

CREATIVE DESIGN IN THE AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

DESIGN CREATIV IN PEISAJUL AGRICOL

DASCALU Doina Mira¹
e-mail: doinamira@yahoo.com

Abstract. *At first sight, cultivated agricultural environment does not provide a convenient ambience to landscape design. However, some landscape creations, located right in the middle of farmland fields, succeed to prove the virtues of such pioneering facilities. Important psycho-physical effects are created by combining both design manners for philosophic-romantic-rural and modern-ecologic-sustainable atmosphere.*

Key words: agricultural environment, landscape design, effects

Rezumat. *La prima vedere, mediul agricol cultivat nu pare a oferi o ambianță propice amenajărilor peisagistice. Câteva creații speciale, amplasate chiar în mijlocul unor culturi agricole, demonstrează virtuțile acestui tip de amenajări deschizătoare de drumuri. Efectele psiho-fizice sunt create prin ambientări care îmbină atât atmosfera filosofic-romantic-rurală, cât și cea modern-ecologica-durabila.*

Cuvinte cheie: peisaj agricol, design peisager, efecte

INTRODUCTION

At first sight, cultivated agricultural environment does not provide a convenient ambience to landscape design. In the history of landscape architectural creations there weren't many compositions related to agricultural terrains features or working with the agricultural environment elements.

Not even today, from the landscape architecture point of view, the subject of virtues and qualities of the agricultural landscape didn't arouse the interest of many landscape designers.

Why this absence of interest regarding the agricultural environment?

However, in the past few decades, in the context of the emphasis of global pollution, some daring landscape designers approach the beauty of features combined with the utilitarian particularities of the agricultural landscape.

Some landscape creations, located right in the middle of farmland fields, succeed to prove the virtues of such pioneering facilities. Important psycho-physical effects are created by combining both romantic-rural and modern atmosphere.

We don't talk about the well known utilitarian decorative plantations, but about creations, working with large agricultural plots, that tend towards a visionary symbolism, with important sustainable, economic and educative results (Dascalu Doina Mira, 2006).

¹ University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Iasi, Romania

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Studying the existent few cases, we can observe two tendencies:

1. one that underlines a philosophical-aesthetical symbolism;
2. other one underlines how saving, productive and also full of many aesthetic qualities, the agricultural landscape can be. I selected and analysed two interesting case studies, in order to prove that is possible to promote the aesthetic aspect of agricultural plantations, through judicious design proposals, also with multifunctional and sustainable effects on multiple levels: economic-social, educative-cultural, hygienic-sanitary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Some of the most important aesthetic qualities of the agricultural landscape are very visible at a big territorial scale in the general aerial images. There are geometrical combinations of forms and colours, with a big power of impressing positively the human mind, soul and awareness, emanating the majestic deep and innocent beauty of our Mother Earth. First we should remind that since the 70's the Austrian artist Hundertwasser underlined how not to waste the urban terrain, obtaining agricultural plantations in a builded urban environment. In his visionary lay-out and sketches we can observe, at urban scale, the geometrical beauty of his roof-cultivated plots, terraces with different colours and features. Garden-roofs are nowadays an already used sustainable solution, but not in the idea of roof-agricultural plots. In the context of ecological disasters that threaten the planet, the idea of working with agricultural plots as morphologic elements of landscape architecture is not a very useful but saving solution that should be promoted and applied at urban and territorial level. (Dascalu Doina Mira, 2006)

The first case we want to present is of the designer Fernando Caruncho who works in a philosophical manner in the rural context. (Taylor G., Cooper G., 2000)



Fig.1- Fernando Caruncho, Catalonia Garden. Geometric cuts in the crops, bordered with rhythmic alignment of cypress and olives Photo <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenstovisit/7692561/Fernando-Carunchos-geometric-gardens.html>

Two gardens in the middle of some crops are located in Catalonia (fig. 1) and Galicia (fig. 2). He is working on limited surfaces trying an original mixture between ancient agriculture and formal contemporary gardens.

His design style combine profound simplicity with a subtle sophistication, prouving how the wheat, olive trees, cypresses, water and grass can be the primordial elements of a beautiful landscape composition, full of calm, peace, majesty and dignity.



Fig. 2 - Fernando Caruncho-Galicia Garden.

Armonious cypress alignment on the mountain background

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenstovisit/7692561/Fernando-Carunchos-geometric-gardens.html>

His concept seems to have almost theoretical impact, with its deep philosophical-aesthetical symbolism, but I feel that the beauty of this kind of landscape design can signal the debut of a new style with a major useful and sustainable impact. Caruncho doesn't work on large scale, but on limited surfaces, valorising the details and the subtle beauty of ordinary agricultural elements.

The second case (Krauel Jacobo, 2006) approach large agricultural surfaces and will explain better the meaning of my study ideas. On the other part of the world, in China, another kind of design tries to raise the collective awareness about a new agricultural landscape design solutions. In 2002, the Shenyang City in North of China commissioned some architects to create a big Architecture University campus, located downtown.

Due to a high interest for architecture in China, the project of the university extended, creating congestion and overcrowding its urban location of downtown. After much deliberation, the principal designer, Kongjian Yu, decided the best solution was to move the campus to a bigger location, unfortunately in the agricultural suburbs. The designers fight with important difficulties of site conditions and budgetary limitations.

The new site for the proposed campus had agricultural use – it was a rice field, known for a high quality, due to the cool climate and its longer growing

season. The soil quality was good and a viable agricultural irrigation system was still in place. It was important not to destroy all these values.

The budget was small: only about one US dollars per square meter was allocated for landscaping.

The timeline was short: the university required the design to be developed and implemented within one year.



Fig. 3 - Architecture University Campus Shenyang China. Study platform for students in the middle of the crops. Photo: Kongjian Yu, Chao Yang <http://www.asla.org/awards/2005/05winners/090.html>

As China moves towards modernization, the landscape architects must address issues of food production and sustainable land use, two of the biggest current issues on nowadays China's horizon. The concept of the landscape design tried to use rice-native plants and rice plots as design elements, in order to keep the landscape productivity, while also fulfilling a new role as an environment for learning (fig. 3. fig. 4).



Fig. 4 - Architecture University Campus Shenyang China. Study platform detail. Photo: Kongjian Yu, Chao Yang <http://www.asla.org/awards/2005/05winners/090.html>

An important goal of the landscape project was also to raise the awareness of land and farming amongst architecture students, who usually want to become city dwellers. In addition, the university designers try to demonstrate how inexpensive and productive, but also with many aesthetic qualities, the agricultural landscape can become, through a careful design and management, usable space as well.



Fig. 5 - Architecture University Campus Shenyang China. Photo: Kongjian Yu, Chao Yang
<http://www.asla.org/awards/2005/05winners/090.html>

Major features of this design :

- the productive campus rice paddy was designed to be a composition with small open platforms for relaxation, all along many walkways spanning the landscape; in this way the area kept its complete functionality as rice paddy, with its own system of irrigation (fig. 5).
- other native crops were kept also, such as buckwheat growing in rotation across the campus, annually.
- the productive and aesthetic aspects of this agricultural landscape involved both students and faculty teachers into a dialogue of sustainable territorial development and food production.

The rice produced on this campus continues to be harvested and distributed "Golden Rice", serving both as a keepsake for visitors of the university, also as an economical resource and source of identity for the campus. The most important fact: the distribution of this "Golden Rice" raised the awareness of this new landscape design solutions, that could both continue old, yet crucial uses, such as food production, while supporting new uses, such as the education of students.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Landscape compositions *into and with* functioning agricultural plots might constitute a new sustainable design that allows the process of agriculture to

become transparent and accessible to all. Relaxation and education of the people became part of a productive landscape. The farming processes can potentially become educative and productive laboratory for all interested.

2. On the background of the nowadays dreadful crisis, I want to underline that this work with agricultural plots as morphological design elements of landscape architecture compositions, should be promoted and applied on a large scale, due to their important sustainable, ecologic and economic impact.

3. The productive and aesthetic aspects of this landscape design will involve all the people into a dialogue of sustainable urban and territorial development. (Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi, 1995)

4. In my opinion, in the context of the emphasis of global pollution and food crisis, a combination between these few initiatives might initiate a new stylistic wave in the landscape design, with a very important impact on the level of collective awareness, with positive issues of food production, sustainable land use and aesthetical-educative features.

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