

"The stone starts to talk"

School sponsorships for monuments

The Idea

The Monument Foundation would like to motivate young people to take responsibility for their cultural heritage.

The "Stone starts to talk" stands for a school project, in which the next generation is involved on a practical level with responsibility for the preservation of this heritage. Students take on the sponsorship for the monuments of their city, in order to help save them from imminent loss.

Of course, it would be much more lively and beautiful if the dedicated students introduced the project here personally with their special youthful charm. However, perhaps I will also succeed in transmitting something of the contagious commitment to you of the students and teachers for their "sponsored monuments".

Our sponsorship contribution - initiated 15 years ago by a small foundation and a very committed high school - would like to encourage more passionate environmental and monument conservationists and show that it is possible, even with few resources, but good ideas, great commitment and with special motivation, "to move mountains and to preserve monuments on site".

Goal of the project

With the integration of students in the responsibility for our cultural heritage, the next generation should perceive early on the spiritual and material meaning of monuments as an essential part of our history and our environment, and realise that art, culture and the environment take an important role in our society.

The historical legacy is not - as generally understood - a more or less undeserved gift, but also an order of the past generations to the following ones at least to preserve what has been created by them and to increase it as far as possible.

The students are motivated within the scope of the project to think about the history of the monuments, the current situation in the location, the problems of decay and destruction, their causes and possible solutions. They should search for their own ways and act practically, while they implement the newfound knowledge and recognise how worthwhile it is to deal with our environment rationally and with understanding.

So they are developing new abilities, opportunities and ideas and can release their own creative forces in different areas. From the beginning of the operation, the school and the foundation were sure that the students will understand within the scope of the school project, "The stone starts to talk", when we get involved with it.

Especially with the acquisition of sponsorships, the boys and girls develop their own responsibility through their intensive commitment. Through the path of the very personal, active creation of finances for the restoration of monuments, they learn the difficulties associated with financing urgently required measures. They also understand that you cannot always only shout simply for public funds.

For the young people, the dedication takes on a special experience value - also especially at this financial level. For students it is not natural to take over responsibility in this area.

Finally, it must be emphasised that, in addition to the educational effect, an important goal of the project is to save monuments from final loss, for which no money exists for their restoration in times of scarce resources, and also to motivate the citizens of the town to participate actively in this project.

The enthusiasm and contagious panache of young people is perfectly able to arouse further civic commitment.

Implementation of the project

I would like to present to you the implementation of the idea using the example of the Kaiser Heinrich Gymnasium in Bamberg.

In the meantime, six impressive monument sponsorships make clear the commitment of the students within the scope of the school operation in Bamberg.

The Rotenhan Marter, a small wayside memorial, started the project.

This was followed by the "Bamberg Stations of the Cross", founded in 1503. This precious sculpture is the oldest, completely preserved Stations of the Cross in Germany, which still stands as it was originally and in the original location.

The Kaiser (emperor) portal in the Michaelsberg monastery, the organ in the church of St Elisabeth and the St Catharine portal from the gardener quarter - were the next sponsorships.

At the moment the students are involved in the restoration of three historic fountains in the Michaelsberg monastery.

The activities of the students are focused on three points:

- the content and practical examination of the sponsorship projects
- the financing of the restoration of the monuments
- the motivation of the citizens of Bamberg for the commitment

Firstly, there is major importance in the content discussion in the humanities, in fields like art, history, geography, religion, German and Latin.

Educationally it is very successful that the project work is carried out in the class and multidisciplinary teaching, covering everything documented on the internet.

In this connection, Latin also suddenly gains an important role in practical use, for example in the source search, the translation of inscriptions and even while detecting restoration errors. This has actually happened in Bamberg.

In the natural sciences, the students deal with the interplay of nature and culture, with the causes of the destruction of monuments, with solutions for the avoidance of environmental damage, with restoration possibilities, with materials and technologies.

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Yes, even in mathematics there is an issue with the calculation of the step length of the Marschal of Raueneck who has donated the Bamberg Stations of the Cross. By this operation, the students find out that one of the reliefs must have been at a different location, which was also confirmed by the subsequent source search. Such an experience brings colour into the classroom and remains forever in the memory.

The practical discussion within the different subjects links what was learned in school with reality in an excellent manner.

Site inspections provide a tangible relationship between reality and what is taught.

The gardener quarter of Bamberg, for example, belongs closely to the overall "World heritage" ensemble. For the most part, it is largely an impressive natural monument. The meaning for the economy of the town - against the backdrop of the climate and soil conditions - and the professional life of the gardener bring new perspectives too.

The inspection of professional companies in the care of monuments - from the restoration company, and the sculptor's studio, up to the architect's office - and the cooperation with numerous institutions - like departments of the University, the regional authorities for care of monuments, the monument office of the town, libraries, churches, museums and old town associations - extends the horizon of the students.

Dealing with technologies and materials like plants, stone, clay, wood and restoration means are a special incentive for many students, and the practical support of the repair measures opens up exciting findings to the boys and girls.

The fund raising requires ideas, commitment and a lot of effort.

With concerts, performances, musicals, readings, raffles, flea markets, approved door to door collections, collections at school events, donations, prize money and proceeds on birthdays and anniversaries, the students of the Kaiser Heinrich Gymnasium have collected a large part of the money needed – since 2002 until now about 350.000 €.

It is impressive how intensely the boys and girls identify with the sponsor projects and how big their wealth of ideas is.

The students introduce their own highly qualified proposals, like for example the idea for a joint city guided tour on "Trees and buildings" with the Department of Monument preservation. Especially in the canon courts, the students discovered ancient, sometimes strange trees. The canons brought them from their crusades and travelling.

All these exciting, colourful activities attract large numbers of younger students also to take part repeatedly, so that we need not worry about the younger generation, because, in the meantime, some "monument conservationist" generations, of course, have already left the school with the High School certificate.

Another important goal in the context of the sponsorship is the impulse and motivation effect for civic commitment in the city of Bamberg.

This part of the project is realised through intensive public relations, like articles in the press, appearances on the internet and the presentation of the project at numerous opportunities. Prizes won as a result of the commitment are an important contribution to the financing, but also arouse the interest of the citizens.

Support from different institutions is also monitored and considered carefully and this fortunately has a contagious effect, and causes motivation for donations.

Here, the generous support from the "German Environmental foundation" - Osnabrück and the Oberfranken foundation - Bayreuth must firstly be named.

I mention the prizes and the often surprising pledges of support so emphatically because they are the consequence of the dedicated and inspiring work of the students and their teachers. Commitment really pays off. The students of the high school also learn this within the scope of the project.

A good idea came to the actors for the third project sponsored in Bamberg - the Kaiser portal in the Michaelsberg monastery. Until now, the foundation and school has formed a special party "Denkmalissimo" four times, a very successful operation.

Different crafts, specialised companies and scientific areas that have been closely related to monument conservation and the environment, are introduced and invited to provide information, but also to take part.

Stonemasons, stone and wood sculptors, restorers, plumbers, church painters, makers of musical instruments, geologists, biologists and architects, the offices for historical monuments, the World Heritage centre and the Department for Monument conservation are represented.

It is a unique opportunity for interested lay people to get closer to the care of monuments with all its facets. Musical contributions of the students, theatres and concerts frame the practice so that almost the entire school is involved and therefore supports the active Monument team - a school project precisely. A low entry fee, the sale of donated vegetables from the gardener's quarter in Bamberg and of treats for the stomach - contributions of the parents - provide the means for the restoration of the sponsored monuments.

These four events have brought about 10.000 euros and infinitely more enthusiasm, joy and recognition from all sides.

With Denkmalissimo, Kaiser Heinrich Gymnasium and the Monument Foundation hope to arouse in the citizens a better understanding for historical monuments as important witnesses of our history and as part of our environment. A historically grown habitat means a piece of native country and quality of life, and it is important that the citizens and especially also the next generation recognise that preservation and care of the environment with its monuments is not possible without insight, effort and personal commitment.

Looking into the future The school project run for fifteen years and will be continued, because for lasting success there must be time to do the work. Many short-term operations that are initiated according to the principle of the "Sandbox" fall too quickly into oblivion.

The educational idea of this school project can be implemented and anchored in the consciousness of the students only with long-term effect. Therefore, virtues like, courage, determination, motivational ability, steadfastness and persuasive power, in addition to all campaigns, initiatives and operations, are of the utmost importance for the implementation of a successful project that will have a lasting effect.

Against this background, the Monument foundation has initiated a travelling exhibition to support the idea of good, implementable school sponsorships for monuments also in other cities. The exhibition was also shown with great success and a lot of attention in the Bavarian Parliament in Munich.

If I have to say in the end where the strength of this project lies, so that it stands out from similar ideas, then I would like to formulate an important aspect:

All ever-so-perfectly developed teaching concepts on the subject of monument conservation and all the theoretical plans, proposals and training cannot replace intensive, personal contacts and the proximity to the participants - the school and the monuments.

Here, the Monument foundation can introduce its special strengths with the project "The stone starts to talk":

The coordination of basic tasks by the foundation, the takeover of all bureaucratic work, the implementation of submission of applications and follow-up work, such as reports, press relations, contacts with all involved areas, the organisation of events, the incorporation of available networks and the repeated provision of new ideas and initiatives.

Another important task of the foundation is the specific creation of open areas for the participating teachers, so that they can concentrate within the scope of the school project upon their role - the teaching work and the motivation of the students.

Encouragement, praise for the students and also for the teachers are an inspiring addition to all the contributions that are introduced by the foundation through intense personal commitment. In addition, above all there are also recognition for the not self-evident volunteer commitment of young people in the area of the school and the care of monuments, because this kind of recognition motivates and inspires.

That's why it is exceptionally important to create platforms for the dedicated youngsters, where they can introduce their work. The participation at international congresses is to be mentioned, e.g. at the Marienthal monastery in Saxony organized by the German Environment foundation, in Berlin at the European congress of Soroptimist International, in the Bamberg Sparkasse bank, in Bayreuth at the "Stifterland Bayern" (event of all foundations in Bavaria), in the Munich parliament, the visit of the monument fair in Leipzig and also with "Denkmalissimo" in the city of Bamberg.

The highlight was certainly participating in the "Week of the Environment" in the Bellevue Berlin castle - the residence of the German President - as the school monument sponsorship of the Kaiser Heinrich Gymnasium and the foundation was selected from more than 400 applications as one of the 150 best innovative projects, a high recognition for the joint commitment.

For the Monument foundation I can joyfully discover that it is a good feeling to have brought "the stone not only to talk" but also "to set it in motion".

I hope that I have been able to pass on to you the idea of the sponsorships for monuments convincingly, as a possible contribution to emphasise the meaning of World heritage and the environment in which we live, and to link this thought with the important aspects of the cultural education of young people, the saving of historical monuments and the bonding of generations in joint responsibility for the cultural heritage.

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