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# LATE MODERN PARK HIGH ABOVE THE CITY – SPACE COMPOSITION OF THE 50 YEARS OLD *JUBILEUM* PARK IN BUDAPEST

## NOWOCZESNY PARK WYSOKO NAD MIASTEM – KOMPOZYCJA 50-LETNIEGO PARKU JUBILEUM W BUDAPESZCIE

### ABSTRACT

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century numerous parks were built all over Europe, which, though different in many aspects, still show certain similarities in space structure and composition. The question is, whether late modern public parks, built in the second half on the 20<sup>th</sup> century follow the classical design and composition „rules”? How did the extremely functionalist design approach of the era after WW2 influence park design?

The answer is the result of a detailed analysis on space structure and composition principles of the parks built in these times. In this research I analyzed according to specific criteria the Jubileum Park in Budapest, one of the most prominent work of the late modern period in Hungary.

The 12 ha Jubileum Park (built in 1965) is located in the heart of Budapest, on the top of Gellért Hill, next to river Danube. Laying high above the city on an exposed hillside, the park offers a broad view of the whole city. The structure of the park is basically determined by the extreme topography, and one of the great value of the park is the natural looking grading, which determines the space structure and fits to the natural terrain very nicely, and the walkway system, which fits to the contour lines and explores the whole site. Fitting to the windy and exposed hilltop position, in space division the terrain in the most appealing, the plantation is only secondary. From formal point an interesting feature is the dominance of two dimensional elements with characteristic shape, like flowerbeds or ornamental pools and the curves of the walkway system. Though the main function of the park is to underline the fantastic visual potential with providing viewpoints, there are some playgrounds as well. For the visitor of today the specialty of the park celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, is, that – disregarding some minor changes – there were no alterations since it exists.

As a first step I analyzed the space structure of the park, putting an extra emphasis on the existence or lack of any axis, on the accentuation of the park entrances, on the space organization inside the park and on the existence/lack of hierarchy. Important aspect of analysis was the connection of the park to connecting urban fabric and green surfaces nearby. The next step was to compare the results with other parks built in former times, but having similar natural setting.

The goal of the research is to determine, how much the spatial composition of Jubileum Park is different from the spatial composition of classical parks. The results might help to realize, what kind of spatial composition and space structure is typical of late modern parks. It would be important to preserve these space structural specialties of the Jubileum Park during a more and more urgent renovation.

**Keywords:** late modern, spatial structure, repetition of elements, terraces.

## STRESZCZENIE

W XIX i 1. połowie XX wieku w całej Europie powstały liczne parki, które choć różnią się pod wieloma względami, wykazują jednak pewne podobieństwa w strukturze przestrzennej i kompozycji. Pytanie brzmi, czy późne nowoczesne parki publiczne, wybudowane w 2. połowie XX wieku posiadają cechy klasycznego designu i „zasady” kompozycyjne? Jak oddziałuje ekstremalnie funkcjonalne podejście na projektowanie parków ery po II wojnie światowej?

Odpowiedź jest wynikiem szczegółowej analizy w zakresie struktury powierzchni i zasad kompozycyjnych parków wybudowanych w tych czasach. W badaniach analizowano, według przyjętych kryteriów, Park *Jubileum* w Budapeszcie, jedną z najbardziej znanych, współczesnych realizacji na Węgrzech.

12 ha Park *Jubileum* (zbudowany w 1965 roku) znajduje się w samym sercu Budapesztu, na szczycie Góry Gellerta, obok Dunaju. Lokalizacja wysoko nad miastem, na odsłoniętym zboczu, daje możliwość szerokich panoram widokowych na całe miasto. Układ parku jest zasadniczo zależy od mocno urozmaiconej topografii, a jednym z jego największych walorów jest naturalisty wygląd zbocza, które określa strukturę przestrzeni i wpisuje się w naturalny teren, a także system ścieżek poprowadzonych wzdłuż linii konturów. Z formalnego punktu widzenia, ciekawą cechą jest dominacja obiektów dwuwymiarowych, o charakterystycznych kształtach, jak rabaty kwiatowe lub ozdobne baseny oraz układ systemu ścieżek. Pomimo, iż główną funkcją parku jest podkreślenie fantastyczny walorów widokowych, istnieje także kilka placów zabaw. Dla współczesnych użytkowników, główną zaletą parku, który w tym roku obchodzi 50-lecie istnienia, jest fakt, iż – pomimo kilku niewielkich elementów – od czasu jego powstania, nie wprowadzono w nim zasadniczych zmian.

W pierwszym kroku analizie poddana została struktura przestrzenna parku, stawiając dodatkowy nacisk na istnienie lub brak jakiegokolwiek osi, na zaakcentowaniu wejść, organizację przestrzeni wewnątrz parku i na istnieniu/braku hierarchii. Ważnym elementem analizy był aspekt połączenie parku z tkanką miejską i terenami zieleni znajdującymi się w pobliżu. Następnym krokiem było porównanie wyników z innych parków powstałych przed laty, ale o podobnym otoczeniu przyrody.

Celem przeprowadzonych badań jest określenie, jak bardzo kompozycja przestrzenna Parku *Jubileum* różni się od kompozycji przestrzennej w klasycznych parkach. Wyniki mogą pomóc zrozumieć, jakiego rodzaju kompozycja i struktura przestrzenna jest typowa dla nowoczesnych parków. Byłoby ważne, aby zachować te specjalne miejsca i struktury Parku *Jubileum*, podczas coraz bardziej pilnego remontu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nowoczesność, powtarzalność elementów, struktura przestrzenna, tarasy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There were only very few new parks built in Budapest during the '960s and '970s. In these decades green surface development connected to housing estate developments were more common. According to landscape architects of that period approximately 75–80% of all assignments were openspace design of new housing estates. Though those were complex and extremely diverse tasks, in most cases dull and boring projects with very small budget, which often used type-design.

In this professional environment a real curiosity was the design project of 10 ha Jubileum Park, located in the heart of Budapest, on the south-western slope of Gellért Hill in a fantastic visual environment. The park was executed for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the „deliberation”<sup>1</sup> of Hungary. The special actuality of this presentation is, that the park celebrates it's 50<sup>th</sup> „birthday” this year.

## The research goal

The goal of our research is to clarify the value of the park as a representative of late modern landscape architecture. From research point of view it is an advantage, that until now there haven't been any significant changes in the park. Though the vegetation is overgrown, so the original visual connections, the broad vistas can be enjoyed any more, the spatial structure, the placement of plant – groups, the layout and materialization of pavements, the form of flowerbeds are still according to the original design. The traces of original water structures can be traced even today, and statues can be seen at their original place, only with some exception.

But the park renovation is just a question of time, when it has to be decided, whether it will be restored according to the original design, or a new, more contemporary concept will be executed by demolishing partially or fully the present form. In this case the last late modern park in Budapest would disappear forever.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The evaluation of the park as an example of late modern landscape architecture is based on how

<sup>1</sup> A widespread expression for the end of WW2 in the socialist times

much its composition, its space structure and applied elements fit into the characteristics of late modern landscape architecture. As a first step the landscape architectural characteristics of late modern art should be clarified which isn't well-known even in professional circles, and as second step in this light the park have to be analyzed.

### 3. OPENSOURCE DESIGN OF LATE MODERN ERA<sup>2</sup>

Modern is not just an art historical period with typical formal solutions, but it is a more comprehensive term – similar to Renaissance or Baroque. It is a movements that strives to give tools and forms to a life on the premises of modernity, based on the conditions of modern life. If we consider modernity from this point, it can be stated, that modernity was born already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the level of ideas by the birth of social thinking.<sup>3</sup> The landscape architectural projection of social thinking is the public park idea, which provides recreation for the broad public. Of course from formal point the 19<sup>th</sup> century public parks cannot be considered as modern works of art, typically built in late English landscape style. (Other important idea of Modern Movement, the faith in progress is reflected in the urban utopias of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.)

The birth of modern from formal point started with a great „breakthrough” after WW1, and lasted till the beginning of the 90's. The aesthetical language of the modern between the two world wars and after WW2 is so different, that it is sensible to divide the Modern era into an early modern period (before WW2) and a late modern period (after WW2).

Similar to Modern, post-modern was born on the level of ideas way before its formal appearance, at the time of Student Revolution in 1968, when the students protested with the slogan of „Power of Imagination” against the strictly controlled modern works which were obviously man-made. However from formal point the post- modern landscape architecture was born only in the first half on 90s.<sup>4</sup>

The architectural, landscape architectural aesthetical language of modern is heavily controlled, the modern works of art make the human intervention into nature obvious, the goal is to connect culture (man-made environment) and nature. Among the two approaches running through the history of landscape architecture, the architectural and the

natural approach, in the modern times the architectural character is dominant. In terms of composition the Cartesian system is typical in the European modern works. In case of American modern landscape, though the man – made character is obvious, from formal point we see some differences. In terms of plant use modern style builds on horticultural traditions as the opposite of natural plant use. (Use of identical plants in masses like a plantation, instead of semi-natural plant communities) In terms of grading, earth terraces which are characteristically man – made and plats, often paved and supported by built structure, are typical. The connection between house and garden is extremely strong, with the dominance of the building, so even the main design concept of garden is determined by the architect. Gardens are considered as outdoor rooms, and fundamental design goal is the possibly most direct interconnection of inner and outer spaces from physical and visual points as well. Adequately architecture and landscape architecture are closely linked.

Though these design principles are typical through the whole late modern period, some small differences can be observed between the works of '90s and '70s. Now we focus on the design style of the '90s. In the most significant works of the decade, the strict, „planned” style and the emphasis of man-made character are typical. At the same time the works of '90s show a special sleekness, which seems to disappear in the works of the '70s. The strictly „planned” character becomes obvious by the combined use of vertical and horizontal planes, resulting a simple, but still dynamic composition. The big-scale use of hardscapes is typical, too. (First of all prefab. concrete tiles and fieldstone plates)

The base of many works is a simple Cartesian system. Most important elements of the composition are the plant masses and the plastically formed terrain. Moreover the rhythmic and syncopated repetition of the same elements are also typical.

### 4. JUBILEUM PARK AND GELLÉRT HILL

Jubileum Park is located on the top of Gellért Hill, approx. 140 m above the level of river Danube. Gellért Hill is a dolomite formation on the right bank, next to the river. Its peak is designated by the Statue of Liberty and the Citadella<sup>5</sup>. From this point the whole Budapest can be seen, both the plains on the Pest side and the hills of Buda. The Liberty Statue was

<sup>2</sup> Hauxner: Open to sky.

<sup>3</sup> Csepeli-Knorr, Luca: Korai modern szabadtérépítészet.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Tsumi, *Parc de la Villette*, Paris, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> The Citadella was built in the 19th century by Austrians to keep a close eye on the rebellious population of Pest

placed in front of the Citadella after WW2, which became a symbol of Budapest by now. The Jubileum Park is located next to them on the south-western hillside, which was earlier an unbuilt, windy, barren, exposed slope, where the grading – due to the soil conditions – had to be done partially by exploding the rock plateau. Due to its position the park used to boast with an awesome panorama, which has disappeared by now because of the overgrown, unmaintained vegetation. Looking towards south, the Danube and the southern Danube bridges can be seen. In the south-western direction Lágymányos and Kelenföld Housing estates, built in the 1960s are in the far distance. Towards west the panorama of Sas Hill (Eagle Hill) and the slopes of so-called Kis (Small) Gellért Hill close the view.

Jubileum Park is a member of Gellért Hill Park complex, whose further members are a park on the northern side of Gellért Hill created on the top of an underground water reservoir and the eastern slopes of Gellért Hill, which is a very steep and rocky semi-natural site with only a narrow cross-path. The Jubileum Park on the south – western hillside was built primarily not to serve the recreational needs of the neighborhood, since there is a residential area with private gardens around the park. The primary goal of creating a park here was to provide a nice environment next to the Citadella, one of the most frequented tourist location in Budapest and to create a park with fantastic visual connection for the whole population of Budapest. That leads to the main problem of the park, which is the extremely low attendance. Its reason is partially the difficult approach, since there are no major streets around, which is advantageous as well from noise and air-pollution point. Gellért Square on Danube shore is an important traffic hub, with metro station, with four tram stops, from where it takes an approx. 15–20 m long walk uphill to reach the bottom of the park. North from Gellért Hill next to the Danube, there is another traffic junction (with two tram stops and two bus stops), but from here the park can be approached only by an approx. 50 minutes long strenuous walk, cutting through the eastern slopes of Gellért Hill. There is a rather infrequent bus line, which takes the visitor right to the upper entrance of the park. Though the Citadella is one the most touristic place in the city, and looking down from here the park can be seen very well, apart from a few, no tourist visits the park. This problem existed already in the 1960s, immediately after the execution of the park, because there were plans to create a minibus line around the Citadella, which would have had a stop at or would have run across the park.



Ill. 1. Terraces and connecting slopes in Jubileum Park (source: Fortepan)

Il. 1. Tarasy i połączone stoki w Parku Jubileum (źródło: Fortepan)

## 5. RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

In the next chapter we analyze, how the most important characteristics of late modern landscape architecture are reflected in the design of Jubileum Park. (designer: Mrs. Krizsán, V. Jancsó)

Strong man made character is set off in forming the terrain. The three earth terraces and the connecting slopes with slanting walkways show a clear and well organized spatial structure, however the terrain is smoothly formed and very plastic. An interesting feature of the grading concept is that there are almost no retaining walls applied to span the height differences. The extremely beautiful and harmonious grading was appreciated by the contemporary professional literature as well. (fig.1)

The other key element of the simple and clear composition is the emphasis of the contrast between the horizontal and vertical elements.

On the lower terrace the contrast of the almost horizontal plane paved by prefabricated concrete tiles (the big novelty at that time) and the perfectly vertical retaining wall (not with slanted surface) next to it is conspicuous. The strong horizontal character of the upper terrace is accented by ornamental pools sunk in the ground, and a vertical counterpoint is created by a composition emphasizing the vertical and horizontal directions. (J. Somogyi: Girl with horse) By now, the water pools have disappeared.

In the case of slanting green surfaces the base plane is accented by plain grass surfaces, which is counter-pointed by the vertical stone vases placed here. (Ö. Metky: Amphoras)



Ill. 2. Hexagonal flowerbeds on the middle terraces (source: Fortepan)

Il. 2. Sześciokątne kwietniki na środkowych tarasach (źródło: Fortepan)

The park was decorated by huge perennial and annual flowerbeds in the '960s. The rose bed, originally located in the park, has disappeared by now. The most often photographed spot of the park is the colorful patch of hexagonal flowerbeds on the middle terrace (Fig. 2.).

The rhythmic repetition of the same element can be observed in the case of the three stone horses, one of the most emblematic features of the park, which are popular play equipment for children even today. (L. Barta: Little horses)

Syncopated grouping of identical elements are the rain shelters, which consist of three umbrella-like glass roofs, and appear at some points of the exposed park. (Unfortunately these roofs have partially disappeared, partially significantly altered.) The flower patches consisting of identical hexagonal elements are also good example for repeating a characteristic form.

There are some original high quality artworks in the park from the 1960s. It is interesting to observe,

that there are no statues referring to the socialistic ideology, in spite of the fact, that a clear political will can be traced behind the creation of this park.

Though some composition elements and characteristic attributes typical for late modern landscape architecture can be found in the park, the Cartesian system so typical in the western European works of the 1960s cannot be traced here. The reason for that is the steep terrain. (Approximately 17 % is the average inclination.) On the hillside the curving path system, laying better to the terrain and the creation less formal shaped terraces were logical decision of the designers.

After analyzing the park according to the most important characteristics of the late modern landscape architecture it can be stated, that it is a significant work of the period, which deserves of being preserved or restored according to the original design. The parks and gardens of Budapest were more diverse, if besides of contemporary works some significant works of previous landscape architectural periods were also presented on the public openspaces of Budapest, like in some German or Swiss cities which are way ahead of us in preserving the landscape architectural heritages of recent past.

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