

From Cars to Community: Turning Public Space into green, shared Places



Co-funded by
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**Tour Title: From Cars to Community:
Turning Public Space into Green, Shared Places**

General Information

- Primary Themes:** Public space and community, citizen participation, urban greening, civic agency, sustainability
- Target Audience:** 1-8 participants, people interested in urban change, public space, sustainability, and community
- City / Country:** Berlin / Germany
- Starting location:** Community Garden Ton, Steine Gärten at Bethanien (52°30'18.2"N 13°25'26.1"E)
- Distance:** 7,2 km
- Estimated Duration:** 2,5 hours by foot; 1,5 by bike
- Material needed:** "From Cars to Community"-Booklet, charged phone, usual city tourist gear, map app like googlemaps, bike optional
- Accessibility Level:** Easy to medium with flat terrain and public sidewalks, sometimes uneven terrain in public gardens or narrower access points.

Support Material

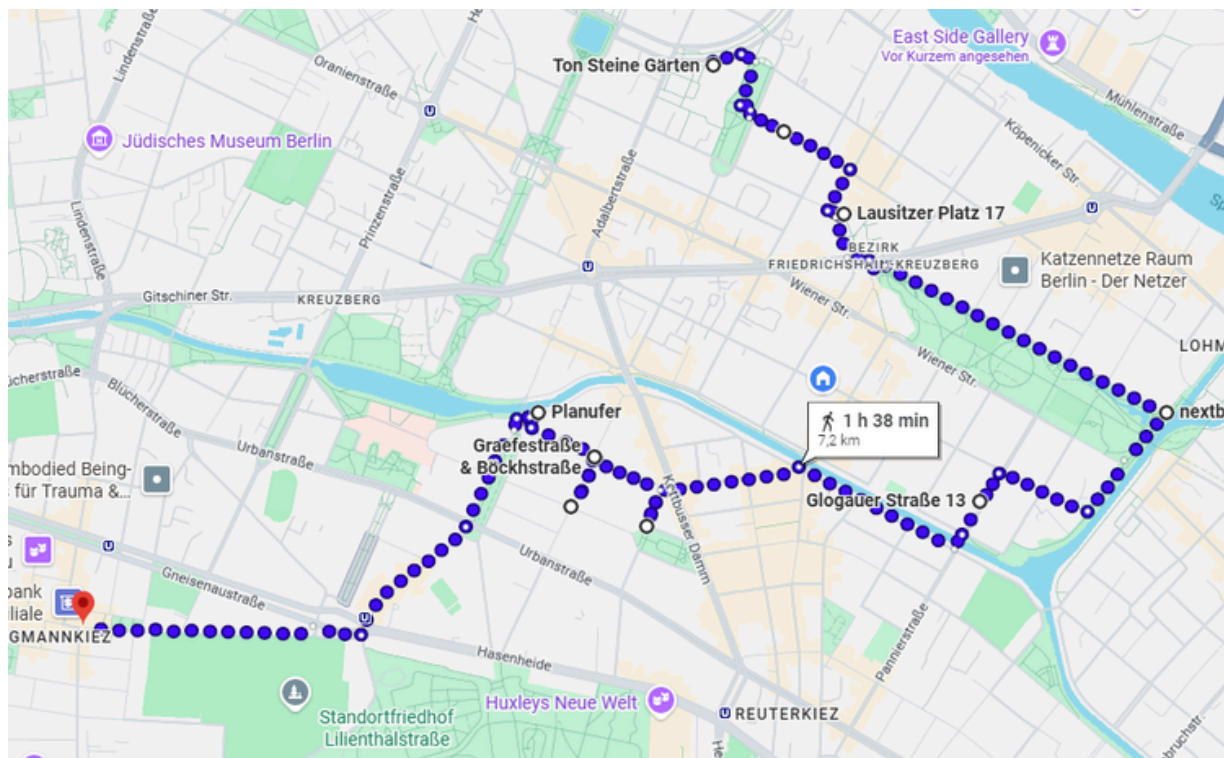
Learning Objectives

Community does not happen by itself. It needs structure: places to meet, reason to stay, and repeated local encounters. The tour shows how redesigning streets and public spaces can create better conditions for meeting, exchange, and community and how the agency of people can bring necessary change.

Objectives

- Learn how public space is shaped through planning, participation, negotiation, and local political decision-making.
- reflect on public space as a shared resource in which different users have rights, needs, and responsibilities that must be balanced
- Learn how design influences what kinds of social life become possible.
- Learn the power of citizen agency

Practical Information



Itinerary: Ton Steine Gärten --> Lausitzer Platz --> Görlitzer Ufer --> Community Garden Glogauer Str. --> Zickenplatz --> Graefestraße & Böckstraße --> Dieffenbachstraße & Graefestraße --> Planufer --> Bergmannstraße

Support Material

Accessibility

Sidewalks and curb cuts

The tour leads participants through Kreuzberg, Berlin, across a sequence of community gardens, redesigned streets, traffic-calmed spaces, and neighborhood meeting points, ending at Bergmannstraße. The route is mostly accessible, with flat terrain and public sidewalks, but some limitations may arise from uneven surfaces, crowded areas, or narrower access points. Also, when visiting gardens we can expect uneven terrain, that may be difficult for elder people or walking impaired. The gardens are also not accessible by wheelchair.

Bikes

The tour can also be done by bike. Most streets are relatively calm, but bike lanes are not available everywhere. Watch out for cars, delivery vehicles, and pedestrians, and dismount at crowded stops

Stairs, ramps and elevators

Everything can be explored by foot or bike. There may be some smaller stairs within community gardens. No elevators.

Rest areas and seating

There are several possibilities to rest along the route: benches and seating areas are practically at every stop. There may be limited seating possibilities in between the stops.

Accessible restrooms

Semi-public toilets are available at Lausitzer Platz, where participants may use the restrooms of several cafés and restaurants. There is also a public toilet at Planufer. Additional public toilets exist along the route, but they are relatively rare, so cafés and restaurants may offer the most practical option in between stops.

Safety

Standard urban safety rules apply:

- stay with the group
- be aware of traffic and bicycles
- keep valuables secure

Support Material



Before the Tour

Introduction

In this tour we explore how places in Kreuzberg that were car-dominated, neglected, or underused have been reclaimed, reshaped, and renegotiated and we ask how cities can create the conditions for local community, shared life, and everyday democracy.

Setting the theme

The facilitator can begin by asking participants what “community” means to them. In a second step, they can ask what community needs in order to exist or grow. This can lead participants to reflect on meeting places, trust, shared activities, safety, and regular encounters, and it introduces the idea that community is shaped not only by people, but also by the spaces they share.

Framing and Mindset

Before starting the tour, participants should be encouraged to look at streets not only as traffic infrastructure, but as social spaces. They should be ready to question what feels normal in a city and to notice how design choices influence everyday life. The facilitator can invite them to think like observers of public life: Who is this space made for? What kinds of activities are possible here? What is encouraged, and what is made difficult?

Assumptions That Can Be Questioned

This tour works especially well when it challenges common assumptions such as the idea that streets mainly exist for cars, that community simply happens on its own, or that public space is fixed and cannot be changed. It can also question the belief that greener or less car-dominated streets are only a technical planning issue, rather than something deeply connected to quality of life, local democracy, health, and everyday encounter.

Mission Prompt

Today, you are urban investigators. As we walk, your task is to notice how space is used, who it seems to welcome, what kinds of encounters it makes possible, and where you can see signs that people have reshaped the street for community life.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 1: Ton, Steine Gärten at Bethanien



Facilitation Tips

- Remind participants to treat the site with care and respect. Ton, Steine, Gärten is a place created and maintained through the ongoing effort, love, and attention of local people. Facilitators should encourage participants to behave considerately and to recognize that they are entering a lived community space.
- Use the stop to introduce the main idea of the tour. Ton, Steine, Gärten is a strong opening because it shows that community does not simply appear on its own. It has to be made and maintained through shared activity, care, and access to space.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Ton, Steine, Gärten is a community garden at Bethanien in Kreuzberg that began in 2009. It is described as an intercultural neighborhood garden whose spaces are collectively shaped and maintained by local gardeners.
- The garden is closely linked to the wider history of activism around Bethanien and the Georg-von-Rauch-Haus. That makes it useful not only as a green place, but also as part of a longer local story about self-organization, housing struggles, cultural experimentation, and neighborhood politics in Kreuzberg.
- The garden's name also echoes the band Ton Steine Scherben. That connection matters locally because the band is closely linked to Kreuzberg, the Rauch-Haus, and the protest culture around Bethanien and Mariannenplatz.



Solutions

- Participants are asked when did the community secure a use agreement for Ton, Steine, Gärten? Correct answer: 2009

Stop 2: Lausitzer Platz



Facilitation Tips

- Stroll a bit about the place to get a feeling for the area. When you are done, place yourself at the marked spot, near the corner with the view in the direction of the church.
- Invite participants to reflect on local businesses. In many debates about reducing car access, one common concern is that shops, cafés, or restaurants might lose customers. At this stop, the facilitator can ask whether participants think local businesses benefit or whether they might suffer.

Support Material



During the Tour



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Lausitzer Platz is an important neighborhood square in Kreuzberg, centered on the Emmauskirche, until the Second World War, the second-largest church in Berlin after the Berliner Dom.
- The "Lausi", as many call it, is a very important meeting place for the neighborhood, especially those with kids. Kids from the area learn to skate, ride their bikes, to ride Inliners here, since this is the best place for it.
- This stop was chosen because it shows that public space can be reshaped and renegotiated. Here a change from cars to kids by excluding traffic is most obvious.



Solutions

- Participants are asked to count how many people are staying versus passing through in 60 seconds.

Stop 3: Görlitzer Ufer



Facilitation Tips

- Unlike Lausitzer Platz, this stop also shows how street redesign can serve ecological purposes. Facilitators can draw attention to elements such as rainwater infiltration and the wildflower meadow and ask participants how these features change not only the look of the place, but also its environmental value and everyday atmosphere.
- Invite participants to imagine how different this place would feel if cars were still parked along both sides of the street, as they were before. Would it feel as open, green, calm, or inviting? What kinds of movement, encounter, or everyday activities would become easier or harder?



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- This street used to be shaped by cars and parking. Today, that logic has changed. The district decided that this stretch should no longer be used by private cars, and in 2023–24 it was redesigned for walking and cycling instead.
- The stop matters because it shows a different kind of urban transformation than Lausitzer Platz. Here, the redesign was also about ecological functions: around 1,000 square meters of former roadway were unsealed, and parts of the area were turned into a wildflower meadow with rainwater infiltration.



Solutions

- Participants shall count the number of sport equipment installed. It's 6.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 4: **Community Garden Glogauer Straße 13**



Facilitation Tips

- Inside we gather, where the group can pause without blocking the way. From there, take a moment to look across the beds, shared structures, and open working areas before we begin.
- As before remind participants to treat the site with care and respect. Encourage participants to behave considerately and to recognize that they are entering a lived community space.
- Use the stop to show that community can grow out of neglected or leftover spaces. The stop is useful because it was not designed as a polished public square from the start. It emerged through reuse and collective effort, which helps participants see that urban transformation can also begin in overlooked places. This interpretive point is grounded in the garden's history as a former sports-field wasteland and neighborhood project.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Glogauer 13 is a neighborhood garden on the site of a former sports-field brownfield in Kreuzberg. It emerged 2012 as a community project that turned an unused urban area into a place for gardening, meeting, learning, and shared activity.
- Like other places on the tour, it shows that community can emerge where people do not simply accept a space as it is, but begin to use and reinterpret it differently.
- The garden actively invites participation from the surrounding neighborhood in multiple languages and seeks to include neighbors as well as social and cultural institutions from the area.



Solutions

- Participants shall answer what color the sign of the adjacent library has: Blue

Stop 5: **Zickenplatz / Hohenstaufenplatz**



Facilitation Tips

- Introduce the square as the gateway into the so called Graefekiez, a whole neighborhood where streets are being redesigned step by step to create more space for walking, cycling, greenery, and everyday public life.
- Highlight that this is a recognizable "Kiez place." The nickname "Zickenplatz" (goat square) gives the square a local identity of its own, and that can help participants reflect on how places become meaningful through memory, stories, and repeated use by people.

Support Material



During the Tour

- Connect the stop to the idea of the Kiezblock. This is a good place to discuss what happens when a neighborhood tries to reduce through-traffic and reclaim streets for local life.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Hohenstaufenplatz is a neighborhood square in Kreuzberg that is also widely known as "Zickenplatz." The nickname refers to the fact that goats once grazed here, which gives the place a strong local identity beyond its official name.
- The square matters because it combines everyday public life with neighborhood routines. It includes a playground and green areas, and it is also linked to regular market activity: the Ökomarkt takes place here on Tuesdays and Saturdays.



Solutions

- No challenges or riddles at this stop.

Stop 6: Böckhstraße between Grimm- and Graefestraße



Facilitation Tips

- Use the stop to introduce the concept of Spielstraße (Play Street). Böckhstraße has actually been used as Berlin's first officially recognized temporary play street, taking place here on Wednesdays from April to September. Play streets are closed for traffic and kids are provided with toys and vehicles.
- Draw participants' attention to Böckhstraße 40, where neighbors maintain and care for a shared garden and a permanent play area for children with small vehicles.
- Encourage participants to notice what children need in a street. Participants may mention safety, slower traffic, room to move, visibility, shade, opportunities to play, and places for adults to stay nearby. This links the stop to the larger question of what a community-supporting street looks like.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- A useful point to note is that the play street did not appear automatically. It was pushed forward by local initiatives and neighborhood engagement, which makes it relevant not only as a mobility measure, but also as an example of civic action shaping the street.
- The significance of Böckhstraße is not only that cars are removed for a few hours. Its deeper importance is that it demonstrates how the meaning of a street can change when a neighborhood reclaims it for different forms of everyday life.



Solutions

- Participants are asked to describe something that for them shows care and community.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 7: Gräfestraße I



Facilitation Tips

- Ask participants to gather at the corner of Böckstraße/Gräfestraße.
- The project had a difficult start because there was a communication vacuum. People did not know what was happening, which led to confusion and conflict. Ask participants to imagine how they would feel if changes suddenly appeared on their own street without explanation or involvement.
- Ask participants who gets heard when a street is redesigned. A good prompt is: Whose voices matter most in decisions like this? Residents, parents, business owners, drivers, cyclists, children, older people, delivery services? This helps participants see that public space is political because many groups use it differently.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- This stop is linked to the wider Graefekiez redesign project, in which the district set out to reduce the number of private cars, protect the climate, and enable safer, more sustainable mobility. The district assembly adopted the redesign in June 2022, and the project included the conversion of around 400 parking spaces in the neighborhood.
- This stop was chosen because it makes participation visible as part of urban transformation. Before a street changes physically, people are affected emotionally and practically, so communication, transparency, and opportunities to respond become crucial. This encompassed the use of focus groups, public discussion formats, and resident involvement in the Graefekiez process.
- One of the most important tools was the "Map of Local Knowledge." These maps collected highly practical observations: where benches and tables were missing, where entrances were blocked by parked cars, where more bins were needed, and where the street did not work well for everyday life.



Solutions

- Participants are asked to think of a street very familiar to them, e.g. where they live or work. They shall imagine they could add one note to "Map of Local Knowledge." What would they add?

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 8: Gräfestraße II



Facilitation Tips

- Use this stop to make the outcome of participation visible. At the previous stop, participants reflected on process, communication, and conflict. Here, you can ask them to look for what that process has actually changed on the street: former parking spaces turned into planted areas, places to sit, bicycle parking, and shared uses.
- Use the stop to show that shared public space also depends on ongoing care. Local hobby gardeners have been caring for perennials and flower meadows since 2024, so you can ask what difference it makes when a redesigned street is also looked after by people from the neighborhood. That can open discussion about stewardship, ownership, and whether shared space works best when people feel responsible for it.
- Invite participants to compare this stop with earlier ones. Lausitzer Platz highlighted shared use, Görlitzer Ufer combined social use with ecological redesign, and here Graefestraße shows how those ideas can become part of a highly frequented residential street.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The wider Graefekiez project was adopted by the district assembly on 29 June 2022 and aimed to reduce car pressure, improve safety, and support more sustainable mobility.
- The redesign also has a strong climate-adaptation function. Rainwater can infiltrate more easily into the ground, which helps reduce pressure during heavy rain while supporting local cooling and a healthier microclimate.
- The stops significance lies in showing how a street can be reorganized to support everyday social life, rainwater management, cooling, biodiversity, and neighborhood involvement at the same time.



Solutions

- If in spring or summer, participants are asked to look around carefully and count how many insects they can spot in one minute.
- If its winter, they shall look if they see a piece of trash and if they find some, put it in a bin.



During the Tour

Stop 9: Planufer and Admiralsbrücke



Facilitation Tips

- Draw attention to the bridge as a social place, not just a crossing. Instead for crossing Admiralsbrücke has become a well-known gathering place. You can ask what happens when infrastructure turns into a meeting point and how that changes the meaning of a place.
- Introduce the idea that successful public space can also create conflict. Admiralsbrücke is famous as a popular evening gathering place, which can also raise questions about noise, crowding, and neighborhood tolerance. Ask how the needs of both sides can be accommodated.
- After the Bridge draw attention to the garden. Ask participants to imagine this spot without it. How would the atmosphere change? Would it feel less welcoming, less calm, or less alive?



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Admiralsbrücke is one of the historic landmarks of the area. It was built between 1880 and 1882 to plans by Georg Pinkenburg, and it is the oldest iron bridge over the Landwehr Canal in Berlin. Today it is a listed monument.
- Just nearby, there is also the wildflower meadow at Admiralbrücke, created through neighborhood initiative. Local residents saw heavily used lawn areas turn into bare, eroded ground. In 2020, after a construction site had been cleared, people from the neighborhood decided not to wait for change from above. They came together to plant an insect-friendly wildflower mix, add shrubs and perennials, organize watering, and create a small green space through collective care.



Solutions

- Participants are asked to walk in a circle around the area starting in the left-hand direction and bring places they pass by in the correct order: Il Casolare, Späti, Ice cream shop, playground, TERRA Italian Craft Kitchen.

Stop 10: Bergmannstraße



Facilitation Tips

- Bergmannstraße is crowded and highly frequented. Choose a place where the group can gather comfortably.
- Use this stop to bring the whole tour together. Bergmannstraße is a strong final stop because it concentrates many of the themes from the route in one very heavily used place: traffic reduction, greener design, local business, public debate, and the question of who public space is for.

Support Material



During the Tour

- Invite participants to look for the street's mixed functions. This is not a purely residential street or a simple shopping street. Ask participants to observe how movement, commerce, sitting, crossing, delivery, cycling, greenery, and social life overlap here.
- Raise the local-business question again. Because this is a classic conflict, you can ask whether streets like this help local businesses more when they are easy to drive through or when people can walk, browse, sit, and spend time there.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The Bergmannkiez used to belong to the old postal district "SW 61." That old label is still part of the area's identity and helps explain why people sometimes speak of this part of Kreuzberg as a distinct, slightly calmer counterpart to "SO 36", where most of the tour took place.
- The street became one of Berlin's most prominent experiments in redesigning public space. The model project "Begegnungszone Bergmannstraße" began in 2011 as part of Berlin's foot-traffic strategy and was followed by extensive public participation, planning studies, and a test phase.
- A useful point to note is that Bergmannstraße combines urban life and heritage in a very visible way. It is not only a redesign project, but also part of a historically recognizable Kreuzberg neighborhood with Wilhelminian-era character and long-established local street life.



Solutions

- Participants are asked to recap the whole tour in their mind and imagine they could leave one short message for city planners or politicians after this tour.
- They shall complete this sentence: "If you want community to grow, you need to..."

Support Material



After the Tour

Quick Debrief Circle

At the end of the tour, invite participants to stand or sit in a circle. Ask each person to share one short response. This helps everyone recall the experience and hear different perspectives.

You can ask e.g.:

- Please share what stayed with you from the tour.
- What is one thing you learned today that you did not know before?
- Which stop stayed in your mind the most?

Reflect on the Stops

Invite participants to look back across the tour and compare the different places they encountered.

You can ask e.g.:

- At which stop would you most like to live nearby, if any? Why?
- Was there a place where you would not want to live nearby? Why not?
- Which stop felt most welcoming or livable to you?
- Which stop felt least comfortable, and why?

Reiterate the theme

You can return to the opening question of what “community” means to the participants and what it needs in order to exist or grow. You can then invite participants to reflect on whether their answers have changed over the course of the tour.

Make the Tour Matter personally

Ask participants to think of one street or public space from their own lives. Give them one or two minutes to reflect individually, then invite them to share with a partner or the group:

- Which place did you choose?
- What works well there, and what does not?
- Does it support community, or mostly movement?
- What is one change you would make?
- Who would need to be involved to make that change happen?

Support Material



References

Cover Image by Timor Kodal from Berlin, Germany - Ton Steine Gärten, CC BY-SA 2.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=92196663>