
Economic Perspective 1

THE GLASGOW GARDEN FESTIVAL: A WIDER PERSPECTIVE

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The 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival which opened on 28 April is and ran for 5 months. It was located on the 100 acre Princes Dock site in the Govan/Kinning Park area of the city, on the south bank of the River Clyde, opposite the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre. Preparations for the Festival included the clearing of decayed warehouses and ship repair buildings followed by the importation of thousands of tons of soil plus more than 300,000 trees and shrubs. The total cost of creating and running the Festival is now put at £41.4 million whilst the estimated net cost is £18.7 million (dependent upon the number of visitors). The need to maximise the Festival's appeal in order to attain the required number of visitors has led to spending of around £2 million on various forms of advertising, including television.

The Glasgow Festival has been the subject of much comment and controversy. Discussions surrounding it have, however, failed to take into account the fact that Glasgow is part of a UK Garden Festival Initiative, made up of 5 related events: Liverpool (1984), Stoke on Trent (1986), Glasgow (1988), Gateshead (1990) and Ebbw Vale (1992). Garden Festivals in Britain were introduced as the UK equivalent of the well-established German Bundesgartenschau and other such Continental events. In this paper it will be argued that many of the shortcomings of individual Garden Festivals stem from weaknesses in the execution of the national Garden Festival Programme. The paper will therefore attempt to evaluate the Initiative as a whole, and the Glasgow Garden Festival as part of this Initiative.

CONTINENTAL EXPERIENCE OF GARDEN EXHIBITIONS

Garden exhibitions are generally accepted to have originated in Germany where there is a long tradition of 'Bundesgartenschau' (BUGA) or 'Garden Shows'. Such shows can be traced back to the 1887 Dresden International Show and similar, even

earlier, events. The Third Reich has been credited with the revival of such events through the 1938 Garden Show held in Essen which extended Gruga Park, but most authorities agree that the present form of Bundesgartenschau arose from the 1951 Hanover Show (Bareham, 1983). Between 1951 and 1988, 19 such events have been held and future shows are planned in Frankfurt (1989) and Stuttgart (1993) (Golletz, 1985).

Similar shows to the German Bundesgartenschau have been held in other European and overseas countries including Switzerland, Holland, Austria and Canada while Italy and Belgium have held indoor shows. The first Garden Exhibition to be held in a tropical country will take place in Singapore in 1989.

Continental experience, particularly in Germany, has proved that garden festivals are an effective way of encouraging major acts of land reclamation. However, the effects are more widespread than this. The festivals encourage urgency in the creation of the festival site, good management, and widespread support within the general community. They provide permanent benefit to the community by improving an existing park, or building a new one, which remains as a recreational development of high standards after the show. New buildings, such as exhibition halls or a sports complex erected for the show, may also be retained to improve recreational facilities for the local population.

At the same time as encouraging reclamation, the festivals also create a tourist attraction, capable of earning substantial revenue, making the festivals self-financing and, if profitable enough, also contributing to reclamation costs. The hosting of such a well-known event is guaranteed to generate interest about the host city. Such interest can be used to advantage by the city to improve its image and morale, and to encourage a general environmental improvement.

In Germany the shows are organised through the ZVG (Zentralverband Gartenbau), which guarantees both the commitment of the horticultural industries to the show and ensures the attainment of high standards for design and horticulture. The planning of future shows is very structured with formalities beginning some 8-10 years before the event is to be held. The long period of preparation ensures that all political parties and the community as a whole are committed to the scheme before a proposal is accepted by the ZVG. Long-term planning is both essential and possible, and the after-use of the site as a permanent park is clearly planned and budgeted for before any work is begun.

The costs of the shows are generally met by the host city from its ordinary budget over a number of years. As the city is the main initiator it takes the major financial responsibility for the event. However the land level of German government may also, depending upon circumstances, provide a significant part of the budget. The federal level of government plays little part in the shows while private sector contributions cover extras, not essential items. Favourable long-term loans combined with the positive and hidden gains to the urban fabric and planning of the host city go some considerable way to mitigating the high costs. The constant requests by previous hosts to stage another Bundesgartenschau and the intense competition to be selected to hold such an event underlines the fact that financial and physical benefits accrue to host cities.

THE INITIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE UK GARDEN FESTIVAL INITIATIVE

The seeds of the Initiative were sown in 1979 when the Department of the Environment was approached by representatives from several horticultural bodies including the Joint Council for Landscape Industries (JCLI), the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI), the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) and the National Farmers Union (NFU). These bodies wished to express their concern over the impact of government policies upon their industry, and at the same time to suggest that the UK Government should seriously consider the possible use of garden exhibitions similar to the German Bundesgartenschau, to act as a catalyst for revitalisation and improvement of the inner cities.

The DoE Inner City Directorate carried out a study

of garden exhibitions, particularly the German Garden Shows, and considered the possibility of applying the idea to the UK. In 1980 they produced a report, Garden Exhibitions in the United Kingdom, (DoE 1980) which raised a number of points for consideration:

1. What benefits might result from a UK show?
2. Would a garden show be of sufficient public interest to be a success?
3. How should such an exhibition be organised?
4. How could the garden exhibition be organised?
5. What other requirements for success would there be?

The DoE concluded that benefits similar to the Continental experience could be expected, especially where a park was already planned in a derelict inner city area. It would seem from the DoE recommendations for a British Garden Festival Initiative, that the initial plan was to follow the German example fairly closely as its success had been proven over a number of years. The DoE argued that it would be necessary to establish an organisation similar to the ZVG, as no umbrella organisation for the UK horticultural industries already existed. Once such an organisation was operational, development of the first festival would take 5-10 years. Only after the success of the first festival had been evaluated would a second go ahead. The importance of complete involvement in, and commitment to, a festival by the horticultural industry and a potential host city was stressed. What happened in reality will become clear in this article.

The DoE report was circulated to a number of local authorities to provide a basis for discussion upon the possibility of holding a garden festival in their area. Considerable interest having been expressed by local authorities, by representatives of the horticultural industries and by others, the DoE commissioned feasibility studies (each of 3 months duration) on sites in Liverpool and Stoke-on-Trent.

The Liverpool feasibility study reached the DoE and the Environment Secretary, Mr Michael Heseltine, in August 1981, just 2 weeks after the severe urban riots in the Toxteth inner city area of Liverpool. Following the riots, the government needed a tangible focus for its efforts in Merseyside. Michael Heseltine had been appointed as Minister with special responsibility

for Merseyside and despite the greater environmental suitability of the Stoke site, the decision on the siting of the first UK Garden Festival went in Liverpool's favour (Heseltine, 1987).

On 15 September 1981 it was announced that Liverpool would host the first UK National Garden Festival. The festival would open in May 1984 and the Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC) would be the organisers. In December 1981, it was announced that a second festival would open in 1986 on a site in Stoke-on-Trent. In the same month it was also announced that the Liverpool festival would be an international event, therefore necessitating higher standards.

GLASGOW'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE FESTIVAL INITIATIVE

In 1983 the DoE produced an advice note for potential host cities and invited submissions from interested parties (DoE, 1983). There had been a growing awareness in Glasgow during the late 1970s and early 1980s of the development potential of the River Clyde, particularly for the tourist industry. A 1976 Scottish Tourist Board Paper had suggested the creation of a 'magnetic core' of tourist development at the docks extending into the city centre, while a 1982 Glasgow District Council report suggested improvements to the city centre and 3 main development axes, including the area along the River Clyde from the inner docks to the city centre (Balsillie, 1986).

The Scottish Development Agency (SDA) saw the opportunity for Glasgow to act as a festival host as a powerful marketing platform for the city where self promotion was already underway through the "Glasgow's miles better" campaign. Glasgow District Council were very willing to support the submission and 2 sites were considered - Glasgow Green and Princes Dock. Eventually Princes Dock was selected and a proposal was submitted to the DoE in June 1983.

Interest had previously been expressed in development of the Princes Dock area by both Leech Homes and the Clyde Port Authority and in October 1983 the Clyde Port Authority issued a Development Brief for Princes Dock requesting submissions from interested companies by 30 November 1983. Three tenders were submitted of which Laing Homes Ltd were the winners, purchasing the site for £1.5 million. In December 1983 the shortlist for the third festival was announced - Glasgow, Gateshead

and Swansea and in November 1984 it was announced that the Third Garden Festival would be held in Glasgow in 1988.

Laings were granted outline planning permission for housing on the Princes Dock site in June 1984. They agreed to lease the site to the SDA for the duration of the festival in return for an equal amount of land elsewhere in the city (spread over 7 sites), in order to maintain their planned 4-year building programme. The agreement specified the retention of 10-12 acres of improved land in the Govan area.

THE FESTIVAL INITIATIVE SO FAR

Once the decision was taken in 1981 to go ahead with the Festival Initiative, the DoE recommendations and the German example were ignored. Although the DoE had itself recommended that the first festival should be used as a pilot scheme, the announcement of the second festival was made by the Department within 3 months of the initial announcement, almost before work had even started on the first. It was a very bold move to commit the funding for the second festival before there was any proof that a festival site could be prepared in such a limited time. The lack of a period of time for reflection upon the success of the Festival Initiative is highlighted by the announcement of the decision to go ahead with a third event just 1 month after the ending of the first. Obviously at this stage only the short term impact of the Liverpool International Garden Festival (IGF) would have been known. In fact the shortlist for the third event was announced before the start of the first, so it was only the decision of the venue which had to be made, not whether further events in the Initiative should go ahead.

Although a number of horticultural organisations were committed to the festival concept, no umbrella organisation was established before the decision to go ahead with the first festival was taken, even though the DoE had recommended such a step. There was, therefore, no overall guarantee of commitment from the trade as a whole to the Festival Initiative. This lack of such an organisation has continued through the Stoke and Glasgow events, but the response of the industry to these later events has been much greater than the disappointing response to the IGF. However, the Glasgow festival has moved the Initiative away from an emphasis upon horticulture and

concentrates more upon leisure time.

The next point at which practice diverged from the DoE recommendations, was in the timescale for the development of the festivals. Instead of following the Continental example of 5-10 years, as recommended by the DoE, the first UK festival was given less than 3 years (about 32 months). The timescale for the development of the second festival at Stoke was greater, at 53 months, but even then this was less than 5 years. Yet again, once the decision had been made on the site for the third event, the organisers of the Glasgow Festival were allowed only a limited period of time for their preparations (approximately 40 months). The short timescale for development has adversely affected the horticultural element of the Festivals resulting in the presence of immature and ill-established plants, particularly trees.

The fact that the Liverpool site was prepared in time, despite the extensive dereliction of the areas, must be regarded as a major achievement, as must the fact that similar success has been achieved with the other two sites. As a land reclamation exercise the Festival Initiative is therefore a success, although the extent to which the urgency of the task has adversely affected the cost of reclamation is unknown.

The speed with which the whole Festival Initiative has developed is partially responsible for a number of the Initiative's problems, which are particularly apparent in the case of Liverpool. It is obvious there that the local authorities involved had insufficient time to develop long term plans for the site and to gain the full support necessary to guarantee the success of the festival. If the commitment of all political parties to the IGF had been obtained, then the problems which arose over the future of the site could perhaps have been prevented. Again, little time was allowed for forward planning with the third event but in this case the future of the site was already determined.

CLARITY OF PURPOSE

Perhaps one of the major difficulties from which the Initiative has suffered has been the lack of clarity concerning its purpose. A number of benefits were identified by the Liverpool festival's feasibility study which would also apply to the later events but the only Government

criterion for success appears to have been the number of visitors. The wide range of possible benefits from a Festival Initiative has perhaps given rise to excessive expectations within Liverpool and the other host cities. Almost from its inception the relevance of the IGF to the economic situation in Merseyside was questioned locally, and a similar attitude has been apparent to the Stoke and Glasgow events.

If the purpose of the Festival Initiative had been clearly established at the beginning as primarily one of land reclamation, then such arguments about it would have been irrelevant, particularly as the IGF site was already designated for reclamation. However, the announcement of Liverpool's selection as the host city for the first event in the Initiative came shortly after the Toxteth riots, in the same period as a number of other packages were announced to stimulate economic recovery in the city. It is not difficult to see why the IGF was viewed by the local community as just another of these packages.

Given the advice note for potential host cities produced by the DoE in 1983, the lack of clarity over the Initiative's purpose which had become apparent through the first two events should no longer have been a problem for the subsequent events. The Initiative's purposes appeared to be earlier reclamation of derelict inner city sites, stimulation of general environmental improvements, promotion of horticulture and the host city, and the positive contribution of visitor revenue, both on and off-site. The note avoided any reference to a festival providing stimulation of economic recovery. Where the advice note failed to clarify the situation was in the question of the after-use of the site. This point seems to have been left deliberately open-ended.

THE AFTER-USE OF THE SITE

The planned after uses of the Liverpool site were developed in line with the MDC's Initial Development Strategy for the area.

After the festival, 50 acres would become available as a business park for commerce and high technology industries, 40 acres would be available for 'imaginative residential development' and the remaining 45 acres would pass to Liverpool City Council for a community park. The Festival Hall was to be converted to a sports and leisure complex for the local community. However,

control of the City Council was lost by pro-festival Liberals to largely anti-festival Labour who refused to takeover the park and Festival Hall without additional central government funding. Eventually agreement was reached between the MDC and the City Council that the MDC would manage and operate the Festival Gardens until October 1988, whilst seeking a commercial leisure operator. In December 1985 the MDC decided to proceed with a plan by Transworld Leisure to develop the Festival Gardens as a commercial theme park, involving investment of around £6 million. Unfortunately by October 1986 Transworld had gone into liquidation leaving responsibility for the site with the MDC who have opened the Festival Gardens to the paying public each summer, at a loss of £250,000. The plans for a business park have not been realised and much of the land has been redesignated to housing development. However, here also, interest has been extremely limited. Almost 4 years after the IGF the future of the site is still uncertain and it is continuing to be a drain upon the already limited resources of the MDC.

The fate of the Stoke site is not such a story of failure but again there have been problems. The preparations for the Stoke festival did include forward planning for the afteruse of the site, principally the drawing in of high technology light industries to the area. This has not proved to be a popular proposition for such industries given the rival attractions of already established high-tech areas such as the M4 corridor, Cambridge and the central lowlands of Scotland. The local authority has had to change its plans for the site and has recently sold it for £8 million for retail and leisure development.

The Glasgow Festival is the first of the Initiative's events to have a definite long term future use for the site. Concern has been expressed over the plans to remove a major part of the festival after its closure in September 1988, given the cost of establishing the festival initially, but the site will then largely be developed for housing by Laings. It should, therefore, overcome the problems experienced with both the Liverpool and Stoke sites.

EVALUATION OF THE FESTIVAL INITIATIVE

In the short term, the Liverpool event was a success. It was aided in terms of the number of visitors (the only Government measure of success),

by the extremely fine summer weather. Over 3 million people visited the site resulting in revenue of around £7 million against Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC) expenditure of almost £10 million. The festival was successful as a means of speedy land reclamation; as a boost to tourism and leisure and the catalyst for the development of the MDC's leisure oriented plans for redevelopment of the Liverpool docklands; as a creator of temporary employment and protector of permanent posts in companies involved with the festival; as a means of improving the city's image; and as a promoter of horticulture.

The failures of the Liverpool Festival have been in exploiting the potential for long term improvements. The main failure, if compared to the German example, is the lack of provision of a permanent park after the festival, but there is also the failure to realise the potential of the reclaimed land for business development with its promise of job creation, and the destruction of the city's improved image through political conflict. Central Government contributed to the IGF's lack of success as a pump-priming exercise through its determination to restrict public sector spending and to crush Liverpool City Council's rebellion to these restrictions.

The effects of the Stoke festival confirm many of the above points and repeat the same problems. Again there were short term benefits arising from the festival such as speedy land reclamation, temporary job creation and promotion of horticulture. However the Stoke event also suffered failures in the short term where Liverpool had been successful. The event needed at least 3 million visitors to break even but was adversely affected by a wet summer. The shortfall in the number of visitors to the site resulted in a £5 million overall deficit for the event (of which half had to be covered by local ratepayers) whilst ineffective advertising failed to promote the city and to develop tourism in the area. In the long term there was again a lack of provision of a permanent park and failure to realise the potential of the reclaimed land for industry, although the proposed retail and leisure development of the site does hold the prospect of potential job creation.

The forthcoming events in the Initiative (Glasgow 1988, Gateshead 1990 and Ebbw Vale 1992) appear to be moving it in a different direction, and several aspects of the development of the Glasgow festival

are open to critical comment. The Princes Dock site for the festival had already been acquired by a housebuilder for development and had to be leased back by the SDA in order for the festival to go ahead. The site could not therefore be easily described as one unlikely to be reclaimed quickly. In fact, if anything, the festival will have held up the development of the site for almost 4 years. Although the alternative site which was considered ie Glasgow Green also fails to conform to that criteria, it does conform more closely to the original Continental concept of improving existing parks.

The SDA have financed the festival from their annual budget, a fact which has caused some controversy. The anticipated total expenditure is around £41 million including reclamation costs. The net cost, which the SDA will fund, is estimated at around £18 million (dependent upon visitor numbers). It has been claimed that the need to find this sum has led to cutbacks in other SDA projects, although the SDA argue in reply that a rethink in policy has led to the cancellations. Recent reports have highlighted the cost of obtaining use of the festival site from Laings. The original cost of acquiring and servicing the 7 offset sites less payment by Laings was estimated at around £400,000 but this has now risen to around £4.4 million.

The Glasgow festival has been clearly designed with leisure as its main theme rather than horticulture in order to attract the 4 million visitors required to break even. As such it is moving the Initiative away from its promotion of horticulture and concentrating much more upon the promotion of the host city and its facilities. The Glasgow festival is intended to represent the new image of Glasgow and to act as a shop window for the promotion of industrial, commercial and tourist opportunities.

Whilst it is commendable that the future of the site has been clearly established before the event, it is difficult to commend the expense involved in the creation of a high quality landscape which is deliberately planned for destruction. It has been argued that the festival budget would be sufficient to reclaim and improve over 200 sites in the city which under present financial constraints are programmed for improvement in the late 1990s. Although a small part of the festival site will be retained as a tourist attraction and there are also plans for a

small business development area, the benefits from these will accrue to the private rather than the public sector. Benefits to the local area adjacent to the site have been limited and most are more likely to be due to the Govan/Kinning Park Initiative rather than the festival.

There are, of course, perceived benefits to Glasgow. The festival has induced the private sector to become involved with environmental improvements to the city including cleaning of buildings, floodlighting etc, and it has also accelerated local authority development programmes. A number of small businesses, originally based in the festival site, have been relocated to better premises which has also resulted in a better quality environment for the development of the site. Although the site is to be dismantled after the event, much of the horticultural material will be transferred to other sites and projects thereby improving the environment in more than just one area. The planned after use of the site does overcome the problem experienced by both previous events, of lack of funding for maintenance of any major landscape features. The festival has already generated interest in Glasgow as a place to invest and a number of interested parties have been redirected to sites elsewhere in the city due to a shortage of available land on the Clyde waterfront.

Of the other forthcoming events the Gateshead site appears to conform more to the continental pattern than previous festivals by linking several sites which include 150 acres of derelict land and 30 acres of existing park. The after-use of the site seems to be for private commercial development rather than public park. Ebbw Vale includes a derelict steelworks, natural woodland, mountainside and a hill farm, so is following a similar pattern to Gateshead, but plans for the future use of the site seem to lean towards less commercial activities than at the other sites.

Current Government interest in the regeneration of the inner cities, combined with their desire to curb local authority spending, suggests that central Government is unlikely to support an initiative that solely creates urban parkland at high capital and maintenance costs, and their acceptance of festival plans involving extensive private commercial development of festival sites, appears to endorse this. The massive Government expenditure on the festival initiative would

appear to be a political move to encourage such private development.

CONCLUSIONS

The original discussions around the development of the Garden Festival Initiative focused upon the utilisation of garden exhibitions as a catalyst for inner city regeneration, whilst at the same time boosting the horticultural industry, the Initiative has been hijacked for political and promotional purposes.

The decision to go ahead with the Initiative appears to have been taken hastily in response to the inner city riots of 1981. Although the concept of the UK Garden Festival Initiative was developed from the example of the German Bundesgartenschau, the proven success of the German methods of organisation were largely ignored in the development of the UK programme, despite the DoE's own recommendations to follow the German example.

The Government has continuously ignored its own advice to consider the first festival as a pilot and has only recently instructed consultants to assess the value for money of the festivals although the Initiative is halfway through. It appears at present that there are no plans for future events after Ebbw Vale in 1992 although it is possible that this could change once the consultants have reported.

The intrinsic problems of the Initiative, and therefore of each individual event, are a lack of clarity of purpose in both the short and long term combined with a failure in implementation of the original concept. It is not too late for the development of a long term perspective on the Initiative in order that its positive aspects are recognised and that it is not judged in the future as being an enormous waste of public money.

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