

Lachmund, Jens: *Greening Berlin. The Co-Production of Science, Politics, and Urban Nature*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2012. ISBN: 978-0-262-01859-3; 320 S.

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Jens Lachmund opens *Greening Berlin* with the image of the Südgelände, a former railroad yard in the district of Schöneberg that has been transformed into an urban park, nature preserve, and art space. It is an apt place to begin not only because the Südgelände is a striking example of how nature has been protected within Berlin's city limits, but also because the serene surface encountered by visitors today belies decades of struggle among scientists, activists, politicians, and developers. By intertwining the history of struggles over the Südgelände and other sites in Berlin with the history of urban ecology as a scientific discipline, *Greening Berlin* accomplishes two related goals. It shows how and why the city became a locus for the emergence of urban ecology and a pioneer in urban biodiversity protection, and it harvests from a fertile case study a number of general insights into the co-production of science, politics, and nature.

This is largely a West Berlin story. After travel restrictions were imposed in 1952, and even more so after the erection of the wall in 1961, ecologists in the western half of the city no longer had easy access to the extra-urban sites where they had previously carried out their observational studies and collecting expeditions. Instead they turned their attention inwards and found a surprisingly rich terrain for the production of knowledge in the city's rubble piles and abandoned lots, where war and neglect had provided the conditions for novel urban biotopes to emerge. The leading figure in this development was the botanist Herbert Sukopp, who adapted existing methods of floral survey in the tradition of plant sociology (Pflanzensoziologie) to Berlin's urban nature and thereby created what Lachmund describes as new „circuits of spatial observation“. Very quickly Sukopp and his colleagues found that models developed to understand non-urban nature did not apply

within the city.

One of the paradoxes of urban ecology as it emerged in West Berlin between the 1950s and 1970s is that even as its practitioners defended the value of rubble fields, they continued to endorse a hierarchy of more and less natural sites. Tellingly, one of Sukopp's early papers on the distinctiveness of Berlin's plant communities employed the term „degradation societies“ (Degradationsgesellschaften). While this particular term had a short half-life, urban-ecological studies continued to privilege the largest, most diverse, and least managed sites within the city. Moreover, unlike the ecosystem ecologists who were becoming increasingly dominant at the time in North America, Sukopp and his colleagues were not particularly interested in studying the energy and material flows of the city as a whole. They saw humans not as integral parts of the ecological communities they studied but as external forces and sources of disturbance. Their attention therefore remained focused on the plant communities that emerged spontaneously in the cracks and on the margins of urban life.

This focus helps explain why the findings of Berlin's ecologists influenced government policy in precisely the way they did. Beginning in the late 1970s with the passage of a Nature Conservation Act by West Berlin's City Parliament, ecologists began working closely with policymakers and activists to implement a Species Protection Program based on urban biotope mapping and floral and faunal surveys. In contrast to earlier regimes of urban nature conservation, these efforts were much more closely integrated with citywide planning initiatives. They were also more quantitative and utilitarian, more concerned with biological diversity as opposed to individual species, and more dependent on ecological expertise. The relationship between science and politics was bi-directional; each reshaped the other. Working under time pressure with finite resources, ecologists began to focus on representative sampling rather than comprehensive surveys. They also shifted from mapping species distributions to categorizing and ranking biotopes according to criteria that were sometimes scientifically dubious but were easy for policymakers to digest.

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As the environmental movement expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, Berlin's urban ecologists also began to interact with a wide range of civil-society actors outside of the formal mechanisms of city government. Lachmund describes these actors as members of „regime communities“: political groups that coalesced around the new nature regime of biotope protection. Members of these communities included professionalized landscape planners as well as activists; the latter were organized both through established conservation groups and through more ephemeral, single-issue-oriented activists' groups (Bürgerinitiativen). The Alternative Liste, a political party founded in 1978 that combined environmentalism with a broader critique of capitalism, also belonged among the regime communities of biotope protection. These actors appropriated ecological science when it was useful to them, but they also frequently came into conflict with it. In the late 1970s, for example, activists in the peripheral Berlin district of Gatow contested Sukopp's claim that clear-cutting a particular forested area would result in higher biological diversity and an improved aesthetic experience.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the participation of these varied actors in Berlin's nature-conservation planning process led to the identification of the Südgelände, the Johannisthal air field, the former railway site at Gleisdreieck, and other abandoned or undeveloped areas in both West and East Berlin as potential sites for a new kind of nature park. In contrast to the existing public parks (Volksparke), which continued to embody nineteenth-century ideals of healthful leisure and landscape aesthetics, these new parks were understood primarily as sites for the conservation of biodiversity and biotopes. In practice, ecological ideals were often compromised in order to provide services to urban residents, but the results were nonetheless distinctive. The most serious threat to ecological goals came not from the desire for more playgrounds and dog walks but from the rush to commercial development in the 1990s. Ambitious plans to preserve biotopes from development gave way to flexible mitigation agreements, in which developers were granted permission to damage or destroy biotopes in ex-

change for creating or enhancing green space elsewhere. Under these conditions, the ecological considerations that had become central to West Berlin's landscape planning process in the 1980s began to lose ground to recreation and economic development.

*Greening Berlin* is a tightly focused, empirically rich study of science and politics in a particular place, with some of the advantages and disadvantages of the genre. It has much to say about institutions, ideas, and practices but very little about individuals; even Sukopp, the book's central figure, is only thinly sketched. It is extremely informative about the relationship between science and government, but only hints at the ways Berliners engaged with urban nature outside of scientific and bureaucratic contexts. Some of the analytic concepts that are introduced, such as „nature regimes“, are elaborated and deployed in useful ways; others are dropped too soon. The book's title does not reflect its almost exclusive focus on West Berlin for the period before reunification. But no book can do everything and *Greening Berlin* does what it does very well. It will be essential reading for urban environmental historians and historians of ecology, and it is well worth a look for anyone interested in the history of Berlin or in the role of science in urban reform and environmental politics in the twentieth century. It would be a shame if it did not also find readers among those who are engaged in studying and caring for urban ecologies today.

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