

Vistas, views, prospects. Research and Design

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Abstract

The renewal of historic gardens, landscapes and sites has become more common in Eastern and Central European region. The Department of Garden Art and Garden Techniques of the Szent István University, Faculty of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design has been dealing with this since 1963, with landscape renewal on landscape, garden and settlement scale, based on scientific research. The more than 50-year experience has already proved the advantages of such “design by research” approach in the garden and landscape renewal processes, with Landscape Architecture being a discipline which has developed from a very practical basis in park and garden design. (Brink, 2017)

The purpose of this paper is to show the most significant conclusions of our historic garden research related to the castle and manor house gardens from Carpathian Basin, focusing on the importance of visual connections and links designed initially on sites.

Using case studies, the paper intends to explore how good landscape design in historic environments is achieved. We highlight that there is not one correct answer or approach per site, but there are ways of thinking and working. The historical value cannot be simplified or understood as 'old'. the heritage being represented by the all-time valuable garden features and elements, independent from their formation in time. Besides the historical authenticity of the actual use, the new functions, the ecological claims, the social needs and the sustainability are the most important aspects which must be integrated in the heritage protection and reclamation process.

Introduction

A landscape presents several structural elements, which narrate the site history, determining the landscape's current aspect, development, natural and aesthetic values. The visual axes and the sight connections play a significant role in the visual connections of cultural and historic landscapes; therefore these are the markers of the landscape structure and of the feature of the landscape.

The creation and display of landscape elements are the result of a creative and conscious spatial arrangement. These elements differ depending on whether they are natural or built elements, and from this difference ensues a different cultural value. Thus, the visual connections ensuring their display are in some cases difficult to acknowledge; occasionally they even transmit different messages to different segments of the society. That is also a reason why cautious and thorough interpretation is needed when assessing their aesthetic value: besides the examination of the physical appearance, the analysis of the emotions and of the atmosphere evoked by the landscape is also essential. (Fekete, Toorn, 2016)

Landscape architecture is an applied science. The research-based design approaches in LA apply to historical fidelity while also recognizing the role of human influences, the changing uses, and the importance of the visual impact and that of the artistic element in the perception and understanding of the site, in the enhancement of the proper layer of a historic landscape.

Background and Literature Review

As a practicing landscape architect and university professor, I have been involved in the research on landscape and garden heritage and the survey of heritage assets preserved, and also in the methodological approach to renovation and management of historic landscapes and gardens for more than 20 years. Results and experience from the past 20 years as a principal researcher, expert in heritage conservation and planner, support the discussion in this paper. Beyond the coordination of the research on manor gardens, the documentation of more than 100 manor gardens and arboreta visited and surveyed personally throughout the Carpathian Basin and the planning work on the renovation of dozens of historical sites verify and provide an appropriate scientific background for the formulation of our research findings.

Very often the same landscape composition allows for the definition of several representative visual axes and several connections (Fekete, Toorn, 2016). This is especially true for larger garden landscapes – at this point we can refer to an excellent foreign example, the most extended European garden landscape, the English garden of Dessau-Wörlitz, where Edith Kresta mentions more than 300 visual axes applied as parts of the composition. (Kresta, 2008).

In case of one the most famous and influential British garden, the Rousham House Garden, we can quote as well the by eye-catchers defined visual axes as the most significant compositional tools and depths of their success during the garden history till nowadays:

“The many wandering walks through the gardens are full of delicious surprises, a sudden meeting with a dying gladiator, a glimpse of Apollo, or a long view of a Gothic mill, an ancient bridge or distant trees, or arrival at an unexpected seat in an alcove” - says Hal Moggridge, english landscape architect. (Everton, 2014) (Fig. 1.)

Concerning Transylvanian castle gardens and landscapes, we tried to determine those eye-catchers and visual axes, which through their meanings and symbolic messages play an essential role in the garden composition or landscape they are part to. (Fig. 2)

We investigated 139 built features, considered eye-catchers and described the current conditions of the visual axes, in order to prove the compositional role of the eye-catcher, which can serve as a basis for the renewal of the visual communication between garden and landscape. (Fig. 3.)



Fig. 1. The main structural elements in Rousham House Garden (Oxfordshire, UK), designed by William Kent (in the 1740's): architectonic features, important eye-catchers, visual axes and prospects, and the regular view of the Venus vale with water features and woody vegetation presented by pictures from 1820's, 1930's and nowadays. Graphical processing by the author (based on Steenbergen, Clemens, 1996)

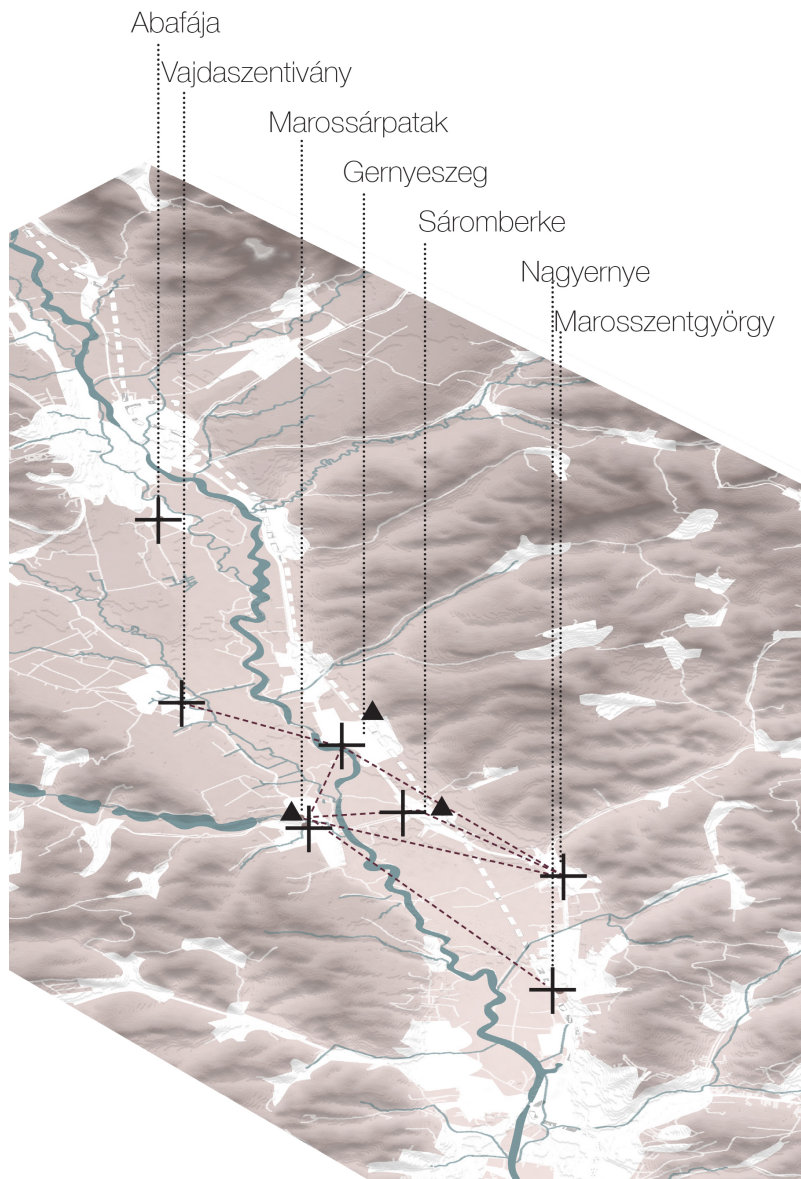


Fig. 2. The location and visual connections between csatle gardens located in the Maros River Valley (Transylvania, Romania). The pictures shows the former (19'th Century) and actual condition of the castles and their tighter environment. Graphical processing by the author.



Fig. 3. Pyramidal thumbs as eye-catchers in case of two Teleki castle gardens - from Gernyeszeg (Gornesti, RO) and Sárpatak (Glodeni, RO) - and related to the Kemény castle garden from Csombord (Ciumbrud, RO); detail of a staffage element in the Brunszvik castle garden from Martonvásár (HU), acting as an eye-catcher as well. Photos by author.

On the other hand, a diverse set of international perspectives from established theories in landscape design, environmental philosophy, geography, environmental history and sociology are working together to form new visions for the restoration that embraces social and ecological histories and values. (Diedrich, 2015) The paper presents design approaches by particular case studies. Therefore, it is not a detailed description of a single project realised, but the introduction of multiple visual compositions and links restored in multiple gardens of varied historic value. The case studies demonstrate and focus on the renewal of the views, so that the solutions applied to meet the specific needs of clients and users are based on the research results, and also comply with the historical authenticity. This is the best way to prove that the restoration of views and axes determining the visual composition is the most important tool of the reconstruction of historic garden layouts and designed landscapes.

Goals and Objectives

The main goals and objectives of this paper are:

- to highlight that, during garden history research, as well as during field research, special emphasis has to be led by the definition and interpretation of visual connections.
- to identify the principal types of visual connections (views, vistas, prospects), to define the role of the eye-catchers of different characteristic, outstanding suitable for closing visual axes.
- to introduce briefly potential applications, projects, case studies realised on the basis of the research results, focusing on multiple visual compositions and links restored in multiple gardens of varied historic value; the solutions applied to meet the specific needs of clients and users are based on the research results, and also comply with the historical authenticity.
- to prove that the restoration of views and axes determining the visual composition is the one of the most important tools of the renovation of historic garden layouts and designed landscapes.

Methods

Research methods

The research method is partly based on analysis of texts, definitions from references. For another part it is based on historical research and field investigation.

Garden history research

The historic overview compiled on the basis of the accessible archives aims at elucidating as much as possible the development of the surveyed gardens. It treats the role of gardens in shaping the character of the landscapes and settlements, it examines all those connections on landscape scale, which were considered as local conditions at the conception of the manor gardens, and which determined significantly the aspect of the larger areas hosting the examined castles. Garden history research also touches upon the history of the castle and the family history of the owner (Fekete, 2007).

Field investigation

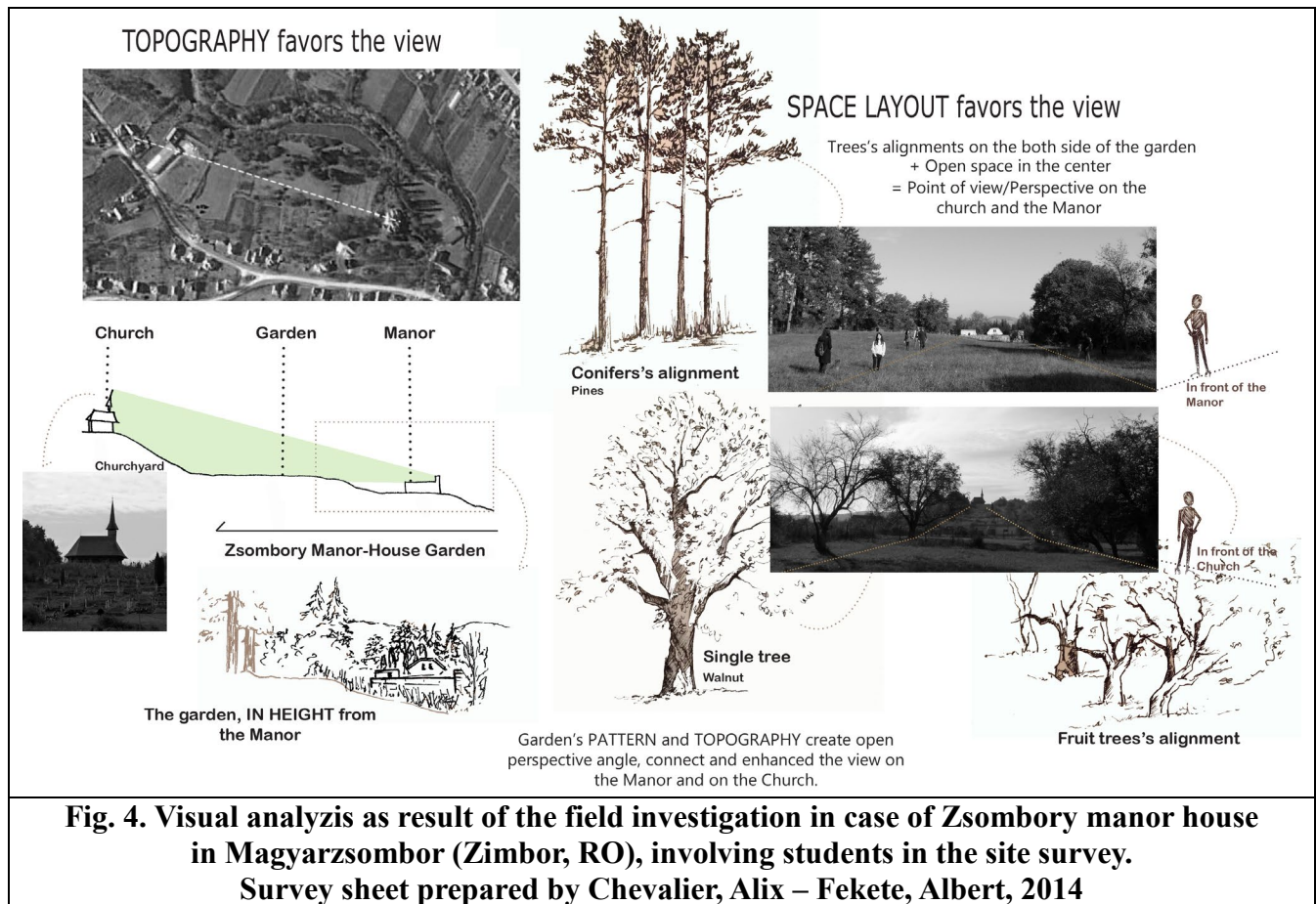
The field research is carried out during survey or examination on the spot. In the case of each manor garden, the existing situation was described accurately (drawings, manuals, PGS coordinates, geodesic surveys, plant survey, digital photos etc.), and we also made the inventory of the values to be found and to be saved. Thus, the field survey offers progress report and a basis for comparison for a future protection and reconstruction strategy, whenever such project would be carried out. Field research also aims at elaborating a value and state survey of garden architecture, made with the help of the geodesic map (land registry map etc.). An important step was the definition and systematization of the survey criteria. In order to achieve this, we took as a starting point the criteria applied in monument survey in UK and Germany, but we also deemed necessary a few additions and modifications based on local conditions. We specified on data sheets the data characteristic for the examined terrain according to historic monument, landscape, townscape and dendrologist criteria, setting up as a primary task the definition of the botanic, architectural and unique landscape values, respectively of the visual connections and landscape structure. The survey and analysis of visual connections was one of the basic investigation criteria (Fig 4).

Design methods

The central dilemma of historic landscape renewals are the right definition and restoration of the most important and characteristic time- and style-layers of the site. Only through the historical authenticity,

through a sensitive, site-specific design intervention can the cultural value and the essence of the site be preserved and represented.

According to the Hungarian and European landscape design practice from last 20 years, we defined different types of design approaches concerning historical fidelity while also recognizing the role of human influences, the changing uses, and the importance of the visual impact and that of the artistic element in the perception and understanding of the site, in the enhancement of the proper layer of a historic landscape.



Results

1. Castle and manor gardens are the most significant garden heritage assets in Carpathian Basin

This finding is supported by the history and the relation to the landscape of dozens of European and Hungarian manor gardens examined during my preliminary studies and earlier research, and also by the results of my research based on the survey of over 100 manor gardens located in Carpathian Basin. Due to their integration with the surrounding landscape and their external and internal visual links, the gardens have a complex (artistic, ecological and economic) importance as heritage assets.

2. The manor house/castle, the manor/castle garden and the surrounding landscape altogether represent a single artistic and compositional unit.

Neither the manor house, nor the manor garden, should be interpreted independently. They are a single unit, and all the man-made and natural elements of the manor garden, and often, specific elements beyond the garden boundaries, make part of this unit. (Fig. 5) The manor house, and the garden altogether, represent a composition that is an integral part of a complex system developed on artistic, culture historical, ecological and economic bases. When the manor estate complexes were established, the views and visual axes made use of the landscape potential, using architectural and artistic tools to explore it.

3. Visual links applied to manor gardens at a landscape scale may be divided into two main categories: eye-catchers and prospects.

The view, as a result of a landscape composition, is produced by creating effects with the aid of visual tools, and by delivering symbolic meanings and messages. Regarding the planned visual links between the landscape and the garden, two types are possible to distinguish: the “eye-catchers” and the ”prospects”.



Fig. 5. The castle, the castle garden and the surrounding landscape altogether represent a single unit in case of the Bethlen complex from Bethlenszentmiklós (Sannicolau, RO) as well. Photo by the author, 2017

4. Eye-catchers are predominantly architectural structures.

Eye-catchers applied as terminal points of planned visual axes of manor gardens are architectural or artistic works that draw attention even from a greater distance. They may be identified and classified. The eye-catchers applied the most frequently in the manor gardens are:

- churches,
- burial monuments tombs / memorial places (crypts, glories, burial chapels, tempietto, imola, obelisks etc.),
- ruins (of castles, manor houses, churches etc.),
- garden structures and artworks (gazebos, fountains, ornamental pools, cascades, grottos, garden cottages, flights of stairs, balustrades, sculptures, viaducts or other structures of staffage),
- other manor houses.

5. Visual links based on the use of eye-catchers are perishable.

Taking into consideration the driving forces (of natural or human origin) behind the change of landscapes and gardens, the original conditions of planned visual links of a garden may change during the times. A

bidirectional visual link may become unidirectional or completely perish. The main factors that can have an impact on visual links may be of natural or human origin. Most of all, the loss of the former eye-catcher, that is the absence (disappearance, damage, relocation) of the architectural / artistic work, is the reason behind the change. Sometimes the change or the loss of a visual link may be the result of natural processes (and the lack of human intervention): for example, with the development of a forest cover. Occasionally, the modified or lost visual link is possible to restore during the landscape and garden restorations.

6. Planned visual links deliver messages.

Eye-catchers do not only provide aesthetic experience, but through their positions and functions also deliver messages. They are objects of symbolic occupation of space and represent national identity. Eye-catchers may be classified by the messages delivered. Regarding the visual links established for manor gardens, it is possible to distinguish eye-catchers related to religion (churches, chapels, crypts, crucifixes), eye-catchers as memorial places (burial chapels, crypts, crosses, obelisks, glories, tombs, burial places etc.) and eye-catchers related to historic gardens and /or delivering cultural messages.

7. Due to the scarce sources in garden history, garden reconstruction is rarely a feasible option in Carpathian Basin.

The current conditions of historic gardens and the availability of historical sources (often still uncatalogued, inaccessible, incomplete) in most of the cases do not allow for a full reconstruction of the original design. Nevertheless, our historical manor gardens still represent a part of our garden heritage that is possible to restore in the most authentic way, on the basis of the features preserved and the data available on the actual conditions.

8. On the basis of the information available on the garden, the relevant heritage conservation principles and the user needs, we have distinguished the following garden reconstruction categories for historic gardens:

8.1. Garden renovation (revitalization): Garden reconstruction based on the historical sources available, the heritage features of the site which are possible to identify, and the stylistic elements and analogies of a specific period. The park is renovated with a distinct application of the stylistic elements of the period most relevant to the site, and with additional functions to meet the actual demands. (Fig. 6.)

8.2. Garden regeneration: The park/garden that has lost its historic features to a great extent is reconstructed on the basis of historical sources and analogies available. Solutions applied integrate the features of the relevant historical period into contemporary contexts. This approach includes the opportunity of creating a contemporary work of art. (Fig. 7.)

8.3. Garden restoration: Garden reconstruction based on the exploration of historical sources, the archaeological surveys, the use of preserved garden features etc. Based on the preserved historic features and the available historical sources, it is possible to restore a part or the whole of the garden so that it will be greatly identical to the original design. (Fig. 8.)



Fig. 6. Renovation of terraces (below, 2014) and visual connections in case of the Mikes Castle Garden in Zabola (Zabala, RO), based on analysis of old plans (above) and field survey. Design: Fekete, Albert – Magdó, János – Jávori, Krisztina, 2008-2010. Photo by the Mikes-family.

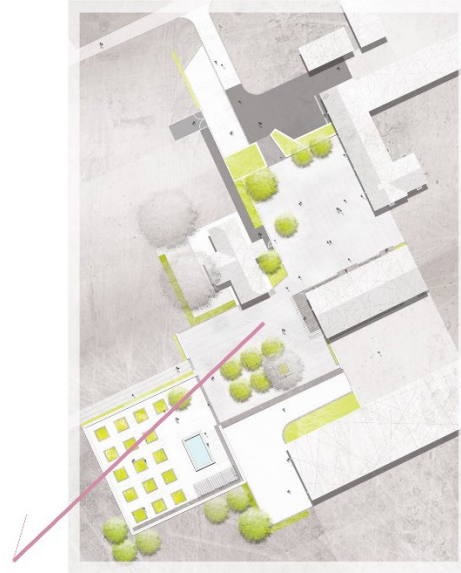


Fig. 7. Garden regeneration in case of the herb garden in Pannonhalma Archabbey (HU). The view of the Cathedral's tower in the background suggest the sacred character of the site. Design: Fekete, Albert – Vajda, Szabolcs – Szilágyi, Klára, 2010-2011. Photo Fekete, Albert



Fig. 8. Reconstruction of main axis in the Royal Castle Garden from Gödöllő. Design: Fekete, Albert – Jámbor, Imre – Sárospataki, Máté – M. Szilágyi, Kinga – Szabó, Teodóra – Vajda, Szabolcs (2008-2010). Photo: Fekete, Albert, 2012

Discussion and Conclusion

The value of this research lies in the fact that it comprises a garden and landscape history review of nearly 400 years and a complex documentation of numerous sites. Results highlight that manor estates in Carpathian Basin were complex and functional units regarding their role in arts, society and economy. Through their establishment, the maintenance and the various agricultural activities contributing to economic sustainability, they had significant impacts on landscapes. The planners and owners made them an important tool and element of the transformation of the 18th- and 19th-century landscapes, and they still play a significant role in the character of what we can call traditional landscapes nowadays.

The design examples briefly show the difficulty of each approach, traditional and new ways to follow in case we do not find particular and detailed historic sources of the site, which have to be renewed, and a very “contemporary” understanding of the landscape heritage in the mirror of expectation of the new owners or attendants. New designs in historic settings will always generate debate. Our aim and aspiration during the educational process of the new landscape architecture generations is that all redesigned parks, gardens and squares, must match the quality of the new with the old, with the authentic; so that they are respected and enhanced for the benefit of those who visit and come to enjoy this wonderful green heritage (Fekete, 2016). Contributions include theoretical design concepts presented by specific, case-based examples. The case studies are represented by examples belonging both to urban and rural environments, some of those re-designed by students and teaching staff members together, according to valid, legal regulations. The research-based and contemporary design approach, as part of the educational process at the Faculty of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism in Budapest, enhances creative and authentic design-visions of the students.

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