

# FLUSSBAD BERLIN



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# Imprint

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Flussbad Berlin Association



From left to right: Lisa Blum, Sylvia Metz, Barbara Schindler, Susanne Bernstein, Kai Dolata, Jan Edler, Tim Edler

# Editorial

The Flussbad Berlin project is part of a worldwide movement committed to making clean rivers accessible to the inhabitants of growing urban environments. For Germany's capital city, this means a clean Spree Canal for Berliners and visitors alike.

First conceived in 1998 by the artists' group known as realities:united, the Flussbad has gone on to win the prestigious Holcim Award for sustainable development twice. Today, the project is supported by a strong association, and in 2014, it was awarded considerable funding from Germany's federal government and the Berlin Senate as part of the „National Urban Development Project“ programme. From the very beginning, the entire Flussbad team has worked to turn this excellent and obvious idea into a reality.

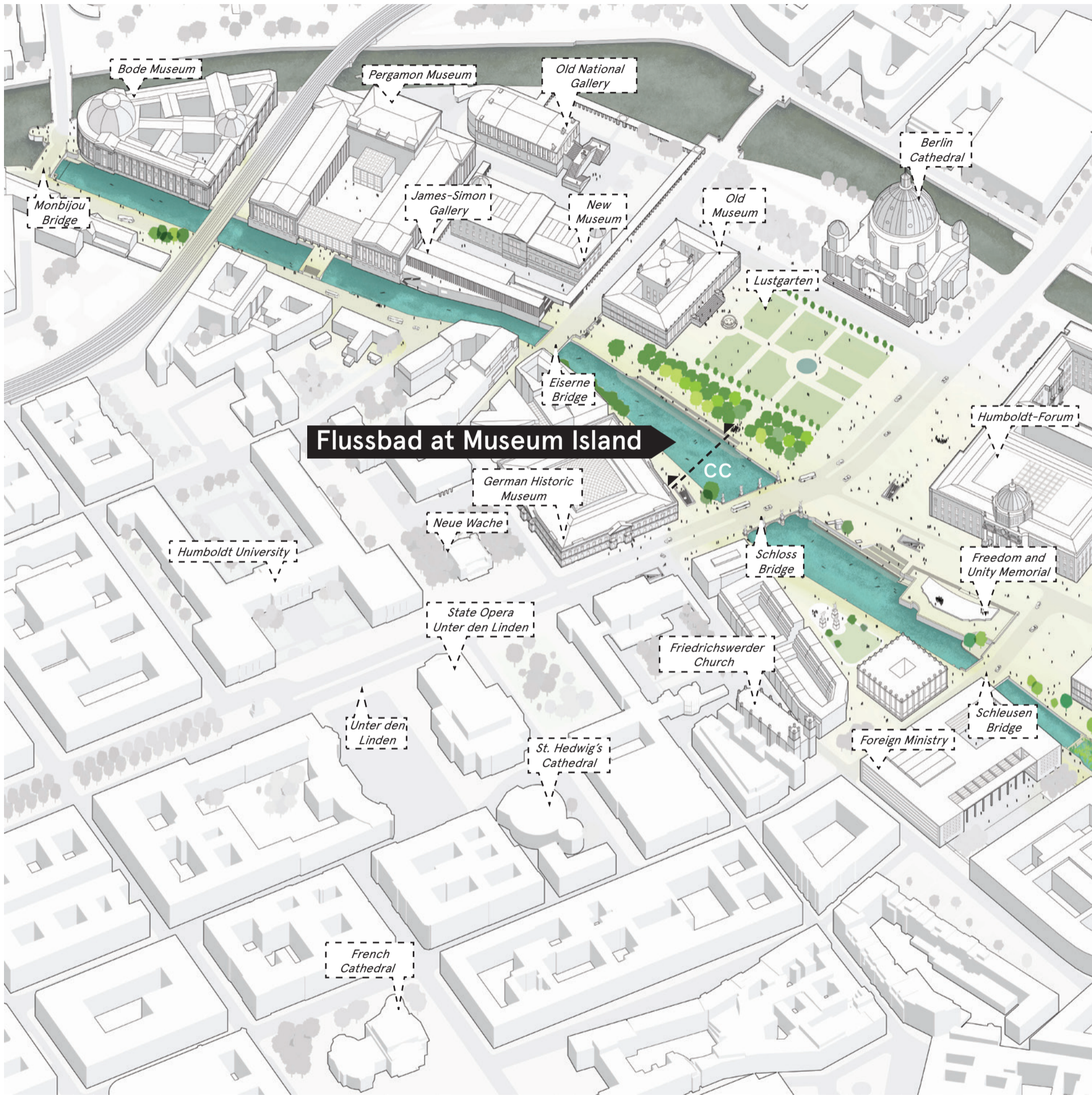
This is our first annual review. Our goal is to provide you with an overview of the Flussbad idea including everything that has been achieved so far. In this issue, Tim Edler from realities:united reports on the concept and the progress of the project. Former Federal Minister Klaus Töpfer talks to us about the Flussbad as a concrete utopia in a liveable city of the future. In her engaging essay, Sophie Zeitz convinces us of how wonderful it is to swim under the bridges near the Pergamon Museum.

And for those of you interested in finding out where the pollution in the Spree comes from and how we can truly get the river clean, the two contributions from water specialist Heiko Sieker will show you the way.

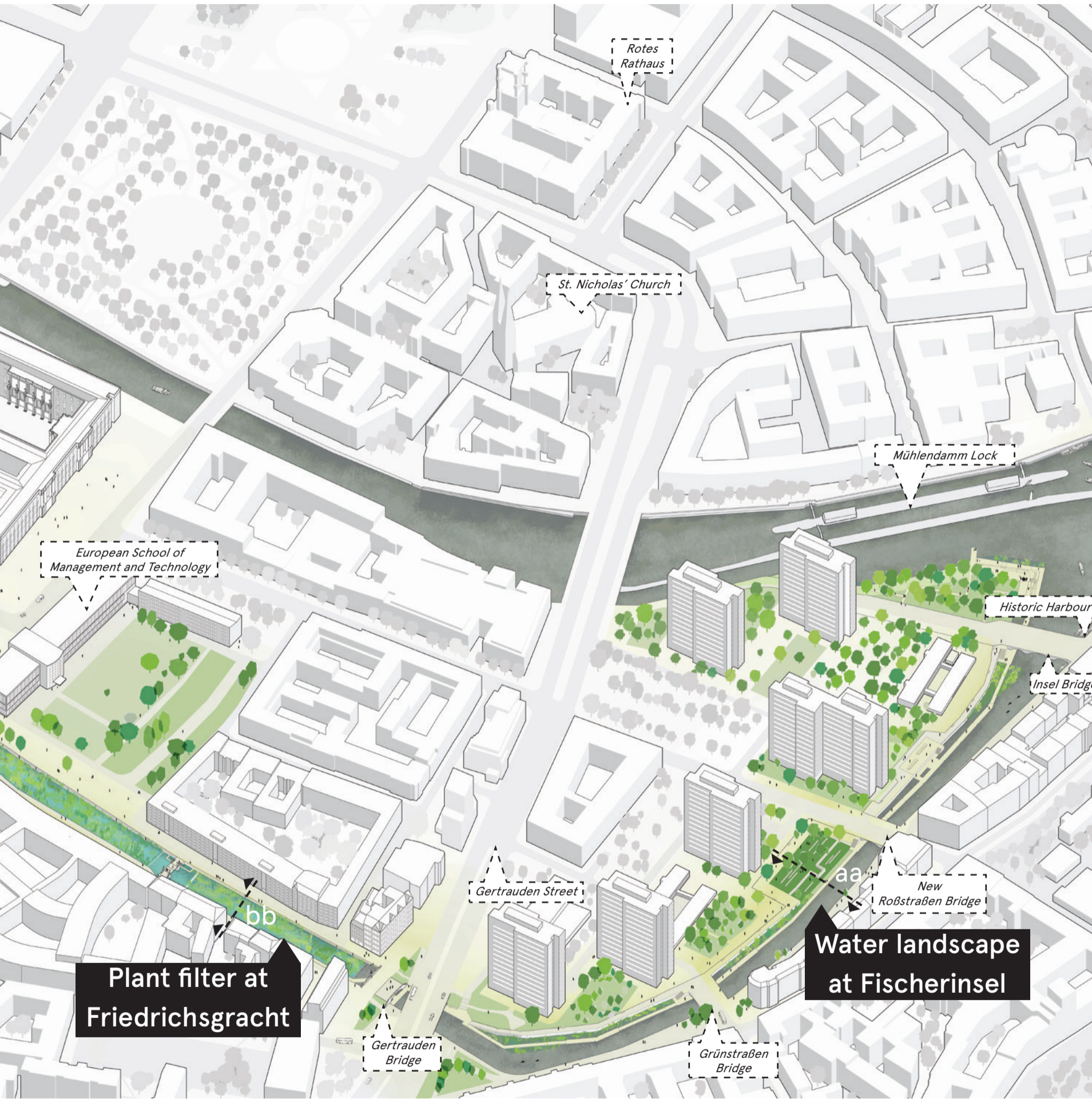
In addition to the voices of many important supporters and association members, the architects Louisa Hutton and Arno Brandhuber also make a contribution to this issue. Plus, the images of the project and of the „1st Flussbad Cup 2015“ show how the Spree Canal – which has enjoyed so many different uses throughout its history – could once again become a lifeline in the city. And, hopefully, these images will also foster enthusiasm and a desire to support our project.

We wish you a pleasant reading experience and hope this annual review succeeds in arousing your interest in the Flussbad even more. Indeed, the path to actually implementing the Flussbad project is long, and we will only succeed if we work together. In this spirit, we encourage you to talk about this project with friends and colleagues. And: become a member!

Sincerely,  
Jan Edler, Charlotte Hopf  
and Kai Dolata  
Management Board, Flussbad Berlin



Project area by Flussbad Berlin / City perspective



# A clean river in the middle of the city

The Spree Canal in Berlin's historical centre lost its original function as a shipping route over 100 years ago. The "Flussbad Berlin" project seeks to clean this section of the Spree so as to enable new uses and make it accessible to inhabitants.





Flussbad cross-section at Fischerinsel (aa)

The Spree Canal is a waterway that extends roughly 1.8 kilometres from the Fischerinsel to the Bode Museum. The Flussbad project would divide this stretch of water into three sections: a renaturalised area at Fischerinsel, a natural plant filter area adjacent to the Federal Foreign Office where the water would be cleaned and, finally, one of the world's most beautiful river swimming pools at Museum Island.

#### WATER LANDSCAPE AT FISCHERINSEL

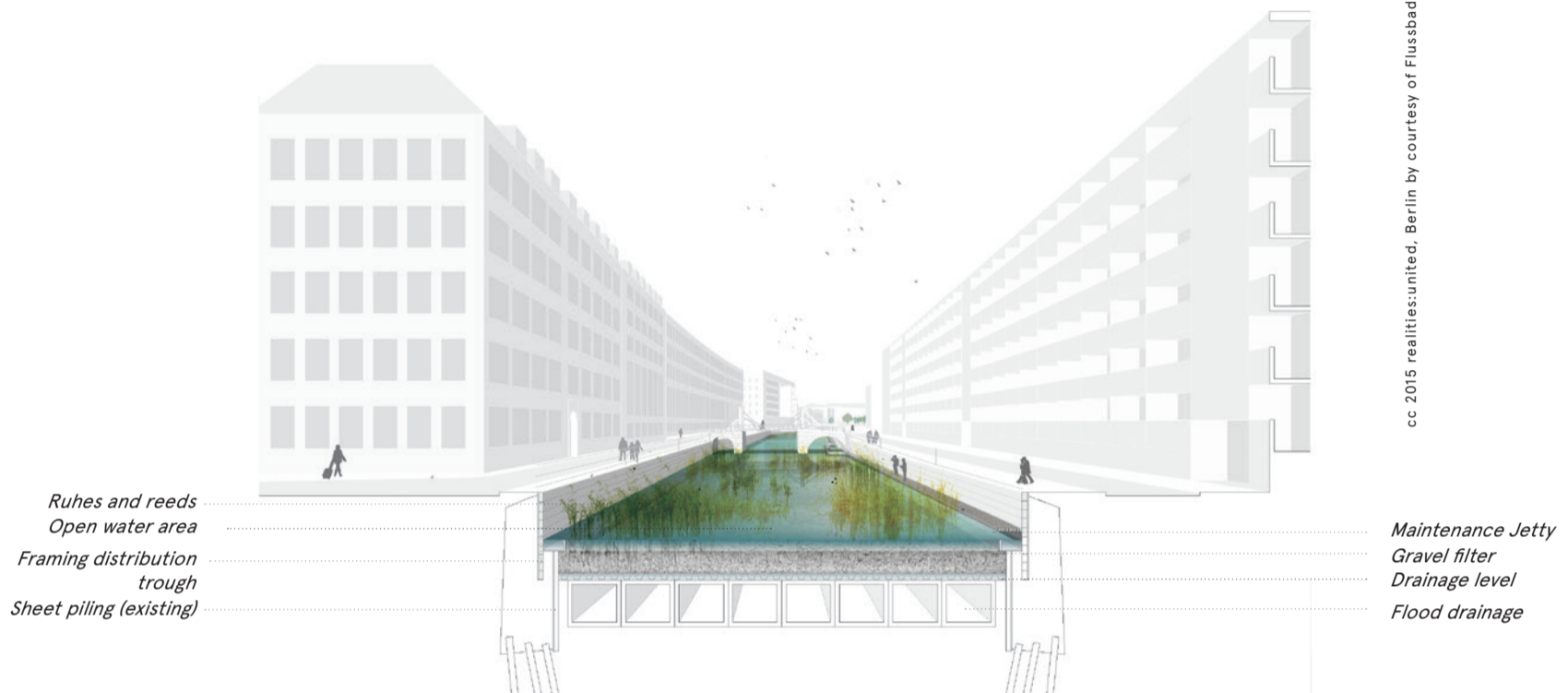
In the upper section of the canal – along Fischerinsel all the way to Gertraudenbrücke – the Flussbad project foresees transforming the water

into a more natural state. By installing the plant filter downstream at the Federal Foreign Office, the speed of the water flow would decline to only a few centimetres per second. In contrast to the faster flow of the canalised main Spree – the main route of the Spree River navigated by tourist boats and barges – the result here would be a very calm area more similar to an oxbow lake than a river. Accordingly, along the Fischerinsel at the northern bank, parts of the canal wall will be removed in order to generate a more natural and softer embankment and river landscape.

This would allow the unique area – located within the kilometre-long canalised inner-city Spree – to become

a type of „resting place“ for wildlife, such as dragonflies, birds and fish. Water plants and bank-side plants could also grow here. In the field of ecology, these connecting rest areas are called „stepping stones“. They foster the migration and spread of flora and fauna and therefore have a unique value in terms of restoring the ecological balance of the Spree.

The water landscape that would emerge here would offer a special opportunity for the people of the city to come to understand the river and appreciate it with all of their senses.



cc 2015 realities:united, Berlin by courtesy of Flussbad Berlin e.V.

Flussbad cross-section at Friedrichsgracht (bb)

#### THE PLANT FILTER AT FRIEDRICHSGRACHT

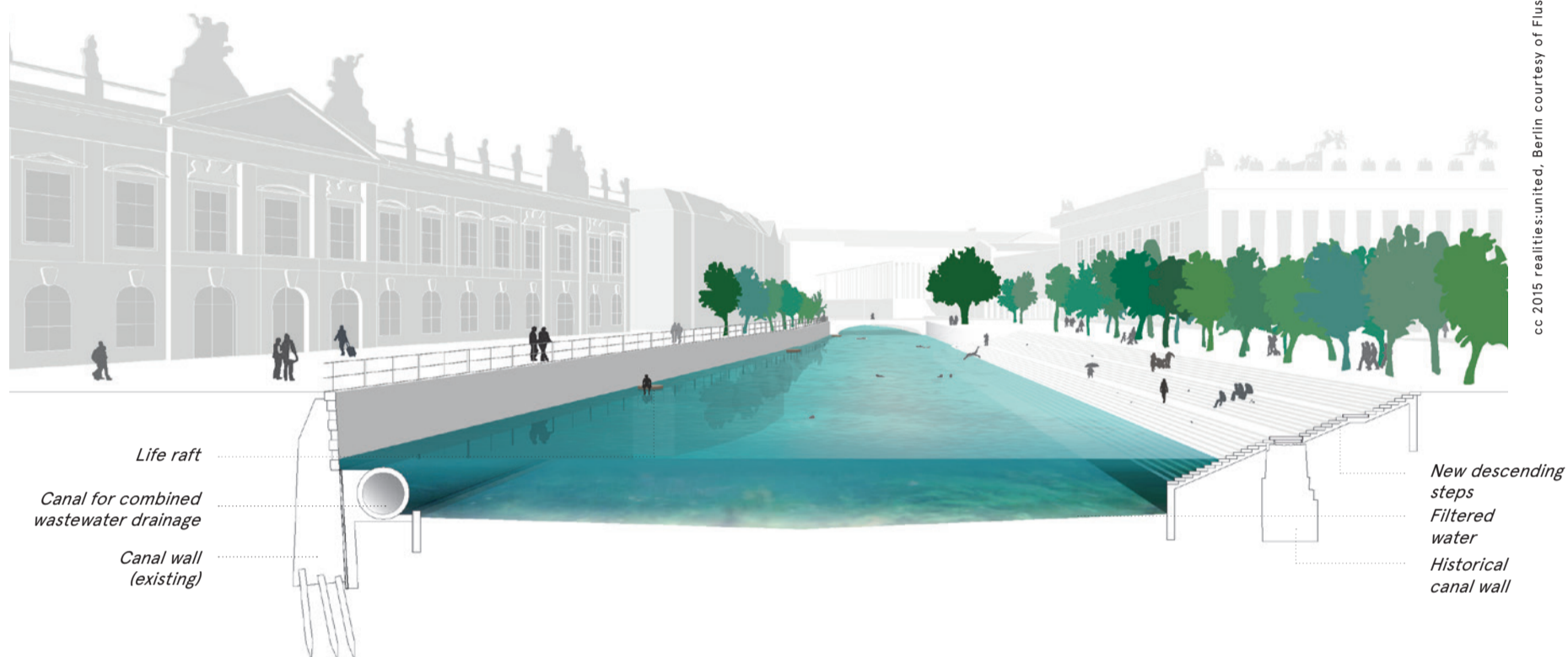
The Flussbad project foresees cleansing the water in the Spree Canal effectively and ecologically using a natural plant filter. This is the purpose of the second section of the Flussbad, i.e. the roughly 300-metre canal strip between Gertraudenbrücke and Schleusenbrücke where the water will be cleaned using natural methods. The water meanders down through an 80-centimetre gravel sediment into a drainage layer lying underneath. After that, the purified water flows on in the direction of Museum Island. An external energy source is not necessary to push the water through the gravel filter. Instead, the filter system simply makes use of the ideal local conditions: the slope of an already existing, one-and-a-half metre high dam at the level of the former Staatsratsgebäude means that the water needs gravity alone to pump

it through the filter system at 500 litres per second. This rate is sufficient to exchange all of the water in the subsequent swimming area located between the Humboldt Forum and Bode Museum in the course of one day.

In the filter area, the gravel layer will be covered with reeds, as their roots guarantee the sustained permeability of the filter surface. A gap is foreseen at the historic Jungfernbrücke so as to be able to retain that bridge's unique appearance and reflection in the water.

Not all of the wastewater currently being funnelled into the Spree Canal will be treated by this filter system. In fact, today, six additional overflow pipes belonging to the sewage system flow into the Flussbad area further north between the Humboldt Forum and Bode Museum. In other words, when heavy rainfall overloads the

capacity of the existing sewage system – which occurs roughly ten times per year – the result is that unfiltered sewage water is introduced into these areas as well. In order to gain the upper hand over such events, the Flussbad project envisages installing a control structure above the Schleusenbrücke in the largest of these overflow pipes. The accumulated waste water would thus be retained and then, as soon as the rain has passed, pumped successively to sewage treatment plants. The small amount of remaining overflow will then be pumped into the main Spree beyond the Bode Museum by means of a long pipe, to which the five other overflow pipes will also be connected. This will prevent sewage water from making its way into the Kupfergraben.



Flussbad cross-section at Lustgarten (cc)

### THE CLEAN SPREE AT MUSEUM ISLAND

Water filters will cleanse an 840-metre section of the Spree Canal between Schlossplatz and Bode Museum so that residents and visitors alike can enjoy a brand new bathing experience in the Spree. A new end weir located at the northern tip of the island in the area around Monbijou Bridge will separate the clean-water area from the main line of the Spree. Descending stairs at two points along the canal – at the Lustgarten and Humboldt Forum – will give visitors direct access to the Spree, whether to enjoy the view or have a swim. On the opposite side, along the west wall of the canal, the already existing small staircases will be expanded as further access points to the river. In the summer, Berliners and visitors will be able to gather on the wide open stairs along the shoreline to enjoy the evening sun. Access to the river will transform it into a new

public space at the centre of the historical city. With regard to additional infrastructure, such as changing rooms, cold-water showers and lockers, there are many options as to where minimal facilities could be set up without the need to build new structures. For example, the base of the forthcoming Freedom and Unity Monument at the Humboldt Forum would provide a location for people to change in private and then access the water. Changing rooms could also be set up on a floating platform anchored under the historical structure built over the old Mühlengraben.

Under the Monbijou Bridge, a jetty could provide an ideal hidden spot for lockers. Small islands and jetties in the water would also create the perfect place for swimmers to take a break while also ensuring their safety. Yet another alternative would be a continuous wooden footbridge along

the western canal wall. It would be accessible to swimmers yet also open up the canal area to pedestrians and make it possible to pass underneath the busy boulevard known as Unter den Linden in a relaxed and easy way.



The Flussbad at Museum Island, rendering



# „Clean water is a cultural asset.“

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## A talk with Flussbad Berlin creator Tim Edler

Katrin Hiller von Gaertringen: Mr. Edler, how did you first come up with the idea for a Flussbad in Berlin?

Tim Edler: We came up with the idea back in 1998. At the time, my brother Jan and I were part of a designer and artists' group called ‚Kunst und Technik‘. Our atelier was at Monbijou Bridge and we had a great view of the Spree River. After a while, we noticed that the Kupfergraben never had any ships passing through it! Instead, the ships always passed by to the left of the Bode Museum. We soon found out that the Spree Canal had been decommissioned for decades.

KHvG: What historical function did the Spree Canal and Kupfergraben play? And how long has it been since they were decommissioned?

TE: The Spree Canal was very important for over 300 years – roughly from the 16th to the end of the 19th century – and mostly for the movement of goods. Each ship that made its way through Berlin had to use the canal. The main Spree River, the wider arm of the river that flows past on the east side of Museum Island and the Berlin Palace, was blocked by the so-called Mühlendamm which, as the name in German suggests, had Mühlen or mills on it. With the advent of industrialization, the canal became too small. In fact, ships sometimes had to wait up to one week for passage. So, in 1894, they built a lock at Mühlendamm, which made it possible to travel on the main Spree. In the 1930s, the lock in the Spree Canal was taken down entirely. At some point in the 20th century, the existing narrow passageway, which had been big enough

only for pleasure boats, was sealed up with concrete. Since then, no boats at all have been allowed on the Spree Canal and Kupfergraben.

Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen: How did you move from your interest in the canal to the idea of a Flussbad?

TE: In the beginning, it was the unused canal that got me started. The idea of making it possible to swim in the river came later. The Flussbad is – and this is very important to me – not a project initiated by swimming enthusiasts. We didn't whip out the map and say „Let's find out where we can swim in this city!“ The project is also not simply about the canal; our main focus was the future of the Berlin district known as „Mitte“, literally „the centre“. At the end of the 1990s, you could already tell that

Mitte was going to change quite a bit, and especially that it was going to get denser and more compact. All of those open, unfilled spaces began to be filled. Suddenly, the canal seemed to be the only site that still existed entirely under the radar of those ever-present forces that were snatching up every last piece of empty land. It was an area we could reflect upon because hardly anybody else was thinking about it. The Spree Canal was – and still is today, by the way – a functional and mental blank space. Literally no one was talking about it ...

KHvG: ... and all of this while radical changes were underway everywhere else in Berlin. Ministries were being built. Museum Island was emerging again as the centre of Berlin's museum heritage. The former GDR's Palace of the Republic was torn down and plans made to rebuild the old Prussian Palace as the so-called „Humboldt Forum“. How do you feel about these major building projects?

TE: All of the projects carried out along the banks of the Spree Canal involved high culture or some form of representation. In essence, a new stone town was (re-)built. The uniform height of the buildings became a symbol of this very closely regulated vision of the city.

HGHvG: What exactly bothers you about this development?

TE: It is too one-dimensional. Today, the historical city centre hardly plays a role in Berlin's lived reality. This is due to the fact that all the plans undertaken in Mitte simply did not do justice to the city's diversity. In addition to all the big museums, the area is also home to many federal government buildings, such as the Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry of Justice, but also universities such as the European School of Management and Technology in the former Staatsratsgebäude. Add to that a few luxury apartments like the „Kronprinzengärten“. In other words, the area is much too homogenous; the focus is on administrative buildings and tourist and cultural sites. There is no connection to a vibrant city nor to anything attractive for the majority of the city's inhabitants. This is where the canal comes in – as a location that offers a contrast to the buildings surrounding it; a place of rest and a model for a different kind of access to nature right in the heart of the city. Today, the area is still completely uninteresting to a large part of the city's inhabitants. Just ask young people from Prenzlauer Berg, Schöneberg or Wedding how often they go there.

KHvG: Why is this the case?

TE: For the past 25 years, Berlin's Mitte area was the site of highly conservative development goals. The idea behind most projects was to rejuvenate something old. Nobody was interested in a programmatic redefinition of the area. As a result, only a small part of society sees its values reflected here. We also see the continuation of that unfortunate

tradition of aggressively replacing old symbolic buildings with new ones. In 1950, the GDR tore down the Prussian Palace and later replaced it with the Palace of the Republic. In 2008, we tore down the old GDR palace and we're now replacing it again, this time with a new version of the Prussian Palace. For once, it would have been more intelligent to create something that broadens our spectrum without destroying what's already here.

HGHvG: How do you feel about the new palace, i.e. the forthcoming Humboldt Forum, which would stand directly adjacent to the Flussbad?

TE: The palace is important to a generation influenced by the trauma associated with the collapse of civilised society, of National Socialism, the Second World War, the murder of Jews, destruction, occupation and the division of Germany. This generation wanted a visible sign to prove that we have come back from that nightmare. I can appreciate that. However, things start to move in the wrong direction when you begin to see history as having been completed. It simply can't be that no other expression of our social identity will be tolerated at the very centre of our city in the future. In other words, the palace is OK, but we have to add new aspects that embody new values, like the Flussbad. This way, we will be able to say: Berlin-Mitte is a living mirror of society.

KHvG: Which group of people is the Flussbad aimed at?

TE: It's aimed at the many people who consider the current traditional-representative city centre to be not enough. It's aimed at all those Berliners who aren't members of that small, conservative group that dominates the discourse and seeks to set the tone in Berlin's historical centre. The Flussbad could activate all those Berliners who have taken themselves out of the debate entirely with regard to the historical city centre. It would act as a counterweight to those groups who seem to want to see old horse-drawn carriages driving through the city again. It's about a city centre in which other values are visible: a pluralistic city, an open space for everyone, a clean river, ecology, the interplay of different uses, swimming and culture, body and mind.

KHvG: Ecology as an additional element in the city centre?

TE: Yes, as an „additional“ rather than a „new“ guiding theme. Of course, it would be presumptuous to argue that ecology should be the leading issue that trumps all others in the city centre. Ideally, Berlin-Mitte would become a place where society is alive. Our thesis is that Mitte can adopt new and contemporary themes and values without destroying what came before. For that reason, the Flussbad does not seek to eventify the area; contrary to what some people might think, it's not a fun-park swimming machine that's going

to just roll into town.

HGHvG: You are referring to the criticism made recently by Hermann Parzinger, President of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, in the Tagesspiegel newspaper. He argued that the Flussbad would attract „tons of waste, police presence, complaints from local residents“ and „a never-ending party“. He also criticised the Flussbad for its descending riverside staircase, which he called a „destruction“ of the Lustgarten in its status as a „garden and architectural monument“. What is your response to this massive criticism?



Tim Edler

TE: I am perplexed by this somewhat strange and negative image of urban society and the opportunities presented by this site. The assumption is that the public space will be destroyed as soon as people gather at the canal and are able to swim in it. One of the most essential ideas behind the Flussbad project is generating new respect for our natural resources. If we clean up the Spree at this spot, and if we make it possible to experience this new cleanliness through swimming, then we are showing first of all a new awareness in terms of our handling of the city and the water. We should never underestimate the act of swimming in natural water. Of course, we aren't just going to let things run loose; we're going to manage what's possible on the banks of the canal. It all depends on how we communicate the new role of the site, and on what kind of infrastructure we set up there. Again, I would like to emphasise that there is no causal connection between swimming and partying. That kind of discussion hardly plays a role at the river swimming pools in Zurich or Basel, for example.

KHvG: And how do you feel about conserving the site as a heritage monument?

TE: It goes without saying that issues relating to the site's historical heritage status will be taken fully into account. I see this argument as reflecting a packaged form of resistance to the project; in other words, some groups fear that certain other groups will start coming to the area. People talk about structural issues, but they're



Sewage system overflow on July 8th 2014, Oberbaumbrücke



really talking about people. Indeed, the somewhat desolate nature of the area – which is not very multifaceted – also has some advantages. It is structured, and the groups of visitors who come here are relatively homogenous.

HGHvG: Still, wouldn't you admit that any changes to the canal wall are problematic? Hermann Parzinger sees it as part of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's historical design. In other words, he sees the Flussbad's riverside steps as being a threat to Museum Island's world heritage status.

TE: As far as we know, the current canal wall was not built in the 19th century, but in fact in 1937. A canal wall such as this is an expendable part. It's rebuilt every 100 years. In other words, we are not dealing here with a structure whose material substance is important; instead, we are dealing with the cultural effect of the view of the canal's edge. We have to ask ourselves: Is it more important for our society to see this edge – which was defined 200 years ago – or is it more important to create access to the water? Or perhaps a combination of the two would make the most sense? We would also have to ask whether this structural intervention, in fact, would have an impact on the meaning of the historic ensemble. Is it not perhaps the opposite, i.e. that Museum Island's social- cultural impact could be increased if this structural intervention actually pushed the area back into the city's social centre?

KHvG: We've talked a lot about urban society and the connection to culture. Let's talk about the ecological aspects of the Flussbad.

TE: Culture und ecology are not opposites. Berlin's cathedral master builder, Charlotte Hopf, who just happens to be a member of our management board, has always expressed it very succinctly; clean water is a cultural asset. A clean river that we handle with care is a value that suits this area perfectly. Which European societies are able to keep their waters clean? The rich and developed ones. Dirty water is typical of poor, underdeveloped countries. In countries such as Switzerland and Denmark, the water is clean and people can swim in the rivers. These days, if a city has the means to avoid pumping faecal matter into its rivers, it's considered a status symbol. In this respect, it makes a huge difference whether a canal that flows alongside Museum Island – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – contains faecal sewage or not. It's also a sign that we take the European Water Directives seriously, that we aren't enacting while simultaneously rolling our eyes.

HGHvG: To what extent is the Flussbad a model ecological project?

TE: To the extent that it is not simply a regional project. Instead, the Flussbad also functions on a national and international level as an example of how a society can better deal with its

water resources. This approach fits perfectly with Museum Island, because this famous location gives the Flussbad an entirely different framework than it would have anywhere else. What we want is for people to go swimming and then, when they come out, hopefully ask themselves: „Why can I swim here and not two kilometres upriver?“ This would make it possible for more people to become aware that we are the ones who pollute the Spree River. The Spree is clean when it reaches Berlin: it's the city that pollutes it.

KHvG: How does the Flussbad work to change this?

TE: It creates a greater consciousness for the fact that our sewage system needs an urgent ecological update. It's an issue that we should be talking about more. When we tell people that faecal matter from Prenzlauer Berg flows into the Spree, they're blown away. Our goal is to impress upon people that the river doesn't have to be forever polluted with smelly things floating around in it. Instead, it's a public space that we can take over and renew. The result would hopefully be the following: the more you can swim in the Spree, the more willing you'll be to pay the price necessary to keep the river clean.

KHvG: What's next? What are the next steps? And how are you going to use the funds provided by the German Federal Government and Federal State of Berlin?

TE: Before I answer that, I would like to say something about how we used the funds we received from the LOTTO Foundation in 2014. We carried out a feasibility study that was just completed. The basic question was: What comprises the least effort necessary to be able to realise the Flussbad? We concentrated on technical aspects, such as the following: Is it even possible to filter Spree water? What kind of systems would we need to get that done? How can we prevent sewage system overflows into the swimming area during strong rain showers? The study also examined the area at Fischerinsel that we want to renaturalise. What kind of impact would this section – which would have many plants and a riverside area free of walls – have in an otherwise highly regulated river? Our research, which we carried out with the help of diverse experts, shows that the Flussbad is technically feasible.

HGHvG: And now, back to the future. How are you going to use the funds provided by the German Federal Government and the Federal State of Berlin?

TE: We need these funds to be able to explain and communicate the feasibility of the project in a comprehensive sense. Also beyond the purely technical questions that have already been answered, in other words: If the project is carried out, who is responsible for which step in the federal and state administrative realms? What kind of property and/or legal structures would

be in place? And the very important question: How can we best involve Berliners in the decision-making? The decision to actually implement the project will set off a series of technical and planning steps. In other words, this is going to involve hard work. These funds allow us to gain a level of clarity about the project, especially what it includes and how we can carry it out.

HGHvG: The level of funding is quite considerable. What would you say are the funding bodies most excited about?

TE: The funding flows into a very important field. Advanced cities are way ahead of us in terms of enabling natural habitats within the city: Zurich, Basel, Copenhagen. These highly developed cities manage their water much better than we do. We need to consider whether we can do those things here, too. Research is already being done today all over the world on a type of urban development that includes water and nature as key issues. This kind of project fits Berlin like a glove.

Katrin and Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen spoke with Tim Edler.

Tim Edler studied architecture and computer science at Berlin's Technische Universität. He was a guest professor at the Hochschule für Künste in Bremen from 2005 to 2008. In 2000, he began working with his brother, Jan, as part of realities:united, studio for art and architecture at the intersection of space, information and communication. In 1998, he co-launched the Flussbad Berlin project with his brother Jan and Denise Dih. He is a founding member of the Flussbad Association and responsible for the further development of the project.



1. Flussbad Pokal Berlin, Kupfergraben, July 12th, 2015



# Have a swim, in the river

Harald Welzer

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As seen from our current perspective, the Flussbad Berlin, which recently received a Holcim Award for Sustainable Architecture, would cause a sensation: in the summer, people working in nearby buildings could swim a few laps on their lunch breaks; tourists could take a time-out from their marathon museum tours for a dip in the Spree; and Berlin residents would get to experience a bathing landscape in their urban environment. [...] In fact, however, the design submitted by realities:united sets out to achieve even more than an ingenious technical intervention in the urban landscape; it also seeks to show what a city can become when it uses social intelligence to approach the situation in a different way. Indeed, instead of focussing on old-school issues, such as traffic, transportation, event culture and mass tourism, the Flussbad deals with parameters such as the public sphere, the quality of life, slowing down our lives and fostering social imagination.

From the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, July 2nd, 2013

Prof. Dr. Harald Welzer is a professor for transformation design at the Universität Flensburg and social psychology at the Universität of St. Gallen. He is the director of the non-profit foundation „FUTURZWEI. Stiftung Zukunftsfähigkeit zur Förderung alternativer Lebensstile“.



Award Ceremony: Global Holcim Award Bronze 2012, from left to right: Rolf Soiron, Jan Edler, Mario Botta, Regula Lüscher, Tim Edler

# „Lead the way“

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A talk with former federal minister Klaus Töpfer about the Flussbad as a concrete utopia



Klaus Töpfer talking to Jan Edler of Flussbad Berlin, Potsdam, July 27th, 2015

Jan Edler: Mr. Töpfer, when we asked you to do this interview, you said you had read about the Flussbad in the media and that you were following the project with an increasing level of sympathy. I perked up at the word „increasing“. It implies that you might have been sceptical at first. How has your attitude towards the project changed over time?

Klaus Töpfer: Well, I didn't have a Saul/Paul experience, but allow me to mention something else; as Federal Minister for Regional Planning in the 1990s, I was responsible for the government's move from Bonn to Berlin. One of our essential tasks was to accommodate the ministries in Berlin, including the combined renovation and new construction of the Federal Foreign Office directly on the Spree Canal. When we sent out the tender for the new wing in 1995, I expected many creative minds to include the canal in their suggestions. But not one of them did. They all thought strictly in terms of buildings, rather than about the city or the water. This is amazing considering the sheer wealth of water in Berlin and its importance for the development of the city. The waterways have always played a decisive role, both in terms of economics and society. In this respect, I find the basic idea of reclaiming urban space with the help of the Flussbad project very meaningful. And it extends

far beyond the question of whether we need a swimming pool in the area. In my opinion, a project such as this is necessary even if nobody ever ended up swimming there. The Flussbad idea of replacing the current canal wall with steps is fantastic in that it opens up the city to the water.

JE: When you were Federal Minister for Regional Planning in the 1990s, what concrete steps did you take to include the Spree in your concepts?

KT: First of all, we wanted to avoid creating a federally managed „District of Columbia“ like in Washington. Our motto was: stay in the city, integrate into it, try to take up and work with its history. And that's what we did, quite reasonably I would say. And that's why we didn't build any completely new government buildings, with the exception of the Chancellery. And yet, one question kept coming up: How can we better integrate and use the city's waters? How can we make them more open and accessible? Swimming was the last thing we thought about. But Berlin has a wealth of rivers and lakes, especially in contrast to other major cities. All you have to do is fly over the city and you'll see right away: it's covered in water. Back then, we thought more about using the water for transportation. The ministries in Paris, for example, all have stops on the water. You can't get through the city by car,

so you just take a boat. We don't have that in Berlin; even today, we go by car. Fortunately, we also use bikes more and more – and, of course, public transport. We could do a lot more in this area.

Charlotte Hopf: And yet, the idea of the Spree Canal as a transport route actually gets in the way. One problem involved with our intention to use the Spree Canal and the Kupfergraben locally and give them other functions is the fact that this stretch of water is a so-called Bundeswasserstraße, a federal waterway. Ships don't sail through there anymore, but several individuals take recourse to the federal designation to argue against installing the Flussbad and a filter system there.

KT: That surprises me. A federal waterway is not an exclusive thing. I grew up in Höxter on the Weser River. When I was a child, it was only natural to go swimming in the water, even though it was also a federal waterway. And back then, in contrast to the Spree Canal today, there really were boats and rafts. We jumped in right next to the ships. Surely we could rededicate a section of the Spree for that.

JE: We have to ask the question as to whether it wouldn't be time to generally rethink our approach. We should be able to question the exclusivity of shipping. Rivers are first and foremost lifelines that we need to protect for ecological reasons.

KT: As far as I'm concerned, this is precisely where the key significance of your project lies. It's also why I find the term „Flussbad“ slightly restrictive. When you use that name, you invite counterarguments that focus very strongly on the swimming element, which is only one aspect of the project. And when you read the criticism lobbied by the General Director of the Prussian Cultural Foundation Hermann Parzinger at the project, you see that he takes it quite literally.

JE: This kind of criticism focuses strongly on the supposed contrast between high culture – as found in museums and at the Humboldt Forum – and the everyday culture of the Flussbad. We prefer to set our sights on creating a sense of synergy in which both areas can connect and maybe even grow closer together.

KT: Your idea of putting a swimming area right next to Museum Island, of all places, already proves that you're interested in connecting these two worlds. As the temporary chairman of the Board of Trustees of the forthcoming Humboldt Forum, I was somewhat involved in the programming process, and I believe there should be a greater level of openness here. In other words, my recommendation would be to „lead the way“. Any current concerns about the Flussbad mistakenly interpret certain aspects as being extreme that will never be extreme. Your task then is to resolve these concerns.

CH: It's true, the Flussbad raises a number of issues that are much larger and more important than the question as to whether people are going to be able to swim or not.

KT: The first time I heard about the Flussbad, I was drawn mentally more to the idea of swimming and less to the idea of cleaning up the Spree. And yet, cleaning the Spree is just as exciting as swimming in it. And you should emphasise that. If you do, you would get those multiplicative effects.

JE: Do you take into account the fact that the Flussbad could help to fulfil the European Water Directive, i.e. that it could transform the river into one in „good condition“?

KT: No, not really. Directives like those aren't the eleventh commandment. In this context, I can only recommend that everyone read Pope Francis's Encyclicals „On Care for Our Common Home“. It forges fundamental connections. It's all about respect for diversity, respect for creation. If people start approaching nature in this way again, it probably won't be because of water directives. That's why I see the Flussbad project first and foremost as a creative mission.

JE: We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

KT: The key point is that we start seeing cities not as ecological casualties, but instead as assets. Throughout all debates, we were forced to realise that nature conservation areas are always considered as areas that have no economic use. And this is why it's so hard to achieve victories for nature conservation in cities where economic uses dominate. In other words, it's a good thing when we say that we have to start converting nature into value in urban areas.

JE: The entire project has ecological but also urban-policy components: it's all about a new connection to the river. The proximity to the Spree was lost in Berlin. People have lived separately from the river for a while now, literally with their backs to the water. Our goal is to include the Spree in the city again. There's no doubt that it would strengthen our consciousness for the quality of this city space. In turn, it would allow policymakers to actually tackle head-on the problem of water pollution as a result of overflowing sewers during heavy rainfall. At the moment, it is still incredibly difficult to get authorities to spend money to change this system.

CH: We have yet to truly comprehend what kind of fantastic change would occur if the Spree were clean. It is truly shameful that we – such a wealthy society, one permitted to live in such a highly developed manner – still treat our river like a toilet.

KT: I would argue that people are already thinking differently today. However, we are still far from our goal. Unfiltered substances from modern human life

are still found in our sewage, in spite of a three-stage purification plant performing very well. These include pharmaceutical residues that have a negative impact on the reproductive systems of fish and snails; residues from birth control pills that causes the feminisation of fish; even antibiotics are a problem. Today, we can trace nanoparticles all the way to the sea. In other words, it's ultimately about the question of how we better handle water as a resource.

JE: That brings us back to an even more fundamental question as to whether we should institute changes at the causal end or try to fight against the harmful effects of these causes.

KT: Based on my own experience, I would say that environmental policy has always been about the attempt to get away from the idea of solving problems at the end of the pipe. We have to start with the polluters. A sewage treatment plant, for example, is obviously at the end of the pipe. We always put too much trust in solving environmental problems using engineering after-the-fact, which is why we don't think long-term enough at the beginning of the process, i.e. at the cause. This brings us to the fact that we are living in the Anthropogenic Era, that is, in an era shaped by human beings. The fact is that we can only correct that which was false or thoughtless in the past. In this sense, our economic growth is running out; it involves merely the elimination of errors made in previous growth. But I don't really want to have a critical debate about the system.

JE: I consider it very important that we not talk about the Flussbad as if it's an isolated project. I'm much more interested in the question: How does environmental policy take place? I have long associated the issue solely with negative images: the world is coming to an end, we can't change a thing, it's too late to change gears, the only thing that could help is a systematic change from above, etc. People feel helpless. Today, I know that we all must make a concrete contribution if we want things to change.

Barbara Schindler: Yes, we have to start with ourselves. That's what I like so much about the Flussbad Berlin. We can all get active by taking time to discuss the initiative and publicising the project in its diversity.

KT: My sentiments exactly. Take the issue of Germany's big turn away from nuclear power: You could, of course, say it was caused by Fukushima. But there were people who had already long since recognised the necessity of developing alternatives. They were initially dismissed as crackpots. I'm thinking in particular of the SPD politician Hermann Scheer, who was active in the Bundestag. Only because of committed people like him was it possible – already back in 2002, long before Fukushima – to commit to a phasing-out of nuclear energy in Germany. Renewable energy sources stopped being mere visions

and became more and more tangible realities.

JE: When I spoke just now about „negative images“, my intention was to go beyond the sheer potential of the Flussbad. In other words, the project can create positive images and thus help to push something through.

KT: It is certainly important to keep the larger context in mind. But you also need to show that the Flussbad can actually be realised. I think it's great to concretely implement such an idea, not just to design it on paper. This is why I was delighted to hear that the Flussbad Idea had received a Holcim Award for Sustainable Architecture in 2011. Fantastic.

JE: That award was certainly a decisive boost for our project. Plus the fact that the award came from Switzerland. That was the point at which we were able to engage in a broader debate in Berlin. It was very important. As you just mentioned, it's all about making a concrete start and thus proving the added value of the project in practice. Holcim places great importance on the fact that the winning projects be close to reality, with a real chance of actually getting made...

KT: They acknowledge projects that help to launch social discussions. Ones that are outside what we would usually think about. This supports my argument that we should first prove the opportunities a project offers, instead of working towards the grand overall solution and saying „we'll start only when we find the perfect solution“. I find it much better to say: let's get this project started and then we'll be able to see pretty quickly what kind of urban quality we can gain from it. In other words, don't start with the big question of whether all federal waterways need to be decommissioned. That won't get us anywhere.

BS: How did you put your vision into practice?

KT: It's good to have visions. And yet, Helmut Schmidt put his finger on it when he described the associated dangers: „Anyone who has visions should see a doctor“. He was warning us that grand visions can be misused as an alibi for not taking concrete action. I agree with the philosopher Ernst Bloch who distinguished between abstract and concrete utopias. The abstract utopia is far from actual behaviour, while the concrete utopia faces reality. Building blocks such as the Flussbad represent a concrete utopia. It's all about the question: What do we want to do with the city in the future? We know that we've landed in an urban millennium and that our living spaces are getting more compact, that our subject is urban density, that we need to mix functions such as work, recreation, culture, etc. But we still have decrees from a time when these different functions were not compatible in the city. Yet, they will become compatible again, and I consider that to be a major gain.





Klaus Töpfer's historical leap into the Rhine, September 13th, 1988

Sometimes people say: When you can't solve a problem, make it bigger. With regard to the Flussbad, I would say you can solve it. You don't have to make it bigger. It's already a tasty morsel. A gem right in the middle of a reunified Berlin; in the middle of all those developments driven by use-based priorities. You should be very proud of your work. Congratulations.

CH: Thank you. That's a great note to end on.

JE: But one more thing; in 1988, you lost a bet and had to dive into the Rhine. What do we have to do to get you to swim in the Spree? We would of course provide for a red bathing cap.

KT: In a democratic system, every politician has to have some sort of screw loose. Some wear captain's caps, some smoke cigars, some have imposing eyebrows and some have pear-shaped heads. You have to be able to be made into a caricature.

JE: But the photo of your dive is fantastic!

KT: Sure, it's my discernible quirk.

JE: For me, it was one of the first pictures that stuck in my political consciousness. It was a very strong

image. In this regard, I'm very grateful that we were able to talk to you today.

KT: That's wonderful. Keep up the good work.

Klaus Töpfer spoke to Jan Edler, Charlotte Hopf and Barbara Schindler.

Prof. Dr. Klaus Töpfer (CDU) was born in 1938 and helped introduce active environmental policy in Germany as its first Minister of Environment in the 1980s. One decade later, as Minister of Regional Planning, he helped design the new federal capital of Berlin. From 1998 to 2006, he was also Executive Director of the Environmental Programme of the United Nations (UNEP). From 2010 to 2014, he was Chairman of the Trustees of the Stiftung Berliner Schloss – Humboldt Forum. Until September 2015, he was also Director of the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam.



Flussbad Cup-Swimmer, July 12th, 2015

# Swimming the Spree

Sophie Zeitz

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The thought of swimming around Museum Island – that majestic Berlin Camelot brimming with treasures – has something strangely intimate about it. It feels like peeking underneath a princess's petticoat, while simultaneously sensing one's own nakedness as one throws oneself at her feet. It will no doubt take some effort, seeing as the water is black, there are ships sailing nearby and one cannot know what lurks beneath the surface or what shipwrecks might be protruding from below. This is why the thought of the Flussbad is so tantalizing; the idea of swimming in an unfathomable setting, without fear. Slipping into the water and becoming one with the city.

When I hear that the Flussbad Berlin Association is organising its first swimming competition, I know I have to take part. The morning of the race, it's raining. The clouds are hanging low and the water is even darker than usual. I wasn't able to find a wetsuit, so I only have my bikini on. I feel extremely naked on the cobblestone path of the Monbijou Bridge. I am reminded of childhood swimming competitions in overly chlorinated pools, the dull roar penetrating my ears through my bathing cap. The black river in the middle of the city is waiting. It is a weird feeling. There are so many people here. Nervously, I make my way down the stony stairs. Then I climb quickly down the ladder and into the water. It is not cold. The water is soft and I try to identify the smell – it smells like a river, but also slightly like an engine. As soon as I'm in the water, my physical observations take over: the gurgling, the colour of the water. I get used to it quickly, put my goggles on and wait for everyone to reach the starting area. Then we're off. The river stretching out ahead of me passes under several bridges. We are swimming deep down. It is beautiful. Like a dream. The people standing up above cheer us on. It is a privilege to be down here. Still, I am reassured to see the lifeguards on their surfboards, keeping an eye on us. We approach the first bridge, the railway Bridge.

I have to overcome my fears to get through it. It is so dark. The bridge is so wide. The structure above me is black and scary. Who knows what lurks in its shadows? Down here, it's even darker, I can't see anything, and it is unpleasant to think that if I were to sink under, no one would be able to see me either. I struggle against my doubts, concentrate on the light. I manage to swim out from under it. The section between the bridges is amazing and I want to burst with exhilaration. I swim with deliberate breast strokes. Head under water, head above water. Head under water, head above water. With each new stroke, I have a mouth full of water. The water doesn't smell bad. Until I get to the construction site at Neues Museum, where it smells of petrol. I swim faster. After three bridges comes the open stretch of water next to the Lustgarten with the buoy that marks the turn. From there, the race heads back under the bridges. I push myself harder, and then it's over. The reception I get among the spectators at the Monbijou Bridge is great. I wish I could stay in the water. I wish I could have my friends and family join me in this unique pool. Just float on my back and stare at the sky.

Sophie Zeitz is a translator of literature and has worked on novels by John Green, Leanne Shapton and Joseph Conrad, among others. She learned to swim at a young age and went on to win a silver medal in breaststroke and a gold medal in butterfly at the state championships in the federal state of Hessen. She also took part in competitions at the national level in Germany and was one of the participants of the first Flussbad Berlin Cup in July 2015.

# Let's speak about Spreewasser

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A talk with hydrologist  
Heiko Sieker



Flussbad Cup-Swimmer, July 12th, 2015

Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen:  
Professor Sieker, how clean is the Spree?  
Or perhaps I should ask: How dirty is it?

Heiko Sieker: Water quality in the past decades has improved significantly, as shown by the latest analyses we carried out in the framework of our hydrological studies for the Flussbad. Different pollution parameters have developed favourably, including oxygen content and depth visibility, which are very important for a project like the Flussbad.

HGHvG: And yet, when I walk along the edge of the Spree downtown, the river doesn't look very clean. Why is that?

HS: In this case, looks are deceptive. And I say that based on our measurements, but also on my own practical experience: I took part in the first Flussbad Cup in July. From above, the Kupfergraben looks like a black canal. You think: „There's no way I'm going to jump in there.“ But as soon as you're in it – and I couldn't believe this myself – you can see all the way to the bottom, even though the Spree Canal at Museum

Island is three metres deep. A three-metre depth visibility – that's astounding for a river. You certainly can't see three metres deep in the Rhine.

HGHvG: But the Spree is still not free of pollution. What kind of contaminants did you find in your most recent research?

HS: I'll start with the ones that are already in the water before the Spree reaches Berlin. Remember, the Spree doesn't necessarily arrive in Berlin in pristine condition. First of all, there's sulphate from brown-coal mining in the Lausitz region. The flooding of former mines frees these sulphates from the ground and they end up in the river. Add to that the pesticides and fertilizers originating from agriculture and waste residues from cities and villages in Saxony and Brandenburg, for example, Cottbus and Lübben. This is the background pollution, which is not any higher in the Spree than in other comparable rivers.

HGHvG: And what kind of pollution occurs within Berlin?

HS: There are two factors in this area: garbage and wastewater, whereby the latter is by far the larger issue. I'll start with garbage, which is generally not taken into account in our research into the water quality of the Spree. However, in the downtown Berlin area, it is most definitely a problem. People throw everything imaginable into the water. At the Panke River, for example, which has transformed over the years from the „stinky Panke“ to a model ecological project. Even though the water here is now exemplarily clean, it still doesn't prevent some small businesses from just throwing their old bread into the Panke. I've seen it myself. Some people throw their old clothes into the river rather than take them to a donation station – I've seen this with my own eyes too. When you talk to the water maintenance people, it's amazing to hear what they fish out of the river: sofas, shopping carts, 30 bikes.

HGHvG: It's hard to imagine that wastewater is the larger problem, as you mentioned. What exactly gets into the Spree?

HS: Wastewater is the essential factor in terms of the pollution of the Spree. First of all, this includes everything flushed into the river by the rain. Allow me to quickly describe this serious problem, because the general population is usually unaware of it. When rain falls from the sky, it is relatively clean. When it then falls on rooftops, streets, parked cars, etc., it takes all the dirt with it, which includes heavy metals, break-lining abrasions and oil residues, cigarettes, etc. There are also people who still wash their cars on the street, which is actually prohibited. In other words, detergents and surfactants also flow into the rain water pipes. And let's not forget dog droppings, which is a massive issue in Berlin. 50 tons every day. It's hard to imagine.

HGHvG: And that stuff ends up in the river when it rains?

HS: Like in many other cities, the basic system in Berlin is the so-called „waterborne sanitation system“. This means that wastewater and rainwater flow via the sewage system into the closest body of water. However, it is cleaned beforehand at wastewater treatment plants, which are expanding every year and whose cleaning capacity has improved. There have also been improvements with regard to rainwater pollution. The waterborne sewage system in Berlin is divided up into two systems: the „combined wastewater system“ in the inner city and the „separated wastewater system“ in the outer boroughs. Combined wastewater means that wastewater from households flows alongside rainwater to one-and-the-same pipeline. Separate water means that there are two separate systems. The biggest problem is caused by the combined system, especially when it rains; the pipelines overflow and lead untreated water via large drains into the Spree. This is done deliberately because the treatment plant would not be able to process such a large amount of water.

HGHvG: Sounds unbelievable. In other words, rainwater mixed with faecal matter, detergents, washing residues, hygiene products, etc. from households flows directly into the Spree? How often does the system overflow?

HS: Roughly 20 to 30 times a year. Statistically speaking, once every two weeks. Particularly in the summer, when it rains the most. It was a big problem again this year. Oxygen in the water was depleted and the fish died. Several tons of dead fish had to be scooped out of the Spree.

HGHvG: As a layperson, I wouldn't think there were any fish in the water near Museum Island.

HS: There are! At the moment, however, I would say that the inner-city Spree is more like a motorway. Fish can really only pass through it very quickly.

Tim Edler: Without any shoulder road ...

HS: Fish can neither spawn nor spend too much time in the Spree Canal. They need the same thing human beings need on a motorway, namely a place where they can rest. We are not going to be able to renaturalise the entire Spree, but at least we could create select ecological stepping stones.

TE: That's an important part of the Flussbad project, developing new approaches to a natural shore design in the area around Fischerinsel.

on the other hand they use oxygen to decompose. The oxygen is therefore reduced drastically and the water „collapses“. Another problem that occurs when a lot of wastewater gets into the river are the so-called „cyan bacteria“. They are also called blue-green algae, even though they aren't algae, but rather bacteria. They are incredibly toxic and carcinogenic. In such cases, we would have to close all swimming areas. The other thing I would like to emphasise in this context is that this filth is homemade. It comes from our homes and not from some evil industrial plant. Those days are over. Today, every individual has to search their own consciousness.



Fish kill at Landwehrkanal, June 15th, 2015

HGHvG: Let's come back to the problem of the sewage system overflowing. What happens with the wastewater when it lands in the river 20 times a year? Is the faecal matter transported further by the Spree? Or does it sink to the ground and remain lying there?

HS: Here we have to make a distinction. Let's take faeces as an example; it pretty much dissolves, liquefies and is ultimately carried away.

TE: It decomposes, too. The bacteria get that job done.

HS: Exactly. But that's also the problem. Faeces are dangerous in two ways: on the one hand they contain germs, and

HGHvG: Have I understood you correctly that the overflowing of the sewage system in heavy rainfall is the central problem?

HS: Yes, you could say that. That's exactly what we examined in the framework of the study. Without sewage overflows, the Spree would be clean enough to swim in. It's not surprising. There are the open-air swimming complexes at the Müggelsee, at the Tegeler See and at the Wannsee, and these waters are crossed by the rivers Spree or Havel. If we were to completely prevent rainwater-related discharge in the city, we wouldn't need a filter and would be able to swim into the Spree.

HGHvG: How can we get this overflow problem under control?

HS: We can't prevent it completely. The amount of water during heavy rainfalls is simply too great.

TE: We would have to build unimaginably massive retainer reservoirs. In other words, you would have to build cellars under half of the city. It's just not possible.

HS: At this point, we're still trying to reduce the effects. The Federal State of Berlin and the Water Utility Company are currently investing €400 million to expand storage space. That would reduce the frequency of these events, roughly speaking, from 20 times per year to 10. However, the amount of discharged wastewater is not halved as a result. But there is still another possibility that has received too little attention until now: it would involve making sure that the larger part of rainwater doesn't get to the pipelines in the first place. When there's less of that stuff in the pipes, less of it can run over.

HGHvG: And how do we achieve that?

HS: By creating more greening surfaces so that rainwater can be soaked up on properties and rooftops. If we use these green spaces optimally, we would be able to bring the number down from 10 to 5 overflows per year. But we would continue to be powerless in case of extreme rain events. And these kinds of events are occurring more often. If we truly wanted to prevent overflows 100% of the time, we would have to restructure the entire sewage system in the inner-city area. That is neither practical nor financially possible.

TE: I am not pleased with the way this debate is often played out in public. Based on what you just explained, it's very clear that it's our expectations that have to change. I hope we live to see the day when discharges are reduced heavily. But we must be aware that there will also be days when we will nevertheless not be able to swim in the water.

HGHvG: How does the Flussbad intend to deal with this problem? The overflow of the sewage system affects the Spree Canal, too, doesn't it?

TE: The Flussbad filter system is upstream, which means we would be able to filter out anything in the water before it gets to the swimming area.

HGHvG: So, there's no problem there at all?

TE: Not quite. Unfortunately, an overflow pipe was installed at the

Schleusenbrücke in 1996 and it flows under water into the canal. It has a diameter of 1.72 metres and lies directly at the spot where the Flussbad swimming area would begin, i.e. directly across from the former Staatsratsgebäude.

HGHvG: How do you intend to deal with it?

HS: We found a good solution in cooperation with the engineers at Pecher and Partner. The pipe represents the end of a so-called discharge canal. It is not steep; instead it runs upwards only gradually. We could build an underground barrage there – a type of diversion dam – there and take advantage of the enormous volume of the pipe to stop the wave of approaching wastewater after heavy rains. And then gradually reroute it.

HGHvG: But the dirt on the Schleusenbrücke would still flow into the Flussbad area – if only in small doses.

TE: No, because we could also install a type of bypass, a pipe that would start here and lie at the bottom of the canal along the wall.

HS: In other words, we would funnel the water through the Flussbad area and it would come out again at the Bode Museum. Seeing as we would be able to regulate things much better via the barrage in the pipe, the amount of pollution would be significantly less. One also has to remember that the water flowing out of the Flussbad would also appear at this point; and it would be very clean water thanks to the filter system. In other words, the Flussbad would make the Spree much cleaner than it is today. This is a highly interesting perspective that emerged in the course of the study.

TE: There is, in fact, another option that would be less expensive and also involve a certain learning curve. If the overflows in the swimming area were to take place with a frequency of roughly 3 times per year, we could decide to go without the bypass pipe. We could just put up a red flag when the sewage system overflowed and prohibit swimming for a couple of days, that is, as long as it takes until the additional water is „processed“. The question with regard to this approach is whether we really want the Flussbad to create a kind of Elysium where the water quality is always perfect. Especially if the whole idea behind the project is to learn how to handle this occasional pollution ...

HS: ... which, as already mentioned, we will never be able to get rid of completely. It is a social task. That's the great thing about the Flussbad project,



Heiko Sieker

as far as I'm concerned; it's not about creating an isolated swimming area, it's much more about elevating the issue of a clean river to a new level. But we should also never underestimate the idea of swimming in such a spot. It is truly a unique experience. It's entirely different from swimming anywhere else, for example, in a lake in Brandenburg, let alone in a swimming pool.

With Heiko Sieker spoke Tim Edler and Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen.

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Heiko Sieker is a civil engineer and wrote his doctoral thesis on the subject „Planning Overall Storm Water Management in Urban Areas“. He is Managing Partner of the company known as Ingenieurgesellschaft Prof. Dr. Sieker mbH in Hoppegarten. He has acted as an honorary professor of „Urban Hydrology“ at TU Berlin since 2012. The focus of his work includes project management in the field of urban drainage, general water management and hydraulic engineering as well as software development for the water management sector.



Friedrichsgracht 2015, planned as a filter area





# How can we clean the Spree?

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## The filter system and how it works

Heiko Sieker

### THE NECESSITY OF A FILTER SYSTEM FOR THE FLUSSBAD BERLIN

The water quality in the Spree River has improved significantly in recent decades. An evaluation of our regular measurements has proven this to be true. Upstream, before the river reaches the centre of Berlin, there are even several swimming areas that are highly popular among Berliners. For example, the lake known as the Große Müggelsee, through which the Spree flows, has been classified according to the EU Directive as having an „excellent quality“. In the subsequent inner-city area, however, a number of elements are introduced into the river – both from the rainwater sewage system and from the combined wastewater system. Add to that the Münchehofe wastewater treatment plant, which also pumps its treated wastewater via the Neuenhagener Mühlenfließ (Erpe) into the Spree. A significant level of water pollution comes especially from the combined wastewater overflows, which pump a mixture of wastewater and rainwater after strong rainfall into the Spree. Storm water runoff from city streets – especially dog droppings and cigarette butts – also contributes to water pollution. This is why it's

necessary to clean the Spree water before it reaches the future Flussbad swimming area. A plant filter installed in the Spree Canal in the section just above the swimming area is therefore an essential component of the Flussbad project.

### FILTER SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

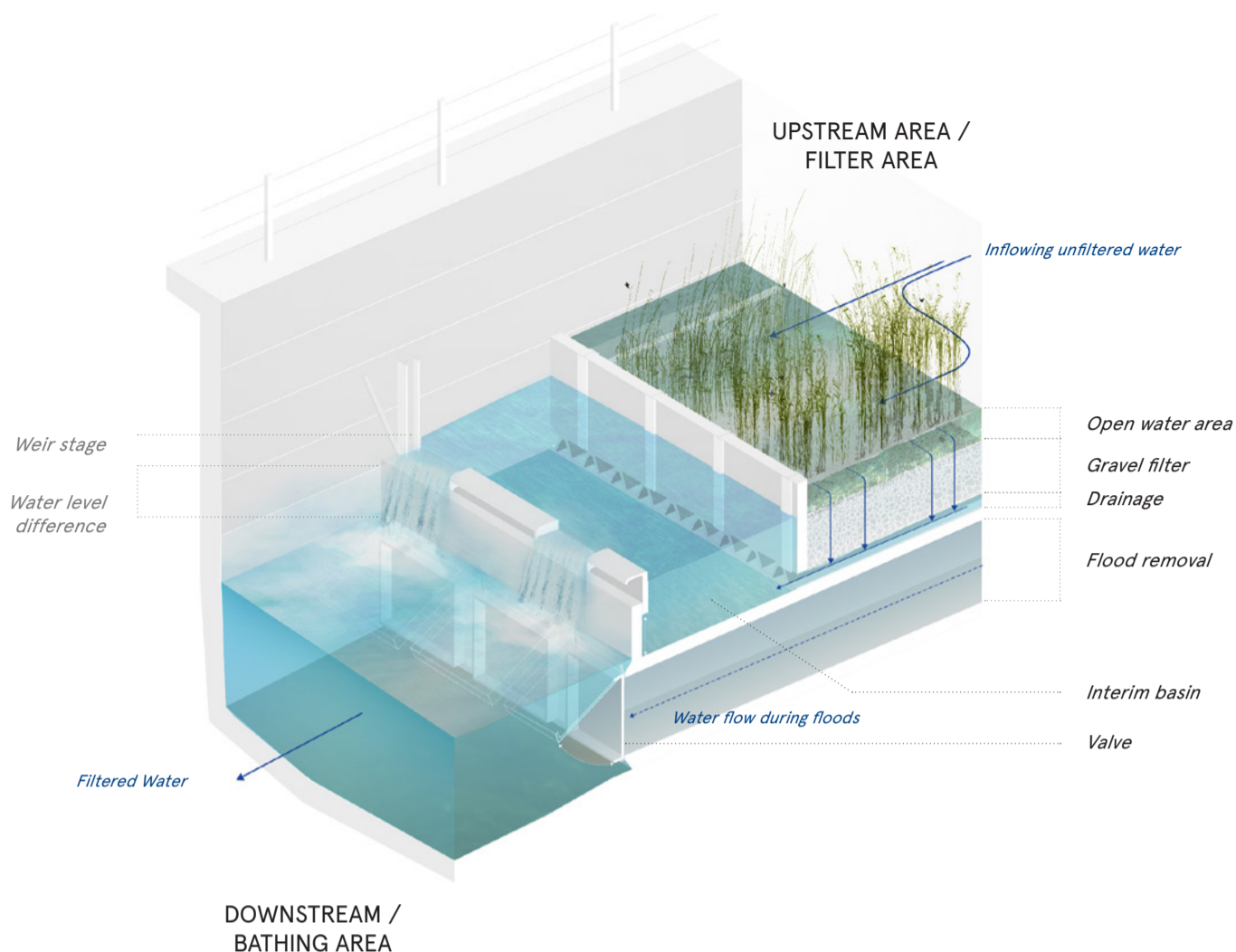
The filter is designed to treat the inflowing water in such a way that the Flussbad always has a good water quality. In order to achieve this, we have to reduce bacteria and algae in particular. According to the EU Bathing Water Directive, a low bacterial count is essential in order to avoid health risks. While algae are not harmful in and of themselves, they can still affect visibility and thus also safety. They also have an effect on our subjective feelings: for example, cloudy water is often considered „dirty“. Excessive algae growth can also lead to the „collapse“ of the water.

At first, we considered disconnecting the Spree Canal from the main Spree and circulating the water for the Flussbad by means of a filter instead of allowing it to continue to flow through the canal. But the character of a Flussbad – a flowing

stream – would be lost in such a setup. Plus the circulation pumps would require the use of a lot of energy. Instead, we opted for a natural plant filter that keeps operating costs low compared to a mechanical filter system. The design of the filter system must fulfil yet another requirement, that is, the guaranteeing of flood protection. Seeing as the flow through the main Spree is limited due to the site of the Mühlendamm Schleuse, a part of the runoff (50 m<sup>3</sup>/s) in the case of flooding must be able to be diverted via the Spree Canal.

### FILTER STRUCTURE

The Spree water will be purified in a reed-gravel filter through which it will flow vertically. In order to keep the required volume small at high capacity, the filter can be artificially ventilated with compressed air. These kinds of plant filtration systems have been used successfully for years to treat wastewater and for swimming ponds. In principle, it would be possible to install a further treatment stage (e.g. a UV disinfection system), even though it's not considered necessary at this point. The space required for this would be available in the area between the filter and the beginning of the swimming area.



Filter cross-section

A new weir would be built between the filter and the swimming area (roughly at the height of the Schleusenbrücke) as a replacement for the existing weir; the new weir would regulate the water level in the system's upstream area to the same as the current level. This would help us to avoid affecting the groundwater. Rectangular profiles would be installed under the filter to remove flood water. When the swimming pool is in operation, these rectangular profiles over the weir would be closed; they can then be opened in the case of floodwater. Hydraulic calculations have shown that these rectangular profiles could guarantee the transport of the required 50 m<sup>3</sup>/s runoff in case of floodwater. A new and adjustable weir would be installed at the end of the swimming area, right before the confluence of the Spree Canal into the main Spree. This would prevent the reflux of Spree water back into the Flussbad. It would also regulate the water level in the swimming area to a height that lies a few centimetres above the downstream level. The weir would be able to be lowered in case of flood runoff or to facilitate the entry of ships in the lower Kupfergraben. It would also take on the function of a „skimmer“ that generates a surface current in the bathing area – much like in a swimming pool – and thus also remove floating matter.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF A PARALLEL COMBINED WATER PIPE

One problem is the fact that combined sewage currently discharges directly

into the forthcoming Flussbad area at several points. The largest combined sewage discharge is found directly at the Schleusenbrücke underneath the weir, which means that it cannot be cleaned by the filter. The plan is therefore to install a so-called „management structure“ at the lead-in; this would clearly reduce the input quality by means of roughly 4,300 m<sup>3</sup> of storage volume. We are also examining to what extent we could reduce the volume and frequency of overflows by means of the decentralised management of rainwater in the area at the discharge point. These measures would provide a noticeable improvement not only in the swimming area, but also in the Spree overall. If necessary, it would also be possible to install a new pipe within the bathing area that takes up the combined wastewater and passes it on into the Spree beyond the Flussbad.

#### SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The filter system presented here makes it technically possible to generate high-quality bathing water in the future Flussbad. Such filtering would also act as a model project for the further cleaning of the Spree that would fulfil the EU Water Framework Directive.

- 1 [www.berlin.de/badegwaesser/badegwaesserprofil/strandbad-mueggelsee.html](http://www.berlin.de/badegwaesser/badegwaesserprofil/strandbad-mueggelsee.html)
- 2 Coliform bacteria, Escherichia coli
- 3 The cyano bacteria commonly known as „blue-green algae“ are not algae in the biological sense. The Flussbad system would also prevent them from forming en masse.

The design of the filter system took place as part of a framework study called the „Analysis, Change and Development of Select Aspects of the Urban Concept of the Flussbad Berlin“. The study was funded by the LOTTO Foundation.

The following individuals participated in the design of the filter system:

Prof. Dr. Heiko Sieker, Mike Post, Nicolas Neidhart  
Ingenieurgesellschaft Prof. Dr. Sieker mbH,  
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Kai Schroeder, Katharina Teuber and Klaus-Jochen Sympher  
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AKUT Umweltschutz Ingenieure Burkard und Partner, [www.akut-umwelt.de](http://www.akut-umwelt.de)



Spree Canal at the Fischerinsel, 2015, planned as water landscape



# Why Berlin needs less dialectic and more dialogue

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Arno Brandhuber



The mobile sculpture known as the Küchenmonument in the Berlinische Galerie was the site of a Flussbad Berlin gathering in June 2014

When we talk about the Flussbad, we're not just talking about a bathing area. What is at stake here is nothing less than the heart of Berlin. It would be highly beneficial to this area if it could become a habitat in which high culture and leisure activities could complement rather than compete with one another. The French philosopher Edgar Morin said it best: "We need less dialectic and more dialogue." In other words, we don't need thesis and antithesis or memorial and anti-memorial; instead, we need a juxtaposition of the two – one in which they are in alignment with one another and can really prove themselves. I support the Flussbad Berlin because I think that no location in the city should be earmarked for a particular sociality or culture. Heterogeneous situations are so much more worthy of our support! Seeing as there is already a certain level of homogeneity at Museum Island, the Flussbad would be a very welcome addition.



Arno Brandhuber is an architect and founder of studio brandhuber+, known for its Antivilla in Kramnitz, the remodelling of St. Agnes and Atelierhaus Brunnenstraße 9, among others. He is a professor of architecture and urban studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Nürnberg a42. He is also co-initiator of the event format known as Academy c/o in Berlin.



First Spree Canal swimmer, March 2014



# The signal from the water

Kai Dolata

How wonderful would it be to just dive into the Spree without worrying if the water is going to make you sick or not. Spree water experts are most likely the only people who can do that without misgivings; everyone else who jumps in does so out of ignorance, frivolousness or cockiness – and only a vague awareness of the fine they will have to pay if they get caught. However, this all might change very soon, as there are improvements in sight, at least in terms of the water's health classification.

In Berlin, the measuring of water quality levels lies in the hands of municipalities. These tests involve a costly manual process, in which water samples are taken, brought to a lab and checked for bacteria and germs (coliform germs/ bacteria, *Escherichia coli*, faecal streptococci, etc.). It takes up to three days to get the final lab results. If the levels exceed pre-defined limits, the inspection intervals are increased. In general, the test is undertaken once a month due to the cost and effort necessary to carry it out.

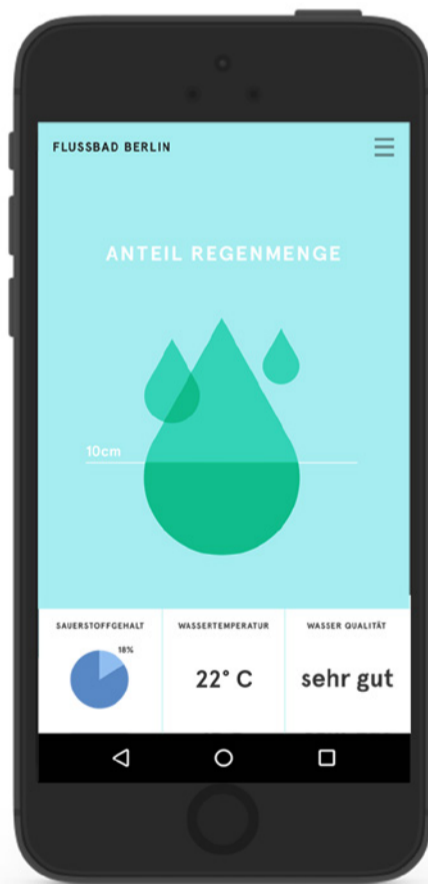
In the summer, the Spree flows quite slowly at roughly 10 cubic metres per second. In other words, by the time the lab results are in, the water from which the sample was taken has reached the Havel 25 km further downstream. Roughly 26 million cubic metres of normal-level Spree water pass by the measuring point between two tests. This is 26 million cubic metres of water whose quality we can only guess; either way, it has not been tested.

Scientists at the network known as the Kompetenznetz Wasser Berlin have been working for a while now to predict river water quality. A new research project aims to acquire different lab results than the parameters mentioned above; it combines data from the sewage system of Berlin's Wasserbetriebe, from weather stations and other sensors to gather reliable information on water quality. For example, New York uses rapid caffeine detection in its waters to measure the input of untreated household wastewater, i.e. faecal matter that can harm our health and put stress on the water.

In the spring of 2016, Flussbad Berlin will install a three-year, 30x3 m test filter in the unused leisure boat lock at the Spree Canal. The water quality will be tested using different sensors both upstream and downstream from the filter; the capacity of the filter will also be tested. An analysis of the findings will allow us to refine the filter's configuration in such a way that the results flow directly into the technical design of the filter to be installed later at the Friedrichsgracht.

least complement the measurements already taken on a monthly basis. We also plan to look at the Spree's water quality past by embedding historical measurement data.

And who knows, maybe all we'll have to do one day in the near future is glance at our smartphones to see whether we can safely swim in the Spree – and maybe even drink the water – as well as other bodies of water. How wonderful that would be.



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- 1 [www.kompetenz-wasser.de/FLUSSHYGIENE.592.0.html](http://www.kompetenz-wasser.de/FLUSSHYGIENE.592.0.html)
- 2 [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3295366/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3295366/)

Kai Dolata is an architect who examined urban and regional planning phenomena of shrinkage and growth as part of the urbikon.com group. He was a research associate at the Universität Kassel and an advisory board member of the Regionale Südwestfalen structural development programme. Kai is also a member of the „wonderland“ European Association of Architects. After many years as a project manager, he became a founding member of the Flussbad Association. Kai has been a board member of the Flussbad Association since fall 2014. When the association's office was established in February 2015, he took on the position of project manager.

The test results will also be processed by a system and made available to the general public. This will allow us to create simple, real-time visualisations that reflect the state of the Spree water in this area. We will be able to generate a comprehensive representation of the Spree using links with rain forecast data from the weather service, overflow information from Berlin's Wasserbetriebe sewage system, mobile rain sensors, etc. This knowledge will at

# An international movement

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© Gabriele Neeb

Big Jump Isarlust 2015, Munich



© Barbara Higgs

The Stadthausquai Women's Bathing Area at the Limmat in Zürich 2016

# River baths abroad



Rhine river bathing, Basel



Canals Swimmer's Club, Bruges

# Public playground for urban inhabitants

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Rainer Hehl

Inhabitants of large cities shift constantly between two extremes: on the one side is the withdrawal into the private sphere, to one's own four walls; on the other side is the step out into the public sphere, to an environment of maximum exposure. In other words, life in the city differs from life in the countryside by means of this constant shift between anonymity and public display. When you leave your house and hit the sidewalk, you automatically socialise yourself as an urban dweller and contribute to the enlivenment of the public space. Indeed, cities emerge as the result of people gathering and meeting each other. In fact, urban culture can flourish only when urban inhabitants have space available to them to carry out this performance on a daily basis. Over time, locations have emerged that contributed significantly to creating an environment that could sustain urban culture in the first place. The 19th century, in particular, saw the appearance of coffee houses, ballrooms, parks, promenades, arcades and, last but not least, bathing areas. They all became public playgrounds for urban inhabitants, thus representing an urban culture that can only unfold when people gather at these sites.

The activation of public life was fostered in the 19th and 20th centuries by the urban facilities mentioned above. Today, these sites are only a shadow of their former selves: when a shopping mall is designed in an arcade style or seeks to re-stage a particular era – such as the revamping of the „Romanisches Café“, a famous artists meeting spot from the 1920s,

at Berlin's Ritz Carlton Hotel – these are nothing more than visual simulations of urban life. They are faded images of a time gone by and serve only to stimulate consumption while being accessible only to a small circle of people.

The culture of river bathing, which existed in Berlin in the early 20th century, is hardly suitable for such a nostalgic re-staging. A river pool simply cannot be used as an architectural facade because it requires the active participation and physical input of urban inhabitants. It would be equally useless in a hypothetical tourist takeover of the city, which seeks to create a mere image of urban life rather than fostering actual participation.

The Flussbad provides an opportunity to improve urban performance and contribute to a transformation of urban culture. Public facilities help to cultivate the urban public sphere, but they also allow us to experience the city as a physical space rather than as a mere facade.

Rainer Hehl is an architect, urban planner and currently a guest professor at the TU Berlin. His doctoral thesis focused on urbanisation strategies for informal settlements using case studies in Rio de Janeiro. He has published several essays on the topic, including „Building Brazil“ and „Informalize! – Essays on the Political Economy of Urban Form“ / Ruby Press, and also lectures on international urban planning and popular architecture. Rainer is head of BAUCo – Bureau for Architecture, Urban Design and Collaborative Action (b-a-u.co).



Start of the 1st Berlin Flussbad Cup, July 12th, 2015



Participants at the 1. Berlin Flussbad Cup, July 12th, 2015



# Respect for the context

Louisa Hutton

Having always admired the trust – and implicit affection – that the Swiss citizens of Basel, Zurich and Bern show towards their rivers, I very much welcome the idea of opening a part of the Spree's canal for swimming. The creation of a narrow park with a 'soft' river edge to the south of Fischerinsel, the installation of a long reed bed with a low level river walk and a permanently clean stretch of river for nearly one kilometre can only be viewed as a huge gain for Berlin.

However, there could be a conflict in atmospheres if the idea of swimming in the city centre were to become merely one of spectacle. Intelligent design thinking to maintain sectional distance between the zone of the city and that of the water could build on the authors' intent of a discrete location for both the changing rooms and the swimmers' entrance to the water. The aim should be to discourage people in swimwear lounging on the proposed flight of steps near the Altes Museum – while not forgoing the chance for Berliners to swim alongside their historic museums.





Bode Museum between Main Spree and Kupfergraben

# “It’s time to turn towards the future”: Flussbad members and supporters reflect on the project

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Roland Becher, Bank Clerk

I’m fascinated by the idea of taking a swim in the Spree after visiting the world heritage sites at Museum Island in the old and new centre of Berlin. When the Berlin Palace is finally finished, it will make the experience even better. Where else in the world can you swim past several of a city’s greatest landmarks?

environmental protection, so I’m fully inspired by the project’s linkage of clean urban waterways, the revival of the river bathing tradition and the fostering of sport and leisure in the heart of Berlin – it’s perfect!



Axel Freudiger, Software Developer

I lived on Lake Constance for two years recently. The Rhine flows through the lake there, and the water is fantastic. The quality of life is tremendous too; you can jump in everywhere, and even drink the water. And now that I’m back living in Berlin, I ask myself: Why can’t we swim in the Spree?



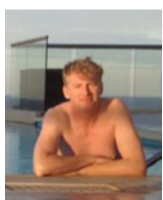
Daniel Buchholz, Chairman of the SPD Urban Development Working Group in the Berlin House of Representatives

A so-called „Flussbad“ in the middle of the historical centre of Berlin? At first, it sounds crazy, but it’s actually a fantastic idea! It makes it possible to create an entirely new urban space out of an old stone waterway. Berliners and visitors alike will be able to experience it with all of their senses. Plus, the area will enjoy a significant ecological upgrade via the reed filter and the natural cleansing of the river water.



Julia Gerometta, Spokesperson, AG Bauen, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen

Night swimming in the Spree, in the middle of Berlin. That would be something. Developed together with Berliners, instead of over their heads. A healthy Spree, cleaned ecologically. We need to examine everything in a transparent manner. Maybe it will work. The Flussbad would be wonderful.



Gregor Blach, Communications Expert

Anima sana in corpore sano! Even the classical art scholars working at Museum Island wouldn’t disagree with that. It would be an amazing thing to see – people doing sports on the riverbanks of Museum Island. Those images would make their way around the world and foster Berlin’s reputation as a great urban space to live in.



Dr. Kristin Feireiss, Author and Curator

My heart beats very strongly for this Flussbad. At the center of Berlin, in the midst of amazing cultural sites and luxury apartments, to have a location open to everyone where you can meet friends, relax and have fun. A place where no one is excluded – it’s simply fantastic. In short, a truly democratic location. If the project becomes a reality, it would represent a great thing and the most positive sign for a new Berlin.



Prof. Dr. Wulf Herzogenrath, Art Historian

River swimming at the centre of Berlin would be a true sensation. If it is possible to connect ecological and economic concerns in a way that also fulfils tourist and heritage-conservation conditions (at one of the most beautiful and intact sites in Berlin), then it will become a major attraction. Thank you to everyone who’s working on it: and don’t forget, utopia has a great enemy in habit!



Dr. Uta Maria Bräuer, Art Historian and Real Estate Agent

I came across the Flussbad project while I was doing research for my book „Bäderbau in Berlin“ („Bathhouses in Berlin“), which was published in 2013. As an art historian and avid swimmer, the idea of being able to swim in the water along Museum Island made me smile profusely. I also trained in the field of



Katrin Lompscher, Deputy Chairman, DIE LINKE Fraction in Berlin's House of Representatives, Spokesperson for Urban Development, Construction and Housing

What an extraordinary project. The initiators have used spirit and skill to successfully present the city with a striking idea. And not only that, a large amount of public tenders will no doubt go out for expert reports and campaigns alone. How was this made possible? It's simple: the charming idea of swimming in the Spree was linked to an exceptional location, Museum Island. I look forward to following the discussions, debates and all the many questions associated with the project.



Dr. Gottfried Ludewig, Deputy Chairman and Health Policy Spokesperson of the CDU Fraction in the Berlin House of Representatives

Swimming in Berlin-Mitte between the Cathedral and Museum Island – that's Berlin the way I like it. And that's why I support the Flussbad Berlin Association. How can we create open spaces in a growing city while also bringing together tradition and modern life? The Flussbad achieves this in a very charming and typically Berlin way. It's also an invitation to anyone with ideas: Come to our city! This is the place where you can turn ideas into reality.



Johannes Riedner, Local Politician and Gardner

It must have been summer 2007 when I swam in the middle of the Spree for the first time. I could see the Alex on one side and the Oberbaumbrücke on the other side. It was a huge adrenalin rush in my brain – a feeling of happiness that I just can't live without. I know I'm not the only Spree swimmer. The water quality fluctuates a lot, unfortunately. Of course, it would surpass the wildest dreams of this hard-boiled Spree swimmer if everyone could join me in experiencing this refreshing pleasure one fine and carefree day in the not-so-distant future.



Sabine von Sarnowski, Graphic Designer

When we talk about urban nature in Berlin, we're usually referring to the city's many parks. We don't pay too much attention to the fact that the Spree flows through the middle of the city. I work in Mitte. I would love to swim in the Spree on a hot summer day in my lunch break or after work. I hope it happens soon and that we will all be able to enjoy the river the same way we already enjoy our great parks.



Marina Schwarz, Biologist

I live in Reinickendorf and am an avid open-water swimmer. I've been participating in international endurance swimming competitions in ice water (without a wetsuit) since 2014. On 28 February 2015, I won my first international medal at the „Pirita Open“ Winter Swimming Festival in Estonia. This is why I'm a friend of the Flussbad. I consider the project to be very important and would love to be able to swim 1 km in the winter in the Spree.



Dr. Birgit Schneider, Visual and Media-Culture Scholar

Rivers are the lifeblood of cities. They pass through the city much like through a body. Today, it's easy to hard to find traces of the Spree's former importance, especially in the central district of Berlin-Mitte. We see a river of brown water flowing through Berlin – too stale, too lifeless and entirely inaccessible. And yet, the Spree holds an immeasurable imaginary potential. A refreshing Flussbad would mean liberating the Spree from its reduced function as a sewer and waterway; it would mean opening up the riverbanks along Museum Island. An enormous force for renewal for Berlin lies in this bold and visionary idea. Who doesn't dream about that!



Frank Scrock, Engineer

As a native Berliner and passionate water sports enthusiast, I often drive 30 kilometres from my home in Kreuzberg to the Müggelsee or Grünau to enjoy a refreshing swim. It's hard to imagine I'm the only one who finds it annoying that I have to drive almost 70 kilometres in total to swim under the open sky. I would most definitely be a regular guest at the Flussbad. I spend most of the day at my laptop, so I'm sure my back would be grateful for a daily regimen of water gymnastics in the fresh air.



Christian Schwägerl, Author

We're living in the Anthropogenic Era. One of the major challenges of this new terrestrial epoch shaped by human beings is that cities will soon have to function like nature and ecosystems. Bringing the Spree back to life at the centre of Berlin would be an important – and beautiful – contribution. The Prussian past is already receiving intense worship, so now it's time to turn towards the future: with projects such as river revitalisation, a network of fast-lane bicycle paths and new spaces for science, startups and innovative technologies.



Caroline Wolf, Architect

The Flussbad would put Museum Island back on my inner map. I would go swimming every day and night in the chlorine-free water, in memories of the Isar and in the new „bottom-up“ perspective of the Museum Island! Most of all, every stroke I made, I would rejoice that we as citizens managed to take back an urban space and design it for all of us to enjoy.

# Flussbad Berlin Association

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The non-profit Flussbad Berlin Association was founded by 15 Flussbad enthusiasts on 2 November 2012. How did the whole thing come about? It all started 15 years earlier when the brothers Tim and Jan Edler (alias realities:united) first developed the Flussbad idea, which they then presented, showcased and revised over time. When the project received the prominent Holcim Award in two consecutive years (2011 and 2012), a tremendous amount of interest was generated in the potential of the Flussbad. This motivated us to found the non-profit association and work to transform an idea for Berlin into a project for all Berliners.

We count on the essential support of an expert advisory board consisting of Dr. Kristin Feireiss (author, curator), Jürgen Mayer H. (architect), Herbert Lohner (biologist), Ulla Luther (former state councillor, architect and urban planner), Prof. Dr. Harald Welzer (sociologist, journalist) and Dr. Cornelia Ziehm (lawyer).

A number of people with far-reaching talents and different spheres of interest work on the realisation of the Flussbad project. They all embrace the Flussbad idea in their own way and contribute new aspects to the project. The association brings together the different energies and talents of individuals interested in working on sustainable urban development and making the Flussbad project a reality. For all of us, Berlin is a city of diversity and participation. Our members help, support and advise. They also activate, politicise and publish. The association thrives on its members!

When you become a member, you become an active part in the realisation of the Flussbad

Berlin project. Each member's voice is important. The more members we have, the stronger our project can be communicated to the general public. Together we can make it possible to one day swim in the Flussbad Berlin.

## Get involved!

Membership is designed for everyone excited about the Flussbad idea and interested in turning the project into reality. Members receive updates on our work and are invited to attend the association meetings to discuss the latest developments and exchange ideas. Many members foster the Flussbad project in additional ways by engaging in individual activities and campaigns.

The donations and annual membership fees submitted to Flussbad Berlin represent the association's most important regular source of income. Donating and applying to become a supporting member is very simple and takes only a few clicks at [www.flussbad.berlin](http://www.flussbad.berlin). Alternatively, you are also invited to make donations in the traditional way using the account provided below. Donations and membership fees are used exclusively for the statutory purposes of our non-profit association. We can also provide you with an appropriate donation receipt upon request.

Flussbad donation account: GLS Bank  
Account holder: Flussbad Berlin e.V.  
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Members of the association (November 2015)

“Belle Époque Paris had the Eiffel Tower; Art Deco New York, the Empire State Building. What will it be here for early 21st-century Berlin: a cardboard Schloss or the whimsical, environmentally friendly Flussbad-for-the-people?”

Michael Kimmelman,  
New York Times, October 12th, 2015

