

The Solarcafé – Philosophy and Event Location

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Oil is running short, the nuclear power phase-out has been decided, renewable energies and along them energy from the sun, are advancing fast. More and more people know that “solar” refers to the sun, that solar energy comes from the sun and that we can use it. Against this background, the Solar Lifestyle GmbH Berlin has developed a philosophy and specific products that bear names such as Solarcafé, Solarobelisk, Solar Coffee Shop and Solar Lifestyle. What is behind all this? And how can you contribute to ease the big problems of this world?

First, this text will present the Solarcafé philosophy and the Solarcafé as a place where people experience and apprehend the solar world. Secondly, some of the products and projects developed by the Solar Lifestyle GmbH according to this philosophy will be described – products and projects which can be part of the event location Solarcafé or which can be used for an independent PR activity: the Icy Rider, the talking litter bin and the Solarobelisk.

The Solarcafé® Philosophy

With the “Solarcafé” philosophy, energy-efficient technologies have been implemented into an event catering, representing an interdisciplinary concept for environmental communication. This philosophy allows grasping the atmosphere of the Agenda-21 concept of “sustainable development” and at the same time communicates it as a “solar lifestyle”, being environmentally and socially compatible and drawing upon renewable energies. That is why energy and the dealing with resources take centre stage at the Solarcafé. Even the café’s menu has been optimized with regard to this. The cooking follows the slow food idea and primarily offers food of regional and organic production. Solarcafé stands for living sustainable development and for communicating the chances of a sustainable life style, as well as converting trendsetting ideas into exemplary products. This is the reason why the Solar Lifestyle GmbH currently also sponsors a book project that discusses different life style

aspects from the perspective of sustainability (Editors: Sepp Fiedler and Andreas Eickelkamp)

There are many ways of living one's life. But most contemporary consumer life styles end at the frontiers set by resource availability. The perspective that if the rich of this world raid all available resources like grasshoppers, no space remains for a worldwide, democratic development is only consequential. The structures to be found in Western society today are not suitable to support self-confident citizens who can put sustainable models of the future into action themselves. It seems to be necessary to establish ways totally different to those currently propagated in all areas of social cohabitation. With the ways we handle resources and energy, many erroneous trends can be demonstrated. If the advertising industry sets today's trends, then this industry should at least be provided with the necessary information and adequate equipment to do so. And if consumers are unable to decide what is beneficial for their future and what is not, than the respective input is also lacking. Who shall wage the wars about resources which will finally result as logical consequence of currently dominating politics? It is absolutely necessary to put living examples and stumbling blocks into the world. Or in the words of the German poet Günter Eich (1907-1972): Be awkward, be sand, not oil in the works of the world!

The Solarcafé as Event Location

If it is possible to boil coffee water with a sun collector, then the sun might also be able to do even more. Thus it stands to reason to operate a café with solar power completely. A Café Solar or, as it were, a Solarcafé, is an easily understandable solar world for old and young, an ever growing puzzle around the topic of energy and across all areas of life. In the world of the Solarcafé one stumbles upon curiosities such as talking litter bins, rolling and solar-powered freezers (Icy Rider) or a Solarobelisk (see below). These solar objects are in themselves original and must-sees and moreover, pieces of the puzzle called Solarcafé. Together they provide a mostly cheerful insight into how versatile handling energy is and how energy takes part in our life. At the same time, many concepts for alternative business models have emerged from these solar objects. Thus a win-win situation results between suppliers and visitors of the Solarcafé as well as a PR platform that does not rely upon public funding. With the modules Solar Coffee Shop, Icy Rider and Solar Island System a theme park can be wonderfully implemented under the roof of a low-energy house that additionally provides for the physical well-being.

The joint root of all modules is the idea for a new energy culture that is supposed to accelerate a reversal away from oil, coal and nuclear power. These practical examples encourage joining in and designing projects of one's own, involving and putting to test all aspects of life under real conditions.

The idea for the Solarcafé emerged from experiences with public relations work in the area of energy in the 80s, with the big conventional energy corporations on one side and the population's comparatively inadequate information situation on alternative energy on the other. At that time, technicians and idealists dominated the solar industry and did not see the necessity to develop their own PR and marketing. The inadequate financial situation of small businesses and the belief that the good will prevail were characteristic for this situation.

The term "Solarcafé" was introduced by Sepp Fiedler in 1992. Since 1995, it is a registered trademark. Today, organic food and fair trade coffee without nuclear energy at the foot of the Fujiyama as well as under the Californian sun can be found under this name. There is a worldwide interest in picking up on this idea. With the trademark registered in Europe, the Solar Lifestyle GmbH and the Solarcafé GbR as rights holders have influence on deciding what is originating from the name "Solarcafé" and how a licence holder and a cooperative model or franchise system will develop. Under the trademark Solarcafé®, a commercial basis to serve a better acceptance of alternative social developments is being created. The Solar Lifestyle GmbH offers developments of the Solarcafé as event location in line with the following.

The Solar Coffee Shop

For the time being, the event location Solarcafé is the last development stage of the Solarcafé philosophy that started with the Solar Coffee Shop. The mobile Solar Coffee Shop represents a miniature street café with a sun collector that on sunny days delivers enough energy to boil 1 litre of coffee or tea water every 5 to 10 minutes. Cool drinks, ice cream and other refreshments are available from the solar-powered cool box or solar freezer. The Solar Coffee Shop can be easily transported and set up everywhere, for instance at street or environment fairs, at exhibitions and trade fairs. The Solar Coffee Shop is suitable even for classes and educational purposes and can be purchased as construction set or be rented. In 1995, the Solarcafé idea and the Solar Coffee Shop have been awarded the Berlin environment prize. Since 1991, a series of two dozens Solar Coffee Shops convince people of the

use of solar power with public appeal at hundreds of events between Flensburg and Vienna.

The Solar Island System

The Solar Island System is an information kiosk and mobile internet café and thus a supply station for leisure and tourism. It is based on a standard ISO container; its development was funded as part of the project agency Zukunftsfähiges Berlin (Sustainable Berlin) with means from the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin (German Lottery Foundation Berlin). Here as well, the energy for power, heating and cooling is obtained from the sun. The grid-independent island system is perfect for open air festivals, sports, music or other events and publicity campaigns. It is an alternative on occasions where there is no access to the common power grid.

The Solarcafé in the Bio-Solar-House

The farewell to oil and nuclear power should be heralded with a drink in the Solarcafé. Thus the Solar Lifestyle GmbH is constantly on the lookout for free urban and rural spaces and environments that can be used for respective experiments. For 10 years, the Deutsche Technikmuseum Berlin (German Technology Museum Berlin) represents such a test environment for thought-provoking impulses regarding energy.

Thought-provoking impulses that communicate energy as not only being, as often assumed something to do with car driving, heating and light. Energy is behind every even minor daily action. This key function, for instance, explains the wild card position of the oil industry. The question is whether today the readiness to learn from mistakes and to sometimes do without the joy of driving already exists, or whether we take our chances of a foreseeable fight over the distribution of energy reserves. Whoever wishes to solve the energy question – including predominantly the handling of oil, gas and coal - in the long run, can at the same time contribute to permanently securing democracy and peace. Now, where there is still room for manoeuvre, we have to find the courage to act. Act in the sense of quality not quantity, of course. Intelligent services are required instead of producing more and more even cheaper products. Our neighbours will provide us with all sorts of junk and run riot in their growth delusion when doing so. After the party, there won't be much more to do than what we should quickly practice in Western Europe. The responsibility and the consequences of personal actions have to be clearly

discernible; otherwise the avowed objective “sustainable development” will not happen. A truly gigantic task lies ahead of us.

Back to the Deutsche Technikmuseum, where during the last years the Solar Island System has been seasonally operative in the museum park. The experiences of many years will now be incorporated into a permanent Solarcafé as a platform to communicate energy and resource perspectives. It will look like this: crystalline solar cell facade elements will submerge the room in arabesque light patterns, generating power at the same time. Light directing systems (heliostats) provide good day light supply and supplement the electric lighting. Cooking is done using gas; hot water is coming from a sun collector. The generous conservatory is heated with a wood heating boiler, and a solar-supported refrigerating machine can supply welcome coolness on hot summer days.

The Solarcafé ought to act as a kind of model house and be a place for exhibitions, round-table talks, music, readings and fringe theatre. It should become a marketing platform for sustainable products and not least a popular meeting point. The Bio Solar House of the Becher GmbH, St. Alban, serves as a basis for a Solarcafé in the Deutsche Technikmuseum Berlin. The interior design concept was developed in the thesis of Friederike Klesper at the University of Applied Sciences for Design and Media in Hanover. She refers to the pedagogue and philosopher Hugo Kükelhaus (1900-1984), who developed the baseline of an “organic-logical” architecture, oriented towards the needs of the human senses and the human organism. The Eco Solar House is perfectly suited for the Solarcafé, since it abstains from unnecessary technology and thus has low operational costs. Of course, the Solarcafé concept can alternatively be implemented in comparative buildings of solar architecture. One such example is the Solarcafé in Kirchzarten near Freiburg, designed by the architect Roland Rombach, which since 2000 is used by the company Sunways AG, Konstanz, as a reference object for their transparent power solar cells. It does not make much sense indeed to plan a Solarcafé in an old building not modernised with regard to energy saving. But after successful equipment with energy-saving building services etc., there is nothing in the way any longer. Respective arrangements for a location can be honoured by the Solarcafé GbR with the licensed certificate Solarcafé .

Public Relations Components

As mentioned above, different products find their place within and around the Solarcafé that can also be used for separate PR measures: the Icy Rider, the talking and luminescent litter bin and the Solarobelisk.

The Icy Rider – Ice Cream on Wheels

The Icy Rider hits the road in the vicinity of the Solarcafé. What at first glance seems like a rickshaw, at a closer look becomes an energy-independent event vehicle with a roof made out of solar cells. The collected solar energy powers a chest freezer. Thus the Icy Rider becomes a mobile ice cream and cocktail bar. The modern design aluminium-steel construction is moved by pedalling. The Icy Rider attracts attention and is an attractive info bike for fair trade or open air events or street and sports fairs. Since 1999, the rolling ice cream and cocktail bar operates as enercity® Icy Rider of the municipal utilities in Hanover. The Munich equivalent is called Solar Eisradl and is used there at different events since 2001.

The Talking Litter Bin – Motivating Litter Disposal

In public street life, these friendly litter bins thank you for everything you “commit” to them. Or they sing a song or present the answer to a prize question. Binning becomes an event and motivation for a targeted disposal. And at night, the well-lit opening significantly increases hit rates. All functions are solar-powered, making installation no trouble at all – additional power supply is not required.

The talking litter bin is a cooperation between Solar Lifestyle GmbH and the Berliner Stadtreinigungsbetriebe (Berlin Municipal Waste Management). The idea for the talking litter bin was developed by Solar Lifestyle during work on the Icy Rider. For it is only a short way from ice cream purchase to ice cream wrapping disposal. And if the litter bin returns a friendly “Thank you”, Solar Lifestyle’s goal to give environmentally friendly products an appealing note has been achieved.

The waste bin becomes an active means of communication with a high potential for public attention and acceptance. Its technical possibilities make it a multifunctional tool of committed public relations for a clean city. CNN honoured this idea for environmental protection with a feature broadcasted worldwide. Apart from Berlin, the talking litter bins of Solar Lifestyle GmbH can also be found in Stockholm and Paris.

The idea of a talking litter bin is congenial and willingly copied. Sympathy is minimised, however, once all too inept advertising takes centre stage. The company Starlight GmbH, Speyer, has picked up on the idea and now offers litter bins for free, financed by advertising. The slogans from the litter promote this or that company and annoy with their intrusive way. If anything, this provokes a quite contrary effect.

The Solarobelisk

The Solarobelisk is a solar-powered, five meter high multimedia sculpture out of high-quality steel and glass. By the integration of light and a sound installation, renewable energies are turned into a sensual experience. The Solarobelisk is illuminated inside, has a granite foundation and is surrounded by a bench. On the backside, a display shows the current solarisation energy and gives information on the location and, for instance, on the results of climate change.

Surrounded by a bench in the same way as village lime-trees of former times, the solar obelisk qualifies as attractive meeting and information point. The Solarobelisk can be understood as a monument to the responsible handling of our planet's natural resources. With this in mind, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development have commissioned the Solar Lifestyle GmbH to realise a respective object – and the Solarobelisk emerged. The Solarobelisk was presented to the public for the first time on the occasion of the international conference for renewable energies „renewables“ 2004 in Bonn, as a kind of landmark in front of the Bundeshaus. The sculpture can be set up permanently as innovative city accessory or temporarily installed on fairs or events – possibilities for usage and design are manifold.

Since September 2004, a glass Solarobelisk resides on the Sharp premises in Hamburg. Sharp Electronics Europe supports the project financially and is manufacturer of the half-transparent thin layer solar modules used on the Solarobelisk. Since December 2005, another Solarobelisk can be found at the Kulturforum in Berlin and a third one could be seen at the regional garden show Saxony-Anhalt 2006 in Wernigerode. Other locations of the altogether five obelisks have been the federal garden show 2005 in Munich, the Wissenschafts- und Wirtschaftsstandort Berlin-Adlershof (WISTA, Science and Economy Site), the solar construction exhibition Hamburg and the Hanover fair. In the course of 2006, the Solarobelisks will be linked via the internet, so that passersby can contact each other at the different locations.

Back to the Solarcafé: in the following, three events are presented where the Solarcafé has already been in operation successfully.

The Solarcafé at the Expo 2000 in Hanover

Man-Nature-Technology: this was the slogan for the 153 days of the world exhibition Expo 2000 in Hanover. Making sustainability the topic of Solar Lifestyle's Expo contribution suggested itself. With the Solarcafé, the Solar Lifestyle GmbH has practised a piece of sustainable development in the children's and youth's platform "Big Tipi". It goes without saying that

organic coffee was brewed with solar power and ice cream was frozen by the Icy Rider. Stew was cooked with a solar cooker.

Youths and adults do engage in unusual things. Motivation to try something out seems to be important to come from others, to satisfy one's curiosity and to be galvanised into action. Technical connections can be better communicated through learning by doing and from person to person. The Solarcafé converts this insight. Playfully, without pedagogics and class atmosphere, know-how got across through practical exercises. Take a simple action such as making coffee, for instance: if half of the coffee is made with solar power, with an exemplary 5,000 litres of coffee (total brewed in the Big Tipi at the Expo), this results in saving 1,500 kWh. Project this and it gets dizzying: according to statistics, every German drinks 160 litres of coffee each year. With half of this coffee brewed with solar power, around 3,8 billion kWh could be saved – corresponding to 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide that our atmosphere would be saved from.

In front of the Big Tipi, additional products were presented, such as a silent lawnmower robot that neither pollutes the air with emissions nor needs a power cable to be connected to the power grid. Solar energy is the driving and “cutting” force. Let the sun mow the lawn! And also spotlight the price list of the Solarcafé, instead of bulbs. But where does the sun shine from the North the whole day? – Only in places to which a heliostat directs the sunbeams. Everywhere at the Expo, ice cream was sold from energy devouring freezers, but the enercity Icy Rider, the Solar Lifestyle development for the municipal facilities of Hanover, did the same job with only a fraction of the energy. In the Big Tipi, even frothing milk was done with solar power and the SoLait. Nowhere else on the Expo premises could visitors marvel at technical innovation in day-to-day use and in line with the Expo’s main idea.

The Café Solar at the renewables 04

An international audience experienced the Solarcafé idea at the renewables 2004 in Bonn. The Bundesverband Solarindustrie (BSI, German Association Solar Industry) and the Unternehmensvereinigung Solarwirtschaft (UVS) implemented the “Café Solar” together with the Solar Lifestyle GmbH and the agency Gröschel-Geheebe. With organic catering and energy from the sun, the participants of this world conference were presented with the possibilities of energy and resource effectiveness. The Café Solar of the renewables 2004 in Bonn is a temporary building and can be operated as event location everywhere.

The Youth Fair “respect” 2006

March 2006 saw the Solarcafé team at the youth fair “respect” in Duisburg. The host Aktion Mensch counted on the Berlin team’s know-how for a solar world. Apart from the coffee, the main objective was to convey background knowledge. Moreover, the climate detective was with them. As presenter and talk master he brought the topics climate change and energy home to the audience playfully. The climate detective could proof with a climate quiz and solar experiments, that the topic energy hunger and climate change – controversial also for young people – can be staged excitingly.

Conclusion and Outlook

The experience from all these events is being introduced into current projects to thus support a solar lifestyle – a lifestyle of sustained comfort. It is not big multi-media dreams that are conveyed but understandable components for a solar future.

The Expo 2000, the renewables 2004 or the respect 2006 have been good practice for Solar Lifestyle performances, which the products and the philosophy of the Solar Lifestyle GmbH have passed with flying colours. Also, the strategy of living examples instead of the usual, hollow PR hype does not depend on public funding, as is otherwise common in environmental communications. Events of all sizes, PR events and company events, museums and exhibitions, but also operators of public spaces and parks are well equipped with it to integrate solar lifestyle.

After many years of work with the topics of energy and sustainable development, it can be stated, that in this area public relations with event character are effective means to make connections comprehensible that are sometimes only understandable with some difficulty. With the demand of so far rather uninterested groups growing, an increasing attention for these social challenges can be discerned. Green everyday life seems to have left the niche already.