

Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin – beyond urban gardening

This is the story of how a huge plot of land of 6000m², a site which had been fallow for over 60 years, was successfully transformed into an urban garden, café and place of working, learning and relaxing; and what were the ecological and the societal impacts of this transformation.

In the summer of 2009, Marco Claussen and Robert Shaw had the idea of leasing the fallow plot of land located at Moritzplatz in Berlin Kreuzberg, and transforming it into an urban garden, a peaceful place that would bring people together, and enable them to grow their own organic food, interact, learn together, and explore alternative ways of urban life. They called their pilot project The [Prinzessinnengarten](#).

After the plot was leased through their non-profit enterprise „Nomadisch Grün“, the two social entrepreneurs, along with friends, activists and neighbours started transforming the area. They cleared away the garbage and started growing organic food, all this without direct support from the municipality, but rather through the engagement of hundreds of volunteers, who either got directly involved or helped through donations.



by Arsaytoma via flickr

Today the garden has about 500 different species of herbs and vegetables. They are all organically grown, in compost beds without artificial pesticides and fertilizers, while the soil and seeds are certified organic as well. The vegetation and populations of bees present in the garden has proven positive for the local ecosystem and microclimate.

Prinzessinnengarten is open for everyone, whether they want to sow, plant, harvest, process or conserve vegetables, do beekeeping, worm composting, or just hang around and enjoy this green meeting place. No one is an expert in agriculture there, but it's rather a 'learning by doing' process. Free to experiment, exchange experiences and knowledge between one another, people get to learn things, not only about agricultural techniques and how to grow their own organic food, but also about biodiversity, urban ecology, recycling, sustainable consumption and future forms of city life. Together, they explore new ways of urban life and shape a small part of the environment they live in. In a district with high population density, little green space and high social vulnerability, this garden is like an oasis in the desert.

The garden has its own café and restaurant, where vegetables and herbs directly from the garden and other regional and organic products are being used. Thus they contribute with its revenues to the management of the garden and to its various projects. Apart from the vegetables that are used directly in

the restaurant, people can grow and sell their own vegetables, and use the revenues to support the garden.

Nomadisch Grün go further and promote the transformation of other unused spaces into 'urban farmland and green meeting places', through their numerous [projects](#). They work with schools, kindergartens, community associations and universities, helping them to build their own urban gardens. They also organize workshops (e.g. on gardening, healthy cooking, 'urban farming and local empowerment'), education programmes for children and teenagers (e.g. Stadtsafari) and provide consultancy to public institutions on valorization of unused places and activation of neighbourhoods.

Since the leasing contracts closed with the city for the plot at Moritzplatz are only for one year each, the future of the garden is uncertain over the long-term. That is why Prinzessinnengarten was designed to be a so-called 'mobile garden'. The vegetables are planted in recycled boxes, sacks or tetra-paks, which can be moved, and even placed on sealed spaces if this space is no longer available. Indeed, now since the city-owned plot at Moritzplatz is to be sold, the existence of Prinzessinnengarten and the result of hundreds of people's work are under threat. That is why Nomadisch Grün started the 'Let it grow!' campaign, and made a [petition](#) to the Berlin Senate, with the aim of ensuring a sustainable future for the Prinzessinnengarten and the appropriate involvement of citizens in the urban planning in general. In this context, they call for the extension of the Prinzessinnengarten lease for 5 years, 'forward-looking civic participation', as well as an urban planning that includes citizens into the decision-making process 'on an equal footing and from an early stage', and recognizes the true value of urban garden projects.

