

**To avoid the paradox of Liverpool, Britain should take note of the permanence of the Bundesgartenschau, Berlin 1985.**

Between April and October 1985 West Berlin played host to the Bundesgartenschau (BGS) after fifteen years of attempting to bring this bi-annual event to the city. Last years BGS represented the latest in a series of such shows staged since the 1950's.

In Berlin the contrast to past shows was pronounced; it was certainly apparent that our German colleagues are placing increasing emphasis on the BGS to be a valuable permanent addition to a city's open-space structure and less importance on its dual role as a temporary horticultural event.

In the past some BGS's have been criticized for producing characterless parkland often at the expense of other open space projects. By contrast in Berlin the City Government (Senate) studied the open space provision during the 1970's and then opted to turn the BGS to its own advantage as an integral part of its policies:- 'it became clear to us that a new large scale recreational area within . . . the suburbs of Mariendorf, Britz and Buckow could only be achieved through the vehicle of a garden show'.<sup>1</sup> The Senate not only justified Berlin as a candidate for the BGS and its Federal subsidies, but also established the machinery to promote the new park to its future users.

When visiting Berlin a number of characteristics become apparent. Firstly, in some districts the city is dense and unyielding, while other areas are comparatively over provided with open spaces and parks. This imbalance is compounded by the fact that the decaying urban districts, especially in the south-east also suffer complex social problems adding to the need for a more stimulating environment. Secondly the cultural and political fabric of Berlin is unique and a product of the bewildering range of racial minorities that make up its population and its peculiar geographical isolation.

**Greening up the city**

The city's present difficulties are a result of uninhibited development during the late 19th century when Berlin was the focus of a united Germany. Despite its status by the 1920's Berlin was cramped and unhealthy; hence in the subsequent years a series of Volksgartens were set out to ameliorate some of the more unpleasant aspects of urban living. Such sentiments continued with the BGS as part of a radical policy of 'greening-up' the city by the senate. It is their intention to provide 14m<sup>2</sup> of open space



■ The Bundesgartenschau from above showing the scale of the lakes and landmodelling

per head of population within 500 metres of home, in order to increase a sense of local identification and pride, as well as catering for diversifying recreational demands. With a population of over two million this is quite a task.

The senate hopes to alter the nature of its green spaces from Prussian ornamentation to more ecologically diverse habitats, intended to contrast more successfully within the heterogeneous urban surroundings and link together the large areas of wasteland within the city. The senate acquired the 80ha of undeveloped fields in one of the worst districts of the city as the location of one of Berlin's largest parks and the BGS.

In overcrowded Berlin, isolated within East Germany, the populace demonstrate a great deal of interest in the city's development. Consequently public participation is widely practised in Berlin, partly to take advantage of inherent ambitions within the community, but also to dissipate serious tension in some of the poorer districts. Unfortunately this did not prevent numerous outbreaks of violence in the 1970's against decaying housing and poor environmental provision; the BGS was aimed directly at this problem.

**Ecological education**

In contrast, more constructive elements within Berlin are the activities of 'green' pressure groups such as *Stiftung Naturschutz Berlin*. These groups promote ecological thinking and education, and provide a vociferous lookout for all forms of environmental neglect, especially when due to the senate's activities. They ensured that the whole affair of the BGS was kept firmly in the political forum. Berlin's ecologists advocated a naturalistic approach to the BGS

to diversify the city's limited flora and fauna, and demonstrate that not only ornamental species but also wild plants and animals should be a part of every park and garden.

For its part the senate recognised the public interest and that to be associated with green policies was a vote winner. In order to maximise such benefits the senate placed much emphasis on the permanent aspects of park planning; with its long-term recreational value being the primary motive. In its briefing the senate required the BGS to be a park with — 'a higher than usual standard of maintenance, level of facilities and events'<sup>2</sup> for a catchment area of around 600,000 people. Other policies were intended to prolong the effect. For instance a series of guided tours explaining Berlin's open space problems; awards for built projects of exceptional quality and a number of annual cultural events were all launched in BGS Year and continued afterwards.

In 1975 the senate chose the preferred design from a number of competition entries and favoured a design by Herr Wolfgang Miller, a landscape architect from Stuttgart. The principles of his design were to remould the flat site by major earth modelling focusing on a large central lake to create a whole range of landscape characters. The main lake is fed by three rivers springing from the artificial hills, thickly planted with thickets of trees and shrubs thereby strengthening the spatial structure. Psychologically this parkland was intended to be a tranquil retreat from urban monotony. These impressive land forms and the naturalistic planting combine to give the park a wild, open feel, displaying a breadth of landscape elements (wood, meadow, marsh and more) of remarkable complexity for a park less than ten years old.

These qualities are emphasised by the circulation system; major footpaths wind in from the three entrances and around the lake with lesser paths leading to the horticultural exhibits on the periphery of the site. This site planning minimised the disruption when the exhibits were removed, while the permanent pathways were crisply detailed with quality materials, maximising the investment.

The horticultural exhibits themselves displayed varieties of plant communities and their ecologies, often illustrating man's influence, good or bad, by text, graphics or more effectively, sculpture. Subjects ranged from geology, succession and the perils of being a street tree; to groupings of plant communities such as alpines and ferns. Overall the exhibits aimed to foster an understanding of many issues of man and his surroundings.

As a visitor the BGS impressed in a number of ways, principally the quality and maturity of the parkland providing a complex framework for both the permanent and temporary facilities of the BGS. Also the effective site planning ensured that although exhibits would be removed, undisturbed habitats would remain. In this

way the park showed great sensitivity in diversifying Berlin's flora and fauna.

However to the Berliners, has the BGS fulfilled its aims? Firstly, the senate were satisfied; a worthy public relations exercise with five and a half million visitors, the project provided jobs, relieved tensions and added another facet to Berlin life. At 180 million dm. it even stayed roughly within the budget. The senate also believed it has promoted the art of landscape and its profession and will have a knock-on effect on the upgrading of adjacent parks and streets. Also by setting up a management company (Federal Garden Show Ltd) to guide the park's development, its future is assured. We should perhaps take note, principally to avoid such a paradox as at Liverpool's IGF now undergoing a viability study, but also to try and establish a series of garden festivals whose permanence instills greater confidence in the horticultural industry and sponsors than is evident at present.

However criticism has been aimed at BGS, with claims that the design was unoriginal, out of date and had too great an emphasis on passive recreation inconsistent with the locals wishes. The green parties

thought the park too exclusive and over-maintained. These sentiments were shared to a degree, by some of the designers, whose main criticisms were the decision to close the park at night and charge an entrance fee. This contradicted the idea of a people's park and restricted the potential of the site to adapt to as yet unforeseen demands. Consequently there were fears that despite its size and because of its design the park was in danger of catering for too narrow a range of tastes. Some designers also criticised the planning procedure of the BGS citing it as inflexible, tending to disjoint rather than unify the finished whole.

Berlin's greatest success was the ability to think long term, taking advantage of available capital, rather than attempting remedial work after the show with little money. Combined with this was the logical site planning of permanent and temporary events, reducing post show damage, one of the more difficult aspects of festival design.

Significantly the 'garden festival' is beginning a new landscape *genre*, with a high public profile, but we must not underestimate the time needed to construct them. The impossible time scale imposed on Liverpool should be avoided; the Germans allowed 12 years at Berlin, and the benefit showed. Unfortunately, Britain is still behind, because we have yet to select the site of the 1992 festival.

Finally Berlin proved that issues of some sophistication and weight can be illustrated in a stimulating way. As such it was in keeping with the public's increasing awareness of environmental problems. Within the context of a festival, some of the most vital issues facing the landscape profession can be explained to the public whose appreciation and support is always desirable. Like the Berliners, we could do worse than elevate our festivals from showing 'house and garden' to defining man and his environment, and as such promote the landscape industry and its profession. ■

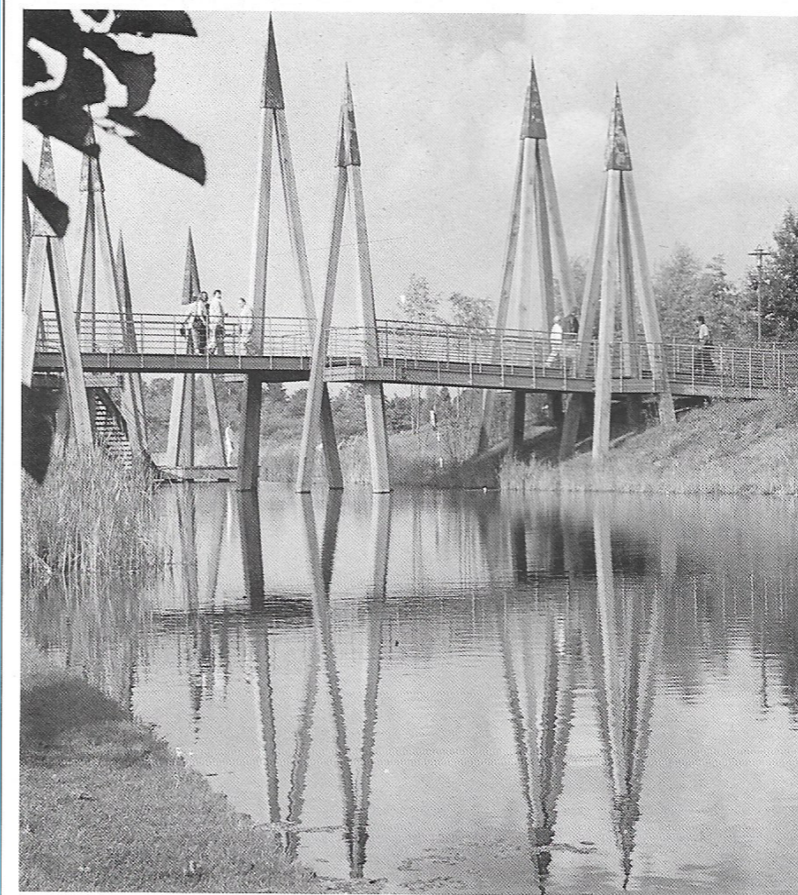
**References**

1. Schindler N: BGS Berlin 1985; Garten und Landschaft (4/85).
2. Mahler E: Significance and development of the new park; Garten und Landschaft (4/85).

**Acknowledgements**

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the following: Halfmann & Zillich, Berlin; Irle Cloos, Senator fur Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz, Berlin; K Neumann, Neumann & Partners, Berlin; Onwards and Upwards Ent., Berlin; Terence Oldani, freelance landscape architect, Berlin; Jurgen Zilling, landscape architect, Berlin.

*Peter Sheard is a landscape architect with Manning Clamp & Partners, Richmond, Surrey.*



■ The 'Bridge' at Berlin 1985