2.5 acres) and follows organic farming principles. No herbicides, fungicides or synthetic fertilisers are used. Instead, the gardeners use green fertilisers and crop rotation. In this way yields have steadily been increased over the years, even though the planting area has remained constant. Salads and flowers, vegetables such as carrots, leeks or kale, and various types of fruit are all thriving in the garden. The soil is normally very sandy in the Fläming region, but the accumulated efforts of the gardeners over the years in ZEGG means that the soil is now relatively rich and fertile. The garden is not a commercial enterprise. Instead it is a garden intended to be both practical and beautiful, reminding both residents and guests what it means to be at home on this planet.

Partnership with Nature - Permaculture and Biodiversity

*It is important to “retain natural biodiversity ... We need a sustainable way of farming the soil...”**

One of the ZEGG community’s aims is to work in partnership with nature. This includes expanding the habitats of animals and plants on the site and enabling humans and animals to coexist. Over the years, many animals have indeed made the ZEGG site their home: this includes birds, hedgehogs, martens, toads and squirrels as well as the occasional larger visitors, such as deer and wild boar. The first step in this direction was soil improvement by extensive mulching. This created a humus layer, which then began to self-regenerate. Then, as the soil became healthier, the higher-order creatures followed.

Soil improvement is one of the key permaculture approaches that the ZEGG community has been implementing on its site. Permaculture can be understood as “permanent agriculture”, creating sustainable, self-sustaining habitats. This includes the edible landscapes around ZEGG. A large variety of plants on the site supply guests and residents alike with fresh fruit. There are even apricots, peaches, grapes, kiwi fruit, mulberries and figs growing in sheltered areas. Bushes and trees combine to form a blossoming landscape: abundance and variety can be found all over the site, which was previously dominated by barren monocultures.

* from: Sustainable Brandenburg: “Implementing the vision of sustainable development” (April 2004) from the Council on Environment and Land Use



Missionaries, SS and Stasi – the History of the Site

The site on the Rosa-Luxemburg-Straße has a chequered and somewhat oppressive past. It was closely connected with the systematic injustice in both the National Socialist and GDR eras, and was at times hermetically sealed off from the outside world. The ZEGG community has researched the site history, collecting old photos, historical documents and other accounts. There is an exhibition about the site's history in the large seminar building. In its role as the current user, it feels responsible for providing information about the site's oft-eschewed history. In this way, it wants to help come to terms with the past in a wider sense.

Coming to terms with the past also includes the measures undertaken by the community with regard to landscaping and improving the ecology on the site. As the ZEGG community took over the site, it was surrounded with barbed wire fences. The vegetation was basically a show garden; many fruit trees from the site's initial years as an agricultural site had died, and wildlife was seldom to be seen. The site was itself a symbol of its past: grey and over-exploited. ZEGG has been actively working on the site's regeneration: the landscape is now home to a variety of plants and animals.

Hitler Youth and League of German Maidens

The site was first settled in 1919: missionaries who had returned from German South-West Africa at the end of the First World War founded an agricultural enterprise including horticulture and some farm animals. Mr Hoffmann was a supporter of National Socialism and transferred ownership of the site to the SS at the beginning of the 1930s. The horticultural business was then

discontinued in 1933. For the Olympics in 1936, the site was used for German military cavalry riders to do their equestrian training. After that, the site was used as a training camp for leaders in the Hitler Youth and League of German Maidens (National Socialist youth movements).

East German Espionage School

At the end of the war, the building that is now the ZEGG restaurant was used as a military hospital. In the 1950s, the East German trade union federation took over the property and used it as a training school for officials. At the beginning of the 1960s the site was taken over by the foreign intelligence service of the GDR (HVA). It was used as a training centre for reconnaissance abroad. The 'student spies' were not allowed to have contact outside the camp: the site was sealed off with barbed wire and guards patrolled with dogs. The school was under the direct command of the Head of Foreign Intelligence, Markus Wolf. After a top agent called Werner Stiller fled to the West and revealed the existence of the espionage school in 1988, it was decided to change the school's location and turn this site into a sanatorium.

However, the renovation work was still being carried out when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. The work came to a halt and different buildings were rented out to companies and individuals. These included the supermarket chain "Penny Markt", travelling merchants from West Germany, and former Stasi employees. ZEGG purchased the site in 1991, but it was another 7 years before it could take full possession of all the buildings.



Prof. Dr. Joachim Bauer



Dr. Scilla Elworthy



Prof. Dr. Bill Metcalf



Manitonquat



Sobonfu Somé

Prominent Opinions on ZEGG

“My experience of ZEGG from my first visit has always been of honest people genuinely trying to build a new society, in a way which is full of integrity. I am fully convinced that the community of ZEGG should be taken seriously as a positive endeavour to provide a non-materialist and ecological way of living.”

Dr. Scilla Elworthy
Director of Oxford Research Group

“Thank you for inviting me to ZEGG. I am very impressed with your commitment and passion. You are a wonderful example of communal living – a viable model for our planet. ZEGG combines the intellectual with the passionate and sensual in a way which I respect and admire.”

Prof. Dr. Bill Metcalf
Griffith University, Australia

“Let us keep up our connection, even when we go our separate ways. And never give up unconditional love!”

Jirina Prekop
Psychologist and Author

“Projects such as ZEGG are handing on the embers of an important fire: the knowledge that humans are made to be in community – to give and receive affection. I wish them every success on their path!”

Prof. Dr. Joachim Bauer
University Medical Center Freiburg

“As the plans for ZEGG to take over the former Stasi training site in Belzig were handed to me in 1991, I supported them although others voiced their concerns. At that time, I met interesting people in ZEGG who were trying to find new answers to the questions of our age. Even then, at the start of the 90s, we were talking about sustainable development – a topic that is now more relevant than ever.

So I have been keenly following their progress. Looking at them today, I can say the following: We made the right decision back then, to allow ZEGG to settle in Belzig. The region has benefited from positive initiatives originating in ZEGG.”

Roland Koch
District Administrator (Landrat),
Potsdam-Mittelmark District

“It was very inspiring to see the transformation that has taken place on a site saturated with the patterns of psychological violence and indoctrination: it has become a place for love and justice. We humans can find inspiration in what you have done, in your devotion to the site and its powers. And there is more than that: You have even made it possible for the heart of this countryside to beat once more.”

Marko Pogacnik
Geomancer, Slovenia



Construction Plans for the Near Future

I. Construction Measures within the ZEGG Energy Concept

An energy efficiency study was commissioned by ZEGG GmbH at the end of 2008. This enabled the actual energy consumption figures to be calculated for heating, hot water and electricity and proposals to be developed for increasing energy efficiency.

It was decided to implement the following measures within the coming years:

Reducing Heating Energy Needs through Thermal Insulation

In spite of a successful 40% reduction in heating energy consumption, the energy requirements for the buildings remain very high.

- The large **roof areas** on buildings 5 (Uni) and 21 (apartment block) are to be re-covered and insulated. It is also planned to install photovoltaic plants on the roofs. At the same time, the roof spaces will be converted into living space.

- Another plan is to restore the **heating pipes**. The old pipes are showing high energy losses. The restoration of the **district heating pipes** is planned for 2011/12.

A new district heating pipe was already laid in 2009, connecting building 35 (Red Villa) to the central woodchip-fired heating system. The previous oil-fired boiler could be taken out of service. A further pipe was installed in 2010.

Installation of Various Heating and Energy Plants

- By the summer of 2011, a new **woodchip-fired boiler**, an **exhaust gas heat exchanger** and a **log-fired boiler**

will be installed. Three combined heat and power plants were installed in the basement of the restaurant and kitchen building in autumn 2010.

- During 2011, a **solar roof** of 200 m² will be mounted on the new **woodchip storage hall**.

Funding

The total investment will be €450,000. All of the measures relating to the heating system (i.e. not the buildings) have been conceived in such a way as to qualify for capital investment subsidies and grants.

II. Buildings: Reconstruction and New Construction

The buildings on the ZEGG GmbH site serve both as accommodation for the seminar business guests and as private residences for tenants within the ZEGG community. Thermal insulation measures have been carried out in some of the buildings that are worth retaining. Further energy consumption savings could be achieved by tearing down the buildings that are not structurally sound and erecting new houses. These would be built according to the latest energy standards and using ecological construction materials. Some houses will be specifically geared towards older residents.

The basis and a precondition for all of the above construction work is the drawing up of a building plan (Bebauungsplan).

A dialogue has already begun with the relevant local planning and building control authorities in this regard.



1. Construction Plans: Seminar Business

1.1 New Construction: Organic Hotel

The hotel will have 16 rooms and 36 beds. It will be a low-energy building constructed from renewable resources and certified as an organic hotel. The ZEGG hotel will offer breakfast from certified organic ingredients. The building will also house the new reception area for seminar guests and a treatment room for use by natural health practitioners. There will also be special offers for cyclists travelling along the R1 European Bicycle Route. This hotel is both an appropriate extension of ZEGG's overall concept and a valuable addition to Belzig's tourism sector for travellers interested in healthy, ecologically sound holidays.

1.2 New Construction: Motel

In common with many of the site's old constructions, this existing seminar building is in bad condition and has an Eternit roof containing asbestos. A moderate amount of thermal insulation was applied several years ago. The plan is to replace it with a new purpose-built seminar building.

1.3. Attic Conversion in the 'University' (the largest seminar building)

The whole roof of the Uni building is in need of replacement. During this process, the roof insulation will be brought up to modern standards and a further attic in the eastern section will be prepared for conversion.

2. Construction Plans: Residential Areas

2.1 New Construction: Residential and Community Buildings

A new construction is planned comprising 3 residential units, each with 3 rooms, kitchen, bathroom and their own entrance. A further new building is also planned with accommodation for a larger residential group of 10-15 people.

2.2 Reconstruction / New Construction: Red Villa

Part of this building needs to be demolished and replaced. The design preserves the character and charm of the old building whilst fitting it out with modern thermal insulation and using ecological construction materials. At the same time, more residential space will be created within the existing building footprint.

2.3 Reconstruction: Children's House Main Building

A small residential group lives in this building, which serves as the primary location for the children staying in ZEGG during the larger festivals. The structure of the main part of the building is sound and will be retained, better insulated and adapted slightly. However, the wings of the building are in a desolate condition and will be demolished.

2.4 Attic Conversion: Apartment Block

A new roof is needed on the apartment block, which houses 7 apartments for smaller residential groups. During this re-roofing, thermal insulation will be added and other measures taken to convert it into further residential space.





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