Report of the Seminar “Historic Landscapes in the Modern Era”
Saint-Petersburg, Russia, 1-3 June 2009

Compte rendu du colloque “Historic Landscapes in the Modern Era”

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Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/paysage/27135
DOI: 10.4000/paysage.27135
ISSN: 1969-6124

Publisher
École nationale supérieure du paysage de Versailles-Marseille, Institut national des sciences appliquées Centre Val de Loire - École de la nature et du paysage, École nationale supérieure d'architecture et de paysage de Bordeaux, École nationale supérieure d'architecture et de paysage de Lille, Agrocampus Angers

Electronic reference

This text was automatically generated on 20 June 2022.
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Introduction

The “Historical Landscapes in the Modern Era” conference was held at the Mikhailovsky Castle in Saint Petersburg, Russia, over the first, second and third of June 2009. The initiative was supported by the city of Saint-Petersburg administration, Saint-Petersburg State Forest Technical Academy, Lincoln University in New Zealand and the International Federation of Landscape Architects. Abstracts were selected by the editorial panel following an international call for papers. About fifty attendees of the conference met together to discuss issues concerning the protection and reinterpretation of our historic and cultural landscapes throughout the disciplines of landscape architecture, contrasting the Russian case with several European, Asian and American contexts.

Protection, Restoration and Maintenance of Historical and cultural landscapes

In times of cultural globalization, urban growth is fast and our cities, our land and our landscapes are changing constantly. We need to interpret, enhance and protect our cultural and historical landscape which is a part of our patrimony.
The case of Saint Petersburg in Russia: the city "museum"

The most European of all the Russian cities, Saint Petersburg, has historically always set the standards of fashion in Russia. On its 306th anniversary, Saint Petersburg, which created the first course of landscape architecture in Russia 110 years ago, and which is the leading city in term of Parks and Gardens in Russia, presents a fantastic Green Spaces patrimony, requiring a high level of maintenance. Ekaterina Shaburova from "the Small Garden" landscape firm in Saint Petersburg presented a number of remarkable park complexes that have been renewed and restored such as Tavrichesky Park, Ekaterininsky Sad, Konstantinovsky Park, the Mars Field, the Garden of the 9th of January, Aleksandrovsky Park...

The city of Saint-Petersburg represents nowadays a popular tourist destination among European and international visitors, often attracted by the "museum aspect" of the city centre, its imperial architecture and parks and gardens. In order to exploit this historical patrimony, the city, concerned with preserving its unique character, invested a great deal of funding in the protection and maintenance of its imperial parks and gardens. In term of legislation, Russia presents different grades of intervention towards its landscape monuments: Protection, Restoration, Recreational Use of the park with maintenance of its historical elements and Complete Recreational Use of the park. There are six types of landscape monuments in Russia: Palace and Landscape Complexes, Estate Complexes, City and Country Mansions, Homes and Country Houses, Landscape Elements of Urban Environment, Gardens and Parks and Developed Areas of Industrial Institutions and finally Nature Landscape Park. The protection and the restoration often raises debates because of their non-viability economically.

How to remember the soviet era markers in the Russian landscape

Although Saint-Petersburg’s city centre architecture and urban planning is defined chiefly by its imperial past, there is another historical layer that shapes the unique urban landscape of this Russian city: the Soviet era. The Soviet era markers are located mainly around the imperial center and in the suburban districts. Shelley Cannady from the College of Environment and Design from the University of Georgia in the United States related her visit during the early years of Perestroika, and her first impression of this “surreal” landscape. She described her reminiscences of Soviet era in the socialist slogans and the omnipresent figure of Lenin, but also in the arctic sun light and the pre-soviet architecture. She described how the city of Petersburg inspired in her spatial experience as profound narrative. In her paper she refers to great Russian writer Dostoevsky, and relates the quality of the urban fabric and the impact of place and space on people’s lives to the contrast created by the juxtaposition of an imperialist town centre surrounded by suburban Modernist, Constructivist and Stalinist blocks. The didactic use of the landscape through signage and reference to Lenin symbolized the sign of a former social control and an imposed orderliness. Shelley Cannady finally underlined the lack of accessible public space in Saint Petersburg.
The case of the Russian and Dutch estates and their protection

In addition to a great historical city centre, the surroundings of Saint Petersburg encompass number of historic royal country estates.

The Saratov University in Russia proposes technical support to protect these estates which are nowadays deprived of the required maintenance. Despite of the interest of a certain number of German buyers for these fantastic imperial relics, most of the estates are in a bad state. In her paper about the role of Historical Recreational Objects in the Modern Era, Olga Sokolskaya from the Saratov State Agrarian University explains that the palaces and its gardens are threatened by transport, residential development and farm construction. The university conducted a study about the flora of the parks in the southwest of Privolzhskoj in order to support their restoration works. The type of park, regular or landscape, determines the type of restoration works. The level of maintenance required is generally high. The recommendations are therefore: annual replacement of lawn grasses, retaining existing forest ground cover, protection of young trees, all according to a realistic financial plan.

Martin Knuijt from OKRA Landschapsarchitecten in the Netherlands proposed practical solutions concerning the protection of Castles and Historic country Houses in South Holland. These houses constitute a part of the Dutch heritage and are often threatened by the proximity of infrastructure and residential developments. OKRA proposes “a proactive landscape strategy” through the “notion of maintaining through development” and the planting of a buffer between the various cores of the historic country domain to create and maintain a single whole. Additionally, the development of a new generation of country houses linked to the historic ones permits their protection. New use of nature, tourism and recreation can play a role in these developments. A large landscape “chamber” comparable to a regional landscape park within the urban area could also protect the historic country houses. Finally, Martin Knuijt suggested the importance of these houses as source of inspiration for new spatial planning projects. The research group proposed also to restore parts of these estates by involving private firms and creating passive touristic recreational activities, museums and exhibition as well as a surrounding buffer to protect the site.

The case of Slovakia: urban expansion over historic vineyards

The Slovakian case illustrates the problem of the lack of funding in certain countries for the protection of their historic landscapes. The case of the vineyards of Bratislava was presented by Katarina Kristianova from the Institute of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Slovak University of Technology.

The Ancient vineyards located on the slopes of the Small Carpathians in Bratislava were created and managed by German colonists for hundred years since the 16th century. After 1945, the Germans were forced to abandon the city, and it fell to the communist regime to protect the vineyards as agricultural land and preserve the genetic bank of the local vine. After 1989, the vineyards were recognized as valuable lands for residential purposes. The Spatial Plan of Bratislava is the guiding document for the development of the capital. The document protects the vineyards as “basis for traditional activities, and part of historical and cultural tradition of settlement, with their use in tourism”. However, urban sprawl is surrounds the vineyard, which is
mainly disused. The vineyards are not cultivated or maintained any longer. The absence of any economic activity on the parcels, the lack of maintenance and the residential development pressure may seriously endanger this historic landscape. The redevelopment of vineyard activity through land acquisition and new cultivation techniques as well as new land use regulations could allow for a better protection of this historical landscape.

The case of Turkey: the importance of tourism

The Turkish case illustrates the use of patrimony as commercial activity and the role of the government in maintaining and promoting its patrimony to attract tourism.

Two case studies from Turkey were presented during the conference. The first case dealt with the conservation of the architectural heritage of the monastery and its surroundings in Osk in the North East Antlia region, presented by Faris Karahan from the department of landscape architecture of the faculty of agriculture of Ataturk University. The second case was presented by Meryem Atik of the University of Akdeniz Faculty of Agriculture Department of Landscape Architecture and dealt with the restoration of Kaleici Old Town centre in the region of Antalya. The two Turkish papers emphasized the cultural meaning of these historic pieces in their local landscape and their importance in defining the identity of their communities. The restoration of these sites is proposed to develop the touristic potential of the place. Among many measures, the restoration work focuses on local identity through the use of traditional materials, techniques and local botanical essences. The urban design is considered through circulation studies, and the interrelation of public areas/buildings and street furniture. Economic development is based on commercial and tourist interest. Finally the sustainability side of the project encourages use of ecological materials and water recycling systems.

The second part of this paper deals with the different ways of combining historic artefacts and urban development

Is there a compromise between patrimony and new landscape architecture? Can we protect our historic landscapes as well as address the new environmental challenge of urban growth?

In order to protect their cultural and historic landscapes, public bodies are often pushed to exploit the touristic potential of their sites with the help of private interventions. However, modern cities require practical urban planning lines and usable public spaces.

Russian cities

As considered previously in the approach of Shelley Cannady, the landscape of Saint Petersburg, is composed of two layers in term of urban planning principles, architectural style and parks and garden design: the historic patrimony dating from the Imperial period, and the markers from the Soviet era.
The city of Saint Petersburg presents fantastic green spaces and historic gardens, yet nowadays these face pressing new issues: rapid urban growth and new financial potential. In this context, the city is looking at how to keep and protect the same quality historic spaces while at the same time developing the city. Larisa Kanunnikova from the Administration of the City of Saint Petersburg presented recent public realm schemes in Saint Petersburg introducing new materials, street furniture and contemporary design to the city. A modernization of the cityscape is generally in operation through public interventions and new residential development. The city of Saint-Petersburg development plan 2020/2025 includes a program for Green Design and reorganization for empty spaces with a special attention for residential development with internal courtyards.

However, Anna Zhelnina from the PNIS Department of the University of Saint Petersburg explained that the term “open urban space” is used instead of “public space” in the official documents of the City of Saint Petersburg, and that the social function of the space is often disregarded in comparison with its visual and historic character. Thus, the 300 year-old historic planning system created by Peter the Great doesn’t offer sufficient opportunities for new public places for “staying-in” and the city tends to be preserved “as a museum” instead of being adapted to the contemporary urban life of its inhabitants.

The city of Saint Petersburg is confronted to the problem of developing its urban grain to modern standards and in a sustainable way while conserving its rich historic patrimony and landscape.

To treat this difficult subject, Diane Menzies from the International Federation for Landscape Architecture gave examples of “providing new without destroying the past patrimony” by using “historic landscape as a source of inspiration for new design”. In particular, she cited the Herzog and De Meuron Beijing Stadium as a result of research into ancient Chinese design philosophies such as Feng Shui and Shang Shui.

**Russia and Netherland : a compromise between restoration and renovation**

Nadya Kerimova from Saint Petersburg State Forest Technical Academy and Ilona Cherepanova from Lanscaping Studio Botanik in Holland illustrated the idea of a compromise between restoration and renovation by analyzing different projects of landscape architecture in Russia and in the Netherlands. The historic artefacts are often used as source of inspiration in the geometry of the new design as well as for the botanical essences or even for the overall concept in terms of site usage and symbolic value in the urban context. The spaces often presented new design elements which complied with modern life styles. Thus, the reinterpretation of the historic past of the place responded to the need of expanding cities to create functional green public spaces.

**How to re interpret the Soviet past of the Russian cities ? Irkutsk**

Andrei Bolshakov from Irkutsk State Technical University delivered a severe critique concerning the heritage of the Soviet era in the city of Irkutsk. The city of Irkutsk was founded in 1661 on the Angara River. Thanks to an original geologic context and a rich
historic patrimony with numerous historical monuments and landscapes, the city has considerable tourism potential. However, the high urban density deprives the city of green open spaces. Andrei Bolshakov suggests that the urban planning principles applied during the soviet era in certain districts cannot be considered as valuable and that these parts of the city should be therefore recycled into public green areas.

The case of Greenwich Royal Park in London

Nigel Reeves and Ruth Holmes from London Royal Parks presented the case of Greenwich Park. Their paper described two aspects: the use of landscape design to refer to the historic landscape on one hand and to address the requirement for biodiversity conservation in the urban landscape on the other hand, which often constitutes a challenge in heavily-used public areas. Thus, Royal Parks of London sought a sustainable approach for landscape restoration and reconstruction projects. In the case of Greenwich Park, the oldest park of the London Royal Parks, investigations and studies were undertaken based on historic maps and legislative designation documents in order to conserve the special quality of the historic landscape of the park. The alignment of the trees, the framework and the character of the avenue and the essence used historically were carefully analyzed before beginning the restoration work. As part of the avenue restoration project, trees were planted. As historic key landscape features, the areas of open grassland were conserved, enhanced and managed for enhanced amenity. Natural grassland was maintained. Both trees and grasslands are under active conservation management to improve their wildlife value.

The case of Brazil: how to protect a local cultural landscape through an environmental approach

Cecilia Herzog from the Interdisciplinary Landscape and Environment Research Department of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro presented “Green infrastructures as a new paradigm to reconcile sustainable landscapes”.

Herzog’s study concerned a section of the recent urban expansion of Rio de Janeiro over the mangrove of the Guaratiba Archeological and Biological Reserve and the rainforest by the Pedra Branca State Park. A Green infrastructure plan was proposed by the academic research group to allow for a sustainable urban development. Ecotourism, ornamental plant production and sales could permit local economic dynamism, while vegetated patches connections, green streets and green ways would allow for a green urban transport plan. Finally a natural storm water management would protect the local biodiversity. The proposed plan seeks to reconcile both cultural and natural potentialities in a sustainable long term development.

A Dutch and an American intervention proposed different ways of approaching and dealing with our historic landscapes

In the context of urban sprawl and climate change in contemporary cities, the protection of historic landscapes is an objective that can be challenged.
The Dutch case: Landscape is timescape! Adapt to the environment to survive

Based on the fact that every square meter in the Netherlands was manmade during the last two centuries, Pieter Boone from the Dutch Government Service for Land and Water Management suggested that “the discussion about landscape and the way we shape it will take cognizance of the evolutionary theory of Darwinism”: it is not the strongest who survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one who adapts the best. Never urge for landscape preservation, all changes are irreversible, so change is good and even necessary. The current phenomena we are facing is climate change. The theory ‘Cradle to Cradle’ (McDonough and Braungart) proposes the need for sustainable use of landscapes and products, inspired by the way nature has managed things. This department of the Dutch government seeks to combine three streams in their practice and policy: landscape as a continuing story, evolution and sustainability. In this way Pieter Boone proposed an evolutionist point of view, and questioned therefore the necessity of the protection of our historic landscapes.

The English garden and the American approach: urban spaces which can provide a more livable environment for its citizens – the park in Porto, Portugal

Professor E. Lynn Miller from the University of Pennsylvania presented a brief history of the role of the park. Thus, his lecture progressed from the garden as “domestic space” under the Persians, Greeks, Romans or French toward “a clarion call for nature to be nurtured” under the English Landscape School. The American School, inspired by the English School, saw Central Park erected in New York by Olmsted and Vaux in 1858 under the statement: “…the single purpose of the park is to provide the best practicable means of healthful recreation for the inhabitants of all classes…” Sidonio Pardal from Universidade Tecnica de Lisbon presented The Porto City Park in Portugal. Here design doesn’t seek to protect the historic setting of the city but rather to propose an open space accessible to everyone, inspired by the concept of the American park. By presenting the American approach, Pardal and Lynn Miller tended to push for an alternative to conservation or restoration in the treatment of historical open spaces in large scale cities.

Conclusion

While the Soviet block is on its way back to the free market, Russia is questioning the challenge of protecting its historic landscapes, parks and gardens. Most of the Russian lectures concerned particular case studies and detailed scientific studies about the protection and maintenance of historic gardens. Relatively few discussions were directed at the political and economic issues of the new rising landscape architecture in Russia. There is no doubt that a better protection of the Russian historic landscape will be possible through education on one hand, and through the development of legal instruments on the other. Some participants discussed a better use of public space for people instead of conserving a “city museum”.

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Maria C. Taylor from the University of Wahsington spent 3 years in Russia. She presented her thesis about the urban design discourse in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. Her work was based on the study of the language and semantics of the designers and architects in today’s new Russian architectural projects. She presented an approach to historic landscapes related directly to the local context. There is a Russian way of protecting the historic artefacts and developing the Russian city which remains to be found. It will be related to the particulars of Russian history and to the social context of modern Russian cities.

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**Keywords:** Russia, historic landscapes, public space, urban development

**Mots-clés:** Russie, Paysages historiques, espace public, développement urbain, défi environnemental

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