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CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF HISTORIC GARDENS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

State Institute for the Preservation of  
Monuments and the Protection of Nature,

Prague

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Historic gardens and grounds are protected in the Czech Republic by Law n°22 of 1958 on monuments of cultural interest, and in the Slovak Republic by Law n°7 of the same year. These laws afford them protection as forming a part of the historical monument - castle, mansion, palace, wealthy middle-class residence, monastery or other building - round which they are laid out. Independent botanical gardens, and parks not containing any ancient building, are protected under Law n°40 of 1956 on the protection of nature.

Cultural property protected by law is entered in an index of immovable monuments of cultural interest. The amount of protection afforded to any given ancient monument or group of monuments will vary according to the cultural interest attaching to it. Historic gardens and grounds are considered to be an important part of our cultural heritage. In Bohemia and Moravia there are about a hundred gardens of very great cultural value; the majority of them date from the 18th and 19th centuries and in style are either baroque, rococo, Empire, romantic or English-landscape. However, those preserved also include medieval cloister gardens, Renaissance gardens with parts of their sculptural and architectural decoration, a few Classical gardens, and also some more recent ones, laid out on the sites of ancient ones and either imitating a period style or else adopting an "independence" style (around 1900), or a modern one.

In the 19th century a great many baroque gardens were completely or partly converted into informal landscape gardens, though a considerable part of their baroque composition was retained, as well as many of their pleasure pavilions and original sculptures. In many cases the dendrological value of these parks in their newer guise is very considerable, and their trees

should be carefully preserved. Several of them suffered for decades from ageing vegetation, lack of upkeep, and air, water and soil pollution. There were even a few - fairly rare - cases where grounds were actually destroyed, either completely or in part, mostly under the pressure of economic interests.

A long-term programme for the restoration of historical monuments has now been drawn up which takes account of the historical value and state of conservation of each monument and the possibilities of finding a public use for it. Monuments of great value - and, consequently, important historic gardens - enjoy a relatively greater measure of protection and upkeep. We thus constantly have in mind the role of gardens as a factor in an improved living environment and their exploitation in response to public requirements along with the ancient monuments themselves. Gardens form an indivisible whole along with the buildings to which they belong, a specific cultural environment of which decorative elements such as garden pavilions and sculptures also form a part. When assessing the interest attaching to historic gardens and grounds, we allow for this aspect as a part of a larger whole, without, meanwhile, overlooking the botanical aspect. Gardens, in our part of the world, are primarily composed of vegetation - of planting which varies greatly from case to case.

Our criteria for determining the importance of a historic garden are as follows :

A. Historical value :

1. Original layout
2. Present-day layout
3. Buildings
4. Decorative works of art.

B. Dendrological value.

C. State of preservation of the original design.

D. Present state.

E. Importance in the present-day environment.

F. Historical, cultural and social importance.

Gardens and grounds placed in the first category (i.e. the highest) are of overriding importance for the study of the development of garden design in our country; they form a part of the surroundings of historical monuments of

national and even European value. They are looked after with the greatest of care so that they remain in the best possible state of preservation and are being, in some cases, completely renovated or restored.

Gardens and grounds in the second category are of national and regional importance; they are regularly kept up so as correctly to fulfil the public function assigned them.

Those in the third category are of regional importance. They represent an extremely valuable contribution to the ~~improvement~~ of the living environment, not merely from the cultural and social points of view but also on the biological level. For purposes of renovating them or adapting them for practical use, more radical alterations are permitted.

Most of the historic gardens and grounds in the Czech Republic are State property. Their conservation and upkeep are provided for by a manager or by the institution which uses them. A private owner whose garden is listed as a historical monument may obtain financial assistance from the State if he wishes to renovate it. We encounter fairly frequent difficulties in connection with the restoration and upkeep of gardens, owing to our limited output capacities and our lack of man-power.

A few brief remarks in conclusion on the organizational aspect of the preservation of monuments in the Czech Republic (C.S.R.). The supreme body in charge of the State is the government of the Czech Republic. The responsible bodies composing this are the ministries, while the executive bodies are the national committees. Attached to the Ministry of Culture, as an advisory body, is the Central Preservation Commission. Executive power is the business of the regional, district or local committee, according to circumstances. The technical aspect of conservation in each region is the business of the State Regional Centre for the Preservation of Monuments and the Protection of Nature, which is subordinate, as far as methods are concerned, to the State Institute bearing the same title. Both in policy and in practice, the administration in charge of the preservation of monuments apply the principles governing the "conception of the development of State preservation" approved by the government of the Czech Republic in January 1975.