

Best Practice: Railway Switchyard Converted into Green Space

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CITY: BERLIN

POLICY AREAS: PARKS AND GREEN SPACES; CITY PLANNING

BEST PRACTICE

The Schöneberger Südgelände **Nature-Park** is a former switchyard (an area where railroad cars are switched and trains are assembled) that was converted into a park and arts venue for residents. The park features original train tracks, switches, signals and water cranes, which were used during the time when it was one of Berlin's busiest facilities for railroad freight.

ISSUE

According to the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development, about half of the wild plants and animal species that previously existed in Berlin are now extinct, threatened by extinction, or endangered. In an effort to preserve its wildlife and reuse the switchyard, citizens lobbied throughout the 1980s and 1990s to place Nature-Park under special legal protection. The land was going to be made into a new freight station and switchyard. Citizens successfully resisted and experts appraised the ecological value of the vegetation, spontaneously grown on the railroad site for over some 30 years.

As a result of their efforts and financing from the Allianz Environmental Foundation and the Berlin Government, Nature-Park was developed into an ecologically and historically protected arts and leisure space and is now maintained by the Grün Berlin Limited under the authority of the Administration of Nature Protection. Nature-Park is also regarded by city officials and residents as a project that helps compensate for the environmental damage caused in the city center by the ongoing construction of new transportation facilities and buildings.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the efforts to establish Nature-Park included the following:

- Preserve the former switchyard's historical structures and train tracks;
- Protect the vegetation, insects and animal species that have flourished in the switchyard since its closure in 1952;
- Create a space for modern art and cultural, artistic and theatrical performances; and
- Develop educational programming to teach children and adults about the environment.

IMPLEMENTATION

Abandoned as a railroad facility in 1995 and transferred to the City of Berlin, the Nature-Park now features various types of vegetation, including dry grassland, perennial herbs and jungle-like woodland. Several rare and endangered species of plants grow at Nature-Park and partly are thought to have come from other parts of Europe, inadvertently brought to the area as "stowaways" on trains years ago.

In 2000, "Schöneberger Südgelände Nature-Park" opened to the public at the same time that Hannover, Germany hosted the World's Fair, the EXPO 2000. Due to its distinctive features, it was selected as an external project of the EXPO 2000. The project was organized by Grün Berlin Park and Garden Limited (now Grün Berlin Company Ltd.), a service agency of the City of Berlin for the



Photo of the switchyard in 1935 (taken from the watertower) by Carl Bellingrodt

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development of urban open space. The project was financed by public funds and subsidies from the Allianz Environmental Foundation, the Allianz company's corporate and social responsibility entity. Nature-Park is characterized by an intriguing combination of nature, railway artifacts and art. The park is 18 hectares (approximately 45 acres). Footpaths were built by filling in soil onto the rail road tracks. Also, artistic walkways, 80 centimeters above the ground lead through the park in order to protect the existing vegetation.

The plans were developed by the Öko - Con/planland working group, while the artist group ODIIOUS was responsible for the creative construction of the walkway. Modern art objects, mainly sculptures, enhance the grounds. There are a number of historic elements in Nature-Park, including a 19th century turntable and a 50 meter tall iron water tower that was built in 1927.

A hall built in 1910 which was used for maintenance and repairs of steam engines and measuring approximately 4,400 square meters will become Nature-Park's theater, concert hall and exhibition space. The park is also home to a nostalgic steam engine (series type 50).

There are two circular pathways accessible to people with disabilities. The water tower and the turntable can be seen along the shorter route, approximately 1 kilometer long. The longer route is 2.7 kilometers and leads visitors through the nature conservation area. It links the dry meadows of the main clearing with a forest of Robinias and it includes a lawn along the ruins of the signal tower.



Photo of the historic water tower and view from the Italian garden ("Giardino Segreto")



*Photo of steam engine
Photos by Holger Koppatsch*



Photo of jogger on raised walkway in the nature reserve area

COST

The initial cost of the project was EUR 1.75 million (\$2.3 million USD), and the annual expenditures are approximately EUR 240,000 (\$316,000 USD).

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

There are approximately 50,000 visitors to Nature-Park each year and the number of visitors is increasing. Evaluation of the park's success is monitored by ticket sales, surveys and interviews with visitors.

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As a result of the project's environmental protection efforts, an impressive variety of species now inhabit the park including: 95 bee species, 30 species of breeding birds, 57 spider species, 95 wild bee species, 15 grasshopper species, over 350 plant species, as well as 49 species of mushrooms.

TIMELINE

1889	Opening of the switchyard Tempelhof on the so-called "Schöneberger Südgelände" (i.e. area south of the Schöneberg village)
until 1945	Tempelhof Switchyard grew to one of the major facilities for railroad freight in Berlin
1946-1952	Successive reduction of railroad traffic on the Tempelhof Switchyard due to the Cold War after WW II
1952	Complete shut down
1979	Planning of a new switchyard on the Schöneberger Südgelände by the West Berlin Senate
1980	Establishment of the Bürgerinitiative Schöneberger Südgelände, citizen's group for the creation of Nature-Park
1984	Experts offer testimony on the status of Nature-Park's unique ecology which developed over 30 years
1985	Presentation of plans for Nature-Park by Bürgerinitiative Schöneberger Südgelände
1989	Inclusion of Nature-Park in the German gardening fair, "Bundesgartenschau 1995." But the fair did not take place due to German reunification
1995-1996	Planning of Nature-Park
1997-2000	Implementation of plans and preservation of the historic elements of Nature-Park
May 28, 2000	Park opens to the public

LEGISLATION

The project was enabled by the Berlin Conservation Law. Nature-Park was designated as a Nature Protection Area and Landscape Protection Area and is protected under terms specified in the following text:

Protected Areas under the Berlin Conservation Law

Under the Berlin Conservation Law (NatSchGBln), the content and process of the certification of protected areas are regulated in §§18 through 26. The following protected area types are described:

Nature Protection Areas (NSGs; §19) are legally established areas in which nature is strictly protected in whole or in individual parts. The protection extends particularly to areas which are of considerable significance for the conservation of biocenoses or habitats of wild plant or animal species, for scientific, cultural, natural-historic or regional reasons, because of their rarity, diversity, particular uniqueness or outstanding beauty. All acts are forbidden which may lead to the destruction, damage or change of a protected area or its elements, or to an enduring disturbance counter to the protection goal.

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Landscape Protection Areas (LSGs; §20) are legally established areas which are especially protected for the conservation or restoration of the productive power of the ecosystem, or the utilization ability of natural products, because of the diversity, uniqueness or beauty of the landscape appearance, or because of their particular significance for recreation. They deserve conservation and protection in the public interest, and should therefore be protected from any impairment which could change the character of the area or contradict the protection goal. Overdevelopment, unregulated waste dumping, removal of vegetation stock, and other actions and impairments are to be avoided. Development adjusted to the natural changes, regulated agriculture, forestry and fishing use may be pursued.

LESSONS LEARNED

The success of Nature-Park is directly related to the steady commitment of residents to the project despite plans to create a new switchyard. Cooperation between residents and conservationists, including scientists, was necessary to induce the city to implement Nature-Park.

TRANSFERABILITY

Nature-Park is an example of collaborative negotiating and planning between civic stakeholders, city government and a professional planning company. Sites such as former railway switchyards can be turned into a green space for residents while saving indigenous plants, insects and animal species.

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