



What is the future of the Prinzessinnengarten? What will become of „beautiful and wild“ Berlin?*

Since 2009, well over a thousand supporters have helped the site to grow „from an ugly vacant lot to a paradise“ (Die Zeit). 50,000 visitors come to Moritzplatz each year to see this „biotope and sociotope with a model character“ (Tagesspiegel), this „utopia in miniature“ (Berliner Zeitung), this „laboratory for the sustainable city of the future“ (Wirtschaftswoche).

But the future of the Prinzessinnengarten is uncertain. The Property Fund has been commissioned to sell the plot on behalf of the Berlin Senate. A query submitted by the House of Representatives has revealed that negotiations with investors on the imminent sale of the property have already taken place. This could mean the impending end the Prinzessinnengarten. The lack of reliable planning horizons is not only an economic threat to the self-sustaining Prinzessinnengarten. 13 full-time positions threatened, as is the result of 30,000 hours of volunteer work per season: a place of social exchange and learning. We work with numerous schools, kindergartens, community associations and universities and have helped build up 16 offshoot gardens at the most varied of facilities.

We have long been drawing attention to the precarious situation and the lack of certainty in planning. In order to establish sustainable future perspectives for the garden we need an open discussion and a commitment from political leaders to preserve places like the Prinzessinnengarten for the long term. The value for the city of Berlin that comes from the Prinzessinnengarten and similar projects is undisputed, even by official sources. It does important work in a neighborhood that is one of the most densely developed and socially most vulnerable in the city. Experts see it as a laboratory for socially and ecologically sustainable forms of urban development. Internationally, whether at the EXPO in Shanghai or in the New York Times, the Prinzessinnengarten exemplifies a Berlin of open spaces for social and cultural engagement. The Senate has announced the promotion of urban gardening as part of a sustainable urban policy. The Property Fund writes that the Prinzessinnengarten is among projects „that make up Berlin in its entirety, without which Berlin would be poorer many times over.“

*The quote refers to the policy statement made by Klaus Wowereit, Mayor of Berlin

Citizen Participation On An Equal Footing

Little is known about the plans for Moritzplatz. The response of the Senate Department for Urban Development to the official query suggests that investors from the creative industries in coordination with the Property Fund are planning construction, within which the garden could also be integrated. How this might look remains a matter of conjecture. Urban gardens, however, are more than just sophisticated backyard greenery. They provide incentives for sustainable and neighborhood-oriented urban development. They give people room to actively shape their environment. Taking this potential seriously, in our view, must mean including the neighborhood around Moritzplatz and its diverse actors in the discussion of the future of the neighborhood – on an equal footing and from an early stage. Last year, in conjunction with other local actors and with the support of the District Mayor, we submitted a concept for appropriate public participation procedures to the Property Fund.

Moritzplatz: A Model For Forward-Looking and Neighborhood-Oriented City Policies

The issue of Moritzplatz is not only about a few years more or less for the Prinzessinnengarten. The situation offers an excellent opportunity to take on far-reaching and urgent urban issues. Questions regarding appropriate opportunities for participation, the preservation of open spaces and diversity, the value of social engagement, the balance between economic interests and the protection from the displacement of existing social structures. This is consistent with the Senate's position of promoting participatory strategies, of enabling space for urban gardeners, of improving conditions for civic engagement, of preserving diverse and socially mixed neighborhoods. But above all, Moritzplatz offers the chance for the realignment of property policy as announced by the Senate. It is not only short-term financial interests that should count when dealing with public land, but the value of social, cultural and environmental engagement must also be adequately addressed. Only in this way can free spaces be preserved or created. They help to make Berlin the beautiful and wild city that Klaus Wowereit so fervently espouses in his policy statement.

**In order to establish a sustainable future for the Prinzessinnengarten
and to appropriately involve the neighborhood around Moritzplatz
in the development of their living environment, we demand the following:**

- the extension of the Prinzessinnengarten lease for 5 years.
- forward-looking civic participation that appropriately takes into account the diversity and different needs of residents.
- secure planning prospects for urban garden projects and other forms of social participation that do justice to the value – also recognized by the Senate – that such places and projects have for the city.