Chapter 12
The Social Construction of City Nature: Exploring Temporary Uses of Open Green Space in Berlin

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12.1 Introduction

For several years, Berlin has been celebrating the so-called Day of City Nature (*Langer Tag der Stadtnatur*). Organised by the Berlin Conservation Foundation, the annual event aims at providing opportunities to experience the diversity of fauna and flora to be found in the German capital. The success of the Day of City Nature indicates that there is considerable interest for nature in the city and for its protection. As in previous years, thousands of Berliners participated in the 2010 Day of City Nature, exploring "real nature" on their way "through the metropolitan jungle" (www.langertagderstadtnatur.de; transl. JL). The relationship between the human inhabitants of Berlin and "their" nature, however, is not always as harmonious as the Day of City Nature suggests. In particular, some residential areas on the Western fringe of the city are notorious for conflicts between the social and natural worlds. Many residents of Grunewald whose gardens are ransacked by feral pigs suffer from what they regard as a menace. After a series of dangerous hog attacks, angry Berliners insistently required the animals to be shot. As a consequence, the Senate Department for Urban Development has issued a website with guidelines for encounters between humans and feral pigs (www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/forsten/wildtiere/de/wildschwein.shtml).

Different from the Berlin-wide Day of City Nature, the example of the wild boar of Grunewald demonstrates that nature does not necessarily represent a subject of harmony – but one of conflict – and that each conservation strategy, therefore, faces a fundamental problem: It is simply impossible to protect nature *as such* (in the sense of all nature and all of nature). What can be protected are only specific and concrete elements of the natural world (Hard 2001). Gerhard Hard describes the problematic nature of this dilemma:

> Wherever nature is protected, it is never nature (all nature and all of nature) (. . .) that is protected. (. . .) In this respect, all conservation strategies and all pro-nature politics always

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> and by necessity imply the destruction of nature. Orchids yes, nettles no, and if nettles, then not where orchids are to be protected – and no knotgrass under any circumstances. (. . .) In one case, hedges with trees are planted to provide shelter to specific animals; in other cases, hedges with trees are destroyed to prevent specific beasts from finding lair (Hard 2001; transl. JL).

At closer inspection, therefore, the seemingly harmonious and holistic field of (all) nature decomposes into a series of different, pluralistic, and antagonistic natures. While some of these natures are said to deserve our protection, others are represented as a menace and consequently have to be defeated. The decisive question of which part of nature is to be protected and which to be defeated, however, is never answered by nature itself, but is a question of social evaluation and political judgment.

To some extent, such a perspective runs counter to our common sense. By saying nature in everyday language, we usually refer to a somehow organic domain, which is located outside of society and therefore not negotiable. In contrast to this everyday account, it is suggested in the following that there are many different perspectives on what nature is and on what parts of nature are to be conserved or, conversely, to be disposed of. From the point of view of this chapter, nature is not given *as such* but is regarded, imagined, or constructed differently in different times and places. By taking up such a viewpoint, the authors follow a cultural-historical perspective, which is related to a constructionist epistemology in a broader sense. While such an epistemology has had considerable impact on the mainstream of Anglo-American cultural geography in the past two decades (for the debate on nature-society relations see, e.g. Castree and Braun 1998; Demeritt 2002; Whatmore 2005), constructionist arguments are hardly made productive in the field of German-speaking urban ecology.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to answer three questions: What is meant by the "social constitution of nature"? What do we see when we look at city nature from a constructionist point of view? What are the challenges posed by a constructionist viewpoint for urban ecology? In order to answer these questions, we will proceed in three steps. First, we will briefly outline the theoretical background of the constructionist perspective. In the second step, we aim to empirically show that there is not only *one* city nature. Presenting preliminary results from an ongoing research project on temporary uses of open green space in the city of Berlin, we will identify a number of everyday representations of nature which surface in the arguments and conflicts about the question of how urban space should be used. Finally, we discuss the challenges of a constructionist perspective for the field of urban ecology.

12.2 Nature from a Constructionist Perspective

In an early paper on "constructed natures", geographer Michael Flitner writes

> All [theoretical] perspectives which draw upon the construction of nature share the opinion that the access to the dominion of what is commonly regarded as nature (in contrast to culture or society) is problematic or precarious. Every perception, thought, expression, or

> action in relation to nature (. . .) is said to be mediated, is said to be based on a construction. Formulated pointedly in the words of [Donna] Haraway (1992: 296): "Nature cannot exist prior to its construction" (Flitner 1998; transl. JL).

In the course of his paper, Flitner distinguishes four approaches which act on the assumption that nature is constructed (ibid.). We will not elaborate on these approaches in detail, but we will rather work out, by means of a simplification to heuristic ends, the basic theoretical assumptions of constructionist social theory.

Generally speaking, social constructionism claims that "for society, the world exists only in so far as it has been ascribed a specific meaning by society on the basis of the latter's symbolic orders (. . .)" (Reckwitz 2000). Put differently, reality is not regarded as pre-given, i.e. given independently from social structures or agency, but as constituted by signifying practices, which in turn are based on socially and culturally specific symbolic orders. What is experienced as reality is thus inevitably shaped by the way it is constituted in processes of sense making by social actors and interpreted by them according to their worldviews.

Having said that, constructionist arguments do not apply solely to the individual or subjective level in the sense of everybody constructing their own worlds. On the contrary, they are especially valid for the inter-subjective level of social life, i.e. for socially shared meanings and for culturally specific patterns of interpreting and experiencing reality that we have learned in the course of our lives and that we usually do not put in question but rather take for granted. In light of the above discussion, the aim of a constructionist analysis is to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and to excavate the symbolic orders, interpretive schemes, semantics, and cultural models by which reality is constituted by social groups and individuals (e.g. Reckwitz 2000; Eickelpasch 1997).

Coming back to the social construction of nature more specifically, it can be argued that, like reality, nature is not simply given, but is powerfully shaped by the human imagination. It has to be made sense of, and "is unavoidably filtered through the categories, technologies, and conventions of human *representation* (. . .)" (Whatmore 2005). Our representations of nature do not mirror an objective or universally valid knowledge about the role, function, or "essence" of nature but are, on the contrary, dependent on culture-specific knowledge systems. These knowledge systems are changing over time because they are subject to a certain form of zeitgeist. They also vary, however, at a given time since "there are many incompatible ways of seeing the same natural phenomenon, event, or environment" (Whatmore 2005).

From the perspective of social constructivism, nature "is (. . .) therefore best treated as a part of culture" (ibid.). What we know from the Alps, for example, are first and foremost our cultural representations of the Alps as they have been produced in the filtering process of our imagination. This filtering process has been described as a "way of seeing" the natural world that is culturally specific and contingent, but never neutral (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Berger 1972). We see in the Alps what we have learned to see. While this applies to all people, not all people see the same: Mountain farmers will have very different representations of the pastures they cultivate as the tourists who perceive the pastures as "sunny

Fig. 12.1 Photographic representation of the Alps (photography: Katharina Winter). In line with the visual character of tourist experiences, the tourist sector has institutionalised a certain 'way of seeing' the Alps as a natural environment. While there are many different ways of picturing mountain sceneries, both marketing institutions (like travel agencies or tour companies) and tourists themselves often represent the Alps as a fresh and healthy space by conveying imaginations of unspoiled remoteness ready for outdoor activities

meadows" they recognize from Luis-Trenker movies, Heidi books, or travel guides (Schlottmann 2006; see Fig. 12.1).

According to the Canadian landscape architect Alex Wilson, our representations of the natural world are instrumental in constituting our sense of what nature is like:

> Our experience of the natural world – whether touring the Canadian Rockies, watching an animal show on TV, or working in our gardens – is always mediated. It is always shaped by rhetorical constructs like photography, industry, advertising, and aesthetics, as well as by institutions like religion, tourism, and education (Wilson 1992).

Once the knowledge from these various sources has been transformed into stable patterns of representation, we usually assume that our conventional habit to see a specific segment of reality (say a sunny meadow) as nature is objectively correct and "true to life". We forget that we operate within a highly contingent, culturally specific system of knowledge, constantly objectifying our representations. The aim of the constructionist perspective is to render visible this forgetfulness. Its mission is to reconstruct the hidden cultural filters that serve to produce or construct certain representations of nature and thus to unravel the cultural and social contents of the natural world.

12.3 Representations of City Nature in Temporary Uses of Open Green Space

The following section aims at exploring everyday representations of city nature as they play a role in temporary uses of urban open green space. In our research, the term "open green space" is not used in a definite but in a qualifying sense. The first

adjective (*open*) conveys two different notions of openness. On the one hand, we are interested in urban areas which are free from buildings or massive material infrastructure; on the other hand, the areas included in our research are open in the sense that they provide possibility spaces for the development of temporary uses. The term of temporary (or interim) uses refers to specific forms of non-permanent uses of urban land. In the literature on temporary use, the users are often characterized by a high degree of initiative and a low degree of financial capital, which leads to specific social and political constellations (SenStadt 2007; Schlegelmilch 2009; Oswalt 2002). There are various reasons why urban spaces are temporarily used (e.g. Arlt 2006; SenStadt 2007). Unresolved questions of ownership often pave the way for a relatively unproblematic appropriation of land. Sometimes it is also the lack of more lucrative investment alternatives which allows for uses that have otherwise fewer opportunities to exist in urban areas. Typical forms of temporary uses involve creative projects, social initiatives, catering services, or community gardens.

Forms of urban *green* spaces range from English lawns, French gardens, allotment gardens, green buffers, to the fallow vegetation of brown fields (for a more elaborate systematic of urban green, see Kowarik 1992). In all of these green spaces, however, the everyday assessment of nature by different interest groups is as diverse as it is riddled with conflict. In the case of temporary uses, stakeholders include users, urban decision-makers, landowners, and adjacent residents. The resources of the stakeholders vary greatly both in economic terms and in their power in the decision-making process. It is by illuminating the reasoning of the stakeholders in the negotiation of a given use of available land and on the importance of nature in particular that we intend to identify different understandings of nature.

Our research examines temporary uses of three open green spaces in Berlin which differ in the stage of their development. The first example, the intercultural community garden *Garten der Poesie* (Garden of Poetry), is still in the making. Community gardens in cities are jointly and voluntarily operated by a group of people. In general, public access is provided which makes community gardens very different from urban allotments (Haidle and Rosol 2005; Müller 2009). Our second example, the *Tentstation*, is an urban campsite on the premises of a former outdoor swimming pool. Initiated more than five years ago, this popular form of use is currently threatened by the development of a spa. The third example is the *Wagendorf Lohmühle* (trailer village Lohmühle), a year-round inhabited "village" of 19 caravans and converted trucks which was founded almost 20 years ago at an open green space on the former "death strip" of the Berlin Wall. The inhabitants of the trailer village have a temporarily limited use agreement with the city of Berlin, who owns the space.

In order to unravel the representations of nature embedded in the development of the case studies, qualitative methods were used. Apart from participant observation, we conducted semi-structured narrative interviews with all relevant stakeholders like initiators, users, urban decision-makers, investors, and residents. Following an initial classification, the ways of reasoning identified in the interviews can be

assigned to three different representations of nature: useful nature, beautiful nature, and sensitive nature.

12.3.1 Useful Nature

Nature in urban areas is often evaluated according to the benefits it provides. Not intrinsic values, but questions about concrete benefits for the urban society are put forward as arguments for the existence and maintenance of nature. In our interviews, differing understandings of a reasonable use of nature have been articulated. With regard to the future community garden, for example, the use of land as an orchard with the concomitant possibility of harvesting is assessed as appropriate and beautiful by the initiators, while use as dog run is not. In this respect, one of the initiators dislikes the idea that the apples of the orchard are "misused" by dog owners:

> But, the apples are sometimes used by the dog owners to train their dogs. They throw them... so it's not, speaking of nature, how nature is used appropriately and in the end makes people happy (interview *Garten der Poesie* I; transl. KW).

The interpretation of nature as useful nature thus leads to contrasting ideas of how to use nature in an appropriate manner. For the community gardeners and their supporters, it is important that the garden is beneficial and recreational for as many people as possible and that it produces food. Regarding food production in urban community gardens, Marit Rosol and Ella Haidle speak of the "countryside in the city" (Haidle and Rosol 2005; transl. KW). This expression can be interpreted, on the one hand, to allude to the idea of a gradual dissolution of the urban-rural dichotomy, in which the urban and the rural are combined in the community garden. On the other hand, speaking of the countryside in the city reinforces the dichotomy of city and countryside, and city and nature. This ambivalent relationship can also be found in the arguments of the initiators of the campsite:

> It is nice this work outside. (...) We are all from small towns, you know? This way you get some sort of small-town feeling – nature in the city – and memories of childhood come to your mind (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW).

By speaking of "nature" and calling it "to be outside", the initiators of the campsite invest the area with memories of their childhood, connecting it to ideas of small-town living.

A representation of nature as useful is also found in arguments to increase the attractiveness of certain parts of the city by means of nature. Such an idea is articulated, for instance, in the case of the community garden, which has been considered in most of the related interviews as upgrading a neglected, rundown area. On the one hand, gardening interventions can be regarded as measures to qualitatively improve an area, leading to greater benefit for the population. On the other hand, gardening activities and their material outcome – flower beds, herb

gardens, vegetable patches, etc. – replace what is regarded by the gardeners and other stakeholders as improper use (i.e. use as a dog run or as an area vandalized by young people) or no use at all. In this sense, the material practices of community gardening can be said to produce a certain degree of social control.

In their study on community gardens, Haidle and Rosol (2005) concluded that the evaluation of existing green as of poor quality or the criticism of unused land are two of the reasons why community gardens are implemented. Such gardens are "useful" in economic terms, not only for the urban institutions in charge of the plots but also for the property management of the adjacent residential buildings. By means of community gardening, the areas are improved by the voluntary commitment of the users, but mostly without monetary investment by the urban institutions or the owners.

Another dimension of useful nature comes to the fore in the case of the *Tentstation*. The success of this urban campground is based, amongst other things, on the atmosphere of the site. It has been argued that nature is an important part of that atmosphere (e.g. Plarre 2008; Heid 2009). According to the interim users, the atmosphere of the reused site resonates with a form of nature, which is preferably left unaltered. Nature is regarded here as functional, self-acting, and therefore practically useful for the campground:

> At the same time, nature is really practical somehow. It grows on its own. And, it would be more of a hassle to remove the bushes here (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW).
>
> We as temporary users, we don't maintain the area too much. Because we think: after us the demolition. (. . .) Because of working with lots of broken or rarely painted stuff, then somehow nature makes it beautiful. But, it was never a conscious decision. It was kind of a convenient decision to speak out for nature (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW).

A more pragmatic but still beneficial representation of nature surfaces in arguments of the people living in the trailer village. According to one of the inhabitants, existing nature has been shaped by the people who live there. The plants are watered only if there is time to water them, and the vegetation is influenced by the inhabitants who brought certain plants and not others:

> And this is the first tree that stood here, that one over there. And it is only there because a bird dropped a seed there and the guy who lived where the little tree grew always put his coffee brewing on it, quasi as a kind of speed-composter. (. . .) And that is why it could grow (interview *Lohmühle* I; transl. KW).

12.3.2 Beautiful Nature

Some arguments already mentioned entail a further representation of nature. According to one of the interim users of the community garden, "it is somehow beautiful, such an orchard in the city" (interview *Garten der Poesie* I; transl. KW). Likewise, the arguments of the temporary users of the *Tentstation* convey a representation of a beautiful nature when the wild growing bushes are said to be

appreciated by the users and when the derelict site of the *Tentstation* is "somehow made more beautiful" by nature (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW). What is put forward here is the idea of a beautiful nature in the sense of an aesthetic or pleasant nature. In a study on the aesthetic perception of urban open spaces, Wulf Tessin (2008) argues that the terms "beautiful" and "green" are the two most frequently used concepts in relation to open spaces. In the arguments brought up in our interviews, at least two understandings of beautiful nature can be differentiated. On the one hand, there is the idea of a "wild" nature; on the other hand, there is an understanding of gardeners' green as beautiful nature.

The appreciation of "wild" nature as beautiful figures, for instance, in the statement of one of the initiators of the *Tentstation*:

> But, we even think it's beautiful (. . .) especially these bushes here between the steps, which break up the concrete slabs, and all the time, we have to renew these steps with cement. Or right here at the rim of the pool, we always let the plants grow. Now you can see that the entire rim of the pool is falling off (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW).

Apart from the pragmatic view of nature already discussed, an understanding of self-acting nature as beautiful can be identified. This relates to a nature that has an autonomous character and grows by itself, without human intervention (for the notion of wilderness, see Kirchhoff and Trepl 2009; Trepl 1998; Rink 2005). This "wild" nature is also present in the following passage, where one of the initiators of the *Tentstation* describes her first impression of the site:

> It was something like love at first sight. And nature has played a major role. So just this enchanted place, that one can imagine being in Sleeping Beauty, which is like in a hundred years of slumber. And it's just the thing that you just find it a nice site. (. . .) and that is that green here. . . (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW).

The idea of uncontrolled growth, however, is not always appreciated as "beautiful" or desirable. The extent to which wilderness in urban areas is assessed as good and acceptable differs from context to context. A site that is largely left to itself, for instance, can either be described as "beautiful" or as "neglected" (Tessin 2008; Hannig 2006). In the case of the campsite, such unaltered nature is welcomed by the temporary users. Regarding the area of the future community garden, in contrast, the lack of gardening and maintenance is interpreted as a symbol of neglect. Therefore, its nature is not regarded as "beautiful", but "shabby":

> The former beautiful park that was created here in connection with this housing estate is simply run-down, as you can see. It is no longer used by the neighbours. They pretty miss it. And it is shabby. The dogs, they dig here, they poo here. Last year, there wasn't any grass in the whole area. There have been branches pulled down, you see. There are dead trees; I mean the trees are not maintained anymore and therefore they die or break apart (interview *Garten der Poesie* I; transl. KW).

One of the most fundamental arguments for the establishment of the community garden is to improve a neglected area by means of gardening. In so doing, reference is made to the former "beautiful" park that the community garden is meant to replace.

The arguments of a gardened nature as "beautiful" nature convey a specific idea of the relationship between cities and nature. This understanding is in line with a conception of nature which regards the gardeners' green as mastery of the "wild" nature (Tessin 2008). The reasoning with the "domesticated elements of nature" (Chilla 2004) is based on a dichotomous view of the city-nature relationship. The undomesticated nature is regarded as external to the city. Nature within the urban area is considered as desirable only when it is subject to gardening or horticultural activities.

12.3.3 Sensitive Nature

Arguments concerning the use of open green space comprise a further representation of nature – a representation that regards the city nature as sensitive. As in the case of beautiful nature, two understandings can be differentiated. On the one hand, urban nature is imagined as needy; on the other hand, urban nature is imagined as a resource that needs protection. In the representation of a needy and therefore sensitive city nature, the evaluation of the gardeners' green as aesthetic can be interpreted in the light of a dichotomous understanding of city and nature. This nature in the city is regarded merely as a substitute (Tessin 2008), since according to the dichotomous understanding, "true" nature can only be found outside the city. Nature is seen as threatened by the urbane. The urban gardeners' green is thus assigned a symbolic, restorative function.

The idea of city nature as a means of restoration can be found in one of the interviews about the *Garten der Poesie*, where one of the initiators speaks about the "awakening moment" which led to the idea of implementing the community garden:

> It was really like a kind of awakening moment. I have seen this pond there behind the bushes and it was terribly run-down. There was no water in it and all sorts of rubbish. So I honestly said to the pond: I will help you. I felt so sorry for it. Like disgraced beauty, which indeed plays an important role in the city. That when something is already destroyed people still kick it and destroy it even more and throw garbage and stuff on it. (. . .) So it was like my vow. I said I'll help you. And then I thought of a way to help it (interview *Garten der Poesie* III; transl. KW).

Also on a later date, when there were first activities on the site (documented on the website of the *Garten der Poesie* www.rixdorfgarten.de), the depiction of a 'proper' handling of the fruit trees reveals a conservationist idea: "The 'children of the garden' have adopted the devastated fruit trees. We have created protective covers from dead wood, 'help to self-help' – so the children cannot climb up to take off unripe fruit and throw it" (www.rixdorfgarten.de; transl. KW).

In the section on useful nature, it has already been mentioned that the present shape of nature in the trailer village is interpreted as resulting from interventions (or non-interventions) of the residents. In the basic decision to treat soil and vegetation ecologically as documented in the philosophy of the trailer village (www.lohmuehle.de),

one can also recognize a sensitive understanding of nature: "Every stone, every insect, every plant, every animal, and every person is equal and has its task" (ibid.; transl. KW). Moreover, the way of life of the inhabitants of the trailer village speaks of a resource-sparing handling of nature. Resource awareness is expressed, for instance, in their decision to live "off the grid", i.e. without connection to water and electricity networks. The consequences of this decision are described by one of the residents as follows:

> Everything I need I have to bring in here. And I also have to carry it away again. (. . .) We collect our own energy. I have to pay attention in wintertime (. . .) do I have enough energy, how is the weather going to be the next three days (interview *Lohmühle* I; transl. KW)?

According to a nearby resident, it was the visibility of this resource-conscious way of life that led to a greater acceptance of the trailer village by the neighbourhood, which had been rather sceptical of the project in the beginning (interview *Lohmühle* IV).

For the initiators of the urban campsite, it is ". . . somehow self-evident that we keep it all like that and that we want to keep the fox here. This is somehow logical, because it was here before us and why should we chase it away" (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW). The idea of resource conservation can also be found in their sustainability-oriented concept of interim use. Not only is the temporality of the project put forward by the users of the *Tentstation* as a reason for low financial input into the maintenance of the green and the essential construction work; the resource-efficient use of building materials is also connected to the creation of the special atmosphere of the site. In the case of the *Tentstation*, environmental resources are linked to monetary resources:

> Since we have a used site here, it just fits to work with things that already have a history. The windowpanes, for example, are from *Sparkasse Ulm* [a savings bank in a city in the South of Germany]. And all the boards, we got them from somewhere. And those boards down in the pool, they are from the former grandstand. Those were the old benches. Of course, it is all right with us to save resources, for the environment, but also for monetary resources. And then, of course, the style fits (interview *Tentstation* I; transl. KW).

Another aspect of a sensitive, resource-oriented argument is reflected in the awareness of the urban climate function of green areas. As mentioned above, green space can be appraised in many different ways. The inhabitants of the trailer village define their place as green space, considered to be significant for the urban climate:

> What I always experience when I come home at night (. . .) is that the temperature here is three degrees lower than in those parts of the city that are covered with buildings. And that's very important for the urban climate and these green spaces do have a very significant influence on it (interview *Lohmühle* I; transl. KW).

In the justifications of a view of nature as sensitive, Annemarie Nagel and Ulrich Eisel have identified two different modes of reasoning, which they describe as anthropocentric and biocentric (Nagel and Eisel 2003). Anthropocentric lines of argumentation are based on human demands and interests, such as the protection of resources for economic reasons, as in the case of *Tentstation*, or of urban climate in

order to increase human wellbeing, as in the case of the *Lohmühle* project. Biocentric arguments, in contrast, are based on intrinsic values of nature. They can be found, for example, in the ecological way of life and in the ecological values of the inhabitants of the trailer village.

12.4 Conclusion

Our research on different representations of city nature follows the constructionist argument that nature, in the context of temporary use of open green space, does not exist per se but is imagined differently in different contexts. In our case studies, three different conceptualizations of urban nature have come to the fore. Concepts of a *useful nature* revolve around the issue of practical benefits of certain open green spaces for the city and its inhabitants. Concepts of a *beautiful nature* oscillate between a gardened and a wild, untamed urban nature. Concepts of a *sensitive nature* are located between a needy, protection-worthy nature on the one hand and the imagination of urban nature as a natural resource on the other hand. Although these representations often go unnoticed, they play a crucial role in the decisions about how city space is used. This is due to the fact that the way city nature is treated largely depends on how it is perceived and assessed (Hard 2003). As Ludwig Trepl (1992) has argued, people behave differently in an environment that they regard as a vulnerable organic system than in an environment they consider as staunch scenery of everyday action which is green only by accident.

What does our analysis of different representations of nature imply for the field of urban ecology? In what ways is urban ecology challenged by the perspective of socially constructed nature? A review of the literature reveals that urban ecologists tend to refer to the importance of preserving city nature by "ecological" or "sustainable" strategies of urban development, calling for an "environmentally sound urban development" or for "more nature in the city" (see, e.g. Breuste 1999). This tendency can be explained by the ambivalent character of urban ecology which represents both a scholarly science and an engaged practice of preservation (Sukopp and Wittig 1998). From a constructionist perspective, however, calls to preserve nature provoke a number of questions. If nature is not given as such, it cannot be protected as a whole but only in parts. Which parts are protected – and which are not – is decided in accordance with underlying valuations and preferences. The challenge that follows from a constructionist perspective for urban ecology is to make explicit these premises and to take seriously the representations of nature that inform scientific research. What is constructed as nature from a scholarly point of view? What is included in academic representations of nature and what is excluded? What is to be protected and what is to be defeated? Last but not the least, what are the conflicts that arise from the fact that some representations of nature are more powerful than others?

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