

NEW TRENDS IN PUBLIC URBAN PARKS - INDUSTRIAL AREAS REHABILITATION

NOI CURENTE ÎN PARCURILE PUBLICE URBANE – REABILITAREA ZONELOR INDUSTRIALE

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Abstract. *The rehabilitation of industrial areas and the development of parks that incorporate the industrial ruins represents a trend born in the USA in the early 1970s, when, for the first time, the abandoned industrial areas were accepted as a valid part of history, with a major contribution to the memory of the society and that of the land. The first such development is the Gas Works Park, in Seattle, designed by landscape architect Richard Haag in 1971, which was followed 20 years later by Landschaftspark, the concept of German landscape architect Peter Latz, located in Duisburg Nord.*

Key words: public urban park, abandoned industrial area, rehabilitation

Rezumat: *Reabilitarea zonelor industriale și crearea de parcuri în care se înglobează ruinele industriale este un curent care s-a născut în SUA la începutul anilor 70, când pentru prima dată au fost acceptate zonele industriale dezafectate ca parte validă a istoriei, cu o contribuție importantă la memoria societății și a locului. Prima realizare în acest sens este Parcul Gas Works, la Seattle, proiectat de peisagistul Richard Haag în 1971, urmând abia după 20 de ani Landschaftspark, conceput de peisagistul german Peter Latz la Duisburg Nord.*

Cuvinte cheie: parc public urban, arie industrială abandonată, reabilitare

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will briefly present a new trend in the design of urban public parks, namely, the recovery of industrial areas, the rehabilitation of unused industrial lands through their conversion into parks. The urban public park typology was developed over time. The need for more spaces in order to create new parks coupled with the concentration of the urban area, which is growing exponentially, are premises for a park that rehabilitates the industrial areas, as well as for the respect regarding the history of the place, the spirit of the place (*genius loci*) and for the architectural value of the buildings.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methods I used in studying/analyzing parks with industrial zone rehabilitation are:

- study and analyse of documents: books, reviews, internet sites, images;
- visits and analyses of sites as possible;
- systemisation of analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The industrial ruins were ignored and demolished until the early 70s. The first industrial area rehabilitation, the Gas Works Park, located on the site of a former gasification plant, was designed in 1971 by one of the most influential American landscape architects, Richard Haag, in Seattle, Washington. The concept was a very controversial one, and it took all of twenty years for another specialist to employ it for another project. Peter Latz, a German landscape architect with important works worldwide, created Lanfdschftpark at Duisburg Nord, in Germany, based on an abandoned steel production plant. Following this project, the industrial rehabilitation trend spread quickly around the world: in Holand, at Utrecht, Griftpark is also realized on a former gasworks site, as Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam, a cultural park opened in 2003; in London, Barnes Wetland Centre is designed on a former water supply reservoir; in Portugal, at Barcarena, a former gunpowder factory was converted into a cultural park; at Caen, in Normandy, Dominique Perrault designs a park on an abandoned iron works site. Here, the industrial traces of the past are transformed in visual landmarks, reference points of the landscape.

Gas Works Park

The American landscape architect Richard Haag initiated the abandoned industrial areas rehabilitation trend through the Gas Works Park project, which was developed between 1971 and 1988 in Seattle, Washington. The park is located on the northern bank of Union Lake, on the site of an abandoned gasification plant.



Fig. 1. Gas Works Park, aerial view

At the end of the 1960s few individuals in this field were interested in industrial archeology, leaving the unused industrial lands in a state of decay. Haag convinced the conservatory government and citizens, that expected the oil plant to be removed and for a common park to take its place, to preserve a significant part of the industrial structures and machines, instead of destroying them. Some of these he included as simple industrial ruins, the others he creatively transformed

into different functionalities (fig. 1, 2). The play barn includes part of the former compressor (where one can also find a maze of lively colored machinery), and the boiler room was turned into a covered picnic area.



Fig. 2. Gas Works Park, special event

Because this was an industrial site, the soil was contaminated. The methods Haag chose in order to remedy this problem were those of phytoremediation, the use of certain plants and natural biological processes. At the time, these methods were highly original and controversial and rendered very good results. Only after two decades they were used again in Europe at Duisburg.

Landschaftspark

20 years later, in 1991, the German landscape architect Peter Latz won the competition for the development of a park in Duisburg Nord, on an abandoned industrial site, with a project that enhanced the history and character of the landscape. The park stretches over 200 ha of land out of which 20 ha are covered by an abandoned steel production plant whose main structure Latz preserved and incorporated in a postmodern landscape (fig. 3). The landscape architect's approach towards the site's industrial background is one of healing and understanding, instead of one of rejection.



Fig. 3. Landschaftspark, aerial view

Like Haag, Latz doesn't change the polluted soil, but he improves it through bioremediation, using certain plants. The contaminated soil was buried deep inside the buildings, under layers of clay that form hanging gardens, home for a spontaneous vegetation, well adapted to the characteristics of the terrain. Thus, the German landscape architect's approach immediately references Gas Works Park, both through the value lent to the site's industrial heritage and through the project's defining environmental trait. The use of existing materials and vegetation are the main features that illustrate this environmental characteristic: the technological structures become symbols reminiscent of Land Art; a sequence of rooms (bunkers) of the old plant are converted to a series of symbolic gardens (fig. 4); the industrial materials and articles from around the site are recycled, the most eloquent example being the 49 steel plates with different high temperature wears from the foundry, that Latz used as pavement for the park's central square, located in the heart of the old plant, Piazza Metallica (fig. 5), a place for ad hoc gatherings, events, shows; the iron stairs were originally part of the demolished merchandise handling path, the metallic blades of the mill become a landmark of the new park (fig. 6).



Fig. 4. Landschaftspark, secret gardens

Like Haag at Gas Works Park, Latz preserves the industrial vestiges of the site. Some he incorporates as ruins, for others he finds new functionalities: the bunkers become spaces for symbolic and reclusive gardens, the old gas reservoirs are transformed into diving pools, the concrete walls become climbing walls, and the heart of the plant becomes the main square, Piazza Metallica (fig. 5).

The vegetation is made mostly of pioneer species, capable of colonizing the difficult and polluted sublayers of soil, most of which are of a recent nature, due to the transportation processes in the iron and steel industry. The exotic vegetation from the park was classified and studied, turning Landschaftspark into a true botanical garden. The presence of vegetation between the rails, the great empty and abandoned plants, the contaminated soil that receives unknown species, the drained channel, everything contributes to the illusion that past wounds inflicted

by men on the landscape can finally be healed by nature, and this strengthens the environmental character of Latz's project. This is a highlight for the metaphor of ruin and that of memory.



Fig. 5. Landschaftspark, Piazza Metallica

The idea of the park is for a grandfather, former worker of the plant, to be able to walk his grandchildren here and tell them the story of what he used to do and that of the site using the authentic objects and articles scattered around. In Landschaftspark memory represents the main theme. Many critics write about the ways in which keepsakes can give visitor information about the site, a concept that prevails in postmodernism. Memory is not about conservation in this project, but about the flow of time. Instead of destroying the plant because of its lack of production, the architects created a design that includes it; they allowed the vegetation to grow spontaneously in order to mend the soil, thus offering visitors the opportunity to understand the process of change. Each individual can have his own experience of the park and create his own personal story.



Fig. 6. Landschaftspark, the propeller

The project focuses mainly on the concept aspect, and less on the design-composition one; it tries to give people a place for recreation, despite the fact that

the main component that this project was based on, is the steel production plant, which, in any other circumstances, would not constitute a very pleasant site. This cleverly planned space attracts more visitors than other German parks because it offers people a wide range of recreational activities. And, most importantly, it is a curiosity and a challenge both for the locals, who continue the story of their lives in a permanent state of change, and for the tourists that are now creating their own memory of the place.

CONCLUSIONS

Accepting the industrial ruins represents a very important step in landscape architecture's recent history. This ensures the preservation of an important architectural heritage, but also of the memory of the place, the *genius loci*, and the memory of the society. Gas Works Park and Landschaftspark are examples to be followed all over the world, even in Romania, where the industrial architectural heritage is an extremely valuable one.

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