

NEW TRENDS IN URBAN PUBLIC PARKS - THE FRENCH POST WAR PERIOD AND ITS INFLUENCE IN ROMANIA

Ileana Maria PANȚU

University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest,
59 Mărăști Blvd, District 1, 011464, Bucharest, Romania, Email: ileana.pantu@gmail.com

Corresponding author email: ileana.pantu@gmail.com

Abstract

In France, the period after the Second World War represents an important phase in the evolution of public parks. This paper analyzes this period and its influence in Romania. After the long stagnation caused by the Great Depression and the world wars, French landscape architecture recovered during the time known as the Glorious Thirties (1945-1975). On account of re-assigning urban parks and gardens as "green space", urban landscape projects suffered from an acute lack of specific planning. As a result, new city parks displayed merely the attempt to green up interstitial "open space", by working around the general city plan. The most important French park from this period is the vast Floral Park in Bois de Vincennes, Eastern Paris. It was designed by Daniel Colin as a large flower expo, within the new French landscape garden style established by Alphand. In spite of the prestige and artistry of the project, Floral Park remains a display of spectacular flower species, closer to a botanical expo. However, its resounding success set a new trend in landscape design worldwide: the floralies. Romania also knew this influence, which led to the display of extensive floral designs in public parks.

Key words: public park, trend, French post war period, floralies, Romania.

INTRODUCTION

After a period of stagnation caused by the great financial crisis and the Second World War, the practice of landscape architecture in France recovered via Le Corbusier's line of progressive urbanism. The recovery went on during the thirty "glorious" years, *les Trente Glorieuses* as they were termed by French demographer Jean Fourastié, meaning the 29 years between 1945 and 1974 (Pawin, 2012; Price, 1993; Fourastié, 1979). Le Corbusier appealed for "green space" in the notorious Athens Charter of 1933, and no more for parks and urban gardens, in a free, neo-romantic style to accompany the geometry of the architecture, a "greeneing" (Le Corbusier, 1971).

STATE OF THE ARTS

Following this mutation of gardens and urban parks into "green space" per Le Corbusier, urban landscape planning suffered from an

acute lack of design. The most affected were the areas next to the large housing complexes that were being built heavily in that time due to population growth. Urban parks were likewise approached with the thought of merely greening up leftover space, or urban interstitial space in an overall plan (Pantu, 2012).

The most important creation in this vein in the Glorious Thirties' France was the Parc Floral in the Bois de Vincennes, East Paris, designed by landscape engineer Daniel Collin and inaugurated in 1969 (Figures 1-5). There had not been any other park of this scope conceived since the time of Alphand (Le Dantec, 2002).

The Parc Floral's style is French neo-picturesque style, via Alphand's line, obvious at a glance over the park's layout (Figure 1), as the Athens Chart imposed. The well-drawn curves of alleys speak for themselves, as do the soft earth mounds seen throughout the park, the elegant flexuosity of lake shape as well as the vegetation massifs.



Figure 1. Parc Floral, Paris – plan displayed in the park, april 2007



Figure 2. Parc Floral, Paris – earth mounds with cedar groups, april 2007



Figure 3. Parc Floral, Paris – Flowers Valey, april 2007



Figure 4. Parc Floral, Paris – detail plan of Flowers Valley (Google Earth)



Figure 5. Parc Floral, Paris – Flowers Valley, central lake shore, april 2007

This project was co-ordinated by Daniel Collin, an emblematic figure of the 60s in French landscape design, and involved other designers that were to become famous over the next few decades. Of these, Jacques Sgard and Alain Provost distinguished themselves by creating important public parks or conducting more complex territorial studies. For the Parc Floral, Sgard designed the Sculpted Garden and Provost conceived the Water Gardens. The Valley of Flowers was created by Caroline Stefulesco and Leandro Silva Delgado (Figures 3-5) (Le Dantec, 2002; Barozzi, 1989).

The context in France at the time saw the era of famous writers Sartre and Roland Barthes, psychoanalyst Lacan, anthropologist Levi-Strauss, philosophers Deleuze and Foucault. Unfortunately, the Parc Floral did not record much at all about those times, about the specifically French cultural ebullience taking

place. Despite the great variety of plant species, the park lacked a sense of temporal placement, as was the case with the rest of green spaces designed in Le Corbusier's manner (Le Dantec, 2002).

Notwithstanding its great prestige due to designer Daniel Collin's and the others' show of mastery and workmanship, the Parc Floral in Paris remained a mere display of spectacular floricultural species - almost a botanical exhibition.

This type of decorative floral thinking achieved great public success and developed widely in French landscape design. As a result, many events called *floralies* were organized, for the purpose of exhibiting stunning flowers.

Other countries' landscape design was influenced also by this trend. It was also the case of Romania which was ruled by a communist regime at the time. For this

ideology, Romanian public space needed to change in order to support its propaganda. New urban parks were designed in a monumental spirit, with large open spaces in order to accommodate the crowd, “the people” and these vast areas welcomed the wide flower arrangements specific of the French Glorious Thirties. Other reasons for adopting this floral tendency in Romanian were: the immediate effect (no need to wait long time for the plant to grow up), seasonal change of those compositions (annual plants were predominantly used) and, more important of all, their adaptability to propagandistic spectacular purposes (like an enormous ephemeral national flag or the communist national coat of arms designed in flowers).

A telling example is Tineretului Park, the vastest of Bucharest, designed by a team of Proiect București Institute lead by architect Valentin Donose and opened in 1974 (Figures 6-10). Together with Circului Park, created also by Donose, and other after the wars urban public spaces, Tineretului Park sustained the mutation in Romanian urban planning and landscape design in the second half of the 20th century. It was conceived to recreate and relax the population leaving in the new large collective housing in south Bucharest. In spite of the housing architecture’s poor quality and its high density of population, this park improved people’s living by ameliorated neighbourhood’s microclimate and city’s green space balance (Pantu, 2012).

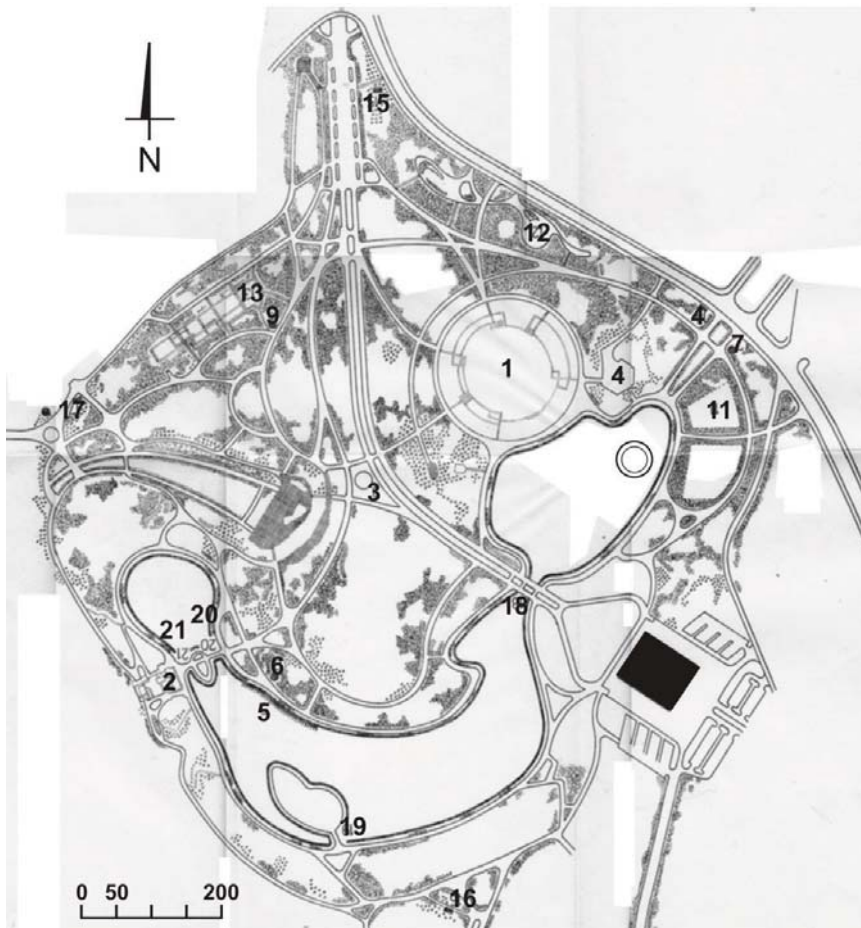


Figure 6. Tineretului Park – plan; equipments: 1. rosarium, 2. waterfall, 3. fountain, 4. restaurant, 5. warf, 6. box office, 7-9. refreshment booths, 10-11. sport grounds, 12-13. playing areas, 14-17. public toilets, 18. main bridge, 19-21. bridges. (Sonea, Palade, Iliescu, 1979)

Donose created this park for youth (*tineret* in Romanian) with the ideas of creativity and confrontation as concepts. His main design approach was to highlight the natural terrain configuration (16 m level difference) and to model it in order to create harmonious volumes and various interesting scenery (Figure 7). This is basic for all Donose's many landscape design creations. Alongside the elegant curves drawn by the circulation and the vegetal massifs outlines, the lake's sinuosity, planting composition with colour accents are all

elements of this unitary park to show the French Glorious Thirties (neo-Alphand) style influence and also Donose's creativity and ability in landscape design (Pantu, 2012).

Furthermore, as a good example for the influence of the French Glorious Thirties *floralies* in Romania, Tineretului Park abounded in floral arrangements: on the slopes and on the lawns in a free manner, in organic shapes, (Figure 7) and geometrical in accompany of the main circulation or architectural equipments (Figures 8-9).



Figure 7. Tineretului Park – floral composition on the slopes in the eighties (arch. V. Donose archive)

Tineretului Park's main circulation is a wide longitudinal open space with two alleys one side and the other of a large axial red roses parterre (Figure 8).

Roses were by far the preferred flowers of Ceaușescu couple, in power at the time.

For this reason also, one of Tineretului Park's major compositional elements was a vast circular rosarium (Figure 9).

Foreign leaders who visited the Romanian capital were given a tour of the park simply to admire these flowers. Unfortunately, the rose garden was deteriorated and eventually lost its initial function (Pantu, 2012).



Figure 8. Tineretului Park – Main circulation with large axial red roses parterre, 2003 - photo by C. Enăchescu



Figure 9. Tineretului Parc – the circular rosarium in the time of its construction (arch. V. Donose archive)

Typical for the Romanian Communist era were the seasonal floral tapestries. These arrangements were used to amplify the monumental character of buildings in parks

such as Sala Polivalenta (Figures 10) or Palatul Copiilor in Tineretului Park or in the city, such as Sala Palatului in Bucharest (Figure 11).



Figure 10. Parcul Tineretului – Sala Polivalentă with geometrical floral arrangements in the eighties (postal card)



Figure 11. Central Bucharest - Monochrome flower carpet in front of Sala Palatului in 1964, photo George Damian

During the Communist regime, vast floral arrangements were seen in parks all over Romania, such as Theatre Park in Constanța

(Figures 12), the park of Roman (Figures 13) and Liberty Park in Bacău (Figures 14).



Figure 12. Theatre Park in Constanța – floral tapestries, 1970 (postal card)



Figure 13. The Park of Roman – floral composition in the seventies (postal card)



Figure 14. Liberty Park in Bacău – floral composition, 1974 photo A. Comănescu (postal card)

CONCLUSIONS

As part of the evolution, in theory and practice, of French urban public parks in the 20th century, it is possible to discern many influences and trends disseminating in Romania, modelling the topical ideas and achievements in its cities. After the wars, in this country, new additions to urban parkland were conceived in a mixed style with French neo-Alphand style as dominance with their extensive floral areas, while pre-existing locations were embellished with such floral compositions, as a French Glorious Thirties influence. Those flower compositions were adopted very fast there in the communist era because of the perfect compatibility with large open areas characteristic for this period. Moreover, those elements were also easy adaptable to propagandistic spectacular purpose, fitting the research of a new landscape design language for the communist architectural style. The fast impressive effect obtained was also associated with progress and efficiency in the new era like a power demonstration of the working class ideology.

As an example the Tineretului Park tells us a lot about the Romanian park style in the communist era, it preserves its spirit in the large open spaces in the monumentality of the architecture.

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