

“European Garden Award 2015 – Winner Contemporary Parks” Martin Luther King Park in Paris

Laudation by Roswitha Arnold, Member of the jury

The “Parc Clichy-Batignolles” or “Martin Luther King Park” is a perfect example of a contemporary public park, with high attention placed on usability and appropriation by those who visit it, together with an awareness of ecological issues and a good standard of design. This park is already vibrant and lively, completely appropriated by the residents of the area.

Martin Luther King Park is located in the Clichy Batignolles area of Paris, which was chosen to host the Olympic Village as part of the – finally unsuccessful - city’s bid for the 2012 Olympics.

The park and new districts have been built upon old railway lines and storage places. The project has kept most of the main structural lines. The park is truly a new piece of Paris making connections between the quarters of Epinettes and Pereire, Batignolles and Boulevard Berthier, and connecting with the green spaces along the river. The whole area is 45 hectares, which includes the 10-hectare park.

The park has been designed mainly in two phases. The whole process from proposal to a finished project will take more than 13 years.

The park started from the east side of the project, where high-density districts already exist, so the park offers a leisure space for the many people who live nearby. The first section of the Park Martin Luther King was opened in 2007, and named the following year to mark the commemoration of 40 years since the assassination of the American civil rights activist.

The second phase is divided into two parts. The first part was built between 2008 and 2014. It extends to the northwest side of area. In this part, the concentration is on the park, not buildings. The second part includes the new districts in the northeast and southwest quadrants. They are expected to be complete in 2016.

What makes this park so attractive for visitors is the variety of the spaces and of the activities it can accommodate. Of course many people come simply to walk or to run through the park, to sit on its benches or to lie on its lawns. But there is also a skate park, a basketball court, an area for community gardens, water fountains to play in. In the centre of the park, the biotope basins provide an open park view and a habitat for wildlife. The lawn and woods offer a perfect place for daily relaxing.

Several subtle, but important features enhance the enjoyment and encourage the use of the park. By using different vegetation and water features, the park is divided into four seasonal themes. In spring and summer, magnolias, cherry trees, apple trees, dogwoods, and Judas trees exude their particular scents. The effects of autumn daylight and sunsets will come into play with crimson oak trees that line several walkways. An open and inviting community garden prompts gardeners to post little signs with information about themselves and what they grow. The position of the skate park beguiles watching, making it a spot for more than just skateboarders. And the successive incline of one of the lawns invites people to sit and play.

The park contains a sustainable water system. In the centre of the park is an open water feature consisting of four biotope basins for the decanting and filtering of non-potable water from the Seine. Another area provides a wetlands-type environment, rare in Paris, where flora such as Narrowleaf Cattail and the yellow Swamp Iris can thrive.

Ditches are formed along walkways to show wetland vegetation and also to collect rainwater and move it to underground storage to supply water for the park. Additional underground storage captures excess rainwater that can be reused in the park. Energy for pumping is provided by a wind turbine.

In total, the jury fully agrees with Paris's former mayor, Bertrand Delanoë, claiming that the central goal of this park is to emphasize the essentials of what a green space really is: a corner for nature in the heart of the city, one that is beautiful, fragile, and productive. Or, coming back to one of the EGHN projects: a perfect hybrid park.