Berlin Fact Sheet

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Berlin is the capital of Germany, located in the northeast of the country and sprawling over an extensive area of 891 km^2. With a bustling population of approximately 3.9 million residents as of 2024, Berlin stands as Germany's most populous city. Its unique geography is marked by a rich tapestry of waterways, including the iconic Spree and Havel rivers, coupled with numerous lakes that not only represent important aquatic ecosystems but also provide numerous recreational opportunities for the cities inhabitants.

URBAN WATER MANAGEMENT

Berlin's water management system is a testament to its dedication to sustainability and climate resilience. The city's historical sewer infrastructure, designed to manage stormwater through a network of underground sewers, faces the dual challenges of urban flooding during heavy rainfall and the discharge of untreated wastewater. Annually, approximately 3-4 million cubic meters of untreated water are released, impacting the health of local water bodies and posing a risk to aquatic life and water quality.

To address these issues, Berlin has embraced a multi-layered approach to water governance, underpinned by both federal and regional policies. The Wasserhaushaltsgesetz (WHG), aligning with the EU's Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, and the National Water Strategy (2024) mandate sustainable rainwater management, prioritizing infiltration to manage runoff from impervious surfaces. Complementing this, the Berlin Water Act (2005) adapts these principles to local conditions, emphasizing decentralized stormwater solutions and the disconnection of urban areas from the sewer system. The goal is to disconnect 1% of Berlin's surfaces from the sewer system annually, aiming for a significant reduction in direct runoff into the sewers.

The Berliner Wasserbetriebe (BWB), the main water management authority in the city, is at the forefront of integrating Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) into urban planning through innovative strategies like the 'Sponge City' concept, which aims to enhance the city's ability to absorb and manage rainwater naturally. These efforts are further supported by the Berlin Rainwater Agency and Berlin Centre of Competence for Water, two institutions that promote sustainable rainwater management through increasing green spaces in the city, community engagement and knowledge sharing.

NICHES IN BERLIN

- NICHES will conduct a diagnosis of the problems, constraints and opportunities of the management of stormwater events in the urban water system.
- NICHES will assess the policy and governance context enabling or hampering the implementation of NBS for the management of combined sewer overflows.
- NICHES will engage in various stakeholder exchange mechanisms to discuss sustainable, integrated urban water management strategies that align with Berlin's long-term environmental and infrastructural goals.
- NICHES will collaborate with multiple stakeholders to co-create transition pathways towards an integrated social-ecological technological urban water system.

OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED IN NICHES

We will promote interactive multi-stakeholder arenas for developing, testing and monitoring most of the strategies that will be developed in NICHES. If you want to get involved, send an email to ulf.stein@ecologic.eu.

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