

ALARMING SITUATION: THE GRADUAL EXTINCTION AND DEGENERATION OF URBAN LANDSCAPE SETTLEMENTS

O SITUAȚIE ALARMANTĂ: DISTRUGEREA ȘI DEGENERAREA TREPTATĂ A AMENAJĂRILOR PEISAGERE URBANE

DASCĂLU Doina Mira

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iasi, Romania

Abstract. *The accelerated destruction of many urban spaces, mainly those with plantation and landscape arrangements, became nowadays an alarming situation in many Romanians towns, representing a chronic and common process. Using a menacing corruption, avoiding and defying the lows and the human rights to a better urban life, many city fathers operate by spreading fear, creating a pessimistic atmosphere. Many urban spaces was destructed, as streets, plazas, transition urban spaces and green spaces, by using subtle ways like avoidances of the existent urban and landscape lows, or exposing an aggressive defiance of it. Usually the action start generating an urban dereliction or degradation of the marked area, then a gradual amputation, finishing with total demolition of these spaces. What effect can have this destruction, the gradual degeneration of green spaces, the presence of dirtiness and kitsch at the urban scale? There are well-known the main results: the emphasis of urban pollution, an urbanistic layout full of visual shocks, and a particular human spoilage on physical, psychic and aesthetical level.*

Keywords: landscape arrangements, destruction, urban pollution.

Rezumat. *Distrugerea accelerată a spațiilor urbane, în special a multora amenajate peisagistic sau doar plantate, a devenit în prezent o situație alarmantă în multe orașe ale României, reprezentând un proces cronic obișnuit. Folosind corupția agresivă, evitând și sfidând drepturile umane la o calitate mai bună a vieții și a confortului urban, mulți edili ai orașelor încearcă să răspândească teamă, generând o atmosferă de pesimism. Multe spații urbane, precum străzi, piețe, spații de tranziție și spații verzi, au fost distruse oficial sau neoficial, evitând subtil sau sfidând agresiv legile urbanistice și peisagistice existente. De cele mai multe ori acțiunea poate începe printr-o abandonare urmată de o degradare a zonei vizate, apoi o amputare gradată, sfârșind cu demolarea totală a acestor spații. Ce efect poate avea această distrugere și degenerarea gradată a spațiilor verzi, prezența mizeriei și a prostului gust la scară urbană? Este binecunoscut principalul rezultat al acestei anihilări: creșterea poluării și încălzirea microclimatului urban, un aspect urbanistic plin de șocuri vizuale și o alterare umană specială, pe plan fizic, psihic și estetic.*

Cuvinte cheie: amenajări peisagistice, distrugere, poluare urbană.

INTRODUCTION

The destruction of many green urban spaces, in order to build different constructions, represents a chronic and common Romanian process. Using a menacing corruption, avoiding and defying the existing lows and the human

rights to a better urban life, many city fathers operate by spreading fear, creating a pessimistic atmosphere. They inhibit the citizen's protests and defence. Usually the corrupted urban "developers" start generating an urban dereliction or degradation of the marked area, then a gradual amputation, finishing with total demolition of those spaces. Many urban spaces, which need an urgent rehabilitation, receive a subtle and gradual degradation, instead of a new life. Streets, plazas or transition urban spaces start to be suffocated by cars, dirtiness and bad taste advertising. Green spaces and landscape architectural arrangements disappear over night in many ways, like subtle avoidances of the laws protecting the urban green landscape, or an aggressive violation of it.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

We started from an existing example of urban landscape destruction in Iasi town, identifying two manners and some administrative characteristics of this process. Selecting and analyzing other proper examples, we will try to link all these facts to the main results: the emphasis of urban pollution, an urbanistic layout full of visual shocks and a particular human spoilage on physical, psychic and aesthetical level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Destroying the existent green spaces and children's games

The urban rehabilitation in Romania focuses mainly on the buildings. Many towns' spaces are waiting to be rehabilitated, designed and transformed, replacing the destructed ones. The buildings and the traffic expansion generate a high level of constructed areas saturation and a huge urban pollution, but also a huge waste of public space, waste of spatial qualities, of urban comfort and of urban life quality.

During the communist regime many areas were demolished, but after the 1989 revolution the urban destruction followed on, destroying the cities personality and identity. Either historical urban spaces, but also new ones were destroyed. As a result, the lack of public spaces for recreation creates a stressing zones atmosphere for the inhabitants.

In this context, in Iasi town, the destruction of one central green square, from the 60's époque, constitutes an alarming example. This green square hardly satisfied the needs of a big dwellings complex around. 60% of the inhabitants of this area are elders: they cannot easily walk far away to rest and have fresh air in other green places. 10% are little children-they don't have any place for games: the destruction of children's games was the starting point of the demolition works.

Despite the public protests of the inhabitants, the municipality assigns this green square to a hotel of neighbourhood, in order to build their parking area, underground. From the very beginning of this project the corruption was obvious: in the urbanism certificate they didn't specify the existing function of the place, that the place is an urban green square with landscape arrangements and furniture for relaxation of the elders and also with children games. They "forget" to specify

because of the existing laws protecting the green spaces: an Urgent Government Decree (OUG) 195/2005 (ratified through the Law 265/2006 and improved by OUG 114/2007) forbids the destruction of urban green spaces or the changing of this function. The destruction of the square and the works for the new parking started despite this decree (fig. 1 and 2).



Fig. 1. They started by cutting the trees and destroying children's games (original)



Fig. 2. The works started despite the public protest of the inhabitants (original)

The parking project proposes some new green spaces, but only over the concrete floor of the subterrain area; this situation creates a big problem: the earth for the vegetation roots can be only 1,00 m high, meaning that big trees cannot be planted and the other green species will not resist without regular irrigation and maintenance works in order to avoid drying. Without the shadow of big trees this area will be totally dry and the repose areas for elders and children will be exposed to the heat of the sun without protection.

It is known the attachment of elders to their old residential and public places, which can give them an important territorial feeling, urban identity and self respect. After the destruction of this green area, all the old people inhabitants suffered an important psychological shock and a part of them became very ill.

2. Alarming signs in landscape rehabilitation works

The importance and role of the urban spaces with landscape arrangements as stimulating and coagulating element of urban life, with its multitude of aspects, was understood long ago, but the transformation of the public consciousness has a very slow pace, especially the consciousness of authorities to take saving and rehabilitating measures.

The modern city with geometrized spaces, with arid technical details and dry decorations, having a polluting psychic effect, tends to be deeply disqualified by its values of content and form. In fact, the majority of our cities public spaces were degraded, not only the very old historical spaces, but also the modern spaces created several decades ago, becoming mostly utilitarian, contaminated by strange and parasitical ornamental objects or kitsch arrangements and advertising.

Even when there are some rehabilitation efforts of authorities, injudicious design solutions were performed as a result of municipality's designer's disinterest, or because the correct details of landscape design were not known. In this way, not only the destructed spaces, but also some new rehabilitated ones, offer nowadays many visual, physical and psychological shocks.



Fig. 3. Sideslip urban floor (original)



Fig. 4. Dangerous polished surface (original)



Fig. 5. Excessive floor declivity (original)



Fig. 6. Benchstairs with declivity (original)



Fig. 7. Dry space, lack of trees (original)



Fig. 8. Cars traffic and parking in the plaza (original)

The following examples of dysfunctional details from these rehabilitated public spaces prove how the flagrant landscape design mistakes have already critical consequences for the citizen's safety domain: side-slip urban floor dangerous for rainy and snowy days circulation (fig. 3 and 4); excessive declivity of urban floor leading dangerously from plaza directly/open to the roadway (fig.5); bench-stairs, which are sitting places, having absurd sidelong declivity, instead of being horizontal (fig. 6); the lack of trees exposing the space to the heat of the sun and a big percent of impermeable floor (fig. 7); the dangerous presence

of cars traffic and parking crossing the plaza, carrying away and subordinating to the needs of traffic an important surface of plaza (fig. 8).

Beside the urban discomfort and insecurity, the daily presence of these dysfunctional design details inside two central plazas constitute also a dangerous inoculation to the citizens of wrong ideas about urban landscape design, instead of giving them good lessons about harmony and aesthetical composition: stylistic, texture type and colour dissonances (fig. 9 and 10); furniture redundancy, like benches in front of bench-stairs sitting places (fig. 11); benches around a monument spoil the perspective and the magnetic effect of the monument-the statue should be a spatial focus point, but the benches destroy its image (fig. 12).



Fig. 9. Stylistic and texture dissonance of furniture (original)



Fig. 10. Stylistic and colour dissonance (original)



Fig. 11. Furniture redundancy (original)



Fig. 12. Spoilage of the statue magnetism (original)

Missing the proper information and education in the domain of judicious urban design and landscape arrangements, the inhabitants of our cities don't know about their daily visual pollution, they are not aware of these negatives aspects and details which spoil their safety and sanity. They also don't know that they can and should protest, protecting their rights to urban security, comfort and a high quality of urban life.

Solutions? In the context of finding sustainable method to minimize urban spaces loss, the universal design constitute an ideal instrument, contributing to the improvement of urban comfort degree, offering very efficient tools for the urban regeneration. Multifunctional landscape design can follow the highlight of landscape morphological elements, offering solutions that can be adapted to any specific environment problems, giving multiple efficiency to many urban design details.

CONCLUSIONS

The nowadays urban situation is one of alarming dejection: architectural erections are furiously built, monuments are demolished, parks and green spaces are destroyed, the density of constructions is increasing and the atmosphere became dry and dirty. We hardly find the presence of water, green vegetation or harmonious landscape design compositions. The public spaces were suffocated by cars, commercial shop-windows, strange signboards and advertisings, all aiming to visually and psychically stimulate the attention of inhabitants in an egotist goal to sell their products. Finally, these stimuli degenerated in aggression and kitsch.

In the historical central areas, the green spaces became the object of financial speculations. Only in the neighboring dwellings, plantations hardly still exist and have a beneficial contribution, either to create a more pleasant atmosphere or hiding out some negative aspects.

What effect can have this destruction, the gradual degeneration of green spaces, the presence of dirtiness and kitsch at the urban scale?

It is well-known the main result of this annihilation: the emphasis of urban pollution and microclimate warming. Beside this, there are the aspects of wasting through degradation many urban spaces, their architectural and urbanistic layout being generally full of visual shocks, creating a particular human spoilage on physical, psychic and esthetical level.

The conclusion is obvious: we should learn more from all these mistakes trying to repair it as quickly as possible.

REFERENCES

1. **Broadbent G., Bunt R., Llorens Th., 1980** - *Meaning and behaviour in the built environment*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester-New York-Toronto.
2. **Dascalu Doina Mira, 2006** - *Peisagistica: o posibilă terapie pentru problemele mileniului al III-lea (Landscape Architecture: possible therapy for the III Millennium problems)*. Editura Societății Academice "Matei - Teiu Botez", Iași.
3. **Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi, 1995** - *Meta Modern Era*. Computex Graphics, Bombay, India.