

HISTORICAL GARDENS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY  
RISKS AND EXPERIENCES

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Why were historical gardens included so late in the protection of historic monuments? Only in the past years the surroundings of the buildings have been subject to ensemble-protection; in addition to the châteaux their parks are a protected.

For the preservation of gardens quite different criteria hold true than for inanimate works of art. The aversion of some art historians to these most changeable transient and perishable works of art is therefore well-founded. Gardens are living monuments. They are never terminated but are subject to ever-constant change because of their continuous growth. For the preservation of buildings the principle is to preserve them in their purest original form. This principle, however, holds true only for one style of garden; the formal baroque Garden. ( We shall see an example of that later on ).

But also in the case of formal gardens the hedges and trees have to be trimmed. Only then can their verdant architecture be clearly featured as it is to be seen in historic designs and engravings.

On the other hand an English picturesque garden takes many years to develop tree-tops fully and thus to achieve the spatial effect which the designers intended. For landscape architects who are in charge of picturesque gardens it is therefore even more important to study sources and descriptions. But especially those plans and books demonstrate the difficulty of representing the spatial effect of picturesque gardens in designs.

For that reason, Christian Bauer, a well know expert in historical gardens in Munich, has drawn up so-called "Parkwerke" for the gardens in his administration. In these directives he describes the measures which have to be taken in the next fifty years in these gardens based on studies of available historical documents.

Additionally to the peril of biological ruin new dangers have arisen which the designers of the historical gardens could not have imagined. The former princely seats are no longer situated outside of the city boundaries but in the middle of densely populated areas. Cities have expanded in the last two centuries beyond the former country seats. Just take as examples Munich-Nymphenburg or Hanover-Herrenhausen,

the Bois de Boulogne or the gardens of the Medici in Florence.

From this wholly altered environment various dangers result for historical gardens;

1) The terrain of the gardens has become costly and highly wanted building ground. Many gardens have already fallen victim to the intensive expansion of our cities, others have survived only as fragments.

The recreation value of many gardens has diminished for reasons of noise and pollution. It is therefore encouraging to see citizens co-operating in the conservation of historical gardens. When the citizens are duly informed of threatening dangers they sometimes succeed in averting some dangers by way of "citizens initiatives".

2) Traffic is expanding with the city. The noise penetrates the old gardens, streets often cut through them relentlessly. The cheap land tempts the traffic agency to build streets through a park instead of acquiring ground in populated areas. In order to find the best solution for everybody concerned a great deal of alertness plus intensive discussions with the traffic planners are demanded.

3) Whereas the palaces became museums the surrounding gardens are now the living property of the population. Karl Hauszer sums up the impact made by historical gardens as follows: "To get refreshment, to be able to relax in the setting of works of art means more than merely breathing good air. In addition it always means unconsciously absorbing a piece of culture".

The more uniform our cities grow the more the inhabitants are drawn by the magic of the old gardens. In the English Garden in Munich for instance on a nice summer day more visitors were counted than in the Zoo or at a famous football match. This is a very satisfying development. However, great problems are resulting. Those old gardens were not planned for such masses of visitors. Not only their pathways are not made for so many walkers but the gardens also lack the required facilities. How many lawns should be allowed to be used for sun-bathing areas and for playgrounds without disturbing the view and impairing the quiet and rest for which people are longing in those old gardens? Is it sacrilegious to establish a café or a restaurant in historic gardens like, for example, the café in the orangery of the Hanover-Herrenhausen Gardens or the restaurant in the Boboli Gardens in Florence? Or do such facilities increase the pleasure of a longer stay in the atmosphere of a historical garden?

Should we fulfil the requests of the population and how much justified are such demands for more comfort?

The administrators of the Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe-Parc, for instance, for several years have been contesting the construction of a restaurant because that building would detract from the view of the famous colossal statue of Hercules.

In this short report I can only give some suggestions of the extent of the problems facing the protection of historical gardens. Those problems ICOMOS realized in time and established the International Committee for Historical Gardens in common with the international Federation of Landscape Architects. This committee has now to be active above and beyond the organisation of meetings. It should gather, evaluate and make public the experiences in preservation and restoration of historical gardens. In the report on the symposium in Fontainebleau in 1971 the main problems are already very well formulated. It is high time now that working groups concerned with those questions are established.

The problems are urgent and their solutions allow in many cases no delay. Buildings in danger of falling in can be protected by scaffolds. Endangered gardens, however, can within a few years run wild to such an extent that they are lost and cannot be restored any more.

These are merely some ideas which should be discussed in these days. Let me finally show you the result of the largest German garden restoration in post-war time; the 300 year-old garden of Hanover-Herrenhausen.

On the left you see Herrenhausen in an eighteenth century engraving, on the right an airphoto after the restoration in 1966.

The great Garden is the historical name of the Herrenhausen Park in Hanover. And indeed like a great garden it is enclosed by a canal and three rows of large trees.

In 1692 when the duchy of Hanover became an electorate the "Nouveau Jardin" was added. There is no doubt that this part garden was influenced by the new trends in the art of gardening which had originated in France; bosquets linked by diagonals with the great fountain which is still a landmark at the centre of the garden and smaller fountains at the crossings of the axes. The parterre is flooded by sunlight the area of the bosquets is cool and shady.

The Duchess Sophie, wife of Duke Ernst August, was the ideal architect of this princely seat. Until 1714 Herrenhausen was the brilliant stage of the Hanover court, a centre of European intellectual life at that time. Scholars were attracted not only by the Elector and his consort but by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the well-known philosopher, historian and scientist, learned in law and philology. But a sudden change put an end to the splendour of Herrenhausen. In the summer of 1714 Electress Sophie died suddenly while walking in her beloved garden, and a few weeks later her son became King of England as George the First. For many years Herrenhausen was visited only for short summer holidays and so the great heyday of Herrenhausen abruptly came to an end.

This is the reason why the Great Garden did not fall victim to the garden revolution

that ruined such a lot of formal gardens in Europe. There were only a few changes in the Great Garden; exotic trees and shrubs were planted in the nineteenth century, the parterre de broderie was transformed into lawns, hedges and trees were left untrimmed and grew into a picturesque site. In 1935, Herrenhausen became the property of the city of Hanover, which did its best to preserve this great architectural heritage. After two years of restoration the garden was opened to the public. After a short time, however, the garden had to be restored again, this time not because of neglect. During the war bombs had destroyed the castle and devastated large areas of the garden.

In 1966 the third centenary of Herrenhausen provided an opportunity to restore the garden even more thoroughly than before. Professor Karl Meyer, the landscape architect, who was in charge of the garden, was as devoted to it as Electress Sophie had been in the seventeenth century. He began by studying carefully all relevant sources in the archives of Herrenhausen, the contemporary literature, the voluminous correspondence of the Electress and the old plans and engravings. In 1959 a seven-year-plan was drawn up. All aspects - buildings, planting, water works - were coordinated. The governing principle was to restore the original layout of the garden without the romantic later additions and to preserve the historical continuity.

#### Parterre de broderie:

The heart of the garden is the large area which was in front of the castle, called the "Luststück" (= pleasureground). Since the original plan was lost, the parterre had to be designed anew.

In order to prevent grass from spreading into the ornamental motifs every piece of turf was bound by metal tape. Where marble gravel was used grooves were dug in the soil and half-filled with sand. Then the surface was spread with Italian marble gravel.

The curving lines of the decorative patterns were planted with box (*Buxus sempervirens*).

For the flowers the ruling principle was to select those species which were easiest to cultivate. Of the great variety only a few proved suitable. Alternanthera, leaf plants with three shades of color, form the decorative patterns, thus guaranteeing that the colors remain unaltered all summer.

#### Statuary:

Statues are an important feature of formal gardens. They provide a visual connection across the wide areas and enhance the festive atmosphere. It was only when the garden was redone in 1966 that restorers were bold enough to give the figures in the parterre the dazzling appearance they had had in the Baroque age. Colours, permeable to air, colours that breathe, tend to make the statues eternally young, immortal as the gods they represent.

In Europe there is much controversy about polychrome painting in historic gardens.

The painting of sandstone statues which are today mostly copies of the originals is similar in spirit to the exact pruning of the natural growth of lindens and hornbeams. In the eighteenth century people did not hesitate to change them to obtain the color and shape desired.

Cascade:

The east wing of the castle of Herrenhausen is continued by a cascade, a motif of Italian gardens. During the war the cascade was damaged to a great extent, but after its careful restoration it looks now exactly as it did in the seventeenth century.

Hedge Architecture:

Herrenhausen has been called the most geometrical garden of Europe. The impact of the mathematician Leibniz is evident. The trimmed hedges symbolize the power of man over nature. Here you see sketches for the trimming of the hedges in the parc of Veitshöchheim near Würzburg. The same work had to be done at Herrenhausen. When the restoration was necessary the trees were nearly 300 years old. In order to give a satisfactory impression the trees of the alleys were replanted and are always clipped very carefully.

Orange garden:

Since the original plan was lost the orange garden had to be completely redesigned. Much care was taken to get orange trees as well as terracotta tubs from Italy. Then the chessboard beds were laid out with box and gravel of coloured marble and the orange tubs were put on them in the strict rule of the quincunx.

There may be some difference of opinion about this new garden, for instance whether the broad paths are quite in keeping with the overall proportions. But whatever the reservations the garden revives something of the beauty on an eighteenth century orange garden.

Theatre:

The garden theatre lies on the central axis of the Gallery. The design is enhanced by the central perspective leading up to the royal box. The shape of the auditorium is like an amphitheatre.

On the left there is a coloured engraving which shows the theatre in the eighteenth century. On the right you see it in its ruinous condition after the war.

The statues in the theatre are cast in plaster and covered with lead a few millimetres thick, then coated with gold leaf.

Graft:

The canal, called the Graft, encloses the Herrenhausen garden like a fence, separating the estate as a work of art from its surroundings. Two airy pavilions in the French style provide the alleys with points de vue. During the war sedge, bulrushes and grass had transformed the canal into a romantic wilderness. The mud had to be cleared out and the banks trimmed again before the sprinkling waters could return.

Water:

In the formal garden the shimmering surface of the canal and the exciting rise and fall of the fountains provide a lively contrast to the stiff, uniform green architecture of the trimmed hedges. The great fountain on the main axis of the castle was always the symbol of Herrenhausen. Here you see it on a medal, struck in 1701. "Vis insita ducit in altum" ( = Inner strength leads to heights )- is the proud legend it bears. The back of the medal shows the castle with the parterre and in the background the waterwheel, the main item in the water system.

But nowadays electricity allow the fountain to rise 250 feet above the treetops. It is now the important landmark that the creators of the garden intended 300 years ago, as we have seen it represented in the contemporary engravings. The whole garden is enlivened by a network of fountains. The sound of splashing, gurgling water accompanies the visitor everywhere.

Lighting:

Festive celebrations usually take place at night. A whole network of cables provide the entire garden with light. The bell fountain at the centre of the parterre is always an irresistible magnet for the visitor. Light makes the great fountain gleam like magic.

Automation:

The most expensive item in preserving the original past of a historic garden is labour. Therefore all the watering system, the fountains and the lighting are regulated automatically and controlled from one central point. This was an expensive installation but in the long run it saves enormous sums which otherwise would have been spent on labour. It seems to be a paradox that historic gardens can only be preserved with the help of modern equipment. But without this in our experience historic gardens always fall into decay because it is impossible nowadays to pay the high wages of gardeners.

In the age of Absolutism the power of princes compelled their subjects to work in their gardens - we know the unfortunate background of these pleasure grounds. Now that the gardens of princes have passed into the possessions of democratic society, modern technology serves to preserve the great heritage and keep it alive, and it will help us to endow our great past with a future.

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