

HERĂSTRĂU'S MAIN SOUTHERN AXIS. WHAT (EMBLEMATIC) IMAGE TO RESTORE?

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Abstract

Herăstrău is the largest public historical park in Bucharest that has developed in several phases during two main periods. All phases have left different imprints on its layout, leading to a hybrid and unclear image, but also on its undeniable values that list it as an historical monument. Lack of clear urban policies and protection of the historical park have led to the alteration of its emblematic images and perspectives during the last 30 years. The most important and iconic image of the park is represented by the central axis of the southern part, leading from Charles de Gaulle square towards the lake. Therefore, this paper will analyse its evolution and transformation in time, in order to find a better response to its present and urgent issue: Herăstrău's restoration plan. Following a detailed historical landscape study looking at all design phases, this paper will present the main values of the park subjected to legal protection and will bring in a perhaps radical solution for the restoration of the axis and its central perspective.

Key words: Herăstrău, central/main axis, historical development, evaluation, restoration.

INTRODUCTION - SHORT HISTORY OF HERASTRAU PARK

Before being a park, Herăstrău was a marsh that ran slowly and lazily along the Colentina. It had, though, already become a place for locals to visit. Lieutenant Colonel Papazoglu (1891) described the banks of the Colentina during springtime: "the Herăstrău marsh started towards the north side, on who's banks Constantin Ipsilante erected a hut higher up on the hill, in 1780, for his lady. He would sit in the pavilion with his fellow noblemen, while his wife sailed on the marsh with her ladies-in-waiting in a beautiful boat while a group of musicians sang for them. Floreasca Lake was named as such because of the Floreasca family who lived on its banks in grand villas and houses, given as dowry by *băneasa*¹ Anica Hereasca, and in whose villages people worked bleaching material and cutting wood at the mill. Not far from there starts the Bănesii Grove, the property of *ban* Ghica, which he left to his widower, the *băneasa*, whose name remains to this day. At this grove, the Bucharest elite

would celebrate every 1st of May. It is there that the melodies of the cuckoo birds, nightingales, turtledoves and larks could be heard, alongside the 'baa's' of the lambs and sheep and the songs of their herders, the bagpipes of the gardeners, the fiddler's violin, and, during the Phanariot age, the drums, pan flutes and the oriental violins which would caress the public".

In 1816, the Austrian Baron Ludwig von Stürmer (Parusi, 2005) remarked during his visit to the capital that the locals' favourite wandering haunts were the Mavrogheni, Herăstrău, and Colentina (the Ghica family's Tei estate) alcoves, and the Elefterie Garden in the Dâmbovița meadow. Doctor Felix (1892) mentions the existence of a number of springs with good water (that come out of chalk) in Herăstrău.

The 1935 Master Plan, created by Duiliu Marcu, G.M. Cantacuzino, Roger Bolomey, I.Al. Davidescu and T. Rădulescu include Herăstrău as a large park that starts alongside Kiseleff Street and grows around the Colentina River, for which work on its regularisation had already begun. The sanitation and improvement project undertaken by Nicolae Caranfil (director of the Bucharest Municipal Plant - U.C.B.) had already been approved by the

¹ Ban - title and function of great governor in Țara Românească (Wallachia) after 15th century, it is the higher rank of boyar (DEX). Băneasă – the wife of the Ban, became the toponymical of Băneasa

Municipal Council on the 21st of February, 1932, with the Ministry of Public Works giving their final approval on the 1st of July 1935. Preliminary construction had, however, already begun in October-November 1933 with the creation of the artificial reservoir in Buftea which could hold up to 9.600.000 cubic metres of water (and which would be finalised in May 1935).

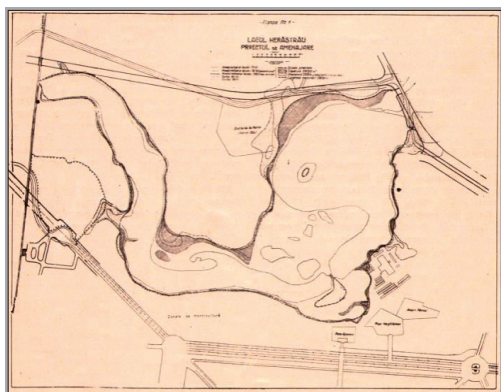


Figure 1. Improvement plans for Herăstrău Lake (Strunski, 1932)



Fig. 19. — Gropile în dreptul grajdurilor Marghidoman.



Fig. 20. — După sistematizarea sectorului din fig. 19.

Figure 2. Sanitation project of Coletina - west shore of Herăstrău (U.C.B., 1936)

In 1934, during Dem I. Dobrescu mandate as Mayor, the development of the Băneasa and Herăstrău lakes were finalised (Figures 1, 2).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Herăstrău Park and its beginnings - a historical analysis

In 1910 and 1912, two laws referring to the creation of a public park on the shores of the Herăstrău Lake were published without any results. The law from 1912 foresaw the establishment of a national park with a surface of 210 hectares. An ulterior forecast proposed that the Herăstrău estate be enlarged and the surface area be expanded to 820 hectares, without taking into account the surface area of the lake (Sfințescu, 1933). Today, Herăstrău Park has 187 hectares.

In 1915, the Master Plan accounted for the establishment of the national park, which was illustrated in the Bucharest Guide of 1923, created by Pântea (Figure 3), and was present in Bucharest's administrative division plan of 1929 as well, but only on the west side of the lake. The guide's example shows the plan of the new park drawn all the way along Kiseleff Street, on the shores of the Floreasca Lake, reporting Old Herăstrău Park and Fronescu Park (around the Bordei Park). According to the Bucharest administrative division plan, the park on the Herăstrău shore is defined as the National Park.

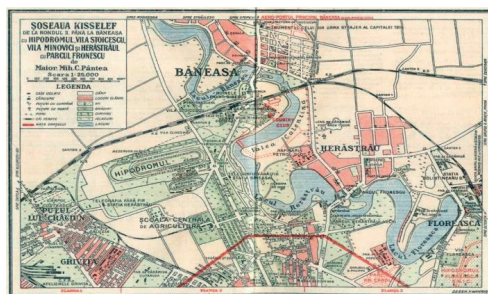


Figure 3. Green area placed along Kiseleff Street - 1923. The National Park is not yet mentioned (Pântea, 1923)

Taking all these into account, C. Argetoianu stated, on February 28th, 1934, during the conference held at the Carol Foundation in the framework of a series organised by the

Association for Bucharest's Urbanism (Asociația pentru Urbanistica Bucureștilor), about the stringent necessity of the construction of the National Park, construction which was never undertaken following his departure from the Ministry of the Interior. This leads us to believe that construction had begun earliest in 1935, under the coordination of Fr. Rebhun (Olteanu, 2002).

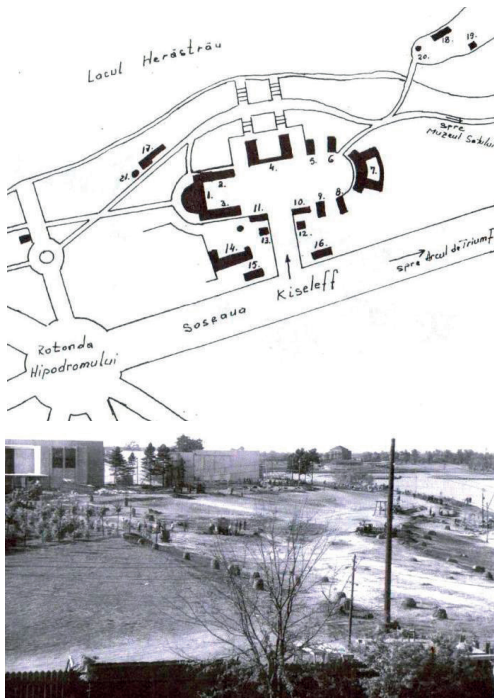


Figure 4. Exhibition plan for the Bucharest's Month festival and the development of the esplanade and lakeshore - 1936 (Dușescu et al., 2016)

The development of the Herăstrău Park was intrinsically tied to a series of public events in Bucharest, with every step of its construction being tied to a major festival. The organisation of the Bucharest's Month Festival (Luna Bucureștilor) in 1936, in the western area of the park, along Kiseleff Street (following the 1935 edition when Carol I Park was modernised), was decided upon given that the landscape development plan in the area had already begun, which, at the time, covered 60 hectares, and was already a point of attraction for locals. In this way, a series of improvements, built following the plans of architect Octav

Doicescu, and flora composition following the indications of Friedrich Rebhun, are linked to the organisation of the Bucharest's Month Festival from 1936. On this occasion, the whole west side of the park was developed, along with Rose Island and the Village Museum. This intervention also included the Miorița Fountain. More important, however, is the esplanade of the exhibition along the former School of Horticulture, whose stairs lead to the lakeshore and are still in place today (Figure 4).

The construction of the southern part of Herăstrău Park

If in 1936 the Bucharest Month Festival was organised in the new National Park, the 1939 edition, then when the festival was again organised within the current Herăstrău Park, the emphasis was taken away from Kiseleff Street in favour of Jianu Square. Here, efforts were made on a grand scale, with old areas requiring demolition, and whose former streets are still discernible within the park's structure. Simultaneously, the new profile of Boulevard Prezan was established, with the route of the old street being transformed into a path in the park that still exists today (Figures 5, 6).

An actual demolition and urban restructuring project is to be brought to light, leading to the construction of the south side of the park. Evident also is the maintenance of the existing infrastructure of former road, included as paths throughout the park, arguably an economic decision.



Figure 5. Prezan Blvd and former route of the street integrated in the park (photo: Willy Pragher - <http://willypragher.blogspot.com/>)

At the same time, urban E-V connections are also established which follow former roads sections (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Former route of Prezan Blvd, and the existing neighbourhood within the park's current boundaries cca. 1933-1937 (Romanian Academy Library - BAR)

As for the park layout, things are unclear. The results of archival research do not clarify the project on which the construction of the south side of the park was based, a possibility being, however, a hybrid arising out of several incentives and political motivations of the time (such as the partial preservation of the road system). The mix of several proposals and economical decisions is resulting out of historical and present plan analyses. One plan created by Friedrich Rebhuhn can be found in the Central National Historical Archives (Figure7), probably referencing a study in its early stages, created before the completion of the lake's restoration and the consolidation of its banks due to the shape of the lake which appears in a vastly different form from not only the one finally achieved, but also by all variations set forth by Nicolae Caranfil (Caranfil, 1936).

The project proposed by Rebhuhn includes the eastern bank as part of the park, this being

connected with the rest by a bridge that takes the former road leading to the Petrol Block refinery. Closer to the current image of the park is the plan proposed by Emil Pinard and published in "Urbanismul" in 1933 (Figure 8). This one seems to have served, at least partially, as the basis for the 1939 construction and includes the system of boulevards which intersect a *étoile* plaza from where the central axis of the park takes off. This was an integral part of a new urban structure inspired by the Parisians. Both projects obviously rely on a visual relationship with the lake along an axial perspective "to infinity".



Figure 7. Herăstrău Park plan, development proposal. (National Historical Archive - Fritz Rebhuhn Fund)



Figure 8. Emil Pinard's project for the National Park (Sfințescu, 1933)

For the Bucharest's Month Festival of 1939, the works for the exhibition pavilions as well as

for other facilities were entrusted to the architect Horia Creangă. It establishes the central pavilion and the courtyard of honour, located in the center of the newly developed area, in the proximity of the new E-V axis and placing two large lawns, one facing Jianu Square (presently Charles de Gaulle Square) and the other facing the lake (Figure 9). Thus, Creangă's proposal contradicts the visions of the two landscapers pursuing the axial visual relationship between Jianu Square and the lake, blocking a direct view and consequently generating two distinct paths, of different characters. The pavilion was organised around courts of honour that opened to the lake, in a diving perspective (Figure 10).

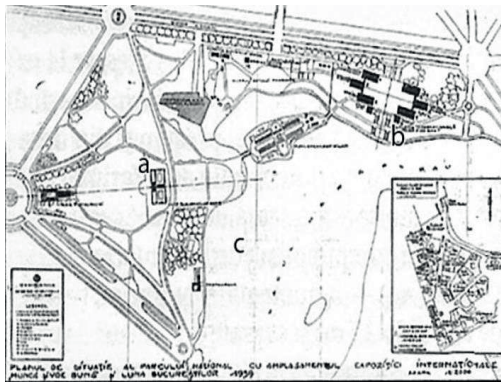


Figure 9. General organizational plan for the Bucharest Month Festival, 1939 (Sion, 2012)

The entrance to the park from Jianu Square, was, during the 1939 exhibition, marked by the presence of a double row of "vernacular caryatids" representing peasants from the Muscel and Mehedinți region (Figure 11) made by Constantin Baraschi and called Restoration Alley - Aleea Restaurației (King Carol II in 1930). It was demolished immediately following the festival. At the end of the alley, the Modura fountain was erected, also made by Constantin Baraschi (Figure 12).

It stayed there for some time, after which first the statue, and then the socket from the basin was removed. The basin of the fountain has, however, permanently remained in its original position. In removing the statuary ensemble, the park once again cleared the way to the Square, reintegrating the visual axis of the park into the general urban composition (Figure 13).

After the demolition of the pavilion, it was possible to restore the perspective "to infinity" towards the lake.

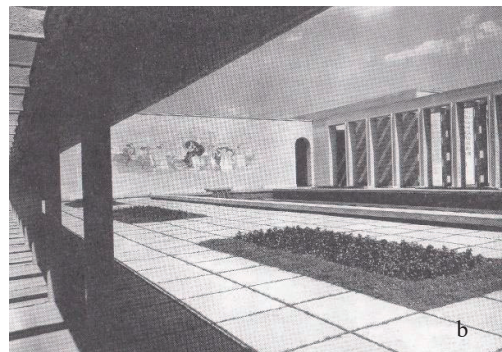


Figure 10. Central pavilion, arh. Horia Creangă (Dușescu et al., 2016)

Both the caryatids and Modura illustrated a nationalist discourse that is hardly relevant today, the reconstruction after 1990 of the Restoration Alley being difficult to explain both in terms of political discourse and the principles of restoration. The reconstruction of the caryatides took place in 2005-2006 by the sculptor Ionel Stoicescu. He also reconstructed the statue of Modura, the original of which can presently be found in the Bellu Cemetery, at the tomb of Elly Baraschi-Xenakis, the sculptor's wife. The caryatid originals can also be found in the Bellu cemetery, built in bronze, like the Modura.

Apart from construction dedicated to the Bucharest Month Festival, garden landscaping was also carried out. In addition to the large lawns, massive groups of trees have been planted that define the spatial structure of the park to this day (Figures 14). Besides the poplars and willows that marked the shores of the lake or the alignments and groups of

oaks, maples, linden trees, ashes, tufts, etc. Nicolae Caranfil mentions the bringing and acclimatisation of pine trees in the park arranged along the Colentina River during 1936-1937.



Figure 11. Restoration Alley (Aleea Restaurației) in 1939 (Dușescu et al., 2016)



Figure 12. Modura Fountain during Bucharest's Month Festival, 1939 (Dușescu et al., 2016)



Figure 13. Adolf Hitler Square and the park entrance ca. 1941 (Simetria Magazine Archives)



Figure 14. Aerial Image of Herăstrău in 1966
(<http://fostulbucuresti.github.io/#13/44.4410/26.0745!/a6>
)

Subsequent interventions and reconfiguration of the central axis

It is not certain when the demolition of the Horia pavilion took place, but it is clear that the arrangements related to the two courtyards of the building (Figures 10 b, 14) were maintained for a long while, namely the basins, pavements and flower beds integrated in the current central esplanade from the intersection of the two major axes of the southern area (Figures 15, 16).



Figure 15. The plan of the exhibition pavilion of the Bucharest Month Festival, 1939 superimposed with the current image of the central esplanade as in the Screenshot Google Earth 8/27/2018 (Sion, 2012, Google Earth, ©2018 DigitalGlobe / © 2018 Google)

Part of them have subsequently disappeared or been severely altered over time.

Today, there are still present only the basins whose former natural stone kerbs are covered by concrete planters and the interiors are painted in bright blue (Figure 17 a). Only the basin on the esplanade at the entrance to the park remembers (through it's regularly colours changed fence) its original image (Figure 17 b). Two major moments of intervention emerge over time. The first, at the beginning of the 1950s, is also related to the organisation of the World Festival of Youth and Students in 1953, in Bucharest (Festivalul Mondial al Tineretului și Studenților - that included just the communist bloc), which led, among other things, to the reconfiguration of the central ground floor by introducing the suggested axial composition and by the plans of Rebhuhn and Pinard (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 16. Images of the basins on the esplanade before and after addition of concrete planters (Georgescu family archives by courtesy of Oana Pirvu)

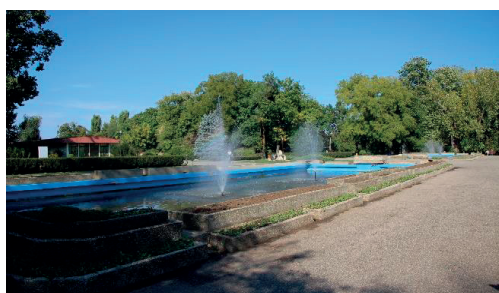


Figure 17. a. The basins on the central esplanade covered by planters; b. the fenced basin at the park entrance (personal archives)

An image from the inauguration of the new park of culture and rest I.V. Stalin on the 1st of May, 1951 (attended by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Vasile Luca, I.I. Kavtaradze, Petru Groza, Ana Pauker, Petre Borilă, Gh. Apostol, C.I. Parhon, and Șt. Voitec) is caught, besides the slight alignments of poplars that today flank the central ground floor and the rockery located inside the basins of Horia Creangă (Figure 18 a).



Figure 18. Central Axis in 1951 and 1970.

(a- <http://redescoperaistoria.ro/> Online communism photo collection - Photo #EA028, b-<http://orasulluibucur.blogspot.com>)

Also during this period, the park was expanded in the North-East area, the summer theatre was built and other new facilities for the working class. Adaptation to the new “popular” taste and especially to the taste of party and state leadership brings with it the plethora of “ornamental” plants, foliage and floral arrangements. Rică Marcus mentioned in 1958 “two pavilions - library, three pavilions for exhibitions, buffets, refreshment kiosks, docks, a restaurant, a large group of entertainment facilities, three corners reserved for children, with swings, cabinets, buggies, etc. The plantations were greatly enriched with trees and flowering shrubs. Countless ridges exaggerated

by many mosaics were made especially around the constructions, beside the statues, etc.” (Marcus, 1958). In that vein, “of the plantations remade in the southern area, we deem the ridge from the entrance of Stalin Square successful, from where it would be good to remove the ‘vessel’ made of flowers that has a dimension completely out of proportion and which is of questionable taste and very expensive.” (Marcus, 1958). The alignment of the poplar trees created a huge green room whose entire dynamic was oriented towards the lake and the diving perspective towards it (Figure 18 b). A second moment, in the same aesthetic line that denied the modernism of the initial arrangements, is the achievement of the Expoflora flowers exhibition, at the initiative of the park administration. Its arrangement, including the construction of the two pavilions, of which the one at the top of the slope destroys the symmetry of the central axis, was attained in 1970. In the same period, the alleys that cross the ridges were rebuilt and raised so that its focal point is presently fragmented (Figure 19 a).



Figure 19. a. The symmetry of the axis severely affected by the resin plantations and the Expoflora pavilion marked in red and the green carpet crossed by the transverse alleys marked in yellow (picture taken by me in 2006 and still featuring the incongruous vegetal clock); b. The axis (in yellow) destroyed by the inadequate realisation of / The Expoflora upper pavilion, located asymmetrically in relation to the visual axes of the initial layout of the park (Tudora et al. 2018)

Another catastrophic intervention that accompanied the new passion for flowers was the destruction of the modernist basins, as they were covered by planters, poorly built both in terms of materials and design (Figures 16 b, 17 a).

The establishment of the Expoflora was accompanied by the new fashion of the ceramic vessels that adorn the entire central axis (Figures 18 b, 20 a). On the other hand, despite all the insertions made at the Expoflora, the descending perspective towards the lake remained open between the 70s-90s.

All the problems mentioned in the text are highlighted in the pictures using Adobe Photoshop CS3.



Figure 20. a. Ascending perspective from Expoflora to Aviatorilor Sq.; b. Perspective on the lake in Expoflora (a. www.orasulluibucur.ro, b. DMI archive)

New reality post 1990

After 1990, unsuccessful interventions carried out in the absence of specialists certified by the Ministry of Culture (although Herăstrău is included in the List of Historical Monuments with code 832-B-II-aA-18802, which requires that any intervention be based on a project developed by an MC certified specialist and with the input of the National Commission of

Historical Monuments) led to the rapid and aggressive destruction of the image of the park.

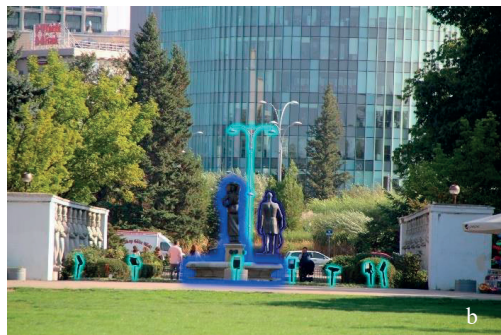


Figure 21. The main access from Charles de Gaulle Square - both directions of perspective with planters and fences (a.), aggressive lightning system around Modura (b.) and the floral clock located in the axis and the conifers on the sides and background, the buildings on the Bucharest-Ploiești Road (c.) (Tudora et al., 2018)

From decisions such as the reconstruction of the Restoration Alley (Aleea Restaurăției) to poor management, a series of unsuccessful planting initiatives, but also the construction in the vicinity of the Scânteii House, led to the

irreparable destruction of the axial perspective towards the lake and to the northern part of the park (Figure 21). The destruction of poplar alignments, the location of the upper pavilion of the Expoflora and the generation of longitudinal and transverse visual partitions led to the destruction of the simple and clear image of the central “green room”.

The central esplanade, a key element of the improvements made in 1939, was transformed into a fair in where a number of statues are chaotically placed, temporary attempts at *arstopia*, various kiosks and stalls, blue basins, yellow garbage cans, green bicycle lanes, pink flowers, etc (Figure 22). The situation is all the more serious as the current state of the central esplanade severely affects **the perception of the spaces along the transverse axis of the park.**

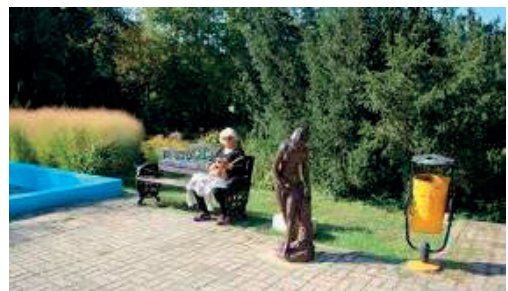


Figure 22. Central Esplanade today (personal archives)

In turn, the Expo flora was transformed from the flowering meadow that had been arranged in the 70s into a collection of floral patterns bordering on kitsch, where new ornamental trees have been planted that block the view towards the lake (Figure 23, 24). The pavilions are in a state of advanced degradation and are closed to the public, thus becoming useless for the Expoflora. The end of the axial route ends with a distressed perspective towards the opposite banks of the lake, dominated by the presence of new buildings that rise above the top of the trees as well as the kiosks and docks transformed into terraces (Figure 25).



Figure 23. Expoflora image from 1972 (<http://www.xplorio.ro>)

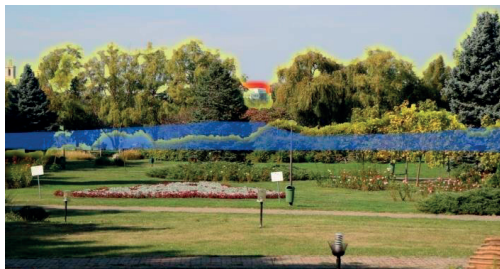


Figure 24. Current image of the Expoflora area with plant inserts (especially trees) blocking the view (blue mark) towards the lake (Tudora et al. 2018)

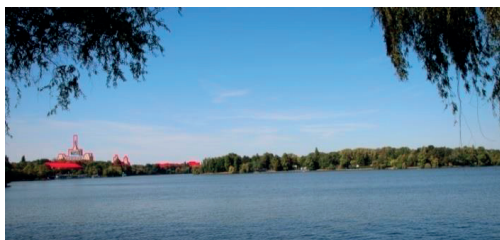


Figure 25. Perspective of the horizon irretrievably affected by the buildings (marked in red) rising above the flora in the background (Tudora et al., 2018)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Following the analysis of the way in which the central axis has evolved over time, from a compositional point of view and its architectural quality, but especially of the historical importance of its constituent elements, the values are summarised in Table 1. The data in the table represent details on segments of the axis of the values taken from the Landscape Study conducted by myself in the frame of RPR_birou de studii contemporane (bureau of contemporary studies) in 2018. The evaluation takes into consideration the original project and its evolution along the time.

Table 1. Constitutive elements of the central axis evaluation - based on historical criteria

Constitutive elements of the park	Pre 1935	1935- 1940	1950- 1953	1965- 1975	1990- Prezent	Historic value
Charles de Gaulle entrance esplanade	-	high	high	high	high	high
Aleea Restauratiei	-	high	medium	medium	medium	medium
Central ridge / green room	-	-	high	high	high	high
Central esplanade	-	high	high	high	medium	high
Diving lawn / Expoflora	-	high	high	high	medium	high
Lakeshore / perspective towards the northern part	high	high	high	high	high	high



Figure 26. Evaluation of perspectives in the southern area of Herăstrău (Tudora et al., 2018)

Given the irremediable nature of the destruction of part of the park's iconic values that occurred after 1990, such as the destruction of the flora borders on the each side of the lake, a restructuring and reconfiguration of the central axis composition is more than necessary. The situation of the inner perspectives within the central axis of the southern area is analysed in Autocad (Figure 26).

The aforementioned analyses break into the directions of intervention on the central axis that aim less to a restoration of one phase of development but to an integrated vision that respect and recover the main elements of each phase that, meantime, became emblematic.

Thus, on the section between Charles de Gaulle Square and the Central Esplanade, the following actions are required:

- the removal of ornamental and design elements that do not conform to the modernist project;
- the relocation of statues and monuments in a coherent spatial and stylistic structure;
- realignment and regeneration of the poplar trees found in the green room;
- correction measurements and vegetation management plans;
- restoration of all elements from the 1939 project; assessment of the possibility of rebuilding the central courtyard of honour. (RPR_birou de studii contemporane, 2018).

Regarding the Flora Expo area, including its lateral zones between the Colentina perch and the Summer Theatre, the following priorities and intervention measures are required:

- restructuring the plant composition according to the conclusions of the axial perspective study;
- moving the pavilion from the upper level of the perch to a position symmetrical with the pavilion from the lower level; restoration of valuable landscape elements.

All this intervention should be correlated with those required by the others areas of the park, mainly the two free-composition zones that juxtapose to the main axis. Thus, the visual enclosure of the green room is also ensured by the vegetation (and its management) in the proximity areas, which should be taken into account.

CONCLUSIONS

The southern part of Herăstrău Park is the result of different stages of evolution. Each stage of its evolution was marked by the political discourse of the moment, the main ones being the expression of two the dictatorial periods (fascist and communist) but also the "opening" period of the 60s and 70s. The democratic period, after 1989, is marked, from Herăstrău park point of view, only by aggressive and disrespectful interventions, marked by kitsch and lack of vision. Due to the lack of a coherent management plan of the park the entire vegetation is suffering today, most of the trees being mutilated by radical cuts called (in the local administration's erroneous language) "toaletare".

Despite this reflection of dictatorial discourses in the architecture of the park the result was one of an outstanding and almost neutral modernity, due, on one hand, to the appreciation for modern architecture during the fascist period and, on another, to the shy, but important, insertions and details of the short period of modernity in the communist era.

At the architectural and landscape language level, the single strong reminder of the two dictatorial phases are the public art monuments, scattered around the park. Thus, the relocation of statues and monuments, which has been analysed in detail in aforementioned landscape study, but weren't presented in the present article because of the limited space, should follow this political periods that generated from the very beginning their initial location in the park. The entire green room should be transformed in a monumental alley, presenting the statues of the main Romanian writers that are presently spattered around the park, while Aleea Restaurației shall be subjected to a *mise-en-valeur* project.

The reconstruction of Creangă pavilion depends of the quality of archive documents to be found. Detailed plans could lead to a real reconstruction while the lack of document might impose a architectural reinterpretation based both on architectural and landscape elements. Nevertheless the three basins still standing in the park have to be restored. The proper reconstruction of the pavilion or an architectural / land-art / landscape

reinterpretation of the pavilion not only aims to recover the historical image of the park but also to regain a visual coherence of the two main areas of the axis: the green room spatial structure and the perspective from the city into the park, that now ends in a destructured space and the Expoflora area. The restructuring of the entire space and the visual relation are presented in Figure 27, realised in Lumion.

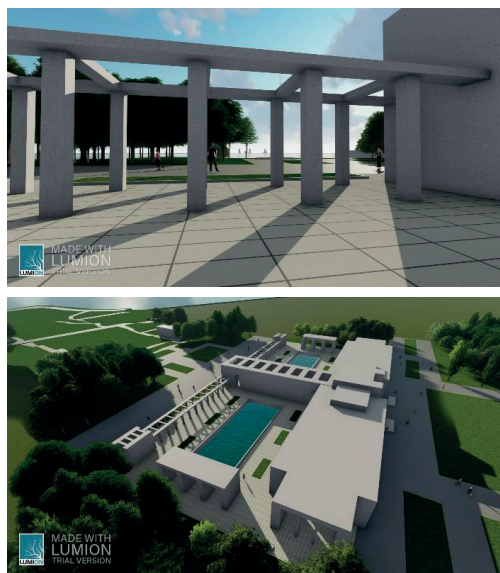


Figure 27. The spatial and visual impact of the possible reconstruction of Creangă's pavilion (Images: Iasmina Petre - diploma project in landscape architecture USAMV Bucharest - work in progress)

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Bucarest collaborating with RPR_birou de studii contemporane: Andreea Chiriac, Răzvan Dumitru, Giovanni Luca, Raluca Mihai, Iasmina Petre, Anca Strugariu, Ioana Șerbulea. The study will hopefully be followed by a regulation plan for the entire park.

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