

Flussbad Berlin

A vibrant photograph of a river bath in Berlin. In the foreground, a person is swimming, their head and shoulders visible above the water, splashing. They are wearing a yellow life vest with a black pattern. The water is dark blue and turbulent. In the background, a large crowd of people is gathered on a wooden bridge or walkway, watching the swimmers. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is lively and captures a popular summer activity.

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Editorial

All parties were in agreement! Well, almost all of them. On 30 November 2017, the various members of Berlin's House of Representatives – the parties known as the SPD, CDU, die Linke, die Grünen and FDP – voted in supporting the Flussbad project under the title "Das Flussbad zum Fließen bringen or "Getting the Flussbad flowing". The AfD, a right-wing party, abstained. The Berlin Senate was thus given the task of advancing the implementation of the Flussbad and creating the conditions for the project to receive all the permits it requires to begin operation. Thanks to this motion, we are now one major step closer to achieving our goal of generating a clean Spree Canal open to all.

In our third Flussbad annual review, we are understandably eager to show how this political decision reflects an overall shift in consciousness – one that has come about as a result of our efforts over the past years. In turn, our work would not have been possible without the funding we received from the German federal government and the state government of Berlin. Besides, over the past several years, administrators and people in general have become much more conscious of the ecological importance of downtown waterways, their tangible social force and the crucial role they play in growing urban communities.

But when is the Flussbad actually going to become a reality? This is the question we posed to Jan Edler, one of the co-initiators of the project and the current association chairman. We invite you to read his answers in the interview we carried out for this review. Just like Jan, we never get tired of pointing out that the Flussbad is about much more than just being able to swim in the Spree. Indeed, as Sylvia Metz argues in her essay, swimming is so important it should probably be accepted as a basic human right. In fact, the contemporary debate about "environmental justice" demonstrates that universal access to clean and swimmable water continues to be a pivotal social issue.

We were also interested in finding out what cultural and environmental leaders think about the Flussbad. Is it possible to reconcile the ecological aspirations of a clean and sustainable public swimming area with the protection of longstanding cultural values and monuments? In a conversation on the pages of this year's review, Hubert Weiger from Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) and Olaf Zimmermann from the German Cultural Council (Deutscher Kulturrat) agree that the future Flussbad public swimming area is located in precisely the right spot in the historic "cultural district" of Berlin's Museum Island and Humboldt Forum. Both emphasise the opportunities provided by the Flussbad at the centre of the city to raise awareness among the general public with regard to urgent ecological and social tasks.

To this day, many Berliners are still unaware of exactly how polluted the river gets after every downpour – and how complicated it is to clean it. For this reason, we decided to explain as best we could the historical events that led to Berlin's so-called "overflow sewerage" system. We also take a look at the groundbreaking scientist Käthe Seidel, who came up with the plant-based treatment technique we're thinking to use in the Flussbad. We also provide an overview of the current filter systems being tested under real-life conditions at the future site of the Flussbad; indeed, this pioneering undertaking marks the first time ever in the world that such a system is being attempted in a river.

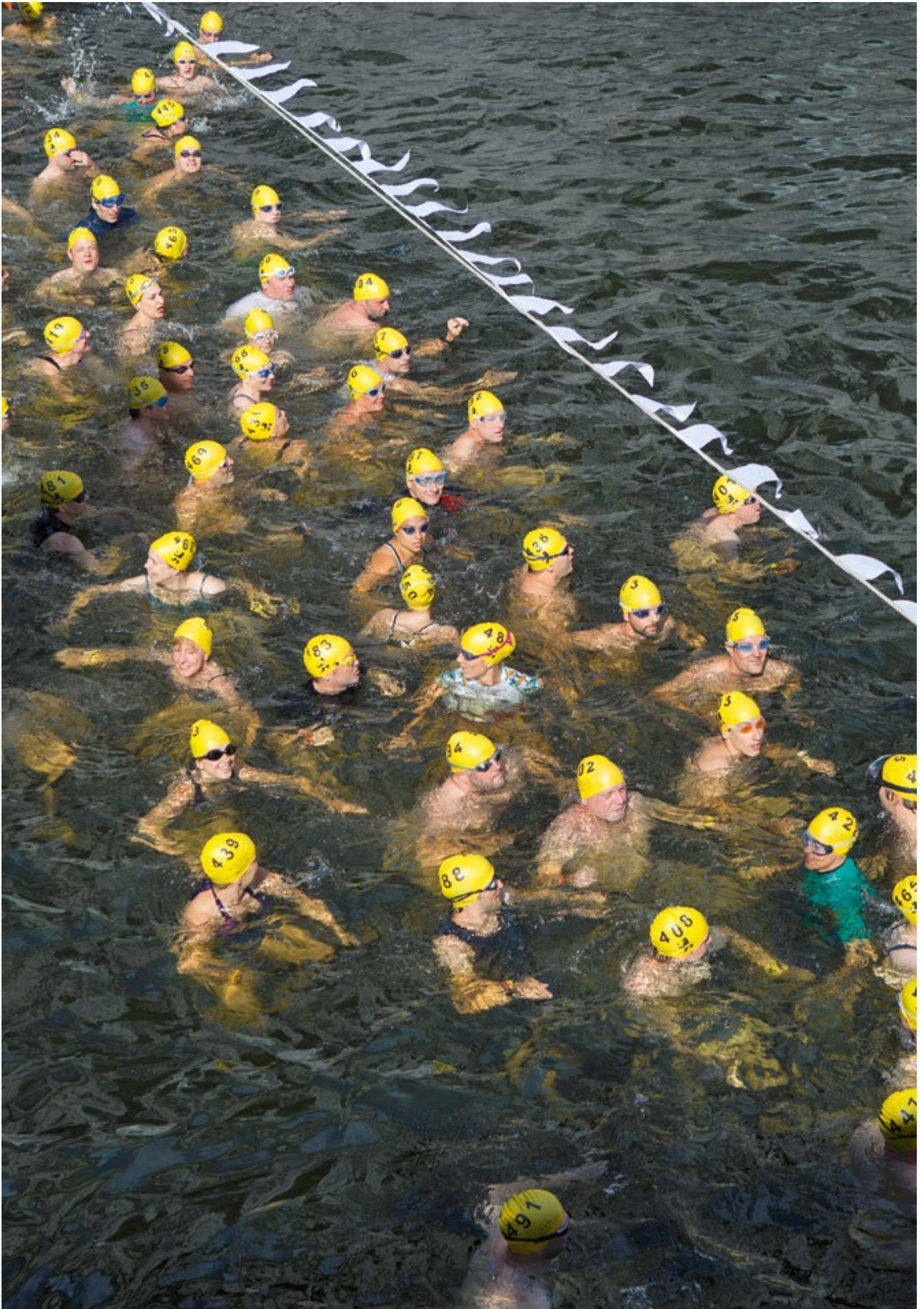
We are delighted at how many new members joined our association in 2017, and we owe a large number of our activities to their voluntary commitment. These activities include our regular on-site walking tours as well as all the presentations and discussions we organised and participated at from Berlin to Paris. It also includes the organisation of our annual Berlin Flussbad Swimming Cup and the refitting of the "Hans-Wilhelm" barge to house our prototype test filter. As you might already know, we had to cancel our annual swimming cup in July 2017 due to record-breaking rainfall and the resulting pollution of the Spree Canal. However, we were thrilled to see how many people nevertheless joined us at the Monbijoubrücke that day, where we sang Barbara Morgenstern's new Flussbad song with the Chor der Kulturen der Welt; this impromptu sing-along was a wonderful substitute for the event we had been planning for months.

We hope you enjoy reading this year's annual review. If you find yourself feeling inspired and enthusiastic about the Flussbad idea and all the work we do, then we encourage you to join us and become a member! There's no better way to make sure the Flussbad Berlin becomes a reality.

Sincerely,
Barbara Schindler,
Katrin and Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen
Editors of the Flussbad Annual Review

The "Hans-Wilhelm" barge containing our test filter makes its way to the Spree Canal in May 2017





Swimmers wait in the crystal clear Spree Canal for the start of the 2nd Berlin Flussbad Cup, July 2016

Official Greeting



Since the end of 2014, Germany's federal government and the federal state of Berlin have been jointly supporting the Flussbad Berlin Association in its efforts to drive forward the innovative "Flussbad Berlin" project. Our support comes in the form of a nationwide programme known as the National Urban Development Projects. Our decision to support the Flussbad followed on a tremendous level of cross-party political support and advocacy for the project on the part of civil society actors.

Why are Germany's federal government and the state of Berlin supporting such a project? At first glance, it might appear that the Flussbad is only about making it possible for people to swim in the Spree Canal. In fact, however, the creative and enterprising team at the Flussbad Association has set its sights on something much bigger; their goal is to bring new life to the historical centre of Berlin.

Until 1920, it was commonplace for Berliners to bathe in the Spree. Indeed, there were roughly 30 bathing facilities well into the 20th century, all of which were forced to close as a result of industrialisation and the related problems with sanitation and hygiene.

Berlin's waterways are part of the public identity, with the Spree River in particular acting as a lifeline. If we want to draw on this precious resource to invigorate our urban environment, it is essential that we make full use of the multitude of functions it offers us. We have the exciting and worthwhile opportunity to link the high-culture museum environment found at the northern end of the Spree Island with the everyday life and recreational activities at its southern tip. The Fischerinsel would experience a considerable improvement in quality as a residential space if it had an attractive and welcoming area along its natural shoreline. Without a doubt, the Flussbad would provide an essential impulse to this inner-city residential district.

Again, let's not forget; the Flussbad is not just about making it possible for Berliners to swim in the Spree. The project combines ecology and the careful handling of natural water resources with sustainable and integrative urban development. It also achieves the very challenging task of linking a breathtaking World Heritage Site with the day-to-day lives of Berliners living in the here and now.

I consider the Flussbad Berlin to be a truly valuable undertaking. It is an important urban development project with a high international profile, tremendous innovation potential and an above-average level of public participation.

In the past three years, the Flussbad Berlin Association has achieved a great deal. It has worked tirelessly to publicise the project idea, to promote its multiple goals and to raise the level of enthusiasm for a Spree Canal that is clean, accessible and open to the general public. At the end of 2016, Berlin's governing coalition agreed to enable swimming in the Spree and also to foster the realisation of projects such as the Flussbad Berlin. Since then, with the help of funding and support from important partners, the Flussbad Association was able to open an information platform depicting the project in the courtyard of the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT Berlin), which is now housed in the former GDR's State Council Building (Staatsratsgebäude). The Flussbad team also anchored a pilot facility designed to test the various possible water-filter processes in the adjacent Spree Canal.

The year 2017 came to a crowning finish when Berlin's parliament passed the cross-fractional proposal "Getting the Flussbad flowing" on 30 November 2017. This political mandate represents a major step in the work being done by the Flussbad Association to develop and implement the project in collaboration with a range of authorities.

The Flussbad has captured the spirit of our time. Berlin now joins the ranks of cities all over the globe attempting to make their waterways viable for swimming and urban recreation again. Chicago, Paris, London, Copenhagen, Brussels and Munich are just a few examples. In Berlin, the Flussbad also represents the attempt to create a unique link between the past and the modern era.

I am delighted that the Flussbad Berlin is taking on shape after 20 years. I am also excited to see that the implementation of the project is now within tangible reach. Congratulations to the Flussbad Berlin Association on its fifth anniversary. I offer my personal support in all of your efforts going forward and wish you much success in the future!

Katrin Lompscher
Berlin Senator for Urban Development and Housing

A project in progress

Flussbad Berlin is an urban development project designed to reactivate a stretch of water in Berlin's historical centre known as the Spree Canal, which has lain almost entirely dormant for 100 years. The plan divides up the 1.8 kilometre-long canal into three sections: after an ecological regeneration zone and a filter section, the project is designed to allow for a swimming area in one of Berlin's most historical settings, while also fostering a new relationship among the adjacent buildings and open-air spaces.

It's been twenty years since the project founders came up with initial idea and design for the Flussbad. A first reworking of the project took place after it won the 2011 LafargeHolcim Award in Gold, Europe's most important global prize for sustainable architecture and urban development. The designers moved the changing rooms from the banks of the Lustgarten to an area at the pedestal of the memorial to freedom and unity that was planned at the time. In 2012, the project was able to win over the jury of the global edition of the LafargeHolcim Award, which granted the Flussbad its Bronze prize. In 2014, the design was adjusted again after the project received support from the LOTTO foundation. These funds were used to test the Flussbad's technical feasibility, and the project also reduced the extent of its previously planned structural interventions: the current design maintains the canal appearance in the upper area at the Fischerinsel, and the changing rooms are now foreseen as a temporary floating facility under the monument base, so as to limit the need to intervene in existing structures. In addition, the planned jetty along the left waterside has been exchanged in favour of an invisible solution involving a bypass canal for the funnelling of sewage system overflows.

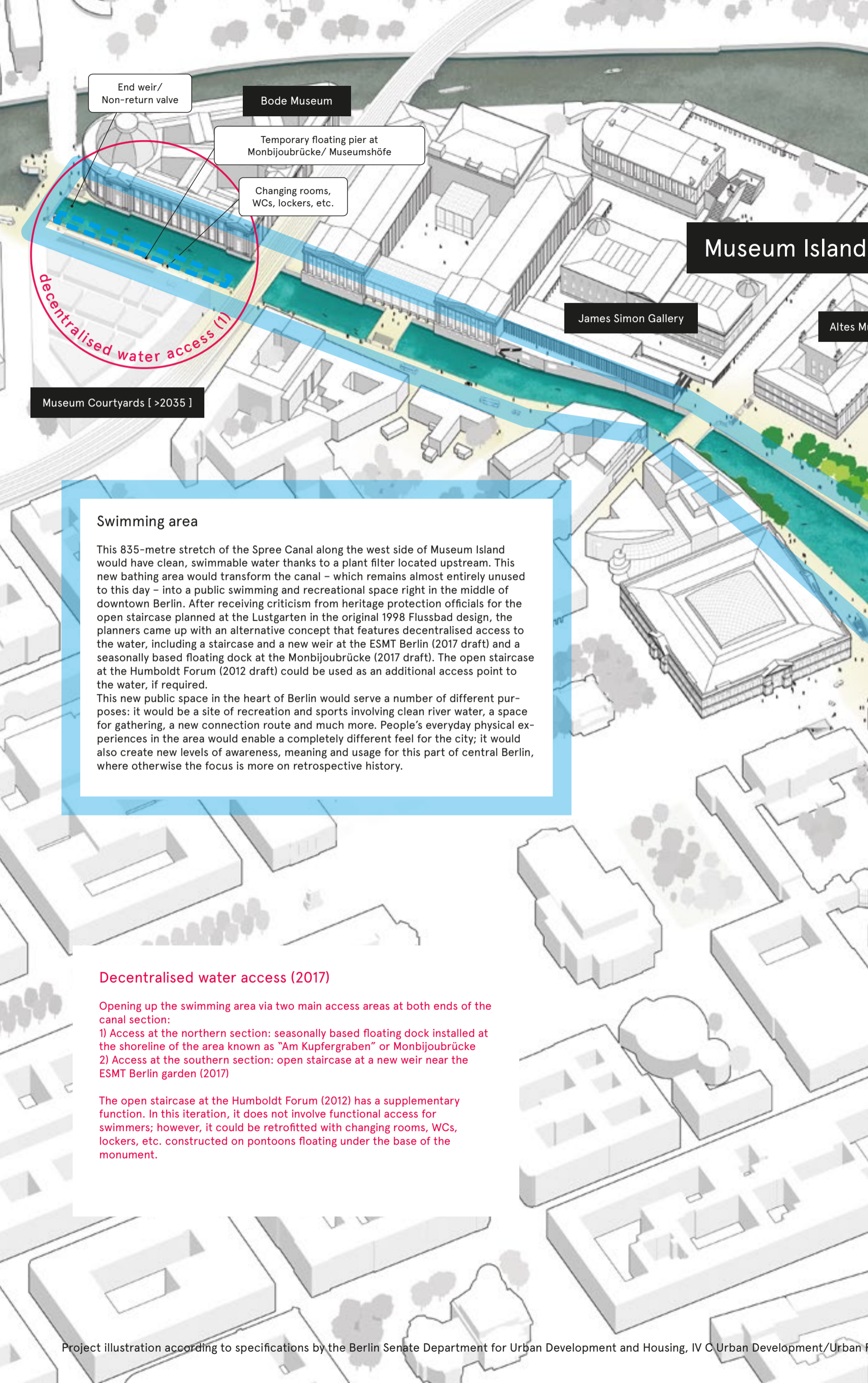
In 2014, the project became part of the federal programme known as the "National Urban Development Projects", and since then, we have been working on creating the basic conditions necessary to implement the project.

In the past several years, we took part in many discussions with the Flussbad's various neighbours and tenants in an attempt to learn more about their respective needs, concerns and objections. Among our discussion partners were the neighbouring museums, the Humboldt Forum, the ESMT Berlin, the Federal Foreign Office, the Historic Harbour and the passenger ship companies. No less important was our ongoing exchange with public authorities, including the Waterways and Shipping Office and the Berlin Monument Authority.

Additional key developments in our ongoing planning were the alternatives we devised for the large staircase originally planned for the Lustgarten – which became strongly criticised from heritage protection officials – and the related idea of "central" access to the swimming area. We now favour the installation of several decentralised water-access areas: at the ESMT Berlin, across from the Bode Museum and in front of the Humboldt Forum. Each of these areas would have its own unique character, scope and function, thus also requiring individual measures to realise them.

The planned access area located at the weir steps next to the ESMT Berlin has a special importance for the project. It would enhance the opening-up of the park area behind the Staatsratsgebäude – a measure that is also being sought by the federal state of Berlin – and transform it into an extraordinary public space for recreation and swimming right in the middle of the city. At this point, it seems that the open staircase at the Humboldt Forum is an option that many of the neighbouring institutions can already agree upon today – even independently of the Flussbad project itself. Yet another project adjustment was made in response to criticism from monument protection officials; the plant filter around the Jungfernbrücke will be omitted so as to preserve the reflecting effect the canal water has for the historical buildings surrounding it.

The following three pages provide an overview of the essential adjustments we've made over the past years. Each one of them reflects the "work in progress" nature of our project. From the very beginning, our planning activities have aimed at gathering all parties at the table, listening to all attitudes and approaches, and ultimately bringing the project to a successful close with the help of compromises and alternatives.



End weir/
Non-return valve

Bode Museum

Temporary floating pier at
Monbijoubrücke/ Museumshöfe

Changing rooms,
WCs, lockers, etc.

decentralised water access (1)

Museum Courtyards [>2035]

Museum Island

James Simon Gallery

Altes M...

Swimming area

This 835-metre stretch of the Spree Canal along the west side of Museum Island would have clean, swimmable water thanks to a plant filter located upstream. This new bathing area would transform the canal – which remains almost entirely unused to this day – into a public swimming and recreational space right in the middle of downtown Berlin. After receiving criticism from heritage protection officials for the open staircase planned at the Lustgarten in the original 1998 Flussbad design, the planners came up with an alternative concept that features decentralised access to the water, including a staircase and a new weir at the ESMT Berlin (2017 draft) and a seasonally based floating dock at the Monbijoubrücke (2017 draft). The open staircase at the Humboldt Forum (2012 draft) could be used as an additional access point to the water, if required.

This new public space in the heart of Berlin would serve a number of different purposes: it would be a site of recreation and sports involving clean river water, a space for gathering, a new connection route and much more. People's everyday physical experiences in the area would enable a completely different feel for the city; it would also create new levels of awareness, meaning and usage for this part of central Berlin, where otherwise the focus is more on retrospective history.

Decentralised water access (2017)

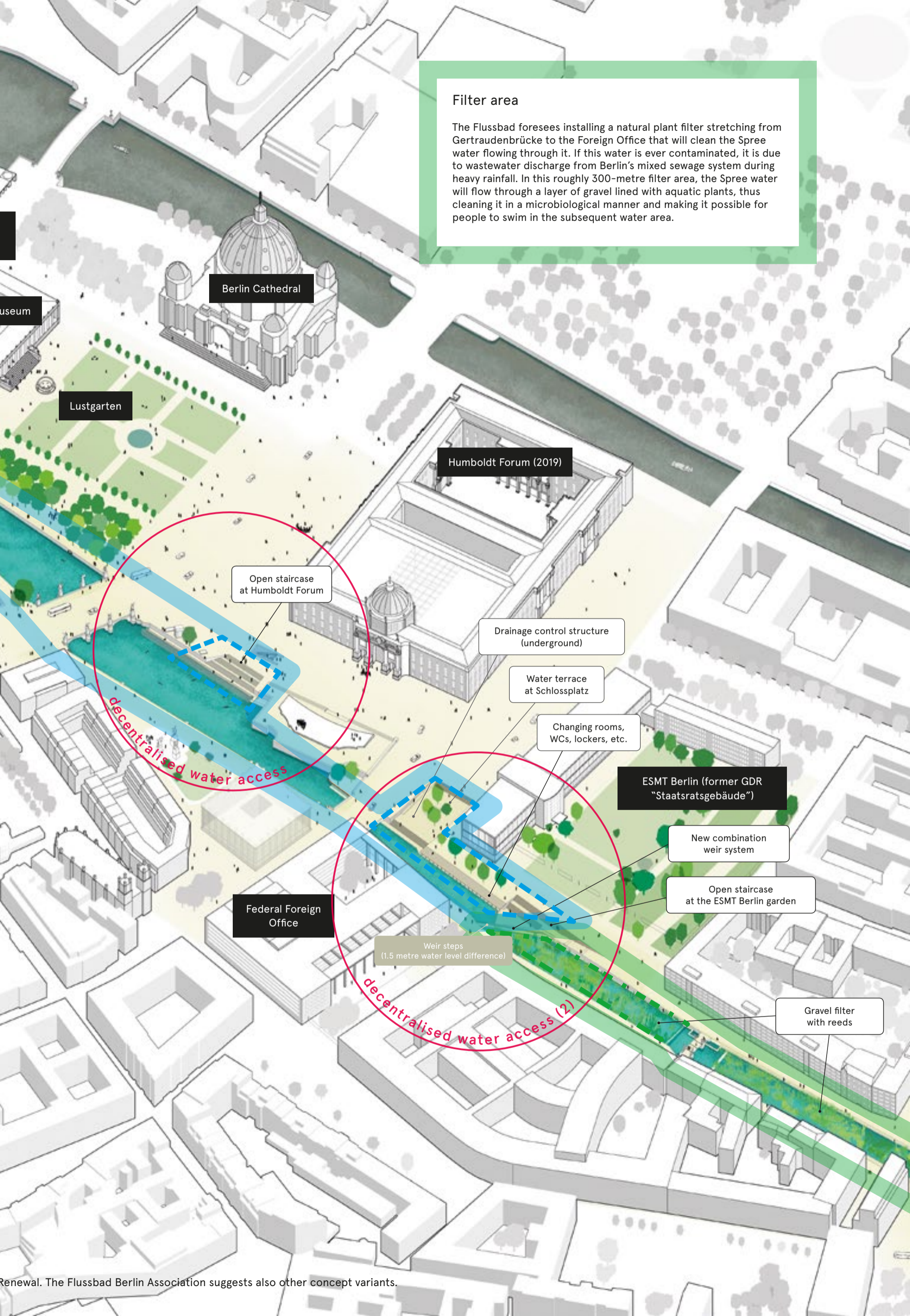
Opening up the swimming area via two main access areas at both ends of the canal section:

- 1) Access at the northern section: seasonally based floating dock installed at the shoreline of the area known as "Am Kupfergraben" or Monbijoubrücke
- 2) Access at the southern section: open staircase at a new weir near the ESMT Berlin garden (2017)

The open staircase at the Humboldt Forum (2012) has a supplementary function. In this iteration, it does not involve functional access for swimmers; however, it could be retrofitted with changing rooms, WCs, lockers, etc. constructed on pontoons floating under the base of the monument.

Filter area

The Flussbad foresees installing a natural plant filter stretching from Gertraudenbrücke to the Foreign Office that will clean the Spree water flowing through it. If this water is ever contaminated, it is due to wastewater discharge from Berlin's mixed sewage system during heavy rainfall. In this roughly 300-metre filter area, the Spree water will flow through a layer of gravel lined with aquatic plants, thus cleaning it in a microbiological manner and making it possible for people to swim in the subsequent water area.



Berlin Cathedral

useum

Lustgarten

Humboldt Forum (2019)

Open staircase
at Humboldt Forum

Drainage control structure
(underground)

Water terrace
at Schlossplatz

Changing rooms,
WCs, lockers, etc.

ESMT Berlin (former GDR
"Staatsratsgebäude")

New combination
weir system

Open staircase
at the ESMT Berlin garden

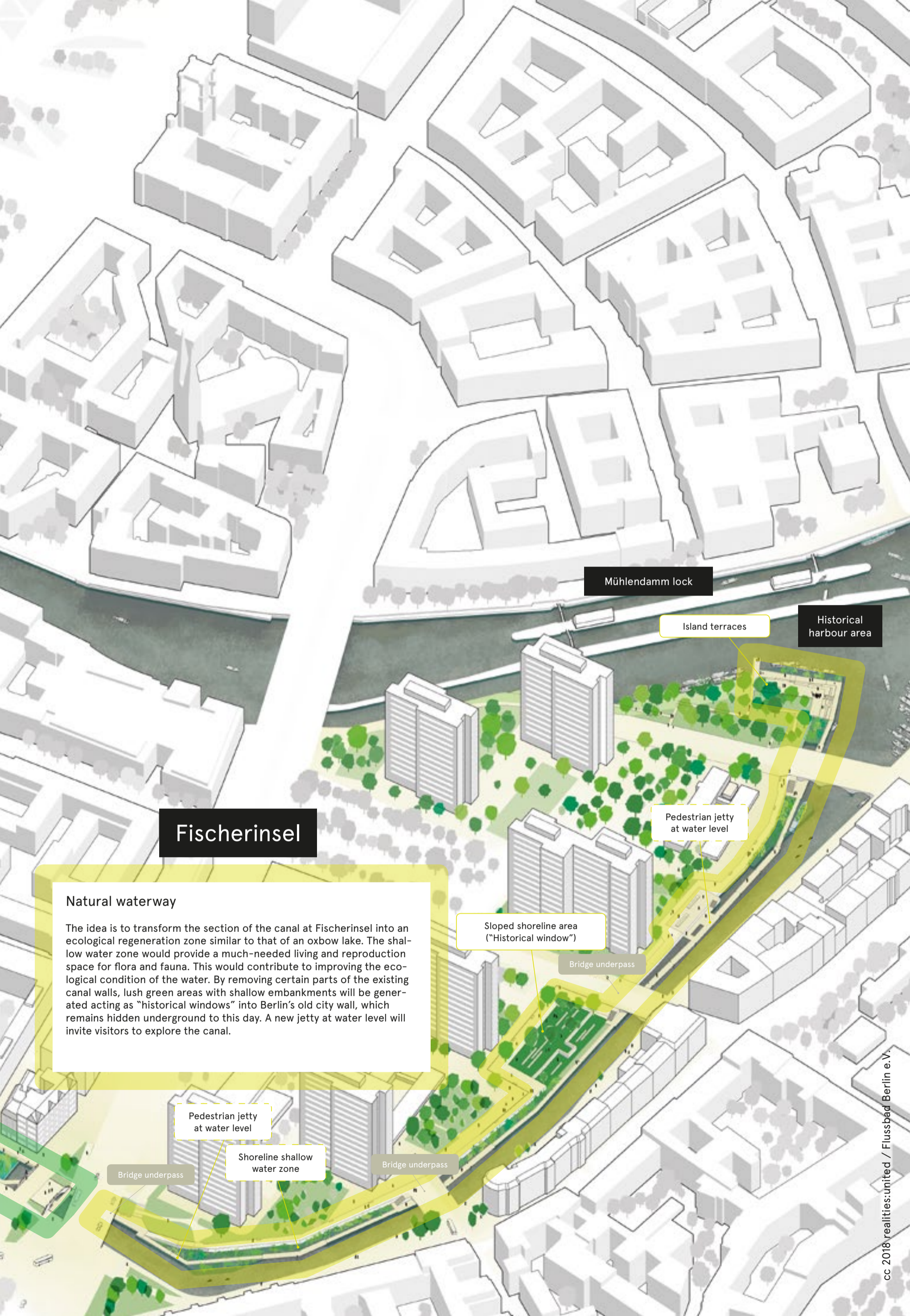
Federal Foreign
Office

Weir steps
(1.5 metre water level difference)

Gravel filter
with reeds

decentralised water access

decentralised water access (2)



Fischerinsel

Mühlendamm lock

Island terraces

Historical harbour area

Pedestrian jetty at water level

Sloped shoreline area ("Historical window")

Bridge underpass

Natural waterway
The idea is to transform the section of the canal at Fischerinsel into an ecological regeneration zone similar to that of an oxbow lake. The shallow water zone would provide a much-needed living and reproduction space for flora and fauna. This would contribute to improving the ecological condition of the water. By removing certain parts of the existing canal walls, lush green areas with shallow embankments will be generated acting as "historical windows" into Berlin's old city wall, which remains hidden underground to this day. A new jetty at water level will invite visitors to explore the canal.

Pedestrian jetty at water level

Shoreline shallow water zone

Bridge underpass

Bridge underpass

When is the Flussbad going to become a reality?

A conversation with Jan Edler



cc 2017 Dawin Meckel / OSTKREUZ

Editors: Jan, you and your brother Tim came up with the idea of creating the Flussbad in the Spree Canal twenty years ago. Can you give us a quick overview of the genesis of the project and the results you've achieved since then?

We presented our Flussbad idea in public for the first time in 1998. Thomas Flierl, who was building councillor for the district of Berlin-Mitte back then, said the project was "unrealistic enough to be able to discuss it in an impartial way". That response reflected the prevalent belief that our proposal was a utopian idea, albeit one that many people thought was great. At the time, Berlin still had a somewhat fractured relationship to its waterways, including the Spree River and Spree Canal, and almost everybody underestimated the importance of water in the process of urban development. A lot has happened since then.

When did the project gain momentum?

In 2011, the Flussbad project was awarded Europe's LafargeHolcim Award in Gold. The Holcim is the most

important international prize for sustainable architecture and urban development. It comes with prize money totalling \$100,000 US, which places it on par with the well-known Pritzker Prize. In 2012, we followed that up with the Bronze prize at the global level of the competition, this time with \$50,000 US. The unique thing about this award is that it acknowledges outstanding projects that have not yet been realised – projects that need a little push to get out there in the world. It provided the initial spark for the Flussbad project. This recognition from outside, coupled with broad media coverage, also paved the way for our first talks with political figures. It awoke the interest of Berlin's Senate Department of Urban Development and motivated us to found our non-profit Flussbad Association to move the project forward.

How has the Flussbad Association developed since?

We started out with 15 founding members, and that number has now grown to roughly 400 today. In 2014, the association was able to acquire

€110,000 in funding from the Berlin LOTTO Foundation to undertake an initial study that would test the project's basic technical feasibility. Since 2014, the association has received a total of €4 million as part of the "National Urban Development Projects" programme operated by the federal and state governments. These funds were used to develop the basic parameters of the Flussbad concept so that social and political decisions can be made by the end of 2018 with regard to the realisation of the project.

Didn't that already happen? The Berlin Senate seems to have already made a preliminary decision in favour of implementing the Flussbad project.

Indeed, some of the facts point in that direction. Since late 2016, the Flussbad project has been anchored in the state government's coalition agreement as an urban development policy objective. And in November 2017, a cross-fractional proposal regarding the Flussbad was adopted by the majority in Berlin's parliament. The senate was given the task of supporting our project by establishing

a working committee and making sure the Flussbad receives the permits it needs to get realised.

But we're still waiting for a clear political decision with regard to the realisation of the project. And, of course, we're going to need broad and ongoing support, especially from the public. In other words, if Berliners want the Flussbad, then things will work out. Membership in our association is a great way to express your support and encourage our work. There are many other valuable building blocks and ways to help us promote the Flussbad project, such as telling other people about it, and even sharing and liking items on social media.

How can you continue working on the project after 2018 when the funding ends?

That has already been taken care of, at least partially. For the first time ever, a separate title was created for the Flussbad in the 2019 state budget. This symbolises a strong political commitment to our project. We are also going to try to acquire additional funds so that when our current funding comes to an end, we can guarantee a secure transition into a realisation project.

In other words, even though construction is by no means underway, we can counter Mr Flierl's quip about the Flussbad being "unrealistic enough" and argue that our project is now sufficiently realistic that we can start dreaming about having a clean Spree River for everyone at the centre of Berlin.

What are the most urgent issues you're currently working on?

There are quite a few! For example, questions of ownership, exclusive usage rights and the development of legal frameworks that permit the safe operation of the Flussbad in the middle of the city. We have to secure financing for the construction, operation and all the related sponsorship issues. And, of course, there are a number of planning aspects that will have to be clarified at a later stage.

Let's cover each of these individual points. What is the current project status with regard to economic matters? Many people have asked how much it will cost to actually realise the Flussbad. Have you already calculated how much?

We came up with an initial cost estimate when we launched the technical feasibility study financed by the LOTTO funds. At the moment, we're having these numbers verified by an engineering office. As soon as possible, we're going to take these numbers and adjust them to fit the project development that has taken place since then. At the end of 2018, we will publish the numbers together with the updated planning status.

What kind of legal challenges does the project face?

First of all, as I mentioned above, we have to deal with questions of ownership. Like almost all rivers in Germany, the Spree Canal belongs to the federal government. And, although very few ships have sailed through here in the past 100 years, it is still officially a federal waterway. Even though it belongs to the federal government, the canal is used today primarily by the state of Berlin as a receptacle for untreated sewage during heavy rainfall. On the other hand, the fortifications along the riverbank are shared equally by the federal, the state and the municipal government. This is a highly complex situation that requires a legal agreement supported by all participating partners. What it ultimately comes down to is the scope of each partner's responsibilities with regard to preservation and maintenance; in other words, as so often in these cases, it's about money. It is a fact that it already costs a lot of money to maintain the canal today, even though it is of no use to the general public other than generating private revenue from the few remaining excursion boats that still operate on the canal. This economic imbalance alone gives us a good argument in favour of the Flussbad, especially in terms of being for the common good.

Who would handle the day-to-day management of the Flussbad? And who would be liable if something happens?

We've noticed that many people assume that having the Flussbad in the centre of the city automatically means that there will also be an organised bathing facility with all the associated operating and safety measures. This begs the following question: if we make it possible for the general public to gain access to clean bathing water, does this automatically also mean that public

authorities are obliged to provide lifeguards? As a society, we accept the fact that we swim in bodies of natural water outside cities – thus putting ourselves in danger – without the state preventing us from doing so. In other words, our goal in this realm is to come to some sort of social agreement. On this issue, it helps to take a look abroad. In the Swiss city of Basel, for example, public authorities construct and manage infrastructure facilities that enable residents to swim in the water, but the residents do so at their own liability.

Does that mean there is no need for any official institutional body responsible?

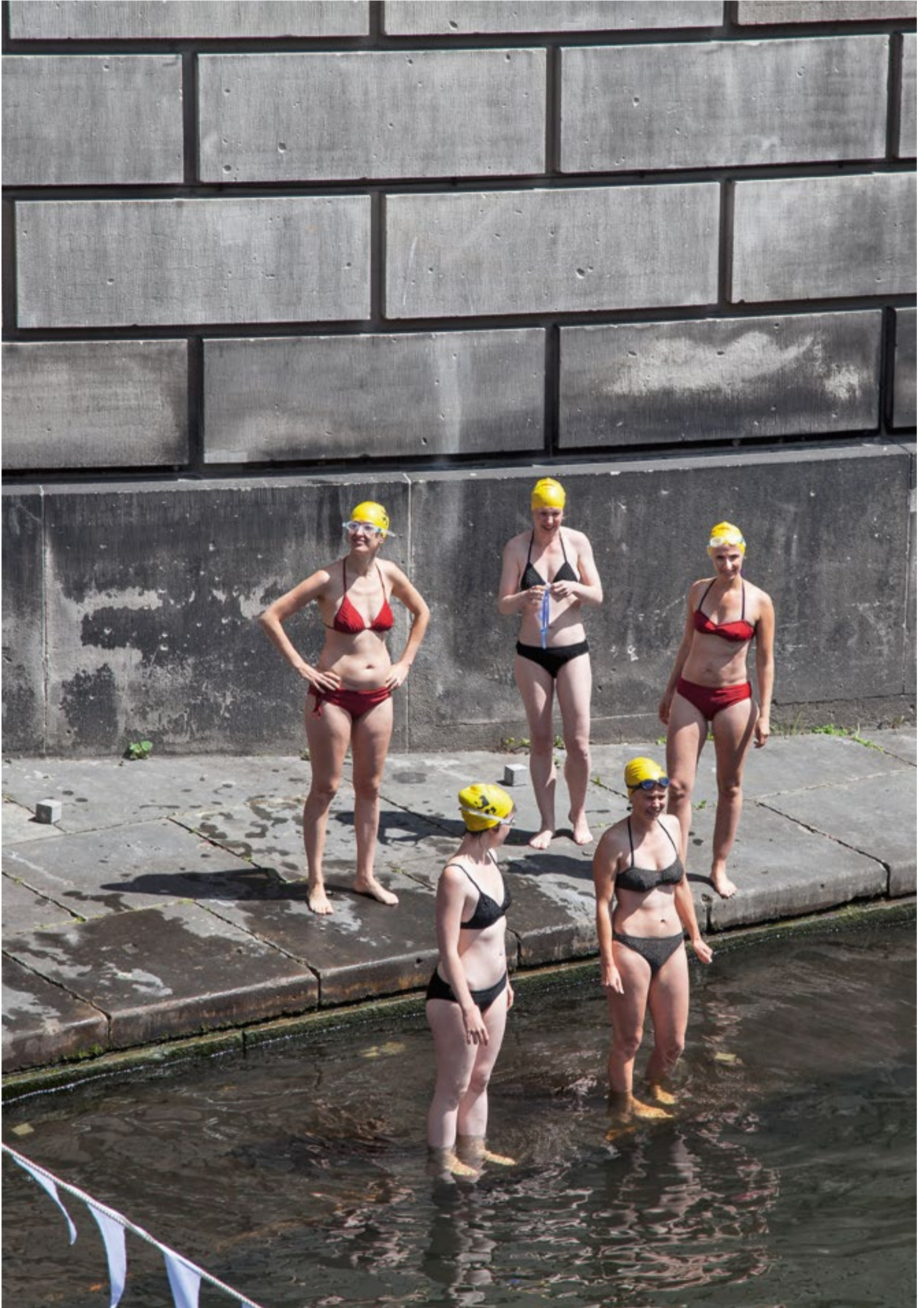
Of course, public authorities would be the institutional body officially responsible for the project, just like they are responsible for public parks and green spaces. On the off chance that public authorities reject the idea of taking on this responsibility – which I don't think they will – I can see the Flussbad being operated by a non-profit association or foundation.

The idea of filtering a river in the middle of the city and keeping it clean involves many technical challenges. How are things looking on this point?

The study we carried out using funds from the LOTTO foundation allowed us to produce the numbers showing that it's theoretically possible to clean the Spree Canal in a natural way. We are now testing out our calculations at our true-to-scale water filter test facility on a barge called the "Hans-Wilhelm", which is anchored in the Spree Canal. This makes it possible for us to amass the data we need for the subsequent planning of the filter. At this point, it's still too early to be able to present results. Ultimately, things are probably not going to focus on whether it's possible to get the water clean enough, but instead which specific filters get the job done best.

Have the issues regarding the project's desired water-entrance areas been resolved? There was a great deal of criticism on this point from the museums and heritage protection officials, specifically regarding the stairs foreseen for the Lustgarten area.

We sought out a dialogue with heritage officials and neighbouring



cc 2016 Annette Hauschild / OSTKREUZ

Participants in the 2nd Berlin Flussbad Cup at the Bode Museum, July 2016

institutions so that we would be able to better understand the reservations and fears expressed by these groups. This allowed us to develop the project further while also taking into account their concerns. We also undertook the very first comprehensive documentation of the historical heritage found in the entire project area from the tip of the Fischerinsel all the way to the Bode Museum, just to make sure that people can judge for themselves whether the Flussbad is in accordance with heritage protection. We made a number of planning-related adjustments designed to address those areas that came under the most criticism; and we made these changes in such a way that they comply entirely with the requirements of heritage protection. This includes, in particular, fundamental changes to the water-access concept.

What aspects did you change?

The original access plan envisaged the Lustgarten as a large green space. Indeed, if you look at a map of the area around Museum Island, it makes sense to have this spot act as a link to the widest space in the canal. However, heritage protection officials were especially opposed to the open-air stairs at Lustgarten; they argued that our plans would affect the urban ensemble (Altes Museum, Lustgarten and Schlossbrücke) designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel and also lead to the overuse of the Lustgarten.

Based on their objections, we came up with an alternative “dual” access concept that focuses on the neighbouring residential areas. A staircase at the southern part of the project near the former State Council Building (Staatsratsgebäude) – today occupied by the European School for Management and Technology – would link the Flussbad to the Fischerinsel and Luisenstadt areas. A second access point could be near the Museum Courtyards (Museumshöfe) opposite opposite the Bode Museum. Our subsequent discussions with heritage officials were much more positive than the first round. And yet, I would argue that the open staircase we initially proposed – which would be set up at the Humboldt Forum – remains a practical option. This is viewed less critically by heritage officials and is even explicitly welcomed as a public area by the Prussian Cultural

Heritage Foundation, which is the owner and operator.

The Flussbad also came in for some criticism relating to the plant filter and how it would alter the visuals on the surface of the water at the Friedrichsgracht.

Wherever we can, we try to address the concerns people might have in terms of our concept and the technology we use. This includes the criticism that the canal will lose its role as a reflecting water surface in the area where the natural filter will be set up. The heritage authorities specifically found fault with the reeds we want to use as a natural filter, so we’ve been conducting a number of tests on the “Hans-Wilhelm” barge – which has been in operation since last summer in the Spree Canal – and we’re investigating to what extent the natural filter system can function effectively without the use of reeds. We shouldn’t forget, however, that any filter we install will be entirely reversible and generally considered to be a temporary installation, seeing as the long term goal is to be able to swim in the water without the need for such a filter. At that point, the visibility of the water surface would be fully restored.

All in all, we value the fact that Berlin’s heritage officials are taking our project seriously and actively working to develop perspectives as to how to process such an extraordinary urban development project. Indeed, the project raises a number of questions that touch on the goal of sustainable urban development in general, and not just in Berlin. Usually, however, these issues don’t have to be solved so concretely. This is one of the tasks and challenges facing cultural development.

How is the dialogue going with the museums?

We have launched a regular discussion roundtable with those museums that are managed by the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. Our goal here is to incorporate their concerns into our planning. We’ve already seen some encouraging progress here; the foundation has moved away from its initial and quite public rejection of the project. The president of the foundation, Hermann Parzinger, recently stated that the issue is no longer if people will soon be swimming along Museum Island, but rather how they’ll do it.

When do you think the Flussbad will open?

If we approach the Flussbad as a large-scale project, then I would have to say it’s going to take a while. However, if we are prepared to see it as a series of individual measures building successively upon one another, then we just need courage and determination to be able to make this happen – at least the swimming part of it – quite quickly. One thing we need above all is a reliable and ongoing method of measuring the water quality. Our floating test facility on the “Hans-Wilhelm” could provide a basis for this; we would also need some water access points, however temporary they would have to be. Then we would be able to test the Flussbad.

How do you stay calm in the face of all these challenges?

There are a number of examples across the globe that prove it’s possible to reclaim even heavily polluted water and make it fit for human use again. Just look at what happened in Basel, Switzerland. When people saw those apocalyptic images of the Rhein stained red with thousands of dead fish as a result of the 1986 Sandoz catastrophe, it triggered massive opposition to the ongoing industrial exploitation and pollution of that river; today, you can swim in the river again. Or think of Copenhagen, where only a few years ago the port area seemed inaccessible due to heavy use and pollution; today, the location has several port swimming areas, and even more nearby spaces are going to be designated as swimming areas soon.

In addition to these inspiring examples, which give us plenty of hope for our own project, we are also seeing a significant increase in the levels of awareness people have as to how important it is to foster the ecological, sustainable and equitable development of our growing cities. The time is ripe!

Jan Edler is co-creator of the Flussbad Project. He is a founding member and the current board chairman of the non-profit Flussbad Berlin Association. Together with his brother, Tim Edler, he has been working since 1997 on projects that inhabit the interface of art and architecture – since 2000 as “realities:united, studio for art and architecture”. He was interviewed by Barbara Schindler and Katrin and Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen.



Synchronised swimmers from the Schwimm-Club Wedding 1929 e.V. at the Bode Museum during the 2nd Berlin Flussbad Cup, July 2016

Getting the Flussbad flowing—a political debate in Berlin’s state parliament

On 30 November 2017, the government fractions that make up Berlin’s state parliament – BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, CDU, SPD, Linkspartei, FDP and AfD – deliberated on a motion relating to further support for the Flussbad Berlin. Immediately following the debate, the motion was approved without opposition by a majority comprising the coalition and other contributing fractions. The AfD abstained. The following are excerpts from the speeches given by members of parliament in the order in which they spoke.



© Rainer Christian Kurzedder

BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN | Silke Gebel, parliamentary group environmental policy spokesperson in Berlin’s state parliament:

(..) It’s going to be a marathon, not a short-distance run, which is why we decided to table this motion. We want to give the project some tailwind and get clear that we intend to push it forward and support it across all departments and levels. Planning is already underway. It would be fatal if things were built in the area that ultimately ran counter to the Flussbad, even though perhaps everyone involved says: “Wow, that would be a great idea.” It cannot be incompatible, which is why we said we need a working body that brings together all of this and where we, as political actors, can make sure that it continues to be

compatible. The ownership structure is, to say the least, complicated. We still need to build a bridge to the Waterways and Shipping Office, above all others, even though we are already in constant dialogue with them. Of course, cleaning the water is also a big task. If we get that up and running and manage to build a great filter – the feasibility of which is currently being tested – then we could also apply this knowledge and experience to other bodies of water, such as the Wuhle or the Panke, and generate even more ecological benefits for the entire city. At this point, we’ve set aside money in the budget so that the project team can continue working and concentrating on the future. Once again, our goal with this motion is to generate tailwind for the project and ensure that the working group functions across all levels. I hope that by the time the 2018 Flussbad Cup takes place [...] we will have a report ready and be able to say that we’ve taken a major step forward here. I’m looking forward to it.



© Tobias Koch

CDU | Dr. Gottfried Ludewig, deputy chairman and parliamentary group healthcare policy spokesperson in Berlin’s state parliament:

(..) I am particularly pleased that we managed to bring the motion to the plenary with the support of all parliamentary groups, so that we can make it clear that we, as a whole parliament, stand behind this project across all parliamentary groups. It is a project we have supported for so many years now already. [...] The Flussbad takes free and open spaces and gives them a new function and meaning. These are free and open spaces that are less and less available in our city, which continues to grow at a rapid pace. This type of use is exactly our goal. [...] I am delighted that this ecologically innovative bathing area allows us to create something unique, something typically Berlin. It sends out the signal that

developments such as these are still possible in Berlin; that the craziest and most exciting projects in the world are being carried out in Berlin and nowhere else. However, it has to be clear to all of us that this is not a project put forth by one individual. It is not a CDU project, it's not an SPD or a Green party project, it's not an FDP project. Instead, it's a project by and for all of us, and it will continue to be a collaborative project, a classic example of how this project, which is based on an original idea put forth by Tim and Jan Edler and their friends, was promoted over the years until it found an ever-increasing group of supporters, made its way to us here in the parliament and all the way to where we find ourselves today with this motion. [...] I am delighted that this is taking place across all parties. It would be great if, in addition to having this debate today, we also took up the senate's progress report – which is available twice a year – at least once a year. If we were to hold discussions with one another, we might be able to push this mammoth project forward year by year and perhaps even go for a swim together one summer in the future – maybe in 2021 or 2022, although I know the Senate is not so good with dates. Many thanks to everyone who participated.



Foto: SPD Berlin

SPD | Daniel Buchholz, chairman of the urban development working group of the SPD parliamentary group in Berlin's state parliament:

(...) The German federal government and the state government of Berlin have made €4 million available so far [to fund the project]. Until now, however, there was no clear decision as to whether the project would actually be implemented. This is why it is very important that we – as Berlin's state parliament and across all political parties – demonstrate clearly that this idea is very important to us, not just as an ideal. We have succeeded by working together. If I'm not mistaken, all parliamentary groups agreed, and now, starting in 2019 – the point at which the project financing would have

expired – we are going to support the project office with €250,000 from the state budget. This is an important means of support for this great idea. [...] I am also on the Cultural Committee, and I thoroughly enjoy examining issues relating to monument protection and questions of urban planning; however, to this day, I still cannot comprehend how some monument preservationists can say that the idea of removing a piece of the old quay wall and replacing it with stairs leading down to the water for this project is, for them, unimaginable. If this is the case, then I can only say, Ladies and Gentlemen, how is it possible that a new entrance area – the James-Simon-Gallery – is being built on Museum Island? Oddly enough, that this project is entirely compatible with monument preservation, but when it comes to reinstalling a quay wall, all of a sudden, the story is different. This isn't something we can explain to a normal person. [...] And this is the reason why the Berlin state parliament – indeed, all of us together – must announce that we want to get this Flussbad flowing. We want to create new areas of experience in the city for ourselves and for visitors. We see this being done in other metropolises, and it means winning back a piece of our city. I believe the Flussbad continues to be a fascinating, exciting project. Today, I am delighted that we can clearly state – across all parties in the immediate vote – that this project can and should be brought forward. To everyone who is still hesitating, we simply say "Join us!" If you do, in a couple of years, we'll be able to go swimming together in the Spree in Berlin.



© Ben Gross Photography

DIE LINKE | Marion Platta, DIE LINKE spokesperson for environmental policy and sustainability in Berlin's state parliament:

(...) I've been interested in the distribution of environmental justice for many years now. The statistics regarding air pollution, noise pollution, bio-climatic conditions and the level of green spaces are publically

accessible to all, as are the planning-related data on the social index. The Fischerinsel is found at the southern end of the Spree Canal, and Stadtmitte is also not far away. What we have here are high-stress areas that are still disadvantaged. This is why we want to take advantage of this idea of swimming in the Spree to offer inner-city residents some sort of improvement in terms of environmental justice. We also have a strong social interest in making this happen. [...] The Flussbad project also provides an answer to the question of what could possibly prompt us to take a step towards the otherwise sluggish implementation of the European Water Directive in Berlin. Indeed, in addition to the good condition of the Spree's surface water, the Flussbad would give us a new opportunity to use publicly accessible and clean water in the Spree Canal. I have worked to ensure that we can vote directly on this motion today, especially seeing as it is a cross-party motion. [...] Summer swimming is a great thing, but why not also set up an academy for children and youth to monitor and explore the new and all-natural water filter. Interested parties could join together with experts to increase their knowledge about water and aquatic environments in a central downtown space at Museum Island. In my opinion, there are a myriad of exciting development opportunities – public bathing being only one of many – to look forward to here in the city centre, but also at other waterside locations throughout the city.



Foto: FDP-Fraktion Berlin

FDP | Stefan Förster, FDP parliamentary group spokesperson for building, living, monument protection in Berlin's state parliament:

(...) What it's going to take are active individuals and a project team that is truly committed and full of passion for their work. These are the basic prerequisites for the success of any idea like this. And the Edler brothers are doing just that. And the people that are working with them are doing the same, which means



From left to right: Daniel Buchholz (SPD), Stefan Förster (FDP), Silke Gebel (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN), Gottfried Ludewig (CDU) and Katalin Gennburg (DIE LINKE)

they already have the essential building blocks. A project like this wouldn't work if it were prescribed by the state; the civil-society approach is the most effective approach. State actors can and should support the project, but the people who came up with the idea are the ones who need to implement it. Our job is to support them to the best of our ability. [...] The same goes for the question of historic preservation. I'm not as sceptical as others on this question. To date, there simply have been no concrete plans that we could have officially

approved. Instead, we've had non-binding discussions, whereby the preservation people pointed to a few problems with the preliminary plan, which they are absolutely right to do. None of us want any part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site to be lost the way it was in Dresden. We simply don't want that. In this respect, we are going to do our utmost to ensure that the framework conditions are right – and, indeed, we are going to work together with the heritage preservation team, not against them. Our goal is to gain a major attraction in Berlin without

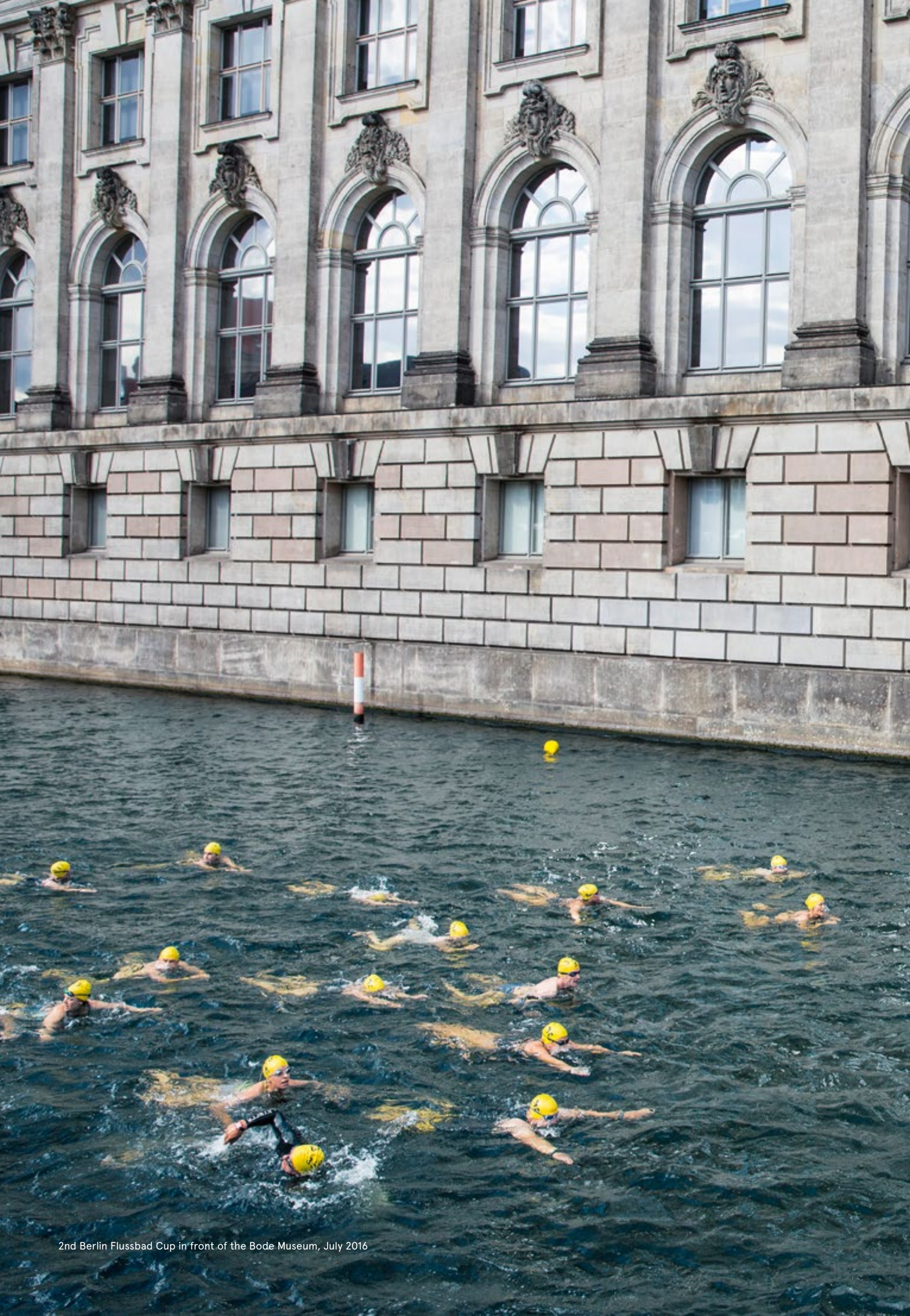
losing another one. We have consensus on that point among all of us applicants, I believe. [...] And now, we want to send out a positive signal to the project team – those great visionaries – that they should get started. Indeed, we want them to start going into detail with the knowledge that we will accompany them in a constructive way throughout the process. We want everyone to know that we also believe in re-thinking Berlin time and again, just to make sure the city stays exciting.

Flussbad Berlin sincerely thanks all of those political parties and members of parliament who have campaigned for our project for their support.

The buoy at Lustgarten marking the halfway point of the 2nd Berlin Flussbad Cup, July 2016







2nd Berlin Flussbad Cup in front of the Bode Museum, July 2016



Swimming. No more and no less

Sylvia Metz



Leopold Kuchwalek (100), Berlin's oldest swimming instructor

© Barbara Schindler 2017



Foto: Ed. Gross Rimini

My love for water came into being at the same time as my love for Italian ice cream. And both of these affections continue uninterrupted to this day. As a child, my family and I travelled every summer to the Adriatic coast in Italy. The area we stayed in had Luna Parks with bumper-car swans us kids would drive around and around in at night; however, more importantly, they also had delicious Gelato and a Mediterranean sea that was as warm as a bath. In fact, I frolicked in this sea before I even learned how to swim.

For me, it was only logical that I should learn how to swim properly as soon as possible. Shortly before I started primary school, my parents signed me up for a swimming course on Saturday mornings in a pool in a town next my own in the State of Hessen, Germany. In the 1980s, it was perfectly normal for children to learn how to swim at the age of five. We proudly wore our "seahorse" badges on our swimsuits, and when we grew out of those suits, our mothers would sew the old badges on our new suits. I had so much fun swimming that I went straight on to the "bronze" and "silver" levels and even joined the Marburg Swimming Association (MSV). When regular swimming lessons started in fifth grade, I ended up teaching our sports teacher how to do butterfly.

A recent non-representative survey of my colleagues on the Flussbad Berlin team showed that 95 % of them learned how to swim at a nearby pool at the age of five. The most common name for a swimming instructor was Uwe. When we think back to our first swimming experiences – no matter whether we come from East or West Germany – we can all vividly remember the smell of chlorine.

Unfortunately, it is no longer a given that children in Germany learn to swim as early as we did. In fact, more than half of all 10-year-olds in Germany don't know how to swim.¹ The German Lifesaving Association (DLRG) regularly calls on schools to implement swimming instruction more consistently. In 2015, almost 500 people drowned in Germany, including 25 girls and boys aged up to 15 years old and 72 teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 25.² In 2016, for the first time in ten years, the number of drowning deaths even grew to over 500. Refugees were also among those who died; indeed, many refugees cannot swim and often underestimate the dangers associated with swimming. However, refugees alone do not explain this distressing trend.

Some say that the blame for the growing number of non-swimmers lies with our changing lifestyle. General

motor disorders in children, obesity and ever-increasing media consumption are cited as the reasons for this.³ The large number of swimming pool closures is also seen as one of the biggest causes. When municipalities stop spending money on swimming pools or delay their renovation, this inevitably leads to a shortage of sports facilities. If there is no pool in the vicinity of a school, then swimming lessons simply don't take place. The result is that people are dying today simply because they can't master a sequence of easy-to-learn physical movements.

And what's more, swimming is great for our health: it has positive effects on a person's mental abilities, helps to reduce stress hormones, promotes blood circulation, stimulates the heart and circulation, strengthens muscles and relieves joints. One of Germany's leading daily newspapers, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, titled a recent article: "Learning to swim. It's as important as learning how to count."⁴ This is the right approach. Swimming is the fourth most popular sport among Berliners.⁵ If someone asked me, I would put swimming at the top of my list. However, not everyone is as enthusiastic as I am. In fact, swimming lessons have even become the subject of regular lawsuits; Germany's Federal Constitutional Court recently determined that parents of Muslim girls are not permitted to excuse their daughters from joint swimming lessons with boys for religious reasons.⁶ The court argued that the state's responsibility to educate is more important than any religious objections. In my research on the theme, I came across something called the UNESCO "International Charta for Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sports."⁷ This actually exists, and I'm delighted it does. It states, for example, that sports are part of human beings' non-material heritage. Article 1 of the Charta says: "Every person has a basic right to physical education, physical activity and sports without any difference made in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other convictions, national or social origin, wealth or other characteristics."

With regard to swimming, I wonder how concretely these noble principles can be put into actual practice. Can every family afford swimming courses when even schools can't offer them as part of physical education due to a lack of facilities? At the moment, swimming courses during the school holidays at the Berliner Bäder-Betriebe (BBB), Berlin's official public swimming pools, cost €105. Other providers charge up to €150. In early 2011, Germany introduced its so-called "Bildungspaket", an education package that states that "children in need should not be excluded from participating in recreational activities. They must be able to participate in sports, play and culture. For this purpose, a monthly amount of up to €10 is available, for example, for membership in a sports club, for fees for a music school or, in exceptional cases, also for equipment such as sports shoes and music instruments".⁸ If a family dependent on such funding decides in favour of the €105 swimming course, it means that all other sports-club events are out of the question for a good ten months. The family also has to decide, for example, between swimming lessons and, let's say, an arts class or football practice. In other words, the fact that so many children cannot swim these days is likely also due to social causes.

But let's assume that the family nevertheless decides in favour of sending their kid to a swimming

course. Once the child gets its “seahorse” badge, it might want to go swimming more often. Today, it costs €9 for a family with one kid to go swimming at one of the BBB pools. If you don’t have this kind of money, there’s simply no going to the pool. If your neighbourhood pool falls victim to the wave of closings – roughly 80 pools are shut down in Germany each year – you might even have to seek out a public swimming spot.⁹ Berlin indeed offers several lovely and often free beaches and lakes, but most of these are not found in downtown Berlin. While access to these swimming spots is possible in theory, it’s usually hard to organize such visits in practice. And while some people enjoy “driving to the lake for the weekend”, for others, this is simply not an alternative, whether for financial or time-related reasons. In other words, it’s simply not the case that people who find Berlin’s swimming pools too expensive or too far away can just drive to a lake. For this reason, public and freely accessible spaces for sports and recreation in the city should not be seen a luxury, but rather as a necessary investment in a healthy community.

For a number of years now, this quandary has come under increasing public scrutiny, with the focus being placed on the word “Umweltgerechtigkeit” or “environmental justice”. In 2015, Berlin joined with the “Bund Naturschutz” environmental group to generate the “Umweltatlas” or “environmental atlas”, a study that investigated the unequal distribution of environmental pollution in Berlin, including noise pollution, air pollution and too few green spaces.¹⁰ That report states the following: “It has long been known and scientifically proven that social milieu influences people’s health and life expectancy”. In fact, the study shows that negative environmental factors and low-level social status encounter one another directly in some neighbourhoods. In other words, if you live in certain parts of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Wedding, Reinickendorf or Neukölln, you might want to refrain from mentioning so to your healthcare insurer if they one day attempt to introduce a new rating system based on external health risk factors. If we were able to increase the opportunities to learn how to swim in these neighbourhoods, it could act as a great counterbalance.

By 2050, it is very likely that not just my family and I, but also around 70% of the world’s population, will live in cities. At a recent event focusing on health, I learned that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has already started thinking about what can be done to ameliorate enormous urban crowding. Indeed, in its “Urban Health Initiative”, it explicitly welcomes urban projects that foster health and help to avoid illnesses.¹¹ Flussbad Berlin is an urban project that embodies this very spirit.

As I explored the topic further, I realised that the link between health and urban planning today forms a part of each and every contemporary sustainable development agenda. For example, one of the goals of the United Nations’ “Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development” is to make cities and residential settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.¹² They are also looking into whether the “right to a healthy environment” should be recognised as a new fundamental human right. The first step towards recognition has been taken, and soon a draft treaty will be submitted to the UN General Assembly.¹³

I see these admirable expressions of intent and the key goals pursued by the major health and environmental

organisations as being very important; indeed, they represent the theoretical basis for our practical action. Federal states, cities and communities receive orientation aid and planning assistance for a form of sustainable urban planning that is environmentally friendly while also fostering health and social justice. In fact, a clean environment is the prerequisite for being able to move around freely and engage in sports in public, no matter whether you’re in the city, in the countryside or on a river.

However, we should not allow this approach to remain in the theoretical realm. We need to think very concretely about how each and every one of us – in the context of our own personal lives and spheres of activity – can work to realise these goals. The Flussbad project wants to make swimming possible for everyone, and also to make it a part of our right to personal health and a clean environment. The Flussbad envisages a swimming area in a central location with excellent accessibility, free entrance and the opportunity to swim for leisure or for sport. This is the vision! And yet, for our society, swimming can only be the beginning. No more and no less.

Dr. Sylvia Metz was responsible for public affairs at Flussbad Berlin from July 2015 to December 2017.

1 <https://www.dlrg.de/presse/pm-dlrg-bilanz-2016.html> (consulted online on July 10, 2017).
 2 https://www.dlrg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/DLRG.de/Fuer-Mitglieder/Downloads/Verbandskommunikation/PM_Statistik_Ertrinken_PM-Dokument_neu.pdf (consulted online July 10, 2017).
 3 <https://www.welt.de/regionales/nrw/article154770566/Bequem-ueberge-wichtig-und-falsch-erzogen.html> (consulted online July 10, 2017).
 4 See Süddeutsche Zeitung, July 12, 2017, S. 24.
 5 See https://www.statistik-berlin-brandenburg.de/produkte/kleinstatistik/AP_KleineStatistik_DE_2016_BE.pdf (consulted online July 10, 2017).
 6 See the decision handed down by Germany’s Federal Court, Az. 1 BvR 3237/13.
 7 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002354/235409GER.pdf> (July 10, 2017).
 8 <http://www.bmas.de/DE/Themen/Arbeitsmarkt/Grundsicherung/Leistungen-zur-Sicherung-des-Lebensunterhalts/Bildungspaket/leistungen-bildungspaket.html;jsessionid=3068527098331358B-9D2A2C44E3874D9> (consulted online on July 19, 2017).

9 See http://www.dosb.de/de/service/sport-mehr/news/detail/news/1041_schwimmbaeder_geschlossen_oder_von_schliessung_bedroht/ (consulted online on September 21, 2017).
 10 <http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/umwelt/umweltatlas/index.shtml> (consulted online on August 23, 2017).
 11 See <http://www.who.int/sustainable-development/cities/Factsheet-Cities-sustainable-health.pdf?ua=1> (consulted online on August 24, 2017).
 12 See http://www.bmz.de/de/ministerium/ziele/2030_agenda/index.html (consulted online on August 24, 2017).
 13 <https://www.csr-news.net/news/2017/06/25/recht-auf-eine-gesunde-umwelt/> and <http://www.leclubdesjuristes.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Draft-project-of-the-Global-Pact-for-the-Environment-24-June-2017.pdf> (consulted online on August 24, 2017).

Lifeguards from the German Lifesaving Association (DLRG) at the 1st Berlin Flussbad Cup, 2015





Swimmers in the 2016 Flussbad Cup at the James Simon Gallery (under construction), July 2016



“The spark that triggers other initiatives”

Hubert Weiger, Olaf Zimmermann and Tim Edler discuss culture, sustainability and Flussbad Berlin



From left to right: Tim Edler (Flussbad Berlin), Olaf Zimmermann (German Cultural Council), Hubert Weiger (Friends of the Earth Germany)

cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen (HvG): So, we’re here to talk about sustainability and culture. When I hear the word sustainability, I think about environmental protection and nature, but not about culture. Mr Zimmermann, as a man of culture, where would you say these two issues meet?

Olaf Zimmermann (OZ): The concept of sustainability is not limited to a specific area. In culture, too, we try to work in a manner that’s as sustainable as possible. The exciting point is discovering where exactly the dividing line is between nature and culture. Nature is shaped by culture. Indeed, what we think of as environmental protection today is not the re-creation of some sort of original state of mankind. Instead, it involves the conservation of a cultural approach to life. Our forests, for example, are extremely cultivated

areas; that is to say, they are far from being in their original state. And precisely in this cultivated form they are loaded with mythical and cultural meaning, especially here in Germany. This is the exciting link between nature, culture and sustainability. It’s also what connects all of us at the German Cultural Council with the organisation known as Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND).

HvG: Mr Weiger, as a nature conservationist, what is your perspective on the relationship between sustainability and culture?

We’ve been discussing sustainability for decades. The idea behind sustainability is to shape the economy in such a way that it does not destroy the natural basis of our existence and livelihood, while at the same time ensuring a social balance. In the past several years, it has

become quite clear to us that we must include the dimension of culture in discussions of sustainability. Just as Mr. Zimmermann noted, the things we protect as nature have all been significantly altered and shaped culturally.

Nature conservation in Germany did not emerge from out the wilderness, but rather from the cultural landscape. In fact, these cultural landscapes—which were seen as being harmonious, multifaceted and “biotope-rich”—were considered especially valuable from the perspective of nature conservation. What’s also interesting is that in the early years of nature conservation, there was no divide between monument protection and nature conservation. The two realms—the city and the environment—were seen as a unit. The separation of these two occurred as a result of jurisdictional

regulations, and indeed the preservation of historical monuments today has different structures than those of nature conservation. This explains the emergence of the idea that nature conservation only begins outside the city. It's only been in the past several decades that we realised the extent to which we have a responsibility to take particular care of nature where only remnants of it remain, that is, in cities.

HvG: Which brings us back to the Flussbad. This is a project situated in the middle of downtown Berlin—an area shaped by culture in an almost extreme way. I'm referring, of course, to Museum Island. Mr Edler, what are the goals of the Flussbad project?

Tim Edler (TE): The project focuses on the Spree Canal, which was created artificially in the 16th century and runs from the Fischerinsel all the way to the Bode Museum. Back then, the canal was used for shipping, but today, it is unused. So it represents a large area in central Berlin that is without any kind of function. Our goal is to start using this area again, to re-functionalise it as part of the Flussbad project. The idea is to have three distinct sections: the first area around the Fischerinsel will be fully nature-oriented; the second section will purify the canal water by means of a gravel filter; and from there, the filtered water will flow into the third section, a public swimming area that will run between the former State Council Building of the GDR (Staatsratsgebäude) and and Bode Museum.

HvG: You created the idea for the Flussbad together with your brother, Jan Edler. As artists and architects, how did the two of you come up with a project whose core focuses on water purification?

TE: It was in no way our goal to somehow link culture and sustainability and then seek out the right location to put this link into practice. Instead, the project was related quite concretely to the Spree Canal and its real-life situation. Only when we first became aware of the area did we actually start thinking about the water quality. We tried to figure out how the river could be used differently. We wanted to find out exactly where it was being polluted by wastewater and why access to the water was prohibited.

HvG: How can we regain access to the Spree Canal?

TE: The project has different levels. First, there is a tangible advantage to having clean water that people can swim in. After that, it's all about what we would today call sustainable urban planning, that is, the improvement of the microclimate and efforts to achieve that so-called "dense" city that produces as little traffic as possible. For me personally, the most important thing is that we bring back opportunities for people to experience Berlin's historical centre. In other words, that we create something geared towards the people who actually live there. In cities, this is exactly what sustainability means. We need to work against forces that would divvy up the city into different groups, for example only tourists and rich people in the city centre while everybody else lives and works in other districts. For me, the idea of connecting these two to one another again is an essential feature of the project. And then, of course, there's the symbolic level. Museum Island is a site where our society displays its cultural values and showcases artefacts and ideas that shaped our identity in the past and to this day. As far as I'm concerned, the idea of using the Flussbad to examine sustainability and our handling of natural resources at this culturally charged spot is very exciting. This subject represents one of the biggest cultural tasks we will have to face in the future. We are going to have to accept the fact that nature and culture cannot be separated from one another.

HvG: Mr Zimmermann, as a representative of the cultural realm, what is your perspective on this? Is it even possible to negotiate such concerns at this spot in the city? Would you say that an ecological urban planning project such as the Flussbad even fits with Museum Island?



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OZ: It's a very exciting idea, particularly at this location. It goes right to the cultural heart of the modern German republic. Of course, Museum Island is a very special location. It's the pinnacle of high culture in Germany. However, this also means that it's not necessarily a particularly dynamic place. Add to that the fact that almost all of the urban development here over the past 20 years was oriented towards the reconstruction of historical conditions. For me, the reconstruction of Berlin's City Palace is neither a dynamic departure nor a fresh approach. In my opinion, the site would have been better served by a structure representing contemporary architecture. This is why I tend to approve of any project that strives to work against the trend of restoring the area to its original historical state.

The name »Museum Island« already says it all. Indeed, the water surrounding the areas creates a kind of demarcation line. The idea of opening up this protective barrier and giving it back to the city's residents and visiting tourists—of actually inviting them to jump into the water and swim—is indeed an excellent idea. I see no diminishing whatsoever of the highbrow culture represented on the island.



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

HvG: Mr Weiger, when I think of nature conservation projects, I think more of areas like the Lüneburger Heide and the Spreewald. In other words, I don't necessarily think of the downtown district of Mitte in Berlin, and definitely not of Museum Island. Is it really feasible to pursue nature conservation at such locations?

HW: For me, it's precisely the location of the Flussbad that makes it so fascinating. The project allows us to show people that it's possible to recover a minimum of nature here on Museum Island. It also allows us to showcase something incredibly important, namely where we come from as human beings. We don't arise out of our relationships to high

culture; we come from our relationships to nature. And we must maintain these bonds to be able to continue to reach great cultural heights. Back in the day, swimming in the river was accepted as being completely normal and even expected. Today, however, it's no longer possible to swim in the majority of rivers because they simply don't have the water quality we require. If we are able to improve water quality by means of biological and technological processes, then we will have concretised the concept of sustainability once again. Indeed, sustainability implies managing our lives in such a way that we improve the quality of our existence and start making up for the destruction of nature that has taken place in the past decades.

HvG: But don't we run the risk of pursuing purely symbolic policies? This attitude would take us in one of two possible directions; either the Flussbad serves as a spark that triggers similar projects in a kind of positive avalanche, or it leads to a situation in which people rest on their laurels and say, well, there you go, we've solved things at this one site, so that means we don't have to do anything anywhere else in terms of clean water.

HW: The latter would obviously be the wrong conclusion to come to. Ideally, the Flussbad would function as a first spark that triggers many other initiatives. People will start seeing the river with completely different eyes, that is, no longer as a dead trickle of water moving past concrete walls. If I know that the river is no longer just a receptacle for our wastewater, then I'm going to care about the water in a different way. I will think twice before I contribute to polluting it, because I'll know that I'll soon be swimming in that same water.

HvG: How effective are you going to have to be when explaining the Flussbad idea to its neighbours?

OZ: This is an important question. Do we want to embed and fully integrate the Flussbad into the cultural landscape of Museum Island and the Humboldt Forum? If so, the area would no doubt become a very exciting location—the perfect place for discussions focussing on nature and culture and their relationship to one another. These kinds of

discussions could also take place at the Humboldt Forum.

HvG: How does the Flussbad team publicise the project on-site and talk about what it wants to achieve beyond just swimming?

TE: There is a large amount of interest in discussing the project on the part of Berliners. This is exactly why we opened our information and exhibition platform at the water adjacent to the ESMT Berlin.

OZ: I'd like to come back to the Humboldt Forum. This complex will be finished soon, and it offers us a tremendous opportunity. Indeed, it is designed to also be a site of reflection on sustainability and climate change; but to this day, nobody knows exactly how to do this. The field remains, quite literally, completely open. We have a conflict here between the first-class cultural artefacts that will be housed in the Forum and its function as an entirely new space for discussion. The Flussbad itself should also be a site of discussion—a place where we can explore these different themes and a symbol of the connection between nature and culture.

HW: First off, the name Humboldt is virtually predestined to provide the best backdrop for such discussions. Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt are the very archetypes of scholars who combined science, nature conservation and the preservation of cultural treasures. In my opinion, this is exactly the connection the new Humboldt Forum should strive for. A project like the Flussbad also provides an opportunity to improve not only the quality of urban experiences but also to direct our gaze to the Spree River itself. All of us at the Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) would be happy to contribute our expertise in this sphere. Indeed, I personally think the Flussbad is a fantastic project and a forward-looking undertaking that is definitely worth supporting. The project has excellent prospects, too, especially because it fits perfectly with the newly formed "Bundesprogramm Blaues Band", a federal programme whose goal is to renaturise federal waterways. Of course, there also has to be enough political force to make sure the appropriate funds are provided; we would have to make sure the

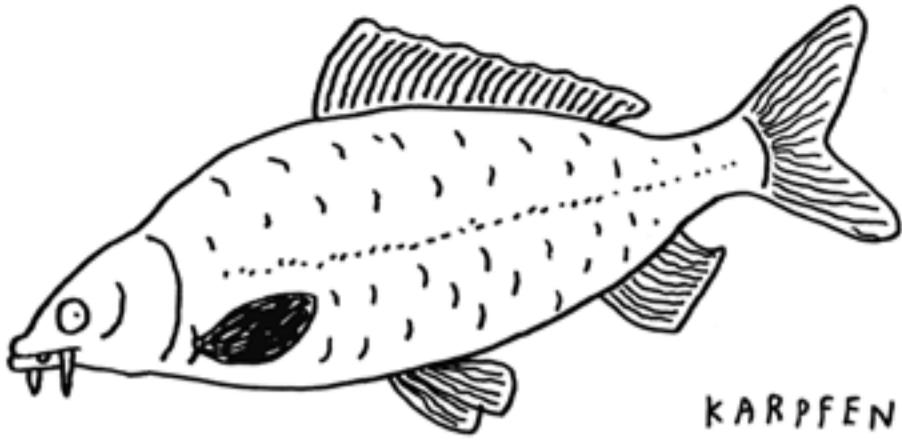
project moves beyond the exciting planning stage and actually gets implemented. The team at the Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) is very much looking forward to getting involved and participating in any way we can.

Hubert Weiger is chairman of the Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), Olaf Zimmermann is managing director of the German Cultural Council (Deutscher Kulturrat), and Tim Edler is co-creator of the Flussbad Berlin project.

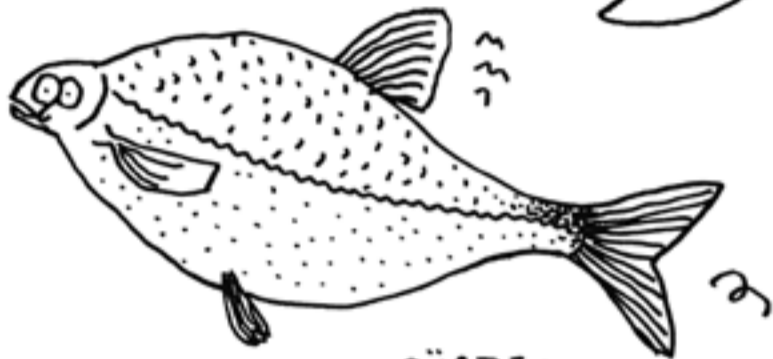
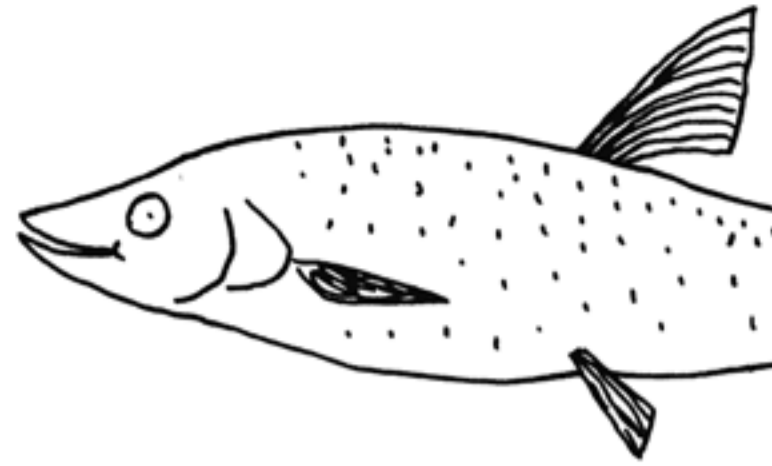


cc 2016 Annette Hauschild / OSTKREUZ

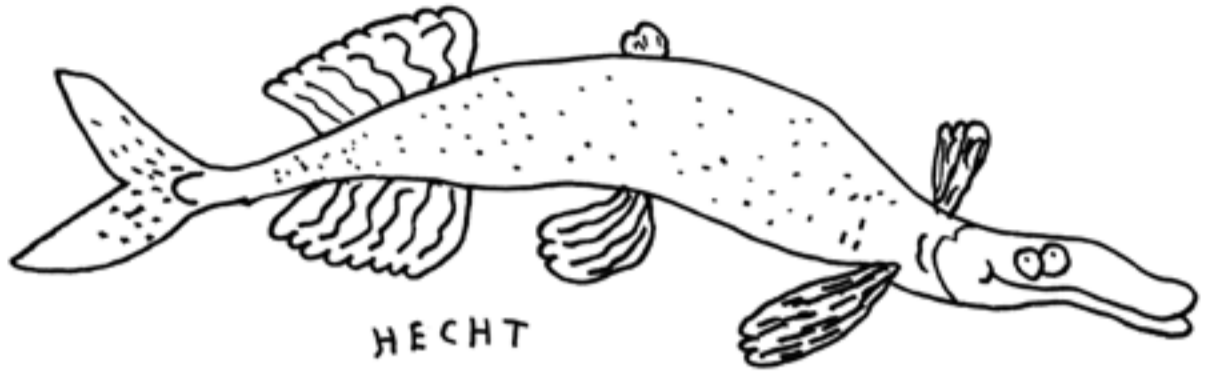
Swimmers in the 2nd Berlin Flussbad Cup with the Humboldt Forum (under construction) in the background, July 2016



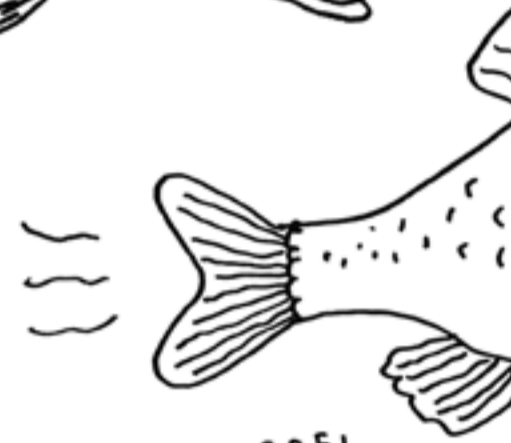
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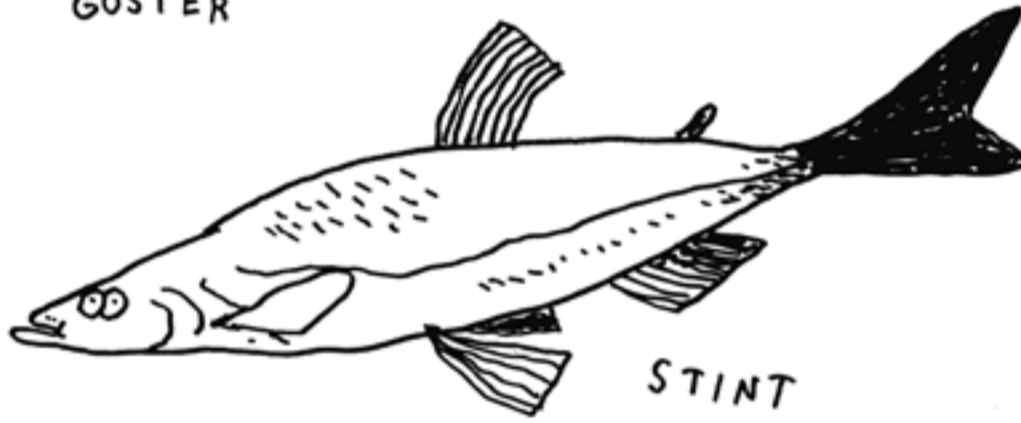
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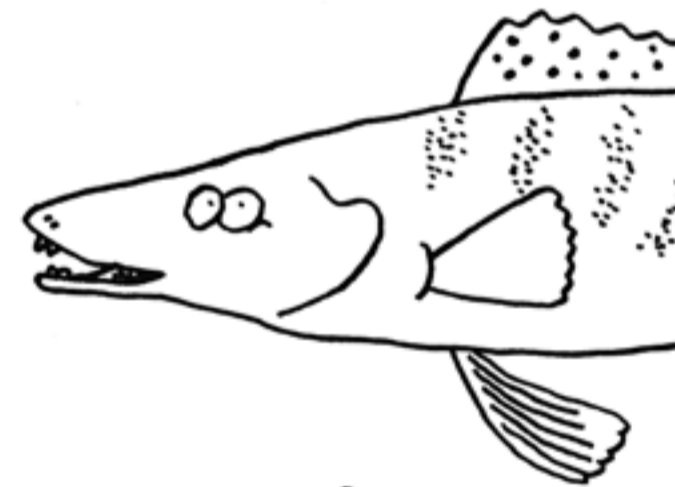
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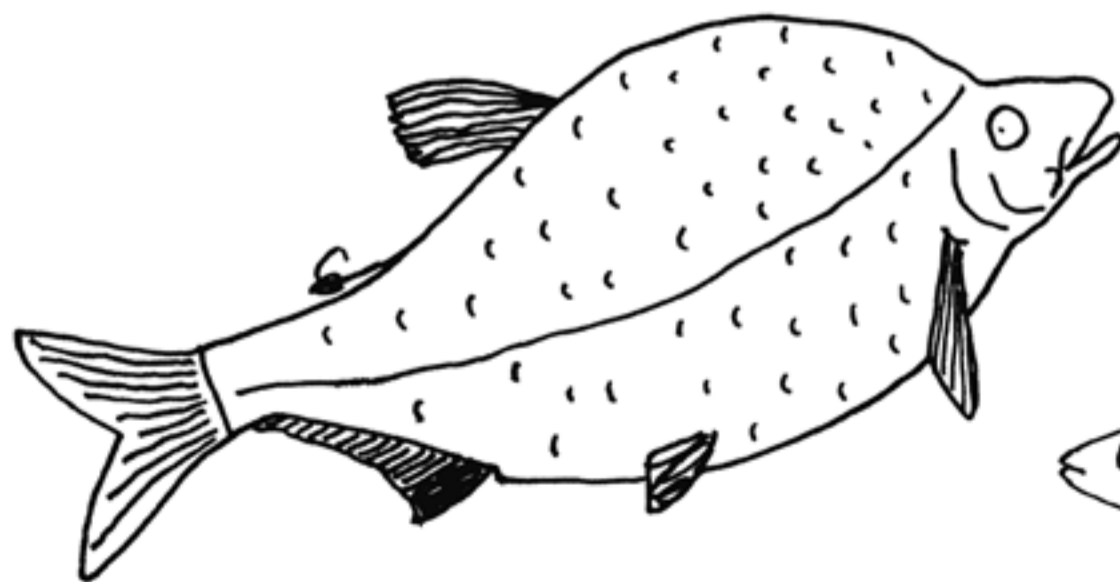
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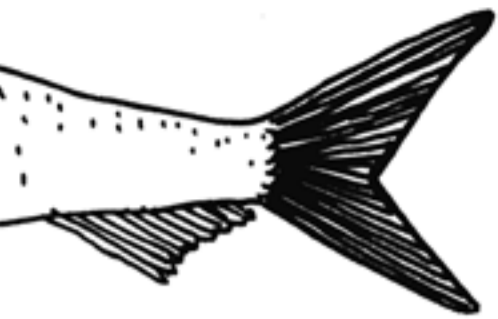


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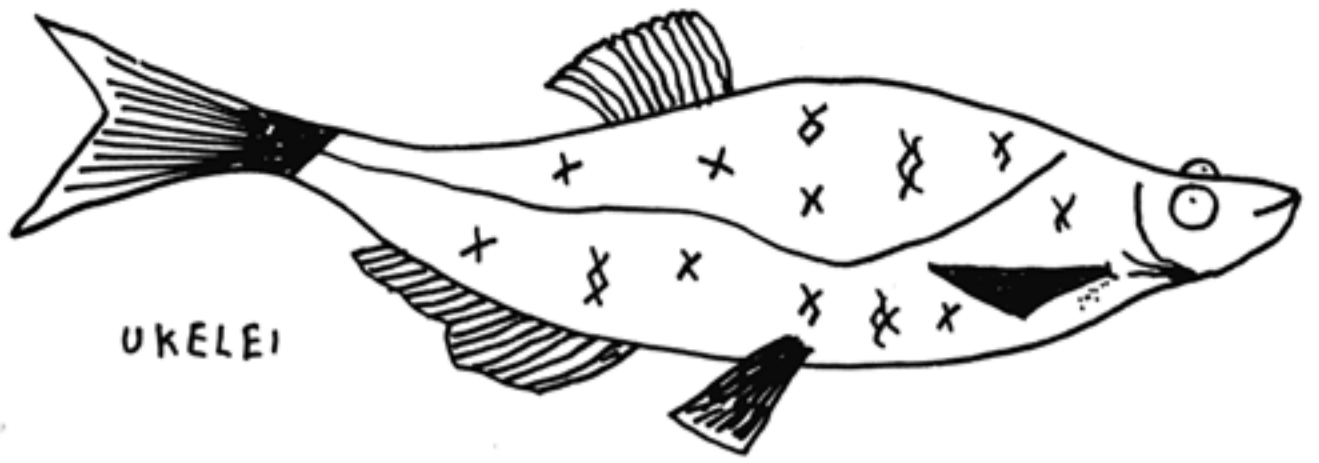


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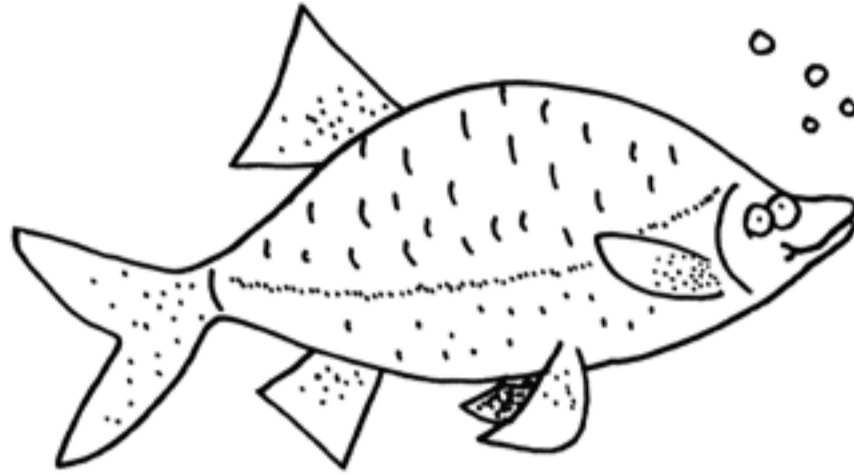
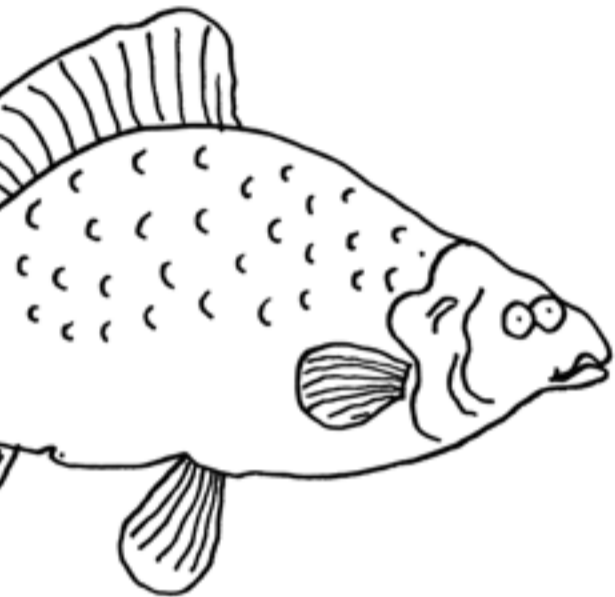




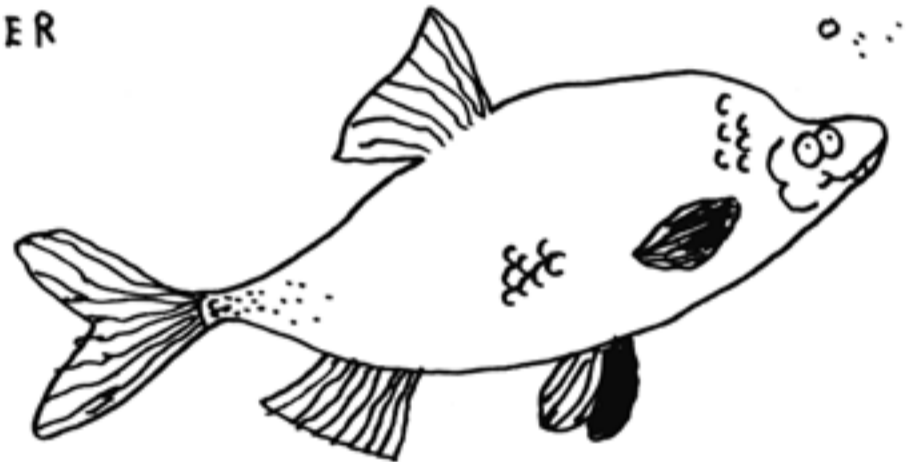
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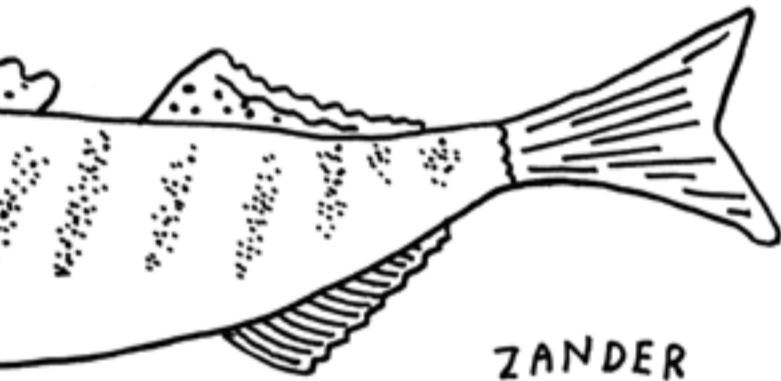
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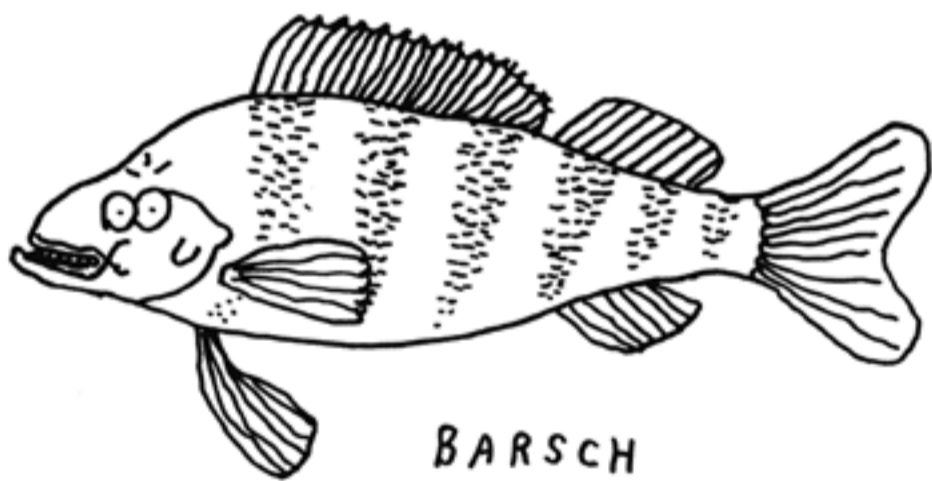
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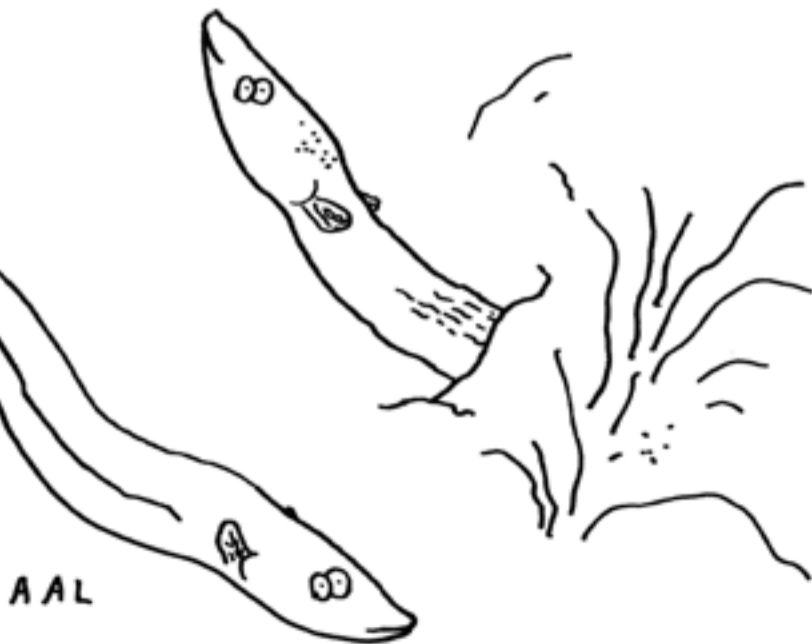
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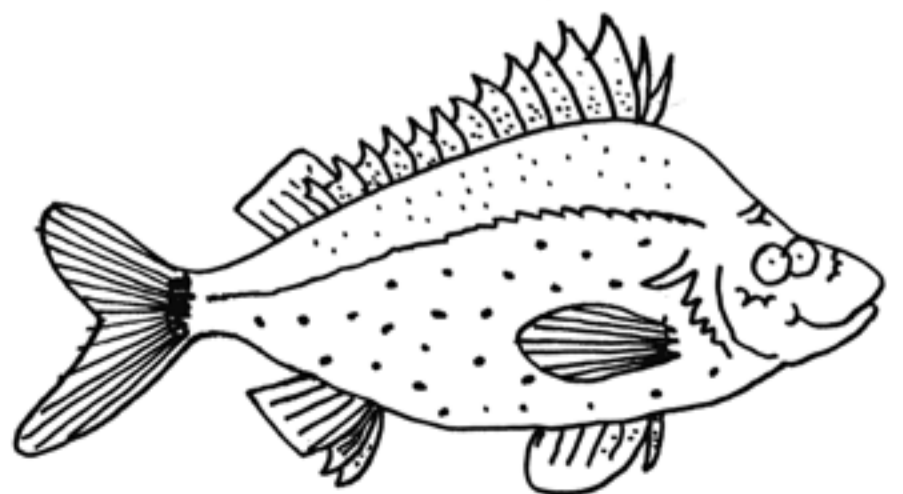
ZANDER



BARSCH



AAL



KAULBARSCH

In July 2017, the 3rd Berlin Flussbad Cup had to be cancelled due to low water quality after a "storm of the century" prompted Berlin's sewage system to overflow into the Spree Canal. Participants gathered nevertheless to "sing in lieu of swim", joining the Chor der Kulturen der Welt and Barbara Morgenstern. Although they couldn't swim that day, the group sent out a loud and clear signal in favour of water conservation.







Flussbad Berlin

Text + Musik: Barbara Morgenstern

1 Refrain Cm B \flat A \flat E \flat /G

Schwimm, schwimm durch die Mit- te von Ber- lin im Spree- ka- nal wirst Du

5 Fm E \flat /G A \flat B \flat

Dei- ne Bah- nen ziehn', mit- ten in Ber- lin Berl- lin, Ber- lin.

9 Cm B \flat A \flat E \flat /G

Stürz' Dich in die Flu- ten in das städ- ti- sche Nass, ver- giss beim Plät- schern al- le

13 Fm E \flat /G A \flat B \flat

täg- li- che Hast im Fluss- bad Ber- lin. Ber- lin, Ber- lin. Schwimm vor-

17 E \flat Str. 1 A \flat Cm

bei an ehr- wür- di- gen Mu- seen, Mer- kels Woh- nung Laut- ar- chiv,

20 A \flat E \flat A \flat

dem D H M. Hast Du schließ- lich die Schloß- brük- ke er- reicht ist das

23 B \flat E \flat A \flat

Ziel nicht mehr weit. Und dann zu- rück, rechts der Per- ga- mon Al- tar, ein paar

27 Cm A \flat E \flat

Zü- ge, Zack, schon bist Du da! Dann am Bo- de Mu- se- um steigst

30 A \flat B \flat Refrain

Du aus der Spree, so ein Bad: top I- dee! Man springt

35 E \flat Str. 2 A \flat Cm

nie- mals zwei- mal in den glei- chen Fluss, denkt die Spree und gibt dem

38 A \flat E \flat A \flat

Schwim- mer ei- nen Kuss. Könnst' sie spre- chen gä- be sie uns zu ver- stehn': ich hab

41 B \flat E \flat A \flat

ei- ni- ges ge- sehn'. Bom- ben- kra- ter, ei- ne zwei- ge- teil- te Stadt, Wirt- schfts-

45 Cm A \flat E \flat

wun- der, Love- pa- rade, Trä- nen- pa- last, ganz zu schwei- gen von

48 A \flat B \flat Refrain

lang ver- gang'- ner Zeit, da war hier gar nichts weit und breit.

Planned weak points in the system

A short history of wastewater disposal in Berlin

It was all Rasmund's fault. In one single day, it rained as much as it would have normally over the course of 4 months. In fact, Rasmund brought around 200 litres of rain per square metre to downtown Berlin within 18 hours. The low-pressure storm on 29 June 2017 was so bad that it forced us to cancel that year's Flussbad Swimming Cup. Indeed, the event was supposed to take place three days later on 2 July 2017. But the river was simply too polluted for us to be able to swim in it.

The cause of this pollution helped shine a spotlight on a unique feature of Berlin's sewer system, namely its overflow channels—historically referred to as “emergency exits”—that relieve the overloaded system during heavy rain by funnelling excess wastewater directly into the Spree. We decided to take Rasmund's rage as an opportunity to show how this system came about in the first place.

18th century



wikimedia commons - Eduard Gaertner

Berlin is flat. As a result, the city's groundwater is only 2 to 3 metres deep. This is why water is free and easily available. There are wells everywhere from which residents can draw water. But what should the city do with its wastewater? Initially, Berliners' urine is poured into the gutters, faeces are put in so-called “Nachtstuhl-Eimern” (commode buckets), picked up by “Nachteimer-Frauen” (commode women) and dumped into the Spree. As early as in 1707, they had figured out that the buckets had to be emptied from the middle of the bridges into the river so that the contents could be washed away completely.

1796

Physician Ludwig Formey complains that the water of the Spree River is still being used for other purposes, even though it is contaminated: “Beer, which is enjoyed often and by all, must indeed also be prepared from this contaminated water, which can be neither good nor beneficial.”

1814

Due to the stench, it now becomes prohibited to dump the contents of the “Nachteimer” (commodes) into the water before 11pm.

Around 1820



wikimedia commons - Waldemar Titzenthaler

Every year, roughly 200,000 buckets containing faeces from neighbouring districts are dumped from the Jungfernbrücke into the Spree. Residents in nearby homes must keep their windows firmly closed “due to the pestilential stench”.

1831

The first cholera epidemic in Berlin. The disease spreads especially through poorer districts along the Spree. However, many people refuse to make a connection between contaminated water and the disease.

1842



Berlin's Museum of Modern Art, Photography and Architecture

The emptying of the contents of bucket commodes into the Spree is finally prohibited. In place of the commodes, each Berlin residential building must now have an “Abtrittgrube” (pit toilet) on the premises. These are supposed to be sealed off and emptied regularly.

Unfortunately, the contents of these pits often seeped into the soil and polluted the ground water. Sometimes they were not emptied for years.

1856

From this point on, water comes out of the wall: the new waterworks facility at Stralauer Tor pumps Spree water into Berlin homes, which are now connected to a central water supply for the first time ever.

1859

“The Year of the Great Stink”. After wastewater begins being discharged into the Thames, Londoners begin complaining about the unbearable stench.

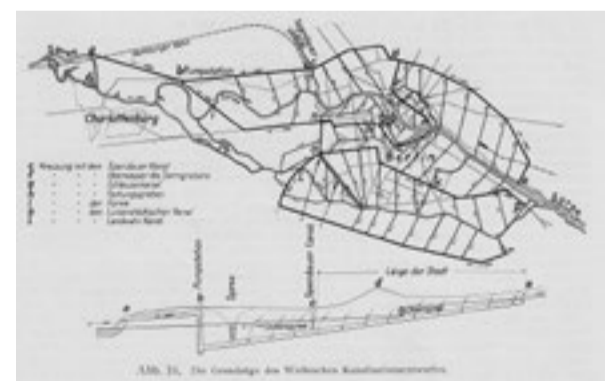
1860

Residents living on Berlin's well-to-do Regentenstraße (today: Hitzigallee) in the Tiergarten district are the first to have underground sewer canals in the city. However, the sewage is merely directed into the Landwehrkanal, a canal at the end of the street.

1860s

The first “water closets” (WCs) are set up in Berlin. Sewage from these WCs is supposed to be routed via street gutters into Berlin's rivers and canals. But the system doesn't work; instead, the sewage mixes with dirt from the streets, accumulates and gets stuck in the gutters.

1861



50 Jahre Berliner Stadtentwässerung, Berlin 1928

Wastewater to Moabit? Berlin's chief building officer, Eduard Wiebe, suggests guiding wastewater downstream via a new canal system and emptying it into the Spree outside the city. This was the principle by which Frankfurt's much-lauded wastewater system worked. The

fact that Frankfurt's Main River had already "collapsed" outside the city was simply ignored. And yet, Wiebe is not able to push his idea through against the proponents of the "Abfuhrprinzip" (discharge principle) who want to have sewage transported out of Berlin using wagons. The stalemate between these two sides leads to a situation in which nothing happens at all.

1866

Worst cholera epidemic ever in Berlin's history: 5,457 Berliners die of the disease.

1867

Physician Rudolf Virchow points out the connection between hygiene and health in the city. According to Virchow, the most important step would be to stop draining wastewater into the rivers. He sees the solution in setting up a sewage system or removing sewage by other means. Both systems would have to bring sewage outside the gates of the city where it could then seep into the ground.

1871



50 Jahre Berliner Stadtentwässerung, Berlin 1928

An urban planner named James Hobrecht designs a sewage system for all of Berlin. He divides up the city into 12 so-called "Radial systems"; from there, the wastewater is transported off via pumps, cleaned via irrigation and brought to sandy grounds in Berlin's outlying areas.

1873



50 Jahre Berliner Stadtentwässerung, Berlin 1928

The first sewage irrigation field is set up at Tempelhofer Feld. Wastewater is pumped to these fields and seeps into the ground. One decade later, most of Berlin's sewage was being pumped to large fields lying all around the city. Even though people had already recognised the problems associated with the contamination of groundwater under the septic drain fields, it was still largely ignored at this point. Opponents of the septic drain fields also claimed that vegetables grown there tasted of sewage.

1876

In spite of the new sewage system and septic drain fields, Berliners still have a problem when heavy rains came. The sewage system simply cannot handle large amounts of water. With the commissioning of the Radialsystem III, the first six emergency discharge outlets

are built in Berlin. When the city experienced heavy rains, these six outlets are used to discharge wastewater into the river. In other words, it marked the introduction of "planned weak points" in the city's wastewater system.

1877

A Prussian ordinance known as the "Zirkular-Verfügung" prohibits the channelling of wastewater into rivers. It is enacted against fierce protest by many municipalities.

1878/79

Seeing as Berlin's emergency discharge outlets are in conflict with the Prussian "Zirkular-Verfügung", the city is granted special permits to be able to continue operating the existing outlets.

1880

At this point, there are already 41 emergency discharge outlets, 12 of which discharge into the Spree River, 19 into the Landwehrkanal. Other discharge outlets are found in the Spree Canal and at areas near the Festungsgraben, Nordhafen, Berlin-Spandau Canal and Münz Canal.

1882

Thanks to the large emergency discharge outlet at the bridge known as Marshallbrücke—which lies not far from the Reichstag building built soon thereafter –, so much filth and sewage flows into the Spree that the river has to be dredged on a regular basis at this point and from here on after.

1883



© akg images

The new sewage system is quite popular and considered highly modern. Homeowners and landlords urge officials to provide quick access to the system and complain that it's more difficult to rent out flats when there is still a septic tank in the courtyard.

1886, 1888, 1892

Berlin experiences three phases of large-scale fish deaths in the Spree. Authorities determine that the system of emergency discharge outlets is more problematic than originally thought.

1898

The first wastewater treatment plants in the Berlin area are opened in the independent municipalities of Spandau and Tegel.

1930



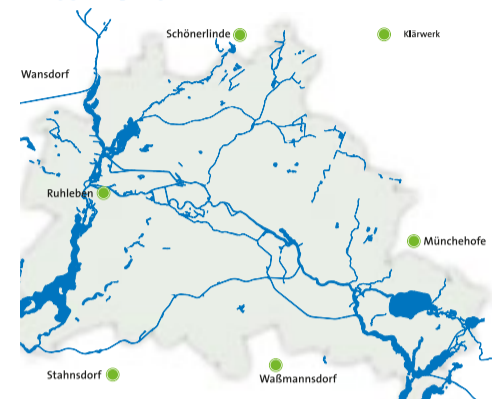
© Rainer Lang

77 Pumping stations, some of which are state-of-the-art, continue to transport Berlin wastewater to 20 septic drain fields. However, it soon becomes apparent that increasing populations and higher levels of water consumption are pushing the system to its limits, seeing as there are no new areas available.

1931

The large experimental sewage treatment plant in Stahnsdorf begins operations. Instead of channelling wastewater exclusively to septic drain fields, half of it is directed into the Teltow Canal for biological purification.

After 1945



Berliner Wasserbetriebe, Klassewasser.de

Biological wastewater treatment plants are the system of the future. However, this doesn't change the system of emergency discharge outlets.

1993



© ullstein bild - Willmann

The last septic drain fields taken out of service.

2017

The system of emergency discharge outlets into the Spree during heavy rainfall continues to operate unchanged today.

Most of the information contained in this timeline was taken from a highly recommendable book by Shahrooz Mohajeri, *100 Jahre Berliner Wasserversorgung und Abwasserentsorgung 1840–1940*, (engl. 100 Years of Berlin Water Supply and Wastewater Disposal/Sanitation 1840–1940) published in 2005 by Franz Steiner Verlag.

Plants, wastewater and us. On the scientist Käthe Seidel

Charlotte Hopf



© Archive of the Max Planck Society, Berlin-Dahlem

The Krefeld System, an experimental set-up involving roof battens, wire mesh and plastic buckets designed to clean wastewater



Käthe Seidel in the mid-1970s

“This text will communicate facts, not utopias or hypotheses”, wrote Käthe Seidel in *Scirpus-Kulturen*, a book published in 1959. And, indeed, the 52-year-old limnologist and microbiologist would go on in the subsequent three decades to expand these “facts” by means of several innovative research reports on the properties of higher aquatic plants.

Käthe Seidel was born in the Erzgebirge region in Frankenberg, Saxony in 1907. She grew up in an anthroposophical family and learned to cultivate and observe plants from a very early age. She trained as a gardener, horticulturalist and handicrafts teacher and worked initially as an educator in church institutions. After many of these institutions were closed and/or taken over by the Nazis in the early 1930s, Seidel worked as a handicrafts teacher at a school called the Reichswerkschule Hinrichshagen. She joined the Nazi Party in 1935 and became head of the school in 1939.

The focus of her work with plants was a bulrush called the *Schoenoplectus lacustris L. Palla*. In 1940, Seidel took a leave of absence from the school to examine, harvest and process the natural stocks of lichens at the Dümmersee in Lower Saxony. At the same time, she started a degree in Pre- and Early History, Art History and Biology at the University of Greifswald. Her choice of subjects suggests that her interest in the bulrush was equal parts scientific and cultural-historical. In 1945, she set up a total of four plant-rush workshops in Schleswig-Holstein where at times roughly 100 people worked. In addition to serving the production of objects sold at weekly markets, these “teaching and experiential” workshops were used for the purpose of “scientific research into the economic exploitation of the rush plant”.

In 1947, Seidel continued her studies in the field of Botany, Microbiology and Inland Waterways (Limnology) in Kiel and completed her doctorate in 1951. She had long since begun cultivating and observing rushes in nurseries, placing her focus on the protection of shorelines as well as on land reclamation using bulrushes. After the great storm of 1953, she discovered that the plants she had planted along the coast of the island of Sylt, among other places, had weathered the storm almost completely undamaged. Indeed, the root bales of the rushes lie like heavy anchors in the ground.

In the subsequent years, Seidel carried out systematic experiments into the breaking-down of bacteria and organic and inorganic toxins using aquatic plants. Starting in 1962, she began doing these experiments at

her own section of the Max Planck Society called the “Limnologische Arbeitsgruppe Dr. Seidel” in Krefeld. In addition to the bulrush, she spent considerable time researching reeds or *Phragmites communis*. On the grounds of the institute, she built experimental roof structures out of roof battens, wire mesh and plastic tubs. She performed experiments with wastewater from landfills as well as from the food and paper industries, but also with polluted river and surface water. The experiments showed that the plants were not only able to supply their subsoil with oxygen; they were also capable of breaking down pollutants and/or storing them in large quantities. The plants were also used to neutralize strong alkaline and acidic waterways within a very short time. These research findings were, in part, so surprising that Seidel’s remark about focusing on “facts, not utopias”—quoted here at the very beginning—seems more than justified.

The research performed by Seidel’s limnological research group (Arbeitsgruppe Dr. Seidel), led to the development of the “Krefeld System”, a plant-based water treatment station consisting of several interconnected filtration and sequential elimination basins that would go on to receive worldwide acclaim and usage. For the purposes of engaging in scientific exchange, Seidel travelled to North and South America, Asia, New Zealand and several countries in Europe. For her, it was “an ethical obligation” to disseminate her research findings “among the people who need them most and for whom they are life-sustaining [...]”. Between 1964 and 1971, the Max Planck Society filed eleven patents in which Seidel was named as the inventor. And yet, the reaction of her German colleagues to her research was restrained, and in professional circles she was referred to as “Binsen-Käthe” (bulrush Käthe). She herself once stated: “A prophet doesn’t count for much in his homeland, and even less when it’s a female prophet”.

And yet, some of Seidel’s statements appear quite visionary today. In 1977, she wrote the following in an article titled “Plants, Wastewater and Us” (“Pflanzen, Abwässer und wir”) for the youth newspaper *Wir*: “Shouldn’t those of us working in the field of synthesis (i.e. production, aggregation) be educated and put to work in the field of analysis (distribution)? [...] We continue to wait for an increase in production yet we’re already unable to cope with its residual products today. Sooner or later, we will be forced to face the challenge of water regeneration”.

Today, more than 25 years after Käthe Seidel’s death in 1990, a global consciousness has emerged with regard to clean water as the scarce and priceless foundation of our livelihoods. The results of Seidel’s over 40 years of equally visionary and disciplined research have now made their way into the field of water treatment and clarification. In fact, the plant filter system currently being tested on our historical barge “Hans-Wilhelm” in the Spree Canal—the system that will ultimately be responsible for transforming the Flussbad vision into reality—is based on the process of biological water purification developed by Seidel.

Charlotte Hopf is an architect, founding member as well as deputy chairman of the Flussbad Berlin Association.

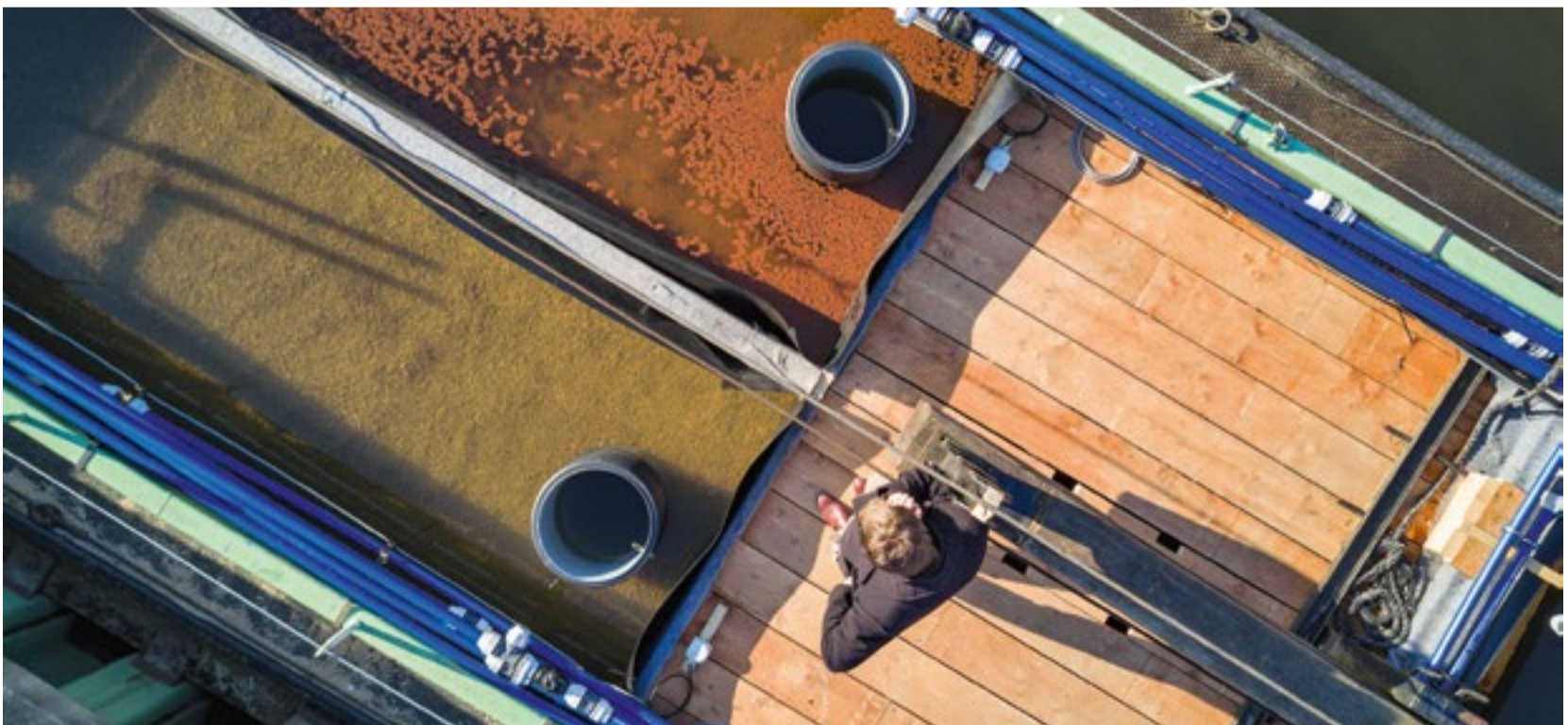
A pioneering test filter— the path to a transparent river

Kai Dolata

Across the globe, countless rivers continue to suffer contamination due to high levels of pollutants. To this day, no system exists whereby an entire polluted river can flow in at one end and come out clean on the other. In this sense, our Flussbad test filter—which we’ve reported on exhaustively both on- and offline—is truly a pioneering enterprise. We are the first people in the world to test if it’s possible to clean a river—in our case the Spree Canal—in the riverbed itself. On 18 July 2017, the moment finally arrived: it was the day the barge known as the “Hans-Wilhelm” dropped anchor in the Spree Canal near the Flussbad garden (next to the ESMT Berlin) with the test filter on board. This 45-metre-long ship is home to the prototype filter systems we are now using on-site to test which method suits best to clean the canal water well enough to be able to swim in. As part of our experiments, we hired the Berlin-based engineering office of AKUT Umweltschutz to create and install four different filters in the ship: these include a reed-gravel filter, a lava-rock underwater plant filter and an expanded clay filter without plants. The fourth filter is the so-called “mussel reactor” in which we test to what extent freshwater mussels actually possess the tremendous filtering qualities often attributed to them. This approach allows us to examine the filter efficiency in several different configurations. The technologies we’re using here have proven themselves very effective

in purifying standing waters, such as natural-water pools. They were selected because we were hoping to attain good results in the case of flowing water as well. But there is one big difference; unlike in a lake or pond, the contamination in the canal fluctuates to a much greater degree. On most days throughout the year, the Spree River—and thus also the Spree Canal—is already surprisingly clean; however, after heavy rainfall and sewage-system overflows, the water becomes very contaminated.

Before one attempts to purify a body of water, it is necessary to first define concepts such as “clean” and “contaminated”. What kinds of contaminants are found in the Spree? On the one hand, these include sulphates from opencast mines in the Lausitz region as well as nitrates used in agriculture. On the other hand, when the sewage system can’t handle heavy rainfall, the canal is inundated with urban sewage; for example, indicators such as coli bacteria and enterococci denote the presence of faecal matter. In such cases, the discharged wastewater is also accompanied by sewage from the city’s gutters. Another problem is the dangerous blue-green algae whose growth is fostered by particular discharges and specific environmental conditions, such as sunshine and high water temperatures. For this reason, the first task of our system on the “Hans-Wilhelm” is to measure the tangible level of impurities in the Spree



A look at two of the four different filter basins on the “Hans-Wilhelm” barge in the Spree Canal

cc 2017 Axel Schmidt



Test filter on the "Hans-Wilhelm" barge in the Spree Canal between the Federal Foreign Office and the ESMT Berlin

Canal at short time intervals before and after filtering. By comparing the different processes, we will eventually be able to determine which filter does the best job at removing impurities from the river water.

In order to determine actual pollution levels in the canal and test the efficiency of each filter, we are measuring no less than 29 elements in the water, some of which we then use as the basis of the presentation of our assessment. One important factor is the oxygen content. Other factors include coliform contamination, water temperature, electrical conductivity as an indicator of contamination, pH-values as an indicator of the level of acidity, and biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), which gauges the sum of all biodegradable substances in the water. If the river has a high BOD value and, at the same time, low oxygen concentrations, it's possible for the water to "turn". In that case, the fish swim to the surface of the water because they no longer have any air to breathe. Conditions such as this occur in Berlin waters only after heavy rainfall, that is, when wastewater (from the combined sewage system) overflows directly into the Spree. And, finally, we are also determining the levels of ammonium (NH_4), nitrate and phosphate. Only

after all of these factors are taken into account will it be possible to make a comprehensive statement regarding the quality of water in the Spree Canal.

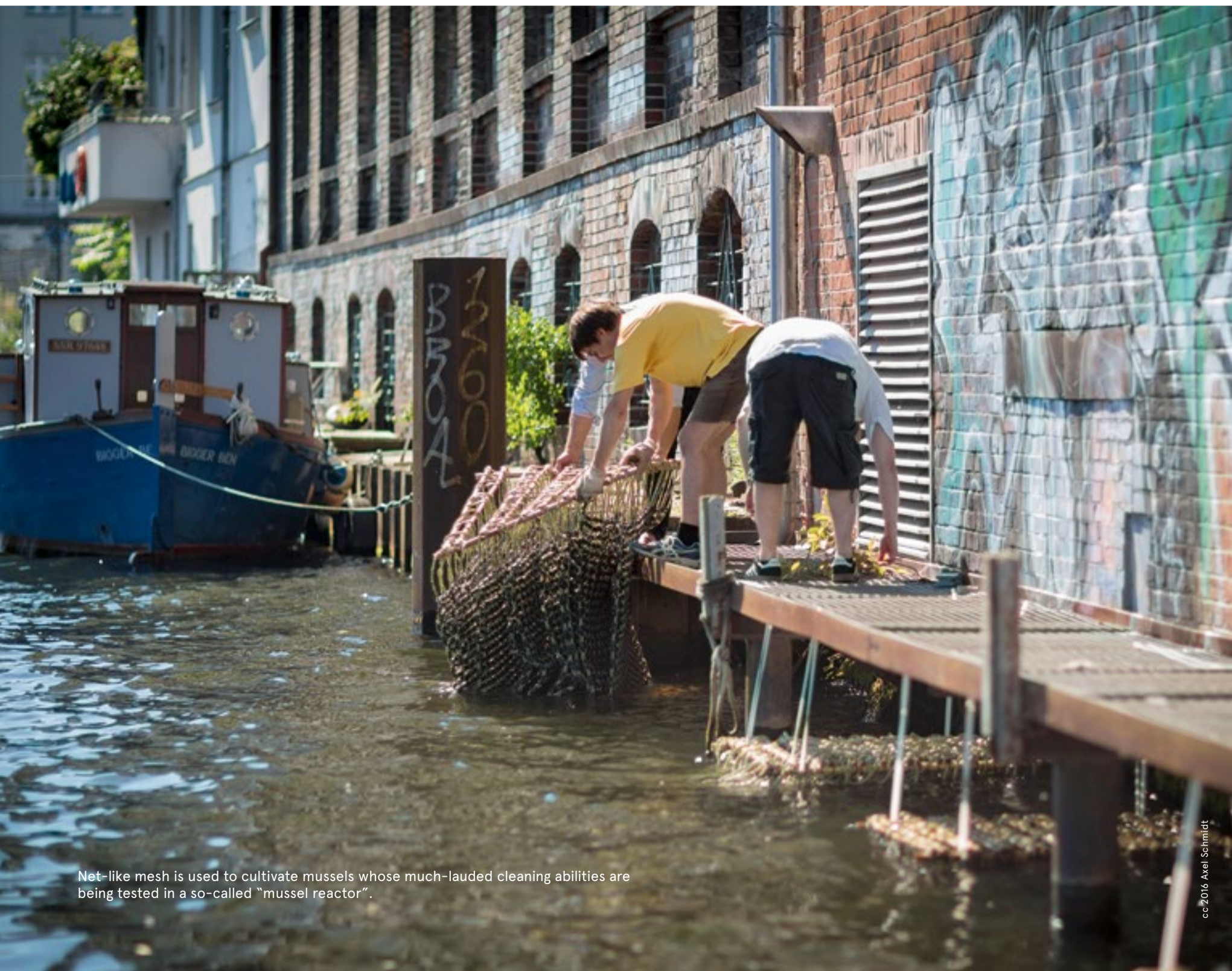
We have already collected various initial results; however, it's going to take two to three years for the system to have been in place long enough to deliver conclusive findings. Indeed, it is also important that we take measurements in years that have varying weather experiences. In other words, we're still waiting for the ultimate results, and especially to find out which filter proves to be the best. But we're not just comparing the different filter systems; we're also looking into the optimal rate of flow for the Flussbad project. Since we can manage this flow by means of the weirs in the Spree Canal, we are now in the process of finding out which volume of water is ideally suited to the pace of the filters and to creating a consistent exchange of water in the swimming area. As far as we can determine the basis of our data by now, the ideal flow speed is one that ensures that the water between the Humboldt Forum and Bode Museum is completely exchanged within 24 hours. We are also exploring how the Flussbad could best react to flooding; our current plans include a level of tubes

installed underneath the future filter in the canal, through which large amounts of water could flow in the case of extreme weather events.

Ultimately, in addition to purifying the river, we are also using our measurement and filtration systems to pursue an even bigger goal, that is, more transparency! In the future, up-to-date data on water quality in the Spree Canal will be available at all times, which means that it will be measured in short intervals and the results then made available to all. Even if the filter system we ultimately use isn't up and running yet in the Spree Canal, we still want to be able to provide information about the current state of the water: by visiting our website flussbad-berlin.de, people will be able to get a clear and real-time picture of how clean or polluted the Spree Canal is at any moment. We also want to make the methods we're using to measure water quality more transparent and participatory; not only are we going to make our measurement results public, we also want to make them available for use by other people. Third parties could then collect their own water data and enter it in a standardised format or derive it from our database. And we could even go a step further: why not set up several small "water stations" along the Spree—comparable to those private weather stations that feed their measurements into public weather databases? This

would enable more varied and accurate measurements and thus more precise conclusions on water conditions in Berlin. Today, we're already teaching school classes and university students how water quality is measured; our goal is to raise awareness for water ecosystems and the opportunities available to get involved. And, of course, this pioneering enterprise creates a brand new perspective—not only for the Spree but for all rivers across the globe.

Kai Dolata is an architect, a founding member of the Flussbad Berlin Association and a current member of the Flussbad board. He works as a project manager at the Flussbad head office since 2015. Among other tasks, he is currently supervising the filter system on the "Hans-Wilhelm" in the Spree Canal.



Net-like mesh is used to cultivate mussels whose much-lauded cleaning abilities are being tested in a so-called "mussel reactor".



cc 2017 Annette Hauschild / OSTKREUZ



cc 2017 Dawin Meckel / OSTKREUZ

Work on the "Hans-Wilhelm" barge with the test filter



cc 2017 Dawin Meckel / OSTKREUZ

Water drain in one of the filter basins

Welcome to the Flussbad garden!

In June 2017, we opened our Flussbad garden on the grounds of the former State Council Building (Staatsratsgebäude) of the GDR. This space was made possible thanks to our close cooperation with that historical building's current tenant, the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT Berlin). This is the building where Erich Honecker, one of the GDR's last heads of state, received official state guests for many years. It is also the building from which Chancellor Gerhard Schröder governed the reunited Federal Republic of Germany for a short period of time. In addition to these political markers, the site is also a reminder of the bathing culture that used to be popular throughout Berlin. Indeed, the area known as the Mühlengraben—a mill ditch that is completely filled-in today—was once home to the "Doppel-Bade-Anstalt an der kleinen Jungfernbrücke", a bathing facility built in 1895-97. It was probably the most magnificent "Flussbad" bathing area in Berlin, but unfortunately also the last. Nothing remains of the facility which was closed by local magistrates in the mid-1920s along with all other inner-city bathing areas due to the bad water quality.

In an effort to pay tribute to the former bathing area and to open a historical window to Berlin's former bathing culture, we recreated a 1:1 scale floor plan of the original swimming pool in the form of a large wooden terrace in our Flussbad garden. At the same time, our goal was to open an additional window to the future by providing information on the current status of our Flussbad project in an open-air exhibition at the very downtown spot where it will hopefully soon be set up.

Our Flussbad garden is a small green, unique oasis where people can gather in the middle of the city. From 1 May to 30 September, we are on-site every day, offering in-depth information, coffee, tea and cold drinks. We answer questions our visitors have about the project objectives and explain how our pilot filter system in the nearby barge known as the "Hans-Wilhelm" works. We also hold regular discussions examining the Flussbad project, the Spree River and the sustainable development of Berlin's Mitte district.

For more up-to-date information on our event programme, please visit www.flussbad.berlin/flussbad-garten

The opening of the Flussbad garden on the grounds of the ESMT Berlin in June 2017





A more vibrant environment along the canal

A talk with Professor Jörg Rocholl, president of the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT Berlin) in the former East German State Council Building



cc 2017 Dawin Meckel / OSTKREUZ

Editors: Professor Rocholl, you probably look at the Spree Canal every day on your way to work. As one of its closest neighbours, what does this body of water mean to you?

Jörg Rocholl: I do indeed walk past the canal on a regular basis, and I'm looking forward to the day when the area finds a greater use, perhaps even becoming a place for hundreds of people to swim in the canal and bring the riverbanks to real life.

What is your impression of the area as it stands today?

I would love to see a more vibrant environment along the canal. At the moment, it's not a very

inviting area, especially when you make your way south from Schinkelplatz, where Schinkel's Bauakademie (Building Academy) is going to be rebuilt. For me, the most striking symbol of the somewhat dismal atmosphere is the lonely old oak tree at the Schleusenbrücke.

The ESMT Berlin is housed in the Staatsratsgebäude—the former East German State Council Building—which has a large green area with a wide lawn at the back. This is an amazing oasis in the middle of the city, and yet it's almost entirely unknown to the general public.

Our garden is indeed beautiful. It's a listed historical site. Legend

has it that Margot Honecker [wife of Erich Honecker, one of the last East German heads of state—Translator's note] planted the rose beds here. We've been committed to preserving the unique mosaic fountain in the garden from the very beginning, and we're eager to refurbish it with the help of donations.

The garden area is open to the public, but you have to go through the main building to get to it, which perhaps creates a certain barrier. We want to make sure the garden becomes a more public place, in particular in the context of a redesign of the entire ESMT Berlin environment. This includes the Flussbad, of course.

One of your other direct neighbours is the forthcoming Humboldt Forum, which will likely attract up to 3 million visitors annually. The Flussbad Berlin is also expected to bring people to the area. Do you have any trepidation about all these new visitors and tourists, or are you happy about anyone who comes by?

We're happy about every visitor, and everyone is invited to check out our new public café on the ground floor of the Staatsratsgebäude. In general, we're also excited that our garden area will be a magnet for visitors to Museum Island, especially those looking for a quiet place to rest. But for us, it's important that our garden is only one of many elements embedded in an overall strategy for the entire area. We're already in discussions with the federal state of Berlin about possible development plans.

Is it true that no form of construction is permitted in the garden area itself?

That's right, but there's one edge that still has parking spaces and service buildings. There are large open spaces on Breite Straße, as well. I think it's quite charming that we function as a type of "island of knowledge" here—a big university campus in the heart of Berlin.

Has the fence to be kept that now separates your garden area from the banks of the Spree Canal?

If the overall concept makes it possible to do so, we might be able to get rid of the fence. At the moment, we're still talking to all of our key neighbours, including the Humboldt Forum, the Music Academy and the Berlin Cathedral about all the issues regarding future use and traffic management.

Shouldn't the Flussbad be involved in any discussions about such overarching concepts? Even though it only exists on paper at this point, it should probably still be taken into consideration, for example, when it comes to traffic planning and the like.

All of us at the ESMT Berlin are huge supporters of the Flussbad. This is why we provided our grounds free-of-charge for the set-up of the Flussbad information platform. We think it's a wonderful idea and we do everything in our power to support the project going forward.

Where does your passion for the Flussbad come from?

There are several reasons for it. First of all, it's fascinating to think that we could bring Berlin's historical centre back to life, to make it what it used to be, a true city centre that forms the heart of urban life. I like the idea of having other groups here that aren't just busses of tourists and people pouring into the museums. The second interesting point is the ecological and social function the Flussbad can have, especially as a role model for other cities. The third thing I like is the added value and focus that comes with the question of how to most effectively handle the issue of wastewater management. It's simply unacceptable that the sewers overflow as soon as we have our first heavy rainfall, thus turning the river into a cesspool.

Would a Berlin Flussbad be something for you and your students?

Absolutely! I can absolutely imagine going for a swim myself there one day.

Are you planning to take part in the Flussbad Swimming Cup in 2018?

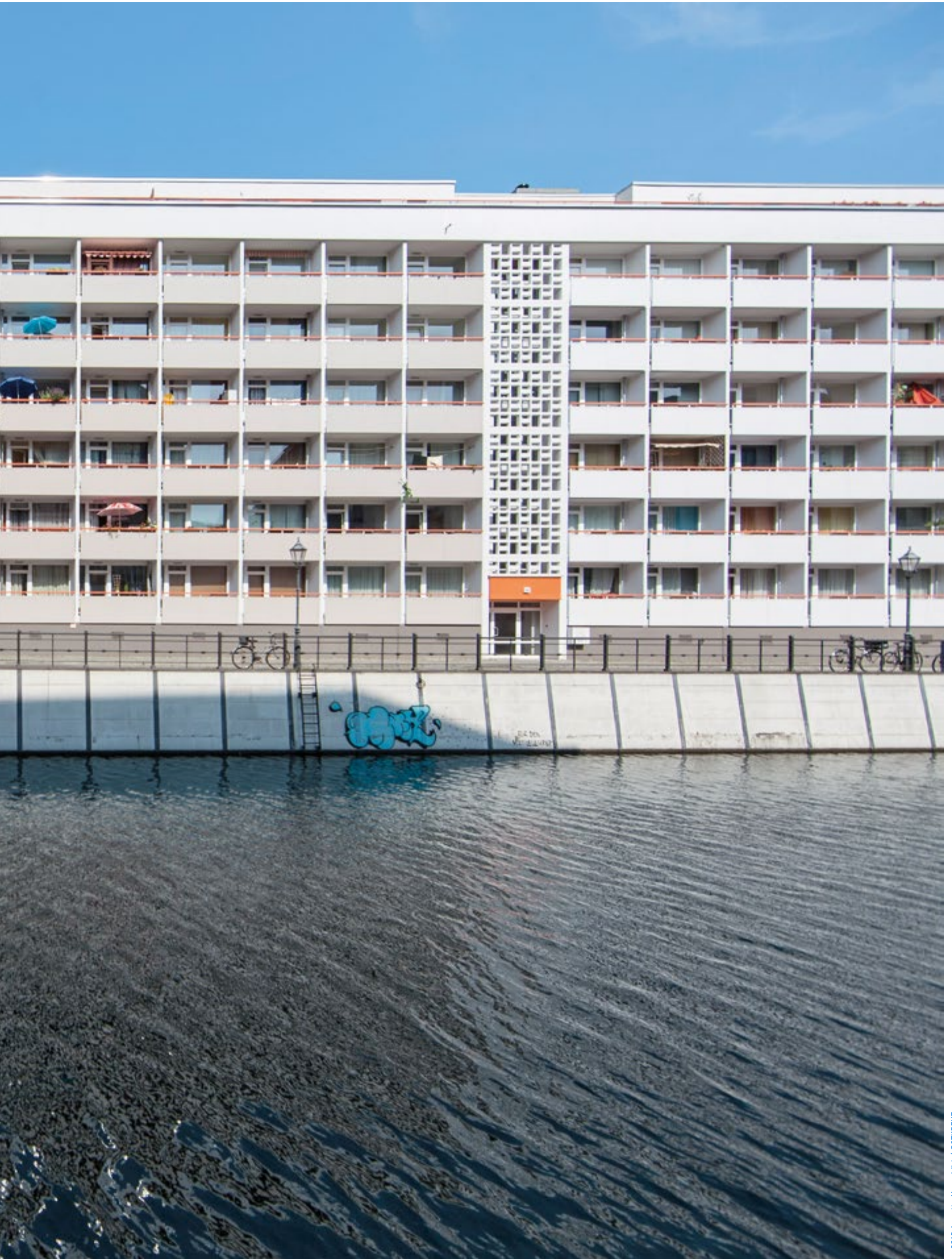
You have my word! I think it's a great idea and I will definitely be there, even if I consider myself more of a runner than a swimmer. I've run one marathon, and I ride long distances on bicycle.

Great! All you have to do is swim and you'll have all triathlon disciplines under your belt!





Residential housing at Friedrichsgracht where the future plant filter will clean the Spree water using natural means



Journal

Flussbad Berlin activities in 2017



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

3 January

Work starts at a shipyard in Spandau on the installation of the test filter to be set up in a barge known as the "Hans-Wilhelm"

20 January

Participation in the Academic Council on Participatory Urban Design at Berlin's Haus der Statistik

27–29 January

Flussbad Berlin @ GreenMe Film Festival with an information table operated by Flussbad volunteers



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

8 February

6th edition of the überFLUSS roundtable discussion—"The Spree Canal: Lifeline or Sewage Depot?" with Berlin's Senator for Urban Development and Housing Katrin Lompscher, art historian Dr. Uta Maria Bräuer and journalist Nikolaus Bernau, hosted by Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen

15 March

Flussbad Berlin presentation at the BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN cultural commission in Berlin's state parliament

23 March

Flussbad Berlin receives the "Projekt N" quality seal from the Council for Sustainable Development

26 March

Completion of the filter system on the "Hans-Wilhelm" barge in Spandau; test filter passes inspection

1 + 2 April

Flussbad Berlin @ Berlin perennial market incl. a children's workshop "Become a water detective"



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

5 May

3rd Landgang—Garbage collection along the Spree Canal (from Fischerinsel to the Flussbad garden)

9 May

Flussbad Berlin workshop "Youth Participation and River Swimming" @ IGA (International Garden Exhibition in Marzahn)

13 May

Flussbad Berlin @ 3rd Urban Development Funding Day, 3 walking tours / FlussLÄUFE

17 May

4th Roundtable at Berlin's state parliament, presentation on the current project status

19 May

The 2nd *Annual Review* published online in English



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

19 May

Transfer of the "Hans-Wilhelm" barge housing the test filter from Spandau to the Historical Harbour at Fischerinsel



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

29 May

Flussbad Berlin @ Annual Conference, Council for Sustainable Development, Berlin

31 May

“Entry” of the mussels into the test filter on the “Hans-Wilhelm”

9 June

1st workshop “The Flussbad and Its Neighbours” – Presentation of the current project status; expert discussions on the project area



cc 2017 Annette Hauschild / OSTKREUZ

10 June

Opening of the information and exhibition platform at the Flussbad garden

11 June

Flussbad project awarded the environmental prize of the Grüne Liga e.V.

15 + 16 June

Open-air classroom @ Flussbad garden with 20 grade-10 students and a Spanish teacher from the Friedensburg Oberschule and Wilma-Rudolph-Oberschule; part of the city partnership between Kreuzberg and San Rafael del Sur (Nicaragua)



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

17 June

Germany-wide “Open Society Day” – Food and conversation in the Flussbad garden

19 June

Conversation with Olaf Zimmermann (German Cultural Council), Hubert Weiger Friends of the Earth Germany and Tim Edler (Flussbad Berlin) on the Flussbad



© 2017 Gregor Fischer/TINCON

25 June

Flussbad Berlin @ TINCON, Festival for Digital Youth Culture; Tim showcases the Flussbad project

26 June

Flussbad Berlin @ Stadtforum “Participate. How can we talk about urban development in the future?” – The Flussbad project was selected to present itself as a special urban development project

29 June

A “storm of the century” leads to the overflow of Berlin’s sewage system into the Spree



cc 2017 Annette Hauschild / OSTKREUZ

1 July

Installation of the so-called “dolphins” (pilings) in the Spree Canal at the Flussbad garden to ensure the stability of the “Hans-Wilhelm” housing the test filter

2 July

3rd Flussbad Berlin Swimming Cup cancelled. As a consolation, "Singing in lieu of swimming" with hundreds of Flussbad Friends at the Monbijoubrücke. Along with the Chor der Kulturen der Welt, everyone sang the new "Flussbad song" composed by Barbara Morgenstern.

6 July

Flussbad Berlin @ Forum Objectif Baignade, Paris, organised by the Marne Vive Association and the Grand Paris Community Association

8 July

FlussLAUF for students from India interested in our project as part of the "Embrace our Rivers" programme organised by the Goethe Institute Chennai

12 July

Town hall meeting with Berlin's Senator for Urban Development and Housing, Katrin Lompscher, at the Flussbad garden



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

14 July

Visit from the Mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, whom we informed about the project on a boat tour

15 + 16 July

Flussbad Berlin @ Historic Harbour Festival at Fischerinsel, where the Flussbad was represented with a two-day information table and a workshop called "Become a water detective" in cooperation with the Märkisches Museum. Art historian Uta Maria Bräuer was on hand to talk about the historical bathing facilities along the Spree on a boat tour



© 2017 Knut Lindner

17 July

First big school-kids workshop "Become a water detective" and waste collection event as part of the

"Heute ein Engel" (Today an angel) Day in cooperation with Theresienschule, the "Kehrenbürger" (Sweeping Citizens) of the BSR and the Gute-Tat Foundation, in which over 25 grade-five students took part

19 July

Transfer of the "Hans-Wilhelm" barge containing the test filter to the berth at the Flussbad garden next to the ESMT Berlin



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

27 July

Flussbad Berlin @ Water Music Festival at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, podium discussion "Who owns the Spree" with Nadja Berseck (Panther Ray), Lutz Freise (Reederei Riedel), Michael Bender (Grüne Liga e.V.) and Tim Edler (Flussbad Berlin)



© 2017 Benjamin David

1 August

Flussbad Berlin @ International Urban Swimming Pre-Conference in Kassel, organised by POOL IS COOL, Brussels



cc 2017 Axel Schmidt

3 August

Flussbad Berlin @ Water Music Festival at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, "The Rivers of Tomorrow" featuring Pankaj Vir Gupta (Yamuna River Project, New Dehli), Hon. Chris Finlayson (Whanganui River, New Zealand), Nick Wesley (Urban River, Chicago) and Jan Edler (Flussbad Berlin)



24 August

Publication of Harald Welzer's new book Die nachhaltige Republik (The Sustainable Republic): the cover and pages 28 to 33 focus on Flussbad Berlin

26 + 27 August

Flussbad Berlin @ Open Door Day at the BMUB (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Protection, Building and Nuclear Safety), where we were present with an information table and showed kids how to build a water filter

31 August

FlussLAUF—guided walking tour for the non-profit German-Japanese Youth Society

8 September

Flussbad Berlin presents itself at the committee for Urban Development, Renovation, Building and Development of the Berlin-Mitte District Council Assembly

8 September

Summer Festival at the Flussbad garden: 20th anniversary of the Flussbad idea, 5th anniversary of the Flussbad Association

9 September

FlussLAUF—guided walking tour as part of Berlin's "Open Historical Monument Day"

18 September

Flussbad Berlin @ Berlin's National Sports Association (Landessportbund), "Recreational Space in a Growing City"

21 September

Submission of the study on Water Cycle and Water Quality Visualisation carried out on our behalf by the Creative Media Research Group of the HTW University of Applied Sciences Berlin

26 September

Presentation of the Master's theses focusing on the theme of the redesign of the Spree Canal by students at the Institute for Open Space Development at Leibniz University Hannover in the context of our academic cooperation with different universities in Germany

4 October

2nd workshop "The Flussbad and Its Neighbours" (Federal Foreign Office, German Historical Museum, ESMT Berlin, Humboldt Forum, Berlin State Museums)



© Alles im Fluss

10 October

"Alles im Fluss" (Everything in flux)—Launch of the joint initiative of wirBERLIN e.V. and Flussbad Berlin e.V. on preserving Berlin's shorelines and waterways

19 October

Resolution of Berlin's state parliament: Flussbad Berlin is listed as an item in Berlin's official 2019 budget

14 November

Flussbad Berlin @ Annual Meeting of the German National Committee for Monument Protection in Basel-Rheinfelden

16 November

7th Annual Flussbad Association Members Meeting

30 November

Berlin's state parliament decides to further support the Flussbad Berlin



© 2017 Benjamin Renner

14 December

Under the guise of a "Christmas party", the Flussbad team gathers at Berlin's Wasserwerk

15 December

The "Hans-Wilhelm" barge moves to its winter quarters in the Historic Harbour at Fischerinsel

Best of ... press commentaries 2017



cc 2016 Espen Eichhörer / OSTKREUZ

Under the sandstone lies the beach

Out of the blue, €18.5 million was approved for the reconstruction of the so-called Schlosskolonnaden or city palace colonnades. [...] But one would do better to invest those millions in the serious Flussbad Berlin initiative, which seeks to transform an unused arm of the Spree River that runs along the City Palace and Museum Island into a swimming pool. Instead of those historicist Schlosskolonnaden, one could set up a spacious green lawn and install changing rooms in the cove that still exists beneath it—a cove the Kaiser once moored his boats in. A public swimming area amid the monumentality of all this Prussian sandstone would be a truly breathing tribute to freedom and unity.

—Tobias Timm, *DIE ZEIT*, 19 January 2017

Narrow-mindedness preferred over urban authenticity

The great thing about the [Flussbad] idea is the clever way it would bring ever-increasing urban authenticity to a place where—due to the area's complete "museumisation"—there is increasingly less life today. In other words, groups of people would gather to have fun free-of-charge in a place where only a few well-to-do people live, if at all. The situation here was a lot different one hundred years ago when the last Flussbad closed. In that sense, one could interpret the Flussbad itself as a type of heritage protection.

—Claudius Pröber, *taz*, 17 June 2017

Save Berlin: Spree dreamers

Now Berlin has a chance to claim a High Line of its own: the Flussbad, or "river bath". This ingenious proposal to transform a cleaned-up stretch of the Spree River into a public pool would not only inject much-needed adrenaline into the city's nostalgia-petrified heart, it would give Berlin an iconic 21st century urban feature destined to inspire copies around the world.

—Dan Borden, *EXBERLINER*, July 2017

Architect wants to open up the Spree to swimmers

Whether it's Thurn, Basel or Zurich, in major Swiss cities, the idea of swimming in the river is an everyday reality for many residents. In Germany, in contrast, rivers are reserved for ships. But one architect is fighting to change that.

—Maike Freund, *Handelsblatt*, 22 July 2017

Going with the flow. More and more people are staying in the city to swim—and more and more cities are 'renaturing' their rivers

Swimming prohibited: this rule applies to all federal waterways. These include large German rivers, which belong to the federal government, who is responsible for ensuring that traffic stays flowing. But two brothers have spent the past twenty years trying to figure out how to remove this ban in Berlin so that people can swim in the Spree Canal again.

—Lars Reichardt, *SZ Magazine*, Issue 30/2017

Berlin's new historic centre: one palace and lots of dreams

Longer-term ideas for the historical centre are nebulous—yet sometimes spectacular. For example, Unter den Linden Boulevard could become a car-free zone. That idea would gain significantly in charm if we added the implementation of the so-called "Flussbad" project, which would make the Spree Canal west of Museum Island a huge swimming area, with open stairs down to the water at the Humboldt Forum or Altes Museum and natural filter space at both ends of the waterway. Although this might sound like a utopia, the project is much more concrete than others: indeed, by the end of 2018, the federal and state governments will have provided €4 million to develop the Flussbad idea further.

—Katja Bauer, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 1 August 2017

Swimming along Museum Island

The Flussbad project has the potential to upgrade neighbourhoods at Berlin's historic centre, but it would also be a win for the whole city. Up until now, direct access to the Spree has only been possible at a few points in the Berlin metropolitan area. This sustainable urban development project would make it possible to create attractive waterfront areas and valuable recreational spaces.

—Bettina Krause, *DOMUS*, September / October 2017

Swim in the Spree starting in 2025

It doesn't happen very often that a government and its opposition agree on anything. However, last Thursday, SPD, Linke and Grüne, CDU and FDP joined hands and leapt into the cold water. They called on the Berlin senate to support the rather crazy "Flussbad Berlin" project, which wants to make it possible within a couple of years for Berliners and tourists to go swimming in the Spree Canal between Fischerinsel and Bode Museum without poisoning themselves.

—Ulrich Zawotka-Gerlach, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 1 December 2017

Swimming in the Spree. State parliament wants a bathing area in downtown Berlin

Last Thursday, while most Berliners were digging out their winter hats and mittens, the state parliament was reaching for its swimming trunks—and dreaming of the planned Flussbad in the Spree Canal between Humboldt Forum and Bode Museum. The project is something all parties think is great.

—Sabine Rennefanz, *Berliner Zeitung*, 1 December 2017

A great reason to step out of the house

New views on Flussbad Berlin



When we take visitors on our boat tours of Berlin's Spree River and Landwehr Canal, we pass many areas that used to be home to "Flussbäder" or river bathing facilities. Our guides always make sure to mention them to our guests. Unfortunately, most of these swimming areas had to be closed over 100 years ago due to bad water quality. Even just 25 years ago, the Spree was still a highly polluted river. Fortunately, the water quality has improved significantly since then. These days, I'm always delighted to be able to see all the way down to the bottom of the river in the winter. It's all the more reason to take up the tradition of river swimming again. And we would especially like to see the Flussbad Berlin project implemented in the Kupfergraben area of the Spree Canal. It would be such a big win for the city. We wish the whole project team all the best!

Lutz Freise is managing director and partner at Reederei Riedel GmbH.



For me, the Flussbad is both an important project and a fascinating undertaking. It tackles the problems associated with Berlin's sewer system and also sustainably improves water quality in the Spree Canal. When it's finally implemented, it will turn a dusty and walled-up part of the Spree into a community oriented site for recreation and relaxation. It's going to feel like getting a piece of the city back as a gift. The whole project shows how successful civil-society actors can be when they really burn for an idea.

Nadja Berseck is an active member of the Panther Ray Floßkollektiv, a raft collective in Berlin.



The Flussbad is a great reason for people to step out of the house

The connection between urban living and mental health is very significant, especially seeing as global urbanisation is set to cause the biggest changes to our lives and living conditions in the upcoming decades. In terms of our health, these changes will be just as relevant as climate change. Urban dwellers already have a high risk of stress-related mental illnesses. By 2050, it's estimated that around 70 % of the world's population will live in cities. For this reason, it's high time we start thinking about how we can make cities more liveable so that they can actually benefit our health. This is where public space takes on a special meaning—it prevents the isolation of individuals and fosters social cohesion.

In all our cities, we are seeing a process of social segregation; living in the city centre is getting increasingly expensive, and this noticeably transforms the urban population in tangible ways. But urban society can't be allowed to segregate, because that would accelerate processes of social isolation whereby the social stress on everyone would increase. This is why the Flussbad Berlin is so attractive! It would be a space where people from different social levels and backgrounds could come together. It would foster social cohesion and urban culture. Plus it would help to counteract social stress.

We focus on the hypothesis of "social stress" in our interdisciplinary Forum Neurourbanistik; the concept argues that social stress—which comprises the sum of urban social density and social isolation—wears down our mental health, especially when the stress is chronic or even permanent. The best way to cure this type of stress is through integrated and welcoming public spaces. This is why I think the Flussbad is so important at this precise point, because segregation of the city's residents is at its clearest here in the centre of Berlin. If we create an attractive public space in the middle of the city where different people can have contact with one another, then it's not just good for the mental health of Berlin residents; it also sends out a very symbolic signal.

Plus there's an activity associated with the Flussbad, that is, you can swim. This answers the ever-present question of how the public space will actually be used, and it does so in an original way. And, finally, anything that gets urban residents out of the house is a good thing that inevitably strengthens the "social capital" of any urban society. This is why I fully support the idea of an inner-city Flussbad in Berlin.

Priv.-Doz. Dr. Mazda Adli is a psychiatrist and psychotherapist. He is chief physician at the Fliedner Klinik, head of the Affective Disorders Research Unit at Charité Hospital and co-initiator of the new interdisciplinary forum "Neurourbanistik" (Neuro Urbanism).



I left the seaside for Berlin years ago. Today, I'm working on achieving what Kurt Tucholsky described in his poem "The Ideal" as "a villa with the Baltic Sea at the front and Friedrichstraße at the back".

Hans Strömsdörfer, volunteer



Flussbad Berlin—Because the Spree River should be something Berliners are super proud of.
Lisa Junghans (left) and Tanja Linke (right), volunteers

Get involved and make Berlin even better!

Join us as a member of the Flussbad Berlin Association



© Flussbad Berlin e. V.

Let's work together to take back the Spree! Let's clean the river of all our waste and garbage. Let's experience how great it is to hang out at the river's edge—and in the water itself. Right in the middle of the city! Let's revitalise Berlin's historic centre. Let's create a meeting place for everyone. Let's see what it's like to live in an ecological city. Let's prove that sustainable urban development is not an empty promise and that the city of the future doesn't have to be an unreachable utopia. Let's create a new urban lifeline. Let's connect the World Heritage Site with real-life urban society. Let's prove that we care about Berlin's development.

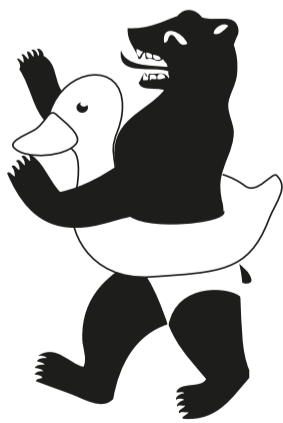
The only way we can do this is if we are many. Only then will we be heard. Only then will we have a clean Spree. Only when there are many of us will we one day be able to swim in our river in the middle of our city.

Since 2014, thanks to the support from the "National Urban Development Projects" programme, we've

received €4 million in funding to bring the project forward and publicise it both at home and abroad. Seeing as this funding period is expiring at the end of 2018, we are delighted that the Flussbad has now been anchored in Berlin's official state budget for 2019; for the first time, the project will be supported with €250,000.

Nevertheless, the crucial, long-term work done by our association and its members cannot be financed by these earmarked funds alone. We are able to do our work exclusively thanks to donations and, in particular, regular annual fees from our association members. An annual fee of at least €30 (or €20 in special cases) enables us to advance the project further, to publicise it and to grow as an association in such a way that allows us to pursue our shared dream of realising this project. That's why we urge you to become a member.

Join us at www.flussbad.berlin/verein



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