



Historic parks in the climate crisis

Numerous historic gardens and parks are in great danger. Climate change and especially the last hot years with their long hot and dry summers have left their mark.

This also became clear when we set out on our final excursion to the Schönbusch Landscape Park. Actually, we wanted to go there with our guests in September 2022 - but just then there was too much rain. Now we made up for it on our own, on probably the hottest day of the year and after a long dry period. Many canals didn't carry water and the cascade was also only a pile of stones. There, water should meander down over an artificial cairn in a kind of small waterfall.

The meadows were all yellowish-brown and many shrubs were drooping their leaves. At first glance, the large trees looked healthy, but even there you could find thinning crowns or even dead trees.



Figure 1: Plants in need of water



Figure 2: Dead tree in Schönbusch park

At the end of 2019, the German Palaces Society and the German Society for Garden Art and Landscape Culture (DGGL) founded an alliance on the topic of "Historic Gardens in Climate Change." There, experiences are to be gathered, research applications coordinated, and a database on shrubs and trees in parks created.

Many trees in the historic parks are old, characterize sight lines as primeval solitaires, and are now suffering. Often the crowns have to be cut back so that the trees can manage with less water or to protect visitors from falling branches. Trees defend themselves against drought by shedding branches on their own. So it has become much more dangerous to go into the forest.

The fact that the trees are old does not make things easier - they become more susceptible to pests and heat damage. It is quite normal that old trees need to be replaced. However, conditions have changed - many of the classic species, such as beech, do not cope well with the new climate conditions. New tree species have to be found. However, this also changes the traditional and historically "correct" appearance of the parks. Leaf colorations and growth forms transport design concepts of the garden architects - there the overall picture and the historical idea should be preserved despite new tree species. This is not an easy task. At least individual important trees are fought for intensively - but a wide-area park cannot be irrigated - at least with affordable effort.