

Urban renewal and swimming-pool precinct, Berlin, Germany

Project data

Project group	Landscape, urban design and infrastructure projects
Client	Kunst und Technik e.V. supported by Senatsverwaltung Berlin
Project background	Public commission
Estimated start of construction	January 2018
Main author	
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City, country	Berlin, Germany



Further author(s)

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Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Europe

The jury commended this project due to its direct and very strong impact on the quality of urban life in an area of Berlin which has been previously overlooked. The project questions the ownership of the river itself that is currently used exclusively for shipping and drainage purposes but not for public activities. The idea of providing a public facility is convincing, feasible and easily transferable. It is complemented with an ecological concept that supplies unpolluted water and with a simple design that adapts respectfully to the historic context of the adjacent buildings. It is an excellent example of what could be achieved within challenging inner city areas that possess a rich tradition and cultural heritage where the local public has been overlooked.

Project description by author

The *Flussbad* project is located in the very center of Berlin. The practical scope of the project is to transform with limited means an unused river arm into a natural 745m "swimming pool" and to provide water of according quality by treating river water in a natural reed bed filter.

Interventions are restricted to the creation of the necessary provisions to make the river accessible and to ensure the appropriate quality of the river water. The first aspect is dealt with by converting parts of the Lustgarten quay wall into a generous stair providing access to the swimming pool and offering a place to sit, hang out and watch. Functional locker- and changing rooms etc. are integrated unobtrusively into the terrain. A continuous gangplank lines the entire stretch of the river section for safety. The pool will be fed and constantly perfused by river water purified in a succession of reed bed filters and a sand bed filters located in the upper section of the river arm. A barrage at the lower end prevents the backflow of unfiltered water into the swimming pool. The continuous underwater stormwater pipe will contain and channel off any overflow from six emergency outlets of the city's sewage system. ("Planet")

Practical effect
After 120 years of "unemployment", the project reactivates a currently under-valued urban resource. ("Prosperity") *Flussbad* will add to the sparse provision of sports and recreation spaces for the central districts of Berlin caused by an increase of population (up to 75%) and a parallel loss of vacant spaces since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In addition, this project will both supply a vital impulse to the historic center and will return to the contemporary population i.e. some "authentic life" to Berlin's museum island. It will diminish the mental and practical division between "everyday" Berlin and the official i.e. touristic/governmental Berlin. ("Proficiency")

Symbolic effect
Beyond its practical implications, the project is highly symbolic. Not so much because it stands in contrast to the past 20 years of urban development policy in Berlin – but as a most fundamental challenge by creating a new interpretation of the river's potential. The conversion of the city's most central river section into a resource for recreation and for public urban life radically questions the "ownership" of the river and its status quo solely as a means of transportation and effluent disposal. The project signals the chances (and the need) for an open-minded and radical reassessment of the river being one of the important natural resources of Berlin. ("People")

Creating the possibility to swim in the river will raise the appetite for more ("Progress") and an awareness of the body of water and its ecosystem. This will promote much needed change through *Flussbad*, Berlin, Germany.

Relevance to target issues by author

Innovation and transferability – Progress
Transferability is a central aspect of the project. This is less for the elements of conversion (stairs, reed bed, etc.), but for the approach: the reassessment of rivers (or other resources) from a cultural, ecological and a broadened economic perspective. In many modern cities the idea to use (their) river as a resource for a richer, healthier and more sustainable urban life will be more competitive than the status quo deployment of rivers as a means for transportation of goods and waste.

Ethical standards and social equity – People
This project is about ownership and control of the river. It shows the potential (and need) for an open-minded reassessment of the river being one of Berlin's outstanding natural resources. By converting the central part of the river into a resource for recreation, for a public urban space - and for everyone - it radically questions the status quo. Today the river is used for transportation and effluent disposal and by law any alternative kind of appropriation is hindered or suppressed.

Environmental quality and resource efficiency – Planet
Two valuable resources are at the focus of this project: water and urban space. Water: although 6% of Berlin's area is covered by water, the city has a significantly increasing negative water balance. Berlin's city center has an outmoded sewage system that is the sole source of pollution for the otherwise healthy river Spree. Several times a year during heavy rains the mixed sewage system spills over into the river and wipes out most of the biological life. The new usage of the river for swimming and other recreational activities will significantly grow the currently lacking public awareness for this issue and will help to bring about the needed infrastructural and administrative change. Urban space: Out of a former biological and functional "wasteland" *Flussbad* creates with little means a generous and robust recreational facility, valuable public space plus a 1.8 ha reed bed natural reserve.

Economic performance and compatibility – Prosperity
Over centuries the river has been a fundamental driving yet variable aspect of the development of Berlin. Our section of the river became altogether functionless in 1894. Here the *Flussbad* will generate an economic effect by increasing the quality of life in the inner city quarters. Secondly the bold show of mundane vitality next to the museum island will become a new icon of Berlin - important for a city that economically is based increasingly on the exploitation of its peculiar character.

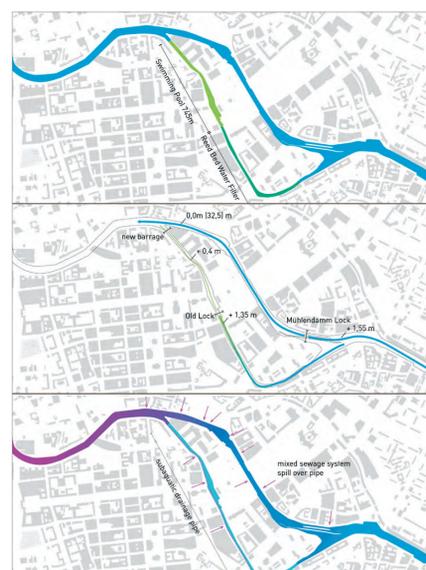
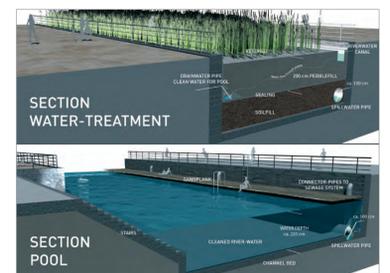
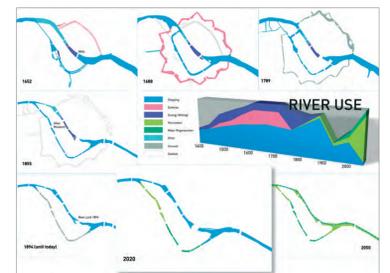
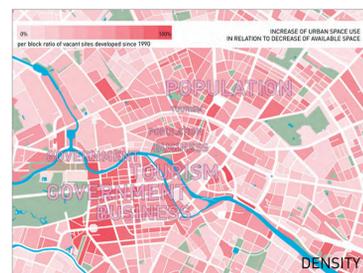
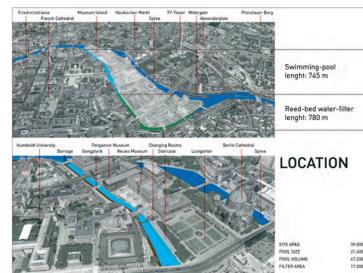
Contextual and aesthetic impact – Proficiency
Flussbad is located at the very center of historic Berlin next to the ancient villages of Berlin and Cölln and the castle in later times. In the past 120 years this area has lost domestic use in exchange for public functions, many of them related to national government and high culture museums. The *Flussbad* project through also welcoming roughly 1 million exhausted tourists after their tours aims to widen the usability of the existing urban space and generate a renaissance of the city center as a place of importance for the "real" domestic Berlin. The mundane recreational place, providing a badly-needed recreational facility in this part of the city, will mix in a relaxed way the domestic, the touristic and the iconic Berlin.



Panorama Flussbad - left side.



Panorama Flussbad - right side.



OVERVIEW

The FLUSSBAD project at the very center of Berlin.

WATERFLOW

The river will continue to stream thru both river arms. The smaller amount feeding the western FLUSSBAD river arm is purified and released back into the main river at the north end of the island.

SPILLWATER

Several times a year during heavy rains the mix water sewage system spills over into the river and wipes out most of the biologic life. As long as this system is not yet modernized in the FLUSSBAD river section the spill over water is collected and deducted in a subaqueous drainage pipe.