

Spreepark Konkret Think Tank I Executive Summary

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“Important is the unobstructed, fresh perspective from the outside. Therefore, I hope for valuable impulses for further development from this present initiative. Even more so, because it consciously engages local residents and initiatives of the district.”

Honorary Chair Oliver Igel, District Mayor of Treptow-Köpenick

Over 30 decision makers and international experts in the areas of urban and cultural planning met on June 20, 2012 at Treptow city hall to envision a future for the family amusement park Spreepark Plänterwald, which has been closed since 2001. District mayor Oliver Igel was honorary chair of the event. A holistic and site-based approach forms the basis to the initiative. Efforts to date to restructure the 28.5 hectare site at an idyllic stretch of the river Spree have been unsuccessful to date due to the complex circumstances.

A think tank goal was to develop robust, feasible ideas at the administrative, programming and planning levels, which can serve stakeholders as an incentive for a goal oriented basis for collaborative realization. The discussion was moderated by Christina Lanzl and Dieta Sixt of Berlin's Urban Culture Institute. A general overview of history and challenges, including the introduction of comparative precedents followed facilitated workshops, which were shared with all participants in a concluding plenary. Sponsor of the event was the project team of Kulturpark, an international initiative of cultural producers and scientists with the goal to revitalize the Spreepark.

The think tank served as a neutral platform to enable the exchange between decision makers and international experts in the field of urban and cultural planning. This Executive Summary will be followed by a detailed conceptual framework that will be developed by the working group in the coming weeks and made available to participants as basis and point of departure for a further discussion regarding the future of the Spreepark. Public access to this publication will be made available online on the websites www.urbancultureinstitute.org and www.kulturpark.org. This represents a novel approach to date in mastering the complex challenges regarding this property (see attachment).

Summary Results

The think tank focused on the themes of financial debt, forest status, cultural issues and planning questions. The terminologies require clear definitions in order to successfully realize a convincing concept. To proceed unity and political will are necessary. The participants issue a series of summarized conclusions and recommendations:

1. **Debt:** Agreement between all decision makers is the key to success. Since a large number of stakeholders have to decide over the future of the property, we recommend the introduction of a well-respected mediator who will be able to unite the wide-ranging and diverging interests in a compromise. Basis for any further planning is a financial solution to the current debt of 15 million Euros. Instead of a single investor an affiliation of several partners should come together. This group could realize a successful, curated further development of a thematically linked concept with several components, which sustains itself through moderate profit and ensures free access to the property.
2. **Nature and Forest Status:** Established in 1760 by Gustav Meyer (a Lenné disciple), the Plänterwald is an exceptional inner-city forest of both deciduous and evergreen trees, as opposed to the prevalent pine forests of the Märkischer Streusand. Comparable landscapes in Treptow are the Wuhlheide and the Königsheide. Designated as conservation land (Landschaftsschutzgebiet) in the mid-1990s, the experience of nature must be the most important development aspect, in addition to the designated use as a “recreation park”

(Freizeitpark) in the land use plan. This historically significant cultural landscape should be understood as a cultural experience in the sense of a *'forest culture park'*. The presently lacking professional care of not only the protected third, mainly along the Spree river, is urgently needed. In addition, a major site characteristic is the high percentage of water and green space within the district, whose most attractive offerings are in the form of active recreation on and along the water by people of all ages and especially by families.

- 3. Cultural Issues:** New ideas are important, which can be realized as an innovative, holistic *creative economy* concept under the umbrella of the recreation park definition. The existing, wildly romantic landscape of the Spreepark with its slumbering attractions can serve as a point of departure for a winning concept featuring controlled decay. As precedent we refer to Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, which is centered around a former steel mill, and today advertises nature, industrial culture and light art. Unsustainable today is the traditional concept of a theme park, because this concept is no longer viable as a recreational attraction, for the site, or from a land management perspective. Innovation is preferable to the copying of already existing attractions in the Berlin region. Noted are already existing, financially challenged artist studio buildings – not only in Treptow. In this context, temporary projects can indeed serve as matrix for a successful, new permanent concept. However, this requires openness, as well as a well-staffed and professionally competent cultural and permitting advisory office. To warrant not only the cultural programs, but also financial viability, it is necessary to effectively navigate between high, popular and leisure culture. The Spreepark offers potential as unique Berlin landmark.
- 4. Planning Questions:** After the reunification the instable, multi-layered identity of the German capital produced some failed, market economy experiments. Privatizing the Spreepark combined with the continued development of the planning framework for the area is one of them (see attachment). A bundled presence of several collaborating users could offer the key to success, though more difficult to master from a planning and administrative perspective. Therefore, the placement of well-versed curatorial experts in the areas of cultural and landscape planning should be assured, both during the planning and following the implementation phase of the new Spreepark. A thematic division is expected, with an expectation that the new identity will build on the already existing legend: dinosaurs are always frontrunners, the park train already runs again on weekends and Europe's once longest water slide could be reinstated. Access paths and view corridors should assure transparency and access of the property in all directions.

The current status quo of the closed park locks out residents and the public from a large, 28.5 hectare site. The goal of the decision makers in political, cultural, economic and planning circles should be to swiftly and amicably find a solution for the lingering debt. The current situation of the 66-year lease contract with a closing date of May 31, 2061 is untenable. The since 2010 pending suit of the finance bureau for a forced auction of the lease is one approach for a solution, but it contains the threat of an additional disaster. The Spreepark think tank demands a coordinated approach *prior to instead* of the forced auction.

ATTACHMENT I Spreepark Plänterwald Fact Sheet

History

- 1969: *Kulturpark* opens as the only year-long GDR amusement park, lovingly nicknamed *Kulti & Plänterwald*
3.000 parking spots at Dammweg not permitted
- 1991: following the fall of the wall the park is privatized as Spreepark. The lease projects 1.8 million visitors annually.
- mid-1990s: Plänterwald is designated a nature conservation area
- 2001: Spreepark closes (lack of parking & 2/3 development limitation)
- 2008: bankruptcy proceedings are withdrawn
- since 2009: revitalization efforts begin – guided tours, Café Mythos opens 2011, Park train, events
- 2010: IRS sues for mandatory auctioning of the lease

Challenges

To date, revitalization efforts fail due to manifold challenges:

- 28.5 ha along the Spree river, of which 19.7 Hectar are surrounded by the nature conservancy Plänterwald
- Lacking transportation access as greatest challenge
 - extremely limited parking and limited public transportation options
 - recent transportation study envisions widening of Dammweg access road and 900-car garage
- 66-year lease until May 31, 2061 held by bankrupt lessee who tried to annul the contract more than once.
- Debt: circa 15 million Euros total owed by Spreepark corp.: 11,5 mill. Deutsche Bank debt; 3,5 mill. Euros *rent* owed to city-state of Berlin
- City-state of Berlin as debt guarantor
- Land-use plan designation as “special use area with high green space requirement and the designation *leisure park*”
- Development master plan (draft version): 40% buildable area und 60% green space
- Regulations of the *Building Code for Outer Regions (Baugesetzbuch zum Außenbereich, § 35 BauGB)* apply
- Leisure park can handle a maximum of 400-500.000 visitors/year
- Historic preservation: historic inn Eierhäuschen (“Little Egg House”) deteriorates, because it is included in the lease
- Need financially strong investor

Culture in Context

- Berlin Trade Fair / Berliner Gewerbeausstellung 1896
- Treptow City Hall & Archenhold Observatory, where Albert Einstein taught
- Soviet War Memorial / Sowjetisches Ehrenmal
- 17 km former wall strip in Treptow (incl. Teltowkanal), where Chris Gueffroy was the last victim killed fleeing the GDR in Feb. 1989
- Leisure culture: boating, sports, picnicking and restaurants along the der Spree; events on Insel der Jugend (Youth Island)
- Plänterwald landscape inspires reflection on the subjects of public history, resistance, leisure activities, commerce and technology...

Unsuccessful Initiatives since 2002 among others are

- Rolf Schmidt, amusement park proprietor of Baden-Württemberg state
- Tivoli Denmark theme park
- Grévin & Cie – proprietors of Asterix & Obelixparks in France, Walibi Parks in Belgium, Fort Fun in Germany's Sauerland region
- Lost Worlds/Verlassene Welten* theme park concept: Stonehenge, Hanging Gardens, Pyramids, Inca-Cities (notarized purchase option until March 2010)
- Spreepark-25* proposal by Bar 25 techno-cub to district office in November 2010
- Treptow citizen groups demand sustainable integration into overall development

Literature

1. Christopher Flade; Sacha Szabo: Vom Kulturpark Berlin zum Spreepark Plänterwald, 2011.
2. Markus Langenstraß: *Spreepark auf Eis gelegt*, Tagesspiegel, 26. Dez. 2010.
www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/immobilien/spreepark-auf-eis-gelegt/3680114.html
3. Plänter Waldblatt, Sonderausgabe Bürgerkomitee Plänterwald mit AG Pro Plänterwald, Feb. 2009.
4. Spreepark, <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spreepark>