

LANDSCAPING THE EASTERN ORTHODOX ECCLESIASTICAL SPACE: NATION'S CATHEDRAL BUCHAREST (CONTEST PROPOSAL) AND METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL IASI

PEISAGIZAREA SPAȚIULUI ECLEZIASTIC ORTODOX: CATEDRALA MÂNTUIRII NEAMULUI BUCUREȘTI (PROPUNERE DE CONCURS) ȘI ANSAMBLUL CATEDRALEI MITROPOLITANE DIN IAȘI

*CIOLACU Dragoș*¹, *RĂCHIERU V.*²
e-mail: vrlaiasi@gmail.com

Abstract. *One of the particularities regarding Orthodoxy is that it preserves the tradition defined by the seven Holy Councils, in doctrine and in the spatial organization. Today, working properly with these special spaces, it can become quite a challenge, as we all can imagine. In this paper we focus on two examples, both personal works, attempts of reconciling nature with architecture. At The Nation's Cathedral (contest proposal) in Bucharest, the landscaping concept was to transpose the physical Cathedral into a metaphysical one (The Church in the Nature - a controversial theological attempt). The other project, at Iași Metropolitan Assembly, a milestone both in the history and in the city silhouette, attempts to correct certain deficiencies in the current landscape language through interventions especially on vegetal composition. Well received by the beneficiary, through implementation, this project may become a first step to a well deserved urban reconsideration of the Iași city center.*

Key words: *Spiritual becoming, Church, Eastern christianity, Ecclesiastic space, Landscaping, Church in Nature*

Rezumat. *Ortodoxia a păstrat nealterată tradiția așa cum a fost ea definită de cele șapte Sinoade, nu numai în dogmă ci și în organizarea spațiului sacru bizantin. Să lucrezi în ziua de azi cu un astfel de spațiu extrem de special poate fi o importantă provocare, după cum ne putem închipui. Cele două exemple încercă o împăcare a naturii cu obiectul de arhitectură. Catedrala propusă pe Dealul Arsenalului. are un concept de peisagizare pornind de la transpunerea bisericii în natură, o imagine răsturnată a noii Catedrale. Ansamblul Mitropolitan din Iași este un reper atât în istoria cât și în silueta orașului. Proiectul încearcă să corecteze anumite deficiențe ale limbajului peisagistic actual prin intervenții mai ales asupra compoziției vegetale dar și la nivelul celei minerale. Bine primit de beneficiar, prin implementare, acest proiect poate constitui un prim pas către o mult meritată reconsiderarea a spațiului urban din centrul Municipiului Iași.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Devenire spirituală, Biserică, Ortodoxie, Spațiu ecleziastic, Peisaj, Peisagizare*

¹"Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iași, Romania

² VRLA – Vlad Rachieru Landscape & Architecture Iași, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Orthodoxy insisted on a space that was defined by the seven Holy Councils. Thus, The Church is an interface between the sacred and the profane, a complex relationship containing aesthetic experiences, customary practices and rational solutions. Deciphering this informational maze is made thru FAITH. The strong symbol of The Holy Trinity has a profane correspondance in the perception of the ecclesiastical space: expression as a purpose, constructive system as a mean and form as an intrinsic connection between the first two. The desideratum both in architecture and, possibly in the landscaping of sacred space is to transcend the rational structuralist spatiality into mystical architecture.

The Byzantine sacred space is divided for centuries by its immutability itself in the same canonical matrix. This body of laws leads to the special usage of the interior space and light. Predilection for the interiority will gradually acquire an exterior correspondent. The church is a miniature universe, obtained through **dematerialization**. The reduction of masses: the massive Greek architrave accommodates the full arch, both internally and externally.

The expressivity was expanded by polishing or traforation. Size was also potentiated: the rectangular plan and columns emphasize building's length, the gradually ascending of the roof on ships amplifies the sensation of height Unfiltered light penetrates through small holes in the wall or the glazed drum of the dome producing scenic effects which lead to religious excitement. The principle of ascending levels is figured in architecture by the in stair-progression of structural elements that make a church / cathedral: butant arch – aisle's hemisphere - dom. Church rooms are designed by the same symbolical algorithm (Ciolacu and Budescu, 2011).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

These projects are pioneers in terms of landscaping the ecclesiastical urban spaces in our country. Leaving the fear for outside space, it promotes the uninterrupted call for symbol. The junction between architecture, landscape and theology creates for the instructed consumer a digestible language that Bible enriches it with various signs and symbols. The resulting symbolistic network has the main decryption in the **spiritual becoming trough Church**.

The utopian model is represented by the Garden of Eden, a symbol of eternity, of Paradise. It is not a geographical place, but rather a symbol of God's original approach to man and in the same time, the place of committing the original sin. This symbol of approaching the Deity can be revived and may become subject of contemplation, reflection and meditation to park visitors. But gestures must be extremely well calculated, because all layers of landscaped space present a paramount importance in creating the desired atmosphere.

The usage of natural building materials is mandatory: stone, wood, glass, iron/metal. Vegetation should coobserve the note of solemnity, the choice of species not beeing easy. The relationship with architecture must also be carefully studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The title proposes two concepts and not without courage it joins them. We're talking about *landscaping* and *ecclesiastical space*. An attempt to define these concepts proves more difficult than we originally thought. Analyzed historical, Byzantine ecclesiastical space had a centripetal development, with overwhelming introversion, leading sometimes to the neglect of the exterior. Analyzed theological, this space has a binary nature (see St. Maximus the Confessor): *Cosmos* and *Soul*. The Holy Church is the model and the image of the world, composed of visible and invisible essences into a unity and diversity of binary sequence. St. Maximus finds an inexhaustible variety of multivalent meanings in the sacred space through analog or interpretation of scripture, postulated by the holy fathers. We can now walk outside the Church in its proximity and quit the millennial fear for outdoors. Here occurs the junction with the second concept. Landscaping is the complex process of *in situ* transforming an area, by equipping it with aesthetic and philosophical meanings, then offer it to the consumer (a mandatory trained subject) that uses models (*in mentu*) previously assimilated (Grigorovschi and Rachieru, 2011). The individuals will finally transform that certain space into a landscape through look itself (*in visu*). Training of these subjects is a decisive factor into the producing of a landscape. Outside the Church, the instruments of the negative space will seem few, but maybe that's why more special, more lenient, less definitive. Of these, vegetation, used here as a valuable building material, allows us to establish a deeper relationship with the site, suggesting thus a sincere reconciliation with the architectural objects.

Why pioneering church landscaping? In a local context, landscaping the ecclesiastical space is almost nonexistent. With a few exceptions, and here we mention the monastic ensembles (on which however the vernacular phenomenon is very pronounced), Orthodox sacred urban space seems to disregard this aspect. The traditional continence for the exterior and the much greater attention paid for interior, made landscape architecture to not find a canon similar to the matrix that architecture founds in the dogma. This lack of a solid theoretical corpus determines an empirical practice with current condescension, which is doubled by a poor professional representation.

The biblical heritage reveals a strong relation between man and Creator, mediated by Nature, relation that seems now extinct. God created man and gave him the utopian Garden of Eden, depicted in the Old Testament. It is a symbol of rapprochement between Man and Divinity. The New Testament abounds in references regarding nature, abounds in landscapes depictions. Nature played an essential role in the anatomy of sacred space; we all know that the first temples were the nature itself. Retreat to interiority is happening slowly but surely. Tumultuous history of Christianity (paleochristianity) canonizes this interiority, but an armistice should be nowadays concluded. In order to formulate this armistice's conditions we must not forget the uniqueness of the church as an architectural program. Trought symbol, it seeks to transcend the matter into

spirit, the usage of biblical heritage being an axiom. Symbolizing the initiating path (trough church) to spiritual becoming is a goal, proposing thus a reconciliation of nature with the architectural features. For an efficient reception, the language of spaces should be clean, fair, consistent and readable. The church is a community program, a landmark, an urban refuge.

Based on this hypothesis, we will analyze below the competition proposal for the People's Salvation Cathedral in Bucharest (2010) and the rehabilitation and restoration of Iasi Metropolitan Park (2009-2013). The landscaping concept started from the canonical progression: Telluric – Church - Celestial (or, in other words, Sacred - Temple - Profane). Overall composition of the ensemble is the expression of the cultic symbol of a European capital. The solving solution invokes the specificity of Romanian Orthodoxy. We know that is the only country with neo-Latin language of orthodox religion with a large diaspora disseminated in the West. The Cathedral must be both an expression of national dignity in the twenty-first century, a meaningful spiritual response and should expect the presence of many believers. Hence, an extended space is indispensable to provide a complementary framework, a cultic expression of a special atmosphere.

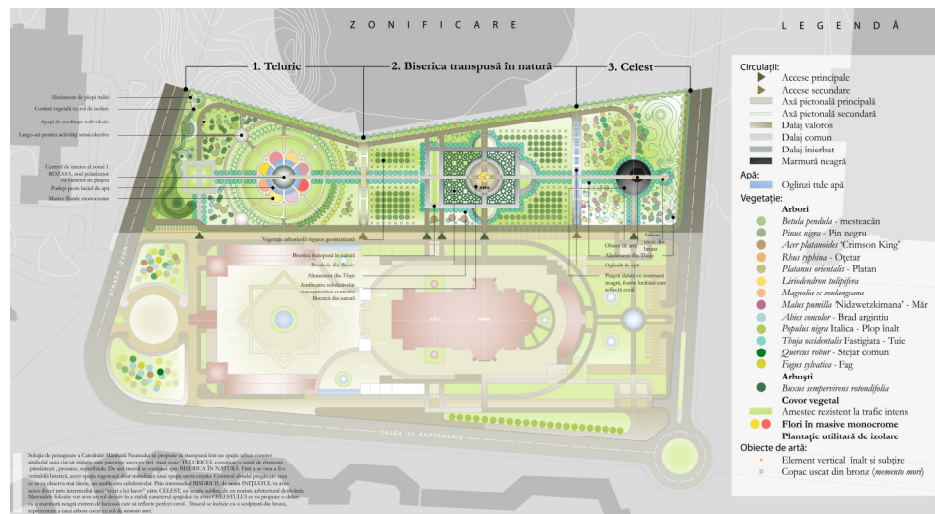


Fig. 1 – Landscaping plan for Nation's Salvation Cathedral Bucharest (contest proposal 2010)

The Cathedral's site is structured through a main axis (a contrast line) that divides the site in two major subareas (fig. 1): 1. the mineral component - Cathedral's Ensemble and 2. The vegetal component – The Park, a mirror image of the real Cathedral, that is evoking the biblical heritage of Eden. It was solved through a solution that aims to translate into physical space the symbol of an initiating circuit that passes through three major areas of interest: 1. *Telluric* gathers *earthly, prosaic, superficial* elements. It is limited by an urban circulation

artery (Calea Izvor) which contains heavy-rate traffic and it is separated by this trough a thick plant curtain. The compositional center of this area consists in a small square surrounded by a ring of water, reachable through footbridges. Vegetation and paths are following the concentric contour of the square thus accentuating the ordinating power of the place. The drawing of the alleys in this section of the park suggests a flower form. Each *petal* contains monochrome flower island and then the ring of water, reachable trough footbridges. The character of this place sends to interiority, to introspection, to reconsederation.

The route continues straight to the Church in Nature. It suggests a metaphysical Christian sacred space, called the *Summer Shrine*; it is only implied by several lightweight structures on which ivy can climb. It can serve processions which traditionally take place outside. It can be visited, lived, experimented of all meanings and it symbolizes the opening of the Church for people. Arboreal vegetation now consists of a rigorous geometrization. Area also contains vegetable geometric embroidery. The Church in Nature stands for the proof that Orthodoxy must align to contemporary living, must leave the fear for outside space.

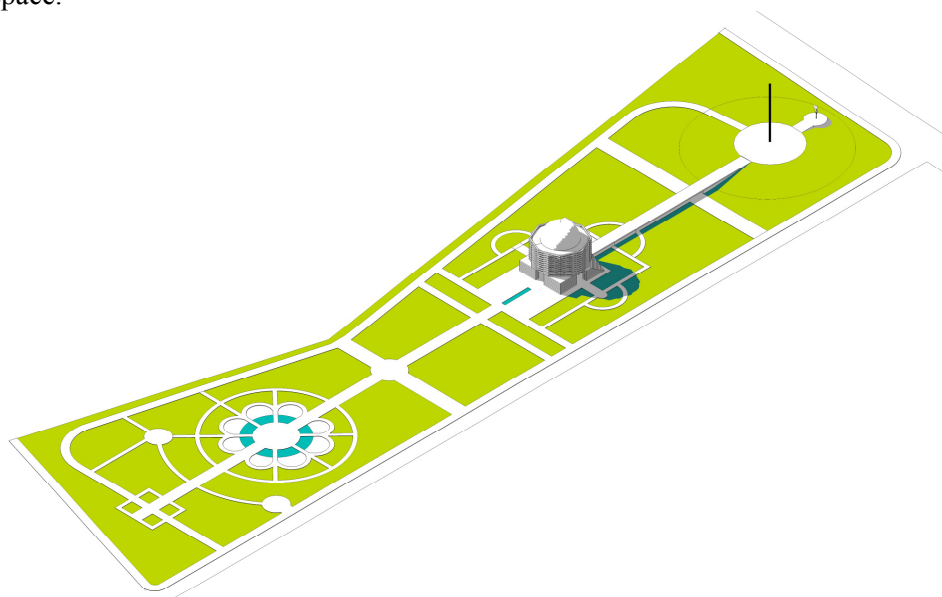


Fig. 2 – Landscaping solution for Nation's Salvation Cathedral Bucharest – axonometry (contest proposal 2010)

Through the Church, we are now initiated. Using a “Jacob's ladder” we arrive to *Heavenly*, a space of sublime aspirations, a perfect architectural purism. The materials used will have a decisive role in determining the nature of space: the area will offer a celestial pavement with a high gloss black marble that perfectly reflects the sky. The image of the sky reflected in the glossy pavement, may suggest the image of The Creator (Manolescu, 2003). The route ends with a sculpture, representing a dead tree, a *memento mori* (fig.2).

The other studied site, Iași Metropolitan Ensemble of Moldavia and Bukovina is a lesson of Romanian spirituality structured during two centuries of searches for identity varying between East tradition and temptation of the West as a modernist vector. Analysis of this short study certifies that Metropolitan Park is chaotic, old, and unkempt and argued with proximal buildings. The need rehabilitation is undoubtedly and it entails a significant investment that would be achieved through: Creating a global composition in sacred key to complete the ensemble's spirit; restoring natural-built balance; releasing the perspective on the National Theatre - Cathedral Mitropolitana axis; removing visual obstacles near historical monuments; meticulous organization of compositional elements to obtain a readable landscape language; creating an suitable atmosphere; providing a constant color show through flowers, leaves, bark and grass; assigning a solemnity note to the natural element; rejuvenation of species; zoning of the park; removal of the typical landscaping tendencies of the city; efficient irrigation system to maintain the garden to the highest aesthetic level.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Church remains a very fresh program (this fact needs to be understud by the Church as an institution), maintaining a privileged place. A material development with such a timeline is genetic and finally merges with spirituality which serves.

2. This landscape architecture program is becoming more and more necessary, but made in the appropriate key. Landscape architecture must find a canon similar to the one in architecture that will be followed afterwards by all landscape professionals.

3. A church park is loaded with a whole range of signs and symbols, but the axiom that governs them is the spiritual becoming through Church.

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