

## Tendencies in European landscape and garden design during the last centuries

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**Abstract** The ideas concerning green spaces changed a lot in Europe during the centuries. The role of these gardens, their aspect, their dimensions and social role seemed to be in a continuous transformation. Some innovative ideas were born in Europe, while others were imported from other continents. The Renaissance, French Gardens and English Gardens added their contribution to European culture. The old gardens of Europe were the isolated, but often beautiful parks of the noblemen, which were usually connected with palaces and other important buildings. The restoration of these green spaces follows in general the same principles which are used nowadays in the case of built areas, though there are some important differences. After the fundamental changes that succeeded in time, with many famous innovations, the role of gardens changed. Many became in time important urban symbols, or include elements that define the settlement. Today green spaces are fundamental parts of town and country policies, all over the continent, and contribute a lot to the aspect of settlements. The social and economic importance of gardens changed in time, and is still changing in the present. Urban planning and restoration programs use today the means offered by garden and landscape design, as essential elements for redefining urban areas. Tourism is much determined by the quality of urban spaces, which include green areas. For many developed countries the modeling of certain territories has become a major issue. The purpose is to obtain an attractive landscape, as a result of the evolution which takes place in accordance with the regional development plan.

### Key words

culture, garden design, landscape, green spaces

Being part of the great family of sciences connected with design, and a cultural phenomena, landscape design developed during the past century it's own theory, which of course cannot be so exhaustive and complex as it is in the case of architecture and object design. Authors like Simon Swaffield tried to find the proper questions and answers which would precisely define landscape design, its role in society, in culture, and the way it appears throughout the planning process. Questions and answers are of course very complex, and tend to interfere with many branches of culture and with many sciences. What is remarkable about gardens, is their ancient history, and ubiquitous presence in all known periods of time. This is why many things connected with gardening gain universal values, and are sometimes subjects of debates. There are of course very important unique moments in the history of landscape design, like the Renaissance and the birth of the English gardens in the XVIII'th century.

All critiques and theorists agreed in the last century that garden design is the expression of abstract ideas with cultural background, not only a way to

satisfy an esthetic necessity. In this respect there are many common points with architecture, and design in general. The reinterpretation of landscape seems to be one of the new ideas of modernism in European culture. Anyway, respect for the surrounding nature, and the artistic integration of built elements, were in all times the best signs of good architecture and urban thinking. These rules can be applied everywhere, with or without the will to model the surrounding territories. The French word "Paysage" seems more abstract then the English "Landscape", which tries to describe more in connection with the real aspect of the place. The French word is used only in the case of nice places with artistic values. It seems very relative which places deserves the name "paysage" and which do not. This incertitude about the meanings and limits of "Landscape" seems to influence the profession of Landscape Design too, some people considering it entirely connected to art, while others considering that garden design is a practical activity of decorating outside places, with little connection to real art. This confusion is hard to clear, because both situations are

possible in reality, but there are no different words to describe them.

In ancient history, China invented landscape design before other civilizations. The villa and the garden of the Italian Renaissance, created a new way of interaction between house, garden and landscape, on the basis of a new way of thinking, and following the artistic values of the antique world. For the first time in centuries, abstract ideas tend to model the thinking of the artists of the period, in accordance with the new standards of beauty, and with respect for human scale, in all visual arts.

In time there have been very different views about the role of gardens, and the way they should look, in tight connection with buildings, or individually without them. The roman tradition of the villas which included gardens, the gardens of Spain in Arab times, and even the gardens of the Renaissance, are very much connected with the building which these beautiful green space serve and complete. These ideas are much applicable to the Baroque French Gardens, which appeared in the years 1600. On the opposite side should be mentioned the English gardens of Lancelot Brown, which choose extreme liberty of shapes and colors, eliminating any possible geometry of the compositions. During the XVIII'th century the ideas of Palladian Renaissance architecture arrive to England approximately in the meantime with new ideas of gardening, which originate in the Extreme Orient.

English gardens created real landscapes on large surfaces of land, with great investments of money and energy, even demolishing villages if necessary for the composition. The idea was to model great parts of estates on a big scale, in order to create places which seemed natural, but were harmonious and well ordered. The limits of traditional English gardens are well hidden, creating a perfect unity with the surrounding nature, and inventing a different way of creating perspectives compared to traditional geometric French gardens. Between the first who created innovative English gardens we must remark Charles Bridgeman who died in 1738. In his works for King George II he is still conservative, but tries to innovate when he designs private gardens, even before William Kent. Some authors consider that the victory of English gardens over conservatism was influenced by the political changes that happened in England after 1688, with the arrival of a new dynasty of the protestant House of Orania, and the bigger influence of the Whig Party. Kent interpreted the landscape as a painting, and had a great success. His only untouched project that survived to our days is a park at Rousham. His colleague Lancelot Brown got the name Capability, for his good projects. He called himself an improver of landscapes, not a designer. Browns gardens are simple and elegant, somewhat purist and homogenous. The spiritual successor of Brown was Humphrey Repton (1752-1818). He reintroduced in his project certain special elements, little garden parts, which made his

designs more colourful, but less homogenous. With his way of thinking, Brown went beyond his age, proposing pure and nearly abstract compositions. The ideas of English Gardens spread all over Europe in the following years having an influence over gardens in every country.

The Baron Haussmann who rebuilt Paris following a modern plan in the XIX'th century created many parks that can still be seen today. These smaller and bigger green spaces follow partly the traditional French and English gardens of the nobility, but are conceived in a different way, being adapted for the public use by the citizens of the big city. This makes them similar in certain ways to the urban parks of our days. In her book entitled "For an Anthropology of Space", Fraçoise Choay regrets the fact that the old urban furniture which existed in the streets and parks of Paris beginning with the XIX'th century was replaced by a modern one. In the article "The signs of the town", in the above mentioned book, Choay explains that the old furniture was created by Hausmann, the mayor of Paris, together with designers Alphand and Davioud, in order to express the new cosmopolite character of the city of the years 1800. The old objects, that were drawn with great attention and humor, using materials like metal and wood, were contrasting with the massiveness of the city. These elements were in harmony with the cast iron fences of the green spaces. Old urban elements with a specific design, these objects were signs that became characteristic for Paris, symbols of an age and of a specific culture.

Ebenezer Howard, an English intellectual, wrote a book entitled "Garden Cities of To-morrow- 1898", which was revised in the year 1902, with the purpose of creating a new way of thinking in English urban planning. In this writing he exposed his innovative ideas about a new possible way of ordering settlements. He wanted to promote an alternative to the way people generally lived in the cities and towns of the time, especially in crowded and polluted London. He proposed a town plan created around a nice central park of great dimension, with radial boulevards. The dimensions of the town had to be limited (around 30 000 inhabitants), and dwellings should have appropriate gardens and courtyards. The image of the public buildings, located in central town, and the pieces of green land belonging to them, were meant to contribute to the urban atmosphere. In 1899 Howard created the Garden Cities Association. The result was the building of Letchworth Garden City - developed by a company named First Garden City. It was designed for a population between 30000 and 35000 inhabitants, and was situated 37 miles north of London. The second garden city built in the same period of time is Welwyn, with a population of 10 000, with well established residential , industrial and commercial zones. In 1930 the health of the inhabitants was greater than those living in London. Welwyn is situated at 20 miles from London, in an area that was a woodland

formerly. The principles of Howard were used later in Great Britain after World War II, when thirty new communities were built by the government. Around the year 1900 the importance of green spaces as major elements of towns, was an evident issue which needed no more proof, both for investors and for public institutions.

Of course the debate about the role of green spaces, and the way they should look never ended in the past centuries. Authors like Jay Appleton try to find the answer to the question "Why we like a landscape?". It is of course very hard to solve the problem, even if all the possible means of cultural research and psychology are used. It is even more difficult if we try to connect the problem of landscape with those "landscapes" which can be found on paintings and art photographs. These originate from the real ones, but are filtrated through the sensibility of the artist.

Generally the main cause of modeling outside space was connected in all times with the necessity to change nature and adapt it to the needs of human groups who inhabit a place. Beginning with the XX'th century Modernism changed profoundly the way in which buildings and green spaces were conceived. Modern architecture which invented new and new techniques to serve industrial development and created the idea of modern apartment, gave up the old tradition of architecture and garden design. Modern buildings became abstract, they got beautiful interesting forms, which had nothing in common with tradition, culture, or the spirit of the place where they were built. Gardens had the same fate, becoming in the best case decoration of open spaces, if they were not created only for ecologic purposes. In the last fifty years many theorists had shown that architecture lost its cultural background, charm and attractiveness, because of the new principles of Modernism. Garden and landscape design had the same fate. It is generally accepted that build spaces became less human in the last century. In fact we do not speak any more about gardens, but about green spaces, which must cover a certain proportion of a normal town. These spaces are very important for the health of population, but only a little part of them has esthetic value, or cultural meaning. The Charta of Athens, which is one of the founding declarations of modern architecture, stated clearly that green spaces were necessary for a healthy life, but nothing more. The main idea was to create great block of apartments placed in enormous homogenous green spaces. These ideas inspired many town planners and politicians, who before and after World War II created new quarters in existing towns, and new little towns. These little settlements built in many European countries, especially after the war, follow the ideas of the Chart of International Modern Architecture (CIAM) -1933, and some ideas of the British "Garden City". In all cases, green spaces were one of the most important elements that had to be studied during the design process. The green spaces

softened somewhat the severe character of the new urban spaces of the second half of the 20'th century, characterized mainly by concrete buildings with simple cubic forms.

In the "European Landscape Convention" which was signed in the year 2004 by 34 states, landscape is defined as "a part of territory, which is perceived in a certain way by the population". This means that landscape is considered something subjective, connected to group psychology.

Since Urban Planning appeared as a science, more then a century ago, it always was preoccupied by the problem of green spaces, as a necessary element for the health of the population, and sometimes as decoration for certain urban areas. It is obvious that the creation of such enormous green surfaces in towns, cities, and around them, created a situation in which it is impossible to decorate all these parks with flowers and nice trees. It became obvious that even in rich countries, only a little part of these surfaces can be designed as attractive gardens. The rest had to become green space with ecologic role. In a first period this new way of conceiving parks reduced considerably the quality of these areas, but today especially in western countries, more and more nice gardens are created, which are appreciated by the inhabitants, and by many tourists. Nice colourful spots of flowers appear in towns here and there, together with decorative trees, very expensive in the past, but cheaper now because of the new technologies used in horticulture. The standards of green spaces in the parks of Europe have generally very much grown during the last decades. Besides the many average green spaces, still exist the old parks, and other new ones with modern design.

For "Town and Country Planning", landscape design is becoming more and more an important issue. Considered in the past a marginal theme, the problem of territories is today very important, especially in regions that are attractive for tourists. Towns and territories outside settlements are largely modeled by urban planners with the purpose to create a certain quality of space. In order to achieve these goals "Landscaping" was invented.

In the last thirty years it seems that many new parks in Europe, North America and Australia have become real experimental grounds for innovation in design. Art and diversity are very easy to achieve in the design of a green space, which gives the artist nearly as much freedom as the one painters have in front of their canvas. Structural problems are few in the case of gardens, functionally the space can be adapted easily, while modern art has demolished the majority of rules concerning compositions. This great freedom has become attractive during the past decades for artists, and has resulted in the creation of interesting and valuable new green spaces in different corners of the world. In an age when architects are more and more restricted in their work by urban rules, and the scarcity of free land, garden designers seem to discover all the

time new ways of expressing innovative ideas. It can happen because in many situations, the old styles used in garden design and the traditional patterns of urban parks are considered now obsolete. This gives new opportunities to those who want to use their fantasy to create totally new interesting spaces, that include an endless variety of colours and forms. Watching the plans of contemporary gardens it becomes obvious, that the combinations of colours and the compositions satisfy the expectations that existed traditionally only in the case of paintings. Images have become very complex and interesting. The possibility to combine built elements with vegetation is another advantage, that enriches the diversity of these compositions. Generally, in order to achieve results, abstract artistic ideas are combined with practical solutions. Green spaces are one of the most interesting ways of combining free artistic thinking with practical aims.

The American theorist of urban planning, Lewis Mumford, who wrote about the history and theoretical problems of urbanism, observed that technique used by civilians and by the military influenced decisively the evolution of urban spaces. Using his vast culture he found explanations for many things connected with urban life. He foresaw the future of towns, being afraid of an evolution that can conduct towards systems of a high technical level, but inhuman and with no artistic values. In time, many observed that one of the most efficient ways to save our towns is to create green spaces, which can solve the problem of ecology, and can also counterbalance the effects created by modern buildings made of concrete, steel and glass. In a strange way, it is exactly the development of techniques that makes us feel green spaces so important in the context of contemporary cities.

Georges Friedmann, a sociologist, observed half a century ago that traditional towns and villages have no future in the time of global urban planning, when traditional limits of settlement will become theoretical notions. In this context of towns and cities which sprawl in the territory, creating a complex system of built and free spaces, the planning and decoration of these spaces is becoming essential. Green spaces become important in this context, due to their great size, and to their vicinity to important built areas.

An other important problem is the restoration of historical green spaces, which are more valuable than other parks or gardens because they are cultural assets. These parks which generally belong to historical castles or other old buildings are considered more and more important, as places that guard the memory of past centuries. There are international seminars and conferences dedicated to the restoration of these gardens, and renowned specialists who created new theories concerning the methods that should be used in different situations. In the present cultural context of our century, during the process of restoration, green spaces can change their aspect, but remain much appreciated cultural values.

During the last centuries, in Europe there hasn't been any general continuity in the way of thinking concerning the problem of landscape and garden design, but rather a continuous debate over the role and aspect of these spaces. The invention of Town and Country Planning a century ago complicated even more the existing issues, because each new way of reconsidering the problems of settlements came with new proposals concerning the role and contribution that landscape planning should have. Being initially an art and technique promoted exclusively by the upper classes, garden design evolved into an important science, strongly connected to urban planning, the health of the population and the appearance of towns. Other issues strongly connect landscape design to tourism and its benefits. The cultural role of gardens seem to appear nowadays here and there, when historical town centers are renovated, decrepit town parts are renewed, or when new gardens with a specific theme are built. In all these situations the intervention of landscape designers is generally a real success. The quality of many green spaces in Europe, their variety, the quantity of money invested in them, and their cheerful presence, is the proof of the well being of many towns and cities. Garden design and landscape design have become in time the best and easiest means to change the aspect of urban areas, to save the appearance of poor quarters, especially those used for social dwelling. Though relatively small investments are necessary, these projects are in many cases the motors of urban renewal and change.

## Results and Discussions

The aspect, the size, the value and the social role of green spaces evolved in time, in all European countries. The innovative spirit passed from one country to another, creating in time new varieties of gardens, which always were the results of different ways of thinking. The new ideas originated in the local culture of certain people, in the innovative spirit of landscape architects, and in the ever changing demands of society. These elements created in certain moments surprising effects, which later determined the style of parks for tens of years or centuries. Social and economic evolution influenced the role and aspect of green spaces in all periods of time. From enclosed units created only for a small number of rich people, green spaces became in time more and more public spaces, covering in the end a great part of the surface of present day towns and cities. According to this, the cultural, social and economic role of park never stopped to grow, to our days, becoming one of the important elements of urban value, comfort, and tourist attraction.

## Conclusions

Gardens and parks played a more and more important role in time in the development of European settlements. Thought initially created only for purposes of decorating the yards of rich families, green spaces accumulated in time more and more cultural value. Today they have a double importance, for their great cultural value, and also for their social role, as basic elements of town and country planning. In many situations they become today valuable elements of the urban system that can determine the character of towns or cities.

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Fig.1 Private garden Timisoara-Romania,  
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Photo - Gabriel Szekely





Fig.2 Botanical garden Bucharest -Romania,  
Photo - Gabriel Szekely



Fig.3 Geometrical garden - Prague, Czech Republic  
Photo - Gabriel Szekely



Fig.4 Schönbrunn park - Vienna, Austria  
Photo - Gabriel Szekely