

Between April and October this year Stuttgart hosted the fifth International Horticulture Exhibition (IGA) held in Germany, the latest in a programme of post-war projects to create permanent parks.

Stuttgart is no stranger to such festivals, as the IGA represents the culmination of a plan to complete the 'Green U', an 8km swathe of parks connecting the historic Schlossgarten, in the centre of the city, with the outskirts.

The value of the IGA and the Bundesgartenschau (BGS), the national garden festivals, is renowned. Stuttgart is a textbook example of how long-term planning has led to the creation of a significant park and is worthy of study in the UK, given the demise of the British garden festival movement.

The concept of the 'Green U' was first realised in the 1920s with the preservation of the Rosensteinpark as a public open space. Then in 1939, the Reich Horticultural Show attempted to connect the Hohenpark Killesberg with its adjacent spaces. War precluded such ambitions until the 1950 German Horticulture Show marked the rebirth of Killesberg.

More than a decade later, the first BGS (1961) reconstructed the Upper and Middle Schlossgartens in the heart of the city with a further linkage of parks created by the 1977 BGS with the redesign of the Lower Schlossgarten.

The IGA, therefore, provided the final link, and plans were made to redesign the Wartberg and Leibfriedscher Garten and undertake some major infrastructure improvements. The design involved the refurbishment of the Killesberg, the redesign of a major traffic interchange in association with a new tram stop and a series of striking pedestrian bridges.

This achievement contrasts sadly with the UK experience where, largely because of political whim, the garden festival movement was ditched after Ebbw Vale as a failed experiment. The statistics of visitor numbers and net costs did not balance with the sparse private income raised and the Government's lack of interest in central planning.

In comparison, the planning of the IGA was meticulous. The city decided as early as 1977 that the completion of the 'Green U' was possible and in 1979 submitted its successful application to the Zentralverband Gartenbau in Bonn (ZVG), the central body for Germany's horticultural industry. The ZVG is

Planning for the green connection

This year's IGA festival in Stuttgart sparked off a major project linking the city's parks. Peter Sheard reports



This overview illustrates how the landscape plans created a 'Green U', which connects Stuttgart's network of separate parks into one



federally funded and promotes horticultural standards within the country. It also judges applications for the programme of festivals.

By 1984 the Stuttgart Parliament committed itself to the enterprise, and by 1986 the competition to design the IGA was launched with its guiding principle of 'a responsible approach to nature in the city'.

The winning scheme was designed by a multi-disciplinary Stuttgart consortium of Luz-Egenhofer-Lohrer-Schlaich whose scheme was considered the best way of fusing together the individual parks into a cohesive whole.

Two years later construction work was under way for an April 1993 opening, with a budget of £46m for the permanent park and £54.2m for the festival, plus additional funding for the infrastructure works.

The heart of the IGA was the Wartberg where a haphazard arrangement of gardens and orchards was redeveloped



into an informal hillside park with gently sloping footpaths, streams and terraces all focusing attention on a new lake with an arrangement of computer-controlled fountains.

'Art stations' were sited throughout the IGA and the Wartberg. These were

Top: architect's plan of the main IGA site. Above: the computer-controlled fountains and floral displays at the specially-constructed Egelsee Lake were the focal point of the Wartberg area of the festival

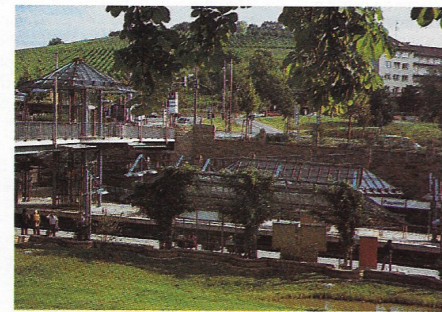


the IGA's new suspension bridges which curved its way over highways and rail lines for 460 metres.

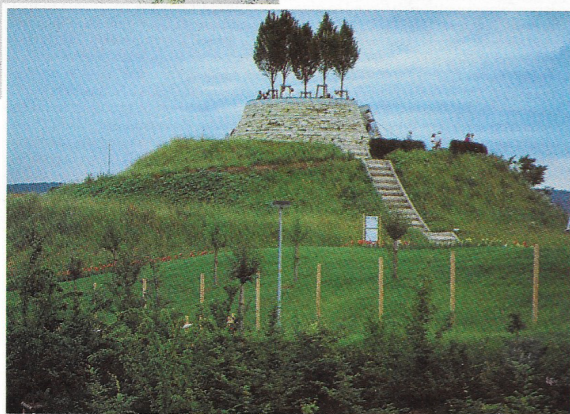
This served the southern most part of the Leibfriedscher Garten whose origin was as a private garden and whose ruins are now visible from a suspended walkway connecting a sandstone-capped viewing tower to the new Lower tower bridge. This section of the park connects northwards, via two new bridges,

Hohenpark Killesberg at the other end of the IGA were already mature landscapes, and the festival activities located within them were the usual competition gardens and exhibits. The Killesberg was a perfect setting for these events. But those within the Rosensteinpark sat uncomfortably among the huge oaks and hay meadows.

The IGA site covered 100ha, but the investment extended beyond the festi-



Left: an example of the major infrastructure investment at the Pragsattel tram stop with pergolas and sandstone detailing. Below left: ground modelling and accent tree planting creates a visual landmark



sculptures whose locations visually connected the parks and provided points of reference for visitors.

In addition, the connection to the Leibfriedscher Garten was marked by groups of upright poplars echoing the huge vertical elements of the largest of

to the Pragsattel tram stop, a grouping of pergola-like buildings.

The Rosensteinpark to the east is linked by another innovative bridge structure, a curving walkway suspended over the roads by a stainless steel rope net. Both the Rosensteinpark and the

val boundaries, with most of the approach roads being upgraded with extensive tree planting.

So overall the IGA was an impressive sight. But, in terms of its design, development and long-term future, compromise occurred. In design terms the Wartberg was the weakest part of the festival. The remaining private gardens, interspersed with orchards and meadows, had an uncomfortable atmosphere due to the strange sight of scores of visitors surging around what had been peaceful allotments.

The festival gardens in the Rosensteinpark were not only strangely sited, but largely pastiche. The displacement of the Wartberg Kleingarten was controversial and greeted with hostility by the Green Party in the Stuttgart Parliament, and the felling of trees caused dismay and tarnished the IGA concept of responsibility towards nature.

The organisational structure between the city, the ZVG and the masterplanners tended to dilute some of the early design concepts. Once the budget had been set, the polarisation of the parties occurred, tending to lengthen the planning procedure.

The desire to host traditional festival events reduced the scope for more

serious landscape messages, for instance, innovative techniques involving solar-powered lighting and fountains.

Positive drainage techniques, and the integration of landscape, art and industry to the benefit of the environment were dropped. It had been hoped that the IGA would examine the direction landscape design should follow as the demands on the landscape evolved to face the new millennium. However, cost, time and a reluctance on behalf of Stuttgart to invest in new and untested methods meant that some of the competition concepts had to be altered.

The IGA's cost will also impact on Stuttgart's ambitions: the £29.2m income from visitors did not cover the lavish expenditure and as such the authorities have plans to reduce its staff, its maintenance programme and its new works programme.

The next four to five years will see tough decisions because of the IGA investment, made in a time of boom and realised in a time of recession.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that the IGA was a considerable success, and consequently Stuttgart's legacy stands comparison with any city in Germany.

The scale of the infrastructure improvements was staggering and has created new landmarks for the city, and has also meant that money from sponsors has been forthcoming.

The German festivals have a tremendous galvanising effect and are 'target-makers' which force project realisation by setting deadlines to capitalise on the 'image effect'. When considered in such terms the expenditure becomes an acceptable part of investing in a city's fabric. Opera is funded, why not parks?

The ZVG's role in promoting such events is vital in overcoming local shortcomings and streamlines the operation. As a result faith in festivals in Germany is undiminished: the future programme is booked until the year 2007 with more taking place in the former East Germany.

This is happening in an atmosphere where the direction of these events is being questioned. There is a growing demand for similar provincial events with greater federal government funding, to widen the effect of the festivals. But the horticulture industry is concerned that this would diminish the prestige of the festivals.

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Decline of UK garden festivals

In the UK, the debate surrounding the value of garden festivals centres on where we should go next. British festivals finished their run last year, and we need to ask why this happened. Given Stuttgart's example, is there any justification for their revival?

The objectives behind the UK festivals were commercial and political. The Government wanted a return on its funds and linked the festival's worth directly with its capacity to generate development.

As a result, local authorities without a UK equivalent of Germany's ZGV to advise them were given unrealistic timetables to work in, and consequently channelled three-quarters of their funds into temporary events marginalising the garden festivals to assist in urban regeneration.

For example, the spine road at Liverpool was not in place until sometime after the festival. Worst of all, Glasgow's festival landscape was totally throwaway, and is now the subject of a competition designed to give it some purpose.

However, some festival legacies show us their value: the Otterspool Promenade at Liverpool is highly valued and Ebbw Vale is permanently greener for its Festival Park. Despite spending almost as much as the Germans on our festivals we have comparably little to show for it.

The basic problem is that the Government does not recognise the value of planning parks as a force for regeneration, as is evident in the current legislation to set up the Urban Regeneration Agency (URA) with its remit to reverse inner city dereliction and a budget of £230m.

There is almost no reference to the strategic planning of green space in its own right, prompting the Royal Town Planning Institute to observe that the URA should have an obligation to 'enhance the extent of green-space in our cities' and 'not simply secure development'.

The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Landscape and Amenity Management have both made similar calls for a planned and co-ordinated approach to open space provision, but such requests have been turned down.

Hopefully, political considerations will eventually alter, and it is up to professional bodies to keep up the pressure. The Government may yet be forced to plan.

Festivals should be flagships for planning parks and towns. Many examples could be emulated in addition to the German experience: the Floriades in Holland are designed to frame housing and commercial development. Paris has invested in numerous parks which have attracted substantial private funding.

In Barcelona, 80 per cent of the municipality's budget has been spent on open space provision to enhance the economic life of the city.

A Garden Festival is the ideal vehicle to advertise this strategy, maximising the publicity and the commercial benefits. Also, they should be linked with other cultural events such as Olympic bids, the millennium, anniversaries of some of our 19th Century parks to mark their revival.

We need not spend as much money as Stuttgart but the landscape industry and our cities would benefit from such a park development. Landscape design is as important to the image and success of cities as it is to the commercial appeal of a business park.

Other sources of funding, in addition to the Government's, could also be more easily attracted on the back of a festival, especially if an organisation similar to the ZGV was set up to co-ordinate its generation.

Charitable trusts and private industry could be used to help long-term maintenance. The proposed National Lottery could be a source of funding for a garden festival movement.

The dereliction of Britain's inner cities and parks are a cause for great concern, yet landscape planning and more foresight on the part of politicians could reverse this trend. Many opportunities exist for parks to redefine our urban environment as is happening all over Western Europe.

It is a telling fact that the IGA at Stuttgart was realised against a backdrop of four elections to the city's parliament and caused no reduction in commitment. We need that kind of enthusiasm here if we are to enjoy the same results.

Article on the IGA in Stuttgart, Germany (1993).

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