

The Pursuit of Public Happiness: Gardens and Parks in Europe and North America

Conference at the Bavarian American Academy,

Conveners: Sonja Dümpelmann (GHI) and Raimund Lammersdorf (BAA);

Co-sponsored by the GHI and the Bavarian American Academy (BAA)

München, 16. bis 18. Juni 2005

Speakers and Chairs: John Dixon Hunt (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia), Gert Gröning (Universität der Künste Berlin), Philip Paar (Zuse Institute Berlin), Terence Young (California State Polytechnic University, Pomona), Solveig Köbernick (Leipzig), Susan Herrington (University of British Columbia), Sonja Dümpelmann (GHI), Alan Tate (University of Manitoba), Sara Cedar Miller (Central Park Conservancy, New York), Elizabeth Barlow Rogers (Foundation for Landscape Studies, New York), Rainer Herzog (Bavaria Administration of State Palaces, Gardens and Lakes, Munich), Andrew Theokas (City of Boston and Boston Architectural Center), Wolfram Höfer (BUGA GmbH, Munich), Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Hanover University).

On occasion of the biannual German National Garden Festival held in Munich in 2005, the German Historical Institute and the Bavarian American Academy hosted a public conference in the Bavarian capital. Bringing together scholars of garden history, landscape architecture and garden and landscape conservation from the United States, Canada, and Germany, the conference provided insights into transnational aspects of garden cultural history in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe and North America and into similarities and differences in dealing with garden cultural heritage and open space planning on these continents. In accordance with the conference title „The Pursuit of Happiness”, all presentations dealt with public green open space, and the conference was open to the public.

Garden and landscape historian *John Dixon Hunt* began the conference with an evening keynote speech. Five topical questions addressing European and North American public park planning structured his talk. Looking back into park history, Hunt provided examples of what over the centuries was considered as „public” and who was the „public” that was granted access to urban parks and gardens. The public functions attributed to parks not only included „community, congregation and conversation,” but were and still are educational in many different ways. Hunt pointed out how Lawrence Halprin, just like Frederick Law Olmsted a century before him, had considered parks and public open space as a common meeting ground for all classes. Just like New York’s Central Park and Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park in the nineteenth century, the „grands projets” initiated by President Mitterrand in Paris were part of political agendas, securing local pride and local or even national images. Asking what ideas of „nature” influenced park design, Hunt offered various examples from the American public park movement. Furthermore, he pointed towards the garden’s influence on park design while at the same time stressing the garden’s neglect in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s when landscape architecture and planning were largely influenced by the ecological movement. Lastly, considering tradition and innovation in park design over the centuries, Hunt suggested the continuity of an alluring green world which, just like the idea of paradise, does not cease to provide the basis of all park and open space planning.

The presentations on the following conference day explored some facets of the transatlantic connections in nineteenth- and twentieth-century garden culture in the public realm.

Gert Gröning gave an overview of the work of German-American landscape architects in the nineteenth-century and their influence on park and open space planning in North America. Gröning began his presentation by shedding some light on German immigrants who were involved in early professional activities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, it was the big influx of German immigrants to Texas during the second third of the nineteenth century, and their knowledge of and leanings towards gardens and designed landscapes, that Gröning suggested as the reason underlying an increasing interest in and reception of German landscape literature by American landscape architects such as Andrew Jackson Downing, Frederick Law Olmsted and Henry Sargent Codman. Following the examples of „Turnvater” Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, the immigrant German university lecturer Karl Theodor Christian Follen introduced the first sports grounds at Harvard University, and in 1826, a „Turnplatz” in Boston. Sports grounds would later play an important role in urban public parks. After having pointed out some of the ideas which crossed the Atlantic, Gröning also presented some less-well known German-born figures in American landscape architecture, such as Robert Demcker and Hermann Schwarzmann, active on the East coast, and Friedrich Kanst and Maximilian Gottlieb Kern, whose traces can be found in Midwestern landscapes.

Franziska Kirchner had to cancel her presentation on short notice. Kirchner would have presented her thesis that Frederick Law Olmsted’s and Calvert Vaux’s aesthetic sensibilities and social vision underlying their design of Central Park originated in German garden theory. When designing and building Central Park, Olmsted was not only familiar with C.C.L. Hirschfeld’s and Friedrich Ludwig von Sckell’s works, but also employed gardeners trained in Germany.

Philip Paar, a research associate at the Zuse Institute Berlin stepped in to fill the gap with a presentation of the virtual reconstruction of a historic garden in the park of Sanssouci, Potsdam. By virtually reconstructing and simulating a „lost garden”, the research into computer landscape modeling and visualization was extended to the field of garden history and garden conservation. Interactive computer simulation is under consideration as a desirable tool not only for future open space and landscape planning, but also for the management and maintenance of garden cultural heritage.

While Gert Gröning had focused his attention on the East Coast and the Midwest, *Terence Young* talked about German influences on the development of nineteenth-century greenspace on the West Coast in San Francisco. Young pointed out the role two German immigrants played in the creation and design of two of the oldest and most important designed greenspaces in San Francisco. Founded by German immigrant Christian Russ, the Russ Gardens served beer and food and provided a site for German festivals in the 1850s and early 1860s. Additionally, the landscaped grounds provided a variety of gymnastic facilities and arrangements for shooting, so that the Russ Gardens became particularly attractive to the local German „Turnverein.” It slowly lost its attraction, however, as more and more Germans became acculturated and advocates of a major public park for the city gained ground, and in 1870 San Franciscans created Golden Gate Park. When the Superintendent of the newly-planned park, William Hammond Hall, failed with the tree and shrub plantings, Frederick Law Olmsted recommended to him one of his German acquaintances, William Fredrick Poppey, most probably a „48er,” who had already been employed by Olmsted on various projects. Under the hands of this German landscape gardener, who had been trained at the Royal Educational College in Berlin, Golden Gate Park began to flourish. His horticultural skills enabled him to successfully establish a park on grounds with highly unfavourable soil conditions.

Whereas these German influences might not be conspicuous to the unsuspecting visitor anymore today, the idea of the kindergarten which crossed the Atlantic in the nineteenth century has since left its mark in the English language. *Susan Herrington* explained how the kindergarten, invented by Friedrich Fröbel in Thuringia in 1838, spread to become one of the most globally shared educational experiences in the world. Beauty, connectivity, and self-directed play were central to Fröbel’s kindergarten pedagogy. Fröbel’s education included block playing, interpretive walks and gardening. Herrington pointed out that in the United States,

many aspects of the kindergarten, including its garden, were transformed to suit the needs of a burgeoning free-market society eager to prepare their children for industrial life. Furthermore, she analyzed how the kindergarten helped necessitate the provision of children's play areas in public outdoor spaces. Children's play areas, playing fields and sports facilities were especially prominent during what has been described by Galen Crantz as the reform park movement in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Conversely the American playgrounds and park planning movement at the beginning of the twentieth century attracted attention in Europe. The parks and playgrounds which the German architect and writer Hugo Koch experienced on a study tour to Chicago and various cities on the East Coast in 1910 deeply impressed him. By focusing on Koch's American experiences and his accomplishments as a widely-traveled architect interested in garden architecture, *Solveig Köbernick* provided a profound insight into the impact of American park planning on German developments at the beginning of the twentieth century. During his North American journey, Koch met with landscape architects Jens Jensen and the Olmsted brothers. His American experiences on the one hand, and the German concept of „Heimat“ and his work within the German circles of city planning on the other hand, led Koch to develop a theoretical basis for a „green network“ that would link city centers to the surrounding countryside. Koch promoted this idea in his book „Gartenkunst im Städtebau“. American park systems that were discussed internationally at the time provided Koch with a number of examples for his „green networks.“

Park system planning, which had been promoted by Frederick Law Olmsted and his colleagues and followers especially after the civil war, and which largely influenced the city planning movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, not only attracted German architects and planners. Although city planning was discussed in international forums dominated by American, British, French, Austrian, German and Dutch professionals at the time, park system planning became an international phenomenon that spread south as well.

Sonja Dümpelmann showed in her presentation that while Americans were appropriating small-scale „Italian beauty“ in their private gardens and public parks, Italians were importing the large-scale „American system.“ American park system planning was discussed by the Roman director of parks and gardens, Nicodemo Severi, in 1909, and the Chicago South park system acted as model for the architect Marcello Piacentini's park system plan for Rome in 1916. As a result of the international significance of park systems for urban planning, and of the fascists' political interest in garden culture, the final proposals for the Roman land-use plan presented to Mussolini in 1930 featured a park system. Dümpelmann exemplified how American landscape architects and city planners adopted design features associated with autocratic systems to represent their democratic political system, while Italian city planners appropriated open space models from democratic America to bolster their totalitarian, fascist state.

Using a range of old and new city parks in different European and North American cities, *Alan Tate* provided an overview of today's functions of city parks by asking „What works?“ He thereby introduced the topics presented on the next conference day. Supporting Hunts' arguments, Tate demonstrated that city parks remain as versatile and significant in the twenty-first century as they were intended to be when Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld called for them in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century, and when Andrew Jackson Downing and William Cullen Bryant promoted the case for a large park in New York in the first half of the nineteenth century. Tate put forth the contemporary purposes of city parks and commented on decisive factors for a park's success such as its location, response to context and funding. He attributed the resurgence in usage of a lot of central city parks over the last 25 years to the re-gentrification of the post-industrial western city.

Besides presentations dealing with the history, current development, management, and maintenance strategies of Munich's Englischer Garten and New York's famed Central Park, the final conference day

provided insights into the history of garden festivals and the aims of the current Munich garden festival, BUGA 05.

Sara Cedar Miller from the Central Park Conservancy, New York, discussed the political, social, and economic forces that led to taking the land for Central Park, the first major public park in America. Apart from introducing the leading men and women in the development of this new urban institution, Miller showed the combined influences of contemporary paintings of the Hudson River School, the American landscape and private European estates in shaping the design of the park. Contrary to a common assumption, which attributes Central Park's landscapes and character traits entirely to Calvert Vaux's and Frederick Law Olmsted's genius, Miller revealed the influence of other competition entries and designers on this work of art. Miller's presentation testified to Hunt's and Tate's statement that although park uses have changed over the decades, there is a strong continuity in the requirements which Central Park is apt to fulfill.

A narrative of the more recent history and a contemporary outlook on Central Park was provided by *Elizabeth Barlow Rogers*, who founded the Central Park Conservancy in 1980. Barlow Rogers explained how the first public-private partnership in support of an American park between 1982 and 1985 drew up a management and restoration plan that would guide the rebuilding of the park, which by that time had been run down by mass events and unregulated sports. In dealing with the park's restoration, the Central Park Conservancy regarded the park as a time-layered palimpsest and work of art which has to provide for a wide range of contemporary uses. The successful restoration of Central Park, following Olmsted's and Vaux's original design intentions, while at the same time taking into account modern usage and developments, provided the necessary starting point for Christo and Jeanne-Claude's final realization of „The Gates” in Central Park in February 2005. The two artists had been waiting for permission since the year the Central Park Conservancy had been founded. Barlow Rogers pointed out how in February 2005, Central Park had again acted as landscape palimpsest upon which cultural intentions were inscribed, thus confirming and promoting the Central Park Conservancy's belief and aim to revalidate the park's original vision and the layers of its subsequent additions.

Supposedly having influenced Olmsted and Vaux in their design of Central Park, the English Garden in Munich, a model for urban green space designed to serve a social function, today faces similar challenges to New York's Central Park. *Rainer Herzog*, acting director of the garden department of the Bavarian Administration of State Palaces, Gardens and Lakes, presented a narrative history of the first German Volksgarten, largely designed by Friedrich Ludwig von Sckell during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Influenced by events during the French Revolution, as early as 1789 Elector Karl Theodor of Bavaria decreed that the royal hunting grounds along the river Isar should be laid out as public pleasure grounds. The undertaking was promoted by the American-born courtier and adjunct to Elector Karl Theodor of Bavaria, Benjamin Thompson, a social reformer who later explained that the public park was intended to benefit „not merely one class, but the public in its entirety.” The English Garden, which was opened to the public in 1792, served the public not only as a place of enjoyment and relaxation, but also as a place of instruction and education. The objective of cultural preservation work in the English Garden is both to bring the botanical assortment closer to Sckell's conception, and to recreate the garden's original spatial and visual structure. At the same time, however, it has become very important to determine which usages to permit in which areas.

What public parks were for nineteenth-century European and North American cities, garden festivals have sought to provide for cities in European countries such as Germany, Britain and the Netherlands after the second World War: horticultural exhibitions paired with newly designed public open space and a tool for urban development.

Andrew Theokas asked the question why garden festivals – so successful in some North European countries – had not caught on in the U.S. With the exception of AmeriFlora '92 in Columbus, Ohio, celebrating

Columbus's arrival in America, the U.S. has not undertaken garden festivals similar to the European examples. As one possible reason, Theokas pointed towards the differences in urban open space legislation between the United States and Europe, where in some cases federal or even state-wide statutes affect the amount or kind of open space to be provided in a particular locality. In contrast, urban open space legislation is a local phenomenon in the United States, which Theokas subsequently exemplified by presenting the open space plans of three cities, Phoenix, Chicago and Boston. As major new public parks are being built in the U.S., the garden festivals' qualities Theokas considered worthwhile for importing to the U.S. are their educational landscape and their function as a temporary planning agency, providing impulses for comprehensive change.

Currently working for the „Bundesgartenschau München 2005 GmbH“, *Wolfram Höfer* introduced the planning concept of Munich's BUGA 05. The masterplan of the national garden festival taking place on a former airport site on the outskirts of Munich, which from 1992 has been developed as a new city quarter, mixing residential and commercial uses, was designed by the French office Latitude Nord under the direction of the landscape architect Gilles Vexlard. Munich landscape designer Rainer Schmidt is responsible for the design of the garden festival's grounds. The aim underlying his garden designs is to entertain and educate the public and in this way shows some parallels to the original functions of the first public urban parks on both sides of the Atlantic. Continuing his talk on-site, Wolfram Höfer concluded the conference with a guided tour of the BUGA grounds.

After a first international conference organized by the „Atlantische Akademie Rheinland Pfalz e.V.“ and the Rhineland-Palatinate office of the German Association of Landscape Architects (BDLA) in October 2000, the conference in Munich provided further insights into the transatlantic transfer of ideas in garden cultural history, an area of study which until now has been neglected but, as the conference has shown, does not lack potential.

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