

To Have and To Need – An open letter about the planned Berlin City Tax

Berlin, April 19, 2013

Dear Klaus Wowereit,¹

Berlin is planning, like many other cities, to also introduce the so-called City Tax: the taxation of private accommodation at 5% of the hotel prices. Three quarters of all tourists say they come to the city for the cultural life. Since the idea of the Berlin City Tax was first proposed, the opinion has been voiced that the majority of proceeds from the City Tax, a double-digit million sum, should be used for the cultural sector, and in particular the dramatically under-financed independent scene². The argument goes that it is the free cultural producers, the independent project spaces and venues, which contribute significantly to Berlin's image as a diverse and innovative centre for art and culture.

Politicians from the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Green Party and the Left have spoken out in favour of using the proposed City Tax to finance culture in Berlin. The bill is currently being debated in the Senate. The decision about where the additional tax revenues can be directed – taxes cannot be imposed for specific purposes – is made by the Berlin House of Representatives, and as such is a topic for political decision-making.

The 10-point programme of the Independent Scene Coalition³, published at the end of last year, demands 50% of the City Tax revenue for “an appropriate and sustained policy of support for freelance artists and cultural producers”, and provides a concept for the allocation of the additional revenue.⁴ The paper includes, among other points, a new project and production fund for the independent art, music and theatre scenes, regulated exhibition fees and the maintenance of local cultural support in the city districts.

Although the introduction of the City Tax was announced for January 1, 2013, in the coalition agreement between the SPD and the CDU⁵, and has only recently been postponed until 2014 at the earliest, the Senate Chancellery – Cultural Affairs has neither actively nor noticeably tackled the issue, nor has it presented a concept on how to make use of the expected revenue. The cultural administration has however started a dialogue with representatives of the Independent Scene Coalition and the Rat für die Künste⁶.

WE NOTE:

– The production of art is a community-oriented activity. Art continually describes and investigates social processes,

critically reflecting upon them and developing experimental extrapolations in new and varying ways. Contemporary art produces and communicates knowledge; it creates spaces in which social acts can be experienced as values. Society achieves an awareness of itself and a consciousness through that which is formed in art. This is made possible by the basic freedom from being bound to a specific goal or intention. Beginning with this understanding of the nature of art, we would like to talk about the production of art and its public funding.

– The activities of cultural producers are still celebrated as assets and investments in the future of the post-industrial city. The promises of success surrounding the new economy of creativity, however, conceal a reality of desolate work and living standards. We reject demands to provide the culturalisation of the economy (for example in the guise of deregulating working conditions) with a veneer of artistic glamour – this would entail working towards the economisation of culture, and the first victim of that process is art itself. Whoever reduces art to its usability, standards of efficiency and market compatibility is denying the essential meaning of art and culture in a heterogeneous, open and democratic society.⁷



1 The open letter was sent to Mayor of Berlin and Senator for Culture Klaus Wowereit as well as State Secretary for Culture André Schmitz on April 19, and was published in full length in the daily newspaper *taz* on April 20, 2013.

2 The term “independent scene” refers to all freelance artists, groups, initiatives and institutions run by free agents in the fields of architecture, visual art, film, literature, music, new media, dance and theatre.

3 The Independent Scene Coalition is an association of independent artistic initiatives, institutions and professional artists from all media. www.berlinvisit.org

4 Cf. Independent Scene Coalition – The Future of the Independ-

ent Scene: 10 points for a new cultural policy, Berlin 2012. see: koalitionfszb.bplaced.net/wordpress/?p=459

5 Cf. Berlin Perspectives for a Strong Economy, Good Work and Social Cohesion. Coalition Agreement between SPD and CDU for the legislative period 2011–2016, SPD Regional Association Berlin and CDU Regional Association Berlin (ed.), Berlin 2011, p. 42. www.spd-berlin.de/positionen/koalitionsvereinbarung-2011-2016/

6 The Rat für die Künste (Berlin Council for the Arts) is an elected, independent commission which represents culture in Berlin. Members of the council are currently 24 people, most of whom represent established Berlin cultural institutions, festivals and associations. www.rat-fuer-die-kuenste.de

– It is well known by now that rents in Berlin's central districts are becoming increasingly unaffordable. Studio and rehearsal spaces are vanishing, and professional artistic work is largely a matter of self-exploitation. The imbalance in the existing funding policies to the disadvantage of freelance artists, as well as smaller institutions and initiatives, can no longer be tolerated. The independent scene is self-determined and self-organised to a remarkable degree, but it does need the perspective of stable frameworks for the production of art. The long-term improvement of these conditions cannot be accomplished via prestige projects and award ceremonies, but only through a differentiated structural funding system, improving on existing instruments and complementing them with appropriate grants and funds (research, production, work spaces, etc.) as well as regulated fees.

– We as artists, cultural producers and agents absolutely do not want to become dependent on the smooth functioning of the Berlin tourist industry. We do not want more tourism in order to live better from the taxation of private stays in hotels! However, we are in favour of a claim on revenues from the City Tax, because the anticipated additional revenues make the argument irrelevant that Berlin is too poor to be able to significantly raise cultural funding in the foreseeable future. The binding allocation of these revenues for culture must be an instrument to finance equality between institutional and independent culture in the Senate's cultural policies.⁸ This goal must be in mind when it comes to talks between representatives of the city's cultural administration and parties from the independent and institutional scenes. These talks should be transparent, and any results should be made available for public discussion.

WE DEMAND:

– 100% of the proceeds from the City Tax for freelance cultural producers, project spaces and theatrical venues, as well as for struggling art and cultural institutions.

– That the Senator for Culture takes a publicly visible stance in the debate on the use of the planned City Tax for the cultural sector, based on a concept which is to be developed together with, and on an equal footing with, representatives of the institutional and independent scenes.

– The implementation of the statement made in the coalition agreement between the governing parties that they wish to increase support for independent cultural production and to improve its structural framework⁹ in concrete, active political action: independent of if and when the City Tax does eventually become reality.

– A new, qualified and sustainable cultural policy which recognises the reality and social relevance of a self-organised artistic practice which has grown out of the specific historical conditions and free spaces to be found in Berlin.

First signatories:

Petrov Ahner, Dorothee Albrecht, Andreas Altenhof, Mario Asef, Markus Bader, Sandra Bartoli, Stéphane Bauer, Ute Meta Bauer, Leonie Baumann, Silvia Beck, Jochen Becker, Matthias Beckmann, Wibke Behrens, Gabi Beier, Daniel Belasco Rodgers, Chris Benedict, Ursula Maria Berzborn, Christoff Bleidt, Ellen Blumenstein,

Monica Bonvicini, Laurence Bonvin, Shannon Bool, Daniela Brahm, Anna Bromley, Thomas Bruns, Sabeth Buchmann, Marcel Bühler, Matthew Burbidge, Libia Castro, Filipa César, Michael Clegg, Martin Conrads, Dellbrügge & de Moll, Diedrich Diederichsen, Ursula Döbereiner, Helmut Draxler, Christoph Dreher, Birgit Effinger, Ekkehard Ehlers, Matthias Einhoff, Ulrich Ernitz, Lou Favorite, Silvia Fehrmann, Tatjana Fell, Ulrike Feser, Jesko Fezer, Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani, Micz Flor, Rike Frank, Anselm Franke, Nikolai Franke, Joerg Franzbecker, Roland Fuhrmann, Peter Funken, Kristoffer Gansing, Henryk Gericke, Maurus Gmür, Cristina Gómez Barrio, Erik Göngrich, Pierre Granoux, Raphaël Grisey, Annett Gröschner, Sönke Hallmann, Gerd Hartmann, Michael Hauffen, Frauke Havemann, Hans Hemmert, Vanessa Henn, Naomi Hennig, Tobias Hering, Pablo Hermann, Carina Herring, Mathias Heyden, Paula Marie Hildebrandt, Tom Holert, Annette Hollywood, Ralf Homann, Laura Horelli, Gabriele Horn, Philip Horst, Gregor Hotz, Markus Huber, Dominique Hurth, Katharina Jedermann, Karl Heinz Jeron, Ela Kagel, Kerstin Karge, Karin Kasböck, Anne Kersten, Thomas Kilpper, Julian Klein, Christophe Knoch, Alexander Koch, Andreas Koch, Doris Koch, Dorothea Kolland, Nina Korolewski, Bernhard Kotowski, Folke Köbberling, Florian Köhl, Eva Könnemann, Hannah Kruse, Stefan Kruskemper, Ulrike Kuschel, Christine Lang, Pia Lanzinger, Heimo Lattner, Julia Lazarus, Ines Lechleitner, Achim Lengerer, Regina Liedtke, Silvan Linden, Kai Lorenz, Nadine Lorenz, Cornelia Lund, Holger Lund, Annette Maechtel, Moritz Majce, Antje Majewski, Yutaka Makino, Sandra Manhartseder, Séverine Marguin, Wolfgang Mayer, Diana McCarty, Angela Melitopoulos, Doreen Mende, Nikolaus Merck, Karolin Meunier, Herbert Mondry, Tina Müller, Wolfgang Müller, Ute Müller-Tischler, Alice Münch, Anh-Linh Ngo, Frank Oberhäußer, Ólafur Ólafsson, Sonja Ostermann, Marie-josé Ourtilane, Kirsten Palz, Anne Passow, Andrea Pichl, Katrin Plavcak, Judith Raum, Karin Rebbert, Axel Daniel Reinert, Thomas Rentmeister, Cornelia Renz, Angelika Richter, Christian Römer, Stefan Römer, Constanze Ruhm, Barbara Rüth, Harry Sachs, Susanne Sachsse, Natascha Sadr Haghghighian, Jochen Sandig, Jan Sauerwald, Ines Schaber, Bernd Scherer, Birgit Schlieps, Les Schließer, Martin G. Schmid, Florian Schmidt, Marc Schmolling, Detlev Schneider, Meggie Schneider, Frieder Schnock, Nadja Schöllhammer, Pit Schultz, Michael Schultze, Max Schumacher, Maya Schweizer, Marcel Schwierin, Judith Siegmund, Heidi Sill, Marina Sorbello, Heinz Stahlhut, Raimar Stange, Anita Stöhr Weber, Christoph Tannert, Signe Theill, Mina Tinaburri, Stella Veciana, Vlado Velko, Jan Verwoert, Friedrich von Borries, Katja von Helldorff, Moritz von Rappard, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Penelope Wehrii, Ute Weiss Leder, Jutta Weitz, Antje Weitzel, Christina Werner, Franziska Werner, Anke Westermann, Maya Weyermann, Barbara Wille, Simone Willeit, Susanne Winterling, Marc Wohlrabe, Maik Wolf, Thomas Wulffen, Florian Wüst, Miya Yoshida, Simone Zaugg, Florian Zeyfang, Lena Ziese, Inga Zimprich, Moira Zoitl.

ALL those who wish to support this open letter are invited to sign here:

www.habenundbrauchen.kuenstler-petition.de

To Have and To Need (Haben und Brauchen) seeks to advocate in the field of art as well as in art's neighboring occupational fields a platform for discussion and action. The aim is to establish a consciousness and self-concept concerning what distinguishes the forms of artistic production and articulation that have unfolded in Berlin during recent decades and how these forms can be preserved and further developed.

www.habenundbrauchen.de

Contact:

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⁷ Cf. To Have and To Need – Manifesto, Berlin 2012. www.habenundbrauchen.de

⁸ The City Tax is only one possibility to ensure the future financing of equality between institutional and independent culture. If the Berlin cultural budget can already deal with impending pay raises, for

instance, in the opera trust, then the same must apply to funding for the independent scene.

⁹ Cf. Berlin Perspectives for a Strong Economy, Good Work and Social Cohesion, p.92.