

Funding Report: Klinta conference, Lund Sweden.

Sophie Cook

My name is Sophie Cook, and I am a trainee horticulturist at Dyffryn Gardens in South Wales. I am at the beginning of my second year as a Historic and Botanic Gardens Trainee, a scheme run by English Heritage. As part of the scheme, I work full-time at Dyffryn while completing projects, diaries, idents and my RHS level three diploma in my evenings and weekends. I have been training for two years in horticulture, before which I completed a BSc in Environmental Science and conducted a year of postgraduate research.

I was fortunate enough to receive £185 from the National Gardener's Scheme donation to the Professional Gardeners' Trust and £105 from the National Trust to attend the 'Urban Growth - perennial planting beyond nature' conference in Lund, Sweden. The total cost of the trip was £570, including the conference ticket, travel, three nights' accommodation and meals.

The 'Urban Growth - perennial planting beyond nature' conference was the first of its kind, held in Lund, Sweden from the 8th to the 10th of September 2017. It was organised by one of the leaders and experimenters in this field Peter Korn, and his partner Julia Andersson. The conference concerned itself with how to bring nature into the city in a sustainable and legible way. It advocated the use of designed plant communities influenced by ecology, which inherently promote longevity and low maintenance in the design.

The speakers were James Hitchmough (UK), Thomas Rainer (USA), Carrie Preston (NL), Patrick and Sylvie Quibel (Fr), Panayotis Kelaidis (USA), Kevin Hughes (UK) John Greenlee (USA) and Peter Korn (SE). They covered subjects such as grassland ecology, allowing the viewer to take ownership of the space, functionality of plants, woodlands in parks, ensuring the legibility of planted areas to the public, and picked apart the argument for native versus non-native flowers. In fact, the subjects were so varied and in depth that to ensure the conciseness of this report, I will focus on the three speakers that I found particularly interesting and relevant to my interests.

As I came to this conference after contacting James Hitchmough, I expected to enjoy the talks he gave. He wove humour and science together harmoniously, grounding his talks in peer-reviewed data. James gave three talks over the three days, but it was the talk 'Do look back' that I particularly enjoyed. He provided practical advice on how to succeed in ecologically informed plantings, and he made us realise that we need to consider what designs will look like in the future; how will it feel to walk through in 20 years? He also provided information on soil productivity to show the difference between traditional horticulture and ecological horticulture, where the soil in a horticultural setting has a productivity of around 1300g of dry biomass per m², whereas the soil of a wildflower meadow has a productivity of about 400g per m². This is a theme that was reiterated throughout the conference, where we are so used to conditioning the soil that we ignore the natural growing conditions of plants.

A strong theme throughout the talks was that ecological horticulture was not something that could be timetabled, where certain tasks are carried out on certain dates, but that we need to respond creatively to what is actually happening on the site. James then went on to talk about the various projects he had completed over the years and what he had learnt from

them. Perhaps one of the most important lessons was a solid and complete understanding of the vision by both the designer and the management staff. Although these planting designs do not need as much maintenance once established, the maintenance they do require is more skilled and in depth. This will certainly be something to consider when I begin to carry out planting designs such as this

The second talk that I particularly enjoyed was by Peter Korn, entitled 'Creating conditions'. Peter is a pioneer in planting into sand, and he has reported that plants growing in these conditions become stronger and longer lived than when planted into conditioned soil. He admitted that planting into sand always looks bad in the first year, which is practical advice that would really make a difference if I were to try this myself! He again touched upon the notion of a low nutrient substrate, and suggested that fertilizing the ground actually breaks the mycorrhizal associations between plants and fungi. I intend to find published papers on this subject, as it is a very interesting idea.

Alongside larger ideas like this, he also gave some important practical information from his experience. These were made up of small but invaluable tips, like watering only into the bottom of the planting hole to prevent weed establishment and to remove all compost from bought plants before planting into sand. Peter's experience in this area was clear from his comfortable manner of speaking and the whole auditorium appeared rapt at his talk.

The third speaker that I particularly enjoyed was Thomas Rainer and his talks 'Planting in a post wild world' and 'The biodiverse garden'. Thomas is a landscape architect and a leading voice in ecological landscape design. It was his second talk that was my favourite of the conference. This talk was structured around different 'hacks' for achieving a biodiverse garden; vertically layered planting; understanding plant sociability; using a diversity of species; using a diversity of plant metabolisms; and understanding how plants compete with one another. His talk was based upon these theoretical principles, and enforced by practical examples of his work in the field. It was clear that Thomas has an omnipotent view of all the different aspects required for this method of planting, and truly believes in its function in a rapidly urbanising world.

As well as the talks, I made a host of new contacts with other people who are enthusiastic advocates of ecological horticulture and landscape design. I hope to stay in touch with them and share ideas and events. Since the conference, I have also bought numerous books on the subject in order to be up to date on what has been achieved up until now.

Attending this conference was a great success. I am much more informed and determined in my pursuit of a career in ecological horticulture. I am very grateful to the National Gardener's Scheme, the PGT and the National Trust for their financial assistance, without which I would not have been able to attend.



In the foyer of the Stadshall, Lund, where the conference took place.