

TRANSCRIPTION PODCAST SIEMENSSTADT CALLING #5

- SIEMENSSTADT AS A LOCATION FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION -

Steffen Krach

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Sarah Tietze

Welcome to Siemensstadt Calling, the Siemensstadt Podcast. A podcast for everyone who is interested in cities of the future, in smart technologies, in the urban environment, in sustainable urban development, and for anyone who is looking forward to the development of Siemensstadt as a place of the future. I am your host, Sarah Tietze, and together with the general manager of Siemensstadt, Stefan Kögl, and other guests, we will introduce you to the background of the Future Place Siemensstadt. Enjoy! In today's episode, we take a look at Siemensstadt as a place for science. We want to find out how important education, research and innovation are for a place of the future. What makes Berlin special as a location for science and what strengths and potential Siemensstadt has in this area. For this, I couldn't wish for better interviewees than Steffen Krach, Berlin's State Secretary for Science, and Stefan Kögl, the director of Siemensstadt. Steffen Krach has been the face of Brain City Berlin for many years. And even though there is a lot of complaining about Berlin as a science location, everyone agrees. There is nothing to complain about. Berlin's appeal as a research and university location is internationally unrivalled. Steffen, Stefan, it's great to have you both here. I look forward to talking with you.

Steffen Krach

Hello!

Stefan Kögl

Hello Sarah.

Sarah Tietze

Steffen, as I just said, Berlin now has a top reputation as a location for science. Berlin has universities of excellence, 200,000 students, and it has also become "the place to be" for cutting-edge research. What makes the Brain City so special?

Steffen Krach

So, we can actually be really pleased that this is now the case. Because it wasn't always like this. There were years in 2003, 2004 and 2005 when we had to make savings due to a lack of funds, and we were actually ridiculed throughout Germany. And that has changed completely in the last ten years in particular. And everybody likes to come to Berlin. The scientists like to come to Berlin, and not just from Germany, but internationally. Berlin is now really a hotspot for science and new institutions are coming here to the city. And that is simply a wonderful development that we can also be really proud of, that the institution in particular can be proud of. And of course all the scientists who work here, and also the employees who work at the universities, at the Charité, at the research institutions, at the universities of applied sciences. This is a joint effort that has developed in recent years. And that is a sensational development. And this is now also reflected in the results. Of course, this has an impact on the economic development of a city, on the social development of a city, and especially now, in this phase of the Corona crisis, it shows how important science is. We have constant advice, also from the scientific community. So it's really nice to see how this has developed.

Sarah Tietze

You said ten years ago the switch flipped, what is the reason for that, who flipped it?

Steffen Krach

We have actually, yes, really invested in science and research. We have also seen this as a priority of the Senate. We have also - and this is, I think, quite central - made a real effort to bring new institutions here to the city. Something like the Berlin Institute for Health Research. It's the first time the federal government has invested in a university hospital. This is now becoming the third pillar of the Charité. And this has to do with translation and also real collaboration between health and business. And these are simply unique things that we have fought for and strived for over some time. And then it also led to the federal government saying: Okay, we'll take Berlin as the place where we try out a model like this. That is not a matter of course. And of course, the entire development is also related to the fact that we have strengthened the universities. We said: Okay, we don't necessarily want the universities here in Berlin to compete against each other, but to see themselves as one science location.

Steffen Krach

And that's why the three universities decided, for example, to join forces with the Charité in the Excellence Strategy with the Berlin University Alliance.

Ten years ago, no one would have thought it possible. That Humboldt University, Freie Universität, Technische Universität and then Charité would enter such a competition together. This has unleashed an incredible dynamic. This has also led, for example, to a university like Oxford saying that it is the best university in the world. In every ranking they are in first or second place - that they have said: Okay, we want to cooperate with this entire location. They could have cooperated with any location in the world. But they chose Berlin and said: Okay, we want to cooperate with the entire location and not with a single institution, because with these three large universities, with the Charité, they basically cover every field of science, have excellent scientists in every field of science, and that makes it incredibly attractive for cooperation partners.

Sarah Tietze

Yes, really exciting. Stefan, these excellent universities, these internationally renowned research institutions, the many talents that Steffen just mentioned, are these also important factors for the Siemensstadt of the future?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, of course. That was one of the most central reasons for the existence of the Siemensstadt 2.0 project in the first place. So to take up the idea or the development of which Steffen Krach spoke. Berlin is of course the place where Siemens was founded, that's clear, and they think very long-term and were certainly - especially before the fall of the Berlin Wall - not yet so much in the foreground in terms of development. Although Berlin is still Siemens' largest production location - all in all, together with Siemens Energy today, one has to mention - with a total of 11,000 employees. But due to developments in Berlin in recent years, especially in terms of talent one must add, which is attracted by such scientific developments, it has become particularly attractive, also in terms of focus. And to find this combination now, to decide in favour of Berlin, to develop such a future campus here, certainly meant keeping existing production here. So to establish yourself in an existing environment or to develop further and to combine that with new developments in terms of research, technologies, etc., is the best prerequisite you can have. And in this respect, this has been an essential basis for Berlin.

Sarah Tietze

Steffen, Berlin has developed this magnetic effect for these really great target groups. Berlin has somehow achieved on a large scale what Siemensstadt still has to do on a small scale. What does Siemensstadt 2.0 have to offer in order to have this magnetic effect on talent, research and cutting-edge technology?

Steffen Krach

So this is simply a wonderful example of what we have also considered with this location. That we strengthen science, that we strengthen research, in order to then also cooperate with companies, in order to make the location so attractive that such companies also invest more here in Berlin. And Siemens is a wonderful example of this. I can still remember it very, very well. It was one of the first talks that the Governing Mayor and I had with Mr. Neike and others from Siemens. I remember it so well because it was the day after my birthday and I had spent the night in the hospital because my son had just run into a post and had a big wound. And then we had this appointment early in the morning and I came directly from the hospital, this first conversation and Mr. Neike had a presentation with him and I don't know if it was the third slide or the fourth slide. And there the reasoning was explained. At that time, the decision had not yet been made, but first there were discussions. One of the reasons given on this slide was that Siemens could imagine investing more here in Berlin, and that they were hoping for something from this cooperation with science. And then the Berlin University Alliance was explicitly mentioned, which confirmed to Mr. Müller and myself that we are on the right track, that we can say: Okay, something is developing with these three large universities and the Charité that makes the location so attractive that a global corporation like Siemens can imagine investing more intensively here, even more clearly, and developing such a wonderful project. And therefore, science and business are completely different in many respects. And of course, the freedom of research and teaching is also very central. And there are of course differences in one or the other point of view. But nevertheless, the opportunities for cooperation that exist in some areas, especially with the Technical University, are wonderful. And when a project like this is made possible and science can contribute to the development of such a project, for us this is also confirmation of science policy, which then simply has an enormous impact on the economic development of a location.

Sarah Tietze

Definitely. Stefan, we often talk about Siemensstadt as a place of the future and what we will achieve in the future as Siemensstadt. But Siemensstadt is also already a place of the present. What is already happening here today, if we take a look at the science location Siemensstadt today?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, science location is a very ambitious term.

I think it is important to emphasise that we have several thousand employees in five plants here, who of course also work in R&D, how do you say in German, research and development for their products. Here we have power transmission, we have measuring instruments in the field of vacuum technology. So, it's all about electrical topics. To put it simply. And one of our primary goals at the moment is, of course, to make these products and this development sustainable. So that there are such products in the long term and that they also develop naturally in relation to the market. And one of the first goals - and it's a pretty comprehensive one - is to make these local jobs sustainable and also to maintain them. That was also something that Cedrik Neike said in the first hours before the project. He had done his apprenticeship in Siemensstadt 25 years ago, his training, and he had actually said a little bit, a little bit without judgement: well, not so much has happened here in 25 years, when he came back. And that was also one of the reasons for this almost neutral opinion of his, that you have to do more or make much more. And in combination with the development of Berlin, it was simply a, how shall I put it, a template to say: Okay, we are now going into the topics here. We will strengthen these plants there and position them in such a way that they can exist in the long term. And at the same time, of course, we are working on establishing research and development, new research and development topics here. We are creating space for another 20,000 employees there. Not Siemens employees, but for various companies that will settle there and also for research and development. So that is a relatively large area that has to be covered.

Sarah Tietze

Steffen, Stefan just said 7,000 people already work here today. A lot of them work in research, development and industry. Siemensstadt is now opening up to new things. Is that a special feature of Siemensstadt? Is that a risk, an opportunity? How do you see it?

Steffen Krach

I am firmly convinced that this is a huge opportunity to develop something that other cities and regions will certainly want to look at. It's a wonderful project, both for the scientific community and, in particular, for the business community. Something is being further developed in many areas, and of course we are also looking at how the jobs that already exist here can be secured. But where, through cooperation partners, there is also the possibility of creating many more jobs. I can already see this happening in recent months and years.

The decision by Siemens alone to invest here and to modernise such a location has led to countless inquiries, also from other institutes, also from research institutes, like the Fraunhofer institute, many other cooperation partners, who are simply interested in participating and collaborating at this location. And then there is also the disused airport nearby, which is also to be developed somewhat. And there is simply an incredible opportunity to further develop this part of Berlin in such a way that we actually make it extremely modern and innovative.

Sarah Tietze

Yes, that's right. Tegel is less than three kilometres away. It's really incredible, you once called this area a hotspot for education, science and research. Do you still see it that way?

Steffen Krach

Absolutely. And now that I can say, I mentioned it when it wasn't 100 percent sure that Tegel is definitely closing. And now the decision has been made and now it has already been implemented in parts. And now it all depends on the development. And if you look at the ideas that are there, whether in Tegel or here now in Siemensstadt, it is an incredible opportunity for this part of Berlin. But then, of course, for the city as a whole. It creates new jobs, it creates new opportunities in the areas of research and development. An incredible number of new institutions and institutes want to come to Berlin. Last week alone, we were delighted by the decision in the German Bundestag to establish two new Fraunhofer Institutes here in Berlin. When such decisions are made, as by Siemens, an unbelievable dynamic develops and more and more people follow suit and want to be involved, because they see that something great is being created, not only nationally, but also internationally. A few years ago, we were not regarded internationally as a truly excellent science location. Now we are seen as one, whether in the UK or in other parts of the world. And that's why we now have the opportunity to attract absolutely top scientists to Berlin. Ten years ago, we would not have had to ask whether we could bring them to one of the institutions here. Now we manage to do that, or we manage to keep top scientists like Emmanuelle Charpentier, who has just been awarded the Nobel Prize, here in Berlin. That, too, is not a matter of course, and we have made every effort to do so. We have also made it possible for her to have a new institute, a new building that is being constructed here. Things like that. There is an enormous amount of work behind it. But it's worth it, because of course it's a role model for many other scientists. And then they come here. And the whole thing stands and falls with the best minds. And that's why we want to keep absolutely top scientists here in the city and, if possible, bring in new ones as well.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, Steffen just mentioned the proximity to the Urban Tech Republic and the strength that also results from this proximity. Do you see it that way too?

Stefan Kögl

Yes, of course. In science and research, these are certainly the two locations that support each other in the sense that the northwest, or Berlin in general, naturally becomes attractive as a result. Overall, if you take the northwest of Berlin, then you can also mention housing developments such as the garden city or others. So an enormous amount of money is flowing into the northwest. It's interesting and important because the airport in the southeast has just opened at the other end. But it also shows that Berlin as a whole is extremely attractive and that not everything depends on the location of the airport. And the only thing that has to be said is that we are still at a relatively early stage of development with Siemensstadt. So now, regardless of a certain transition period, Urban Tech is of course years ahead. And in this respect, we might even have a bit of an advantage in Siemensstadt. We can see what they are doing there, how things work. By the way, we are also in close dialog with the other areas. It's also about topics such as the energy transition and the mobility transition. These are key topics in the area of urban development that are also strongly related to research topics. And we have already had a number of discussions where questions have been asked or ideas have been raised that are not yet so common in implementation today. Especially with regard to networked energy generation, storage options, and so on. And then, I believe, together we will be able to develop sustainable solutions that are fit for the future.

Sarah Tietze

You talked about the long-term future, but you also told us what is already available in Siemensstadt today. There is already the Werner von Siemens Center. What exactly is happening there?

Stefan Kögl

So the Werner von Siemens Center has also been approved with the launch of Siemensstadt 2.0 in 2018 or has been decided and the first funding has also been approved. It is also a cooperation. We just had a call yesterday with the TU, with the HWR and others. And the first topics are electric drives.

In the area of research in the field of high temperature, technology and maintenance, so topics that also fit very well into the production topics in Siemensstadt, of course, but also look beyond that into the future. For example, there are 3D printing topics. So if I have to replace parts of machines, I don't have to produce them separately, somewhere in production chains, but can do it in the 3D printer. And of course the question of not repairing such that it is as it was before, like when you bring your car to the workshop today, but repair in the sense of improving the machines through new parts or digital solutions and networks. So there are many possibilities due to digitalisation. And these are the main topics at the moment. Of course, we still have the issue of how to locate this in the Siemensstadt Campus. We have an existing production facility. There is not an endless amount of free space there now. But we are in the process of creating an interesting campus and I would say we are well on our way.

Sarah Tietze

You just said you had a call. Siemens had a call with the Berlin universities. That means they are already working on the Werner von Siemens Center today.

Stefan Kögl

They are already cooperating. So the people involved have been named, so to speak. Yes, I know what that is called, the institutes that are involved in the preparation, that's what I would call it. For example, we have now defined the areas for production, i.e. where production research is to take place. There are already machines there, so it is now in preparation so that it can start, so really active in the next few months.

Steffen Krach

So, the Technical University is involved, Fraunhofer is involved, the Federal Institute for Materials Research. This is also a wonderful example of how both universities and non-university research institutions are involved and then, with the Federal Institute for Materials Research, a federal institute, so to speak, all here on one site. They are cooperating on the Werner von Siemens Center and we as a state are providing three additional professorships. And I'm quite sure that they will be filled with top people, because of course it's just incredibly attractive for a scientist to be involved in a project like this, where all the possibilities are there. And I am quite sure that super results will be achieved in the next few years.

Sarah Tietze

But this really shows that great strength really lies in linking the economy with science, with the country. So these...

Steffen Krach

Exactly. And we really did have some catching up to do. For many years, we... science in particular, but perhaps also business, have been a bit alienated from each other. And we then brought them together more intensively through various initiatives, including something like the Einstein Centre Digital Future, where for the first time there was actually really good collaboration between science and business. The concept was as follows: We wanted to create around 50 additional professorships in the field of IT, and as a state we said: Okay, we'll provide money, but we'd like to have cooperation partners from industry, and that has worked out well, or better said, very well. There are now just under 50 professorships filled. And that's a huge success. And the concept is that if a company provides money, that the state provides additional funds as well. So, for every euro that a company gives, the state pays another 50 cents on top of that. We developed this concept with the Einstein Foundation Berlin and from my point of view, this has great advantages for all sides. In the past, when business invested there was often a fear that the state would then withdraw from financing. Now with this concept, so to speak, that danger no longer exists. And that's why it also makes it more attractive for industry to participate. And other cities and other countries are now looking at the model we developed here at the Einstein Foundation and want to do something similar. So Berlin has also led the way there and is now serving as a model for others.

Sarah Tietze

Cool. It's really exciting to see how the state, science and industry benefit from each other and need each other. Stefan, you just said that an area is to be created in Siemensstadt where the topics will be advanced and a bit of a campus feeling will be created. You have just completed the structural engineering competition. That means we now know for the first time what the new Siemensstadt will look like. Will it do justice to this future campus, this vision of a place of innovation?

Stefan Kögl

Of course, we assume that. That is the reason for our decision. When I just talked about an area, then of course it is also to be seen as something of a transition period. So one is, after all, in the final expansion stage. The entire campus is open, the entire area is filled with life, with companies. But that will still take a few years and Werner von Siemens Center will already start now. So we also have to ensure the transition, so to speak.

And as far as the buildings or the architecture are concerned, the competition that we organised together with the Berlin Senate and which was also decided with the participation of Ms. Lüscher on the jury, is a continuation of the dialog that we had with Berlin from the very beginning. That is very broad, the interests of the participants are taken into account and then also lead to results. And an important point is, of course, the protection of historical monuments in a Siemens city. We have 250,000 square meters of listed buildings alone. This means that modern architecture must enter into a dialogue. It must be credible, but it must also not deny modernity. So between paying too much attention to the old, which would be quite wrong, and being too detachedly modern, an intelligent solution must be found. And this design has that to a great extent. And of course thereby also creates, or should also create, an atmosphere that also serves the talents. That's what I want to call it. Berlin is also attractive because people like to be in Berlin. Young people are also very often in a digital environment. That's why the city is attractive and sexy. And it plays a very, very important role in this. And of course, in areas like Siemensstadt, we have to make sure that these needs can be met.

Steffen Krach

I am impressed by the pace that is being set here. At the time of the decision I think there was a certain skepticism as to whether Berlin was prepared to support such a huge project in such a way that it could actually be completed quickly. And I believe that the Senate as a whole has shown that it can be done, if it is declared a top priority. And that's what Michael Müller did at the time. And then many things were simply clarified very quickly with the relevant representatives of Siemens. And the fact that everything is now moving forward so quickly is really a positive signal. I don't think many people thought the city of Berlin would be able to do that. And that's why I'm particularly pleased that things are now working out so well.

Sarah Tietze

Is it working well, Stefan?

Stefan Kögl

I can only confirm that point. I am asked the question again and again and I can only answer it like this: One thing is of course firstly the will that is there and I call it quite simply the representatives of the authorities with whom we are now dealing, and there are more than 70 of them. As I mentioned, they are firstly all really very, very good experts and very motivated and very committed. Many people might say: Aha, without meaning that in a disrespectful way.

But it's like this... And if... I'll deliberately say it casually, if they are let loose, then an incredible amount of things happen. So you can probably imagine the topics that are discussed every week, it's highly intense, it's highly complex. There are very, very many people sitting around the table. But that's necessary, because a lot of topics... Today, all topics are intertwined. So, when we talk about energy and mobility, for example. We talk about autonomous driving and about sector coupling, i.e. that energy is stored, for example, perhaps also in cars and is transmitted again. So I'm also, at that moment, with energy, I'm automatically with the utilities. I can, no longer work on individual topics separately. And that works well. We have challenges, of course. There are many topics that we can't just answer so quickly. There are regulations from the 80s, 90s or even earlier that simply don't take the future into account. And of course, representatives of the authorities are also partially trapped in certain framework conditions. But here, too, we have modules and formats to keep things moving, to keep things open and to consider how we can find solutions. And yes, that means that it is important to have a high level of dialogue. And we at Siemens, in the beginning we had this image in the room that the project wouldn't fly if we have to consciously work through the individual authorities, one-by-one. That won't work, the complexity is far too high, and we can do it differently. And then it works quite well. And yes, we can continue to do it this way. We would like it to stay this way, I must also emphasise, yes, even beyond next year's elections. Very important.

Sarah Tietze

70 representatives from Siemens and the city sit around the table and shape the city of the future. That's an enormous number.

Stefan Kögl

Those are just the government officials...

Sarah Tietze

70 only for the authority representatives...

Stefan Kögl

Some will also be present from Siemens.

Steffen Krach

And probably from five or six different Senate offices....

Stefan Kögl

So there are 6 working groups and one is communication and 5 are the substantive issues. So, that's urban planning and building law. Of course it's historic preservation, that's infrastructure, media and infrastructure, transport and of course the topic of location profile, actually the topic that we are also discussing today. What are the settlements there, scientific topics, research, and so on. And then there's a steering committee. That is a very important element. In the Senate, I have Dr. Lang in the Senate Chancellery as my contact person and also in the steering committee, where topics are discussed that cannot be solved in the individual group.

Sarah Tietze

That means the whole city is sitting around the table to plan the city of the future. That's right. Steffen, you yourself just mentioned your son. I think you have two children. We are planning the city of the future or a district of the future in Siemensstadt. If you imagine that for your children, what kind of district would they like to live in?

Steffen Krach

Of course, I hope that they will live with me for many years to come, because they are only 3 and 6, but when they move out at some point, I would be happy if they moved into a district that is designed in such a way that autonomous driving is actually possible there, and that the public transport system is climate-neutral. That there are beautiful apartments, which are of course also designed in a climate-friendly way. That there is an environment where people also like to live, i.e. where there is also life, i.e. also gastronomy and culture and many other options. Of course, there are also bicycle paths that are somewhat different from the bicycle paths that we currently know in the city. And I believe that this can of course be combined with a district where there is also research, where there are scientific institutions, where simply everything is there that a district needs to be lively and also to be able to attract young people. That's what I would like to see, for them to live in a district like that. And I can imagine that Siemensstadt is exactly on its way to becoming such a district.

Sarah Tietze

Stefan, is Siemensstadt on its way?

Stefan Kögl

So, I'm definitely saying yes now. Of course that is the goal. I think Berlin offers important basic prerequisites in that it is an open city, it is a diverse city, also in terms of people and cultures.

That is one of the essential prerequisites, that is, being open to new things, to different things. Thinking freely is an essential prerequisite for having an attractive district, and I think an attractive environment for everyone. And one of our fundamental considerations for this project is of course, what technologies are being used here for the development of this site, as I mentioned regarding energy and mobility. And if the talents then settle here accordingly, then of course a very nice and interesting mixture also arises for the, how may I put it, the normal citizen to look for an apartment there. And the ideal situation, by today's standards it must be said, is when I imagine someone with a laptop, I don't know how it will be in 20 years, that he sits down in a café for example, and puts his laptop on the table without thinking about it. If he wants to get something to eat in between, he just leaves it on the table, he has the feeling of being here in an almost private environment. That would be an ideal goal in terms of atmosphere. So like a university campus, if you will. You don't leave everything around either, but you would like to. I would like to create an environment where you can deal with it in that way. And that is also possible.

Steffen Krach

A district like a campus, where you also have a feeling like being on a campus. I think that's a pretty good idea.

Sarah Tietze

I think that's a good idea, too. Trusting togetherness. That's nice. Steffen, may I ask you a private question? I've heard that you're looking for a change of direction after six years as state secretary. You've applied for a new job in the Hanover region. What will you miss about Berlin?

Steffen Krach

A lot. And of course I'll be back in Berlin every now and then, and I'll keep in touch. But this was a decision that we made together in the family. And yes, I've been State Secretary here for many years now, and I've been attracted by a new task. And now I'm looking forward to seeing what's in store for me in the coming months and next year.

Sarah Tietze

We're definitely keeping our fingers crossed for you and will miss you.

Steffen Krach

Thank you!

Sarah Tietze

Yes, thanks to you both. I really enjoyed myself, it was a great conversation. I also took away a few things. I learned that Berlin is a real magnet for talent and top researchers and that Siemensstadt needs precisely these target groups in the future. I also took away that what is special about Siemensstadt is what already exists here today, the industrial core. The goal is really to open this up for innovation, for new things, and that is precisely what makes Siemensstadt what it is. Thank you!

Sarah Tietze

If you want to learn more about Siemensstadt, the people who live and work there, or the projects that are happening around Siemensstadt, then tune in next time. Bye and see you soon.

S-Bahn announcement

Next Stop: Siemensstadt.