



Your friendly neighborhood cleaning men and women, global edition (from left to right): Ben and Amanda Hopewell; Sovrina Carr, Jialong Kang, and Catherine Knight; Matt and Caroline Sullivan

# Trash tourism

A popular new activity for Berlin visitors: picking up garbage with friends

BY PETER ZEHNER

Germans used to be undisputed leaders in the global export of goods, and they’ve been world champions several times in soccer. In each case, whenever they noticed that their own skills weren’t going to be enough, they simply procured foreign muscle to get the job done. In the 20th century, they brought in “guest workers” from Italy, Greece and Turkey to accomplish their “economic miracle,” and in the 21st century, they invited talented foreign-born soccer players like Miroslav Klose and Lukas Podolski to help win a World Cup.

These days, Germans are eager to set standards in a new realm: environmental protection. And it would appear they’ve already started – with garbage in Berlin. Apparently, even the capital’s highly capable sanitary workers alone are not able to handle the full extent of the litter left behind by sloppy locals and visi-

tors, which is why a Berlin company, East Berlin Park Cleanup, has come up with a clever idea to help. Sandemans New Europe is a tour company that invites tourists on a tour where participants collect detritus in parks. The district offices of Mitte and Pankow are more than delighted to support the “event,” as the company calls it.

In the shining sun of a hot Monday afternoon in late August, 80 people from around the world have come together to clean up Mauerpark, a popular Berlin location for young people looking to party, enjoy open-air karaoke, play some soccer and basketball, or just take their babies and dogs for a walk.

Matt and Caroline Sullivan are among those who have gathered at the meeting point today, in their case with slightly sweaty and sunburned faces. What prompted them to show up? Why did they come here to pick up other people’s trash? “Cause we’re mad,” they say, laughing, before explaining that they do the same thing at home on the beach in Perth, Aus-

tralia. “You can’t just leave garbage lying around like that,” noting that plastic gets flushed into the sea and then eaten by animals. As Matt points out, lobsters eat everything: “These days, people at the Barrier Reef call them sea cockroaches.”

Today’s event starts with a short, guided tour along the Wall Memorial, an open stretch of terrain with lines marking where the Berlin Wall, the signal fence and the no-man’s-land once stood. Participants are told stories and shown where daring East Germans dug tunnels under the Wall and where some people were killed trying to escape.

Then it’s on to Mauerpark, where the real fun starts. At the entrance, the organizers hand out vests, plastic bags, gloves and oversized wooden pincers. Participants then set out, usually in small groups of two or three people. “One person to scout, one to pick up the trash and one to hold the bag,” recommends Sandemans CEO David O’Kelly. The groups of young men and women disperse

quickly, like ladybirds in search of a place to spend the winter.

Basia and Thomas from Kraków have already participated in a Sandemans tour that morning and immediately accepted the invitation to take part in the current one. Why? “It’s free and you get to do something good in the process” – a win-win, they say.

Jialong Kang is from China but lives in Switzerland. “I love Berlin, and I want to see it clean,” he says. One of the other members of his trash-collecting group is 20-year-old Sovrina Carr from Boston. She’s been traveling alone through Europe for the past four weeks. “This is a good opportunity to get to know people,” she says, picking up a discarded bottle cap.

Amanda and Ben Hopewell are spending part of their last night in Berlin in the park. They laugh a lot. “We’re having fun!” they say, noting that the tour only lasts an hour, which means one less hour in the pub. More laughter. Amanda is a teacher, and she’s always telling her pupils to “pick up your garbage!” She simply can’t ignore

it. The two of them shoot a short video of themselves working in their red vests and send it to their friends, who are obviously already at the pub back in Manchester. Seconds later, they receive a two-word response: “What the...?”

These do-gooders are indeed a jovial and multicultural pack. And lo and behold, there are even some born-and-bred Berliners among them. Elisabeth Okun-robo and her two friends came all the way from the southeast district of Neukölln. The 20-year-old poli-sci student intends to pursue a career in climate and environmental protection when she’s older. At the moment, however, she’s busy despairing about all the packaging and shards of glass left by people who – it would appear – love to watch empty beer bottles get smashed on the ground. Elisabeth can’t stand all the carelessly discarded cigarette butts either, it’s those small pieces of glass and all the other litter that Berlin’s motorized garbage sweepers obviously have a hard time collecting that

are, she says, “extremely damaging to the global system.” Cigarette butts eventually get swept away, she points out, just like the plastic, with all their pollutants being released. It takes 40 liters of water to dispose of a cigarette butt, Elisabeth argues, which is why no one with a conscience can just stand by and let this happen: “We all have to do something to keep Berlin clean.”

Sheiku Kabba crouches down and glides his gloved hand over the dry grass and sand. He’s originally from Sierra Leone but has been living in Berlin with his German family for almost 20 years. Like on most other nights, he’s just been playing soccer, and sometimes he plays basketball here, too. He’s seen the red-vested people earlier and decided “to leave my soccer ball with the others and come over to help out. I couldn’t just stand around watching foreigners pick up garbage on my field.”

Peter Zehner is a freelance journalist based in Berlin.

# Futures market

The new Futurium in Berlin wants visitors to reflect on the world of tomorrow

BY KLAUS GRIMBERG

Can trees grow out of houses? Are robots taking over? Are we done with globalization? At first glance, these three questions have nothing in common. If we take a closer look, however, we see a shared theme: the future.

At their core, the questions revolve around future scenarios of human life on planet Earth. How are we going to live in the future? And, more importantly, how do we *want* to live in the future?

These and many other future-related issues are the key themes being examined at the new Futurium in Berlin. This “House of Futures” is the only one of its kind in Europe and has three interactive “thinking rooms” that focus on the realms of technology, humans and nature respectively. The goal and purpose of the Futurium is to discuss current ideas and blueprints for the coming decades and also to weigh the risks and opportunities involved.

In previous centuries, human beings saw the future as something immutable, that is, as either a favorable or unfavorable destiny we were obliged to accept. In the 20th century, this perception changed; in a technologized and ever-more digital world, we human beings are increasingly seeing ourselves as designers capable of having a decisive impact on the woes and well-being of the Earth.

Scientific and technical advances have raised the stakes, both good and bad. We have to keep up, in other words, with the possibilities come more responsibilities.



Shiny new object: The Futurium in Berlin

This shift in consciousness forms the conceptual foundation of the Futurium. Its function is not only to convey knowledge, but also to stimulate people to reflect on the world of tomorrow at every turn. The Futurium wants us to think about the contributions each one of us can make in our common quest to find answers to the most pressing challenges we face.

Back to the first question: Can trees grow out of buildings? Well, it might look a bit odd, but it actually works. The GraviPlant, created by a small Stuttgart-based startup, has the potential to revolutionize the greening of high-rise façades. A one-to-two-meter tree grows horizontally out of a fixed façade element with the help of a

rotating plant unit. The façade is then able to provide better heat and sound insulation while also fostering better filtration of harmful substances and more oxygen for cleaner air. What more can we expect from a building?

The GraviPlant is only one of many ideas aiming to expand nature’s presence in big cities. Green roofs and vertical gardens, renaturated rivers and protected wastelands can also help to improve the microclimate in urban areas by adding trees, flowers and herbage to steel, glass and concrete. The greener the city, the more hospitable it is for human beings to live and work in.

Second question: Are the robots taking over? Well, it’s already

clear today that robots are going to be natural companions in our everyday lives at some point in the future. In many areas, they already are; for example, in heavy industry and medical technology, robot-like machines already perform tasks with a level of precision that no human being could even dream of. But what happens when robots start to take on a more human likeness and carry out simple activities and services in areas in which only human beings have worked up to now, such as nursing and homecare?

Indeed, one of the biggest challenges facing us in the coming decades is the task of determining the nature of the coexistence of human beings and machines

over the long term. Are we human beings even going to need to work in the future, that is, if robots start to take on more and more jobs? And what are we going to do if artificial intelligence starts to exceed the intellectual capabilities of human beings? If we want robots to become our companions rather than threats or even enemies, we have to do a lot of thinking about our relationship to them.

Is globalization coming to an end? Even far into the 20th century, it was normal for people to both live and work in one neighborhood. For example, the factory owner lived in the front building, the factory space was in the rear buildings and the workers lived in the workers’ settlements nearby.

Over the past decades, industrialization and globalization have completely separated these former worlds of living and working.

Today, however, there is a tangible countermovement visible in more and more cities. Old craft shops and new tech labs are emerging side-by-side; open workshops and co-working spaces are bringing together human beings with different skills; and new technology such as 3D printers can make do with much less space. The motto is “Think global, work local.” Why send ideas, human beings and goods around the world when local experts and trades can work even more closely together in effective on-site networks?

These three examples make it quite clear: the Futurium is not a museum that provides all the answers, but rather a place that asks us to come up with the best questions we can. The Futurium challenges every visitor to provide input on how to design and determine the future. It’s impossible for a visitor to leave this unique museum without at least one new insight, especially as arriving visitors are given a take-home data chip with which to access background information at the museum’s countless media stations – and later deepen their knowledge on their own computers at home.

The Futurium refuses to allow any of its guests to be passive or indifferent. It entices them to think hard and actively participate in the future. What else can you expect from a museum?

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