

## **Trends of Landscape Architecture in Hungary in the '70s**

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### **Introduction**

The history of landscape architecture in the seventies is part of a larger topic which covers the history of Hungarian landscape architecture from the 50-s to the end of Socialist era. The strong political pressure which was so typical in all fields of life in these periods, was determining in landscape architecture as well.

The era has not been researched yet, since it hasn't been enough long ago to be considered as a history. The parks built at this time are disappearing due to park renovations, alterations or functional changes. These works are not protected yet; the officials of historic preservation do not consider dealing with them as a major task. We, landscape architects see in our practice these landscapes, which are facing to be renovated or altered. We have to determine if the given work should be demolished and a new fashionable landscape should be built instead of it, or it represents such a value, which deserves to be preserved, independent from the present fashion and trends. As there is no comprehensive scientific work dealing with landscape architecture of the 70-s, we can use only our instincts to decide, how valuable the given landscape is. On the other hand it is easy to realize that the open space- system of Budapest would be more uniform less diverse, if these designs would disappear.

Deep knowledge of the era could help both in making the above mentioned decision, and in understanding the recent trends and fashions. The majority of the current active landscape architects were young children in the seventies, so visual culture of these professionals is primarily determined by the works of this era.

After a life totally isolated and oriented only towards the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 50's, the Hungarian architecture, urban planning and landscape architecture could „breathe” more free after the 1956 Revolution. The older generation of landscape architects (e.g. Professor Imre Ormos, the founder of landscape architecture in Hungary) still remembered the landscape style of the 40's. From the 60's each significant landscape architectural office was subscribed for the most respected professional periodical of western Europe, „Landschaft Architektur”, so the most outstanding achievements of western landscape architects and the new trends of that time were well known in Hungary, behind the iron curtain, too. In my opinion it could be considered as an important impact on the new design style of Hungarian landscape architecture, which was earlier influenced by the style of the 40-s and of the soviet social realistic examples.

The period of the 70-s was basically determined by the state-planned economy, but the unique political-economical feature of the early 70s, - the „new economical mechanism”- added new color in the political and economical life of the country.

The era cannot be understood without understanding the system and working methods of state owned planning offices, landscape construction and maintenance companies. It is important to get known the characteristic landscape designers and most important works of the period. Finally we have collect the design elements, materials, products and plants typical for the landscape design of the seventies.

### **Background, Literature Review:**

Regarding this period the lack of comprehensive professional reviews is a basic problem. Professional literature of the 70-s (books, articles etc.) are valuable resources for further studies. (E.g. Dezső Radó: Budapesti Parkok és terek, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, Bp. 1985, Ambrus Pirk: Öteltek a kert berendezéséhez, Mezőgazdasági Könyvkiadó, Bp. 1977.)

Nevertheless many professionals, determining personalities of this period are still among us, hence we have the opportunity to collect first-hand information regarding that era. Interviewing these colleagues is very informative and exciting since they have overseen the big-scale projects. Others, who started their carriers at that time, are still active professionals with a perspective over this period, this way they can compare the professional practice of the 70-s with the practice of today.

The third important source is the existing works on, parks and open-spaces. Although nowadays many of them are disappearing due to park reconstructions, renovations, there are still many works to be seen. These green spaces (though in a very run-down shape), illustrate clearly the original space structure, designed forms, usage of materials and plants.

### **Goals and objectives**

The goal of my research is to learn, which the typical landscape design tasks of the 70-s were. Understanding the kind of professional challenges, design problems the landscape architects had to face and professional responses given, would let us understand how this era affected the architecture of open space development in Hungary. It is interesting to recognize the useful tools used by designers to create unique characteristic open spaces with only a poor plant- and material variety available... It seems to be an interesting aspect to analyze the context of the plans, and to understand to what extent the era's dominant ideology, the socialism and the communism determined the landscape architecture of the time.

### **Methods:**

Studying numerous plans created in the same period, gives us insight into typical trends, fashionable solutions typical for that era. The comparison of the realized works with the plans and original ideas dreamed by the designer provides important information regarding the preservation of these works, it may become visible, and

how much they have been contorted by the lack of proper maintenance. Although when visiting the parks, our first impression is the total neglect ion due to the lack of maintenance, nevertheless by disregarding it, one can get a lot of interesting information about the spatial structure, the usage of materials and plants.

During the interviews with the designers many data and facts were mentioned regarding the planning and construction practice of the period.

Although in our profession no comprehensive study has been done regarding the 70-s, however in some fellow-professions, urban design or public art for instance professional literature about the 70-s is available, which may help us to learn more about this era and to adjust the trends and changes noticed in landscape architecture to the changes happened in other professions.

It is important and interesting to study the western European professional literature of the 70-s, moreover it is extremely useful to learn the open space design works of the decade in other socialist countries. We have mainly Czechoslovakian and Polish examples(Czepczynski 2006).

### **Results:**

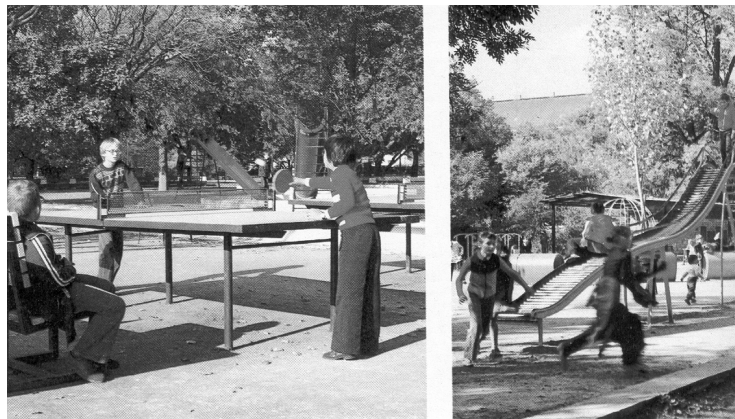
According to the professionals of the 70-s, 70-75 % of the assignments were landscape plans for green surfaces of housing estates. There was a huge and despairing deficit in flats from the 50-s in big cities especially in Budapest, which could only be decreased by the enormous housing estate programs of the 70-s.



**Figure 1. Housing estate under construction in the 70-s**

The system building technology became dominant in this decade, for example housing estates of Óbuda and of Újpalota were built at that time. At this point did the numerous 150-200 meters long and 33 m high „slab-houses” appear in some areas of

Budapest. (Preisich, G., 1998) The distance between the buildings and the placement were determined by the technology, by the optimal distance between the crane-stands. This way the architects’ hands were „bound” as well. The task for landscape architects was to create friendly and intimate, humane residential parks with sport fields and playgrounds. The accelerated building technology required accelerated design-process as well with short deadlines. The first utility-plans for playgrounds were made at this time by FÖKERT or LAKÓTERV.



**Figure 2. Typical playground of the 70-s, (Radó 1985)**

The humanization of the narrow spaces enclosed by huge, desolate vertical volumes was a great professional challenge. There were basically two successful professional answers for this challenge. The first solution was to plant groves of deciduous tree-species producing huge crowns. The well developed green foliage covered the building-facades partially, creating balance between the artificial/and the natural/green volumes. The disadvantage of this method was that the positive results could only be seen 10-15 years after the plantation. Hence visiting the housing estates nowadays one may realize that the biggest value is the well developed vegetation, first of all the trees.

The other method for distracting attention of the huge, vast space walls was the following;

The terrain, the base plane between the building-giants should be regraded by creating mounds, so that the waving base plane distracts attention off the built volumes, the real vertical space-walls. The advantage of this solution is that it comes into effect right after the implementation, and besides of the favorable visual effect, the slopes of the mounds are perfect places for special playgrounds. Although in a rundown state, this kind of successful earthscaping can be seen in „Moon-yard” of Óbuda Housing Estates and in Kaposztasmegyér Housing Estates.



**Figure 3. Courtyard of Káposztásmegyer Housing Estate, photo: Anikó Andor**

The park design and renovation assignments were significantly less, but from professional point they were much more exciting and diverse. Usually landscape-architectural planning competitions preceded these assignments.

After moving the expo-site to Kőbánya from the Városliget (City Park) in 1974, the reconstruction of this famous park of Budapest could have launched following a successful landscape architectural planning competition. The construction works between 1974-78 were the biggest scale landscape construction works of this decade. (27 ha) (K. Hlatky 2001) The long walkway winding through the whole City Park was created at this time, and the car traffic was limited, too. The unique atmosphere playgrounds, which can be seen even today, and the fountain were built at this time. The lake was cleaned and sunbathing decks were placed at its shoreline.

The other significant landscape-planning and -construction assignment was to fit an underground water reservoir into the natural terrain and to create a park above it.

Unlike the usual practice, placing the water reservoir underground was justified by its location, which is the best from technical point, but an extremely sensitive area from visual point of view. There is a full view of this area from the southern, south western slopes of the Castle Hill. The design task was very complicated; on one hand two huge reinforced concrete tanks had to be placed into the hillside, providing a minimum 0,5 meter maximum 1 meter soil cover on the top of them, and no pavements, not even a walkway was allowed to be placed above the tanks. On the other hand, the terrain had to be regraded after construction fitting to the rugged original terrain, typical for the northern slope of Gellért Hill, and the planned new park should fit to the adjacent, untouched areas.



**Figure 4.**View of the park and retaining wall system on the Northern slope of Gellért Hill from the Castle Hill Typical pedestrian zone above a metro-station, source: google

The huge elevation difference was spanned by the combination of slopes and concrete retaining walls similar to an earth-made rampart, consisting of unique foam work units. The extremely steep green area is revealed by stepped walkways, and an artificial creek is running along the deep-line, ending in a cascade consisting of round pools.

The „Centenarian Garden” (Centenárium Park) in Népliget built in the 70-s can be considered as an interesting professional task, too. It is approx. 3, 7 ha, in which the separated „garden-units”, typical for each of the twenty-one counties, are connected by a walkway made of railroad ties. This walkway symbolizes the railways which connects the settlements of Hungary. Each park-detail, or garden shows some characteristic element typical for that county, like a special natural stone- material, plant or a typical product symbolized by a statue (K. Hlatky 2001).

When describing the most important open space design tasks of the 70-s, we cannot forget about open space design tasks connected to development of traffic system. Significant open space design tasks were the aboveground area of the newly built metro stations, and the green-system development connected to the extension of HÉV (local-train) line to Batthyany Square or Nagyvárad Square.

This development included the creation of a green stripe between the Danube and Arpád fejedelem Street, the reconstruction of the site next to the Buda-side bridgehead of Margaret Bridge and the Bem József Square. Besides of the green-system development connected to traffic-system development, the remodeling of the bridges had a positive effect on green system development. For example by

remodeling of Petőfi Bridge new green surfaces were created on the Buda side next to the bridgeheads, and the green surfaces with statues next to Irányi Street.



**Figure 5. Typical pedestrian zone above a metro-station, Bp. Battyhány Square Photo: Emese Hoffman**

While reviewing the Hungarian landscape architecture of the 70-s we mentioned only examples in Budapest. The reason of it is partially, that most of the developments were concentrated in Budapest, the „water-head” of Hungary, a contemporary nickname for Budapest, referring to the fact, that Budapest became oversized compared to the size of the country. Outside Budapest, in the second largest cities (such as Debrecen, Győr, Miskolc, Pécs and Szeged), first of all green space developments connected to new housing estates were determining. Open space developments connected to town-center revitalization were also typical in the 70-s (Salgótarján, Veszpém etc.)

### **Conclusion**

Studying the landscape architecture of the 70-s seems to be important from many points of view. Not only the open spaces of old times should be considered as works to be protected or revitalized, there are unique pieces of art among the works from the recent past, which are typical for the era, deserving protection. In my opinion, these works should be considered as part of national heritage, their protection and revitalization according to the exact presentation of the period should be solved.

Although the National Service of Cultural Heritage doesn't deal with the parks and open-spaces of the 70-s yet, some buildings of this time are already under protection and their numbers are growing. When designing or remodeling the landscape next to a protected building, it might be useful to know the landscape development practice

of the 70-s, even if the exact presentation of period in the environment of a protected building is not always required.

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