



Prinzessinnengarten: Urban gardening and cultural cross-pollination

Prinzessinnengarten is one of Berlin's first commercial community gardens, and, judging by the many press accounts of it, is probably its most famous. The enterprise was launched in 2009, the brainchild of community activists who took their inspiration from the urban agriculture boom in Cuba in the early 1990s.

Robert Shaw from the UK, together with Marco Clausen, worked out an arrangement in 2009 with the City of Berlin to rent a patch of land — neglected for decades and about the size of a football pitch — with the intention of turning it into an urban vegetable garden. With the help of friends, neighbours and various others,

Prinzessinnengarten took root in the city's Kreuzberg district and quickly bloomed into a self-sustaining, multi-purpose urban green space that is now home to more than 500 plant species.

Open to anybody with an enthusiasm for growing things, the organic garden is completely mobile — nothing is

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planted in the ground itself, but rather in raised beds made from stacked crates, or in rice sacks. This ability to relocate the garden is a safeguard should the city decide at some point to sell the land to the highest bidder — a fate that has been forestalled for the time being, but looms nonetheless as a constant threat for this and all other small-scale enterprises competing for highly contested urban real estate.

Prinzessinnengarten operates as a business and has to cover its own expenses, which include rent, staff costs and infrastructure investments. It manages to do so by operating a bar and restaurant that use products grown on site, and by offering a range of gardening and cultivation courses.

It also sells its produce, although proceeds from sales account for just 10% of the garden's revenues.

The most valuable quality of the space, although much harder to quantify in financial terms, is the unique social component that it brings to the neighbourhood. The garden gathers together numerous people from diverse backgrounds and provides a natural space for public interaction. The garden offers peace and quiet — a sanctuary from the persistent buzz and frenetic pace of big city life.

"In this kind of pioneering use of land," says Clausen, "what we're really out to do is to show what is possible in a specific place."

Source: <http://prinzessinnengarten.net/about/>

Further reading: **StreetSmarts Case Study: Urban agriculture in Havana**

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