

Wien, March 2014

THE 1964 VIENNA INTERNATIONAL GARDEN SHOW GREEN POST-WAR MODERNIS

- Press conference:** Wednesday, 9 April 2014, 10 a.m.
Opening: Wednesday, 9 April 2014, 6.30 p.m.
Exhibition venue: Wien Museum Karlsplatz, 1040 Vienna
Duration: 10 April - 31 August 2014
Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Press photos: www.wienmuseum.at/en/press

The Vienna International Garden show opened 50 years ago, in April 1964, at the newly created Donaupark. About 2.1 million visitors came to see what was then Europe's biggest garden show. Its many attractions included the 252-metre-high Danube Tower, a chairlift that glided along above the flower beds, a miniature railway, twelve "nation gardens", temporary outdoor exhibitions, the newly created "Iris Lake", a 41-metre-high greenhouse tower and an eccentric "21st-century garden" with plants that were intended as food for astronauts.

WIG 64 was a landmark event in the history of post-war Vienna that left its traces in the collective memory and, above all, gave rise to one of the biggest 20th-century parks in Vienna, the Donaupark. The exhibition looks at the 1964 Vienna International Garden Show in relation to utopian visions of urban planning and to Vienna's efforts to groom its image in the post-war period, as well as presenting contemporary trends in garden design and reflecting on the later uses of the Donaupark and the changes it has undergone until today. The items on show include contemporary photographs, models, films and posters, and the exhibition also presents personal memories of Viennese people.

Emulating the Germans

Vienna's truly mammoth-size garden show project took its inspiration from garden shows in Germany, many of which were organised in cities that had been devastated by wartime bombing with the aim of creating or re-establishing urban green spaces and improving the quality of life in nearby neighbourhoods. The city of Erfurt took the lead in 1950 with the first national garden show in the GDR, followed by the first West German "Federal Garden Show" ("Bundesgartenschau", or BUGA for short) in Hannover in 1951. A series of ten major garden shows followed over the subsequent years and into the 1960s. They became symbols of Germany's "economic miracle" in the post-war reconstruction era, and were used to bolster the organisers' position in the "peaceful competition" among cities and nations. Vienna submitted its application in 1958 (after a site at Laxenburg, the Lainzer Tiergarten game reserve and the Prater area had been ruled out as locations), and in 1962 the proposed Donaupark project was officially awarded world exhibition status by the Bureau International des Expositions in Paris.

Built on a waste dump

A priority objective of WIG 64 was to improve those parts of Vienna that lay "beyond the Danube". Situated only four kilometres away from St. Stephen's Cathedral in the city centre, the area between the Danube river and its cut-off arm Alte Donau had long been regarded as a „problem zone". Since the times of the monarchy, a military shooting range had been located in what is now the eastern part of Donaupark; during the Nazi era, 129 persons (deserters, opponents of the regime, those found guilty of "subversion of the armed forces") were executed there between 1940 and 1945. Another part of WIG 64 was laid out on the site of an informal settlement called Bretteldorf, a notorious slum. Until then, its inhabitants had successfully resisted attempts to evict them; a confrontation in 1926 was even dubbed the "war of Bretteldorf".

The third part of the Donaupark area was a disused waste dump where waste pickers had formerly eked out a living by searching for usable materials, such as bones or industrial coke. In the 1950s, 70 people still worked at the landfill, whose capacity had already been exhausted by this time. At the same time, the city government decided to move from landfilling to waste incineration in the future. In any event, WIG 64 had to cope with the after-effects of the waste dump: landfill gas escaped, and the groundwater was heavily contaminated. But even so, the garden show proved to be an almost ideal solution for a "problem zone", and grass could quite literally be allowed to grow over its history.

Public green spaces for healthy, handsome people

WIG 64 embodied a paradigm shift in post-war urban planning. "Social green space" was a political catchphrase of the time, applied by political leaders who praised the important social function of public green spaces as a counterweight to the ever more densely built-up city, islands of calm amid the rising tide of motorised traffic. New parks were created to turn Vienna into a modern metropolis where, in the words of Mayor Franz Jonas, "many healthy, strong and handsome people can build a better world."

The garden show took place at a time when modest income growth and the introduction of the 45-hour week were prompting the beginnings of "modern" leisure pursuits and consumption patterns. The promotion of tourism and commerce was a stated goal of the WIG 64 organisers, who saw the show as a tool for image improvement that was to serve not only Vienna, but all of Austria. Its landscape architecture and gardens were accordingly designed with modernism and an international approach in mind.

The City of Vienna advertised WIG 64 as a show of superlatives right from the start. Impressive key figures – 1.5 million flowers, two million herbaceous perennials, 500,000 shrubs and 40,000 coniferous trees – were announced to put the Viennese and the international public in the right mood for the event. All in all, the WIG 64 grounds covered nearly one million square metres – a gigantic area that dwarfs present-day park projects, such as the 70,000-m² Helmut Zilk Park near the new Central Rail Station (to be completed by 2017), or the Lakeside Park in Aspern, which is scheduled for opening in 2014 and covers a modest 50,000 m².

Forward-looking modernism or small-minded allotment garden spirit?

The design of WIG 64 bore the signature of Alfred Auer, then Director of Vienna's Parks and Gardens Department. He took on the project after a competition, organised at short notice and at the national level only, failed to bring forth any convincing projects. Auer put an extensive 180,000-m² "lawn bowl" around the newly-built Danube Tower at the centre of the park, next to the 30,000-m² "Iris Lake", and surrounded both with smaller-sized exhibition areas. There were exhibition halls, permanent themed gardens and temporary outdoor shows, including a rose show. The Danube Tower with its revolving restaurant, though controversial from an architectural standpoint, was immediately adopted as a new landmark for Vienna. A dense programme of events was organised to ensure that masses of visitors – not only gardening buffs – would flock to WIG 64.

Efforts were made to recruit notable international collaborators for the "nation gardens", and Vienna succeeded in securing contributions by excellent landscape architects, including Roberto Burle Marx for Brazil, Hermann Thiele for Germany and Willi Neukom for Switzerland. Othmar Ruthner, a Viennese engineer, designed a greenhouse tower which drew much international attention. Built on a floor space of 50m², it contained a kind of paternoster lift which moved thousands of flowerpots up and down, with the plants being watered and fed along the way. Vegetables and flowers grown in this utopian arrangement were used in the eight restaurants of WIG 64.

But WIG 64 attracted its share of criticism, too. Ulrich Wolf, President of Germany's Gesellschaft für Gartenkunst und Landschaftspflege (Society of Horticulture and Landscape Management), disapproved of the wide walkways and the big size and monotony of the entrance areas. Critical voices in Vienna included the daily Die Presse, which called WIG 64 a "bureaucratic project", and architect Hermann Czech, who saw "an allotment gardener's fantasy run wild" in the park and felt the overbearing attitude of urban planning experts looming in every corner. By and large, however, the response to WIG 64 was quite euphoric, so that a sequel was planned and took place ten years later – another International Garden Show, this time at Laaer Berg. WIG 64 was also a

private media event for many, who tried out their first photo camera or filmed their first home movie during a visit there.

After WIG 64 had closed the Donaupark was opened to the public in 1965. Although spaces were carved out later for the Vienna International Centre (UN Office Vienna) and the adjacent conference centre, the Donau City development and a motorway along the Danube, the Donaupark still covers 600,000m² today. The final section of the exhibition is dedicated to the park today and its present-day uses. These are impressively depicted in a photo series by Klaus Pichler and a film by Peter Arlt and Manfred Schwaba, both commissioned by Wien Museum. The extensive Donaupark grounds still owe much of their appeal to the juxtaposition of designed areas and less strictly defined multi-purpose spaces that are used by visitors from all walks of life.

The WIG 64 exhibition has been curated by Martina Nußbaumer of Wien Museum and Ulrike Krippner, Lilli Lička and Nicole Theresa Raab from the Vienna University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Department of Landscape Architecture. A catalogue with texts by Annemarie Bucher, Ulrike Krippner, Lilli Lička, Helmut Neundlinger, Andreas Nierhaus, Martina Nußbaumer, Peter Payer and Nicole Theresa Raab, as well as many pictures and illustrations, including photographs by Klaus Pichler and WIG 64 pictures by Barbara Pflaum, will be published by Metroverlag.

- Admission:** Adults EUR 8, concessions EUR 6
(senior citizens, disabled persons, Vienna Card and Ö1 Club Card holders, students up to 27 years of age, apprentices, conscripts in military/civil social service, groups of ten or more persons)
Free admission for school pupils and students under 19 years of age
Free admission for all visitors every first Sunday of the month
- Visitor information:** T +43 1 5058747-85173, service@wienmuseum.at, www.wienmuseum.at
- Curators:** Martina Nußbaumer (Wien Museum),
Ulrike Krippner, Lilli Lička, Nicole Theresa Raab ((Vienna University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Department of Landscape Architecture)
- Exhibition design:** Thomas Hamann
- Graphic art:** Bueronardin
- Catalogue:** WIG 64. Die grüne Nachkriegsmoderne. Metroverlag, 160 pages, EUR 24,-
- Main sponsor:** Wiener Stadtwerke
- Cooperation partner:** Parks and Gardens Department of the City of Vienna
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