Public Participation in Post-Fordist Urban Green Space Governance: The Case of Community Gardens in Berlin

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Abstract

This article examines citizen participation in the governance of contemporary urban green space. Rather than exploring normative questions of ideal forms of participatory democracy, it focuses on changing roles and relationships between local state and non-state actors in order to identify and explain the changing nature of participation. I argue that neoliberal urban restructuring has changed the conditions for participation and thus participation itself in fundamental ways and that we need an account of changes in statehood and governance in order to capture this conceptually. Based on the case of community gardens in Berlin, the article discusses the extent to which this changed relationship is expressed by current citizen participation as well as the potential and problems that result from it. My empirical results show the emergence of a new political acceptance of autonomously organized projects and active citizen participation in urban green space governance. The central argument of this article is that this new acceptance can be conceptualized as an expression of the neoliberalization of cities. Nevertheless, this neoliberal strategy at the same time leads to complex and contradictory outcomes and the resulting benefits are also acknowledged.

Introduction

This article examines the role of citizen participation in contemporary urban green space governance. Rather than exploring normative questions of ideal forms of participatory democracy (Silver and et al., 2010, this issue), it focuses on changing roles and relationships between local state and non-state actors in order to identify and explain the changing nature of participation. Based on literature inspired by regulation theory, the article examines citizen participation in the context of ‘actually existing neo-liberalism’ (Bremer and Theodore, 2002a). The starting point of the article is an understanding of the process of civic engagement gains importance as a substitute for welfare functions of the local restructuring has changed the conditions for participation and thus participation itself in fundamental ways, and that we need an account of changes in statehood and in order to capture this conceptually. These developments lead to ambivalent outcomes, which the article also aims to explore.

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Citizen participation in neoliberalizing cities

The term ‘neoliberalizing cities’ refers here to work inspired by regulation theory that focuses on the implementation since the 1980s of neoliberal ideology through urban policy (e.g. Painter and Goodwin, 2000; Bremer and Theodore, 2002; Jessop, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Three observations are crucial for my argument here:

Firstly, there has been a shift in planning paradigms towards competition and a new understanding of cities as entrepreneurs and enterprises (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Urban development policies are now primarily directed towards business development and less towards the provision of collective services, which used to be the traditional core-task of the local state (Mayer, 1994). Public parks, as a part of urban collective infrastructures in the city, are affected by this reorientation of urban policies.

Secondly, new forms of governance-beyond-the-state have emerged from the transformation of the welfare state towards the activating state (for a critique of Esser, 1998; Lindenberg, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2005). This has led to an increasing importance of non-state actors and to a transformation of roles, responsibilities and institutional configurations of the (local) state and citizens in urban spatial politics.

Lastly, this development goes hand in hand with the re-importance of civic engagement and a new focus on territorially defined local communities as a relevant actor in urban governance. Neo-communitarians in particular advocate that civic society and community are the opposite and alternative to market-led and competition-oriented neoliberal politics (Ezioni, 1993). On the other hand, critical research suggests that voluntary engagement within the community fulfills the role of compensating for the state’s retreat from its former welfare functions (Evers, 2002; Mayer, 2003; Roth, 2003; Amin, 2005) and for the worst consequences of ‘pure’ neoliberal — or neoclassical — strategies such as deregulation and privatization. Jessop (2002: 108) identifies the rise of a new political ethos that ‘tends to promote “community” (or a plurality of self-organizing communities) as a flanking, compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of this market mechanism.

However, community-based and controlled services do not seem to be the only or even primary answer to neoliberal restructuring. Instead, they address the longstanding left-wing critique of the Fordist welfare state. On the one hand, the specific forms and institutions of social welfare were criticized. In particular, the criticism of the bureaucratic, mechanized and incapacitating health service led to a massive explosion of self-help groups in the 1970s and 1980s which were at that time by no means accepted by the all-embracing, protecting and controlling state. Collective self-help was contested, clients should remain inactive, participation needed to be won (among many others, see Thiel, 1994 for the German context). On the other hand, the criticism addressed the repressive function of the state. The protection against material risks (illness, age, unemployment, etc.), the task of the welfare state has also been the regulation of the labour supply through discrimination, privileges, discipline and control. Extension and perfection of the social state were closely associated with an expansion of the control of its citizens, with the cooperation of the education system, police, justice, working and social management (see e.g. Hirsch, 1982; Kräutle and Schmoll, 1987: 64ff.; Rose, 1996: 330).
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Urban green space governance in Berlin

As a result of the leftist critique of the paternalistic welfare state described above, the 1970s saw the formation of New Social Movements (for the German context, see Brand et al., 1986) and Bürgerinitiativen (citizens’ action committees) concerned with municipal policies and the urban environment (see Roth, 1994 among others). For example, radical protest and self-help was expressed in the squatting movement of the early 1980s in West Berlin (Bodenschatz et al., 1983). As part of these environmental movements people also protested ‘against the administrative control of urban greenery’ (Meissle, 1998: 248, translation by author) by starting to grow patios and backyards of tenement housing blocks, lobbying for more urban green spaces and even publicly squatting in existing open spaces to protect them from development.1

A look at urban green space governance in Berlin today reveals entrepreneurial strategies as well as the call for more civic engagement. The severe cuts in public funding for public green space, due to a severe fiscal crisis of the City of Berlin (Krätké, 2004), led to a search for new ways of maintaining parks, playgrounds and other public green spaces. The City of Berlin adopted entrepreneurial strategies like the formal privatization of parts of the introduction of park entrance fees, the increased use of the low-wage sector and workforce programs for maintenance and the outsourcing of maintenance work to private companies. At the same time — and of particular importance to this article — local politicians have specifically called for civic engagement as a form of citizen participation (EA UE, 2000; Schröder, 2000; Krug-Ghab and Pressler-Holl, 2004). For example, in 2004 the borough (Bezirk) started an initiative for the ‘rescue of the borough parks’ (slogan of the campaign), in which local residents were encouraged to adopt their parks. Another campaign from a different borough also asked for volunteers to support the parks department. In both cases the calls for civic engagement were justified with the lack of funding for public green spaces.7

The current situation in Berlin is influenced both by left-wing as well as neoliberal critique of the welfare state, I will argue that the increasing interest of the City of Berlin in civic engagement has to be related mainly to a new, neoliberal model of the state. This model changed from Fordist welfare and the Sicherheitstaat (security state) (Hirsch, 1989) to an ‘activating and enabling state’ (see above), particularly expressed by the ‘Red-Green’ government in power from 1998 to 2005.5

Community gardening in Berlin

Here I will look at a specific example of civic engagement: community gardens. I chose community gardens as a case study because firstly the engagement expressed here is a form of a long-term commitment (as opposed to day-long neighbourhood clean-ups for

1 In East Berlin at the same time, people were involved in environmental initiatives ranging from officially accepted conservationists groups to alternative and persecuted groups like the Berlin Umweltbibliotheks (Environmental Library) (Rüdinka, 1992). Because of the highly different political and social context in the GDR, these examples cannot be classified equally as part of NMS as in the West.

2 The financial situation is undoubtedly severe: Whereas in 1993 the different boroughs altogether had about €60 million at their disposal for the maintenance of public parks, in 2003 it was only €20 million. In 2000 the boroughs received on average only 39% of what they needed for the maintenance of standards (EA UE, 2000:25). For detailed information on the diversified strategies based on an analysis of official documents and reports, websites, newspaper articles, etc. see Rosol (2006: 83–118).

3 This new framework of the state is also expressed in urban policies, e.g. the introduction of new instruments of urban renewal like the programmes Soziale Stadt — Social City and Quartiersmanagement — Neighbourhood Management (see Silver et al., this issue, for a German critique, see Mayer, 2002; Krummacher et al., 2003).

1 A growing responsibility of citizens and civic institutions corresponding to the neoliberal goal of greater institutional efficiency, which is usually not accompanied by increasing resources, influence and power (Ghose, 2005).

2 The outsourcing and privatization of state services towards the profit-making and the non-profit sector and to volunteering citizens (Bondi and Laurier, 2005).

3 The emergence of a discourse of collaboration that ‘has the potential to depoliticise urban governance practices and effectively discipline community organizations into forms of participation that are more manageable for the state’ (Elwood, 2002: 123).

4 The co-optation of energy, time and agendas of participating citizens (Elwood, 2002).

5 Increased competitiveness among community groups — e.g. as they compete for grant funding — at the expense of cooperation (see e.g. Mackinnon, 2000: 298).

6 These general trends are path-dependent and recent research on neoliberal urban transformations accepts as the ‘uncontested, voluntary and uncertain character’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2005: 101) of these restructuring processes. Participatory processes and the downloading of responsibility onto community groups can lead to complex and contradictory outcomes — it may serve a neoliberal agenda, but at the same time still foster an emancipatory agenda. This points to the high spatial variability of these outcomes (Elwood, 2002, 2004), which, therefore, will also be further explored in this article.

7 In providing an analysis of participation in urban governance ‘on the ground’ and over time, this article moreover seeks to overcome a binary opposition present in theoretical discussions on participation democracy (for a discussion see Silver et al., this issue) and rather tries to show how bottom-up and top-down approaches as well as consensus and confrontation, and making use of direct and representative forms of democracy, are all present in the strategies of parties involved. However, this article is also in agreement with Aylett (2010, this issue) and Becher (2010, this issue) in their emphasis on conflict and clashes between positive elements that are ever present in these processes — i.e. also in deliberation — as they are in a capitalist society in general. I argue that the shape and outcome of participatory processes are hardly determined by an imaginary ‘perfect’ participatory models or tools, by deliberation and the ‘power of the better argument,’ nor induced by the ‘perfect’ protest strategy, but rather by the real-existing balance of forces, by (mostly mundane) struggles, and by the historically and geographically specific circumstances and conditions of these struggles.

8 Based on the above literature review, the article will now turn to the case study on community gardens in Berlin. It will focus on the first two observations concerning participation and neoliberal urban governance, thus referring to the changing role of state and non-state actors in urban green space governance by addressing the following questions:

1 To what extent are the changing conditions for citizen participation expressed in the changing role of state and non-state actors?

2 What are the potentials and limits of citizen participation in the context of neoliberal restructuring of urban governance?

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Lichtenrader Volkspark

The oldest example is from 1977, when an informal garden was established on land that was earmarked as a construction site. The tenants of the adjacent large-scale housing development got together with professional community workers of the local church and a local citizens’ action committee, Bürgerinitiative Lichtenrade Ost, to protest against the further density that the construction of more high-rises in an already very dense housing estate would cause, and they lobbied for a park instead. The neighbourhood already severely lacked open public space and — although situated at the margins of West Berlin — there was no access to the surrounding rural areas because of the Berlin Wall. More apartment housing would only increase this imbalance. The protest initiatives did not stop at wishing development, but proposed the creation of a public park that would be in nature suitable for the community. In 1981, the activists founded the Bürgerverein Lichtenrader Volkspark e.V.. After symbolic squatting on the land, planting shrubs and trees for publicity, neighbourhood parties, public relations work and endless negotiations with local councillors, a contract for a small part of the land was agreed with the borough in 1983. Not until 1988 did it come to a positive decision. It is the largest — 4.5 hectares — of the projects I studied and the one which most resembles a typical public park in appearance. Unlike common public parks however, its funding is mainly based on membership fees, donations and voluntary work. Except on some rare occasions — when the city financed specific projects (such as a community composter) or when the association won an “environmental prize” and a prize for social engagement from the borough of Berlin-Tempelhof — there has been no public funding. The park is situated on public property and the Association leases the land — at no cost — from the borough under the condition that it is fully accessible to the public at all times.

Kinderbauernhof Mauerplatz Kreuzberg

This urban farm for children in Berlin-Kreuzberg came into existence as a result of squatting on derelict land right beside the Berlin Wall in 1981. A readers’ group called Kinderbauernhof Mauerplatz e.V. (Kinderbauernhof Mauerplatz e.V.) was founded in the same year. In contrast to other projects examined in this article, the urban farm is not solely about gardening, but also includes the care of domestic animals (horses, donkeys, ducks, etc.). The idea to create an urban farm for children in Kreuzberg dates back to circa 1979. Organised mainly by single mothers, the aim was to create an educationally supervised green space for small children in this densely built-up inner-city borough. At the same time, the project was part of a broader social movement of squatters and other social activists against the predominant urban renewal policies of that time (Kohlhagensanierung, the clearance of old tenements to make way for new high-rise buildings). With the founding of the Kinderbauernhof (children’s farm) the group could criticize these policies as well as demonstrate alternative ways of creating a city. Members of the group have been actively engaged not only in environmental and educational topics, but also in local politics in general. One of the founders became a borough council member and actively influenced the local democratic system. The project has been an integral part of the neighbourhood for over 25 years. Although mainly organized by alternative and left-wing oriented white Germans, the users of the site reflect the diversity of the neighbourhood. One of the people involved in the project describes the involvement of the neighbourhood as follows:

It was part of the autonomous scene. Or at least it was referred to as such, although the social mix has been broader since the beginnings. How this project emerged was very much linked to the squatters’ movement. But already in 1984, when I joined the group, there was a larger social mix. There were seniors from the neighbourhood. And people from churches and Turkish neighbours… According to my experience there aren’t many places where German and Turkish neighbours are in such close contact [as here] (interview with gardener, 19/2003).

4 The case study is based on 44 semi-structured in-depth interviews and another 24 shorter interviews — some of them as group interviews — with community gardeners from 14 garden projects (N=26) and support organizations (N=12), local politicians and administrators (N=16), academics (N=6) and environmental organizations (N=8) conducted in 2003–2004 and analysed with MaxQDA qualitative data analysis software. Further sources are participatory observation and analysis of secondary literature, media coverage and policy papers (for detailed information on methods see Rosol, 2006).

5 This is especially well documented for New York City (Schmelzendorf, 1999; 2002; Staeheli et al., 2002; Hassell, 2005; for another example see e.g. Lebuhn, 2008). Here the guerrilla gardening movement stands out, which became famous in New York City in the 1970s (Meyer-Renschhausen, 2004; Reynolds, 2008).

6 There is limited data available on other and falling examples of older gardens. Thus no representative sample can be provided. Although the possibility of earlier non-surviving state-organized gardens cannot be entirely eliminated, it is very likely given the all-embracing role of the state in the 1970s and 1980s and its unwillingness to engage self-help groups (see literature review above).
The plot of about one hectare in size remained a squat for 20 years until in 2001 — after a long battle with the borough’s politicians and administration — the association obtained a contract for over five years from the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. During this long period of 20 years, the Kinderbauerhof remained highly contested, because the project evolved from the resistance against a misguided urban development policy and in direct confrontation with urban planners and local politics.

Kids’ Garden Neukölln

The Kids’ Garden (its name in German) is one of the newer projects. The concept of the Kids’ Garden was first mooted in 1998. Soon a registered association (Grün für Kinder e.V. — Green Spaces for Children) was formed, and in 1999 it opened the garden. It is located in an area of urban renewal in the borough of Neukölln. The garden is for intermin use only, and established on public land for at least 10 years. After that period, and pending sufficient financing, a public kindergarten and a public path connecting two streets are planned for the 3,000 m² plot.

The idea for the garden came from the formal neighbourhood representation body (Betriebsvereinigung) assigned as representatives in the urban renewal process, but was mostly self-organized by 14 parents’ initiatives, which run private childcare facilities (Kindlärden) in the area. Their aim was to create outdoor facilities for their children, and provide environmental education and exposure. Children in this dense inner-city borough should have the opportunity to experience nature, to grow their own plants and to develop creativity while playing with natural materials. The project has common areas, and also small plots reserved for the different children’s groups. Here the children can grow flowers, fruits and vegetables. The garden is usually locked, and apart from public events, is only accessible for the children, their educators, parents and their parents’ friends. It is estimated that the garden is used by 250 children and 100 adults.

Northern Neukölln, like Kreuzberg, is like especially diverse and multicultural. The inhabitants have a Turkish background form a large proportion of the population. It is also one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Berlin.7 The Kids’ Garden nevertheless is mostly organized by white-middle-class Germans, typical for private childcare groups in Germany. Migrant inhabitants can use the garden through some of the children’s facilities, but are not represented in the association itself.6

The creation of the garden was basically self-organized, and the parents’ association finances the operating costs. Planners within the framework of the ‘Neighbourhood Management’ and the urban renewal institutions actively supported the creation of the garden. The municipality was involved in facilitating the contract, organized soil tests and paid for setup costs. The association hopes to continue to use the plot even after the first contract ends. This hope is not unrealistic because the restricted financial situation of the Berlin government means that further development on the sites is unlikely.

This project stands out because of its restricted public usage, which raises issues of exclusion and privatization. It is the least public garden in my research. The existence of locked gates is justified by the parents association with reference to the specific needs of small children. In favour of the garden it also has to be acknowledged that its creation 7

In the direct surroundings of the garden (an area called Reuterplatz) in 2005 about 39.9 % of the inhabitants did not have German citizenship (source: http://www.statistik-berlin.de/stadtquart/ einwohnerarbeitsberechtigung/ber08.html) compared to the Berlin average of only 12 %. Neukölln’s unemployment rate is significantly higher than the Berlin average: 23.7 % (2008) versus 16.5 % (2006, source: http://www.berlin.de/oa-neukoeln/beitrag.html) and the household income is only €3,000 per month versus €5,500 per month in Berlin (2004, 2006, source: http://www.berlin.de/berlin-im-ueberblick/lebenshaltungskosten/index.de.html).

In order to tackle that problem and to create community gardening space especially for migrant users, there have since circa 2000 been ‘intercultural Gardens’ established in Berlin and many other German cities (for a short summary on some Berlin gardens, see Rosol, 2006: 187–200, for general information see http://www.stiftung-interkultur.de/eng/index.html).


Neighbourhood Garden ‘Dolziger Straße’ Friedrichshain

This garden was opened in 2002 and is also situated in a designated urban renewal area (Sanierungsgebiet). It is a very dense inner-city neighbourhood dating back to the end of the nineteenth century. Regarding built structures and densities, it is a neighbourhood similar to the one mentioned above where the Kids’ Garden Neukölln is situated. This garden project is located in East Berlin in a less diverse neighbourhood than Kreuzberg or Neukölln. Unlike the other examples, this garden is located on the private land of a single owner. The empty plot — about 800 m² in size — is a relic of World War II bombing. The initial idea for this project came from the neighbourhood representation body (Betriebsvereinigung), along with the urban renewal administration of the borough and the associated urban planning bureau Statibau GmbH.

The starting point for the initiation of an interim use by the borough was the severe lack of open green spaces in the area and empty plots used as garbage dumps with no foreseeable development in the imminent future. The aims were to improve the appearance of the neglected site and to foster civic engagement. The process was initiated in 2000 and subsequently supported by urban planners. Through guided walks in the neighbourhood and participative planning workshops, municipal staff provided the prerequisites for forming a group of neighbours who took on the responsibility for the lot. Municipal planners played a crucial role not only in initiating a small land use, but also in providing information and assistance and in funding the ongoing process.

Nevertheless, only the gardening group makes decisions about what actually happens on these plots. The project is not free from conflict though: a group of about 12 neighbours wants the borough to buy the piece of land and guarantee its long-term use. Although the borough acknowledges the lack of open spaces, the aim of urban renewal for the plot is still the redevelopment of the site. The landowner can give notice as soon as a building permit is issued.

Despite having initiated the projects, the state representatives see the local authority’s role in these initiatives as supportive rather than leading because: “this kind of initiative from above, from the administration, well, you can do that, but it does not correspond to our idea, actually. Basically that is the call for the state which, I think, is not appropriated anymore” (interview with borough planning staff, 13/2003). This project thus exemplifies the turn towards the ‘enabling and activating’ state as characterized above.

The changing role of the local state

Looking at only these four examples, one finds very different models of creating a community garden (see Table 1). We have seen a self-organized park, which was supported by professional community workers from the local church (Lichteradler Volkspark). The urban farm for children is an example of a grassroots project, part of a broader social movement and developed in confrontation with urban planners. The newer Kids’ Garden is also an autonomously organized project, but was developed in cooperation with urban planners. The last example — the neighbourhood garden in Friedrichshain — was initiated mainly by urban planners and supported by politicians. This suggests that the role and involvement of the local state has shifted over time, from antagonism towards a kind of self-determined land use, towards supporting or even
initiating it. It also indicates a turn from community gardens as part of urban social movements towards community gardens as a form of voluntarism.

How does the local state justify its present engagement? In the interviews I conducted with local politicians and urban planners working in the administration, three reasons were given for their support of volunteer-run gardening projects in the public sphere:

Firstly — and not surprisingly — their support and call for voluntary engagement for public spaces results from severe cuts in public spending for open green spaces in Berlin. Voluntarism is seen as a means of dealing with this problem.

Secondly, they hope for an improved appearance of the neighbourhood. It should look clean, pretty and secure, and voluntary work by neighbours, their presence in the lots and the associated social control are seen as an effective tool to ensure this. One background for this new interest in the public realm is that the traditional task of providing affordable housing through urban renewal has decreased dramatically in Germany and is no longer considered a public responsibility (Holm, 2006). Policymakers' interest in rearranging the public realm according to middle-class values is a common trend worldwide, closely attached to gentrification and 'urban renaissance' (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Potter and Shaw, 2009).

Finally, the planners and state administrators argue politically for a stimulation of civic engagement, community responsibility and social capital in order to 'stabilize the neighbourhood' (interview with borough staff, 13/2003). These aims are clearly expressed in the following quote:

The financial situation is really always the fulcrum and pivot. That's unfortunate to a certain extent. But, on the other hand there is also . . . this whole approach, how can you strengthen again an orientation towards the common good, towards the community. The fact that one should not only count on the state, but also, as far as possible, take care of something with one's own resources (interview with borough councillor, 43/2004).

This quote says clearly that the starting point of the new interest in volunteering is the lack of funding for the parks maintenance. At the same time the councillor alludes to 'the common good' and demands more input by the 'community', including taking on responsibility and providing resources as a community member. In this respect, this quote connects the two trends of neoliberalizing cities — the lack of funding for public infrastructures and the responsibilization of the 'the community' (Rose, 1996; Jessop, 2002) — in an exemplary way.

**Conclusion**

The first question raised in this article was: to what extent can the changing conditions for participation be analysed looking at the changing role of state and non-state actors in urban governance? In order to answer this question, I looked at a specific example of urban green spaces that combines participatory and grassroots approaches, civic engagement and local protest. In line with theoretical observations, my empirical case study shows a new acceptance by the local state of collectively run urban green spaces. Whereas in the early 1980s citizen groups who wanted to greener public spaces were stymied by the local state and had to fight for their right to influence their environment, today such projects are actively encouraged and supported by the city administration and politicians. How can this be explained?

Part of it is certainly the success of grassroots activism and lobbying, of social struggle and active participation in local politics. Pioneer projects certainly eased things for the future generation of gardens and increased their acceptance. However, in this article I want to draw attention to the fact that the conditions that brought the newer gardens into existence are also an expression of the 'actually existing neoliberalization'
of cities, where the local state withdraws from its welfare functions and civic engagement is seen as a cheap solution. The newer gardens exemplify the turn towards the ‘enabling and activating’ state (Neighbourhood Garden ‘Dolziger Straße’ Friedrichshain) or the increasing responsibility of private actors for the provision of services (Kids’ Garden).

Nevertheless, the specific situation of Berlin also has to be taken into account, since restructurings processes are path-dependent and uneven. That means, although we can detect a general trend of neoliberalization in many cities worldwide, there are still inherited regulatory landscapes, national and municipal legislation, the specific social and economic situation of any given city, and specific circumstances like the amount of land owned by that city, which have to be taken into account. In the specific case presented here, many of the studied gardens on public land became possible only because of the appaling budgetary situation of the City of Berlin. Because the City was not too willing to fund the functional and fragile, given that only temporary uses are encouraged. Gardening groups have to acknowledge these new circumstances. They can use this support to promote their own cause, but have to be aware of the local state’s differing interests.

If we look at the historical changes of community gardening in Berlin we can find a shift from community gardening with strong connections to urban social movements towards community gardening as a form of voluntarism or the provision of social services. This of course has important implications for the question of participation. The changes discussed earlier of participation in the context of neoliberalizing cities are relevant here: the withdrawal of funding from public infrastructures and the resulting outsourcing and privatization of state services as well as the responsibility of citizens for the provision of services are especially obvious in the green space governance of Berlin today. Also the increasing competition for public funding between different groups can be detected, although also new funding sources are opening up. The discourse of collaboration and participation as co-creation (see section on ‘Citizen Participation in Neoliberalizing Cities’ are less important in the analysed cases.

From another perspective we can see that different strategies and phases which are often shown as contrary (Silver et al., this issue) are all part of the participatory experiences described here. Although generally this article claims that earlier community gardening projects were developed from a more confrontational stance and confrontation strategies, these projects also used deliberation and negotiations – especially around land tenure – to secure their goals. Equally the newer projects, although created in a deliberative manner and with support from the local authority, have to push for their interests: the garden ‘Dolziger Straße’ in Friedrichshain against the borough’s efforts to create a public greenway and kindergarten. The main difference consists therefore less in the strategies used than in the view of the state and of the projects themselves.

This means that in the general discussion on urban contention and deliberation this article pleads for the importance of the historical and geographical specificity and for an analytical rather than a normative approach towards questions of participation. In this we are able to see how participatory experiences change with changes in society in general, and how this must lead to very different theoretical and political evaluations of the projects themselves.

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9 See the longevity of the ‘interim’ allotment gardens in Berlin, which have been in existence for more than 100 years now (Gröning, 2000).

10 The money the borough provides for the garden in Friedrichshain for example (about €3,000 annually for maintenance plus contractual payment of the planning bureau) would be a drop in the ocean if it were directly running a public park.
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Résumé

Cet article examine la participation citoyenne dans la gouvernance de l’espace vert urbain contemporain. Plutôt que de s’attacher aux aspects normatifs de formes idéales de démocratie participative, il s’intéresse au changement dans les rôles et les relations entre les acteurs locaux gouvernementaux et non gouvernementaux, afin de de répertier et d’expliquer la nature évolutive de la participation. La restructuration urbaine néolibérale a modifié, de manière fondamentale, les conditions de la participation et, par conséquent, la participation elle-même. Le restituer sur le plan conceptuel implique de décrire les changements dans la nature de l’État et la gouvernance. S’appuyant sur le cas des jardins communautaires berlinois, l’article analyse la mesure dans laquelle cette relation évolutive s’exprime dans la participation actuelle des habitants, ainsi que le potentiel et les problèmes qui en découlent. Les résultats empiriques montrent à l’émergence d’une nouvelle acceptation politique à l’égard de projets organisés de façon autonome et d’une participation citoyenne active dans la gouvernance de l’espace vert urbain. Selon l’argument central de cet article, cette nouvelle acceptation peut être conceptualisée comme un mode d’expression de la néolibéralisation des villes. Néanmoins, cette stratégie néolibérale conduit parallèlement à des décisions à la fois complexes et contradictoires, et les avantages qui en résultent sont également reconnus.