

ROMANIAN PICNIC REGULATION - THE LANDSCAPE SUSTAINABILITY GAPS

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Abstract

Law 54 adopted by the Romanian Parliament in 2012 was meant to regulate public space picnic activities, in order to mitigate public health and environmental impacts associated to this traditional middle class leisure. This paper identifies the gaps between the present law and the sustainable approach of picnic in national context, from a landscape architect's integrative perspective. The analysis premise is landscape valuation, which picnic should naturally rely on – though the term 'landscape' is missing from the text of the law. First, a general concept is suggested, that connects all the complex systems involved in picnic activity; a set of principles deriving out of the concept is then identified. Foreign related regulations are presented along their implementation context and the effects they have on socio-ecologic systems. The principles of landscape valuation through picnic are then confronted with the Romanian law and with the foreign regulations selection. Results show the gaps between landscape sustainability key-lines and the law formula, indicating also alternative approaches from other countries. The conclusions show the need to integrate landscape architects in society on multiple levels, in order to enhance policy sustainability, administration effectiveness and management quality.

Keywords: Environmental education, landscape valuation, picnic activities, picnic designated areas, public affluence dedicated areas

INTRODUCTION

Public space suffers the direct impacts of cultural change, and since the 1990's Romania is a very dynamic ground. The ceased properties restitution triggered in 1991 by the Restitution Law, the capitalism revival, the climate change, the Globalization, the E.U. integration process and, more recently, the Economic Crisis are contributing to the construction of a new cultural identity of the Romanians. As a component of the socio-ecologic system, culture induces pressures on natural capital, especially in its turning moments, when environmental resilience is stretched. The Picnic Law is a late answer to some of the changes that the nation and the Romanian environment are passing through. The environmental neatness seems to be the main reason behind this law. This study will prove that among others, this reason is insignificant, and consequently the law requires major enhancements. In the end, suggestions will be made, that will hopefully provide a base for the improvements.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Among the recognized explanations of the word 'picnic', Romanian dictionaries offer almost undifferentiated answers: *jointly, open-air dinner* [5]. In a single case, the *open-air* context is explained between brackets as *outdoor green* [iarbă verde] [12]. Despite these, law 54/2012 [14] considers new meanings for *picnic*: *any public affluence recreational activity (...) involving drinks and/or food consumption and accordingly, eventual fire lighting* [14]. Significant fines enforce the law that forbids *picnic activities* anywhere else than in the *picnic designated areas* or in the *picnic arranged areas*.

A logical interpretation would result in:

- "Public space pretzel-chewing mobs are liable for severe penalties unless their chewing activity takes place in a *picnic designated area*", or
- "Running fountains installation outside the *picnic arranged areas* is prohibited, since they could instigate to disobedience regarding the Law of the picnic".

Obviously, the law was written and approved in a great hurry.

Considering the risk of being a shallow document on any level, starting with its motivation, a bottom-up approach was used for re-defining some of the true Romanian musts in the matter of picnic. A list of the possible reasons for a picnic law was the subject of a brief analysis: examples are found in a few western, culturally related countries, either historically or today's models. Picnic areas setup was found to be aiming:

- Environmental impact and public health risks mitigation: the Romanian law - [14]
- Public space alcohol consumption regulation: Montreal [15]
- Graveyard protection: USA – New Hampshire – Claremont [16]
- Proselytism prevention: Milwaukee, USA [13]
- Finding spots for urban refugees: Alevkaya Picnic Area – North Cyprus [2]
- Urban public space quality enhancement: Vancouver, Canada [7]
- Urban hacktivism through guerrilla *picnic activities*: parking lot picnics in USA [8]
- Creating frameworks for hedonism – rose-garden picnics, as those promoted by Heirloom's Roses [3]
- Social recovery of forsaken territories: Waldpark in Potsdam, by the Dutch designers of Bureau B+B [1] proposes new uses for a former military training site of Easter Germany.
- Exercising freedom: in Dragoș Dascălu's formulation, the best picnic area *should not impose strict usage rules providing more freedom to visitors. A 'vague space' as Augustin Ioan would say, but with a clear image, owed to the very lack of interventions (...)* [9].
- Cultural identity and environmental culture: in Park Klarenbeek – Arnhem, recycled 16th century tomb stones from a nearby former Abbey [6]
- Natural, cultural and spiritual heritage valuation: the 500 km Majella National Park hiking trails (Italy) occasionally offer picnic spots [20]
- Wild landscape valuation: *desert discovery walks(...)* *afternoon walks through woodlands* and *termite tales* accompany the Picnic Day

program in a near-city park of Central Australia [10]

- Social life dynamics: student campuses and many others.

- Green infrastructure integration of recreation, health and wellbeing objectives: provisions of picnic spots ensure mass attractiveness of Ingrebourne Hill – London [11], especially when exercise is the subliminal goal. These examples suite in different degrees the Romanian context: the geographic and ecological diversity of the country induce major restrictions on regulators; the cultural diversity in terms of area of influence, tradition age and dynamics of phenomenon is another difficulty that law form must overcome. The most 'simple' thing in this equation is the socio-economic system – still bearing the marks of the uniformisation imposed in the 50 years of communism.

National site diversity approach requires the introduction of the term *landscape* in the text of the law. Furthermore, Romania was one of the first countries to assume the European Landscape Convention of Florence 2000. The official commitment was signed 11 years ago, yet no steps were performed so far in the adaptation of the law system. No references were found that would dissociate picnic activity from the landscape approach.

Cultural diversity is partly included in *landscape* matter. Yet, the traditions and customs diversity induce phenomenological differences among the regions of the country, which derive in various patterns of picnic activity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Picnic sites necessity could be resumed as following:

- for mid-term circumstances, they provide social cohesion frameworks to local communities and organizations; a key social benefit – that skipped the ruler's intentions in Law 54/2002 form – is the connection between picnic activity and the discharge of social tensions, otherwise provided in very little circumstances, like festivals or sports competitions;

- economic impacts of picnic sites is of short-term interest, since they provide consumption raise opportunities, of mid-term impact when considering the life quality enhancement of the working class – inducing work productivity raise – and long-term impact – deriving in health costs decrease or even prevent emigration (according to Waltert & Schläpfer 2010 [19], *migrants are attracted by amenities nearly as often as by low taxes*)

- cultural identity and heritage valuation (either natural or cultural) through picnic facilities rely on education – this induces the long-term liquidation of the initial investment, since community or national identity recovery, as well as environmental culture inoculation involve social values change

- the immediate impact conflicts between picnic facilities and the supporting sites were circumstantially approached in law 54 [14]; environmental protection as depicted there relies exclusively on the responsibility of the picnic areas users; the control tasks are assigned to local police; force seems to be the only argument the law makers could bring forward. The police involvement – and its ecological footprint – could be drastically reduced if picnic sites protection relied rather on social appropriation, local and national pride; landscape valuation is the missing keyword from the text of the law – it would refer to the means of achieving the appropriation goal.

Common sense relies on cultural acceptance of real-world facts. This involves a great deal of change, deriving from the evolutionary character of culture. More than participating to common sense definition, culture is an identity factor on different scales of space and time, including the national level, which any national law should target in democracy. No cultural arguments were used for the law construct. A formal analysis could point out that the law creators' eluded democracy.

The Romanian Law of the picnic [14] lacks the nation-wide addressability; it also lacks *common sense* in the matters of public space approach (anachronism), *public affluence recreational activities* [14] recognized *public affluence areas* [14] and in the matters of landscape valuation, protection and enhancement. In the national law system,

landscape is left as *lorem ipsum* [4] when picnic activities are involved. Environmental and human health seem to be the only values that Law 54/2012 rely on. Picnic opportunity derives from landscape amenities [17]. For urban targets, comfort and sense of security associated with picnic activities involve ensuring the following: *lighting, trash receptacles, information and directional signing, benches and street furniture, trailheads and trailhead parking, information kiosks, drinking fountains, public telephones, transit shelters, distance markers, bicycle parking, restrooms, picnic tables and protective shelters, ramps and stairways, grassy areas and buffer strips, shade trees, planters, textured walkway surfaces, statuary or artwork (sculpture), ornamental fountains, selective relocation of utility poles or burial of utility cables, up lighting of trees, monuments and gazebos* [18].

CONCLUSIONS

A Romanian law of the picnic should include the following issues:

- Social freedom expression (avoidance of flagrant fencing, facility and landscape diversity)

- Picnic sites should address equally to all social categories of the country – providing common interests for the rich and the poor, for the more or for the less educated people (their common values should be approached essentially through landscape valuation)

- Site adequacy to social pressure (traffic, inherent pollution, vandalism)

- Environmental protection should integrate environmental culture objectives in picnic site planning and management (trash disposal and selective waste collection – as regulated in the present law, but also water management and energy efficiency objectives, adapted to site specific)

- Site appropriation policy (local, regional and national identity valuation – the integration of the picnic areas in cultural and educational programs)

- Site adequacy to local culture (picnic facilities, noise levels, crowd density, access, security)

- Green infrastructures should integrate picnic site quotas, derived from the available local landscape resources, local culture, demography, environmental and urban requirements.
- Multifunctional landscaping should address among others the picnic site matters;
- Public space approaches – including picnic activity regulations – should value local identity, unlike the uniformity enforced by the present picnic law.
- Picnic areas designation should rely on national standards, since they provide national landscape valuation; they involve as well landscape change, and its impact should be properly assessed in the case of sensitive sites. Based on the landscape provisions of The National Territory Planning, the picnic spots densities, as well as their setup and maintenance costs should rely on national standards.
- Public affluence areas should be designated in connection to picnic site social targets – those of local interest should remain the responsibility of the local authorities, but those of regional or national interest should be approached as touristic sites and be integrated in regional or national touristic policies. Landscape sustainability relies on the integration of all the aspects involved in its structure and functioning on scales of space and time. Since picnic activity is one of landscape’s characteristic functions, it is a must to integrate it among the other characters of the landscape. The sectorial approach of picnic planning and management can result in resource squandering, negative socio-economic system impact and even jeopardize landscape integrity.

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