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European Garden Award 2018/2019

1st Prize: BEST DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF EUROPEAN RELEVANCE

BIOSPHERE RESERVE SPREEWALD & SEENLAND LAUSITZ

It is a real take-off today. It is for the first time that the European Garden Award is given to landscapes. It is for the first time that a Prize is given to a couple of sites.

It is only logic that I give this laudation as I was jury member for the first time this year. And, in addition to that, I am from Denmark which many people think about as “landscapes only” with Copenhagen as the solitary city.

So why do we have Seenland Lausitz and Biosphere Reserve Spreewald as joint winners?

After sharing all information during the jury meeting, we ended up with a list of four perfect candidates for the 3 awards to assign. Trying to solve this challenge, we agreed that Spreewald and Lausitz are very different today, but that they are a perfect example to show how nature and humans are able to create such different landscapes even if they are so close. Even so close that the Lausitz has a huge influence on the water quality in Spreewald. With the award we want to motivate people to visit both and to understand the relations between landscapes and their wider cultural heritage. We agreed that Lausitz and Spreewald might have benefits from being considered as a good couple.

With this added value it was clear for the jury that this couple must win the first prize. We then, very happily realised, that the other two landscapes from our initial list of four could both win a second prize. Life can be so easy sometimes!

Lausitz is a proof that hidden natural treasures can be the reason for devastating a landscape. Lausitz is rich of brown coal. To extract this, giant machines were constructed and huge plants were built to use the coal. Rural areas – one after the other were turned into industrial landscapes. The mining of brown coal still continues, but many areas have been exploited now and “former industrial landscapes” or “post-industrial landscapes” were left.

It was certainly not easy to identify the “sleeping beauty” in these man-made landscapes. But it was exactly this what was done by people in the Lausitz, several experts but many inhabitants too. People who often had spent much of their life in this unpleasant, hostile and often unhealthy landscape.

Creative thinking and courageous implementation started with the IBA (International Building Exhibition) in the year 2000 and since 2011 the work is continued by Lausitzer Seenland e.V.

The emphasis of this new multifunctional landscape was always on high quality and unusual solutions. When finding new uses for industrial remains, when moving mountains and creating lakes, nature has always been a winner too. That is why Lausitz earns 50 percent of the 1st Prize.

The other 50 percent go to the Spreewald. Here for centuries people adjusted their life and work to the resources and conditions given by this specific landscape and its nature. Especially the water (groundwater, lakes, rivers, canals etc.) has formed the landscape. It affected the soil, determined the vegetation and the wildlife. Landscape influenced culture and heritage. Compared to the Lausitz for instance, Spreewald is much more small scale, green, silent, relaxed, traditional, but high quality and unusual as well. Its natural beauty has always been obvious and attracted visitors.

The main challenge for the Spreewald was balancing this public interest and somehow pressure and the needs and limitations of nature as well as the cultural heritage that make this landscape unique. Tourism in the Spreewald has been slow, environmentally friendly and sustainable long before tourism experts postulated this as new trends. The local people and companies in cooperation with the public bodies in the region and in Brandenburg, created a joint vision and have taken responsibilities for developing this cultural landscape of European relevance. A range of high quality local products, including the famous cucumbers, but much more, was created and renewable energies are strictly supported. Income generated is used to manage and to enhance habitats and other natural values.

All this has helped to achieve two things: Spreewald is one of the main tourism destinations in Germany and it is a registered biosphere reserve.

In the last few weeks EGHN noticed that the decision to award Spreewald and Lausitz as a couple is very well accepted in the region. The jury has not been certain about that. We learned that the award might help to renew an older discussion about a closer cooperation and promotion of these two landscapes with benefits for both and entire Brandenburg.

As a first step towards this cooperation, may I ask the representatives of both winners to join the stage and to tell us – very shortly and balanced – what the award means for them and for their future work.

Thank you.