THE IDEA OF THE STRATEGY
FOR KAUNAS BOTANICAL GARDEN
IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONTEMPORARY
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE THEORY

EWA PODHAJSKA, MARTA WEBER-SIWIRSKA
Institute of Landscape Architecture, University of Environmental and Life Sciences,
pl. Grunwaldzki 24a, 50-363 Wroclaw, Poland; e-mail: ewa.podhajska@up.wroc.pl,
marta.weber-siwirska@up.wroc.pl

WOJCIECH KOWALEWICZ
Institute of Landscape Architecture, University of Environmental and Life Sciences,
pl. Grunwaldzki 24a, 50-363 Wroclaw, Poland; e-mail: vacumex@wp.pl

Abstract

The Kaunas Botanical Garden stands now before making important decisions. The innate qualities of the area’s historical value, multidimensional spatial structure and natural resources, and above all, the importance for the city and for Lithuania in general, make the decisions about the Garden’s further development responsible and difficult. The agreement between Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, established in 2012, provides a basis for reflection on the subject. On the basis of the considerations made the programme that distinguished a coherent system of dealing with the garden existing values and give direction for new investments. The concept is based on two assumptions: on the one hand, the holistic recognition of qualities and resources of the present KBG, on the other, the introduction of contemporary landscape architecture. Such a combination introduces new aspects that have a chance to save and improve the quality of the Garden in a creative way.

Key words: modern landscape architecture, planting design, the Dynamic Landscape, the Planetary Garden, the Landscape of Changes.

INTRODUCTION

The agreement between Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, established in May 2012, led to the meeting of academic communities and made the study on the Garden development possible. In effect, the study resulted
in the concept of the Landscape Plan and Strategy for the Kaunas Botanical Garden (Drapella-Hermansdorfer et al., 2012; Podhajska, 2013). The concept is based on two assumptions: on the one hand, the holistic recognition of qualities and resources of the present KBG, on the other, the introduction of contemporary landscape architecture. The postulates of development are based on the current achievements in that field of academic discipline. Such a combination introduces new aspects that have a chance to save and improve the quality of the Garden in a creative way.

METHOD

1. The introduction to the method (Drapella-Hermansdorfer et al., 2012; Podhajska, 2013).

The formulation of guidelines of the Landscape Plan and Strategy was preceded by research studies conducted on the current Garden resources in three categories: the natural resources, the cultural resources and the human resources & access.

2. The method of formulating the guidelines.

A common method was adopted to formulate guidelines for all three categories. The key issue was to distinguish and name three characteristic stages of the garden development. In each category, the basic structure has become a distinction:

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| The initial level | ⇒ | The development | ⇒ | The present day |
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The above diagram presents the most important stages in the development of the Garden and identifies representative trends of the each period. In such way, it creates a platform for exposition of multiple threads and stages of the Garden development and enables the comparison between them, simultaneously building the perspective of the context. The method produced a significant value for the next steps of the development of KBG. As a result, this led to the formulation of the guidelines of the development program; it enables the implementation of a coherent system in dealing with the Garden’s existing qualities and presents direction for new investments.
3. The presentation of the method.

Below, there are the results of the implementation of the method in all three categories (Drapella-Hermansdorfer et al., 2012; Podhajska, 2013).

a. The aspect of cultural heritage is presented as the meeting with garden art and recognized in the following steps:

| Romantic landscape park | Early modern style | Postmodern style |

The essential criteria were selected for particular stages:

| Aesthetic criteria | Functional criteria | Semantic criteria |

b. The aspect of human resources and access is subjected to a similar distinction. Below, the diagram shows models of how the KBG functions in relation to the society and the city.

| Private collection | Scientific collection | Multifunctional collection with social aspects |
| Limited contact | Semi-opened | Interactive |

c. In the aspect of the natural heritage – meeting with Nature.

The KBG’s natural qualities were identified as an area of man’s meeting with Nature and in accordance with the accepted method the three characteristic stages were distinguished; each, presenting different rules and different creative goals. At the beginning of the 19th century, in the first stage of Freda’s park development, the meeting with Nature had a form of exclusive amateur collections with a tendency to expose single plants. At that time, the static understanding of Nature and the exhibition of artificially arranged compositions created according to the aesthetics imposed on Nature predominated.

In the 1930’s, during the transformation of the garden from the private property into the scientific area of the botanical garden, the image of Nature had changed. The garden gained a scientific character; permanent floristic collections, as well as the pomology and medicinal plant sector were introduced. Instead of satisfying the aesthetic interests,
in accordance with the modernist canons of utility, the expositions became the object of regular studies under the scientific principles. In the third stage of the meeting with Nature, that is happening today, the assessment of the KBG resources and the analysis of contemporary trends relevant in designing the landscape made it possible to nominate a mainstream leading – the exposition of plants in their natural, semi-spontaneous group.

In the brief presentation of the natural qualities of KBG was carried out according to the following scheme:

| The amateur collection and exposition of single plants | The scientific and functional collection of plants | The observation and lack of intervention in natural processes |

4. The summary of the method.

The method is the key in distinction of the directions in Garden development. Apart from providing a coherent framework for the existing qualities, the method also leaves an open space for continuation. It facilitates further development in accordance with contemporary trends without the necessity to follow historical canons. Instead of sinking into oblivion or being passively imitated, the present quality creates a wide range of characteristic forms of the KBG from various periods, gaining a creative continuation. It creates the opportunity to order the existing qualities and to determine what differently created parts of the garden have in common, without negating or favouring any of the historical stages. Thanks to this identification, the existing qualities of the place are neither contradicted nor ignored by contemporary tendencies, but they situate the future of the garden in the context of its past, building a long-lasting identity of the place.

5. Justification for a contemporary approach in the process of shaping the natural qualities.

A contemporary methodology of the plant exposition in KGB consists in the exposition of the plant in its spontaneous group. This aspect is treated with priority in the programme. The expositions of the dynamic semi-natural habitats, which are created consciously and in accordance with the criteria defining the purposes of these expositions,
are able to determine the contemporary scientific profile of the garden by placing it in the framework of the sustainable development and by using the potential of the place.

The decision about how to shape the contemporary stage as exhibition areas of natural processes in plant communities was based on the following considerations:

a. The potential of the place of KBG.

The analysis of KBG resources showed significant areas of spontaneous vegetation habitats. The natural resources of KBG allowed noticing the possibilities of creating expositions of such habitats based significantly on the existing arrangements. Among the unexploited assets of the garden are large areas of spontaneous growth with rich vertical and horizontal structures. These assets were marked as the basis for contemporary compositions in the garden, as it facilitates the creation of various expositions of semi-natural clusters.

b. The ideological base.

Working with spontaneous groups of plants is one of the most important assumptions and achievements of the contemporary landscape architecture.

The fundamental change was brought by understanding the landscape not in static categories but as the process of revealing the changes. Exposing the beauty of natural plant communities has become a leading method in a number of significant works. The terms “third nature”, “industrial nature” and, above all, the concept of “landscape of changes” are inalienable achievements of the theory and practice of contemporary landscape architecture. The approval of semi-natural vegetation communities, the protection of the natural aspects of the succession has become not only a method of shaping the vegetation but it was also a turning point in the development of the ideological basis of such objects. An icon of this type of activity has become Landschafts park Duisburg-Nord by Anne and Peter Latz. Designers as particularly valuable and worthy of prominence recognize the moment when nature returns to the lost space and moves to expand, the birthplace of third nature – the industrial nature – as a conglomerate of cultural
and natural places – creating industrial natural scenery. It is imperative to note, however, that the formation of plant communities is based on environmental grounds – not qualities of set design. Interest is not so much the visual effect – as is the case in the earlier naturalistic solutions of, but the process of change, in which the plants are involved. This is accompanied by an attempt to develop a new aesthetic canon in relation to ecological values. “Wildness” of these communities is treated conventionally, mainly in terms of natural succession, reduced maintenance and dominance of native species. The fundamental change was brought by understanding the landscape not in static categories but as the process of revealing the changes. The clarity of this trend among many different trends in contemporary landscape architecture qualifies it to be representative for the area from the turn of the last century. It seems to be strong enough to create a counterpoint to the preceding periods criteria and establish a modern scientific research trend for the KBG.

c. The new formula of botanical gardens.

The contemporary tendency to expose plants in the context of their group relationships seems to be already a rule in the programmes of botanical gardens around the world.

Today, botanical gardens that had initiated such programs provide evidence that a comprehensive exhibition of the plant community has become the guiding principle of exposing the natural qualities. This method forced the traditional formula of exposing a single plant out, making a kind of rule the “citation” of ecosystems with their mutual dependence and structure, as an essential element of exposure. The Millennium Commission Foundation’s objects are: Eden Project, National Botanic Garden of Wales, Leicestershire Brocks Hill Millennium Park et al., including Jardin Botanique de Bordeaux, Jardin Botanico de Barcelona and other.

d. The economic factor.

Crucial for the implementation of spontaneous habitats expositions in the KBG is a possibility of their organization at a limited budget. Plant expositions based only on the aesthetic and systematic qualities,
which require a considerable budget for the arrangement and care, seem to belong to the garden past. To continue this program, based on the 19th century rules, means to create some kind of botanical relic that would be interesting but would have very limited relevance to the challenges of the contemporary civilization.

e. The imperative of sustainable urban habitats.

A postulated limited budget is related to the aspects of the program’s relevance to modern urban realities. The imperative of the sustainable development imposes the necessity to create sustainable urban habitats, in which the parameters of plant arrangement and care are adjusted to the reality of the city budget. There is a need to obtain more experience in this field and to educate the society in this direction. The proposed postulate to regard the botanical garden as a unit cooperating with the city should not only be considered in the context of providing space for municipal activities but also, or maybe even primarily, in the context of creating a reliable source of experimental base for the sustainable urban green areas. There is undoubtedly a need for systematizing the knowledge connected with such habitats.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EMBEDDING THE DEMANDS OF THE PROGRAM IN THEORY OF MODERN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

1. The gallery of the dynamic landscape by Noel Kingsbury (Dunnett, Hitchmough, 2008).

The biocenotic group of the semi-natural landscapes with exposure of the process as the most important element was named the “dynamic landscape”. And its exposition, “The gallery of the dynamic landscape”, is proposed as a contemporary method for shaping areas of KBG. Such exposition does not only create impressive visual references to ‘wild nature’, but goes much further and shows the dependencies within a given biocoenosis called the patterns of naturalness. In this case, both the process and the pattern of the plant community become the elements of presentation. The role of such exposition is to keep and present the dynamic character of the plant community, showing fully
the change in a single plant in time and space, as well as mutual impacts and interactions. Crucial for such an arrangement is the identification of the garden parts and their placement on the axis of human-Nature relationship, as well as the marking of the degree of their naturalness. The level of naturalness of the given plant group is marked according to Noel Kingsbury’s division of plant groups, based upon the analysis of the degree of their stylisation and the presence of domestic plants (Dunnett, Hitchmough, 2008).

2. The idea of the Planetary Garden by Gilles Clément (Leenhardt, 2005).

Anne Spirn, in her essay “The Authority of Nature: Conflict and Confusion in Landscape Architecture” argues “it’s impossible to create garden without expressing, sometimes subconsciously, the idea of the nature” (Spirn, 1997). The garden art is a spatial expression of the human image of nature and the garden itself can be understood as a ‘medium’ reflecting the relations between a man and its natural surroundings. In the process of maintaining the garden there is expressed the idea of Nature; however, the idea can also become a theoretical aid in the creation of a new place. Helpful in shaping KBG’s modern face can become an idea of Planetary Garden by Gilles Clément, one of the most important theorists and practitioners of modern landscape architecture. The key is to see the overall form of the Earth; not as isolated natural and cultural monads, but as a common interconnected archipelago. The Planetary Garden is the concept of Earth as a garden, which accumulates the diversity of life. “The Planetary Garden”, this brilliant oxymoron, as noted by Jacques Leenhardt, compiles in the value of the opposition by introducing the concept of the garden that is something local, private, with an element of global or even cosmic. The concept is ready to look for a common denominator between what is global and local, what is natural and what is a derivative of human activity. G. Clément’s concept emerges through philosophical discourse, a set of guidelines, shaping the cooperation with the planetary dimension. The idea does not contain a ready-made recipe for the physical shape of the garden. Principle importance is the fact that the designer states, not so much a garden should look like, or what it should contain, but rather how it should work.
3. The phenomenon of life is the priority of the garden. The most important factor in creating a garden is a process – not its spatial structure. The form of the garden should not result so much from the arrangement of plants in space but should be the provision of nature to create conditions that will allow for the development of its natural course. Canvas, which stretches over garden ecosystem relationships, is dynamic, abolishing the order imposed by the architectural concepts of the garden.

4. The priority of the Process involves directly the attitude of a guardian of the garden: he rather monitors the garden without trying to express himself through his work. The keeper of the garden is a gardener, not an architect. The garden is a product of the person who establishes a relationship with nature, which should be a personal, continuous and marked by a kind of restraint. There is recommended the activity as intense as possible at the lowest possible negative impact.

5. The division of plants into native plants, cultivars, exotic plants, is abolished. All are considered to be full-fledged part of the succession. The vision of an integrated biosphere allows seeing the Earth as a melting pot of influences – including human influences. Additionally, migrations of species caused intentionally by man are accepted in historical and geographical scale. Human decisions are recognized by G. Clément on a par with other factors causing the flow of various properties in of the planet, such as wind or moving seeds from the migratory flows animals. The Earth is also the area of human experiments – a gardener becomes the direct creator of meetings of species which has never occurred together before.

6. The Planetary Garden Model stands in sharp contrast to the uniformity of the world in the era of globalization. It does not generate a uniform aesthetic canon, does not determine the stylistic attitudes, and does not indicate a single visual priority, despite the many connections, not even a link to the aesthetic canon of wild nature. The only accepted a priori basis for aesthetics of the Planetary Garden is ethics.

7. The basis for the creation of the garden is neither utilitarianism nor his artistic vision; a garden is dedicated to the life of nature beyond its usability and the only reason for its creation should be a kind of
“code of pleasure” creations which is not possible with objects. It refers rather to the sensitive spectacle of nature as a whole and it is not a generic introduction of the concept of Mother Nature, in her wide and religious terms, but the modest experience of nature in the size of the garden, in which man is confronted with it directly.

The Planetary Garden remained a theoretical model. There has not been developed one physical model, the icon of the concept, which would be able to reflect on the bio-vision of G. Clément. The designer leaves the physical organization of the garden as the open model, finding no highest final formula. “(It) will always remain in the philosophical sense, an Idea, a horizon and a provocation” (Leenhardt, 2005) which has the power to shape the new quality of the Nature-human relation.

G. Clément states the formulation of an ethical approach to universal values, expressing the attitude towards the world. His principles, however, are so versatile, that they create not so much of the original style or particular aesthetics as formulated strategy. Its flexibility, versatility and relevance in relation to the major problems of civilization make its adoption on the ground KBG favourable, giving a stable base and opening beneficial horizons for growth.

CONCLUSIONS

The implemented method introduces an equal signs between successive stages of the creation of KBG space as it is abolishing the time barrier. The most important property of this place, its dynamic, evolving character, is disclosed in this way. The term “dynamic landscape”, taken from Noël Kingsbury’s work, in the original version was concern only to the natural values. The implemented method in the meantime showed the adequacy of the postulated idea of a whole object. The vision of a dynamic landscape has become a master formula that includes both historical stages of development and is capable of outlining the direction of place. The idea of the Planetary Garden presented in combining with the figure of KBG confirms the belief that the garden is not, and cannot reach the final, only right formula. It proves that the most important form increases in the same
way as the patina as if between of human decisions. Although KBG is a place of major historical importance, it is also today’s place, and what is more, it should remain a place open to the decisions of future generations.

In 2000, The European Landscape Convention introduced in the landscape the term of “palimpsest”, that is a manuscript written and edited by subsequent epoch. The landscape in this sense is a kind of documentor rather a large archive, which is a record of works in space, thoughts and dreams of successive generations (Scazossi, 2006). This term does not present the landscape as a static stage; rather it creates understanding of the landscape as a scene of processes. Generally speaking, the exchange process of garden space, natural forces and human activity take place on the area of the Garden. On the area of the garden it makes the process of exchange of garden space and human activity. The perception of this mutual, ever-lasting exchange to appreciation of her and to enabling the continuation is a major prerequisite for the creation of an unusual place of a significant importance.

REFERENCES


KAUNO BOTANIKOS SODO STRATEGIJOS IDĖJA ŠIUOLAIKINĖS ARCHITEKTŪROS TEORIJOS POŽIŪRIU

Santrauka

Dabartinis VDU Kauno botanikos sodų istorijos tarpsnis yra sudėtingas, reikia priimti svarbias, jo egzistavimui įtakos turinčius sprendimus. Šios vietovės istoriškumo bruožai, jos daugiapakopės ervinės struktūros problematika ir naturalios gamtinės aplinkos fragmentiškumas, ypatingo ne tik Kauno miesto, bet ir Respublikos objekto statusas įpareigoja priimti itin atsakingus sprendimus, kaip toliau vystyti šį sodą. 2012 m. Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas ir Vroclavo aplinkos ir gamtos mokslo universitetas pasirašė bendradarbiavimo sutartį, kuri tapo pagrindu išanalizuoti šios vietovės vystymo kryptį. Bendromis partnerių pastangomis buvo pateikta nuosekli botanikos sodo įvertinimo studija, kurioje atsipindi svarbiausios jo vertybės ir galimos investicijų kryptys.

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Reikšminiai žodžiai: šiuolaikinė kraštovaizdžio architektūra, želdynų projektavimas, kraštovaizdžio dinamika, planetos sodas, kraštovaizdžio pokyčiai.