Dragon Lake Bridge Park

Beijing and Shanghai enjoy tremendous attention for their bold new development, but many of China’s often overlooked second-tier cities are engaging in endeavors that are just as intrepid. Dragon Lake Bridge Park in the city of Bengbu, located in Anhui Province, provides a powerful example of how landscape design can transform a city’s identity as well as the way people connect with one another and with nature. AECOM’s design of the $40 million, 25-hectare (62-ac) park is a showcase for innovation and sustainability, turning a once-polluted lake into a vibrant public space.

JURY STATEMENT
The 25-hectare Dragon Lake Bridge Park, in the second-tier city of Bengbu, restores a heavily polluted lake, returning it to recreational use and raising the values of the surrounding land.
Bengbu, which means “clam wharf” in Chinese, has a heritage closely associated with the water because of its proximity to the Huai River and Dragon Lake. A former center of the freshwater pearl industry, the city has seen rapid urbanization and industrial development and is now a major hub for food processing. Bengbu has grown east from the banks of the river and will eventually encompass Dragon Lake. Although growth has brought a certain level of prosperity, it has exacted a high environmental toll. Dragon Lake, once replete with fishing and recreational activities, had become eutrophic. Its water quality had deteriorated to the point where human contact was ill-advised. To mitigate these deleterious effects and reposition Dragon Lake as a focal point for the region, the city hired AECOM and initiated a master-planning process for the Dragon Lake Scenic Area in 2004.

The master plan identified three major objectives: first, the improvement of water quality as a key landscape design aim; second, the enrichment of cultural and recreational offerings available to the larger community; and last, the establishment of a new lake district and a signature lakeside park at the western shore to provide a meaningful interface between the city and the lake. Critical to the plan’s success was the involvement of the public. AECOM and the city conducted many interviews and revealed the design for the park at the very early stages to solicit feedback.

The first steps in creating Dragon Lake Bridge Park revolved around improving the lake’s water quality and stabilizing the ecosystem. AECOM used a variety of measures and technologies, such as artificial circulation and aeration, construction of wetlands, and restoration of vegetated riparian buffers.
The design team altered the topography to create a terraced landscape that allows a continuous flow of visitors along the lakefront. A massive greenbelt of indigenous trees and plants anchor the site to its natural setting. This focus on localism and ecological sensitivity has created new natural habitats while minimizing irrigation and maintenance costs. In addition to the park’s extensive landscape design and habitat restoration, the park offers cultural spaces and elements that instill a distinctive, contemporary Chinese character to the landscape. The Bamboo Garden and Celebration Plaza anchor the core of the park, and outdoor sculpture as well as exhibition and gallery space abound amid the walkways, pavilions, bridges, and terraces.

As Bengbu moves into the future, it does so as a progressive lakeside city. Dragon Lake Bridge Park has become a signature amenity that showcases the city’s potential while offering residents and visitors a significant asset. Juror S. C. Liu, chairman of MyTopHome, commented how “Dragon Bridge Park is exemplary in terms of environmental and investment considerations ... [and is] evidence of how a well-planned project can bring multifaceted advantages to a city and its people.”