Architect, realities united, Berlin, Germany; Project group and effluent disposal. The project signals the chances (and river and its status quo solely as a means of transportation most fundamental challenge by creating a new interpretation, this project will both supply a vital impulse to the vacant spaces since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In addition, this project will both supply a vital impulse to the recreation spaces for the central districts of Berlin caused by the reactivation 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. (“Providence”) Flussbad provides a space provision of sports and recreation spaces for the central districts of Berlin caused by an increase of population (up to 1/3) 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. A “realistic” to Berlin’s museum island. It will diminish the mental and practical division between “everyday” Berlin and the official. “Reinventing the Old 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 most 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.

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.

Reported by author

Profession

Architect

Organization

realities united

City, country

Berlin, Germany

Further author(s)

1. Jan Edler, Architect, realities united, Berlin, Germany; 2. Denise Dih, Architect, DDOR, Berlin, Germany

Project description by author

Innovation and transferability – Progress

Transferability is a central aspect of the project. This is less for the elements of conversion (parks, road 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 changes. 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 visible aspect of the development of Berlin. Our section of the river became altogether functionless in 1944. 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 in the very center of historic Berlin next to the ancient villages of Berlin and Cölln and the castle in later times. In the past 100 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.

Relevance to target issues by author

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 2006

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Gold Award Europe

Regional Holcim Awards competition 2011