



Landscape Values

Place and Praxis

Galway, 29th June – 2nd July 2016

Centre for Landscape Studies, NUI Galway

Tim Collins, Gesche Kindermann, Conor Newman & Nessa Cronin (eds)

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From Ottoman Gardens to European Parks: Transformation of Green Spaces in Belgrade

Zlata Vuksanović-Macura¹ and Dragana Ćorović²

^{1,2} *Research Fellow, Faculty of Architecture of Belgrade, University of Belgrade*

Introduction

At the turn of the 20th century there was a striving in Europe to establish a balance between the constructed city fabric and green space. Parks and squares with greenery became just as important as showcase buildings and entities within the city center. This paper investigates Belgrade's green areas, taking a concise look at their transformation in the historical context: changes in the city center during the 19th century, and concern for health and hygiene in the first half of the 20th century. The paper presents the production of green spaces in Belgrade's city center through the metamorphosis of devastated and abandoned public and private spaces, and through the creation of new green areas. This paper examines the relationship between culture and nature in Belgrade, within the context of its urban history, and its place values, changed by the new capitalist production of space.

Historical and theoretical overview

During the 19th century, Belgrade was a border city between the Ottoman Empire, represented by the Principality and Kingdom of Serbia, and the Habsburg Monarchy. There was a radical transformation of its urban landscape during this period, a process that was primarily driven by the paradigm of a modern European city. The protagonists of the transformation, wielders of political and economic power, followed the example of the state's capitalist development.

Theoreticians of urban political ecology consider that cities are 'built out of natural resources, through socially mediated natural processes' (Haynen *et al.* 2006, 4). Socio-environmental change enables a new urban nature to be produced where various social groups vie with each other in the process of creating their own living environment, in other words: 'the material conditions that comprise urban environments are controlled, manipulated and serve the interests of the elite at the expense of marginalized populations' (Haynen *et al.* 2006, 6). It is within this theoretical context that we investigate the transformation of green spaces in Belgrade during the first half of the 20th century. Transformation of the traditional attitude/relationship toward nature is

accompanied by the phenomenon of a new, *appropriated* nature that characterized a modern, capitalist city: 'Theoretically, nature is shrinking, but the signs of nature and the natural are multiplying, replacing and supplanting real "nature". [...] A tree, a flower, a branch, a scent, or a word can become signs of absence: of an illusory and fictive presence. [...] This space, which has been neutralized by a degrading form of democratization, has as its symbol the square.' (Lefebvre 2003, 27)

Ottoman Private Gardens in Belgrade

Three entities can be singled out in 19th century Belgrade: (i) the Fortress – stronghold of the Turkish army (ii) the Town located in the Moat (*Varoš u Šancu*) – the historic nucleus of the city; and (iii) the area beyond the Moat – marshland with scattered villages in the surrounding area. As of 1521, the city was mostly under Ottoman rule, except for periods of Austrian domination in the 18th century. As with many cities in the Balkans, over the centuries Belgrade became a characteristic multiethnic and multifaith environment – an assemblage of different communities that lived within their own *mahalles* (*Tr. mahalle* - neighborhood, quarter). From the establishment of the Principality of Serbia in 1815 until the Turkish garrison left the Fortress in 1867, a duality of Serbian and Turkish administrative authority was maintained in the city. Located between the Fortress and the Town in the Moat was Kalemegdan, the *town green* – barren and devastated, another symbol of the political and military tensions. Nineteenth century Belgrade resulted from several centuries of adhering to traditional codes of urban order following the principles of Ottoman town culture, and the new program of the national state and capitalist development implemented by representatives of the Serbian elite in the inherited physical environment, expressing new cultural practices. (Ćorović 2015, 75-94)

In the Ottoman areas of the Balkans, a house – as the basic unit of city districts – was defined by three-fold relations to 'wife, neighbor and nature' (Grabrijan, Najdhart 1957, 10). Among the unwritten rules of constructing residential buildings were 'the right to a view' and 'the cult of the neighborhood.' The green

infrastructure of the historic nucleus of Belgrade throughout almost the entire 19th century consisted of gardens next to houses from the Ottoman period. One description of old Belgrade says: 'One can sense that the primary intimate life of the family was focused on the yard, an enclosed circle of greenery and flowers. Belgrade of the past preferred its home and garden to the street.' (Kojić 1949, 70) In the late 1850s, gardens that adjoined houses were similar, regardless of the culture of their owners. A house was built to be a personal safe space in a city divided:

'All the windows looked onto alleys. Other Serbian houses at the time were surrounded by high walls. [...] So the Turks also surrounded their houses with walls and their houses were mostly placed in the center of gardens filled with trellises, a great variety of flowers and fountains.' (Đorđević 1927, 60)

Almost all the residential buildings in 19th century Belgrade were separated from the street by high walls and were divided into men's and women's parts of the house, the latter looking onto the inner yard. The yards invariably included a gate (*kapidžik*, Tr. *kapı* - gate) that led to their neighbors (Fig.1). Thus, the gardens of old Belgrade comprised a single, citywide, and at the same

time private, system of greenery. The system of these old gardens was, paradoxically, above the existing divisions; namely, it was possible to go from one *mahalle* to another by way of the gardens, without taking public city streets (Kačanski 1937). The gardens concealed a unique system of city pathways, which constituted a superstructure of the divided city. During 1830–62 in particular, old Turkish homes and their gardens changed ownership and were abandoned or re-sold. The degradation of these areas occurred almost imperceptibly, and many previously opulent gardens fell to ruin, in the expectation of better financial and political circumstances.

European Public Parks in Belgrade

The first pro-European regulation plan of the historic nucleus of Belgrade was made during 1864–67 by engineer Emilijan Josimović (Josimović 1867). His plan expressed a changed attitude toward land: by creating a data base on the terrain, soil quality, and the size and position of land lots, city land became a resource and a basis for collecting state taxes. The plan covered an area of about 90.0 ha. According to this plan, the largest of the old gardens in the city center were to become public green areas, with a total area of around 7.0 ha. Within this context, in writing about the public green areas of the city,



Fig.1. *Belgrade in the 19th century* (Jullia Wittgens, *Београдс* [Belgrade], colored lithograph, 36 x 25.5 cm, Wien, 1864; Belgrade City Museum, sign.: H1268)

Josimović accurately predicted that a time would come when it would not be possible to allot city land for green areas because it would all be in the hands of private speculators. The implementation of Josimović's plan was slow and obstructed by economic and political factors, but his vision of forming a park on Kalemegdan began to be realized. With time, Kalemegdan Park became a place of cultural, entertainment and art events and the host of a memorial culture of sorts, with an uncommonly large number of monuments and sculptures. We might say that Kalemegdan became a place of 'the urbanization of nature' within the modern city (Ćorović 2010/2012, 86-8; Vuksanović-Macura and Ćorović 2013, 227-8).

During the first decade of the 20th century, communal works were well underway—the creation of cadastral plans, leveling and regulating streets, continued construction of infrastructure systems, building schools, landscaping parks and squares. A 1906–07 municipal study on the state of apartment hygiene in Belgrade states that, out of a total of 1100.0 ha of city area, streets covered 152.0 ha, plazas 20.0 ha, parks and squares 28.0 ha, and wasteland 219.0 ha. Developed land lots covered 376.0 ha, and the Fortress covered 40.0 ha. Unregistered lots, unsurveyed roads, brickyards, empty lots, fields and meadows, covered around 265.0 ha, which, together with wasteland, made up more than half of the total city area. With regard to residential construction in Belgrade, as in other European cities, the beginning of the 20th century was marked by intensive exploitation of land by landowners, who left only the minimal free space required by law for yards in their effort to maximize profits from their land. The average lot in Belgrade was around 688.0 m² of which 248.0 m² were covered by the building, 387.0 m² constituted the yard and only 54.0 m² made up the garden. (Đurić 1912, 21–2)

In the early 20th century, even though the quality of the buildings in the center was poor for the most part, the price of land increased, which brought the replacement of old buildings with new ones with an increased coverage of the lots, and therefore a decrease in gardens and green areas in the city nucleus. Aleksandar Krstić (1932), long-time head of the Department of Parks and Reforestation, wrote that: 'The modern organization of human settlements from the health, aesthetic and finally, the social aspect, cannot be even imagined without sufficient city greenery.' This was in line with the widely accepted belief in the importance of providing a balance between urban fabric and open space (Fishman 2011, 33). The formation of parks and green spaces was an

instrument in the prevention of communicable diseases, which were causing the deaths of a large percentage of the city population. In the early 1930s, out of every 100,000 residents, 125 died annually from tuberculosis in Rome, 180 in Berlin, and 340 in Belgrade, which was almost a quarter of total deaths in the city (Vidaković 1931, 551). Such circumstances made it imperative to incorporate green and open spaces directly alongside the residential fabric and have them evenly distributed in all parts of the city.

In 1923, the Committee to Elaborate a General Plan concluded that Belgrade had very few parks, existing parks were unevenly distributed, and the city lacked tree-lined boulevards. Therefore the greenery system in the General Plan envisaged two peripheral rings with a larger number of radial lines bringing greenery into the center of the city, as well as parks with general and specific purposes (Vuksanović-Macura 2014, 266–8). It was ambitiously planned for open and green spaces to cover an area of around 3,750 ha, which was almost half of the total city territory, and to ensure at least two square meters of green space per resident. The implementation of this plan, as with Josimović's, was obstructed by economic and political factors, with frequent alterations to the planned concept. On the other hand, the practice of forming green spaces gradually began to develop, presented by Krstić (1934) thus:

'Work was being done in all parts of the city, planting began wherever there was available land, regardless of the General Plan. These areas, dressed in greenery, would serve as first-class reservoirs of fresh air and be excellent excursion sites for the people of Belgrade, especially the more impoverished classes [...] Thanks to reforestation and the creation of parks, many areas – until recently eyesores and sources of disease – were reclaimed and sanitized and now are nicely landscaped properties.'

In other words, undeveloped ground was used to create green spaces, but without a clear concept of developing a functional system of green and open spaces. Nevertheless, such an approach increased the total surface area of green spaces: in the mid-1920s parks and squares covered 24 ha, and a decade later they covered an area of 69 ha (Fig.2). The number of avenues of trees planted along streets of various importance leading from the center to the suburbs also increased significantly. In the mid-1920s around 2,000 trees were planted annually, whereas a decade later the number of trees planted was ten times greater, around 20,000 (Krstić 1934, 262).

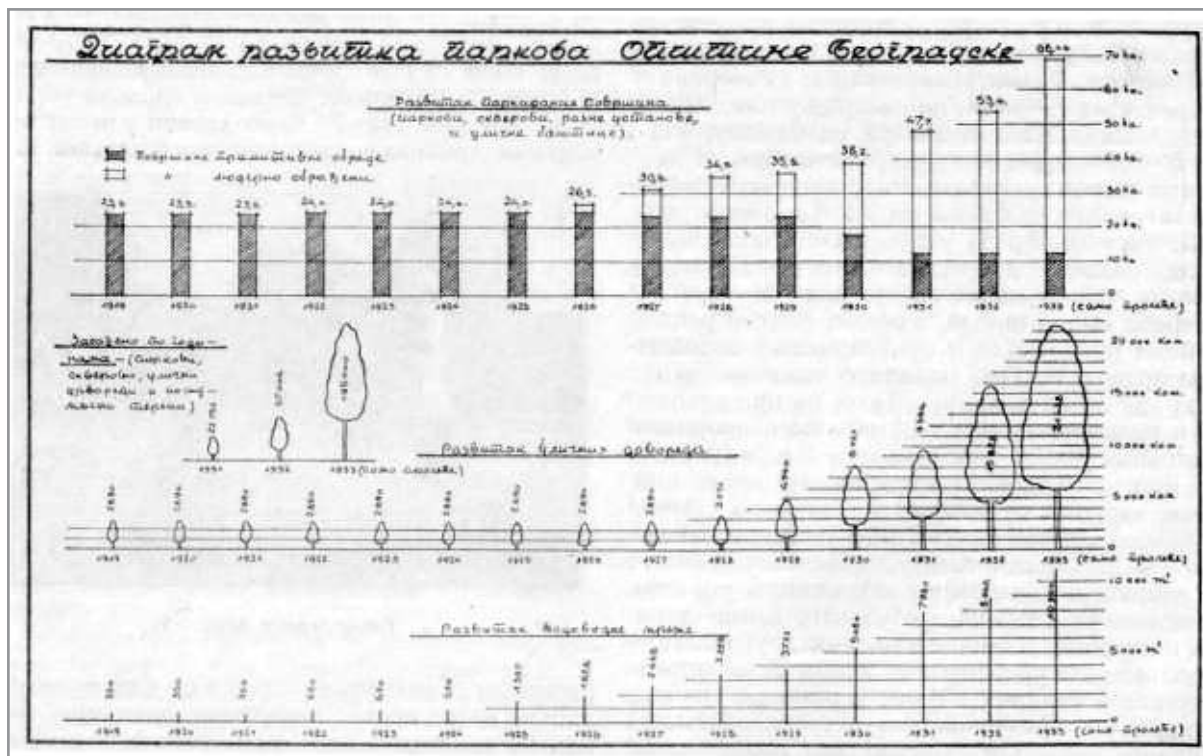


Fig.2. Development of Green Areas of Belgrade in 1919–1933 (Krstić, 1934, 262)

Belgrade Municipality used the creation of parks as a powerful instrument to cover up some of the major problems in the capital city. In 1930, the Municipality tore down hovels in part of the poor settlement of *Pištolj-mala* on the Danube, and constructed a park there, despite protests by residents and their deep conviction that it could not be right for ‘homes of the poor to be torn down so that the gentry might stroll’ (Vuksanović-Macura 2012, 76). From the viewpoint of the municipal authorities, the implementation of such measures was justified because it fulfilled the hygienic and aesthetic requirements of regulating the capital city. However, certain other stated principles that should have been adhered to, such as social justice, were entirely neglected and even bluntly violated. The poor residents were not offered any alternative solution as compensation for their demolished homes.

Inadequate management of land resources, the lack of money, and political outsmarting between city and State authorities led to the specific phenomenon of building so-called ‘temporary parks’ (Fig.3). With time, some of them became permanent solutions, and some of the city’s most important green spaces were created that way, eg Manjež Park and Terazije Terrace (Vuksanović-Macura 2014, 268–9). Changing the understanding of green spaces and their perception as common and public, as opposed to private property, placed a new dilemma before

Belgrade’s municipal authorities—how to landscape the undeveloped part of a plot if it contained a building with a larger number of residents, and not a single-family home in a garden that the family tended. This question became all the more significant with time, and the topic of landscaping common areas within housing block remains a challenge for Belgrade and its residents to this day.

Conclusion

At the turn of the 19th into the 20th century, Belgrade had already been transformed into a European city, judging by many urban indicators, including green areas. Intimate gardens of the Ottoman milieu gave way to public parks and busy city promenades. During the 19th century, parks and tree-lined Belgrade streets were still perceived as elements of city beautification, and members of the newly formed middle class eagerly frequented them *to see and be seen*. At the beginning of the 20th century green spaces become additionally significant from the aspect of urban hygiene, as *reservoirs of fresh air and areas for the citizen’s recreation*. The various strategies used by Belgrade Municipality and its technical services when creating green spaces were closely tied to social, political and economic processes. Bearing in mind previous experiences and history, we believe that city planning should be supported by environmental discourse, and that green city spaces, the city and its surroundings, should be viewed as an actual single entity.

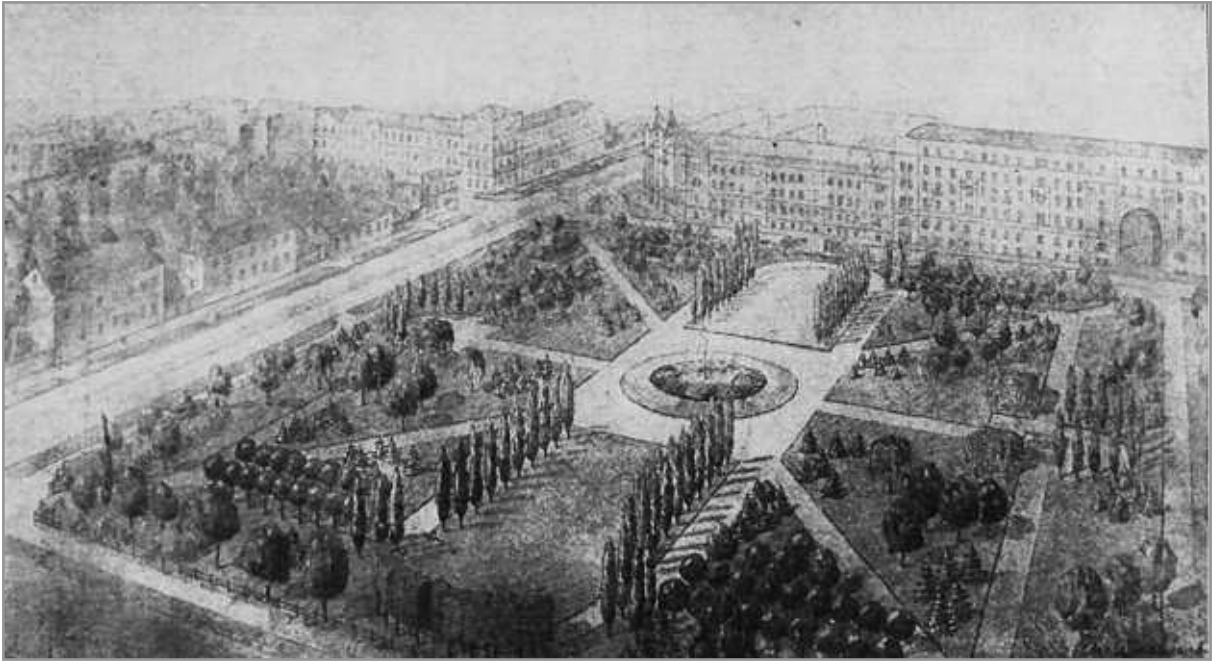


Fig.3. New Park Established on the Site of the Former Manège (Herenda, 1932, 744)

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Comhairle Contae an Chláir
Clare County Council



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí



Offaly County Council





The essays in this book, presented at the international conference Landscape Values: Place and Praxis held at NUI Galway, June 29th – July 2nd 2016, are about the values that accrue to places how values emerge, how they find expression, are recorded, and how they are considered in landscape management, policy and practice

Values have a central role in place-making and community well-being. These essays demonstrate that just as tangible and intangible values meld into one another, so also do natural and cultural values. Indeed, such distinctions are made redundant by the landscape paradigm.

The intellectual and social challenge of our times, and a major concern of the European Landscape Convention, is the antagonistic juxtaposition of monetary and social values. Essays in this book explore innovative ways to record communal and often more ethereal values associated with place, and offer new models of spatial planning and decision-making.

