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European Garden Award 2018/2019

1st Prize: LARGE SCALE GREEN NETWORKS OR CONCEPTS:

PARKSTADT SÜD, COLOGNE

Among planners and architects there is an ongoing discussion of which green qualities are most important in city planning. The discussion is held within all planning scales starting on the comprehensive level.

Sometimes core green assets are defined as the number of square meters as a measure of the density of the city. In other discussions planners and researchers stress that some areas need to be big enough (about 50 - 100 hectares) to have the possibility to create necessary values as better climate, silence, wildlife and experience of nature and recreational use. All needed in a build environment.

There are also theories saying that the structure itself is the most important aspect. The structure can be designed as a more or less randomised network with green links and areas of different size. It can also be designed as an almost geometrical system easy to identify. We all know the radial finger- structure, with Copenhagen and Stuttgart as well-known examples. We have also seen the green ring belts of London and Vienna. I must also mention that we sometimes meet the argument that quality in design and maintenance is the most important park value in a City.

My second introduction theme in this laudation is about which origin landscape qualities can be the backbone in the overall structure. Most cities have its characteristic structure thanks to water – the shoreline at the sea or close to a river. Other cities have hills and mountains difficult to build on and therefore they are assets in the green structure. There are also cities where history has been the guidance for the structure. In Europe we have the fortification systems from Roman time – walls and canals for the defence against intruders.

One of our great cultural cities - Cologne - is a best practise in all the fields I mentioned above: density, green structure and use and utilization of both natural (river Rhine) and historical landscape artefacts (fortification system).

From the first Roman fortification ring Cologne has created a green boulevard and has also transformed the Prussian fortress ring into an Inner Green Belt one hundred years ago. Cologne has also started to design a green belt at the outskirts of the city. In this work Cologne has the objective to develop new wooded areas in the environs. The project is scientifically underpinned by experts on the topic of forest utilization.

It must also be mentioned that an overall European study of green structures in cities and accessibility to green assets some 15 to 20 years ago did show the efficiency of the green belt structure. The city of Cologne was classified as one of the top 5 cities in Europe. It was shown from a scientific point of view that green belt linked with green corridors really did serve the inhabitants of Cologne with accessible green assets.

The Inner Green Belt in Cologne has a missing link, located where the greenery should join the river Rhine. Industrial and commercial use and railways has been the obstacle. Almost no greenery, nature and recreation has been present. Quite a challenge I must say! But Cologne in cooperation with regional planning partners have decided to do what history and heritage has pointed out.... an almost perfectly shaped green belt.

The planning process has been extremely professional. With background and visual inventories and analysis of all necessary content – climate, topography, flood management, transportation, cultural background, land cover analysis, river bank conditions and so on. I recommend everyone to go in to the website of Cologne and see their pedagogical presentation of their planning concept for “Parkstadt Süd”

The completion of the Inner Green Belt has today come within reach. Cologne will complete its inner green belt. The plan is to build on the edge of the Park City South, a lively, colourful neighbourhood with several thousands of new apartments, offices and commercial space. As large as 125 hectares or 150 football fields, the entire planning area includes a former brewery, a former freight station and the big Cologne wholesale market, which is to be relocated. The design programming has put emphasis on connection to river Rhine, recreational functions, social active housing districts, green connections, landmarks and sustainability.

The urban planning framework has been developed in a so-called cooperative process: Five teams of internationally planning offices have created concepts for the new park and the neighbourhood of tomorrow in an intensive dialogue with the urban society. The design, by RMP, Stephan Lenzen and Ortner & Ortner architecture, in which the green occupies a strong position vis-à-vis urban space, received the greatest approval. The concept promises a big new park of almost 70 acres (35 hectares) and a real new townscape.

On the one hand, the new green corridor succeeds in relinquishing a development along the railway embankment as a coherent unit of space and generous access to the Rhine. On the other hand, the dense development structure in the central market district will create a new,

independent urban district - the market hall will move into the middle and be adequately integrated thanks to a new open plaza – I quote from the expert committee in charge.

The Inner Green Belt, as a testimony to the urban development of Cologne and an expression of the green planning principles of its time of origin, forms the backbone of the entire planning. With a dense Grove area for walking and learning, an Open green space for play and picnic, the Open plaza for shopping and events and the Water-front green space for relax and sightseeing.

The inner-city greenbelt, emerged in the early 1920s, continues to make a significant contribution. The implementation of “Parkstadt Süd” is a long-term project, but the first sections are currently under further refinement. It’s time to start implementation. Planners in Cologne can use the phrase “Keep it simple stupid” – saying that it is all about a ring!

Conclusions. The City of Cologne shows that comprehensive physical structures create good green values. Cologne tells us that historical heritage can be the road to the future. Cologne also says that planning is a long-term process – and if you do so - you can create astonishing results.

We will go on loving Cologne for its Cathedral, but we do add the completion of the Inner Green Belt as one of your core assets. Cologne is worthy international admiration and reputation. It has been a great pleasure taking part of your history and what you are aiming at. Congratulations from EGHN from all our hearts.