

LUCA CSEPELY-KNORR

**EARLY MODERN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC PARK THEORY UNTIL THE
END OF THE 1930S**

PHD DISSERTATION BOOKLET

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PhD School/Program: Corvinus University of Budapest
Doctoral School of Landscape Architecture and
Landscape Ecology

Field: Agricultural Technical Sciences

Head of School: Attila Csemez, DSC
Professor
CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST,,
Faculty of Landscape Architecture,
Department of Landscape Planning and
Development

Regional

Supervisors: Imre Jám bor, CSc, DLA
Professor
CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST,
Faculty of Landscape Architecture,
Department of Garden and Open Space Design

Péter István Balogh, PhD
Associate Professor
CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST
Faculty of Landscape Architecture,
Department of Garden and Open Space Design

The applicant has met the requirements of the PhD regulations of the Corvinus University of Budapest and the thesis has been accepted for the defence process.

CONTEXT AND AIMS

The main concern of this dissertation was to investigate and describe the evolution of modern open space design theory. It is difficult to determine what modern means in the field of landscape architecture both stylistically and chronologically. In different countries the design practice that has been described as modern evolved along different principles, and as a consequence, the beginning of the modernist period has been dated differently. However, researchers agree that the German people's parks (*Volkspark*) which came about in the first part of the 20th century can rightly be considered as the first examples of the modernist movement in landscape architecture.

The precedents of these pieces of art were the people's gardens (*Volksgarten*), which were built at the end of the 18th century, and which, for the first time in the history of garden art, turned towards people's needs from every layer of society. By doing so, and by placing social thinking into the focus of the planning process, they advocated the basic concept of the modernist movement. Based on these factors, the thesis examined the new developments in public park design theory from the first appearance of the *people's gardens* until the end of 1930s when *people's parks* appeared.

SOURCES AND METHODS

Contrary to former research into the history of public park design, in my dissertation I set out to trace the changes in design theory, and examined these in an international context so that theoretical influences among different regions, ones that also span country borders could be described. To achieve this, apart from surveying the literature of the topic, the comparative analysis of international and Hungarian written and pictorial primary sources

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Head of PhD School

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Supervisor

(theoretical papers, articles that appeared in various journals and daily papers of the given period, archive designs, and contemporary photographs), served as the basis of the research, as both the intention of the designers and society's answers to these could be investigated thoroughly by these means.

The focus of the research was on the evolution of the theoretical principles, therefore it did not intend to give an all-inclusive historical description of the period. I investigated the changes in two periods: the second part of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th, and analysed the international and the Hungarian theoretical changes separately. I also separated the examination of park design as an independent task, from investigating the relationship between the parks and the city.

RESULTS

The research shed light on the fact that both in terms of the single spaces and in the connection between the city and the green areas, the main theoretical framework of modernism – which serves as the basis of today's public park design – has been established by the end of the 1930s. The analysis of particular open spaces revealed that the most important achievement of the modernist theory was that it stressed the *importance of function instead of formal solutions*, and that it emphasized social sensibility through which, for the first time in landscape architecture, it achieved that *“the requirements of the lower classes became the aims and objectives of planning”*.¹ In town planning, the appearance of green systems was of major significance in the examined period. As far as urban design is considered, the city viewed as an urban landscape, which has built and natural elements, is a principle that

serves as the basis of the contemporary town planning thinking.

The most important academic achievement of the dissertation derive from the fact that I investigated the concepts relating to public parks, and their evolution in an international context, and that I summarized the most important theoretical changes and their international implications. This made it possible to examine and evaluate the public parks of Budapest in an international context, which up till now has been badly missing from the publications in the history of Hungarian landscape architecture.

DISSERTATION STATEMENTS

Statement 1

The major concepts of public park design theory that serve as the basis of today's practice both in terms of functional and planting principles evolved in the examined period.

The design methodology that got standardized gradually by the end of the given era suggested the establishment of *varied and multifunctional spaces* in public parks, which is still an underlying principle of open space design. The idea was to *accommodate these functions in separate spaces by subordinating the structural arrangement to the above principle*. The *ecological and plant geographical planting concept* of landscape architectural theory of our time, and the practice of *taking the climate and soil conditions of the site into consideration* while choosing the plants derive from the novel, although originally patriotic, goals of the early 1920s which advocated the use of native plants.

¹ Reviewing the Landscape: Statements by Twentieth-Century Landscape Designers. Peter Latz. *Garden History*, XXVII (2000)1., 2-16., 4.

Statement 2

In the evolution process of public park design theory the function of the open spaces became more and more complex. In the first half of the 19th century, their aesthetical, pedagogical and educational function was dominant, then their hygienic role, and finally their social function gained increasing significance.

From the earliest history of their existence, public parks performed educational roles. While in the German speaking countries by re-creating idealised Nature aesthetical education and the recalling of the national history was the main aim, in England education in natural history was the main concern. However, in the theoretical writings their hygienic and social roles were emphasised right from the outset. Although the desire of *creating 'classless' places and the idea of the moral education of the users were not fulfilled*, these intentions remained important during the whole period. Between the two World Wars *urban green spaces were created mainly to perform social and public welfare functions.*

Statement 3

Public park theory and the design process based on its main principles evolved parallel to the progressive architectural and artistic trends of the period.

The aim to *recreate the idyllic, 'Arcadian' landscape is also noticeable in public park design. The concept came down from the precedents'* picturesque landscape gardens, however, the *pattern chosen for the purpose had to be changed significantly* in the examined period. While formerly lowlands, meadows and river banks had been considered as the symbols of Arcadia, during the second half of the 19th century, these were replaced by the landscape of mountains and peaks. This process is *not separable from the*

thematic changes in romantic landscape painting. In Hungarian art hills crowned by castle ruins had special significance both in historical and landscape painting. The parks planned in the Gellért Hill area in Budapest show the appearance of this symbolism in landscape architecture.

The new principles in planting, mentioned in statement 1, which emphasise the *importance of using native plants*, cannot be separated from the end of the 19th century trends in applied art and architecture, the primary aim of which was to define the *truly Hungarian style*. The quest for *indigenous characteristics and elements in artistic representation appears in the Hungarian Secession, both in art and architecture.*

Statement 4

The most significant innovations of the evolving (early) modern public park design manifested themselves mostly in theoretical questions.

In the examined period the rejection of the formal solutions of the historical revivalism brought new concepts into landscape architecture both in terms of the formal solutions and the arrangement of the space. However, no radically new stylistic solutions appeared, both the geometrical and the landscape-based formal solutions were accepted and used. The main breakthrough happened when in tandem with architectural modernism the concept that *'form follows function'* became a leading principle of the 20th century design. Accordingly, the formal solutions were subordinated to the needs of the users and the existing conditions of the site. This consideration still plays a decisive role in urban space design.

Statement 5

The differentiation of the urban open spaces began in the examined period, and the process of functionalisation can also be traced. New, earlier unknown design principles and solutions were worked out to meet the specific requirements of different urban green spaces of various types and scales.

The importance of small green spaces that appeared in the densely built areas of the cities at the beginning of the examined period lay in their decorative role. From the second half of the 19th century, as a response to the changing needs of the society, these spaces became multifunctional similarly to the public parks on the outskirts of the cities. Besides the decorative squares and promenades, the need for small recreational parks close to the centres emerged, and the *social role of these urban green spaces intensified*. As a consequence, functional differentiation became necessary, therefore the *first open space typologies were published*. These theoretical writings, which originally classified the urban open spaces only, and did not deal with the questions of public parks and large reservations, *apart from describing the functions of the squares and small recreational spaces dealt with the corresponding formal solutions as well*.

Statement 6

In open space design theory the demand for creating green systems is the main achievement of the examined period that also has bearings on current practice. Instead of establishing urban green spaces as separate entities, general and comprehensive park- and open space system plans have appeared.

The desire to create links between the smaller green spaces and the large public parks at the outskirts of the towns arose at the urban renewals of the

19th century. However, the theoretical phrasing of this aim is an achievement of the 20th century. The concept of park systems and the typology of urban green spaces came into being at this time. Theories by Forestier, Mawson, Migge, Wagner, and Rerrich in Hungary, incorporated *not only the squares, but also all the green spaces in and around the cities into a comprehensive green system*. They also established a hierarchy between them and defined the design principles and functional solutions accordingly. In these concepts they laid down those basic principles of the theory of open space systems in which the 21st century design theory is grounded.

Statement 7

Public park design in Budapest began to develop much later than in the large cities of Western Europe. Consequently, the first parks built in the city followed European examples. Later, in the last decades of the 19th century, when a progressive theoretical background began to take shape, the urban open spaces were created at the same time as their foreign counterparts according to the same design principles.

Placing the examination and evaluation of the public parks of Budapest in an international context made it possible to describe the development of the Hungarian design theory in the light of significant foreign achievements. Based on this, three distinct periods in the Hungarian design theory could be established.

It was in the second half of 19th century that public parks began to spread in Hungary. Although Városliget (City Park) is a very early example of urban public spaces even by European standards, it remained an isolated phenomenon for a long period of time. The artworks of the *first period*, that began with the Compromise of 1867 and was terminated by the years following the Millennium, followed complex public park design patterns of

European examples, ones that came into being as a response to the theoretical development that had begun much earlier. In the parks built in this period, like Erzsébet tér or Népliget 1st phase, the results of the diverse development of the various regions appear combined.

The theoretical background of the *second period*, from the turn of the 20th century until World War I, was not only nearing the complexity of that of other European countries, but also became progressive in an international context. The knowledge and the successful application of the international achievements manifested themselves in exemplary designer's attitudes and complex designs such as Népliget 2nd phase and the first parks of Gellért Hill.

The *third period* between the two World Wars worthily continued the achievements of the turn of the century. Although the type of attitude that advocated the following of the international examples resurfaced and became general, and innovative design thinking appeared only in a few cases, the designers and theoreticians successfully adapted the foreign precedents to the Hungarian circumstances. From an urban design point of view the seminal examples, like the creation of Szent István Park or Tabán, reflect an approach that is exemplary even for the designers of the 21st century.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE AUTHOR

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

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