

## THE GARDENS OF THE CENTRAL SCHOOL IN BUCHAREST - DISPLAY OF NATIONAL HISTORY AND OUTDOOR CULTURAL SPACES

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### Abstract

*A garden is more than vegetation; it is art, cultural memory, national patrimony and it is the sentimental expression of one's identity, capable to becoming a mnemonic for future generations to discover. The Central School in Bucharest, one charming piece of the national patrimony, was recently restored, but its gardens were ignored. The current state of the gardens alters the image of the entire ensemble and contradicts the original architectural style and composition of the monument. The study focuses on recovering both the image and the spirit of the school's remaining gardens, offering the necessary details for recomposing the images the school was identified throughout its history. To this end, our research was conducted on mineral and vegetal compositions and pattern displays, successive style transformations and historical layouts, text descriptions and also on "in situ" observations. The aim of the present study is thus, to demonstrate that the gardens are part of the Central School's history and identity and that they hold all the necessary attributes to becoming themselves recognized as landscape monuments. This must lead in the end to defying the Central School as a historical ensemble consisting in a mixture of both architectural and landscape creations alike.*

**Key words:** restoration, garden, monument, patrimony

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present study is to emphasize the importance of the Central School's gardens in what concerns the restoration programme of an A class monument in Bucharest – The "Central School for Young Women".

Built in 1890, the school is a historical and architectural ensemble composed by a series of historical classified buildings and of a series of geometrical gardens, components yet unclassified as monuments and as part of the historical ensemble.

Inspired by the Italian Certosa di Pavia monastery, Romanian architect Ion Mincu designed the school as a rectangular building surrounding a "chiosstro" type of garden, described as "a enchanting interior garden, prisoner in between Byzantine-style corridors with stone arcades; a kind of a green-flowery chiosstro" (Radulescu-Pogoneanu, 1953). Moreover, the school was integrated into a

green layout composed by two more gardens and green corridors. Thus the Central School ensemble is made up by both its buildings and its gardens: the front garden, the interior or central garden and the large garden or the backyard.



Figure 1. The School ensemble  
and the neighbourhoods, 1935



Figure 2. Certosa di Pavia Monastery's chiostro  
www.tuttocollezioni.it



Figure 3. The Central School's interior garden  
Photo: Simion Luana Andreea  
archive of a former student – Margareta Dan

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our historical research is based on both text and imagistic archives and also on *in situ* research.

### The Central School's gardens – short history

Archive documents have shown that the front and the interior gardens were designed along with the school's buildings, while the large garden was designed just after the school bought two nearby tangent opened fields in 1933-1935; "two tennis fields were placed in the back of the new garden, while nets tied between old chestnut trees invited the students to play ball games during their recreations." (Radulescu-Pogoneanu, 1953).

The large garden was the only garden in which the students were allowed to relax and play, and, this is the reason why this garden is the only one to which they were attached to - "I

cannot see the blossom of the chestnuts without thinking of the large garden, in which we went up studying and playing throughout the evenings" (Demetreius, 1852-1877 Central School monography).

Due to ageing, improper maintenance and the appearance of new buildings and sports fields within the large garden, it is no longer possible to restore the backyard to its original image.

However, although the front and the central garden faced numerous transformations throughout the years, they still maintain much of their original components and composition, making restoration not only possible but necessary as well.

### The central garden

The present image of the garden is the result of numerous transformations that brought significant changes throughout the years. Archive documents reveal that the garden went through four major stages of transformation:

#### A. The first stage- 1890-1901

The first description of the central garden is represented by a photograph taken in 1901 revealing an Italian influenced geometrical garden design, similar to the 15<sup>th</sup> century *chiostro* in Certosa di Pavia Monastery.



Figure 4. The central garden, 1901  
The Central School's archive

Straight alleys, geometrical pruned vegetation, main and secondary axes represent components to be found in both gardens. The main difference between the two is the central element: a large water feature in the Italian *chiostro* and an ash tree in the Central School's garden centre.

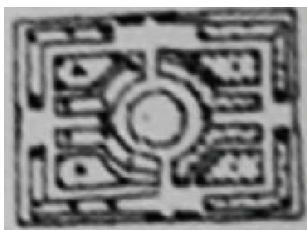


Figure 5. The interior garden of Central School  
www.googleimages.com

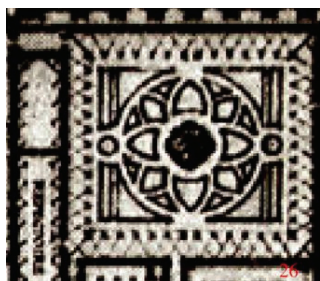


Figure 6. The *chiostro* of Certosa di Pavia Monastery  
[www.courses.cit.cornell.edu/lanar5240/MedievalImages](http://www.courses.cit.cornell.edu/lanar5240/MedievalImages)

#### B. The second stage - 1901-1935

Best described by all archive documents, this stage brings minor changes in what concerns the garden's style. However, newly added plants represent positive new features brought to the general image of the garden. A main difference between this period and the pre 1901's one is the form and height of the ash tree, a topic later to be discussed.



Figure 7. The central garden, 1935  
former student personal archive – Margareta Dan

#### C. The third stage - 1936-1940

This period is described by public and private initiatives to transform the central garden into a small botanical garden. For this reason, the garden went through significant changes

regarding both the alteration of the geometrical layout of the alleys and of the vegetal composition as well.



Figure 8. The central garden, 1940  
www.arhitectura-1906.ro

#### D. The fourth stage - 1940-2013/14

This period is characterised by the lack of written or graphic information. *In situ* research shows that the general layout of the garden hasn't changed much since 1940. However, the vegetal component is seriously altered and completely different from the one of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century as vegetation is nowadays composed by ornamental and invasive species of plants alike. The current composition is therefore no longer in accordance with the rigors of the initial geometrical style imposed in 1890-1901 and 1901-1935.



Figure 9. The central garden in 2013  
Photo: Simion Luana Andreea

A mention must be made regarding the use of the garden. Thereby, research revealed that throughout its history, the interior garden was opened to students just for the end of the year group photos, and thus, the garden represents a frame for the school's architecture, physically inaccessible to the students.



## The front garden

The front garden is represented by a green stripe placed in front of the school's main entrance.

Lack of information ended up in speculating that the front garden was designed in an Italian influenced geometrical manner alike the interior garden. Moreover, significant similarities stand up between the Central School's front garden and Certosa di Pavia Monastery's front garden, emphasizing that the Italian geometrical style was adapted to the central garden as well as to the front garden of the school.

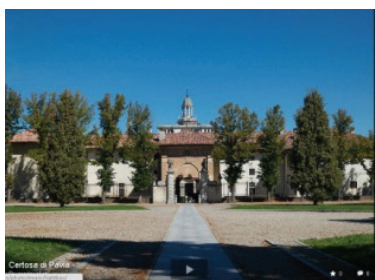


Figure 10. Certosa di Pavia Monastery's front garden [www.tuttocollezioni.it](http://www.tuttocollezioni.it)



Figure 11. The Central School's front garden in 1935  
former student personal archive – Margareta Dan

This garden also went through a series of transformations that ended up in the loss and alteration of the initial geometrical style. To this end, major changes took place in what concerns the vegetal composition and the form and height of the garden's plants.

Hardly remembered by former students, the front garden represented only a frame for the main entrance of the school. Margareta Dan, 1949 graduate: "I cannot remember much of

this garden. I only recall the tall poplars that reminded me of all the strict rules of the school in that period of time. I also somehow recall seeing pruned hedges and red roses."

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter aims to analyse the role and the current state of preservation of all the components of the Central School's gardens. To this end, each architectural and vegetal component was carefully measured and analysed.

### I. The central garden

#### A. Architectural components

##### A.1. Alleys

Initially composed by a series of symmetrical, concentric, radial or straight alleys leading up to creating main and secondary perspective axes, the layout of the alleys in the garden was designed in accordance with the principles of the Italian geometrical style.

The alleys are geometrically subordinated, so that the main alley connects the two entrances to the institution, marking the main perspective while the side alleys keep the outline of the building creating perspectives perpendicular on the main axis.

Besides the transit function, they were designed to lead the passers-by to a centre of interest from which multiple possibilities of perceiving the garden were created.

Due to the 1940's interventions to transform the central garden into a botanical garden it is possible that some of the alleys were eliminated in order to make room for more plants.



Figure 12. Alley comparison (1935-1940)

Above – 1935

Bellow – 1940

former student personal archive – Margareta Dan

### A.2. Pavement

According to the geometrical style principles, the alleys were paved with sand and gravel. However, innovations were made as the contour alleys were paved with Klinker bricks, making it easier to explore the garden.

Nowadays, both the brick and the gravel paved alleys are in an advanced state of deterioration due to ageing, improper maintenance and to recent engineering.

### A.3. Bordures

Initially designed with stone bordure alleys doubled by green curbs, during the 1936-1940 period, the green belt was eliminated in favour of doubling the stone bordure.

However, the circular curb, surrounding the ash tree, was dismantled and reconfigured in a more restrained form.

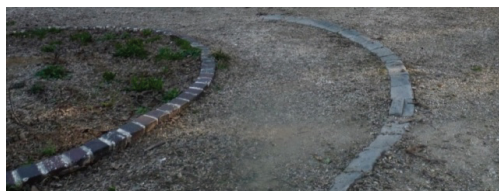


Figure 13. The ash's circular bordures  
Photo: Simion Luana Andreea

Historical image comparison and *in situ* research revealed remains of the original belt, showing that the new circle bordure has a smaller diameter compared with the initial one.

### A.4. Furniture - benches

First appeared in the 1935's illustrations, the benches were made up by a cast iron frame, partially covered with wooden planks as it can be seen below. The images show the presence of four benches placed around the central ash tree, and two more placed on the left and right side of the garden.

Though the present furniture seems completely different from the original one, detail image comparison and *in situ* research revealed that the cast iron frame is highly similar to the 1935 one and that only the wooden covers differ. Our hypothesis is that only the original wooden planks were disassembled and reassembled afterwards in a completely different new way on the original frame.

Nowadays, all benches are highly deteriorated and in need of urgent repair.



Figure 14. Composition and benches in the 1930's former student personal archive – Margareta Dan



Figure 15. Present image of the central area  
Photo: Simion Luana Andreea

### A.5. Sculptures

A series of sculptures, especially busts are now present in the garden while no related information about them can be found in any of the studied documents. They are randomly placed around the garden, partially covered by invasive and spontaneous vegetation.

### A.6. Corridor

Though part of the building's architecture, the arcade corridor is also a part of the garden's components. Similar to the Certosa di Pavia Monastery accolade arcade corridor, the school's corridor is in fact representative for the Romanian National architectural style.

The corridor is the only architectural component of the garden that has yet been restored. The image of the restored corridor is not a topic to be discussed in this study.

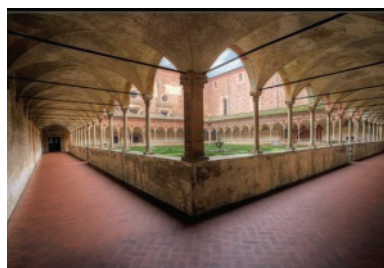


Figure 16. Certosa di Pavia arcade corridor  
[www.tuttocollezioni.it](http://www.tuttocollezioni.it)



Figure 17. The Central School's arcade corridor Photo: Simion Luana Andreea



Figure 20. The ash tree in 1935-right former student personal archive – Margareta Dan

## B. Vegetation

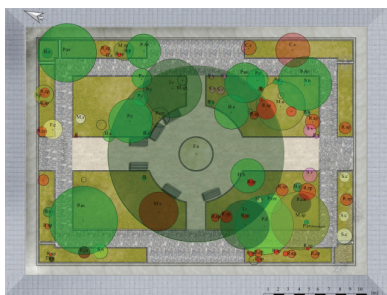


Figure 18. The interior garden Vegetation surveying

### B.1. The ash tree

The central ash tree represents the only vegetal component of the garden that survived all the dramatic changes that the garden has suffered. According to 'legends' and to the old local customs, it seems that the ash tree was planted during the school's opening ceremony. However, the fact that the 1901's tree seems to be a pendulum cultivar, different from the present one it is possible for it to be either replaced with a basic ash tree in between 1901-1935, or for the rootstock to suppress the graft and so that the ash continued its growth according to the basic specie characteristics.



Figure 19. The ash tree in 1901-left Central School's archive

Nowadays, the health status of the ash is precarious due to lack of proper maintenance and to a recently suffered trauma caused by a defoliator or an external agent as it can be seen in the sprout's growth. This may consist in the recent engineering, application of snow clearing toxic substances etc.

The initial impact the ash had had in the general image of the garden is seriously diminished by randomly planted vegetation. The newly added plants compete with the ash both in term of size and of habitus.

The ash tree is not only the main component of the garden, but also represent a symbol and mnemonic to all the former students.

### B.2. The ornamental cherry trees

Four ornamental cherry trees, from which only two are left nowadays, were planted in the corners of the garden recently after 1940, probably as to enrich the vegetal composition of the new botanical garden.

Alike the ash tree, the cherry trees represent symbols and mnemonics for the students, as some text documents reveal: "the thick shadow of the Japanese cherry trees, snowing spring after spring in the interior garden of the school, creating piles and piles of pink satin petals" ([www.confluente.ro](http://www.confluente.ro)).

### B.3. The roses

Roses also represented symbols of the garden as they are most remembered for "blossoming before the end of the school year final exams." (Demetreius, 1852-1877 Central School monography)

Initially placed along the alleys, they are nowadays placed singular or in groups randomly around the garden.



## B.4. Other plants

In the 1935 illustrations, few coniferous species were placed besides one of the garden's entrance. In the 1940's plans and images, they are no longer present.

Another vegetal component that is no longer present in the garden is the green bordure which was probably made up by *Pennisetum* or *Mischantus* species, as we were able to figure out from the archive images and text descriptions. However, the 1901's green bordure seemed to be doubled by different kinds of flowers such as *Hemerocallis fulva* lilies, which are now spread around the garden and form compact carpets along with invasive species such as *Convallaria majalis*, *Hedera helix*, *Lonicera japonica* and *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*.

Over time, new ornamental plants were added, leading to an overcrowded vegetal composition and to a loss of the original image and atmosphere of the garden.

The new vegetal composition of the garden consists both in the presence of the ash, cherry trees, roses and of the ornamental or invasive species such as *Lonicera japonica*, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, *Convallaria majalis*, *Hemerocallis fulva*, *Hedera helix*, *Hibiscus syriacus*, *Syringa vulgaris*, *Magnolia soulangiana*, *Morus alba*, *Malus domestica*, *Prunus cerasifera*, *Prunus domestica*, *Prunus avium*, *Prunus cerasus*, *Juglans regia* etc. alike.

Thus, the compositional confusion took over the rigorous design of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century composition.

## I. The front garden

### A. Architectural components

#### A.1. Fences

Made of wrought iron bars on concrete foundations, the fence represents both a physical limit and an aesthetic and artistic component of the front garden. The wrought iron fence is the only architectural component of the garden which is nowadays in a good state of preservation.

The fence's design is similar to that of the Italian Certosa di Pavia Monastery, alike other features.

Besides the wrought iron fence, a new one, improper wire mesh fence surrounds the green areas of the garden.

## A.2. Pavement

The garden's pavement is made up of concrete slabs with small aggregates, with shaded beige colours. The pavement is in a good condition of preservation, and from the artistic and historical point of view, it largely resembles the stabilized gravel pavement that seems to have been used in the past. The pavement currently supports a practical purpose, but does not neglect the overall landscape design.

## B. Vegetation

According to the historical illustrations, the main vegetal components of the front gardens are represented by poplars (*Populus nigra* 'Italica'). In an undated pre 1935 illustration the front garden contains an alignment of poplars and only a group of two poplars placed in front of the main entrance in both a 1935 illustration and in a 1989 photography.



Figure 21. The main entrance and the poplars  
[www.orasulluibucur.ro](http://orasulluibucur.blogspot.com/)

The two front poplars have disappeared and another two, planted at each end of the garden took their place and nowadays stand in between mulberry or fig trees.

The green *buxus* hedges can be seen in both the 1935 illustration and the 1989 photography but, due to lack of pruning and proper maintenance the plants overgrew and now stand as tall stems, partially leafless shrubs, being unsightly and uneven.

Other hedges made up by *Hibiscus syriacus* and *Spiraea x van Houttei* plants present in the garden along the wrought iron fence seem to be parts of the vegetal composition of the garden since 1935, as archive images and plans suggest. Also a series of roses planted in between hedges also seem to be part of the original layout of the garden, as documentation and questionnaires reveals.

Besides the species mentioned above, other species of plants are present in the garden and are altering its original image (*Ficus caria*, *Ulmus carpinifolia*, *Morus alba*, different fruit trees etc.).

## CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed the way the Central School's gardens were first designed and transformed in time. As recently mentioned, both gardens went through a series of four major stages of transformation. Due to the fact that the 1901-1935 stage is both best described by historical documentation and it is the stage in which both gardens represent a homogeneous composition, designed in accordance to the principles of the Italian geometrical garden, we considered this period of time determinant in what concerns a rehabilitation and restoration of the frontal and central gardens alike.

The restoration proposal is based on the 1935's design and composition of the gardens, but, according to Article 16, in the Florence Charta "restoration work must respect the successive stages of evolution of the garden concerned" (Florence Charta, 1982) the project also integrates mineral and/or vegetal components, symbolic and relevant for each of the four described stages.

### The interior garden restoration proposal

Based on the 1935's images and plans, the garden is proposed to be rehabilitated in accordance to the rigours of its original geometrical style, redesigned as a coherent and homogeneous ensemble, and as a sum of its past and present most important features.

Firstly, the original design of the alleys is to be remade, thus creating a series of both curve and straight axes concentrated around the central ash tree. The contour alley's pavement is to be reconditioned, while the central one's are to be repaved with stabilized gravel. A single, brick-type bordure is to cover de margins of the alleys, while in the case of the circular bordure surrounding the ash tree; only the recent, smaller bordure is to be preserved.

All of the benches are proposed to be rehabilitated, restored and re-planked with wooden planks according to their original 1901-1935 design. Four benches are to be

placed around the ash tree, while the other two are to be placed in between the secondary entrance's double doors, as shown in the plan below.

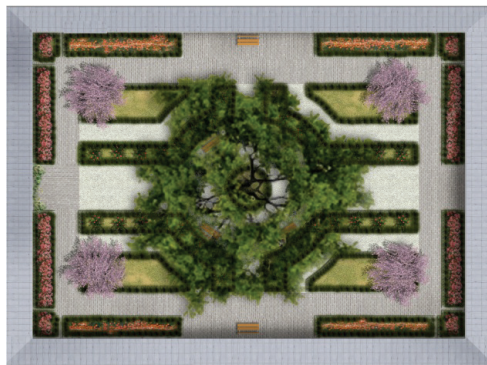


Figure 22. Restoration plan

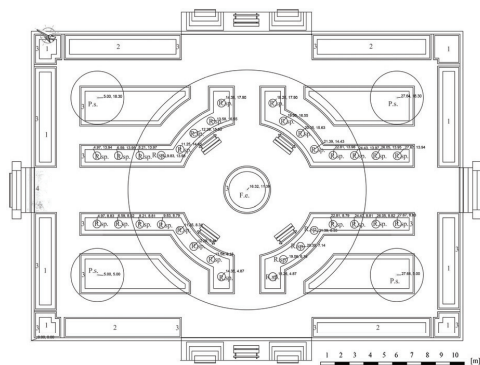


Figure 23. Restoration plan -technical details



Figure 24. Restoration proposal section





Figure 25. Restoration proposal overall image

Concerning the vegetation, the proposal is based on a series of decision making factors such as each stage of the landscape design, collective memory, plant's age and planting norms etc.

The restoration project proposes the use of a handful of plants, iconic for all historical layouts of the garden. Thus, the central ash tree is proposed to be properly pruned and carefully maintained, while four young Japanese cherry trees (*Prunus serrulata*) are to be placed in all the four corners of the garden. The central alleys are to be double-bordered by red, pink and orange roses (*Rosa polyantha hybrida*) and by flower bands (*Zinnia sp.*, *Aster sp.*, *Chrysanthemum sp.*, *Rudbeckia sp.*, *Festuca sp.*, *Mischanthum sp.*, *Pennisetum sp.*) as shown in the plan above. Finally, a *Lonicera japonica* arcade is to be placed at the entrance to the amphitheatre.

### The front garden restoration proposal

Alike the central garden, the front garden restoration proposal project is based on the 1935' images and plans, and integrates components from all its historical layouts.

Planimetric and volumetric restructuring of the garden will create a buffer space between the street and the building. Plant composition will comply with the rigors of the geometrical style and it will be characterized by a series of hedgerows and cover plate with red roses, according to many of the brief historical descriptions.

The mineral components are generally well preserved or restored while significant changes are to be made concerning the vegetal components.

Thus, two oak trees - *Quercus petraea* 'columna' - replacing the original poplars, are to be planted symmetrical to the main entrance. Columnar oaks were preferred to poplars because they have relatively the same height and habitus but they are stronger and outlive poplar trees.

Two hedgerows made up by *Spiraea x van Houttei* one side and pruned *Buxus sempervirens* on the other will be flanking a band of red *Rosa Polyantha hybrida* roses.



Figure 26. The front garden –restoration plan



Figure 27. Restoration proposal overall image – left

Figure 27. Restoration proposal section - right

In conclusion, though the buildings of the Central School themselves were restored, the Central School ensemble is not yet entirely restored. To this end, its gardens represent a vital component in absence of which the overall image of the historical ensemble is yet to be rehabilitated - "whether or not it is associated with a building in which case it is an inseparable complement, the historic garden cannot be isolated from its own particular environment, whether urban or rural, artificial or natural." (Art. 7, Florence Charta, 1982).

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Personal archives (Margareta Dan, Mihaela Mexi, Rita Mihailescu)