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# Water tower quenches cultural thirst



Transforming a water tower into a collaborative artist and event space and an urban and cultural laboratory.



Participatory Governance



Adaptive Reuse



## Oberhausen



212,679



## Challenge

Due to the industrial decline of the Ruhr area, Oberhausen's main station lost its importance and its 33 meter high water tower lost its function. The tower is under monument protection and presents an important landmark with which the inhabitants of Oberhausen identify. Due to its construction, containing two concrete water tanks in the upper section, the building could not easily be reused and was partly vacant.



## Solution

To support the transformation of the central station area and make the water tower accessible to the public, the artists' collective kitev came up with the idea to restore the protected building envelope of the tower to its original state and transform the three levels beneath the water tanks on the sixth floor into space for artistic and creative work dedicated to temporary and projects related activities in the region. This began in 2006.



## How ?

- 1** Idea from the cultural scene: Artists' collective kitev.
- 2** Working with the city: After long negotiations, the German railway company signed a 20-year rent-free contract on the condition that the space is used for artistic activities.
- 3** Acquisition of funding from multiple sources: Public funding from state and city level and resources of the arts collective from sponsoring, foundations and 'brain and muscle' contributions.
- 4** Teamwork and involving volunteers in the planning and construction phase. Volunteers helped with brain and muscle power. To build the sense of community, a fixed ritual with all participants was the daily lunch in the tower.
- 5** Continuation of the open and collaborative approach in the use phase.

### CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACTION

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## Budget/Financing

€680,000

80%

from federal state regional programme "Take initiative"

10%

from city of Oberhausen

+ 10%

from kitev sponsoring (foundations and construction companies) and its own contributions (brain and muscle power).

## Management

- Artists' collective kitev as key initiator, planner, organisator, team worker, manager of the site.
- German railway company as owner signing a 20 year rent-free contract for kitev.
- Federal state funding 80% of the budget through the 'Take initiative' programme
- City of Oberhausen, funding 10% of the budget and supporting the initiative with their employees.
- kitev members, friendly colleagues and citizens as volunteers supporting the project with their own contributions and man power.
- Foundations and construction companies sponsoring construction materials.
- Monument authority accompanying the restoration of the tower.



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## Transferability

- Active initiator, who can inspire people and organisations for a hands-on project.
- Goodwill cooperation between a cultural initiative, the city and its administration, owner of the site and the region to redevelop a landmark in the city centre for the common good.
- Good teamwork among the participants through constant personal contact and joint actions.
- The willingness to reuse cultural heritage for public purposes and to involve interested citizens and cultural workers in the process to become creators themselves.
- Have passion and patience throughout, and constant dialogue, sharing successes that others can learn from.



## Links

- kitev collective website and Facebook page: <https://kitev.de/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/kitev.de/>
- Route of industrial culture in the Ruhr region: <https://www.route-industriekultur.ruhr/>
- Video of the opening: <https://vimeo.com/78331713>



## Impact

The project, through its openness to civic participation, has allowed people to bond and identify strongly with the historical building through very personal experiences.

The involvement of volunteers in the planning and construction phase has created a community. Since the opening of the water tower in 2013, it has become the nucleus for artistic action and a networking point for local, regional and international cooperation projects i.e. New Ideas for Old Buildings, Refugees' Kitchen, Free University of Oberhausen.



## Contacts

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