

# The evening before

Dominique Peck 2018

## COLUMN A

Compared to the housing construction projects, the community building project is very small. This is an advantage when it comes to buying building materials, as the developer simply orders a little more than is needed for the larger construction site. It is equally a disadvantage, because the smaller project only receives secondary attention from the project management, which leads to numerous small mistakes occurring in the process organization that directly impact on the construction process and site. This page presents a descriptive account of what happened during the two evenings prior to the kickoff of the project days (the preliminary exercise).

## ABOUT COLUMN A

The three members of On/Off arrive at my home the Sunday before the Summer School Kickoff on the following Tuesday. One of them will sleep on my couch, another one on my colleague's couch and the third will stay directly at the construction site.

A few weeks ago, we met in my apartment to discuss the concept of the workshop leader's performance profile. On/Off are former employees of the Berlin office Raumlabor. While planning the Summer School, my colleagues and myself from the Urban Design teaching and research program who are responsible for process control, discussed which offices to select so that the extensive range of services would be responsibly dealt with by the future workshop management. When we were looking for suitable offices, the team already knew that around 60 people would participate in the Summer School, of which 40% were refugees, 40% international students, 10% neighbors and 10% trade students of the *Gewerbeschule Bautechnik G19* (industrial school). The task for the workshop leader would be to develop, design, partially test and produce the minimal structure of the project days, which was to take place on 8 and 9 September 2017.

One of the three On/Off employees brought his girlfriend to our first meeting in my living room. The couple was on vacation in Hamburg for one day and agreed to devote an hour to the meeting. I presented the lead sheet of the project days, explained the motif, the conception, the actors and their role and individual core concepts such as minimal structure, storage of things and the rules of

the project days. The On/Off employee could easily follow everything and noted down initial questions and sketches for later consultation with his colleagues about whether they could and would like to work in this way. Finally, I submitted the budget proposal. We were negotiating the payment of the travel costs, as all three employees would come from different projects in different countries and had to travel directly to the Summer School and then return to the projects afterwards. A few days after the first meeting, we were able to formalize On/Off's positive response to our offer in the form of a procurement contract signed by the university. In addition, On/Off provided a list of materials and tools, which we coordinated with the client and ordered from the building materials trade store.

Back to Sunday: We all go to an Asian restaurant opposite the *Hamburger Messehallen* for dinner. Afterwards we discuss the course of the coming days and the previous project genesis over some beers. Back at my place, I fold down the couch, fetch the sheets from the cupboard, provide a bottle of water, and say good night to one of the three employees.

The next day we take the subway to HafenCity University. I just bring everyone to the office and introduce Rebecca Wall and Marius Töpfer, our tutors, to the On/Off representatives. Rebecca and I make our way to a nearby car rental station, where we pick up a Mercedes transporter and a slightly larger Iveco transporter. We drive back to the university and park in front of the underground car park. From here on our paths separate. Rebecca and Marius drive to the Hamburg material administration and pick up the props and furniture for the storage of things and the project days. I drive with the On/Off Team in the direction of Poppenbütteler Berg. After 40 minutes we arrive on site and are amazed at the size of the 400m<sup>2</sup> party tent in which the project days will take place. We take over the party tent and the office, accommodation, toilets and shower containers. The interior of the kitchen container arrives late. The tools will be delivered tomorrow. The fuse box will cause problems. When the showers are running, the fuse blows. Probably we will have to take cold showers. The project manager of f & w fördern und wohnen offers to cover hotel rooms for us. We think about this briefly but reject the offer due to tomorrow's kickoff of the workshop. We plan to welcome 60 people with breakfast from 9.00 a.m. and have to buy groceries and set up before. So we stay in the container village and search for a restaurant in the neighborhood. Turns out this is not so easy in Poppenbüttel. Since we don't want to go to Schweinske or to a pizzeria, we walk to the only Syrian restaurant in the district. The shop looks like an upscale restaurant in the outskirts of the city. Everything is furnished with high-quality materials from the DIY store. People wear suits, polo shirts, dresses with leather jackets on top. Not the best choice, but the employee greets us very friendly. She has a piercing on her left

eyebrow and is not from Syria, but somewhere in Eastern Europe. She notices that we are not from here and asks us the obligatory question “Where are you from?” handing over the menus. Canada, Czech Republic, Austria, three times Germany, we work here on the construction site of the planned refugee accommodation. “Ok, nice to have you”. We all order the cheapest dish with 14€ on the menu, Ratatouille with couscous and a bottle of sparkling water. The tiny dish is eaten in about five minutes yet tastes great. We pay only a little later because we want to get some beer and something else to eat from the discounter Penny. Equipped with rolls, drinks and Toffifee we sit in the atrium of the container village on the benches we kept from the first Summer School and finish the last things for tomorrow. The On/Offs write starchitect names on the doors of the containers. The containers are each equipped with three beds. They’re complete with two windows, a door, a small entrance zone, metal beds with mattresses, cushions and bed covers. The light doesn't work. The heating does not work. We don't have electricity for the mobile router. The fuse is out and it always jumps out as soon as we put it back in. Ok, that doesn't matter. Our project starts tomorrow. I quickly walk into the Rem Koolhaas container, go to bed and get up at 6:30.



The first participants arrive on time with the technician for the fuse box. Photo: Dominique Peck, 5.9.2017, CC BY-SA 4.0