

Urban Practice on and in the
rainwater retention pool of
Tempelhof airport since 2018.



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About the site

On the site of the Floating University, a diverse range of animals, plants and algae have taken root and given birth to a unique landscape: a man-made environment reclaimed by nature where polluted water coexists with the relatively new presence of the University, forming a natureculture or a third landscape.

The site was designed in the early 1930s as a rainwater retention basin to serve the Tempelhof airfield and adjacent avenues, and it remains today as a fully functioning infrastructure. It is surrounded by a “Gartenkolonie” – an allotment or community garden – and is therefore almost invisible to passers-by. The allotment garden was introduced in Germany during the 19th century as a means of enabling the new urban poor, who had been dispossessed of their land, to grow their own food within the city.

After the Tempelhof airport closed down in 2008, the city’s redevelopment plan proposed to relocate the basin as a pond situated within the 300 hectares of remaining parkland. This

would have transformed the 22500 m² area of public land occupied by the basin into a valuable, profitable asset for Berlin’s real estate portfolio. However, in the Tempelhof referendum of 2014, Berliners voted against the city and prevented any kind of construction on the airfield. The result of this referendum not only protected the unique inner-city green space, but also provided protection for the basin.

The basin plot was closed off to the public for over 60 years, and when Berlin-based architects raumlabor opened up the site in 2018, they established a temporary urban laboratory for collective learning. Situating a pedagogical experiment in this location was a deliberate form of political engagement.

Since 2018 the Floating University continues to grow into a site where heterogeneous interests translate into projects, interventions, events and installations. Becoming the Floating University is a constant process of searching, discovering, figuring out and paying knowledge forward.



THE RAIN WATER RETENTION POOL

The Floating e.V.

The founding year of the Floating University saw a diverse breadth of visitors involved to varying degrees with the activity on site, creating a unique ecosystem. The program consolidated a network of practitioners, who towards the end of 2018 decided to continue the experiment by transitioning from a 'temporary' project into an association: Floating e.V.

Floating e.V. is a self organised space and group, where practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds meet to collaborate, co-create and imaginatively work towards futures.

It is in solidarity with the history of the site and with the lineage of alternative narratives for urban development that the

Floating e.V. situates its mission: to open, maintain, and take care of this unique site while bringing non-disciplinary, radical, and collaborative programs to the public. In other words, it is a place to learn to engage, to embrace the complexity and navigate the entanglements of the world, to imagine and create different forms of living.

Floating e.V. is organized in working groups that work on specific tasks and topics driven by interest and desires - or what we also like to call Fields of Knowledge and Action: from maintaining and developing the site to gardening, cultivating collaborations and taking care of neighborhood connections.



Programmes

Urban Practice

Urban Practice is at its best when holding the complexity of the city. A practice of transformation and in constant renegotiation, deeply rooted in the arts, Urban Practice works to intersect the spheres of the socio-political, the spatio-cultural, the ecological and the pedagogical. It can be understood as a transversal approach enacting urban transformation.

The Urban Practice programme is curated by Gilly Karjevsky and Rosario Talevi. 2021 Urban Practitioners in Residence are Kavita Meelu with Berlin as a Diasporic Foodscape and Zoë Claire Miller and Marco Schmitt with Exorcier-Raku.

Climate Care

Climate Care is a 10-day-festival engaged with theory and practice at the intersection of climate challenges, ethics of care and environmental humanities. Emerging from weathering the conditions of its site, the program is a result of in-depth cohabitation with the constructed water infrastructure, its human culture and its multispecies overlays.

Climate Care is curated by Gilly Karjevsky & Rosario Talevi.

LearnscaPes

LearnscaPes is how we describe a floating landscape of knowledge production, of knowing and being and processes of un-, re-, and co-learning, of working and thinking collectively within the site. Floating University offers a broad range of public learning programs in the shape of lecture series, seminars or workshops. The Floating LearnscaPes programme extends these ongoing through two extra academic perspectives: the Free Radicals support system and the Academic Beach resort.

LearnscaPes is organised by Jeanne Astrup-Chauvaux, Markus Bader, Sarah Bovelett, Berit Fischer, Benjamin Förster-Baldenius, Raul Walch.

Neighbourhood

The Neighbourhood Network has existed since 2018 exploring the immediate social environment in and within the water retention basin in Berlin-Kreuzberg. The office is constantly working towards the building of a network of Berlin based groups and initiatives that are interested in being active at the Floating University. The office offers two moments throughout the year to connect and network with the neighborhood: Sprechstunde “open-for-all” – a rubber boots tour followed up by an hour of conversation – and the Seasonal Weekends an invitation to experience the seasonal diversity on site.

The neighbourhood programme is organised by Teresa Huppertz.

Kids Uni

The Kids Uni is a programme for urban explorers between the ages of six and sixteen. In three ‘semesters’ so far the kids have experimented with noise, muddy treasures, materials, walks and cartographic exercises, and got familiar with the Floating site, its many inhabitants and neighbors. We are happy to operate in many different languages: German, English, Turkish, Italian, Spanish.

The kids uni programme is organised by Ute Lindenbeck and Sabine Zahn.

Contaminations

A multi-week program designed for people who want to work with their body. “Contamination” and “immersion” sessions explore the theme of water – our relationship with it and our place in the water cycle. Our bodies are the most intimate ecosystems we know. Taking this as a starting point, it sets up a situation where people connect with their body’s ecosystem and the wetland’s ecosystem. It is a discourse between organisms and the environment.

Contaminations is curated by artist Katherine Ball in cooperation with dancers and performers from various disciplines: Mia Drobec, Luka Agreš, Sara Bauchmuller, Arturo Bautista, Laura Ravn, Kenta Naoi, Jules Kuehner, Stefané Peeps, Flo Graul, and Leila Matzke.

(Re-) Gaining Ecological Futures

A week-long series of affective encounters and collective engagements. How can we learn from the natural world, how to create new synthesis in our technocratic times for a more inclusive and ‘cosmo-logical’ knowing? The week shares proposals to reflect and act on how we contribute to shaping ecological inter-relations and inter-actions and critically engages with the human-centred ontology and the dualism between nature and culture. (Re-)Gaining Ecological Futures exercises and mobilises alternative imaginaries and sets of relations between multiple others in a mutually enforcing and regenerative way. It holistically connects transdisciplinary practices for the making of empowered and empowering social and more-than-human subjects.

(Re-) Gaining Ecological Futures is curated by Berit Fischer.

SPace and Environment

SPace Group

The space group is constituted of members with diverse backgrounds who are catalysts for the visions of the association of the basin. In summer 2020, after collecting spatial visions and knowledges from the association members, a “space task force” worked towards concretizing these wishes, as well as renewing the existing infrastructure of the basin, to offer a structure supporting activities and programs during the spring and summer. In its design, the space group tried to take all relationships with the basin into account – talking with association members, observing trees and polluted water levels, discussing with political actors as well as neighbors, kids, grown-ups or nesting birds.

The group is Jeanne Astrup-Chauvaux, Lorenz Kusching, Felix Wiersbitzky, Antonia Schlaich, Florian Stirnemann.



NEWS STRUCTURES: FLOATING UNIVERSITY 2021



FLOATING UNIVERSITY ON ITS OPENING NIGHT IN MAY 2018



FLOATING UNIVERSITY IN 2019 DURING THE CLIMATE CARE FESTIVAL

Garden Group

The garden group cares for everything that grows at the Floating. Every Sunday they plant, water, care and sometimes harvest.

The garden group is Lorene Blanche Goesele, Ute Lindenbeck, Sophia Tabatadze, Martina Kolarek, Nina Peters and Katherine Ball.

Hospitality

Sharing food and coming together is a fundamental part of our practice. At Floating we gather around the kitchen table, we learn while cooking and we develop diverse hospitality protocols.

The hospitality group is Serena Abbondanza, Gülsüm Güler, Hannah Lu Verse, Inci Güler, Eliza Chojnacka and Florian Kurzenberger

Elements of the basin

Water

Water cycles

Floating University re-visions an urban water infrastructure that invokes public participation. How will life change as our relationship to water transforms? A fundamental paradigm in our research at Floating University is to emulate Mother Earth's water cycles rather than mimic Corporate Man's linear sewer pipes. Water will not fall beneath the streets like garbage into landfills. Rather, water flows down the drain, undergoes organic filtration, and flows back out the spout. Floating University is located in a polluted rainwater basin in urban Berlin. Experimental water systems are constructed at every possible avenue. Its public pedagogy: seminars, workshops, discussions, water filtration systems, water practices and performances, ruminate on our place in the water cycle. Technology is only part of the answer to our challenges with water. What's missing is our relationship with water.

The four different types of water at the Floating

Rainwater

Rainwater takes a 6 kilometer skydive. On its descent through the urban atmosphere it absorbs particulate pollution, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. This tainted rainwater spills off the roofs of the University buildings and funnels through a collection system for reuse.

Basinwater

Basinwater comes from rainwater that lands on the Tempelhof Airport building, airfield and Columbiadamm Road. Currently, this tonic of automobile oil, vulcanized rubber, cigarette chemicals, and trash drains into our large, open air basin where Floating University 'floats' and then drops into the canal system and flows to the Spree River.

Greywater

Greywater is water that becomes "dirty" when it is used. There are various "shades" of greywater. For instance, greywater from our offshore kitchen is laden with grease, fat, and food particles, while greywater from bathroom hand washing is laced with E. coli bacteria.

Blackwater

Blackwater is the most delicious. Produced by toilet water's interaction with human waste, blackwater is full of nutrients for plants as well as pathogens. It's possible to use aerobic decomposition to turn blackwater into fertilizer and anaerobic digestion to create methane gas for cooking.



SINCE 2018 WE ARE DOING TESTS ON WATER AND SOIL ON SITE OF THE FLOATING, IN 2021 THE PROJECT „FLOATING WEB“ STARTED

Flora & fauna

The Floating has its own climate and is characterized by the dynamics of rainwater and largely due to the establishment of spontaneous plants. The Tree-Ring is a ring-shaped wasteland. It brings a demarcation from the cultivated nature in the neighborhood and at the same time is the transition from uncultivated nature to cultivated nature. To one side is the sports facility and the adjacent cemetery, to the other is the allotment garden area, and to the south is the Tempelhofer Feld. Protected by trees and blackberry hedges, the lower-lying basin developed into a niche rich in species. First colonized by animals and today used by humans at certain times, a place of consciously experienced coexistence is developing there. Animal and human territories overlap and form points of overlap that lead to active environmental experiences and inspire us to act.

Biodiversity in the garden colony "Am Flughafen" (July 2009)

The garden colony "Am Flughafen" and the entire overgrown surroundings represent a refugium of a special kind. The diversity of birds, insects and small vertebrates is very remarkable. A detailed list of the different species follows.

Mammals

foxes, pine martens, weasels, squirrels, garden dormice, voles, field mice, ground mice, bank voles, wood mice, fire voles, shrews, house shrews, dwarf bats, brown long ears, evening bats, hedgehogs, moles.

Birds

Barn swallow (few), house martin, crested lark, meadow pipit, wagtail, wren (several pairs), hedge sparrow, robin (several pairs), nightingale (several pairs), black flycatcher, house red-

start, redstart (several pairs), Juniper Thrush (winter only), Blackbird and Song Thrush, Blackcap (breeding bird in garden), Clapper Warbler, Chiffchaff (several pairs), Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit (several pairs), Long-tailed Tit (several pairs), Great Tit (several pairs), Penduline Tit (several pairs), Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Oriole (once) Raven Crow, Hooded Crow, Magpie, Jay, Starling (very many), House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Brambling (only in winter) Greenfinch, Goldfinch (several pairs), Hawfinch (8 to 10 pairs), Bullfinch, Grey Heron, Whooper Swan (guests), Mallard (guests), Lapwing (guests), Buzzard, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Hawk, Kestrel, Little Ringed Plover, Eurasian Collared Dove, Common Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Long-eared Owl (one pair), Tawny Owl (one pair)

Amphibians

Tree frog, Jumping frog, Grass frog

Molluscs

Roman snail (many), grove ribbon snail, garden ribbon snail

Annelids

Common earthworm, compost worm

Dragonflies

Horseshoe damselfly, Brown mosaic damselfly, Large damselfly, Emerald damselfly

Grasshoppers

Green grasshopper, Common bush cricket, Common oak cricket, Warty biter, Common thorn cricket, Nightingale grasshopper

Bugs

common fire bug, common meadow bug, green stink bug

Cicadas

Meadow foam cicada, Rhododendron cicada

Net-winged moths

Camel neck fly, Scorpion fly

Hymenoptera, Ants

Red wood ant, Yellow meadow ant

Wasps

Common wasp, Sand wasp, Common wasp, Hornet, Red-furred sand bee, Leafcutter bee

Bumblebees

Dark earth bumblebee, Stone bumblebee, Meadow bumblebee, Pigeon tails

Beetles

Gold bar (black), goldsmith, grove beetle, black robber beetle, common grave beetle, rhinoceros beetle, common rose beetle, garden leaf beetle, dung beetle, seed snap beetle, soldier beetle, oil beetle, raspberry beetle, 22-spot lady beetle, mulmbuck, large poplar beetle, green weevil, lily beetle, potato beetle

(at the end of the list we add wild beetles, an important component of insect nutrition)

Flowering plants

shaggy willowherb, red fencegrass, ribwort, common mugwort, blackthorn, chickweed, white campion, puffball, horse-radish, shepherd's purse, field cinquefoil, panicle saxifrage, wood honeysuckle, white sweet clover, wild strawberry, meadow chervil, dog parsley, spotted hemlock, wild carrot, Fence bindweed, White deadnettle, Common jew's cherry, Black

nightshade, Common usury, Yarrow, Canadian professional weed, Many-flowered whiteroot, Sharp buttercup, Creeping buttercup, Lesser celandine, Celandine, Meadow-rue, Sharp wall-pepper, Sweet clover, Small-flowered touch-me-not, Common evening primrose, Greater mullein, Black mullein, Canada goldenrod, Giant goldenrod, Common goldenrod, Coltsfoot, Dyer's dog chamomile, Common greisweed, Piglet weed, Meadow and autumn dandelion, Cabbage goose thistle, Compass lettuce, Fleabane, Bird's knotweed, Sorrel, Soapwort, common thistle, common columbine, nettle-leaved bellflower, globe thistle, small grape hyacinth, hairy vetch, annual stinging nettle, hops, curly dock, cypress spurge, radiopaque chamomile, common violet, common toadflax.

Grasses

(just to name a few)

Giant fescue, annual bluegrass, pigeonpea, smooth oatgrass, blue-green rush.

(and many others)

Ferns

eagle fern, angel's-head fern, field-flower fern

Trees

robinia, Norway maple, horse chestnut, oak, poplar, goddess tree, bottle tree

Shrubs

laburnum, sloe, peony, snowberry, black elderberry (and others)

Information by Klaus-Ulrich Kurpiers, tenant of plot 28 of the colony "Am Flughafen".

Species that we find on the basin

Typha (Typhaceae) and *Phragmites* (Poaceae) are abundant on the site.

Nettle and *Pestwurz* are absent, the soils are not rich enough. The dominant algae is *water net*, the *Hydrodictyon sp.* Native status:

It is highly probable that *Typha* and *Phragmites* have established themselves spontaneously at the basin. Both *Typha* and *Phragmites* species are native to the region of Central Europe. In terms of *Phragmites*, it is almost certainly *P. australis*. In terms of *Typha*, more than one species come into question.

Plant species richness is very low while plant species richness is quite high in the surrounding ring of forest. However, the site is so dynamic that any inventory will be outdated soon.

Bees

In a place where bees feel good, people also feel good. This is an old wisdom. The fascinating thing is that the bees survive here. The water in the basin is actually poisoned and contaminated. Could it be that the reeds spreading in the basin purify the water to the point that it is no longer harmful to the bees? Or do the smart hives find clean water elsewhere? The fallow area is one of the few areas that is neither fertilized nor sprayed. This is also special because it is used for educational and recreational purposes. The gardens and the sports fields are regularly fertilized with mineral fertilizers, and there are definitely “plant protection measures” there that kill insects. In this sense, the basin is an experimental field that does without these means. Interesting is the composition of the plants, because on the one hand they are cultivated plants, on the other hand they are plants that have settled spontaneously. I call them here the “uncultivated plants”. Among them are the pioneer plants black locust, goddess tree, poplar – whether the maple, the oaks and the alders have sown spontaneously, I cannot say for sure. The ash maple is also one of the immigrant species, the Norway maple or sycamore is one of the native woody plants.

If we distinguish between native and non-native woody species, black locust and godwood do not count as natives, the others do. Robinia and godwood even count as invasive plants. Here in the basin, they are kept in check by the others and only occupy a portion of the basin as habitat.

The non-native woody plants supplement the bee pasture with their nectar flow. In the spring, the poplars provide good sources of pollen, then the maple and horse chestnuts bloom in the neighborhood. Later, the black locust, the linden and the goddess tree also bloom. As shrubs in early summer, bees enjoy the blossoms of blackberry bushes in the undergrowth of trees. The hazel bushes are excellent for the first pollen supply in spring. When black locust blossoms in late May, the hives produce honey. This is because the black locust has enough water and is more sheltered from the wind than along the railroad tracks. The god tree has already got used to the hot and dry summers and blossoms already at the time of the lime tree. It gives a tart taste to the summer honey.

For the growing bee population of Berlin this is a paradise.

(My reflections refer to the days in August 2019. During “Animalesque” I spent several days at a stretch on the site. Later I would spend more time in spring and summer – and again in autumn).

soil

Toxins that are most likely in the soil at the Floating University are lead, cadmium, copper, zinc, nickel and chrome. Besides there are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, naphthalene, mineral oil hydrocarbons, Methyl tert-butyl ether and benzene. Studies on the soil of the Floating are planned for 2021.



THE DIFFERENT COLOURS OF THE ALGAE AT FLOATING

Funding Group

The funding group works towards ensuring the e.V. has enough resources for developing spatial experiments, radical programmes and compensating the workers. Our income comes mainly from the German public funding system, private foundations and endless hours of ad-honorem work from association members and volunteers.

The funding group is Katherine Ball, Markus Bader, Sarah Bovelett, Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius, Teresa Huppertz, Ute

Lindenbeck, Gilly Karjevsky, Maddalena Pornaro, Rosario Talevi.

DRAUSSEN STADT



FLOATING E.V. WIRD IM RAHMEN DES PROGRAMMS DRAUSSENSTADT VON DER SENATSVERWALTUNG FÜR KULTUR UND EUROPA GEFÖRDERT.

STIFTUNG KUNSTFONDS



(RE-)GAINING ECOLOGICAL FUTURES WIRD VON STIFTUNG KUNSTFONDS UND NEUSTART KULTUR GEFÖRDERT.



DAS CLIMATE CARE FESTIVAL WIRD VON HAUPTSTADTKULTURFONDS GEFÖRDERT.



SUPPORTED BY THE NATIONAL PERFORMANCE NETWORK - STEPPING OUT, FUNDED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONER FOR CULTURE AND MEDIA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE INITIATIVE NEUSTART KULTUR. ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR DANCE.



KIDS UNI WIRD VON DEUTSCHE POSTCODE LOTTERIE GEFÖRDERT.

General Information

Guidelines

1. Activities should be in tune with the Floating University spirit and values - a place to learn to engage, to embrace the complexity and navigate the entanglements of the world, to imagine and create different forms of living. It should not be just rented as an event venue, a wedding hall, a backdrop scenario or for solely commercial purposes.
2. Participation from others in the proposed activities - association members and general public - is encouraged so that a mixture of people and a transfer of knowledge happens. The site runs with an “open door policy” and the idea that activities can co-inhabit the basin.
3. Activities bring in content but also expand the network. We are interested in the production of knowledge and in forming long-lasting bonds with people and organisations.
4. Activities should be able to navigate the site and run their programmes rather independently - with our support, but not expecting the association to deliver a role of “service providers”.
5. Activities should be communicated in consultation with the Floating e.V as well as the use of any images of the Floating site.
6. Floating University is not supposed to be used for marketing campaigns and as an image for advertisement. Funders and other cooperation partners should be informed about it beforehand.
7. Activities should respect the nature of the site: a fragile ecosystem where diverse species co-exist. In the basin you can find anything from foxes to bees, ducks, algae and sometimes humans. We are surrounded by a Gartenkolonie, a community of small gardens which is an Erholungsort (a place for rest and restoration in nature).

Covid19

All events take place only under the current Corona regulations. A hygiene concept is in place at all times and must be adhered to. The number of visitors on site will be limited in order to guarantee a minimum distance.

Contact

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