

PARK AND GARDEN CONSERVATION PROBLEMS IN THE U.S.S.R

In the U.S.S.R. there exist unique specimens of the art of landscape design, mostly belonging to the 18th and 19th centuries. Earlier grounds and gardens which would have been particularly interesting because of their original, purely national, character, are almost entirely gone ; besides, many of them were radically rebuilt at the beginning of the 18th Century, in the days of Peter the Great, when decisive changes occurred in all fields of Russia's economy, science and art.

Russian parks and gardens are a curious phenomenon in the history of landscape architecture. Most of them are the result of many years' collaboration between French, Italian and German specialists and Russian designers and gardeners, many of whom had mastered their art to a very high degree. The names of such architects as Matveyev, Zemtsoff, Yegoroff and Neyeloff and of such garden-designers as Borisoff, Pustynsky, Cuvshinnikov, and Bolotoff have their place in the history of Russian landscape design alongside the more famous ones of Bazhenoff, Cazakoff and Voronikhin and those of the great foreign masters Cameron, Gonzago, Toma de Tomon, Jean-Baptiste Leblond and Edouard André. Consequently, most Russian historic gardens are the visible result of an organic blend of the planning principles progressively evolved in European landscape design and of the methods of composition developed by Russian architects and based on the natural character of the country's landscape.

For the most part the objets d'art of landscape architecture in the USSR are grounds and gardens belonging to city and country estates of old times, though there are a few examples of public gardens laid out as such in the 18th, or at the beginning of the 19th, Century, as self-

contained parts of city historical centres, with a design depending in a great measure on the natural peculiarities of the site.

The existence of such historic landscapes among modern city developments is a rare enough thing. Many excellent specimens of the art were destroyed in the stormy process of urbanization ; such was the case, for example, of the Yauza River Valley in Moscow, which had grown up at first as an area of aristocratic residences with grounds which, though rather small, were of great artistic value. In the 18th Century the Yauza Valley was attractive enough for Peter the Great to choose it as the site of his own house ; but later, as the nobility and gentry gradually became ruined, the garden sites were sold off in parcels to tradesmen and factory-owners. The river became bordered with a helter-skelter arrangement of small factories, warehouses and mills of all kinds. The vegetation was destroyed, and the air polluted with smoke, and the Yauza itself became a sewer for miscellaneous industrial waste. Of the old gardens only Lefortovo (formerly the estate of Peter the Great) and Vysokye Gory ("High Hills"), built a hundred years later, escaped destruction. Right now, projects for cleaning out the Yauza River are being worked out, together with plans for the restoration of the existings grounds and the re-planting of trees where the original ones had been removed. This would make it possible to create the "green zone" so badly needed by the central areas of the city.

Existing historical park sites today often suffer from improper use, even where this is for recreational purposes. For example, the garden of the historic town centre in Kaluga is used as a city amusement park. The 23-hectare (56-acre) site, no less than half of which is taken up by sharp slopes slanting down to the river, is crowded out by the city Pioneer Palace, sports grounds, out-of-door amenities and service pavilions ; and now there are to be new buildings to accommodate an 800-seat cinema, a restaurant and a terrace for dancing. Such use cannot be

considered appropriate, as it leads to irreparable changes in a landscape possessing a historical value. Gardens of this type can be used only for walking, and possibly also for certain exhibitions connected with a lively period of the place's history. This is the way in which the historic Letny ("Summer") and Mikhailovsky Gardens of Leningrad are being used ; the first of these dates from about 1711, the second from 1825. Together with the Marsovo Polye Memorial Garden, created in 1917-1926 by the architect I. Fomin, they form the green spaces of Leningrad's central area ; there is thus unusual co-existence and blending of three landscape creations, each belonging to a different famous period.

The growth of cities, which has rapidly increased in the last few decades, produces conditions in which historical gardens, after centuries of existence far outside city boundaries, find themselves surrounded by new housing estates, with a population numbering many thousands. Such is the case with many of Moscow's notable historic landscape - Kolomenskoye (16th-17th Century), Cuskovo, Tsarytsino, and others. The complete change in surroundings means serious alterations in the way the grounds are used, and in most cases imperils their further preservation.

Landscape violations as a result of urbanization fall into two categories. The first category is that of the visual violations (most simply exemplified by the case where a background of high-rise buildings takes the place of the rural landscape which existed formerly). When it is attempted to fight violation of this sort much attention must be given to a careful survey of the natural features of the tract of land (especially its contours, which must determine the outline of the forms the eye is to embrace) and to timely presentation of a protection zone scheme for approval by the local authorities. The "protection zone" must include those landscapes which exist within visual boundaries of the garden's main vistas, and particularly those included in the initial

lay-out so far as can be judged from available historical data. An interesting instance is the new Tsarytsino-Borisovo recreation zone, designed to cater for the south-east part of Moscow. It consists of a picturesque site including the Borisov cascade of ponds, dating from the 16th Century, and the 18th Century palace gardens of Tsarytsino, with their well-preserved vegetation, 130-150 years old (including many trees planted as much as 300 years ago) : the whole zone is protected under the Nature Conservation Law.

The project is designed to include the restoration of the main panoramic views of the palace and grounds, for these determined many of the spatial compositions conceived by the author-architect Vasily Bazhenov. A well-known instance is the "General Façade", or view from the main stone dam ; this varied image of the whole stretch of palace ruins mirrored in the water, with the gentle contours of the vegetation unfolding across the ponds, produces an irrefragable impression even now, and the main spatial axis has served as a basis for the outline of the protection zone in the new design. The land surrounding the Borisov Ponds, which is in a worse state of preservation than the other parts, is considered suitable for use as a mass recreation zone, while the 18th-Century palace gardens are to be fully retained as such and used purely as a "museum".

But however serious visual violations may be, some of them must be inevitably accepted : we cannot hope to preserve a "museum" landscape to conceal the existence of an urbanized environment. On the contrary, one of the goals to be attained must be the merging of creations belonging to different periods to form a single whole, as has been visibly achieved in the best overall plans of the past.

The violations falling into the second category present a more serious peril for historic landscapes. They are connected with the

uses and functions of parks and particularly with the degree to which they are frequented.

When surroundings are urbanized there is an abrupt change in the nature of their use. Formerly the park visitors could be counted in dozens and it was only on holidays that there might be a few thousand arrivals. In between such days the park had time to "recuperate" from the damage incurred. In a new city housing area the local park with a historical background is immediately put to use as a regular recreation ground for many thousands, and this cannot but tell fatally on its condition. It is clear enough that when a new part of a town or city is planned an existing historic landscape must not be regarded as the main part of the future green area. Such, nevertheless, is still the accepted practice in many cases.

Historic park sites can be used for walking only ; all other functions, all other types of recreation, must be relegated to specially-designed zones in the immediate vicinity of the site intended for conservation. Usually the protection zone can be used for this purpose. It is only by such diversion of the stream of mass visitors that the historic landscape can be preserved from physical ruin ; prohibitions, enclosures or fines cannot serve this end.

The "buffer" recreation zone can take on a variety of forms, depending on local site conditions and the general plan of the town. It may be concentrated in a new city park with a well-developed amusement centre, or may surround the landscape to be preserved with a "chaplet" of smaller areas, or sometimes even be in the shape of a star formed by small amusement and sports grounds broken at intervals by pedestrian walks leading to the ancient grounds in the centre. In any of these cases the streams of visitors will be filtered through the new recreation grounds, and only some of them - the most interested section - will emerge into

the historic part of the park

The project for a "museum park" and tourist centre at Kolomenskoye in one of the most interesting landscapes in what used to be the Moscow suburbs and now forms an actual part of the city, can be cited as an example of this type of approach. Here there has so far been preserved the general lay-out of the Czar's 16th-Century country residence, with its main stone structures, which include one of Russia's architectural masterpieces, the Church of the Ascension, a large number of ancient trees, an archaeological find (the ruins of a prehistoric village at Dyakovo), and other notable features. The size of the area to be preserved is defined in the project as nearly 300 hectares (750 acres). Careful analysis of the morphological features of the ground has made it possible to trace out the protection zone, from which high-rise buildings are barred for fear of their spoiling the harmonious contours of the whole. This zone is proposed for use as a "buffer" park, with a tourist centre spread out on a terraced hillside from which there is an excellent view of the site to be preserved. The total area covered by this site and the "buffer" zones together amounts to 450 hectares (1,100 acres).

Another case, that of the City Park at Cuskovo, illustrates the "chaplet" principle : smallish zones for active recreation are situated on the main pedestrian routes leading from nearby housing estates and along the perimeter of the central area (the outline of which was defined in accordance with the three main axes of the 18th-Century lay-out). The park area totals 250 hectares (625 acres).

Many historic estates (the above-mentioned among them) were declared "museums" in the first twenty years after the October Revolution. Some were used as large convalescent institutions and sanatoriums, while others became centres where artists, authors and architects could do their creative work. These parks, if they are lucky enough to be still situated

far out from the city, as a rule have no problems, except those connected with everyday upkeep, the planting of new trees as old ones die off, as so on. All this is usually done with the help of qualified professionals, and the parks remain in good condition. Such is the case of the excellent sanatorium grounds at Archangelskoye and Voronovo near Moscow, the Ukrainian tree park at Trostyanets, the parks of Mikhailovskoye and Trigoriskoye - former home of the poet Pushkin and now the Pushkin Museum - and others. The grounds of lesser country seats, which have served for years as popular convalescent homes or schools, are usually much the worse for wear. Many of them retain no more than traces of their original design, as a result of decreases in size, the erection of new buildings and the lack of skilled labour, and owing to the absence of any qualified specialist to exert constant supervision and explain the value of the landscape and recommend measures for its conservation. This has in fact been the fate of many gardens of known historical and artistic value. But there exist a number of country estates situated at such great distances from cities that they have been "forgotten" for several decades and are now being re-discovered. The surveying, classification and comparative evaluation of these relics of landscape art offer a challenge to Soviet historians and designers, as any project for restoring such gardens must necessarily be based on the results of their research.

In the restoration of ruined gardens, Soviet specialists have had a great and unique experience. In the years after the Second World War, the magnificent historical grounds at Pushkin, Pavlovsk and Petrodvorets in the Leningrad suburbs were fully restored. The damage that had been inflicted on these areas by military operations and even more so by occupation is difficult to imagine when one visits the restored parks today. Over and above the destruction of palaces, pavilions, bridges and other garden structures, the water-supply and drainage systems had been rendered useless and many areas were chopped bare of trees. In Pavlovsk, for instance, of the 110,000 garden trees in existence before the war,

seventy thousand had been felled.

By the present time most of the work on the restoration of the famous Pushkin and Pavlovsk gardens has been completed, although some engineering and decorative details have still to be finished ; this is true in particular of the reconstruction of the water-supply system - the Tait's Waterway feeding both parks - which has so far been only partly restored. Outstandingly good execution marks one of the last parts of the job - the White Birch area in Pavlovsk, first created by the artist Gonzago. This area of 250 hectares (625 acres) contains an astonishing diversity of park landscapes, although the selection of species is very limited ; the groves and clusters are mostly pine and fir, with a border of birches.

At Pushkin - formerly Tsarskoye Selo - a fine job has been done on the parterre in front of the palace façade on the garden side, which has been restored in accordance with 18th-Century drawings and plans ; it had been overgrown by trees since the early 19th Century. The appropriateness of the restorers' decision had at first seemed doubtful, but the best proof of its soundness is to be found in the results of their work.

All the restoration work in the grounds was based on old drawings, sketches and plans, which clearly showed the authors' original intentions, and on aeroplane surveys, photographs and measurements dating from the years before World War II. It may be added that the total area of the Pavlovsk parks amounts to 506 hectares (1,250 acres) while that of the three Pushkin parks amounts to 530 hectares (1,350 acres) ; this will give some idea of the scale of the undertaking.

Such experience can be of great use, as it simplifies work on less important though artistically valuable parks, of which there are quite a

number both in the vicinity of Leningrad and in many other parts of the country. Experience in park reconstruction, based on drawings and measurements, can also be useful when one comes to tackle a comparatively new problem which is now facing specialists in the field of history and landscape architecture. This is the problem of the landscape environment of Russian monasteries, many of which are becoming well known for their architectural value and are gradually being turned into tourist centres. The monastery sites had been chaotically built over in the course of the years ; during the reconstruction operations the ruined and valueless buildings are being pulled down and the question arises of how to restore the aspect of each place as it was at the most outstanding period of the monastery's existence. A solution to this problem must be devised in the near future.

It will be clear from all that has preceded that the problems relating to the conservation of historic sites in the USSR can be easily divided into two kinds. The first kind of problem is connected with the need for constant and intensive search for little-known or neglected gardens and grounds, their classification and appraisal ; the purpose here is to bring them to public attention, start work on projects for their restoration (including estimates of the cost of the work and of the resources which may be available), and introduce temporary measures for the prevention of further decay. The second kind of problem is of growing urgency ; it relates to the protection of famous park now suffering heavily from intensive mass attendance, partly as one of the effects of urbanisation. It is the problems in this second category, connected with the rapid growth of towns in the USSR, which are considered to be the most acute.

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Mrs. Micoulina emphasized that the biggest problem arising in the USSR was, as she had explained, the mass use of gardens which had not been designed to receive so many visitors ; the rate of admission considered to be normal was 200 persons per hectare.

Mr. Porcinaï here pointed out that at a recent congress on the protection of nature it had been stated that in the case of woods and gardens in Mediterranean countries proper conservation became impossible once more than 90 people were admitted per hectare.

In Mr. Fricher's opinion the number of visitors who could be admitted varied from case to case and depended on the season and the nature of the garden. Mrs. Baseova felt that any organized cultural activity held in a garden involved a degree of risk.

Mr. Bagatti-Valsecchi considered that it was therefore becoming urgently necessary to emphasize the factors which distinguished recreational areas from gardens of historical interest, with which they should in no case be confused. If the total number of people visiting a garden became excessive, a limit must be set to the number allowed in at any one time, as in the case of castles, châteaux or museums, and there must also be a certain amount of superintendence.

Mrs. Micoulina explained that, while gardens were not legally classed as recreational areas or looked on as such by the experts, visitors did not make any distinction between the two ; the question was therefore primarily one of educating the public.

DISCUSSION APRES LE RAPPORT DE Madame MICOULINA

Madame Micoulina souligne que le plus grand problème qui se pose en U.R.S.S. est donc la fréquentation de masse dans des jardins qui n'avaient pas été conçus pour une telle affluence. On considère que le taux normal de visiteurs est de 200 personnes à l'hectare.

Lors d'un récent congrès pour la protection de la nature, précise Monsieur Porcinaï, il a été indiqué que, pour les bois et les jardins méditerranéens, si l'on admettait plus de 90 personnes à l'hectare leur conservation était compromise.

Pour Monsieur Fricker, le taux de fréquentation possible est différent à chaque fois, selon le jardin et selon les saisons. Toutes les activités d'"animation culturelle" dans les jardins comportent quelque danger, estime, d'autre part, Madame Baseova.

Pour Monsieur Bagatti-Valsecchi, il devient donc urgent de souligner les différences qui existent entre les zones de loisirs et les jardins historiques, qui ne doivent en aucun cas être confondus. Si l'affluence de visiteurs dans les jardins devenait trop importante, il faudrait limiter le nombre de personnes admises en même temps, comme cela se pratique pour les châteaux et les musées, et assurer une certaine surveillance.

Madame Micoulina signale que les jardins ne sont pas considérés, au regard des lois et au regard des spécialistes, comme des zones de loisirs. Par contre, les visiteurs ne font pas la différence : il s'agit donc surtout d'une question d'éducation du public.