

Greening

The Hill of Multiple Transformations

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The Teufelsberg Transformation Project in Berlin aims to turn an abandoned Cold War spy station, a "lost space" into a collaboration hub

An abandoned Cold War spy station is getting an extraordinary makeover in the forested landscape of Berlin's outskirts. The Teufelsberg Transformation Lab is an ambitious project aiming to transform a historical "lost space" into a one-of-a-kind hub for collaboration, inclusion and problem-solving. The concept? Revitalising Teufelsberg (literally the "Devil's Mountain") as an immersive environment for civil society, policymakers, scientists, and activists to co-create transformative practices and policies. No stuffy conference rooms here - this unique setting was purposefully chosen to disrupt conventional thinking.

"Teufelsberg has such a rich, complex history of conflict and reinvention," explains Marko Kagioglidis. “It is a special place in Berlin, for Europe because it is in a constant transition. It has been going through a lot of transformation already, located between past and future, art and collaboration,” says Wanda von Bremen. From its origins as a Nazi training facility to its postwar rebirth as an artificial hill of rubble to its later role as a Western surveillance outpost, Teufelsberg's layers of history will be interwoven into the lab's programming. A self-guided augmented reality "audio walk" allows visitors to explore the evocative ruins while contemplating questions about societal change. But the heart of the lab lies in its participatory processes and bold circular infrastructure aims. Through regular on-site "co-design sessions," diverse stakeholders will come together to reimagine transformative policy approaches radically transparently.

“We started with the idea of a policy transformation through deliberate democracy and collaboration. In the process, we understood that we cannot just curate the topics or the process by ourselves. But as we do in the lab itself, curation is a participatory process in itself” says Alex Wolf. In practice, the team is calling for design sessions, where a community talks about the space and the feelings that evoke the energy it carries, learning from each other to work together. The solutions they’re coming up with could manifest as policy recommendations, new technology pilots, or even full-scale models tested in Teufelsberg's natural environs. The lab plans to function as a closed circular ecosystem pioneering regenerative practices in energy, water, waste and more. And what is the goal behind the process? None. It is the process itself. “So one goal, if you will, would be to make it more tangible for people to discuss and feel through the space, so this is why we created this audio walk and then in the workshop, people can share how they feel about the place and its transformation” Wanda explains

And what do people who participate in these workshops say? “That this is a place of suppressed emotions, where we can try to set it free and become part of the process,” says Alex. With infrastructure designs underway, the team is now focused on building supporting communities and funding streams. Teufelsberg Transformation Lab wants to become a model for participatory policy innovation rooted in historical context.

“Berlin has a lot
of historic places and you can still feel like the city is kind of fighting against being capitalized. This is also a space that is colonized with ideology and a specific power dynamic that was in place at the time it was built. And it always kind of fights against it. You could see it as the hunting ground for the Prussian Empire. You could see it with the Nazi military facility, which is also buried underneath. You can see it again with a spy station by the NSA. And then after the wall fell 89 There was this idea to create luxury hotels and capitalize on the place and make money from it. The space was abandoned over and over again as if it was fighting against being taken over. When you're on the spot you can feel it”. As Kagioglidis puts it: "The place is starting to gain momentum again and to bring into this place something that is also serving society as a whole and not just very few selected people with privilege, but it's becoming a place that is including a lot of society. This isn't just rethinking how we develop solutions - it's about reconnecting people with a sense of collective power to create change”.

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This story is part of the Special Feature on the New Bauhaus

Awards 2024.
Find out more at the New Bauhaus website: TEUFELSBERG TRANSFORMATION LAB: Tackling social, economical & ecological challenges together.