

WAYS OF ENHANCING URBAN PERSPECTIVES THROUGH THE USE OF ORNAMENTAL VEGETAL ELEMENTS IN THE HISTORICAL AREA TÂRGU CUCU FROM IAȘI

MODALITĂȚI DE POTENȚARE A PERSPECTIVELOR URBANE PRIN UTILIZAREA ELEMENTELOR VEGETALE ORNAMENTALE ÎN ZONA ISTORICĂ TÂRGU CUCU DIN IAȘI

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Abstract. *The concept of “Cities for People” ‘is promoted by the urban planner Jan Gehl and involves the design of new urban settlements, or the transformation of the existing ones, into environments conducive to daily community activities. Whether we refer to the necessary activities or to the leisure ones, the city has the primary duty to provide favourable frameworks for these various manifestations. Since Antiquity, it has been considered that the city belongs to its people and their lives, this perception becoming in the 21st century an ideological current meant to improve the quality of urban life, through architectural, urban, landscape and artistic interventions. The subject of the quality of urban life has become a leitmotif to recent research in the field of urbanism and social sciences, promoting principles and methods aimed at both terms of impact on the human psychic and the environment. In the context of the urban environment of Iași, affected by the urban transformations of the last century, are suggested landscape interventions that would meet the quality criteria of a healthy public space, transforming the dull area into an attractive and dynamic one.*

Keywords: landscape design, green infrastructure, public space, urban life, quality of public spaces.

Rezumat. *Conceptul „orașelor pentru oameni” este promovat de către urbanistul Jan Gehl și presupune proiectarea noilor așezări urbane, ori transformarea celor existente, sub forma unor medii favorabile desfășurării activităților cotidiene ale comunității. Încă din Antichitate se consideră că orașul este al oamenilor și vieții lor, această percepție devenind în secolul al XXI-lea un curent ideologic menit să amelioreze calitatea traiului citadin, prin intervenții de natură arhitecturală, urbanistică, peisageră și artistică. Subiectul calității vieții urbane a devenit un leitmotiv al cercetării recente în domeniul urbanismului și al științelor sociale, promovând principii și metode ce vizează proiectarea urbană sustenabilă atât din punct de vedere al impactului asupra psihicului uman, cât și asupra mediului. În contextul mediului urban ieșean, afectat de transformările urbanistice ale secolului trecut, se propun intervenții peisagere care să întrunească criteriile de calitate ale unui spațiu public*

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sănătos, transformând spațiul anost într-unul atractiv și dinamic.

Cuvinte cheie: design peisager, infrastructură verde, spațiu public, viață urbană, calitatea spațiilor publice

INTRODUCTION

Over the time, our cities have gone through great changes which shaped the way we are living our urban lives since the 19th century until today. The most impactful modification is reducing the greenery by creating efficient livable areas. One of this process' effects is that the modern cities were transformed into austere spaces for its inhabitants. The urban areas had to adapt to humanity's industrial progress and new aspirations, never considering the green spaces an important element of human's life. Moreover, another result of the industrialization regarding city evolution was zoning it out and defragmenting public life. Beginning with 20th century's anthropologists' work and conclusions arose that the new urban functional structure affects the quality of public life in cities and the "mental hygiene" of their inhabitants (Choay, 2002).

There is an increasing need of creating active public spaces, resolving problems such as boredom, hygiene, communication, mental and physical health. In order to improve the quality of the urban spaces, the designers, architects, urbanists along with landscape architects should find dynamic solutions which would stimulate a unique, personal and social medium for citizens. A contemporary urban space should be able to assure the right context for engaging economic, administrative, commercial, leisure and social activities.

The urban area of Iași city has seen different stages of urbanistic modifications in the past century, leaving behind the utopian ideas and measures, residual places of "no one" (Stoian and Calciu, 2012), lacking adequate qualities of a well-functioning and environmentally friendly public space. Over the years, nothing promoted these spaces nor used them to the benefit of the citizens. Today, the effect is that our public spaces do not offer sufficient opportunities for engaging critical activities for a healthy community and a healthy environment.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Urbanism is by definition interdisciplinary, aiming to find the optimal answers to a declining urban space's problems. When referring to the public spaces, we are considering the green areas, plazas, squares, gardens, roundabouts, sidewalks and interstitial spaces between the apartment buildings (Dascălu, 2016). Analyzing a busy public space of Iași city – Târgu Cucu historic area – we encountered multiple problems such as: inadequate urban furniture, unaesthetic materials, austere and boring spaces, inconstancy in urban furniture pieces (models and colors), declining mature vegetation, lack of proper landscape interventions. The value of public spaces and the criteria used to evaluate them refer to quality, safety, diversity and viability and were promoted by William White in 1980 and by Jane Jacobs in 1992. The urbanist Jan Gehl has been promoting since the beginning of the 21st century the concept of "cities for people", which would be dedicated to their inhabitants. The criteria of public spaces' quality reflect social, economic, environmental

characteristics, pointing out twelve quantifiable elements: healthy and orderly, accessible, attractive, comfortable, inclusive, vital and viable, functional, unique, effective and safe, robust, green and unpolluted, satisfactory (Carmona, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Târgu Cucu area in Iași is just an example of poorly managed public spaces found throughout the city. In order to align with European and International trends, principles and values regarding the quality of public space, it is recommended to intervene with the optimal design solutions in terms of architecture, urbanism, arts and landscape design. A healthy community is not only based on its cultural values, but on the city's capacity to stimulate different community activities which will enrich the overall city experience. When transforming an austere public space into a dynamic and active one, the designing team should consider dimensioning the outdoor spaces to a more human scale, creating more assimilable ways to travel and experience daily urban routes, or to even use them more wisely and sanogenously during leisure activities.

Modelling the public spaces into a more reliable pattern for its citizens, we should consider the two categories of sensory systems of the human body: distance receivers meaning olfactory sense, sight and hearing and proximity receivers meaning skin and muscles (Hall, 1966). Understanding how these sensory receivers work, we may better acknowledge the social contact forms of individuals and how they would perceive a space's conditions and dimensions. Using the human scale and functioning way when designing a public space would create a complete sensorial experience every time using the city's expanse. A public space, such as Târgu Cucu, doesn't have to function only as a transitory area between multiple focal points, but it has to attract and determine people to use it for longer periods of time (Gehl, 2011), offering a great user experience. Considering the two categories of sensory systems of the human body mentioned by Hall and the twelve quantifiable characteristics of a quality urban space mentioned by Carmona, a public space could become attractive and usable in many different ways. We may consider a public area being magnetic from three points of view.

The **functional point of view** refers to creating an effective and optimal walkway system, connecting different spaces or urban points. The new paths should facilitate the movement between the main points of major interest: architectural objectives, piazzas, town squares, markets, public transportation stations, institutions. It is important that they're designed in a way that is easy to assimilate and use through direct routes and in accordance with traffic flows in a certain area. Speaking from a landscape functional intervention point of view we may refer to vegetation as properly used species in a certain area. A functional public space must also be easy to care for and must contain species adapted to the local conditions in order to obtain the desired aesthetic effects and to keep the entire intervention maintenance costs at a low rate. This in fact translates into

using perennials over annuals or biennials, together with shrubs and trees. In addition, in order to have a smaller anthropic print on the green spaces in urban areas and to keep as much as possible the natural local ecosystems, it is desired that the suggested species should be in the largest proportion endemic plants or at least originating from the climatic zone in which the landscape intervention is made. A more complex planting, consisting of different levels of vegetation, is not only more attractive, but will also attract and ensure the wildlife in that area.

The **aesthetic point of view** refers to the equilibrium given by optimal shapes, dimensions, colors, textures, volumes and dimensions of a given designed area and its elements. Sight is the most used sense when using a public space and therefore the majority of landscaping interventions should be stimulating this sense in a balanced way. Foliage, flowers, branches, bark and fruits are the decorative parts of plants which could create spectacular visual effects through color, texture, movement, shape (Draghia and Chelariu, 2011). The more we accentuate the visual effects in a landscape design, the more dynamic and attractive the spaces become. Attention to details gives spaces a human scale, giving them a proximity feeling for each user. This in fact happens because outdoor spaces are usually perceived at low speed (by walking) and therefore the entire experience is visual and stimulating (White, 1980). Vegetation in a public space represents a detail of the larger assembly and could have deep positive emotional effects on users' experience throughout the area, by simply observing a flower, a fruit, a focal point of bright foliage colors, or simply the silhouette of a small tree. These elements not only generate emotions, but they also attract and determine users to spend more time in the expanse. In addition, the role of vegetation is also functional as it could facilitate visual paths through a certain point or even mask an unsightly element. The vegetation component draws the eye and fuels the positive reactions, as it could easily become an interest point throughout the entire year by changing foliage colors, bearing fruits or flowering periods. Adding to these, another important aspect of using plants to create visual interest is represented by the capacity to create sighting axes towards architectural elements or focal points.

The **social point of view** refers to the capacity of a public space to ensure the proper context for social activities and encounters. In a public space there could be direct contacts, meaning conversations, meetings, or could be passive contacts, meaning observing the other participants to urban life (Gehl and Svarre, 2013). When a public space is attractive, there will always be more people using that area and therefore the number of social interactions will increase. Vegetation has a distinctive role in this process as it could easily attract people to admire, photograph and interact with plants and it could also social interchanges.

This paper aims to demonstrate that through a landscape approach, an austere public space could become more attractive and could easily improve its quality, by using the Târgu Cucu area as an example. Analyzing the Târgu Cucu area in Iași we consider that a landscaping intervention should be enough to

change the feel of the area entirely and help citizens find new ways to use the square, in a more suitable approach, especially that this zone is an historical one. Furthermore, a well thought landscape solution could have economic, social, health and ecological benefits such as: ease of maintenance, lower costs of implementation, attractive public space, sanogenous area, beautiful sights within the city center, reduction of stress, closeness to nature, microclimate, vegetal diversity. Being a central zone in the City, it is attended by a significant number of rushing people every day. A way to determine them to sit and enjoy the ambiance would be by reconfiguring the green spaces to create more sitting opportunities and improving the general aspect by using the right amount of plant species. The existing situation shows a larger share of green areas than paved surfaces. These green surfaces contain different species of trees belonging to the genera: *Acer*, *Aesculus*, *Ailanthus*, *Catalpa*, *Eleagnus*, *Fraxinus*, *Juglans*, *Laburnum*, *Pinus*, *Prunus*, *Robinia*, *Tamarix*, *Thuja*, *Tilia*, *Sophora*, *Ulmus*.

Table 1

**Plant species selection and their adaptation capacity on site climatic conditions
(after Draghia and Chelariu, 2001; Dirr, 2011)**

Type	Species and cultivars	Ecological plasticity
Trees	<i>Acer palmatum</i> 'Bloodgood'	High
	<i>Acer palmatum</i> 'Orange Dream'	High
	<i>Betula nigra</i> 'Little King'	High
	<i>Betula pendula</i>	High
	<i>Crataegus laevigata</i>	High
Shrubs	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> 'Pow Wow'	High
	<i>Buddleja davidii</i> 'Papillon Blue'	High
	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>	High
	<i>Chaenomeles japonica</i> 'Clementine'	High
	<i>Cornus alba</i> 'Elegantissima'	High
	<i>Cotoneaster salicifolius</i> 'Parkteppich'	High
	<i>Euonymus fortunei</i> 'Emerald Gaiety'	High
	<i>Forsythia intermedia</i>	High
	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i> 'Blue Chiffon'	High
	<i>Ligustrum ovalifolium</i>	High
	<i>Philadelphus coronarius</i> 'Innocence'	High
	<i>Spiraea japonica</i> 'Little Princess'	High
	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	High
Conifer Shrubs	<i>Pinus mugo</i> 'Mops'	High
	<i>Pinus mugo</i> 'Pumillo'	High
	<i>Juniperus sabina</i> 'Tamariscifolia'	High
Perennials	<i>Achillea millefolium</i> 'Little Moonshine'	High
	<i>Calamagrostis acutiflora</i> 'Carl Foerster'	High
	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	High
	<i>Heuchera hybrida</i> 'Coffee Bean'	High
	<i>Sedum spectabile</i>	High
	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> 'Hidcote'	High
	<i>Leucanthemum x superbum</i> 'Becky'	High
	<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>	High
	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i> 'Goldsturm'	High

Type	Species and cultivars	Ecological plasticity
	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	High
	<i>Santolina rosmarinifolia</i>	High
	<i>Thymus citriodorus</i> 'Silver Queen'	High
	<i>Vinca major</i> 'Deep Blue'	High
	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> 'Adagio'	High
	<i>Stipa tenuissima</i>	High
	<i>Stachys byzantina</i>	High

CONCLUSIONS

An underutilized urban area could easily become an attraction center if properly intervened on site. In order to transform such an area into an interesting one, the designing process should also consider creating human scale spaces, detailed, functional, aesthetical and sanogenous. Moreover, as the sociologists and urbanists from the previous century's studies suggest, the urban areas should be contoured respecting essential rules of a well-functioning public area and using the human perception as principal scaling measure. The use of public spaces should become a complex journey, stimulating all senses in order to obtain great encounters and memories, creating a connection with the city's public areas.

Landscaping the green areas within a city's limits could only bring social, economic, environmental and health advantages. Through vegetation and aesthetical interventions, public areas with green infrastructure could establish the new centers of communities where everyday activities would become experiences and impressions.

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