

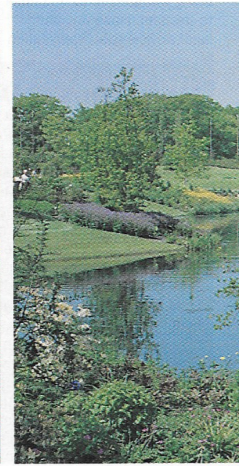
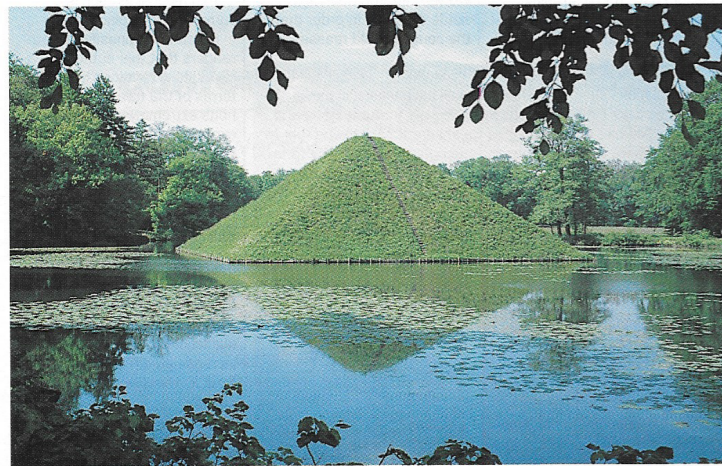
Landscape for a new GERMANY



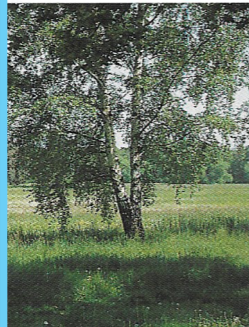
The first garden festival in former East Germany is taking place this year in Cottbus, a city 100 kilometres south east of Berlin. The 23rd Federal Garden Festival or Bundesgartenschau (BGS) started in April and runs through until October. The choice of Cottbus as the venue is apt. The objectives of the BGS movement, to regenerate decaying urban areas and provide new green spaces, have a special resonance in the city, which suffered from considerable industrial dereliction and neglect during the post-war Communist regime. In addition to its surrounding landscape, the city's historic parks were in decline and required an input of money and political will to regenerate them. The garden festival was an ideal vehicle for the city's aspirations, and it has benefited like its predecessors.

Germany's garden festival legacy has been well documented and their example emulated throughout Europe. Unlike the UK, however, there appears to be no sign of their decline. There are four more festivals planned until 2003, each aiming to promote not only the landscape and horticultural industries but also to address important issues of urban renewal and open space design. Despite historical precedent, there is serious debate in Germany as to the future direction of its festival movement: the horticultural industry still sees festivals as the best way to sell their wares, whereas the landscape profession and Greens want the festivals to explore new "sustainable" design and develop their ecological credentials. Cottbus seems to represent a victory for the former. As late as 1991, the 1995 festival was going to be held in Berlin, not Cottbus. It was the capital's late

Peter Sheard describes how a garden festival revitalised a depressed former East German city



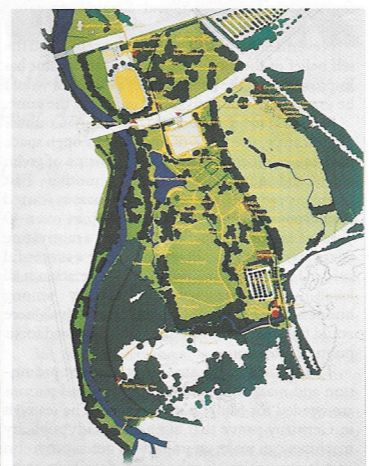
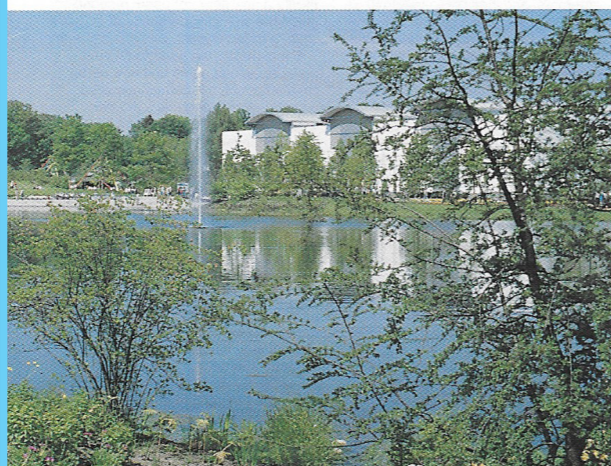
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Above: the Vorpark and sculpture (right). Below from left: the Branitzer Park; the focus of the festival, the exhibition hall and the main ornamental lake; and a site plan of the festival showing the "green connection" from north to south

decision to drop the festival because of its commitment to host the Olympics 2000 that gave the festival administrators, the Zentralverbandes Gartenbau (ZGV), the opportunity to break tradition and award a garden festival to an east German city. The usual eight- to ten-year process was shortened to three, setting Cottbus a difficult goal. The ZGV saw the festival as a chance to promote the horticultural industry within new markets and established a new financial model for the festival, hence the 55-hectare exhibition site gained three quarters of its DM130m (£58m) investment from the state of Brandenburg and federal government, with only a quarter coming from Cottbus. Against this favourable backdrop the ZGV was able to amass considerable sponsorship helping to create the park in record time.

Meanwhile the city and the landscape architects who designed the festival, Heinz Eckebricht and Bruno Leipacher, saw the objectives of the garden festival as being to build on the city's garden tradition, by design reference and park refurbishment, to dispell its image as a provincial settlement ravaged by its industrial past. Thus, the concept of a "Gardenstadt", fostered by a new environmental awareness and boosted by tourism and commerce, would point the way for the city's future. The festival was its starting point. The various components of the garden festival – the permanent elements of the new park system and also the festival events which go after October – illustrate these objectives at work. The focus of the festival is the messe (exhibition hall), with its surrounding lakes and theme gardens laid out in what had previously been drab fields and parking lots. In this area are the more popular elements such as a huge rose garden, an impressive display of rhododendrons, and to the south, streams with displays of waterside plants and gently mounded gardens of heather. The reason for situating the heart of the show here was to link the Elias Park to the north with the Vorpark to the south. The Elias Park then links to the city via a series of new urban parks and the upgraded Spree river. Meanwhile, the Vorpark connects south to the Branitzer Park creating a "green connection" many kilometres long. A significant contribution of the garden festival is the creation of a nature reserve along the Spree. It belongs to the concept of "ecological urban development" and aims, via sculpture stations, to allow people to experience nature and understand the city's heritage and responsibilities. ▷



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◁ Beautifully designed with boardwalks and new planting, it deserves emulation in this country as we think about our new parks. Finally the garden festival realised the refurbishment of the Schloss Branitz and its landscaped gardens thereby guaranteeing their physical connection with the city centre. These lakes, woods and meadows, which were created during the 19th Century, have great historical importance as well as a particular beauty, exemplified by the famous Wasserpyramide, since adopted as the logo for the garden festival. Overall the festival succeeds in fusing a series of landscapes into a cohesive whole producing an interesting mixture of ornamentation and ecology. In urban planning terms the green links succeed in connecting Cottbus with its surroundings and enhancing its cultural and historic heritage. The associated improvements to the city's parks, roads and building stock (including hotels and a conference hall) are also impressive. However, in its layout the festival was highly conservative and illustrated few innovative or challenging design philosophies. The park's designs were unoriginal and its gardens highly predictable. A criticism in Germany has been the dominance of the horticultural aspects of the show with not enough thought given to the long-term future of the landscape. The landscape profession was also incensed by the way the festival was railroaded through the planning consultation process. A decision to abandon the usual competition stage was seen as curtailing an effective design process. Whether this will harm BGS prestige in the long run is doubtful, but speculation on the value of the festival has not abated, and Cottbus displayed nothing new or original. Nevertheless, there are modest successes, and the self belief of the city and its commercial status has improved. Also the parks are there to stay. It would be gratifying if our festival sites could say the same. So what are the positive aspects of Cottbus? Significantly, the value of investing in open space has been reinforced again, with provision of green space and not profit the main motive. East Germany requires vast funding to repair its scarred landscapes. Cottbus has benefited from over 40 years of expertise hopefully acting as a motivating factor to others. To obtain and create a successful garden festival requires political co-operation at all levels which can galvanise activity among businesses and the public; similarly festivals here could help put parks into the public eye and focus political attention. The landscape industry is not adept at promotion and marketing, but sponsorship and patrons are needed for future park creation. The festivals in Germany prove that big names with publicity machines can make an impact on green provision and design quality. Furthermore, despite its com-

mercial bias, the ZGV does succeed in establishing briefs with politicians and an equivalent here could encourage more "horizontality" among government ministries and champion better use of existing expenditure. A revived festival movement here could encourage community, arts, and environmental pressure groups to become more involved in open space planning. Cottbus's sensitive approach to the refurbishment of some of its historic parks has particular relevance for the UK with many of our parks facing decline. The BGS symbolises continuity in the provision of parks for the public good, and the patrician figures of old are replaced by enthusiastic commercial sponsors: what Cottbus fails to achieve though, is a contemporary response to the challenge. Nevertheless the festival can promote landscape and not roads, nature and not dereliction, education and not deprivation. We are at a critical stage as we reach the millennium: we need to restart our garden festival movement with the promise of funding and seemingly a greater degree of political motivation. We should reflect on Cottbus's achievements as a way forward and a useful example of how to invest in parks. In 1992, Berlin's loss was Cottbus's gain and with imagination it could be ours. □ Peter Sheard is senior landscape architect with Skidmore Owings & Merrill, London

THE UK EXPERIENCE

British attempts to emulate the success of the German garden festivals ran out of steam after only five attempts, and did little to raise the profile of new park design or alter the current political ambivalence towards planning open space. Our festivals had fundamental errors in their organisation and implementation, with too little investment put into permanent infrastructure and too much effort channelled into temporary "events". Their potential to establish a rolling programme of new parks as fixed in the British psyche as the Chelsea Flower Show was lost. However, this has not caused a reduction in demands by the landscape profession for the Government to take action. The concern over the decline of our urban parks is being addressed by numerous seminars, conferences and studies, initiated by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Leisure & Amenity Management, attempting to set a new agenda. Spurred on by the temptation of the National Lottery, the landscape industry has campaigned for the creation of new parks such as the Millennium Exhibition, to be launched as part of a festival event. Potentially, this could create a new genre of parks responding to the changing demands of today's urban dweller. Concurrently, the need to find out how people use parks and how better to manage them is being advocated, with the aim of fostering a greater understanding of how to design a 21st Century landscape or refurbish some of our existing "green deserts". So, the investment and the opportunities are there, but with the dearth of park design here over the recent decades we have to accept the need to find inspiration (and experience) elsewhere, such as North America, France and Germany. We should feel no qualms about this, after all the 18th Century landscape park and the botanical gardens of Victorian times were heavily influenced by foreign cultures. Our search for models should teach us not so much what to create as how, and in the German garden festival we have a useful example of how parks can be a catalyst for civic pride and regeneration.

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