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GREENWAYS AS VEHICLES FOR SOCIAL EXPRESSION

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Abstract

Traditionally, the recognized functions of greenways include water resource protection and pollution abatement, riparian habitat enhancement and biodiversity, flood hazard reduction, recreation, environmental education, noise attenuation, microclimate enhancement (cooling and pollution abatement), and the reduction of bank erosion and downstream sedimentation (Platt, 1992). Phil Lewis simply prefers to think of greenways as environmental corridors, which he dubs "E-ways," for the four main purposes of environment, ecology, education, and exercise (1990). In this paper a fifth "e" purpose of expression will be suggested.

As a beginning four different ways of promoting expression will be illustrated with examples. These means will include personal, patriotic, creative, and social-political forms of expression. Examples to illustrate this range will include: 1. Anne Lusk's initiative with the Stowe Greenway in Vermont, where personal social expression underlies the greenway's success; 2. American emergency war gardens from 1917-1918 such as at the Fenway in Boston, where patriotism is symbolically expressed (Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1992); 3. "Meanwhile Gardens," begun by Jamie McCollough where the creative expression of people's favorite childhood places are given shape in the greenway along the Grand Union Canal in London; and 4. the former "no man's" land in Berlin, where avante-garde artists have created a radical new greenway with social-political commentary expressed throughout their outdoor environmental sculptures snaking through this long, linear strip.

This important, yet perhaps overlooked role as a source of expression to its makers and users, helps broaden the meanings of greenways, thereby contributing to their growing strength. A discussion of the range of expressions which greenways afford their makers and users will be developed in conclusion.

Introduction

Greenways are sprouting up throughout America with a renewed fervor and determinism. Motivating purposes include environmental, ecological, and recreational. Charles Little in his landmark book, Greenways for America, has classified greenways into 5 general types (1990, pp. 4-5):

1. urban riverside/waterfront greenways
2. recreational greenways
3. ecologically significant natural corridors
4. scenic and historic routes, and
5. Comprehensive greenway systems or networks

Traditionally, the recognized functions of greenways include water resource protection and pollution abatement, riparian habitat enhancement and biodiversity, flood hazard reduction, recreation, environmental education, noise attenuation, microclimate enhancement (cooling and pollution abatement), and the reduction of bank erosion and downstream sedimentation (Platt, 1992). Phil Lewis prefers to think of greenways as environmental corridors, which he dubs "E-ways," for the four main purposes of environment, ecology, education, and exercise (1990). In this paper a fifth "e" purpose of expression will be additionally suggested.

First the dominant purposes of greenways will be discussed, beginning with evolutionary origins of greenways in this country. The recreational and environmental roots of the purposes will be emphasized. New interest in the ecological purposes will be mentioned. Next four different examples of greenways, where a range of social expression dominates, will be described. These examples will illustrate personal, patriotic, creative, and social-political forms of expression. They will include: 1. Anne Lusk's initiative with the Stowe Greenway in Vermont, where the personal social expression underlies the greenway's success; 2. American emergency war gardens from 1917-1918 such as at the Fenway in Boston, where patriotism is symbolically expressed (Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1992); 3. "Meanwhile Gardens," begun by sculptor Jamie McCollough where the creative expression of people's favorite childhood places are given shape in the greenway along the Grand Union Canal in London; and 4. the former "no man's" land in Berlin, where avante-garde artists have created a radical new greenway with social-political commentary expressed throughout their outdoor environmental sculptures snaking through this long, linear strip. In conclusion a discussion about social expression as an under-developed role of greenways will encourage its potential.

Purpose in an historical context

The origins of the term greenway are not entirely certain. However, Little suggests that it is a cross between the 19th century use of the term parkway (emphasizing carriage use) and the British term greenbelt. He attributes the first use of the actual term to William

Whyte in the 1959 monograph Securing Open Space for Urban America. Without the use of the actual term, noted Olmsted scholar Charles Beveridge points out that the earliest American greenway elements were proposed by Frederick Law Olmsted in the "Park and Piedmont Way Plan" which included a link between the College of California campus in Berkeley and the city of Oakland. College trustees accepted this part of this proposal on October 3, 1865. Little (1990, p.9) has then suggested that this date should serve as the origins of greenways in America.

The main purpose of this original greenway proposal was for pleasure, affording a scenic drive. Subsequent design proposals for single parks back east, like Central Park and Prospect Park, led Olmsted and his colleague Calvert Vaux to recognize the need for linked open space proposals. They began to recognize the need for citizens to have more opportunities to access nature as an escape from urban stress. Proposals for parkways, as wide pleasure carriage drives, planted with shade trees, date back to 1866 with one for Brooklyn and what is now Queens. Recently in 1990, landscape architect Peter Trowbridge received an ASLA Professional Merit Award for his work on the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway, which is now respected for its historical heritage, as well. The parkway concept spread throughout America. Another noteworthy historic example is the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Park system completed by 1895 by H. W. S. Cleveland. Certainly, the famed work of Olmsted and Charles Eliot on the Emerald Necklace beginning in 1887 should be noted. These and other early models promoted walks and carriage roadways for recreational pleasure in the context of a natural landscape.

With the advent and growth of the automobile parkways designed to accommodate

motorized vehicles began with the Bronx River Parkway as early as 1906. The purpose continued to be programmed for open-ended recreational pleasure.

In later times recreational programs became more structured, organized, and specialized in response to changing times (Cranz, 1982). L. H. Weir, a recreation administrator who wrote about parks and recreation in America between World War I and II, classified the recreational purposes of parks and parkways in meeting human interests into 7 categories. Following the Greek ethic for the "good life," a recreational program should meet these human interests (Doell et al, 1954, p. 40):

1. Physical activities interest
2. Constructive, creative interests
3. Interests in learning about the natural world
4. Interest in communication
5. Interest in expressing feelings, emotions, and concepts
6. Social interest to get together and mingle
7. Fundamental interest in an underlying "higher power."

With all of the opportunities for greenway projects the purpose of expression seems the least dominant. At the same time Weir's list of interests, which were also included in a 1944 survey of recreation for the city of Minneapolis (home of an early greenway model) suggests that an interest in promoting expression is very appropriate.

More recently, emphasis has been placed on the economic benefits of urban greenways in particular (Gunn et al, 1972 and 1974). Certainly, the environmental arguments for greenways have been strongly made in general (Platt, 1992). Emphasis on the historic

and scenic values of greenways is easy to find. Recently, the educational role of greenways has been boosted with Lynne Cherry's children's picture book, A River Ran Wild; the environmental purposes of greenways are promoted through the focus on the story of the Nashua River Greenway in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Most recently, the emphasis on the ecological purposes of greenways demonstrates exciting new explorations of creative, ecological, and experimental applications (Ahern, 1992). Interest in biodiversity and sustainability will no doubt continue to inspire and inform greenway efforts. Concern for meeting the needs of wildlife, and not necessarily those of humans, tops many landscape ecologists' lists for purposes today. Among these advocates is Richard T.T. Forman (Grove, 1990, p. 80). Yet the opportunity to value and encourage social expression within the greenway movement, where people still are intended users, can also be promoted. It is interesting to note that three major profiles of the Platte River Greenway story (Grove, 1990, Little, 1990, and National Park Service, 1991) feature the leadership of Joe Shoemaker. But none of the accounts features the community participation effort of a ceramic tile project which brightens the concrete walls along the greenway walk under an overpass. Although not a dominant part of the project, it is a small example of an element of expression. To illustrate a range of more dominant social expression examples, four different cases follow.

Discussion: Four examples of expression

1. personal

On one basic level social expression through the simple exchange of greetings is a typical

outcome with many greenway projects. Anne Lusk, starting a successful campaign back in 1981 to knit together a backland trailway to create the Stowe Recreation Path in the Vermont ski town, combined easements, donations, and the purchase of private lands.

Lusk is quick to point out that the social value underpins the basic benefits of greenways (Figure 1). She believes that, "People are different on a path...On a town sidewalk strangers may make eye contact, but that's all. On a path like this they smile, say hello, and pet one another's dogs. I think that every community should have a greenway" (Grove, 1990, p. 90-91).

Beyond the physical exercise opportunities for biking, walking, and cross-country skiing on this trail in Stowe, it is the importance of the social exchanges which is most celebrated by its creator. Beyond the trust and feelings of good will many users of greenways express through these greetings and smiles, users of greenways can also express more specialized attitudes and views through their use.

2. patriotic

Historically, the emergency war gardens along greenways, as well as other open spaces, became important symbols for Americans to express their patriotism (Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1992). President Woodrow Wilson encouraged Americans to help out, "Everyone who cultivates a garden helps to solve the problem of the feeding of the nations," (Barron, 1917). Railway companies made their rights of way properties available for these patriotic gardens. Gardening became a means of expressing and demonstrating patriotism. This

represented a changing role for greenways in response to new needs (Bischoff, 1993, p. 327).

Patriotic gardening extended beyond the practical realm of raising vegetables for food. Garden Magazine authors urged Americans to grow ornamental flowers, as well, as a source of comfort and a spiritual boost. The patriotic garden from 1917 and 1918 became the victory garden after the war. The tradition of such allotment gardens continues today at many sites, including Olmsted's famed Fenway Gardens in Boston. The kind of social expression evident in the patriotic gardens of World War I demonstrate an important character and potential dimension for communicating strong convictions.

3. creative

In a very different way the site of "Meanwhile Gardens" in London illustrates another potential dimension for social expression. Where the war gardens gave its users a new voice to express and exhibit patriotism, British sculptor Jamie McCollough imagined a new way for neighborhood residents to express themselves. Beginning in 1976 with a vision of reclaiming a 4 acre linear strip along the Grand Union Canal in Paddington, London, McCollough inspired active participation with neighborhood residents in transforming sheer rubble into fantasy-based gardens.

McCollough believes that "shaping the ground around you is the most powerful symbol ...(it's) taking control of your own world," (Nicholson-Lord, 1987, p. 117) Participants helped clear away the mess on the site. They then took the opportunity to recreate places for kindling favorite childhood memories- places for skateboards and bicycles, a

wall for rock climbing, and an amphitheatre for plays and concerts. Planted earthen berms, curvilinear paths, and shade trees characterize the new landscape image created here (Figure 2). Through the creation of memorable childhood fantasy environments, Meanwhile Gardens has offered its makers and users a kind of creative, imaginative, even therapeutic form of expression.

4. social-political

Where Meanwhile Gardens serves as a model for a community participation approach to encouraging social expression, a recent project to shape an art park in Berlin offers more of a counter-culture model, with an anti-social tone, some might contend. In the former "no-man's" land strip along the Spree River in central Berlin several avant-garde artists soon after the wall fell seized the opportunity to express themselves with a string of newly created "forbidden art" installations.

There is a lingering sense that the land remains "off-limits," as the installation works demonstrate freedom of speech. It was in this very zone that up until 1989 anyone caught trespassing would be killed. Artists have reconfigured wall elements chronologically accounting for the post war deaths in the zone, year by year (Figure 3). At the base of the wall segments new grave markers are laid bearing the names of those known to have lost their lives, as well as their birth and death dates (Figure 4). A series of earthen mounds suggest burial mounds, as well as bunkers. Dead trees are planted symbolically. Stenciled on the wall are the words "Parliamentary trees." There are other slogans expressing contempt for America, regarded as a symbol of capitalist corruption. Pleas for world peace also solicit viewers to be friends of the earth. Wildflowers grow around

an effort to fabricate a rustic shelter, created out of branches amidst the barren expanse of this historically hostile, haunted strip. Riders on the "S-Bahn" can glance down at the linear art park. Some are attracted from this glimpse to explore the chorus of voices expressed in these installations. Some of the voices are angry, some reflective, others hopeful. The artists have created a greenway along the Spree with their linear installations of varying shapes and forms. The space would otherwise not invite visitors to venture forth. Now it has become a profound installation of social-political commentary that dominates with its social expression shaping this space.

Conclusion

Greenways function in a multitude of ways for the benefit of people, as well as the environment. The emphasis traditionally has been for the main purposes of environment, ecology, education, and exercise, as Lewis has suggested. With the estimated 500 or more greenway projects in this country, clearly there is a new energy supporting greenway projects today.

As the examples discussed illustrate, the purposes of greenways can also be extended to include a wide range of social expression. Whether a president is asking his countrymen to display their patriotism by cultivating a garden along a greenway, or whether avante-garde artists are commenting upon social-political power, a range of social expressions are possible for a greenway. Whether a greenway affords the everyday, friendly, social exchanges that help people feel good about where they are, or whether it is through the actual shaping of greenway land to evoke special childhood associations providing an active sense of control and pleasure with the environment, greenways offer

a range of potential social expressions.

Such opportunities to contribute to the spirit of greenways should not be overlooked. The potential powers of social expression can add a richness to the fabric of the greenway heritage. Encouraging more opportunities for social expression can be one means of broadening the meaning of greenways, extending the interest, building a larger constituency, and contributing to their growing strength.

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Figure 1. Greenways such as the Stowe Recreation Path afford their users an important opportunity for a special type of kindred social exchange.

Figure 2. The landscape at Meanwhile Gardens has been transformed from wreckage to a series of berms, paths, and trees, giving a sense of comfort and pleasure.

Figure 3. Avante-garde artists in Berlin have created a greenway through their installation of art works running along the banks of the Spree River.

Figure 4. A detail of one art work in the linear park displays the chronological record of deaths each year in the former "no man's" land along reconfigured wall segments, and a new grave marker at the base of the wall for the last victims.







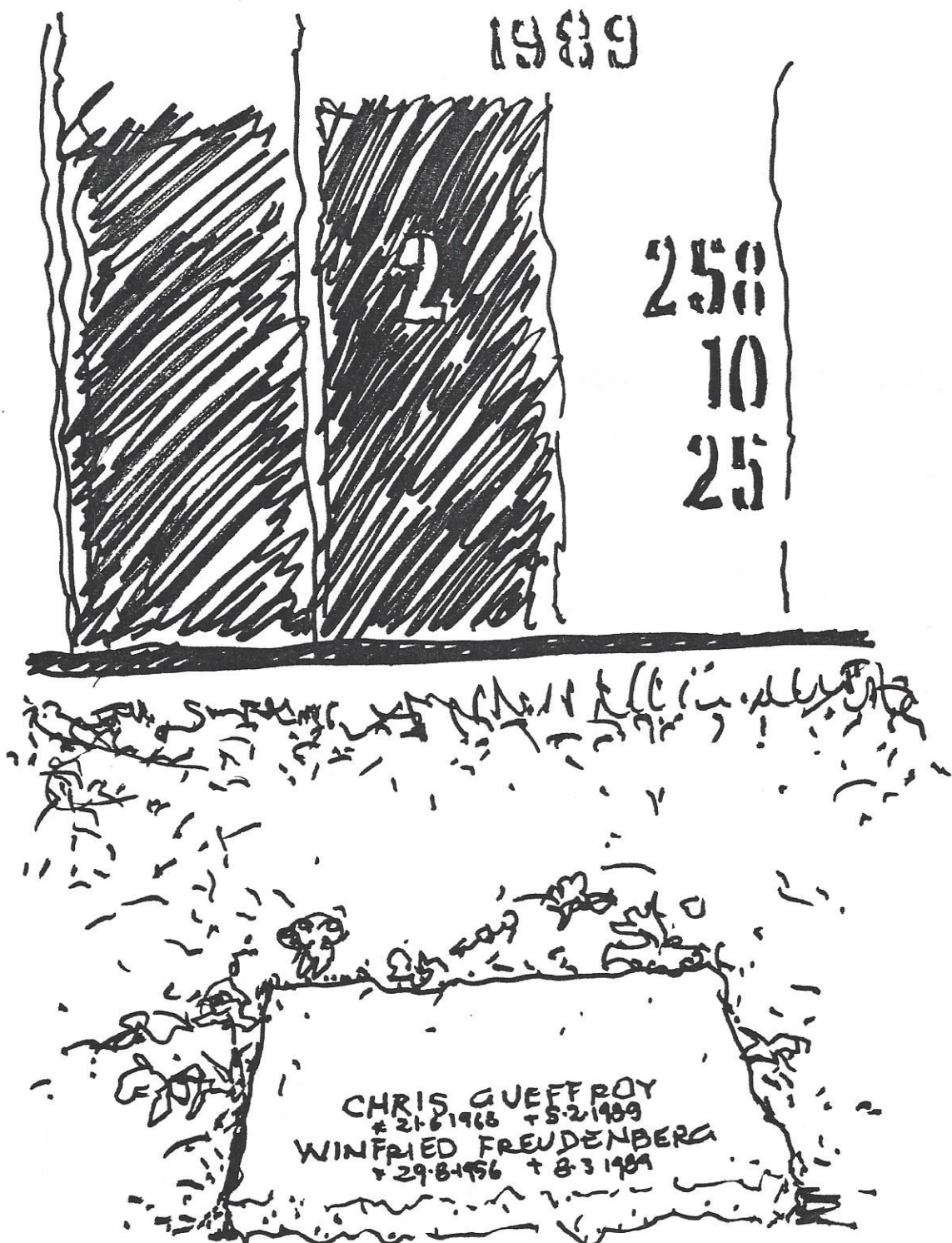


FIGURE 4