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NATURAL EXPERIENTIAL SITES FOR THE CHILDREN OF BERLIN



Content

- 3 Editorial
- 4 Why We Need Natural Experiential Sites in Big Cities
- 6 Preconditions and Principles
- 8 A First Example in Berlin
- 9 More Natural Experiential Sites for Berlin
- 11 Imprint



Climbing Trees, playing in the mud, building dams, catching frogs, watching beetles race against each other – does this list awake some memories in you? Congratulations! Then you belong to a shrinking group of people, who in their childhood were allowed to discover the great outdoors for themselves and become acquainted with nature on their own terms. Such experiences stay with us through our lifetime, shape us and our relationship with nature. Last but not least something grows inside of us – a feeling of attachment, familiarity, belonging and comfort. It makes us being mindful and protective towards nature and environment. In the world we live in today, there are limited possibilities for children discovering nature in a playful manner, without restraints, guidelines and constant observation.

In order to offer a solution to this finding, the concept of “Natural Experiential Sites” (NES) was developed in the 1990’s. The idea behind the Natural Experiential Sites offers the chance to increase the quality of life of children in connection with urban nature protection. The new Testing and Developing Project “Natural Experiential Sites in Big Cities, the Case Berlin”, curated by the Foundation for Nature Protection Berlin, now targets the systematic implementation, observation and evaluation of Natural Experiential Sites within an urban context.





Why We Need Natural Experiential Areas in Big Cities



Experiencing nature is elementary

A defining difference between a childhood 50 Years ago and today is, that children in cities have less and less access to free zones and are “sheltered” almost around the clock. Their playing activities inevitably have moved from the outside to the inside. Their daily schedules are tightly structured and organized and their circle of action is getting smaller. Alarming deficits in physical development, poor concentration, health-problems connected to overweight, badly developed social behavior and a lack of environmental awareness are the consequences. The list goes on.

Longstanding studies have shown that free play in nature helps to master body control and boost creativity, risk and social competence. We therefore have to create areas, where this will be possible again.



First achievements

Various research projects have concluded that independent experiences in nature are indispensable for a healthy development of children. This was the starting point for the concept of Natural Experiential Areas. The main idea behind the concept is that children should make their own experiences through free play in nature or in near-natural areas without any equipment or infrastructure and without being observed or controlled by adults.

Surveys which compared Natural Experiential Sites to conventional playgrounds state the following:

Children in Natural Experiential Sites

- play much more often together with other children, than children who play at traditional playgrounds,
- play more often complex or even highly complex games than children at traditional playgrounds,
- stay longer focused and are not as easily distracted,
- are generally more interested in their surroundings and have basic knowledge of and interest in plants and animals,
- crafts things themselves and design their environment,
- can give a report of their activities in a more complex, enthusiastic and detailed way.

The concept is also very well received with the parents, as interviews and talks have shown. Most parents were aware of the positive effects of near-natural areas on the physical and mental development of their children. The acceptance is accordingly high.

Due to the positive experiences, the concept of Natural Experiential Sites meanwhile makes its way to different levels of relevant legislation, environmental- and urban planning. The reviewed Federal Nature Conservation Act states the preservation and implementation of Natural Experiential Sites as an aim of nature protection and landscape conservation (§1, Abs. 6 BNatSchG).

Preconditions and Principles

Due to the development in urban planning in recent decades which resulted in an inside compaction of cities, suitable open spaces were more and more relegated. Their relevance for a child-oriented city was recognized only much later. Now the remaining potentially eligible areas should be secured. Suitable are preferably large areas, which are well integrated into residential areas, e.g. near-natural green zones, waste lands or forest and forest-like areas.


The project described as following should contribute to this end.

Near-natural areas, suitable for children have to be

- appropriate for common play
- suitable to be shaped by children, in order to enable creative trial and error and to render visible the consequences of their own actions
- offering refuge and places to recharge
- preferably diversely equipped and attractive

Where this is not given, the existing landscape can be enhanced. Suitable measures are planting of vegetation, the creation of hummocks and lowerings or small water bodies. Open ground also offers a variety of options for creative play.





The planning and “construction” of the sites should happen in collaboration with the children.

Scrupulous nursing interventions should only take place in order to keep the area open and in agreement with the users. Other parts should be left to develop without any interventions.

Natural Experiential Sites are intended for children aged 3-12, but adolescents and grown-ups should not be excluded. With the exception of “warm up”-games for getting familiar with the site and to help to abolish threshold fears while encounter “wild nature”, there should not be any educational supervision. It is vital, that the children can be among themselves and make their own and autonomous experiences. In order to ensure the safety, the sites should be tended and monitored like traditional playgrounds.



A First Example in Berlin

The first Natural Experiential Site in Berlin opened in June 2009 in Gleisdreieck Park. Initiated by residents, it was planned based on the ideas of children and implemented as a pilot project by the Grün GmbH Berlin at a ground fallow formerly used by the railway corporation. The planning and implementation was curated by the ARGE Natural Experiential Sites and comprised the participation of various neighboring childcare facilities, which contributed imaginatively to the process. The Natural Experiential Site is monitored by the association südost Europa Kultur e. V.

The 3500 square meter area offers a number of stimuli. There have been various mounds heaped up and lowerings laid out, which can be supplied with water. Together with the children there have been fruit trees and berry bushes planted and some boulders placed. Natural Materials like sticks and branches for creative play are also part of the endowment. First rounds of evaluation show that this Natural Experiential Site is particularly well received with elementary school children.





More Natural Experiential Sites for Berlin – A Project of the Foundation for Nature Protection Berlin

The preliminary study, supported by federal funding, was carried out by the Foundation for Nature Protection Berlin in 2011/2012 (Project Report: www.bfn.de/fileadmin/MDB/documents/service/skript_345.pdf). This first phase served to clarify the preconditions and to select suitable pilot areas.

In mid-august 2015 the second phase, the main project, started. In the districts Mahrzahn-Hellersdorf, Pankow and Spandau, three Natural Experiential Sites will be established and tested as an addition or qualification of the existing public open spaces. Thereby should be taking account of social, health-and education-related, ecologic and economic aspects. The project will span a term of 3 years and is scientifically supervised and evaluated by the University of Applied Sciences for sustainable Development in Eberswalde. The findings will be documented and processed, so that they can serve as a guideline for other actors and cities.





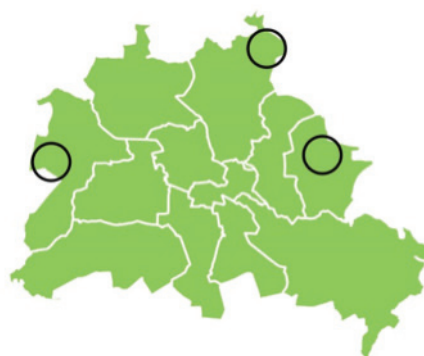
The New Natural Experiential Sites

For the implementation were three areas chosen: on top of the hill Kienberg in Marzahn, at Spieroweg in Spandau and near the Moorlinse Buch in Pankow. In all three cases many children live in the proximity, which could benefit greatly from the new opportunity for playing and experiencing nature. All sites are also located near large-scale housing projects and are part of the funding program for integrated urban development “Zukunftsinitiative Stadtteil II”, which aims to abolish the uneven living conditions in the inner city and to activate local potential.

The **Natural Experiential Site Spieroweg** is a diversely structured fallow with a jungle-like character. Various fruit and nut trees, dense bush-structures and extensive tall forb communities invite to snack, hide and discover.

The alternation between clearings and sapling stands, between light and shadow shapes the picture of the **Natural Experiential Site Moorwiese**. The location, adjacent to the open landscape and neighboring to the exciting adventure playground, makes this site particularly attractive to children.

The **Natural Experiential Site on top of Kienberg** is almost entirely covered with forest. Due to the tree cover and partly rather steep slopes, playing and discovering without being observed even is possible at this site. Apart from the natural characteristics, the convenient location of this site at the IGA- Campus, was also key to the selection of this area. The International Garden Exhibition (IGA) offers from the start of the show in April 2017 the great opportunity, to promote the idea of Natural Experiential Sites as well as the Berlin engagement all over Germany and beyond.



Pilot Area	NER Moorwiese	NER Kienberg	NER Spieroweg
Where?	Wiltbergstr. 29a 13125 Berlin-Buch	Westlicher Mittelhang 12683 Berlin-Marzahn	Springerzeile/ Ecke Spieroweg 13591 Berlin-Staaken
Owner/Administration	Bezirk Pankow	Grün Berlin GmbH	Bezirk Spandau
Care Facility	Spielkultur Berlin-Buch e.V.	Umweltbildungszentrum der INU gGmbH in Marzahn-Hellersdorf	Staakkato Kinder und Jugend e.V.
Landscape Planning	Susanne Pretsch Landschaftsarchitektin	Beissert & Hengge Garten- und Landschafts- architekten	Sabine & Michael Kinder Planungsbüro Naturspielraum

Imprint

Natural Experiential Site for Berlin Kids

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Board: Annette Nawrath (Vors.),
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Managing Director: Holger Wonneberg

Potsdamer Str. 68
10785 Berlin
Tel.: (030) 26 39 40
Fax: (030) 261 52 77
E-Mail: mail@stiftung-naturschutz.de
Internet: www.stiftung-naturschutz.de

Author:

Irma Stopka, projekt leader „Naturerfahrungsräume in Großstädten am Beispiel Berlin“

Editorial Processing:

Heidrun Grüttner

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Camilla Hoffmann

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Camilla Hoffmann

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Arbeitskreis Städtische Naturerfahrungsräume:

» www.naturerfahrungsraum.de/

Naturerfahrungsräume in Großstädten
Abschlußbericht zur Voruntersuchung des E+E-Vorhabens

» www.bfn.de/fileadmin/MDB/documents/service/skript_345.pdf

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„Kinder und Natur in der Stadt“, BfN-Skript 230

» www.bfn.de/fileadmin/MDB/documents/service/skript230.pdf

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Wildnis wagen – Kinder brauchen mehr Natur

» www.wildnisschule-waldkauz.de/Artikel/Natur%20und%20Kinder.pdf

Kinder, raus in die Natur

» www.geo.de/GEO/natur/oekologie/kinder-raus-in-die-natur-64781.html?p=1

Wie wirken Natur und Landschaft auf Gesundheit, Wohlbefinden und Lebensqualität?

» www.bfn.de/fileadmin/MDB/documents/ina/vortraege/2011/2011-Naturbewusstsein-Gebhard.pdf

Naturentfremdung bei Kindern:

Die Bedeutung von Naturerleben für Kinder

» www.kindergartenpaedagogik.de/1740.html

Fördertitel E+E-Vorhaben:

» www.bfn.de/0202_eue.html

