
Steffan Robel

Bürgerpark Weinstadt — Blending Park and Landscape into Smart Park

Our view of landscape has become strongly differentiated and individualized. A collective, society-wide perception of landscape no longer exists today. For the amateur athlete, the romantic landscape of the forest becomes a fitness trail determined by pulse and calories consumed. The gourmet sees the forest idyll as a source of roast and mushrooms for dinner, while the forester may calculate cubic meters of wood, its market value or potential of carbon storage. This example shows that the landscape takes on various tasks; it provides recreation, production as well as climate protection. Moreover, there is no longer consensus on a common aesthetic perception of landscape in today's urban society. The proliferation of multimedia and global travel has made our concept of landscape more diverse while unhinging it from the landscape of our immediate surroundings. And finally, the perception of landscape is also influenced by the countless cultural backgrounds represented in a multi-ethnic urban populace.

From the Domination of Nature to Smart Park

The perception of landscape is always a reflection of society. Rationalism held the domination of nature to be an expression of human power, and thus of absolutist sovereignty. The Arcadian ideal established “natural landscape” as the antithesis of society, especially in response to the urban transformation at the onset of the Industrial Revolution. With progressing industrialization natural landscape became increasingly reshaped and, at some point, simply ceased to exist, thereupon persisting solely as an aesthetic image. For this change to the environment caused by humans, Paul Josef Crutzen, in his 2002 article titled *Geology of Mankind*¹, coined the term “Anthropocene.” The impact of humans has been such that it can no longer be considered that we are in the Holocene, a geologic era; we have entered the Anthropocene, a human era. Mankind is significantly transforming its environment, indeed determining the parameters of its own development. This can lead to an en-

¹ Crutzen 2002: 23.

vironment shaped by culture, as well as to its very destruction. As expressed by Mathis Wackernagel, changes to our society can proceed “by design or disaster”². From the Anthropocene approach emerge two postulates:

1. City and landscape are no longer opposites; landscape becomes a functional component of the city. It assumes important tasks such as recreation and climate protection, as well as food production via, for instance, urban gardening.
2. The totality of our surrounding is shaped by humans, that is to say on the basis of culture and art. In the literal sense, there can be no natural design.

With the emergence of the Volkspark (people’s park) around the advent of the twentieth century, the understanding of the municipal park as a representative showpiece began to give way to the idea that it become a functional component of the city. As industrialization progressed, active recreation for the purpose of maintaining people’s health gained higher priority, and consequently changed the configuration and use of park facilities. Still today, the program of the Volkspark informs our idea of a park more than anything else. However, the demands of a divergent urban society have become more varied, and no longer coalesce across a broad swath of society as they did at the beginning of the last century. The participation of the urban populace today requires that a park program be as flexible as possible.

A second requirement is a result of climate change. More and more often the park is called upon to assume the tasks of climate protection and to compensate for the effects of climate change in the city. Water management and biomass that stores carbon are becoming essential qualities of the park, which is taking on functionality formerly ascribed to landscape.

The Anthropocene model’s dissolution of the city-landscape dichotomy creates new possibilities for landscape and nature to become functional components of the city. A new typology — *Smart Park*, a derivative of the Smart-City discussion — combines the recreational function of the park with additional functionalities for the city. Hybrid open spaces prevail. The application of innovative technology is also of great importance in the *Smart Park*, yet its focus lies not necessarily on *big data*, but rather on the intelligent application of innovative biotechnology. A second aspect, in tandem with innovative technology, is the advancement of participation by the urban populace. This extends beyond usual civic involvement to become a means for the participatory development and upkeep of the public space.

An exemplary project for this new open-space typology — and one that is drawing much attention — is the non-profit organization *Flussbad Berlin*, a plan launched by *realities:united*. The idea is that natural filtering to improve the water quality of the Spree at Kupfergraben will allow for swimming directly beside *Museum Island* in the center of the city. *Flussbad’s* planning principle and technological approach combine several qualities ascribed to

the *Smart Park*. The bottom filter for water purification will rely on bio-engineering technology, ultimately expanding Berlin's historic center around a landscape component and creating a collage of city, landscape and technology.

The new typology of the *Smart Park* is always a hybrid form combining various uses. The various components are optional and not obligatory; any combination of components is conceivable. One highly technological example is the *algae vortex* (fig. 2) designed by *A24 Landschaft* for a themed garden at the 2016 *China International Garden Expo* in Wuhan. The translucent tubes, in which microalgae are cultivated, condense into a sculptural canopy of shadow and shade. The cultivation technology is elaborated to create an aesthetic location to linger, thus re-interpreting the Chinese Garden. The conversion of the *Estienne-et-Foch barracks* in Landau (fig. 1) heavily emphasizes nature preservation. The FFH-Habitat Ebenberg, an area closed to public access, is understood as an integral element of the entire ensemble, while development space for flora and fauna is provided also in the immediately utilizable area.



Fig. 1 The conversion of the *Estienne-et-Foch barracks* is an exemplary integration of nature preservation and recreation. The areas closed to public access can be experienced from the observation platform and tower.

Self-Organization

The life of urban dwellers has ceased to be confined within their own four walls. As private life has expanded into the public realm, the desire to participate in the shaping of these spaces has grown stronger. Participation has become a key aspect of open spaces in the public domain, not least because it carries the potential of reducing maintenance costs for communities and cities. The task of landscape architects can morph into that of developing diverse governance strategies for land use and assisting (future) users. That a park simply takes shape from the bottom up is, at first, an interesting idea. However, if one assumes that process supervision and spatial context are always required, it is helpful to incorporate into the design the notion of resilience, a concept originally rooted in psychology and ecological systems theory. Resili-

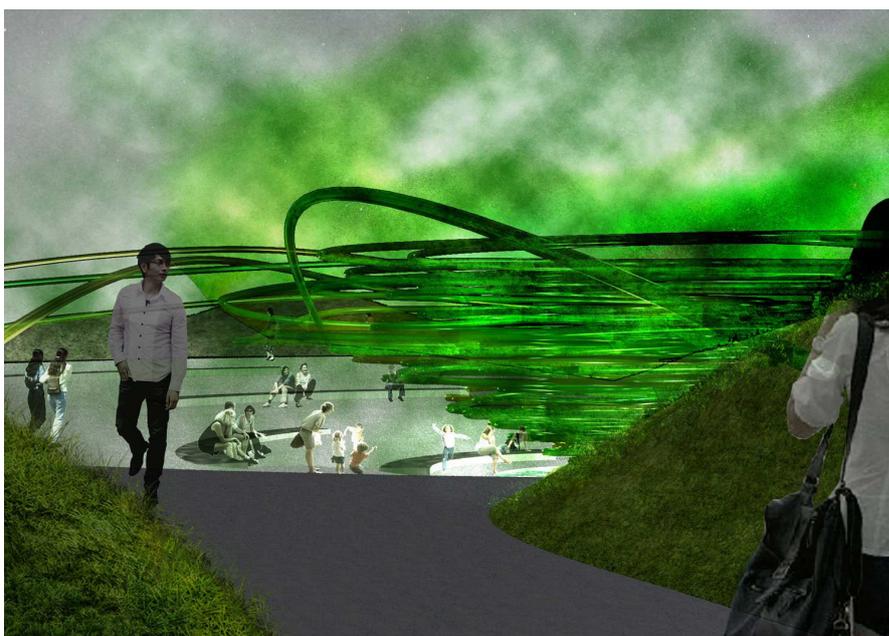


Fig. 2 A nexus of technology and aesthetic — translucent tubes, in which microalgae are cultivated, condense into a sculptural canopy.

ence means that a system must be positioned to compensate for disturbance, or even destruction. For the design, it follows that rules and structures are necessary to sustain a flexible program.

These organizational structures can be rigid, akin to the omnipresent “Billy” shelf sold by *Ikea*. The framework is modest and neutral, yet various juxtapositions allow for a wide range of filling options: a principle that Rem Koolhaas applied in his design for *Parc de la Villette*, and one that has become — with the simultaneity of manifold uses — synonymous with urbanity. However, the scaffolding structure can also become the designed object itself, lending expression to the flexibility of use. To continue with the metaphor of a shelf, this structure corresponds to the “Egal” shelving system by Nils H. Moormann. This shelf’s horizontal partition walls provide maximal flexibility when filling. In this case, flexibility and interactive structure become the design elements.

One project that requires the conjunction of various functions is the *Bürgerpark Weinstadt* (literally, *Citizens’ Park Weinstadt*). The ambitious task of giving the city a center that strengthens its collective identity can only be approached with a strategy that is able to incorporate many diverse things and processes, yet to maintain a strong character.



Fig. 3 A hybrid park combining agriculture and recreation will offer Weinstadt a center for everyone.

Park and Center — Bürgerpark Weinstadt

Weinstadt, located amid the *urban sprawl* of Stuttgart, is not really a city, but rather a loose affiliation of five single villages joined together as part of the regional restructuring that occurred in the 1970s. The name “Weinstadt,” despite its reference to the area’s wine production, did not succeed in lending the conglomeration of towns a common identity. The old names of the villag-es are still predominantly in use; even when traveling by train, passen-

Fig. 4 The site plan illustrates the explicitly retained parcellation—the core concept of the design.



gers cannot book a ticket to Weinstadt, but rather only to Beutelsbach or Endersbach. Weinstadt also lacks a common city center, as each village has retained its own center. There is no location that actually is Weinstadt. Since 2008 the city has been developing the idea of a green center (fig. 3) — as opposed to giving Weinstadt a traditional urban core with pedestrian zone, market square, administrative buildings. The targeted areas have previously been used for small-scale farming: an idyllic mix of small gardens, orchards and fields with sunflowers, pumpkins and raspberries. Community gardens such as these have widely been lost in Germany; only recently have they undergone a renaissance as “urban agriculture,” providing an ideal location for bringing people together.

However, the realization of a park in the intended area seemed not to be possible, as the ownership structure was too fragmented and the purchase negotiations overly complicated. A classic, coherent park could not be implemented at this location. But why destroy something that people actually love? The compartmentalized parceling structure and the resulting patchwork of uses were primary in determining the atmosphere of the area. In large parts, *A24 Landschaft’s* winning entry (fig. 4) in the 2014 design competition preserves the existing configuration. It seemed a better strategy to yield to the evolved structure and to integrate it with new uses to form a park.

Making this dynamic patchwork recognizable as a park required a robust framework to allow an increasing variety of uses. However, parks succeed not only through good organization, but due to strong character as well. Immutable formal elements are essential to the character of a design. These “super objects” (fig. 5) can create a spatial framework as well as atmospheric conditions. In *Bürgerpark Weinstadt*, this framework is provided by the elaborate, concentrated reconfiguration of the course of the stream (fig. 6) that flows through the entire site. An expansive path along the renaturated

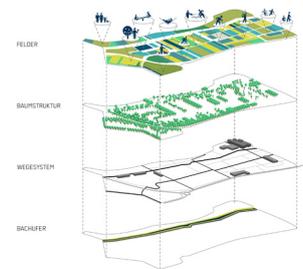


Fig. 6 The layout of *Bürgerpark Weinstadt* allows for flexible, alterable structuring.



Fig. 5 The bridges and paths in *Mangfallpark Rosenheim* are examples of “super objects” serving as the backbone of a design.

Fig. 7 The concentrated reconfiguration of the stream's course — as a “super object” of the design — provides the backbone of the park.



Fig. 9 Diversification of the usage program widens the group of stakeholders.

waterway invigorates the landscape, as does a bicycle path linking the individual communities and connecting to the green corridor of the River Rems. The wider spatial concept takes its orientation from the existing configuration of fields (fig. 7). Previous paths were integrated and supplemented, fruit orchards were expanded and used for spatial divisioning, and a busy street was obscured behind newly planted trees. The layout of the agricultural parcels remained intact. In a negotiation process ongoing for few years, more and more area is being converted to be used by the park, for sunbathing areas, playgrounds as well as for community gardens.

Stakeholders using the area are still constrained by farmers, predominantly older allotment gardeners and users of the previously installed tennis court. The proportional increase in areas for recreational activities, such as play-grounds, picnic lawns, lounging areas near the water, community gardens as well as a pavilion with a park-café (fig. 8) and individually playable spaces, addresses a diverse range of stakeholders: young families, youths, residents of the adjacent home for the elderly, newcomers of various origins, clubs, associations etc. (fig. 9 and 10). In order to gain the widest possible acceptance for the new location, the participation process was begun in the early planning phases. Needs and implementation options were — and still are — discussed and developed in various workshops with potential users. The aim is to create a lively location for all generations and countless stakeholders, instill a close identification with the park and encourage its users to embark on the long-term engagement of maintaining the park. An application is currently pending with the federal funding agency *Nationale Projekte des Städtebaus* (National Urban Development Projects), and planning is now in the preliminary design phase. *Bürgerpark Weinstadt* is expected to be completed before the opening of the intercommunal 2019 *Remstal Horticultural Show*. The design of *Bürgerpark Weinstadt* is a hybrid of productive agriculture and

classic park. The stakeholders receive space to develop on their own while a unifying structure is fabricated, creating a singular location with character and high aesthetic aspirations. And ultimately, Weinstadt gains a new center — a *Smart Park* in which farmers, urban gardeners, families and the elderly come together on equal terms.

Author

Landscape architect Steffan Robel is the founder and owner of *A24 Landschaft*, a landscape architecture firm in Berlin. He has established himself through projects that focus predominantly on the integration and synergy of landscape with urban fabric. His designs have won national and international awards. He has held teaching posts at various universities. Steffan Robel studied in Berlin and the Netherlands.

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Figures

Figs. 1–10 A 24 Landschaft

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