

Since 1951 Germany has hosted 23 *Bundesgartenschau*s (garden festivals), often ambitious set-pieces of landscape planning, initially aimed at revitalising shattered post-war cities. Their example has been emulated all over Europe, and for a short while here in the UK, but it is their German legacy that is impressive. Ironically their continuing status is under attack, with charges that they are outdated, wasteful and anti-green. Popular sentiment is calling for smaller, less ostentatious shows, which are seen as an increasingly democratic way of promoting the horticultural industry while improving a city's open-space provision. Nevertheless, certainly from the UK standpoint, the BGS represent landscape planning of an exemplary nature.

This year's model is in Gelsenkirchen in the heart of the Ruhr, a city coming to terms with the decline of its traditional mining industries and anxious to create a greener, post-industrial image. Ecological and economic recovery from past exploitation is its core theme. German enthusiasm for planning is well known, and the Ruhr benefits from the activities of the *Internationale Bauausstellung Emscher Park* (IBA), the latest of a series of building exhibitions promoting regeneration (AJ 9.11.95), in addition to the conventional planning framework. In 1991 the city, in agreement with the IBA, launched a competition for the BGS coinciding with the closure of the huge Nordstern colliery.

This was indeed a challenge: the blighted site was covered with spoil heaps and physically cut off from local communities – its only value seemingly as the site of a future power station. Furthermore, it was bisected by the polluted Emscher river and the Rhine-Herne canal dotted with calcification plants. Regionally, it was the vital crossroads of an important canal route and a major green corridor; locally, the opportunity to link two previously separated communities was for the taking.

The site's problems (and a



Critical landscape in the Ruhr's renewal

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Bundesgartenschau Gelsenkirchen

At Gelsenkirchen, Germany until late autumn

compressed timescale) were reflected in the low number of responses to the competition invitations. The winning design by Wedig Pridig capitalised on the heritage of the site while looking to its future, seeking a permeability to ensure its social and economic relevance. Use-zoning was a complicated affair involving negotiations with a plethora of agencies, while designating financial responsibilities for site restoration proved a major headache for the organisers. But the presence of the IBA helped and guided the process to a successful conclusion.



New pedestrian connections (top) and engineering structures (above)

Unlike the UK examples, the BGS was constrained from the start by its future uses: housing along the western boundary; High-Tech industries at the heart of the site, and a mix of green industries in the old mining buildings (about a quarter of the total area). In consequence the landscape component of the BGS dovetailed into a site not only physically planned but already attracting investment. The festival becomes a logical extension of this process. The planning process was not without its difficulties, however: green pressure groups forced many design changes extending the nature conservation brief, and local residents managed to extend the programme of improvements to their properties and streets using the festival's budget.

So how did the 'dereliction removal' manifest itself into what Gelsenkirchen calls 'usefulness, simplicity and closeness to nature'? A major component is the dramatic use of spoil which previously scarred the site, now reconfigured to create slopes and hills and a central pyramidal viewpoint nearly 60m tall. These complex land-

forms, interconnected with steel bridges and paths, are a physical expression of the site's reunification with its surroundings, sweeping away earlier topographical restrictions and opening up dramatic new views.

New red bridges span waterways, emphasising the geometry of the design and acting as beacons for the park. These linear connections, expressed as beautiful avenues of lime and chestnut, form the backbone of the BGS, off which many disparate buildings, gardens and traces of local heritage are cleverly arranged in an uncompromisingly rigid fashion, bravely eschewing the Beaux-Arts style so beloved of earlier BGS.

The existing buildings are well integrated into this structured landscape. The old pit-head buildings house floral exhibitions; a cooling tower creates optical effects with waterfalls and lightshows; while part of the main coal-handling plant has been stripped bare to reveal a structure ready for the insertion of prototype 'pods' for offices specialising in green technologies. New structures such as a tent-like theatre suspended over the river are equally confident in their design: however, the planting throughout the site is relatively modest and will need time to make an impact once the festival colour has been removed.

The whole event has cost DM170 million (£60 million), with a large proportion channelled into site restoration. Two million predicted visitors will bring in about DM10 million, besides healthy revenues from sponsorship. The themes of renewal and permanence at Gelsenkirchen have resonance for our Millennium Exhibition, hopefully encouraging the rejection of some of the more throw-away aspects of the current proposals. Only if Greenwich adheres to a lasting vision, reversing the damage of the past, can we hope to emulate Gelsenkirchen's success. □

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