

**URBANISTYKA  
I PLANOWANIE  
PRZESTRZENNE**

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**URBAN DESIGN  
AND SPACIAL PLANNING**

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# SPACE STRUCTURE AND OPEN SPACE RECREATION IN TIME DIMENSIONS

## STRUKTURA PRZESTRZENNA I OTWARTE OBSZARY REKREACJI W WYMIARACH CZASOWYCH

### ABSTRACT

The public demand for urban parks, citizens' use and habits are different in every age and region. But do public parks have some eternal, unchanging values in a field of social welfare? Can we regard the idea as a value, which brought to life the 18<sup>th</sup> century public park movement in today's rushing, tinsel and digital world? Can we find any general aspect in park use forms, which is true, even to the casual visitor or a tourist in a historical garden or a daily guest in an average city park.

The Budapest Városliget is one of the world's first urban park, in some ways perhaps the first. The site was used for urban recreation from mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, and then the city of Pest decided to develop a public park to increase the livability of the city. The plan was drawn up by Heinrich Nebbien between 1813–1816. Although Nebbien's plan realized partly due to the lack of resources, in the capital's life the Városliget have been acting – with changing functions and space structure – as a vital part of the open space recreation for 200 years. This article focuses on the role of urban public parks, and analyses the relationship between changing space structure and use on the example of Városliget. The Városliget analysis is based on the structural and park user surveys, which were made during the last three decades. The history of the urban park clearly illustrates that cramming new functions beyond the historical outdoor recreational activities has not increased the value of the park, but significantly deteriorate what is value and what makes the park loveable.

It is almost understandable that the park is not on the international tourism program, it does not appear on the map of the capital's iconic creations, institutions. But it could be there. Everything predestines for it: two centuries of history, the idea of its birth and creation, its location in the city structure, its current old and valuable trees. The Városliget is a value in itself, without stuffing and subsuming with new institutional functions.

**Key words:** Városliget, Budapest, public park, historical urban park

### STRESZCZENIE

Wymagania publiczne stawiane parkom miejskim, sposoby użytkowania i przyzwyczajenia mieszkańców miast różnią się, w zależności od wieku i regionu. Ale czy parki publiczne mają jakieś odwieczne, niezmiennie wartości w dziedzinie uzdrawiania społeczeństwa? Czy w dzisiejszym pędzie, blichtrze i cyfrowym świecie, idea, która powołała do życia XVIII wieczny ruch parków publicznych, możemy postrzegać, jako wartość?

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Czy możemy odnaleźć uniwersalny aspekt w sposobie użytkowania parków, który będzie sprawdzał się, nawet w przypadku zwyczajnych użytkowników, turystów zwiedzających ogrody historyczne czy też osób codziennie odwiedzających zwyczajne parki?

Budapeszt *Városliget* jest jednym z pierwszych światowych parków miejskich, w niektórych aspektach prawdopodobnie najwcześniejszym. Miejsce to było użytkowane, jako teren do rekreacji od połowy XVIII w., wtedy miasto Peszt zdecydowało o rozwoju parku publicznego, aby poprawić jakość życia w mieście. Park został zaprojektowany przez Heinricha Nebbiena w latach 1813–1816. Pomimo, że plan Nebbiena został zrealizowany częściowo, ze względu na brak środków, to *Városliget* zaczął funkcjonować w życiu stolicy, przyczyniając się do zmiany funkcji i struktury przestrzennej, jako istotna część otwartej przestrzeni do rekreacji, użytkowanej przez kolejne 200 lat.

Artykuł dotyczy roli miejskich parków publicznych i analizy relacji pomiędzy zmieniającą się strukturą przestrzenną i sposobem użytkowania, na przykładzie parku *Városliget*. Analizy parku opierały się na badaniach struktury i użytkowników parku i zostały wykonane w ciągu ostatnich trzech dekad. Historia parku miejskiego czytelnie obrazuje, że wprowadzanie nowych funkcji, poza funkcją historyczną, jaką był otwarty teren rekreacji, nie zwiększyło wartości parku, ale przyczyniło się do znaczącej degradacji wartości i czynników, dzięki którym park cieszył się sympatią użytkowników.

Częściowo zrozumiałe jest, że park nie jest objęty międzynarodowym programem turystycznym i nie figuruje na mapie kulturowych dzieł i instytucji stolicy. Ale może się tam znaleźć. Wszystko na to wskazuje: trwająca dwa wieki historia parku, idea jego powstania i kreacji, lokalizacja w strukturze miasta, zabytkowy i wartościowy drzewostan. *Városliget* jest wartością samą w sobie, bez tworzenia i podporządkowywania się nowym instytucjom i funkcjom.

does not refer in this case to spatial chaos which can be a result of implementation of Local Spatial Management Plan.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Budapeszt, historyczny park miejski, park publiczny, *Városliget*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world's first urban public parks emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the history of landscape architecture these are the first works which were open and available for free to all people. For the first time Christian Hirschfeld wrote about the need of their establishment, and design considerations in his book called *Theorie der Gartenkunst*. According to Hirschfeld every city needs places (*volksgarten*), where the townspeople can gather in order to enjoy fresh air. His essays touch design and space planning aspects, he notes that the “*volksgarten*” must support people's demands, it has to provide shaded, rain and wind sheltered areas and places should be established for boating or listening to music (Csepely, 2011).

The *Városliget* is the oldest and one of the largest public park in Budapest – it lies on almost 100 hectares. It is regarded among the first public parks in Europe, which was fundamentally designed according to people's needs. Today, the *Városliget* is the most significant green area of the city centre, due to the last decades' increasing load and changing park use, the renewal has become relevant.

## 2. THE AIM AND STATE OF RESEARCH

Our research aims to determine the moments which have a high impact on the park and catalyzed – sometimes caused irreversible – changes on the space structure and use. By studying these moments the

future interventions' impact can be predicted. Today it is crucial, because enormous building complex are being planned into the *Városliget*. (*Liget Budapest, Museum Quarter*).

Our research question is how space structure and functions related to the use of the park? We chose six snapshot in the history of the *Városliget* and analysed the park's location in the city fabric, the park's inner structure and connections, the vegetation and use. Historical city maps, drawings, graphics and photos were used in order to examine the changes. Besides, we integrated the results of the park user surveys made in the last fourty years. (Szilágyi-Veréb, 2014).

## 3. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

Cities along with its urban open spaces have going through several changes in the course of their development in time and space. As urban open spaces, the public park functions act on the standards and citizen's demands of a given age, so **the spatial structure can be considered as a footprint of the current political, economic and social conditions.** (Zelenák-Balogh, 2015).

The *Városliget* – likewise several public gardens throughout Europe –was conceived in the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The new city regulatory plans of Pest were prepared by the Royal Embellishment Committee. The aim of the design competition, announced in 1813, was to “**serve people of all classes, so they can meet the comfort of mother nature**”

(Nebbien, 1816). As the location of the first public park, a previously afforested area was chosen, that was already treated by the intent of creating a convenient recreational area serving the citizens of Pest. (Jámbor, 2015) In the lack of a broad development plan, the area had no unified space structure and several incongruous functions – such as grazeland, orchard, recreation forest – emerged in the “Stadtwäldchen”<sup>4</sup>. (Ill. 1/1810).

Heinrich Christian Nebbien, a famous landscape architect of his time, was announced as the winner of the contest. By his masterpiece, Pest was enriched with one of Central-Europe’s most significant public park. The core elements of Nebbien’s design – the space structure, the water features and the path-system – was realized between 1816 and 1832. The **freely shaped spatial structure**, the **wide walkways traced out to the boundaries** – from where artistic pictures are offered to the inner open spaces and water structure – and **the statuesque tree clumps** are all characteristic components of the **Classical picturesque landscape garden** that can be observed also in the works of William Kent. (Jámbor, 2015) This asymmetric, loose composition defines the whole park, except the entrance area, the only spot where the closed vegetation of the Városliget is opening up, at the Rondó.

The strict geometrical form of the urban axis and the alley – that joins here to the circular shape Rondó – dissolves in the surrounding densely planted tree clumps before entering the 130 hectare park. The generous reception area of 100 fathoms (180 m) diameter lawn surrounded by a double alley and a promenade receiving the carriage joyriders, horseback riders and strolling citizens to the park. (Szilagyi et al. 2014) Referring to the previous use of the urban forest, Nebbien designed a grange, where the citizens could taste the delights of the farmers’ life. (Ill. 1/1836).

Between 1845–46, the **first railway line** of Hungary was built, which connected Pest with Vác. It was running on the northern part of the Városliget, cutting through the most significant open grasslawn that was an essential element of Nebbien’s picturesque views. By detaching the 21 hectare area, Városliget also lost its closed spacewalls formed by mature vegetation that ensured the space structure and the intimate milieu. Despite the undeserved mutilation, **the space structure of Városliget could still recover**. The remaining spacewalls were completed by further plantings and the maimed spaces were

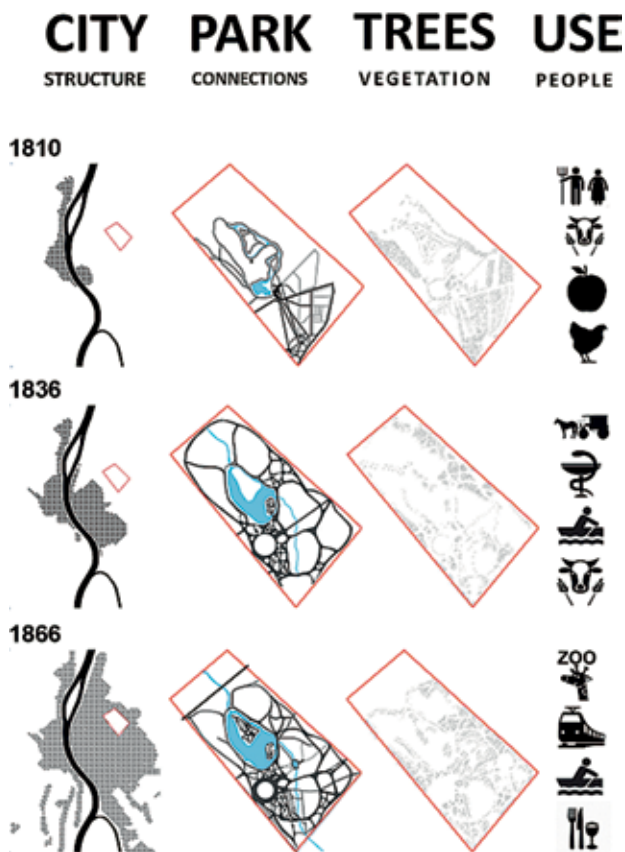
partitioned by similar space-proportions and compositions intent to Nebbien’s concept. (Jámbor, 2015).

After the Embellishment Committee Of Pest ceased to exist in 1857, the City Park ownership returned to Pest in 1861 and a new era of the Városliget had begun. **It was treated as a pleasant scenery capable for distinct utilization**. As a first step, the **Zoological Garden of Pest was established** in an 18 hectare part of the public park between 1864 and 1866. (Jámbor, 2015) Though in the 1860s the Városliget was already surrounded by the urban fabric, still enough undeveloped area remained closeby that could have host an even greater scale zoo. The choice of the location presumably had a rehabilitation intent. This intervention offered a new function for the less valuable areas next to the railway lines, but also meant an initial impetus for the fragmentation of Nebbien’s generous spatial structure. (Ill. 1/1866).

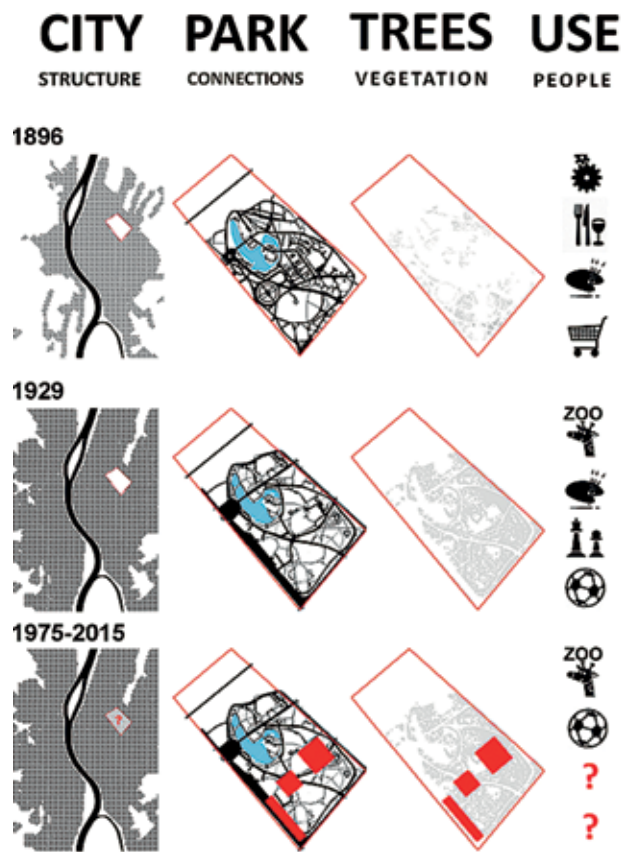
After the union of Pest, Buda and Óbuda, the capital of Hungary was facing grandiose urban developments. The former urban axis ending up in the Rondó, the Városligeti Alley couldn’t serve the increasing traffic load of the era, therefore a new avenue (the UNESCO worldheritage Andrassy Street) was set out to take over its role. The Avenue was also connecting the dense city center with the Városliget and just like its ancestor, it ended in a spacious square, in the Heroes’ Square that became the new main portal of the Városliget. Since the **new entrance indicated new spatial hierarchy, space structure and walkway-system**, the **Rondó lost its function** and degraded into an ornamental element of the park. (Ill. 1/1896).

As the millennium of the state foundation was approaching grandiose urban developments and festive events were under planning. The focal point of the 1896 events, **the Millennium Expo**, was located in the hearth of the Városliget, in the central area that still preserved the spatial structure of Nebbien’s plans defined by mature vegetation. Several hundred valuable 40–50 years old trees had been removed to offer 55 hectares area for the 240 expo pavilions (Szilagyi et al. 2014). **Even though the Expo was a temporary event, it had an irreversible effect on the spatial structure and use of the Városliget**. The generous **open spaces had disappeared** and the **fragmentation of the leftover open spaces** were accelerating. Not only the space structure, but also the function of the Városliget had been significantly modified. The new functions – such as museums, art galleries – attracted by the Millennium Expo provided a base of reference for further installations and fragmentation. (Ill. 1/1896).

<sup>4</sup> At that time the land of the Városliget was called „Stadtwäldchen”, Urban Forest.



Ill. 1. The changing space structure and use in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
 Il. 1. Zmieniająca się struktura przestrzenna i sposób użytkowania w XIX w.



Ill. 2. The changing space structure and use in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.  
 Il. 2. Zmieniająca się struktura przestrzenna i sposób użytkowania pod koniec wieku XIX i w wieku XX.

A few years later the famous Széchenyi Thermal Bath has been established in the land of the former 10 hectare large Great Lake. **The new function indicated new demands on its surrounding area.** The Kós Károly Avenue has been created, by the plans of Károly Ráde, in order to ensure the accessibility of the bath's main entrance by connecting it through the Heroes' Square with the Andrassy Avenue. As the fragmentation effect of the new boulevard, the **northern side of the Városliget** with its mainly institutional functions (Zoo, Circus, Amusement Park, Thermal Bath) **got isolated** from the rest of the Városliget. This tendency becomes more intense in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the M3 highway will join to the Kós Károly Promenade and it becomes the introductory section of the highway.

The recently emerging new functions and institutions, the impact of the Millennium Expo and also the new park user demands raised the need of a new, unified master plan for the Városliget. The plan was realized in 1929 according to the concept of Károly Ráde. This was the time, when the **Városliget gained its new shape** (that is still preserved) and **lost the generous space propotions' of Nebbien's**

**concept.** By preserving the small spaces, formed during the expo, a significantly fragmented, eclectic space structure was conserved without distinct large scale woodlands and open grass lawns, shady and sunny areas that had remarkable social-sanitary purpose. Previously the semi-urban function of sauntering was concentrated in the Rondó, but after the hierarchic path-system of Ráde was installed, the whole Városliget was conquered by this function. (Ill. 1/1929).

The **Heroes' Square** – that was formerly enriched by flowerbeds, grasslands and a fountain – **got paved** in 1938, ruining the transition between the city and the park. As a result the **Heroes' Square is no longer an integral part of the Városliget**, which momentum catalyzed further reductions of the green surfaces on this eastern edge of the park.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Budapest was growing to a metropolis, but the urban developments were defined by the socialist and communist ideologies. The 80 meter wide eastern edge of the Városliget was transformed into a paved square – to the Felvonulási Square – for labour movement marches, military parades and spare runaway in

need. That caused not only a spatial change, but also **added a new – political meaning of the space.** (Eplényi, 2007) This severe intervention not only introduced an extra function in the park, but also tore down a significant part of the Rondó and eliminated the former dense vegetation that supported the inner open spaces. The transformation of the inviting space-walls into a wide paved area destroyed the former sensitive transition between the urban fabric and the park. (Ill. 1/1975).

Referring to the Millennium Expo, in 1958 the city management decided to “utilize” the central area of the Városliget as the location of the Budapest International Fair. As the international role of the fair was increasing, its area was fortified by high walls and fences. (Jámbor, 2015) The **unlimited usage** –that was the core intent of Városliget’s establishment – **was partially eliminated.** The fair was relocated only in 1972, when a new design contest was announced for the reconstruction of the Városliget. (Ill. 1/1975).

Between 1974 and 1975 a new functional system – inspired by the design contest – was developed in the remaining unrestricted public areas of the park. (Szilágyi-Veréb, 2014) This new spatial structure shows more relation to Nebbien’s design intention than the former state of the park. The eclectic micro--spaces system of Råde disappears and the functional distribution of the Városliget is enriched by new units that fulfill (play garden, relaxing garden, playground and several sport field) the emerging recreational demands of the era.

Basically the space structure and the functions of Városliget have not changed since 1975, but currently the 200 years old public park faces grandiose developments. The establishment of new institutions might override again the current space structure and in the lack of a comprehensive master plan, additional fragmentation process is to be expected.

#### 4. RESULTS

While studying the history of Városliget, the repetition of certain effect and their consequent impacts can be observed, which recognition might help to predict the impact of specific future interventions. The effects – that catalyzed significant spatial and functional changes on the Városliget – can be sorted into three categories.

**The urban developments** – such as new axis inside the park (railway line, Kós Károly Promenade) and in the urban fabric (Andrássy Avenue, M3 highway) – **reorganized the space structure, the visitor distribution, the entrance areas and**

**the transitions** between the park and the city. After the transformation and function loss of the main entrances (Rondó, Heroes’ Square) the park became less readable, which causes still **orientation problems** for the park users. (Fekete-Reith, 2012).

The **additional institutions** (zoological garden, thermal bath, museums) that ‘utilized’ the ‘leftover’ open spaces, **indicated new demands.** In order to support the new functions the infrastructure had to develop, which meant further spatial fragmentation.

During the **regularly emerging events** (Millennium Expo, Budapest International Fair), Városliget was considered as a beautiful scenery. The temporary events had irreversible effect of the space structure and the permanent events caused even more **severe fragmentation.**

Even though the core elements of Nebbien’s design – the space-structure, the water features and the path-system – had significantly changed, the **recreational and urban ecological role always remained significant.**

#### 5. SUMMARY

The Városliget had to accommodate various needs, developments and institutional expansion besides its original function as a public park. The capital has not ensured the protection of the park, although it would worth on the grounds of its garden art and historical values. Even if Nebbien’s dream was only built in a modest version and later the park repeatedly become the victim of installations and temporary buildings.

The Városliget is quite rundown today, since the last major renovation was in 1975. The park recreational infrastructure has not kept pace with the changing urban needs. However, it is no „brown field”, where radically new development targets must be assigned new values. The “beautiful nature” experience can be hardly harmonize with the tourism and intense development plans which subordinate the park’s original values.

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