

The social role of green spaces in Timișoara

Székely G.¹, Berar C.^{1*}

¹Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Horticulture and Forestry, 119 Aradului St., 300645 Timisoara, Romania

*Corresponding author. Email: cristianberar@yahoo.com

Abstract In the city of Timișoara, there are nice green spaces, which have an important role in the daily life of citizens. They have ecological value, have a major contribution to the image of the city, and are used by people for outdoor activities and sports, especially in warm season. In recent years investments have been made in order to improve the value of these areas, and to make them more attractive for the population. Studies show that the social impact of these parks and gardens is not the same in all places, and that they have been only partly adapted to the present needs of society. The efficiency of certain green areas is strongly connected to the capacity of these places to address the needs of different age categories. Certain green spaces are also used for sports, some of which are getting more popular recently. Proper changes can attract more people to some areas, and can assure a better use of these places.

Key words

Parks, gardens, Timișoara, social role, activities

Public parks in Timișoara have a two century old history, and it is considered today that some of them are part of the patrimony of the city [1]. Central Park (called Scudier Park) appeared in the XIX' th century, next to the old fortifications of the city, which later were demolished. In western part of Europe public gardens appeared in the meantime.[2] Regina Maria Park (called Coronini at that time) appeared a little later.

There was enough free space outside the city walls, because military regulations of the time, did not allow a 1km wide piece of land to be used for constructions around the fortress. [3]

When in the end, after 1890, military authorities in Vienna permitted the walls to be demolished, a large unused piece of land was visible in the neighbourhood of Cetate (Fortress) district. A part of these free pieces of land were used for new buildings in the following years, other large parts of the empty area became green spaces. Many European cities changed a lot at the beginning of the XVIII'th century. [4]

Half of the centre is surrounded by the Bega Canal, and on the banks there is a chain of parks and gardens. A century ago Timișoara resembled a garden city. [5] Practically all parks of central Timișoara, appeared on pieces of land situated between Cetate

District, and the former outside districts of the city: Fabric, Iosefin, and Elisabetin. Timișoara was developing quickly in the favourable economic and political conditions of the moment. [6]

In time these green areas were remodeled, trees were planted, and new alleys were built. In some places public buildings were added, sports grounds and playgrounds for children were created.

In Central Park there were covered swimming pools in a corner of the park, in Regina Maria Park a Movie Hall functioned during the XX' th century, while in Alpinet Park a restaurant was built fifty years ago.

These central green areas had a very important role in the life of the city during the last 150 years, and provided the necessary green surface and playgrounds for the inhabitants. The squares of central Timișoara, and these green areas which surround them, define the character of the urban space.

Material and Method

We will describe in the following the way in which different green areas of Timișoara are used by the inhabitants, and the social role these urban spaces have today.



Fig. 1. Main parks of Timișoara

Botanical Park is a nice green space situated in Timișoara next to Municipal Hospital, on the edge of Cetate (Fortress) District. Under the earth there are old walls of the demolished fortifications of the city, and casemate buildings covered with earth and vegetation. These are the only small hills which exist in the city. The space and the neighbouring building were initially used by the military in the XIXth century. In 1869 a military school was established here. [7] A century ago the two story building with baroque facades was converted into a hospital and redesigned using the plans of architect Henrieta Delavrancea - Gibory. The park was already used at that time as a public space. After 1980 authorities partly implemented a project that aimed the transformation of the park into a botanical garden, but construction works were never finished. Some areas were replanted with a great variety of plants, but the thematic zones of the garden were only partly built. The plan was totally abandoned after 1990, and the space became again a simple park of the city. A piece of land which is not covered with

vegetation at the entrance will be soon used as building site, because the hospital will be enlarged, and a parking building will be created next. Studies show that the space is one of the most appreciated green areas of Timișoara, especially in warm season, when elder people come here to walk, while young children use the space for different sports. Many children with bicycles can be seen in the park, and people are also jogging here. Though the only important investments in years consisted in repaving the alleys ten years ago, and the nice flowers which can be seen at the entrance, the inhabitants of the city appreciate the vegetation, the relative isolation of the space which is bordered on one side only by the railway, and its accessible position in the middle of the city. The space is clean, and well groomed, though there are no thematic areas, other special objects as fountains, or small constructions. There is one big wooden kiosk near the main entrance area. More investments in the infrastructure of the place would be necessary.



Fig. 2. Botanical Park



Fig. 3. Botanical Park



Fig. 4. Botanical Park

Regina Maria Park, called in the past People's park, and in the XIX' th century Coronini Park, is one of the oldest green spaces of Timișoara, situated next to the entrance into Fabric District. The original green space was remodeled more than a century ago using the plans of local architect László Székely, who designed a special fence for the park using the symbol of the cross and brick decorations. There were two impressive entrance gates into the place, one of which was built in wood and did not survive to our days. Next to the park a small channel of Bega River was visible at the time Székely made his plans, but soon disappeared. There are nice old Quercus Sp. trees in the park.

The space was partly remodeled not a long time ago, small flowering trees were planted, and the historical fence repaired and extended. The park attracts people from the neighbourhood in warm time, though the small constructions created lately are not really appreciated. There is nothing special in this place which could bring people from different parts of the city. People play basket ball in a corner of the park, which was specially arranged for this purpose. There are some statues in the green area. Some inhabitants come here for jogging, while many others come with their dogs. The place is very valuable, but a historical park should have more attractive parts.



Fig. 5. Regina Maria Park

Children's Park is situated in central Timișoara, on the bank of the Bega Canal. It was known for the fact that many of the city's old Quercus Sp. trees can be found here. After the year 1980, the space was rearranged for children, and in that period of time it was called Pioneer's Park. The most important attraction of the place used to be a small train, which was going around the green space. The train is not in use any more, but the park was rearranged a couple of years ago. When weather is good many children from different parts of Timișoara gather here, to play in the special play grounds created for specific age groups.

There is a carting ring also, and a magic castle. Being the only greater park in the city arranged for children, it attracts many families, especially during weekends and holidays. The place is well groomed, though some of the ideas of the original plan were abandoned on the occasion of the reconstruction. Being situated next to the river, and having a long alley on the bank, the place is much used by people who walk or go by bicycle along the canal. The intention was to create a pedestrian and bicycle route along the river, that continues much over the limits of the city.



Fig. 6. Children's Park

Rose's Park is situated in central Timisoara between the Bega Canal and a street with nice villas built in the interwar period. The park was created initially in 1891 on the occasion of an international exhibition by the well known Timișoara based gardener, Wilhelm Mühle with other horticulturists. [8] The final plan of the garden was designed by gardeners Árpád Muhle and Demetrovici in the year 1929. In the new political context of that period of time, the horticulturist imagined this area, together with the English wife of a general who was living in the city. The geometrical design of the place, the nice *Taxus baccata* Sp. trees, with their special shape, the furniture, and especially the rose collection, which was replanted lately, create a special atmosphere. The park is one the finest in the country, and municipality invested in time great sums of money in order to maintain it. This place compensated somewhat the lack of a botanical garden in the city, and used to be a matter of pride for the inhabitants. The place attracts people in all seasons, but especially in the summer, when the rose bushes flower. An other important attraction is the open air summer theater, used in warm season, which was in time the stage of many festivals and concerts. Considering all these aspects, it is obvious that the park has an important cultural role in the city. The nice *Malus*

Brandywine trees planted on the street next to the park, offer lately an other special attraction in the spring. The neighbouring space which is also open to the public, offers something totally different, being a sports ground used especially on weekends, where people play tennis and volleyball. This urban area reflects the expectations of the time between the two wars to create special places with very high standards which can be compared with what was happening in Western Europe. The place is much appreciated by the inhabitants of the city, and is strongly connected to its cultural traditions.

Justiției (Justice) Park is an old green space of Timișoara, situated next to the building of the Town Hall. The place was used in the past mostly by people who were waiting for something in the city centre, or were resting for a short time on a bench. There are some old trees in the park, and a one floor building, which is used by the Association of Plastic Artists. The park changed very much during the last years, because municipality decided to plant here tulip fields of all colours, which attract many people in the spring. For a couple of weeks, this green space, which is used rather as a transition area, becomes the most popular park of Timișoara.



Fig. 7. Justiției Park

Catedralei (Cathedral's) Park is a green space situated behind the Orthodox Cathedral of Timișoara built between the years 1936-1946. [9] The place was replanted more than fifty years ago, and there is nice vegetation. The old *Platanus* Sp. trees which can be found here are really remarkable. The alley that runs along the Bega Canal is planted with *Magnolia* L. trees, and offers a beautiful site in the spring, together with the other side of the river, Alpinet Park. There is also an alley with *Prunus pissardi* Sp. trees, which have nice flowers in April. People come in great numbers to see the flowering trees.

Alpinet Park is situated on the bank of the Bega Canal, in a favourable position, near the Orthodox Cathedral. Though originally it looked like

the other parts of the river bank, fifty years ago the area was transformed. A restaurant was built in the park, and it became much appreciated in the city. Later the whole green space was rearranged, and in time many decorative tree and shrub species were introduced. The last renovation took place a short time ago. The place is remarkable because the terrain is remodeled partly with terraces, which in Timișoara cannot be found in other paces, and in spring one can admire a great variety of flowering trees and shrubs. Alpinet Park has the advantage, that on the other bank of the Canal is another green area, Cathedral's Park. It is the only part of the river bank where both banks of the river are arranged and planted, mostly with *Magnolia* L. trees. The place is used in weekends, in fine weather, when

people come walking along the river. The bicycle route that runs along the canal is also present here. The place

can be considered a representative green area of Timișoara.



Fig. 8. Alpinet Park

Central Park is the oldest park of Timișoara, situated in the immediate neighbourhood of the town centre. It was built initially in the XIXth century next to the walls of the fortress, and was used by the inhabitants of Cetate District, mainly on Sundays. The military was performing concerts in a kiosk. The park was named after general Scudier, a former military commander of the fortification, much appreciated in those times. The statue of the general erected in 1879 was present in this green area till 1920, when Timișoara became part of Romania, and in the public spaces of the city the symbols of Austria - Hungary were demolished. [10] When Victoria Square was built over a century ago, and later the Orthodox Cathedral and the Town Hall appeared in the proximity of the park, the space became again very important and gained its present name Central Park, which shows its essential position in the city. After World War II the

space was rebuilt, and in its centre an imposing statue was built, representing a group of soldiers, the Soviet and Romanian military which fought Nazi Germany. The statue was preserved, but today it commemorates all the soldiers who fought to defend the country. During the last twenty years an alley of personalities was created, where the important figures of the city are remembered. One can see here the busts of all the writers, musicians, professors, and political leaders, who are considered important for Timișoara. In a corner of the park, the building of the old swimming pool of the city is still visible. The park is visited in all seasons because of its position and representative status, being situated next to the central square of the city. People come to play chess in the park, on special tables created for this purpose. The place was renovated lately, and during the spring and summer there are many flowers.



Fig. 9. Central Park

Carmen Sylva Park (formerly called Doina Park) is situated in Doja street, on the limit of Elisabetin and Iosefin districts. It is an old public park, which appeared on a piece of land that originally was outside the old fortifications. It is the only park in the surrounding urban area, a surface that covers a great

part of Iosefin and Elisabetin quarters. Beside the old trees planted a long time ago, especially in the centre of the park, recently young decorative trees and shrubs were added. On the occasion of the renovation that took place a couple of years ago, the alleys were remade, and a playground was created, which attracts

children, especially in warm season. In the central part of the park a big kiosk can be observed. It is made of wood, and has concrete foundations, but it is rarely used by visitors. The green area is well groomed, and is used by a lot of people because it is the nearest accessible park for the surrounding area. People come with children, with dogs, are jogging or practicing other sports.

Civic Centre (Central Civic) Park, is a green space situated in the centre of Timișoara, on a piece of land that formerly was used by the military. The barracks construction with an impressive tower [11] (Transylvanian Barracks) was demolished fifty years ago. [12] There were plans to create an urban square in the area, but in the end the whole space was planted with trees. Vegetation developed in time, and the park is under reconstruction in the present. Civic Centre Park has an important ecological role in the central part of the city. When weather is good people sit on benches along the main alley of the green space.

Pădurice (Little Wood) Park is situated between Soarelui and Girocului districts. The place was used originally as a tree nursery. Fifty years ago this activity was abandoned, and the green area was used later as a place where children were coming to play, and people from the neighbourhood to walk. Originally one ally was paved, and some benches were placed along it. The trees were all young and planted in straight lines. Later the park was rearranged. On the occasion of the renovation that took place ten years ago, more alleys were built, shrubs were cut, decorative trees were planted in certain areas, and a small playground was created. Being the only green area of the district, the place is used by many local inhabitants.

Results and Discussions

Considering the evolution in the past years of the green spaces of Timișoara, we can say that most of them have been renovated, partly remodeled and adapted to the present needs of society. This is a normal attitude concerning green areas, if we think about the evolution of urban planning during the last century. [13] In most places we can see new alleys, playgrounds for children, new vegetation. During the last twenty years the Town Hall tried to change the look of these areas by introducing new species, especially shrubs and trees that flower in the spring. This was facilitated by the offer of the market, because the prices of different plants became more accessible. Studies show that green areas are not used in Romania, as they are in Western countries, because most of the population does not practice sports every day. Unlike in countries in Western Europe and the U.S.A., you can see few people jogging in the parks. Still, the creation of bicycle routes along the Bega river encouraged people to buy bicycles. Some people use them to go to work, while others only on weekends. People riding bicycles are much present now on the bicycle routes

when the weather is fine. Old people tend to spend more time in parks, while others come with young children or walk dogs.

Some green areas succeed to attract many people because of their special function, like Children's Park, or Rose's Park. Others like Apline Park, Justice Park or Cathedral's Park are considered attractive in the spring, when people come to admire the flowers. Other parks like Botanical Park, Carmen Sylva, and People's Park seem attractive mostly because they are situated in the neighbourhood of districts that do not have other green areas. People complain sometimes about the lack of diversity and special events that should take place in the parks of a great city. With few exceptions design models are old, and innovation is not much present in the project that have been implemented in the past decade. Other people, mostly landscape designers and architects complained about the species that were planted, considering that the small flowering trees that were promoted are nice, but have a very small ecological impact, compared to the old Oak, Platanus, and other valuable species that were characteristic for the green spaces of Timișoara in the past.

Conclusions

The parks of Timișoara are valuable parts of the urban space, have a long history and are used today by a great part of the population. Investments in recent years adapted these areas to the needs of the population. Playgrounds, bicycle routes, places where people can practice certain sports, special tables for playing chess, all are getting more and more popular. Flowers attract in the spring thousands, to certain parks of the city. All these have made green spaces more useful and more appreciated by the population. Still many of the inhabitants do not practice any sports and do not spend much time in green areas. The ecological role of the parks should also get more attention. Considering all aspects, green areas in Timișoara and in other great cities of Romania begin to satisfy more and more the expectations of the inhabitants and are in accordance with the standards of European Union. For this purpose local leaders must have an efficient strategy, as it is usual today in urban planning. [14] Modern technology can help to develop more efficient green spaces. Cerda, the first theoretician of urbanism already mentioned the link between technology and the evolution of cities. [15] Studies show that the amount of money invested in time in green areas in Timișoara grew considerably. This will bring change and will create new facilities for a greater part of the population.

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