



HISTORICAL PARKS AS AN ELEMENT OF RURAL LANDSCAPE IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

This paper describes the present state of historical gardens and parks which were founded around domiciles of the gentry in the area of Turiec valley, Slovakia. Almost forty of these manor houses are located in the area. In the past, the park or the ornamental garden was created in the immediate vicinity of these buildings. The current state of their attached historical greenery described in this contribution is based on field investigation. Natural landscape parks have been preserved to the best degree by nobility in Mosovce and Turcianska Stiavnicka which used to belong to the Revay family. The park in the village Zaturcie is partially well preserved. The other parks and gardens were destroyed to a large degree and their existence can be accounted for only by occasional older trees. Some difficulties in conservation or reconstruction of these historical landscapes are described in the presented work as well.

Key words: historical gardens and parks, reconstruction, rural landscape, Slovakia, Turiec valley

Introduction

The natural, geographical and social conditions of the Turiec valley are described in order to understand the conditions in which the research was conducted. The Turiec valley is located in the middle and northwestern part of Slovakia. It covers an area of 1125 km². The Turiec basin counts among the highest placed and most distinctive basins of Slovakia. The Mountains of Mala Fatra create the boundaries in the West and the North. In the East, the basin is bordered by the Velka Fatra Mountains. The river Turiec flows in the middle of the basin. The altitude at the basin's bottom ranges from 370m over sea level in the North to 700m over sea level in the South which causes large temperature differences. An average temperature of the territory is 7,4 °C (temperature minimum -32,2 °C, maximum 37,4 °C), average precipitation is 700-800 mm (summer 250 – 300 mm) and an average duration of snowfall is 60-80 days. There are thirty-three mineral water springs in the territory of the Turiec basin and its surrounding area.

From the phytological standpoint the region of the Turiec valley belongs to the Western Carpathian Flora. Wide ranging flora developed in this area owing to varied natural conditions. The most extensive portion of the region is covered by forest groupings. The vegetation includes all elevation flora degrees and was largely devastated by the Shepherd Colonization at the turn of the 15th century. On the other hand, this step in development of local flora provided conditions for formation of vast mountainous and high-mountainous meadows with rare diversified flora of many thermophilic species.

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Around one hundred thousand of the local residents live in seventy-two villages.

The long history of settlement, abundant cultural background and presence of wealthy manors prepared ideal conditions for building a multitude of luxurious manor houses, curias and mansions around which gardens and parks were simultaneously founded. The architectural style was influenced by ideas and examples from abroad thanks to the nobility contacts with Vienna and Budin. Virtually no records related to garden art from this time period remained until today. Nowadays, only two parks of great value, among many below mentioned ones, are registered in the Central List of the Cultural Sights of Slovakia. These are the historical parks by the mansions in Mosovce and Turcianska Stiavnicka which were later enlarged and remodeled to natural landscape parks with a remarkable dendrological value.

Historical architecture and landscape of the Turiec region

According to the List of the Cultural Sights of the Turiec Region (www.matica.sk) there are thirty-seven curias and mansions by which the presence of gardens or parks can be expected, as well as three medieval castles in the examined territory. These were chosen:

1. Bela – Dulice

This village used to belong to curial villages. Its land used to be an enclave of the Revay and Justhy manors. There is a partially preserved rococo curia from the 18th century in the Dulice part of the village. It is hardly recognizable among the contemporary building density all around it. The curia does not have any features of the original garden arrangement. The remaining sights did not survive and currently cannot be detected.

2. Blatnica

The Blatnica village used to be the centre of the manor belonging to the Revay family. There are a lot of preserved and reconstructed upper-class houses and two mansions. The baroque-classicistic mansion with a circular portico from the middle of the 18th century is located in the centre of the village. A large farm yard is a part of this sight. The Museum of Karol Plicka, a famous artist of the 20th century, is situated in the building nowadays. This mansion has been reconstructed as well as the second one which belongs to late baroque style. It comes from the 18th. It serves as a memorial room to Izabela Textorisova, Slovakia's first female botanist. A little park with a fountain and newer garden layout, which probably used to be the entrance parter, is situated in between the house and the stream running along the street. There is a small garden behind the house which is overgrown with grass. The rear boundary is formed by a stream running in a stone channel which brings water to the local watermill.

3. Blazovce

This village is an example of the curial villages. Its existence was not known until the end of the 15th century. Two preserved curias can be found at this location. The one dating back to the first half of the 19th century is on a private property today. The building is partially maintained but its estate was reduced by farming cooperative and newer villas built in its immediate vicinity. The second curia in the Blazovce village was built in baroque style and comes from the first half of the 18th century. It was abandoned in the past and is presently dilapidated. A latter-day family house borders this curia on one side with a street on the other. The garden is quite large with no fence and no planting that

would suggest the original character of its arrangement.

4. Diviaky

The estate of Diviaky belonged to the Plathy family from the village Paludza since the 15th century. In the middle of the 17th century they built a splendid palace here which was renovated in the middle of the 20th century. This palace serves as a facility for purposes of the Matica slovenska (The Slovak Cultural and Scientific Institution) until the present day. The main entrance to the palace is through a smaller building facing a street. There is a formal parter in between with a centrally placed well and a stone fence enclosing the estate. The actual garden is formed by a grassy area lined with a thick shrubbery plants. Tennis courts can be found in the corners of the garden. This garden was reconstructed in 1956 with a distinctly modernistic approach. The second, rococo palace, later changed to classicistic dates from the middle of the 18th century is in a bad shape today. The only remaining part is the front section of the garden, originally likely with a formal garden layout. The rear part is reduced, enclosed and used for utilitarian purposes. Some maple, ash and larch specimens in the neighborhood suggest the professional establishment of this gardens and its original size.

5. Folkusova – Sebeslavce

Sebeslavce was originally an individual curial village that was founded earlier than the Blatnica castle was built, in the second half of the 13th century. Later it became a part of the castle property and formed a settlement around it. The local curias were defunct as early as the 15th century. The village met the same fate only after the castle was deserted. The original wealth of the village is demonstrated by the Church of Saint Ondrej dating back to 1360 and a linden tree alley guiding a way to this historical monument. This was also the second way leading to the Blatnice castle. Folkusova used to be a curial village back in the day as well. There always used to be four curias here but only one survived until the present day. It was built in the beginning of the 17th century. It is a private property now that was greatly devastated by the previous owners. The object's reconstruction is finishing these days. There are grand trees in the rear part of the estate which account for the existence of a garden or a yard back in the past. The estate was reduced in size by the surrounding building development and today is quite narrow. Its space is used as a utilitarian garden.

6. Ivancina

Ivancina belonged to the Nyary Estate. The renaissance curia from the end of the 17th century is partially rebuilt and belongs to the Kamienna family which now builds their new houses in the garden space. The barn can be found walking towards the stream in the rear part of the property. In between the barn and the residential building is quite a large and considerably neglected garden.

7. Klaster pod Znievom

The village Klaster pod Znievom was originally the settlement around the Zniev (and earlier the Trencin) castle. Its significance was decreased as the district seat moved to the Sklabina castle. The village development was closely connected with the establishment of the Premonstratensian monastery founded here by King Belo in 1251. An extensive monastery property which did not come under the regional ministration in Trencin was formed by this gift. In 1773 Maria Teresa of Austria cancelled the Jesuitical

Order and villages became subjected to the Trnava University and stayed under its control even after 1948 (Sikura 1944). There are many historical buildings located in the village among which are buildings of the First Slovak High School, the old city hall and many citizen and artisan houses along all the buildings of the monastery complex. The Slovak Institute of Historical Sights has two classicistic curias in its registry. One is located approximately in the centre of the village as a part of a continuous housing development with no garden arrangement. It has a classicistic frontage with a rounded portico facing a street. This curia is run-down with a narrow courtyard currently used as a kitchen garden of the residents. The second classicistic curia comes from the second half of the 18th century. Its frontage is also facing a street and there are preserved arcades in its courtyard. No imprints of the original layout are preserved in the garden. A new villa was built in the rear section of the garden.

8. Laclava

Laclava is a typical curial village with six curias of which three are registered at the Institute of Historical Sights. During this research several of them were identified. The once originally renaissance curia from the middle of the 16th century currently belongs to a private owner. It is used for residential and recreational purposes after a previous reconstruction. A large garden is attached to the curia. A few specimens of old linden trees, maples and ashes, growing mostly in the entrance parts of the garden and in the sections along the boundaries, point to the existence of an earlier garden arrangements. Two additional baroque curias in awful conditions, but with vast land and the remains of farm buildings, can be located in the same village. The atypically local flora growing in the marginal sections indicates former landscape arrangements. Another two curias built in classicistic style have been changed to a large degree and are currently used for recreational purposes. There are relatively spacious gardens by both of these curias, however neither of them has any remains of an older vegetation. The sixth, last remaining curia from the list was not detected.

9. Mosovce

The Mosovce village is counted among the oldest ones in the Turiec region. It was mentioned as early as 1233. Presumably in the middle of the 14th century the village was given town rights and became a privileged little town, however still inferior to the royal castle of Blatnica and later Sklabina. Since the beginning of the 16th century Mosovce belonged to the Revay family manor which meant reducing the town privileges and slowing down its development (Sikura 1944). The original seat of the Revay family called the Old Palace has a curial character. The New Palace was built in its vicinity in the middle of the 17th century. This one was remodeled in rococo-classicistic style and is now a property of the Via Magna, s.r.o. company. After the reconstruction will be fully completed the palace will be used as a hotel. The same company also rents an extensive park where so-called dry thinning was realized, dry and sick parts of vegetation were removed. The reconstructed classicistic garden pavilion from 1800 is located in the front part of the park as well as the pseudo gothic mausoleum from 1911. The park was originally smaller, most likely in baroque style of that period. Frantisek Revay loved nature and from his travels he gained broad knowledge about the new natural landscape park style. Therefore, he was progressively enlarging and reorganizing the park in this style. The flora consists mainly of the native species and there are also ponds which used to be part of a bigger fish farm complex in the neighborhood area. Even though this park

was virtually not maintained in the past and the substitute vegetation was mostly inappropriate, it possesses features of a professional establishment. Many of the original trees among which are a few pieces of *Pinus nigra* and *Larix decidua* survived in the park alleys as well as in its vicinity. The existing project of the park reconstruction is not up-to-date but the current occupants have the intention to update it and later use the park and its surrounding areas for the hotel guests. The enclosing landscape was also altered in the past and nowadays presents opportunities for development of this rural area. The typical baroque alley and planted grows offer options for travel and recreation.

10. Necpaly

It was a seat of the Justhy family who obtained its land from Blazej Necpalsky. They had a legal dispute about the property with the descendants of the Necpaly family line as well as with the Revay family. However, they defended their rights and by the 18th century belonged to the richest family in the Turiec valley. They built four mansions in the Necpaly village. Two of them built in renaissance style were already mentioned in 1673 and 1695. The two remaining baroque-classicistic ones date back to the 17th and 18th century. Both renaissance mansions are situated in the northeast part of the village and have renovated thatched roofs. They are otherwise neglected, run-down and abandoned. The farm yard of a considerable size with remaining relics of the original objects is attached to the bigger mansion. Remnants of the stone fence boundary that provide evidence of the square renaissance layout of the yard can be seen in a few places. An elevated parter can be found at the entrance to the mansion. There are remains of presumably formal garden arrangements here. Second, smaller mansion can be found towards the mountains of Velka Fatra, which is located bellow the forest with its garden situated in the front part of the estate. There are no garden arrangements. The local flora consists only from mowed fenced meadow. The baroque-classicistic mansion creates a part of the village plaza. A childrens' orphanage currently occupies its space. Naturally, its surrounding corresponds with this function. There is a stokehold and new conifer trees in the garden along with concrete flower beds etc. The original size and layout is suggested by old trees. The so-called Low Palace was built in baroque-classicistic. In the last decades it also served as a childrens' orphanage. In the present it belongs to the Rozsival family and is generously renovated. A relatively large natural landscape park is situated around the palace with some of the original plants. The palace is accessible from across the bridge and a right-hand oriented linden alley. The stone tank of a regular shape in front of the palace and the remains of most likely pruned yews indicate a formal character of the parter.

Dendrologically interesting parks

According to Bencat (1982) the following parks in the selected area are interesting from a dendrological aspect. They should also be noticed as important forming landscape elements.

1. Turcianska Stiavnicka

This natural landscape park is located by the originally renaissance mansion from the 16th century. The park is from the second half of the 18th century. It covers an area of 10,6 ha. There are one hundred and twelve taxons of woody plants, of which forty-eight are coniferous. This park is registered in the Central List of Cultural Sights of Slovak Republic. According to the Categorization of Historical Parks and Gardens of Slovak

Republic (Tomasko, Supuka 2003) it belongs to the Category „A1+A2“. This category consists of parks with extraordinary architectural and biological significance of a nationwide importance.

2. Park in Zaturcie

This is a park of a regional importance. It originates in the second half of the 19th century. The park lies on 2,5 ha of land. Ten taxons of woody plants were noted here. Out of this number seven are coniferous.

3. Trebostovo

The park is located in the vicinity of a renaissance manor house from the first half of the 19th century. It has a regional significance. Eight taxons of woody plants were detected here. Two of these are conifer taxons.

4. Necpaly

The baroque-classicistic mansion comes from the second half of the 18th century. It is surrounded by a park with ten taxons of woody plants that include one conifer taxon. There are several adult specimens of foreign woody plants in the park (Feriancova, Schlampova, Stepankova 2005). The original size and layout is suggested by old trees. *Fagus sylvatica* 'Atropunicea', *Tilia cordata*, *Fraxinus excelsior* and *Acer pseudoplatanus*. The park covers an area of 3,7 ha. It was put into the Category „C“ which consists of parks that are significant regionally and historically. They are also of value as bio-centrums and as important landscape forming elements of Slovakia.

5. Mosovce

The Mosovce park is situated by the rococo-classicistic manor house from the second half of the 18th century. The covered area is 12,4 ha. Twenty nine taxons of which ten are conifers were discovered in this park. It belongs to the „A1+A2“ Category of significance which is described above.

Preservation of the historical greenery in Slovakia

The historical greenery of the Turiec valley represents precious monuments of the Slovak culture. Castles and manor houses with their attached historical parks and gardens are a very typical part of the countryside. Historical parks and gardens of Slovakia possess the necessary individual features of garden architecture, traditional horticultural culture and landscape-formation, which among the historical, biological and landscape values, and the value of a model for the contemporary landscape and park development give enough reasons for their preservation (Tomasko 2005).

According to the national report on Slovakia the International Council on Monuments and Sites states some issues in preserving Slovakia's cultural heritage today (www.icomos.org). As a cultural heritage, historical greenery is under legal protection of the Slovak Republic. Nevertheless, here lies the first problem. The legislation comes from the socialist era (before 1989) and is based on the responsibility of the owner, at that time mostly being the State. Meanwhile a considerable number of these sights have changed owners. Some have been either restituted to previous owners and afterwards often sold or massively rebuilt, or otherwise left without any care. Others have been given in the possession of the local municipalities. In both cases the main problem is a lack of resources for their restoration. The political changes of 1989 resolved in the

collapse of the system for financing heritage restoration. This system has not been yet sufficiently replaced by an appropriate mechanism even though there are a few sources designated for the purpose of heritage preservation.

The first step in the preservation is the conservation of sights. The conservation of historical greenery among other cultural heritage faces some serious problems today. The present situation is critical mostly because of the lack of maintenance in the past. The planned economy of the socialist era was not accustomed to unexpected needs. Its limited resources did not allow covering the expenses of restoration work for all decaying heritage places. One of the features of the past heritage management system was that it was not based on maintenance, but on costly reconstruction. The objects chosen were often selected ideologically and restored by State building companies, often by replacing the neglected valuable parts by copies or simply by new detail so the object was ultimately damaged and lost its authenticity. This problem persists today. There are still efforts to renovate and beautify the original. The public understanding of the methods and aims of heritage conservation must be understood in order to preserve the precious historical monuments of Slovakia.

The difficulties that occur in connection with this issue are numerous. Except the afore-mentioned lack of funding and knowledge of the proper conservation methods, other actual worries arise. Some of them, such as indifference and ignorance, egoism, greediness and decent taste and incorrect understanding of contemporary needs have survived for decades. Others like a lack of cultural awareness, explicitness of the ownership and consequent lack of maintenance and restoration are more contemporary ones. Another crucial problem is the use of historical sights. Many are still used for social services (e.g. orphanages in the Necpaly mansions). Now the fate of historical parks and gardens is identical to religious monuments of Slovakia, they are either ignored or degraded by a reduced function. Their often unique artistic value is affected by the lack of maintenance and simple conservation methods. These are the fundamental steps in order to restore or renovate the sight and consequently put it to use and maintain it. To do this the funds to prepare a conservation management plan for historical landscapes must be raised. An additional trouble is the difficulty of obtaining enough information from the historical documents in order to find out the original state of the parks and gardens.

Conclusions

The research indicates that the same or similar care was given to gardens and parks as to the buildings. However the current state of most historical parks and gardens in the Turiec valley is a matter of considerable concern. Historical landscapes belong to the most endangered categories of cultural sights in Slovakia despite the fact that they are irreplaceable forming elements of rural landscape. The parks and gardens were built according to the trends as well as the architectural part of the site and their conservation and reconstruction in the original style should be essential regardless of the difficulties. The first step to enable sustainability of the historical greenery in Slovakia is to raise funds for its conservation no matter the current ownership or use. A more detailed research and perhaps a reconstruction or renovation projects should be created for the parks in Mosovce, Necpaly, Diviaky but also the smaller ones with still remaining original sections. This work will be followed by wider processing of the archive materials about the original gardens and parks surrounding curias and mansions in the region of the Turiec valley.

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