

EUROPEAN GARDEN AWARD 2016

Laudation: Emscher Landschaftspark



As planners and architects of open space we deal with different scales. In the small ones we design gardens and courtyards. In the next scale we plan, design and redesign parks and squares – in inner cities, at waterfronts and/or at the urban fringe. When a city's different parks link together to a system we define it as a green structure – and the planning tool we use is a comprehensive green plan. To most of us that is the largest scale of green planning. But there is an even larger scale – it's those green structures that we try to protect or establish within mega cities and metropolitan regions. Most of such green structures don't consist of parks. Their green assets are existing forests and agricultural fields. In this scale we have classical structures as green belts and green fingers. Today we also have green structures created in a totally new urban context showing and demonstrating new green features and landmarks. I'm thinking of landscapes developed on derelict land in former industrial regions. The best example of this scale and context is located very nearby. It's the exceptional Emscher Landscape Park in the urban region of Ruhr – now to be awarded.

It all started in 1989 with the "International Building Exhibition (IBA) at Emscher Park" initiated by the Government of North-Rhine/Westphalia. Analysis, workshops, discussions and international competitions took place and were the fundament for the objectives for the valley with an overwhelming area of 425 km². Objectives about:

- to preserve leftover landscapes,
- to link green areas together,
- to sign agreements with authorities and companies and
- to establish a new permanent park organization.

In this case objectives were not only beautiful words. A system of 7 north/south green corridors was proposed linking the 17 cities in the valley together. A connecting east-western green corridor was added – The Emscher valley. A clear and strong green structure was master-planned. It created an intelligent combination between a green belt and crossing green fingers. Remember the words of your author Thomas Mann. I quote "Order and simplification are the first steps toward the mastery of a subject"! The structure is easy to understand - a very tough challenge to realize!

We have seen several phases of realization. With actions which should contribute to ecological, social and economic improvement of the region. Thus action plans did consist of a wide range of different issues. Cleaning derelict land, changing sewer systems, improvement of water quality, restoration of brown fields, creating preindustrial landmarks, accessibility to ponds, rivers and canals, planning new parkland, improving biotopes and habitats and planting trees. New recreational facilities as cycle- and walking-pathways, open air theaters and a necessary recreational infrastructure.

Not only physical actions were implemented and realized – information and communication has been essential as well as new cultural and sport events of varied scales. Local events as well as those teasing national and international tourism.

Beautiful scenery was not this landscape's former key identity. Today spectacular art projects, lightning of historical features and new landmarks has changed the perception. Furthermore an increasing number of clean water and clear skies are assets of today. The beauty of the landscape is now a core value – appreciated by many. Created thanks to a strong vision, excellent planning and realization.

There are hundreds and hundreds of different projects to mention and honor. You have heard of them. The landscape Park of North Duisburg with activities for all ages and an interesting design concept. The Nordstern Landscape Park in Gelsenkirchen testing planning models for ecology and industrial preservation. 230 km of attractive cycle paths and 130 km for walking and strolling. The exhibition Centre "Haus Ripshorst" close to Oberhausen. Spectacular bridges and landmarks as Tetrahedron – the huge iconic steel-pyramid dramatizing the skyline.

Professionals from many European Regions have already visited The Emscher Landscape Park. They have been astonished, impressed and indeed inspired. They have seen that former industrial land can be restored and transformed into a livable prosperous environment. They have also understood – and now

listen carefully - that a very competent and skilled organization has been and still is in charge. An organization which have power in planning, economics and realization. An organization with a mission, with credibility, with the ability to coordinate as well as to deal with long term issues and perspectives.

The Romanian artist and philosopher Constantin Brancusi once stated "Theories are patterns with no value – only action counts". Perhaps the statement is not the only real truth (theories are important in planning). But we can agree on that without actions there should not be an Emscher Landscape Park. And we had not seen a best practice

showing that the rebirth of European cities and regions must have green spaces as a crucial and current issue.

We would like to honor politicians with visions, landscape architects and other professionals with great skills and of course the inhabitants themselves who expressed demand for change and gave their support. Congratulations especially to Regionalverband Ruhr RVR – now in charge. We welcome our German colleagues to take the floor and receive the award!

Laudation by: Gunnar Ericson