HISTORICAL PARKS AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AT RISK

'Everything of value is vulnerable'. This was written by a Dutch poet and artist several decades ago. The words encapsulate a reality that is familiar to everyone. If they apply in general, they are certainly valid in respect of our natural and cultural heritage. In particular, they are true for our historical gardens, parks and landscape heritage.

Gardens and parks are particularly at risk by their very nature – due to the change of the seasons and the passing of time. Or, as it is put in the *Florence Charter* (1981), which was drawn up in respect of historical gardens and parks:

> *Its appearance reflects the perpetual balance between the cycle of the seasons, the growth and decay of nature and the desire of the artist and craftsman to keep it permanently unchanged (Article 2).*

Landscapes usually change gradually, but sometimes quickly and radically, particularly in the West. 'Designed landscapes' experience change and are touched up in the course of time or are transformed into new ones through irreversible environmental intervention.

Due to the process of globalisation, 'associative landscapes' are at risk of increasingly being unable to retain their hidden significance in contemporary society. They are losing their religious, artistic and cultural values. This changes the manner in which they are perceived and experienced, and consequently their appreciation is also fundamentally altered.

Throughout the world, the traditional links between increasingly urbanised communities and their natural surrounding are being severed. Old, traditional cultures are being transformed into new phenomena. In ever larger parts of the world, 'organically developed landscapes' are increasingly yielding ground to land that is designed and rendered functional with the aid of a drawing board or computer. How to integrate relict or fossil landscapes is still an open, unanswered question.

What is the overall position of gardens and landscapes within monuments conservation?

More is written and spoken about this heritage and more conferences are held to discuss it than professional conservation projects are executed. However, in various parts of the world, there is growing public interest in gardens as an expression of the art and culture of bygone civilisations and generations.

Its primary focus is on a number of acknowledged accomplishments. In Europe and Asia, international cultural tourism is intensively frequenting a number of gardens and parks from the past that have been pronounced to form a canon.

Conservationists usually direct their attention to historical buildings. That a garden, park and building are closely linked to each other compositionally and iconographically as a concept and design, and that a garden or park can constitute an 'architectural and horticultural composition' (*Florence Charter*, Article 1) in its own right, appear to be unfamiliar territory to them or to escape them. Town planners view public parks more as open and public areas within urban patterns, rather than inquire into their artistic or aesthetic significance or what their import is to the identity of the locality or the image of the city or town in question.

Several reasons may be cited as to why gardens, parks and landscapes are virtually defenceless against rationalised administration and regular garden maintenance, against land-price politicking, against dynamically expanding towns and cities, or in the case of landscapes, against the global search for sources of energy.

With some exceptions, historical garden culture is seriously threatened virtually everywhere. In actual fact, these monuments are constantly in great danger everywhere and most are at risk of obliteration.

Risks and Threats

When is there a threat? And what is threatened? Are material conditions at stake or is it the loss of authenticity or integrity? Or is the entirety of the design at risk of disappearing? Or is the historical nature of the place, the *genius loci* endangered?

This begs the question as to how one can measure all of this. Often it is not possible to draw firm boundaries, except where an intervention has occurred that can be clearly described in terms of size and time. Change, decay and loss usually follow each other stealthily in the course of time. Usually, their transition can only be determined in retrospect.

There are many different kinds of threats. Almost everywhere, parks and gardens occupy a subordinate position in the ranking and practice of monument conservation. For the most part, inventories and registries mention and describe buildings and their past. A single word suffices to refer to any accompanying historical garden. However, garden adornments such as pavilions or statues are given a bit more attention, certainly if one can link them to the name of an architect or artist.

Most countries do not provide active, systematic protection for historical gardens and parks, nor for heritage landscapes (unlike the systematic designation of areas of nature as national parks). Not only are the legal instruments required to do this often lacking, so is the expertise. The landscaping curriculum represents an exception in this respect as it covers tuition devoted to the restoration of these monuments.

There is also an internal threat to this heritage in that it comprises living organisms. Parks can die of old age. A lack of maintenance can soon transform parks and gardens, letting nature have free rein.

Nature conservationists often regard an old, preferably overgrown park as an important biotope that should be conserved. The public cherish old trees, rejecting moves to chop them down and replant on emotional grounds. They do not realise that by doing this, a historical park can be lost to future generations. The subject does not rate high on the political scale.

Nowadays, historical gardens and parks are usually open to members of the public, who use them for walking and recreation. They are often places of initial, hasty, furtive human contact.

Although they are not designed for this purpose, historical parks are increasingly used for public demonstrations, concerts, exhibitions of contemporary sculpture, shows and mega-shows, fairs, meetings, processions, sport or 'love parades'. People imagine themselves in natural surroundings, in the middle of an inviting décor. Organisers do not listen to anyone who raises the question as to whether such a park is capable of hosting events of this nature. Only the available space and the nature of the surroundings count. In the most favourable situation, financial compensation is forthcoming if any damage occurs.

The situation is rendered even more difficult by the stratification of landscapes. Only in the past 10 years has landscape as a form of cultural heritage been placed on the international agenda

(*UNESCO World Heritage; European Landscape Convention; Charter of Krakow 2000*). Around us we can see that landscapes alter due to their own dynamics and changing functions. Initially, we often respond emotionally and reject this. But how should one act?

In the case of national parks, the emphasis is more on nature, habitats and ecosystems rather than culture. It is certainly clear that cultural landscapes are not to be seen as open-air museums.

The ICOMOS-IFLA Committee has noted that there are 'poor levels of appreciation, understanding, information and care, among those who, in one capacity or another and at all levels, are responsible for looking after them, from government administrators to gardeners'.

It also mentions that there are inadequate standards of education, training and readily accessible information about:

- the principles and concepts that operate in connection with the ideas of 'heritage', 'culture', 'landscape' and 'conservation';
- the preparation of appropriate policies and management plans;
- the process and skills of management and upkeep.

Generally speaking, there is also 'inadequate explanation of the garden and landscape heritage to the public and insufficient engagement of them in its conservation'. This threat is also evident in 'poor levels of understanding of the relationship between the garden and landscape heritage and broader issues such as the quality of life for people, the quality of the human and natural environment'.

In this respect one must consider what is the social significance of a garden or park from the past. The Florence Charter refers to it:

> *as the expression of the direct affinity between civilization and nature, and as a place of enjoyment suited to meditation or repose, the garden thus acquires the cosmic significance of an idealized image of the world, a 'paradise' in the etymological sense of the term, and yet a testimony to a culture, a style, an age, and often to the originality of a creative artist (Article 5).*

The World Heritage Committee described heritage landscapes as 'combined works of nature and of man', which

> *are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal (Operational Guidelines Implementation, World Heritage Convention, Article 36).*

In many places, the large parks that were once part of regal palaces have become part of the fabric of modern cities. They are used intensively; in fact, so intensively that an admission fee is charged (Giardini di Boboli, Palazzo Pitti, Florence). In Vienna and Madrid the parks Schloss Schönbrunn (UNESCO World Heritage) and the Parque del Retiro respectively, are very popular with both the citizens of those cities and tourists. Millions of people visit them every year. One can imagine how a park suffers as a result.

Facilities need to be established in order to cope with such large numbers, which can change the historical structure of a park, for example, by paving and widening paths. Maintenance costs are high. It is but a small step to start considering hosting major events so as to be able to cover operating costs.

Should one actually allow fairs and similar attractions to be accommodated at the edge of a park designed by André Le Nôtre (the Jardin des Tuileries, Paris, France)? In Amsterdam (the Netherlands) the Vondelpark, a park that enjoys protection as a monument, is facing the threat of sinking into the soft, swampy subsoil a few centimetres every year.

Even parks and gardens that UNESCO has designated to be World Heritage sites can face direct threats or ones that are not directly visible. Relatively few sites of this nature are included in the World Heritage List, including the Classical Gardens of Suzhou, and the Summer Palace and Imperial Garden in Beijing (China), the gardens and castle in Kromeríz (Czech Republic), the parks of Versailles and Fontainebleau (France). In Germany there are the Castles of Augstusburg and Falkenlust in Brühl, and the palaces and parks of Potsdam and Berlin, such as the Park an der Ilm of classical Weimar. Then there is the immense park of the 18th-century Royal Palace in Caserta, in Italy, as well as the gardens of ancient Kyoto and ancient Nara in Japan. In Spain there is the Alhambra, Generalife and Albayzin in addition to the Parque Güell in Barcelona. As well, we have the Royal Domain of Drottningholm in Sweden and the Studley Royal Gardens of Fountains Abbey in the United Kingdom. In the past year the World Heritage Committee has placed the Shalimar Gardens in Pakistan on the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger.

For years now, great care and expertise have been devoted to the recovery and restoration of the chain of parks and gardens in Berlin and Potsdam (Glienicke, Babelsberg, Sanssouci, Neuer Garten and Pfaueninsel) situated alongside the Havel River. Where this heritage landscape was once threatened with the impact of the construction of a large building complex (Potsdam Centre), Germany is still developing plans for high frequency shipping on the Havel using boats with a length of some 200 metres. And all this in the heart of a heritage landscape of 'exceptional universal significance'.

By way of conclusion, mention can be made of other random but illustrative examples of acute threats in various places. Portugal boasts an extremely interesting heritage of gardens. Even in the case of a park that is protected as a monument – in this case the Quinta da Bacalhoa in Azeitao that dates from the 16th century – it appears to be possible for a new owner to destroy and remove not only historical vegetation but also the historical irrigation system. The ICOMOS-IFLA Committee has approached the Portuguese government in connection with this.

In addition, the examples below from Argentina, Bulgaria and Germany show potential outcomes of a similar nature.

Argentina: Cultural Landscapes and Historical Gardens[1]

Argentina originally possessed an outstanding landscape heritage. This was due to its position, climatic variety and range of geographical features: mountains, rainforests, ocean and river coasts, lakes, prairies, deserts, valleys, waterfalls, glaciers, and our immense and characteristic 'Argentinean pampa'.

With the Spanish conquest and the subsequent urbanisation of the territory, ancient and contemporary generations have depredated, degraded, polluted, contaminated and destroyed different natural properties. The pioneer actions of Charles Thays and Francisco P. Moreno in the beginning of the 20th century, which proposed and created the first Natural National Parks, have not been followed by example.

Our original landscape also included humans: the indigenous population that was decimated to 'enlarge the borders of the civilisation'. The resulting great empty space was partially replenished with the arrival of our direct ancestors – immigrants – who came from very different regions and contributed to the creation of a culturally diverse society. The idea of 'one' Argentinean identity

ignored the diverse landscape heritage as well as the cultural variety of the new inhabitants. (In fact, the Argentine Republic is a sum of regional identities.) The result was the concretion of an imported urban pattern across the whole territory that was based on attempts to establish a cultural and spatial 'standardisation'. Some transformations of our original landscape, due to the development of human settlements, produced cultural landscapes representative of our everyday life. Due to their scale and type of intervention, the character they had impressed on the land was retained over time: for example, farming, bridges and roads, and some urban coastal avenues. However, today we are also losing landscapes such as these.

The public-space pattern based on Spanish plazas without vegetation, followed by the adoption of a French-park design that included plantings, gave our cities a similar image to those we wanted to imitate overseas. As a result, Argentinean people were graced with a relative abundance of parks and plazas of great heritage value, most with enough value and history to be defined as historical gardens. Unfortunately, they were not taken care of or given appropriate respect. Consequently, the gardens that still exist no longer reflect the form and expanse of the original examples.

Today we face a harsh reality regarding our heritage in general and our landscape in particular. The main problems are:

1. Lack of a historical garden and landscape inheritance culture.
2. Ignorance of our natural and cultural heritage values.
3. Lack of knowledge of and non-compliance with the criteria established in international documents that the country has previously adopted.
4. Ineffective, non-professional, politicised, and non-transparent management of landscape and garden heritage by public agencies.
5. Incorrect maintenance of Listed Monuments.
6. Insufficient and incorrect legislation.
7. Absence of relevant trained professionals and technicians in public agencies.
8. An insufficient number of landscape and historical gardens listed as protected heritage. We only have the following examples: one park because of its landscape values, four squares because of their historical values, and several gardens adjoining listed buildings. Incredibly, none of them were included in the recent edition of the National Historical Monuments' Guide.

In addition, we face a number of challenges to the protection of our landscape and garden heritage.

Alarming decrease of green surface area

This is primarily caused by illegal usurpation and legal but confusing concessions of land in public spaces: almost all our public parks have been invaded by private clubs and institutions that take up enormous surface areas that must be returned to the public. These appropriations facilitate the loss of land integrity and result in a shrinking of fragile properties that deserve specific and specialised care. As a consequence of incomplete projects, even more numerous than those that have reached completion, all our parks suffer a constant over-use. The result is spatial suffocation and the depredation of our flora and fauna at an alarming rate. The direct sale of public historical gardens to private parties is well illustrated in the recent case of Salvador María del Carril Square in Buenos Aires city, which will now be developed to build a market place.

Loss of original design

This is being brought about by usurpations, incorrect maintenance by public agencies, and lack of surveillance of maintenance by sponsors. Unsympathetic elements have been included, altering the original design and features: for example – fences, wastebaskets, lighting, non-aesthetic monuments, publicity material. Neither the original style nor quality has been respected. Some years ago, a City Mayor demolished the most important part of Burle Marx's unique public masterwork.

Incorrect maintenance

There is often a failure to include the WHOLE property with its different components (design, vegetation, art masterworks, equipment, services, uses, signification, toponomy). Proper maintenance requires the efforts of multidisciplinary professional groups, which are not available in the public agencies so there is a need for ongoing consultation with NGOs. Providing lighting to a fountain, or the unveiling of a new statue, must be considered as parts of a guided professional project – not the results of political or diplomatic pressures or the whim of a government office. All historical gardens must have a professionally designed Master Plan that has been approved by appropriate government agencies, specialised professionals, NGOs and local community groups.

Unsuitable uses

Enormous musical or sports gatherings held in historical gardens and without proper preparation cause unforgivable damage. Motor vehicle transit in historical gardens and parks should be prohibited, minimised, or only allowed if at low speed. The construction of underground car parks beneath historical gardens has turned them into giant 'flowerpots', because the concrete car-park roof acts to prevent and obstruct root growth.

Incorrect organisation of government agencies responsible for public promenades

Public Parks Agencies have lost the centralised authority they had in the past, and today several different agencies participate in garden maintenance. The results are characterised by lack of consultation and overlapping responsibilities. Public Parks Agencies need to centralise and co-ordinate all maintenance actions, employing both regular surveillance and protection measures authorised through legislation. In addition, financial resources should be used with common sense.

Lack of correct legislation

Historical gardens constitute the majority of our public parks and urban squares. Only the Parque 9 de Julio (Tucumán City) is protected by national legislation that takes into account its landscape values. Private examples simply do not exist. Parks, gardens and squares are not included in the National Law of Protection.

Action

The following actions must be taken urgently:

1. Introduce adequate protective legislation at national, provincial and municipal levels.
2. Engage specialists with extensive experience in heritage protection and conservation theory and practice.
3. Include experts in different heritage fields in the National Commission of National Historical Monuments.
4. Prepare a scientific Historical Gardens Inventory and Catalogue as a first step to their legal protection.

5. Enhance the functions of government agencies by means of public, open and transparent contests for executive, counselling and technical positions in all Public Parks Agencies.
6. Organise local specialisation courses and seminars and offer scholarships to study overseas projects as we have very few experts in historical gardens and cultural landscapes.

Properties at risk

Cultural landscapes

- Iberá Lagoon (Corrientes Province): savage exploitation of natural resources and risk of construction of a bridge that will alter ecosystems without an environmental impact study.
- Martín García Island (Buenos Aires Province): jurisdictional incompatibilities are causing a disruption in the site's natural-cultural equilibrium.
- Costanera Sur Natural Park and Ecological Reserve (Buenos Aires City): more than 300 preventible fires, alteration of water salinity, plans to undertake 'cultural gardening' in a natural site.
- Río de la Plata (Buenos Aires City): environmental alteration, loss of the open river view.

Historical parks

- Independencia (Rosario City): usurpations, replacement of 'soft' materials with 'hard' ones, inappropriate uses.
- San Martín (Mendoza City): usurpations, inappropriate uses.
- 3 de Febrero (Buenos Aires City): usurpations, spatial desegregation, insufficient and incorrect maintenance activities, inappropriate uses, overuse.
- 9 de Julio (Tucumán City): over-use, inappropriate uses of a National Historic Landmark.
- General Mitre (Corrientes City): usurpations, inappropriate uses.
- Pereyra Iraola (Buenos Aires Province): intention of sale of an enormous section of land, almost 30%.

Historical gardens

- Numerous squares throughout the country (at least 50).
- Costanera Norte of Buenos Aires City: construction of an airport with coast refilling.
- Costanera of Corrientes City: loss of cliffs, inappropriate uses.
- Palacio San José and its gardens (Entre Ríos Province): incorrect conservation works at a National Historic Landmark.
- Villa Ocampo and its garden (San Isidro, Buenos Aires Province): National Historic Landmark, lack of maintenance by UNESCO, disagreement between government and NGO groups, incorrect recycling projects.

Bulgaria

Vrana Park

Vrana Park, formerly the property of the royal family, situated 11 kilometres from Sofia, occupies a total area of 80 hectares. The composition is shaped in a landscape style that was created by foreign specialists – Joul Lochot, landscape architect (France); Jochen Kelerer, rock-garden specialist and botanist (Austria); Anton Kraus, landscape gardener (Czech); and Wilhelm Schacht, landscape architect (Germany).

Its spatial and colourful arrangement, its valuable and exotic vegetation (skilfully used in its open spaces), periphery massifs and groups of trees, and strongly vertical and colourful effect, combine to make Vrana Park an outstanding and artistic example of park design. The effect of the composition is further strengthened by the style and placement of the pool and rock gardens.

More than 100 conifers, either free-standing or forming the basis of skilfully composed groups of trees, must urgently be cut down. They are all seriously affected by forest decline, compounded by the prolonged drought, polluted air and high temperatures of last summer.

Unfortunately, neither the political nor financial situation is sufficiently strong to guarantee the survival of the park.

Evksinograd Park

Evksinograd Park, the summer residence of the royal family, is situated on the Black Sea, 8 kilometres to the north of Varna. In 1894 Prince Alexander I Batemberg invited Karl Eduard Petzold to design the residential park. Unfortunately, the completion of the project was interrupted by the dethronement of the Prince.

His successor, King Ferdinand Sax-Coburg, charged Eduard André with the completion of the park. The territory of the park was enlarged to 55 hectares and the central part reconstructed in the French style.

The elegant composition of the park is a skilful harmony between French and English styles. The spatial composition is remarkable, characterised by impressive light and shadow effects and the seasonal dynamics of both local and exotic vegetation. There are more than 45 coniferous varieties, 26 deciduous tree varieties and 22 evergreen shrub varieties, all native to southern France, Hungary, Algeria and Syria. The surrounding Black Sea landscape serves to further intensify the already magnificent visual perspectives.

The state of vegetation that is more than 100 years old is very deteriorated. The period of internal social change coincided with the time when regeneration was urgently needed. Underestimation of the problem, lack of tradition, and the lack of skilled personnel and regional authorities, compounded by a severe lack of financing, have resulted in a crucial situation that puts the existence of the park in jeopardy.

Germany

The Berlin Tiergarten endangered by the Mega-event 'Love Parade'

The Berlin Tiergarten has been a listed park since May 1991. Covering 220 hectares, it is the largest, oldest and most historic park in Berlin. Since as early as the 1980s, comprehensive historic garden restorations and renewals have been undertaken that are intended to secure and strengthen the park in its traditional experience and recreation quality, as well as in its art historic and ecological importance.

The Tiergarten is renowned far beyond the borders of Berlin as an extraordinary work of garden architecture for the German-speaking nation. The State monument authority has applied an enormous amount of effort and funding. Despite this unique importance, since 1996 potentially destructive mega-events, the so-called 'Love-Parades', have been allowed to take place in the Tiergarten.

We are aware today that 10% of the 220-hectare large terrain has already been destroyed, which equates to approximately 0.5 hectares per 'Parade'. In the vicinity of 1.3 million 'ravers' roll through the Tiergarten during each annual 'Love-Parade', causing

damage worth millions. The ecological development of the listed park has already been thrown back by 10 years, so that all concerned groups are demanding an urgent stop to the parades that are destroying both the natural and cultural heritage.

Planned conservatory in the park of castle Benrath

Art historians consider castle Benrath near Düsseldorf, finished in the last third of the 18th century, as a culmination of the princely Maison de plaisance. Not only the castle, but also the park and garden, are legitimately praised as masterpieces of the late Rococo and were designed by the architect Nicolas de Pigage who was born in Lorraine and educated in Paris.

Although neglected for a long time, the Land Nordrhein Westfalen together with its capital Düsseldorf have increased their efforts to bring the park and castle Benrath back to the conscience of the general public and to the attention of interested experts through various activities within the framework of the Euroga 2002. These initiatives from State and communal institutions that aim at the revaluation, reconstruction and revitalisation of the historic garden aspects that have been neglected for a long time, are of special significance today with the application for the listing of Benrath in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

It is therefore of critical concern that the district council of the town of Düsseldorf have planned the construction of an oversized 'glass orangery' in the Benrath park. The placement of a large, modern orangery building at the nominated location must be considered very questionable, within the context of a significant and highly sensitive architectural, art and garden historic ensemble.

It is rightly feared that the size and incongruity of design of the orangery cold house – to be presented as a glass sculpture – would impose a totally unsympathetic element among the historic building and garden environment. Far from being visually integrated, it would result in an optic explosion.

While some consider the new structure to be a positive addition to the Benrath grounds, experience teaches us that it will lead instead to irreparable damage of the cultural values of the castle and its garden, as well as destroying the specifically rural quality of the ensemble. The disruptive effect of a new building with such design characteristics must be considered in advance.

With the large number of pot plants at Benrath, it makes practical sense to have a so-called cold house in the castle area. However, the aim should be for a restrained orangery building that does not interfere with the high quality of the monument. In the unhappy event that the decision is given to go ahead, and the modern glasshouse will still be placed at Benrath, it should be located outside the central area of Benrath at a site that does not interfere so dramatically with the monument and its garden.

ICOMOS-IFLA International Scientific Committee of Historic Gardens-Cultural Landscapes

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