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**Autor:** Schubert, Bernd / Rodel, Heiner  
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# IFLA AND SWITZERLAND

Since its foundation in 1948, there have been close links between the IFLA and Switzerland. **Bernd Schubert and Heiner Rodel**

When the Mayor of Zurich, Corine Mauch, welcomes guests from all over the world on the Blatterwiese by Lake Zurich on 26 June 2011, and on the following day the President of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), Desiree Martínez, opens the 48<sup>th</sup> IFLA World Congress "Scales of Nature – From Urban Landscapes to Alpine Gardens", this will be the third time that Switzerland will have played host to an IFLA World Congress. The 5<sup>th</sup> World Congress took place here in Zurich in 1956, and the 18<sup>th</sup> in Bern in 1980. But even before IFLA was formed in Cambridge in 1948, Swiss landscape architects, together with initiative colleagues from a

number of countries, were taking steps to establish an international professional body.

## **The formation of IFLA and the role of Walter Leder**

The idea of creating a firm structure for international relations between landscape architects was debated time and again, mainly on the occasion of international garden exhibitions and congresses on garden architecture (later: garden art), thus for example in 1935 in Brussels, in 1937 in Paris, in 1938 in Berlin / Hanover / Essen, and in 1939 in Zurich. The congress in Zurich was attended by some



*IFLA World Congress 1956 in Zurich: IFLA president Walter Leder, Switzerland, speaking in the Auditorium Maximum of the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule.*

200 specialists from twelve different countries; it was opened on 31 July in the new, recently completed Kongresshaus, which is also the venue of this year's World Congress. Those attending had the opportunity to visit the 1939 Swiss National Exhibition ("Landi") and to confront the latest developments in Swiss landscape architecture, a central role being played by the Landi's chief garden architect, Gustav Ammann.

All these endeavours were interrupted by the devastating Second World War, which broke out on 1 September 1939. It was not until 1948 that the idea started taking shape once again. After an international conference and exhibition in London, the Institute of Landscape Architects ILA called a meeting at Jesus College, Cambridge, on 14 and 15 August. Twenty landscape architects from 14 national professional bodies voted nem con to set up the "International Federation of Landscape Architects IFLA". Eleven European associations were represented (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Britain, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland); another founder-member in absentia was the Netherlands. The representatives from Chile, Canada and the USA, though present, had not been authorized by their national associations to vote in favour, though personally they supported it.<sup>1</sup> The enthusiasm for rebuilding Europe on the ruins of the war inspired the landscape architects to take this important step. Over the years and decades, further countries joined. Finally IFLA became a worldwide umbrella organization, which today comprises national professional bodies from 60 countries and individual members from a further 17 countries.

Representing Switzerland in Cambridge in 1948, and hence a founder member of IFLA, was the well-known Zurich landscape architect Walter Leder, who was a delegate of what was then called the Bund Schweizerischer Gartengestalter BSG (Federation of Swiss Garden Designers), today known as the Bund Schweizer Landschaftsarchitekten und Landschaftsarchitektinnen BSLA (Federation of Swiss Landscape Architects). Walter Leder was a committed advocate of international collaboration. He not only played an important role in the formation of IFLA, but also exercised central functions in the organization in the years to come. From 1951 to 1953 he was IFLA Treasurer, and from 1954 to 1956, the second IFLA president in succession to Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe.

#### **The 1956 Congress in Zurich and the post-war years**

The 5<sup>th</sup> IFLA World Congress, held from 20 to 23 August 1956 in the Auditorium Maximum of the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule ETH (Federal Technical University) in Zurich, whose theme was "Landscape in contemporary life", was attended by some 250 visitors from 25 countries. Prepared under the direction of BSG president Richard Arioli, and opened by IFLA president Walter Leder, it had four items on the agenda: the urban landscape, the industrial

landscape, the agrarian landscape, and the natural landscape. The context of this discussion was the "new start" atmosphere and the desire for renewal in Europe. Prof. Erich Kühn put it thus: "There is a revolution in town planning just around the corner, and the chief implementers of this revolution will be the landscape architects. ... The new task is to provide town and city-dwellers, within easy reach of their homes, with an opportunity of spending their leisure time in creative activity, be it in the garden, or in sports or games." There were also demands for planning to ensure "orderly settlement of the countryside" and landscape planning "on an ecological, sociological and ethical basis." The Helmhaus was the venue of a much acclaimed exhibition on the theme "Man and Landscape".<sup>2</sup>

Switzerland, and Zurich in particular, had, during the post-war years, a great attraction for landscape architects and architects generally. In a country spared by the war and favoured by relative prosperity, landscape architecture and architecture generally were able to enjoy uninterrupted development, attaining a high standard. A year before the congress, the well-known book by the landscape architect Gustav Ammann, "Landscape Gardens" had appeared.<sup>3</sup> He devoted a large part of the work to the international interest in Swiss housing estates, and the special role of landscape architecture: "The pictures of these estates [depicted in photos and plans and annotated, ed.] demonstrate the endeavour to provide a view of nature and create green open spaces in order to still the growing hunger for landscape and nearness to nature, to resolve the tensions and to contribute towards reconstruction, and the recreation of body and soul." Books on architecture and town planning, such as "Schweizer Architektur" ("Swiss Architecture") by Hans Volkart (1951), in which among other things the public open-air swimming pools at Letzigraben and Allenmoos are described, spoke of Switzerland as a model to follow.

The demonstration of landscape-architectural works was followed a few years later by the garden-landscape exhibition on the shores of Lake Zurich G159, which was acclaimed far beyond the country's borders. This exhibition created a large-scale park landscape and thus the most valuable recreation space for the people of the city and the region (see anthos 2/09).

#### **The 1980 Congress in Bern**

A further IFLA World Congress was held from 8 to 11 September 1980 in Bern, on the theme "River and Lake Landscapes". The organization was in the hands of the Bern city gardener, Willy Liechti, while the specialist managers were Klaus Holzhausen, Ottomar Lang and Bernd Schubert (lectures, workshops) and Kurt Huber (excursions). Shortly after the congress, Willy Liechti sadly died in a tragic accident. Reflecting the development of IFLA, this congress embraced even more countries than the one in 1956, with some 350 participants from 34 nations from all five continents taking part,



*IFLA World Congress 1980 in Bern:  
opening by the Swiss Minister of Justice, Kurt Furgler.*

including the People's Republic of China, represented by Prof. Zhang Weizhen from Wuhan, who also spoke. In those days that was a minor sensation. His lecture was planned for the evening and open to the public at large, and attracted a huge audience.

In theoretical contributions and using real examples of exemplary planning and design, the preservation and development of managed and natural landscapes along rivers and around lakes was presented as a worldwide responsibility. Kurt Furgler, a member and representative of the Swiss government, was optimistic in his opening speech where Switzerland was concerned: "What lies close to the hearts of us in Switzerland is paraphrased in a brief, unambiguous principle by a planning law which came into force on 1 January this year: The landscape shall be treated with care, in particular the banks and shores of rivers and lakes shall not be built upon and public access facilitated." The reality today, though, presents in many places a different picture. *anthos* was present at the congress with a special issue (2/80) and reported in detail on the meeting and its results (4/80).

As that same year the innovative and much discussed garden exhibition "Grün 80" took place in Basel (see *anthos* 1/80 and 4/80), the participants in the congress had the opportunity, in one of the post-congress tours, to examine the ideas presented here.

#### **Functions in the IFLA organization**

Alongside the founder-member and sometime IFLA president Walter Leder, other Swiss representatives also exercised func-

tions in IFLA. The associations accounts, in particular, were often in Swiss hands: 1951–53 Walter Leder, 1974–79 Pierre Zbinden, 1985–90 Franz Vogel and 1992–95 and 2000–2001 Heiner Rodel. Even today, the IFLA accounts are still kept in Swiss francs. Gustav Ammann (1954) and Heiner Rodel (1996–99) also held the post of IFLA Secretary General. It goes without saying that the BSLA always has a standing representative at IFLA (Walter Leder, Richard Arioli, Willy Jacquet, Pierre Zbinden, Eugen Fritz, Jean Boccard, Klaus Holzhausen, Franz Vogel, Heiner Rodel, and today Christian Tschumi).

#### ***anthos* as the official information organ of IFLA**

*anthos*, the Swiss journal of landscape architecture, was from its foundation in 1962 until 2003 the official information organ of IFLA. Until the latter started publishing its own journal, the *IFLA News* (from 1978), which today goes out to member organizations in digital form, as well as the publication of the *IFLA Yearbook* (1980 to 1992) and of course later the IFLA website, *anthos* reported comprehensively on the meetings of the IFLA World Council, its decisions, worldwide activities, congresses etc. Even now, though sporadically, reports by the Swiss delegate to the IFLA still appear in *anthos*; together with IFLA, *anthos* has also published special editions, for example on "Endangered Landscapes" (3/85) and "Historic Landscapes" (4/91).

This year's 48<sup>th</sup> IFLA World Congress "Scales of Nature – From Urban Landscapes to Alpine Gardens" will be observed and reported by *anthos* as media partner.

<sup>1</sup> Anagnostopoulos, G. L.; Dorn, H.; Downing, M. F.; Rodel, H. (2000): IFLA – Past, Present, Future. IFLA.

<sup>2</sup> The Swiss landscape architecture archive in Rapperswil has extensive material on the 1956 congress (Leder estate) and other IFLA congresses.

<sup>3</sup> Ammann, G. (1955): Blühende Gärten – Landscape Gardens – Jardins en fleurs. Erlenbach near Zurich, Stuttgart.



*IFLA World Congress 1958 in Washington: technical excursion to Boston. Swiss participants (standing, from left to right): Franz Vogel sen. (4), Eugen Fritz (8), Walter Leder (14).*



*Manila 1989*



*Tokyo 1994*



*Bali 1998*

*IFLA World Congress 1989 in Manila: ceremonial reception of the IFLA delegates at the Grand Council in Puerto Azul, Ternate, Cavite.*

*IFLA Commission session during the cherry blossom in Tokyo, 1994: IFLA treasurer Heiner Rodel is on the far right.*

*IFLA World Congress 1998 in Bali: congress participants on a technical excursion to the island's paddy fields.*