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## Places

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### Author

Shapins, Jesse

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## Cultural Landscape Goitzsche Bitterfeld, Germany



“We need more rusted metal!” exclaimed French artists Marc Babarit and Gilles Bruni.

On this day in the middle of the Goitzsche, a sixty-two-square-kilometer region in former East Germany that was once one of the largest brown coal mines in Europe, an unusual group has come together. There are artists. There are workers, most of them miners from the region who have been unemployed since the mine closed in 1991. There are local residents, who offer their help.

The artists, gathered around an artificial hill of gravel, sand, dirt and scraps of rusted metal, have decided they need more material to realize their vision of a landscape memorial to the region’s industrial history. The crowd disperses to search for contributions and returns with heaps of personal belongings that they are willing to donate to the project. The hill is now covered with soon-to-be-rusted old metal objects. This is the creation of a very special place.

For the Goitzsche and Bitterfeld, the area’s main town, the last century has been a time of immense upheaval and transformation. Once one of the most industrialized regions in Europe, the tensions and transformations of Germany’s recent history have been deeply imprinted onto the area’s physical and psychological landscapes.

Today the Goitzsche, once called the “the dirtiest corner in Europe” by the magazine *Der Spiegel*, is a model for comprehensive, dialogue-based regional planning and development that focuses upon strengthening the distinct character of local places, fostering intercity cooperation and sensitivity to ecology, and promoting interdisciplinary and international communication. The former mine has been flooded to create a new landscape of lakes, recultivated vegetation and art projects intended to regenerate the identity of the area in the minds of potential residents and visitors.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Goitzsche was developed as a major resource of brown coal for rapidly industrializing Prussia and, eventually, the German empire. By the turn of the century, an open-pit mine had been started and chemical plants soon located next to the energy source. After World War II, the ravaged landscape received no respite: the area was part of the communist German Democratic Republic, whose policy of promoting intense industrial production stood far before environmental concerns. The mining and chemical industries expanded, forcing the displacement of four villages and the relocation of more than four miles of the Mülde River. The impacts on people’s lives were enormous: In windy



weather, neighboring cities would become coated with polluted soil blown from the open pit.

After German reunification in 1991, the mine was closed, the industrial infrastructure was demolished, and the region was declared an ecological disaster site by the federal government. Much of the population was left unemployed while the devastated landscape and environmental hazards remained. Bitterfeld and its neighbors were left to confront the ecological restoration of the former mine and develop a new economy for the region.

The former mining organization, the LMBV, a regionally organized federal entity, hired the landscape architecture firm Knoll Ecoplan to lead the replanning. Ecoplan saw the opportunity to redevelop and redefine a former industrial landscape through a process that would involve a constant dialogue with the local communities and emphasize the distinct historical character of the landscape and region. Ecoplan aimed to provide the local communities with usable, accessible public space, while confronting the area's socioeconomic problems by creating opportunities for growth and employment in tourism and by improving the quality of life in the region to help attract new employers.

The connection with local communities was achieved

through the mediating role of the Zweckverband (roughly translated as “purpose association”), an organization that brought together the mayors and other public representatives of the eight surrounding communities. This group connected the consultants with the concerns of local citizens, thus assuring that the planners', designers' and artists' visions would reflect the concerns of the communities themselves.

The Zweckverband's most important accomplishment was the creation of the so-called “Shoreline Contract,” which outlines the cooperative goals of the various communities. The first point of the contract binds each community to respect the new shoreline as a public space, accessible to all for relaxation and recreation, not to be developed for commercial purposes (except for a selected intensive-use region near Bitterfeld). In an area with an intense history of political turmoil and oppression, the provision of public space was regarded as essential to democratic, community-based, socially-conscious development. Other elements of the Shoreline Contract included an

**Left:** *Eight Hills and Forty-Nine Cones* (Marc Babarit, Gilles Bruni).

**Right:** Goitzsche mining landscape.

Photos courtesy Commission Cultural Landscape Goitzsche.

emphasis on recreation activities and ecological and aesthetic strategies that would attract people to the area; creating landscape art projects, in a manner consonant with landscape recreation and protection; and using traces of the former industrial activity as design elements.

The comprehensive master plan for development in the region was completed in 1995. It cultivated a mixture of uses in different areas, setting aside places exclusively for environmental protection, for light recreation (hiking trails and bike paths) and for more intensive use (camping and limited commerce). Lastly, sites were designated for the integration of art projects, most of them on the half-island of Pouch, a perfect place for creating a web of interconnected landscape art projects.

The technical aspects of redeveloping the mine according to sensitive environmental standards and flooding the open pits was carried out by the LMBV, and the work was paid for by the LMBV and special funds from the European Union. These projects were one of the central means of creating jobs: Along with the construction of the art projects themselves, from 1995 until 2000 the redevelopment of the Goitzsche provided on average one hundred jobs for otherwise unemployed members of the region each year. The total investment in the project will total about 550DM, with funds coming from both the German federal government and the state of Saxony-Anhalt.

The implementation and selection of the art projects was led by the state-financed, but privately-incorporated group, EXPO 2000 Saxony-Anhalt, which was organized to carry out regionally significant projects to be showcased at the World EXPO in Hannover in 2000. The state of Saxony-Anhalt, its image within Germany and abroad heavily tainted by its extensive environmental, social and economic problems, saw the World EXPO as an opportunity to create and showcase innovative methods for redeveloping the state's most troubled regions. EXPO 2000 was essential to realizing plans for the Goitzsche, providing much of the funding and vision for the art projects and forcing the project to be completed by a specific deadline.

EXPO 2000 selected the art projects through the Kuratorium for the Cultural Landscape Goitzsche, a forum that realized the interdisciplinary and international objectives of the region's politicians and the project's planners. In 1997, the Kuratorium invited artists, scientists, politicians, architects and engineers from throughout Germany and Europe to discuss the integration of art into the new lake landscape. The art projects were understood in practical terms as a means of communication between the professionals and the local communities, and more broadly as the means of strengthening the region's identity and assuring a

tangible connection between the landscape's history and its emerging future.

At first there was resentment and confusion among the local community about the idea of using art to drive the redevelopment of the region. Most of the population had little experience with public art and considered the projects a waste of money. These feelings were not ignored, but confronted through constant public meetings between the planners, artists and local residents. An atmosphere of dialogue was regarded as the only means of connecting the communities with the outside professionals and assuring that local citizens took part in shaping the new form of their region.

The interaction went beyond public meetings. All artists were required to be present during the building of their works, and the construction was carried out by unemployed former miners and managed by the former mining company. This approach created jobs and forced the artists to shape their work in dialogue with the local population. At the same time, the community could learn through firsthand experience the significance and purpose of the art projects.

Today, many of the plans for the Goitzsche have been realized. The flooding of the mine was begun in 1999. A number of art projects have been completed—including functional and symbolic structures such as a swimming bridge and water level tower, which visitors can climb to observe the progress of the filling of the lake, as well as conceptual projects that explore the ecological and psychological conditions of the site. In all, nearly 600 hectares will be reforested and some 34 miles of trails are being built.

Today the Goitzsche is no longer remarkable for its degree of heavy industry and ecological destruction, but instead is one of the most interesting landscape redevelopment projects in the world. Indeed, Cultural Landscape Goitzsche will always be changing. When the flooding of the lake is complete, a new process will start for developing recreation facilities and planning events. The restored landscapes will continue to evolve. In a region traditionally at the forefront of technology and ideas, it is fitting that today the whole area can be seen as an inspiring model for planners, artists, developers and politicians.

—*Jesse Shapins*



## Jury Comments

*Sommer:* I love the integration of art with industrial history and biological restoration—they brought artists in and had them create site-specific projects. What I take away from this is the idea of continuing change.

*Hood:* I really admire the artists' interpretation, since this had been working area, they have to be open to broad interpretations, which lead to different landscapes. I didn't see anything that reminded me of a traditional park, it's an in-between place where landscape is undergoing the process of change, whether through remediation or bringing back things. All the projects seemed very thought-provoking.

*Hanraban:* It's really a project that evolved from experimentation and research in the world of art and sculpture, particularly Robert Smithson. This is case of an art mentality combining with a certain knowledge, with the specific history of a place, to produces an artificial landscape at a

Smithson scale. They used the industrial character to generate projects that are literally Pirenesian in scope and character. Whereas Smithson used certain materials to cut, to transform, to move landscape in ways that we associate with the universe of conceptual art in this country, they use these practices to make design at a scale that's really interesting.

*Hood:* How many years does it take implement a project like this? That's the biggest challenge. When you see a project like this, which is actually being completed, that's really impressive.

*Hanraban:* It would be interesting to think about how one could accomplish a project that covers such a vast area. In the U.S, where we are attempting to tangle with so many different interests, how would this fare?

### Clockwise from top left:

View of open pit mine and nearby town.

Stairway in the *Water Level Tower* (Wolfgang Christ), which provides a reference point for the rising level of the lake.

*Eight Hills and Forty-Nine Cones* (Gilles Bruni, Marc Babarit)

*AGORA* (Sigfried Knoll, Werner Sobek, Andreas Bosshard).

The opening of the channel used to fill the new lake.

Study sketch for *The Vanished River* (Hermann Prigann), which traces the former bed of the Mülde River.

Photos courtesy Commission Cultural Landscape Goitzsche, Knoll Ecoplan

### Cultural Landscape Goitzsche, Bitterfeld, Germany

**Sponsors:** Commission Cultural Landscape Goitzsche, Expo 2000 Sachsen-Anhalt Company

**Landscape planning:** Knoll Ecoplan (Martin Stein, Executive Director)

**Artists and artist teams:** Marc Babarit and Gilles Bruni; Claus Bury; Wolfgang Christ; Anatol Herzfeld; Sigfried Knoll, Werner Sobek and Andreas Bosshard; Jacques Leenhardt and Heike Brückner; Domenico Luciani; Till Neu; Zenon Polus; Hermann Prigann; Hartmut Renner; Nadia Schmidt; Gilles Vexlard.