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CISMIGIU GARDEN IN BETWEEN ORIGINAL DESIGN AND FURTHER TRANSFORMATIONS – A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON A CONTINUOUSLY REDESIGN PROCESS

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Abstract

Cismigiu garden was designed in 1845 by Karl Friederich Wilhelm Meyer according to the requests and needs of the mid 19th century urban society of Bucharest. However, the original design and composition of the garden is now lost due to a series of successive transformations undertaken on both the architectural layout and components of the garden as well as on its planting design and composition; thus transforming the romantic 19th and 20th century romantic landscape into a contemporary livable but "adorned public space ruin". To this end, this paper aims to compare and analyze the historical transformations that successively altered and reinvented Cismigiu garden's overall image and composition, in the hope of understanding how and why did the garden had to be redesigned and, to a certain extent – reinvented, so many times in its history. The study is based on field research as well as on comparative analyses in both archive images and on contemporary "in situ" photographs.

Key words: *Cismigiu, composition, patrimony, transformations.*

INTRODUCTION

Representing the second public garden opened in Bucharest, Cismigiu first designed by the Austrian landscape architect Karl Friederich Wilhelm Meyer according to the specificity of the mid 19th century society of Bucharest. However, Meyer's designed was reinterpreted and to this end, the entire garden was redesigned many times during its relatively long history. Thus, Meyer's work was successively carried out, improved but mostly reinterpreted, after his premature death (1852) by engineer Lalanne and architect Seminet; gardener Frei; botanist gardener Hoffman (1855), architect Al. Orascu and engineer Gilbert (1860); Swiss horticulturalist Louis Leyvraz (1863); botanist engineer W. Knechtel; architect Joseph Hartl (*apud*. El-Shamali, 2011). However, the most important transformation took place at the beginning of the 20th century when architect Friedrich Rebhun (1910) drastically modified the original design of the garden both adding and eliminating different features of the garden.

To this end, this paper aims to show how the garden changed over time, both in what concerns the visual and physical transformations and also in what represent the formal and informal use of the garden by nowadays society. The study will thus focus on both the interpretation of several historical images of the garden as well as on written documents that offer both a physical and a social description of the second public garden in Bucharest.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the effort of showing the scale of all the transformations the garden has suffered since the middle of the 19th century up to the present day, this chapter will focus on analyzing both literally brief descriptions of both the entire complex and of its components as well as on overlaying plans and image comparisons.

Short history - predating the design of the Cismigiu garden.

In order to understand how Meyer designed Cismigiu as a public garden fitted for the

traditional population of 19th century Bucharest, one has to understand the image of the city at middle of the 1800's.

Bucharest represented "a city built heterogeneous over the Dambovita river" (Parkinson, 2014), but was seen by most foreign travelers as a city of contrasts. To this end, Bucharest was a city of both western and oriental urban textures, a city where often described as a "garden-city", but a "garden-city" misinterpreted due to the fact that the green image of the city was due to the numerous private houses with relatively large garden and not due to a specific public concern for green public spaces. The strange outline of the western-oriental city was however changed after the adoption of the Organic Regulation in July 1831 and January 1832. Along with the Regulation, the idea of a public garden was more popular and, in 1843, Gheorghe Bibescu commissioned Austrian landscape architect Karl Friederich Wilhelm Meyer and his collaborator Franz Horer to design the first public garden in Bucharest. Thus, the two landscape artists continued the work on the "Baneasa promenade" or "The big/grand alley" and, in between 1843 and 1847, designed the first public garden of the city - "Grădina de la Şosea" (future Kiseleff garden). The garden was designed according to western romantic principles and, but due to the fact that the Romanian society was not used to use public spaces as the western societies did the garden was improperly used by the local population. This was due to the "more «wild» landscape that the society was used with for daily activities, totally different from the rest of Europe […] the contact between the Romanians and the green spaces was more tactile than visual" (El-Shamali, 2011), meaning that the society was used to use outdoor green spaces for religious procedures, parties, barbeques etc. However, Meyer started analyzing the habits and way of life of the society of 19th century Bucharest and, when he became commissioned with the design of a second public garden to be planned over the Cismigiu swamp, he adopted a style more closer to the Romanian model and way of using public spaces and he designed Cismigiu garden as a garden of western inspiration fitted for the semi-oriental society of Bucharest.

Short history - the specificity of the mid 1800's Romanian society.

In terms of the use of green spaces, the Romanians were used to a more practical and very religious way of seeing and using nature. To this end, the Romanian folklore associates almost every type of plant with a Christian story, considering that Nature is created by God, and every aspect of nature is of divine influence (apud. Simion-Florea, 2010). To this end, water was perceived as a divine element as well, and as sociologist Dolores Toma states, "water is found in the Romanian view of Paradise […] Not by chance the church, the garden and the well were next to each other, both real and imaginary, in the heavenly space given by God" (Toma, 2001). Thus, the Romanians were used to a more practical and pragmatic way of using green outdoor spaces, and they perceived that and planted space is a garden (El-Shamali, 2011).

In terms of the way of life of the Romanian society, many foreign travelers offered detailed descriptions of how the population of Bucharest was used to living. English author Rea Maude Parkinson summarizes the specificity of the late 1900's society, considering that, when it comes to outdoor living, Romanians like to "see and be seen by others" (Parkinson, 2014).

Designing Cismigiu garden - original image and future transformations

Taking into consideration all the aspects of the daily life, habits, superstitions and religious symbols of the Romanian population, Meyer came up with a very interesting design for the Cismigiu garden. One of the advantages of the site where the garden was proposed to be designed was that the specific area was already considered by the local population as a "garden" in the sense that the wild swamp was already used by the locals for recreational activities such as fishing. Furthermore, an 18th century well inserted in the proximity of the swamp and two churches (Sarindar and Schitu Magureanu) built near the future garden represented helped the 19th century society of Bucharest to more easily appropriate Meyer's landscape design. However, while

his original design was highly appropriate for the urban society of Bucharest, the future transformations that the garden suffered due to many aspects, both technical and social-political, forever altered the original image of the second green public space in Bucharest. To this end, the following subchapters aim to show different parts of the garden, briefly describing their history and offering details on how they evolved and also on their current state of preservation.



Figure 1. Garden components - dating (1. False ruin, aprox. 1910; 2. Former Cretzulescu garden, design by Rebhun 1910; 3. Former (lost) Semicircular Pavilion; 4. Monte Carlo island and restaurant; 5. Elizeu hillock; 6. Former flower beds, current French Monument, 7. Romanian Writer's Rotunda, former Music Pavilion; 8. Sissi spring (beginning of the 20th century); 9. The gazebo, former Mineral Water Pavilion; 10. The log (beginning of the 20th century); 11. The fountain - 1860; 12. Main entrance - design after Rebhun 1910; 13. Gheorghe Lazar high school (1891-1910); 14. Former entrance according to Meyer's original design; 15. The roses parterre per. Rebhun 1910; 16. Main entrance at the beginning of the 20th century; 17. Entrance, aprox.1850; 18. Main entrance according to Meyer's design, aprox. 1850) (El-Shamali, 2011)

A. The main axis

As stated before, Meyer begun to observe and better understand the habits and way of life of the local population shortly after designing Kiseleff garden. To this end, after observing that the Romanians used *The Road* (Kiseleff avenue) "to see and be seen"(Parkinson, 2014), the Austrian landscape architect designed a large straight axis within the garden, an axis which he divided into 3 parallel "corridors" - the central corridor for walking and the lateral for sitting and observing (El-Shamali, 2011). Meyer alternatively planted the three corridors with alignments of white poplars (*Populus alba*) visualizing the "cathedral effect" that the tree crowns will create. This particular design represents and adaptation of Karl Friederich Wilhelm Meyer of the western landscape architecture ideas in the Romanian traditional usage of the garden. The two ends of the main axis were represented by a *round-point* with a opened gazebo surrounded by acacia trees designed for the stationing of carriages and by a semicircular pavilion surrounded by poplars and elms and the other end of the promenade. The axis did not physically connect the two ends - the road was interrupted by an extension of the lake but the visual field extended up the water to the semicircular pavilion. Due to some probably technical problems, William Knechtel extends the axis over the lake and thus unites the lake's shore with the island Meyer designed for a statue of the goddess Diana with the deer. (Apud. El-Shamali, 2011) (figure 2).

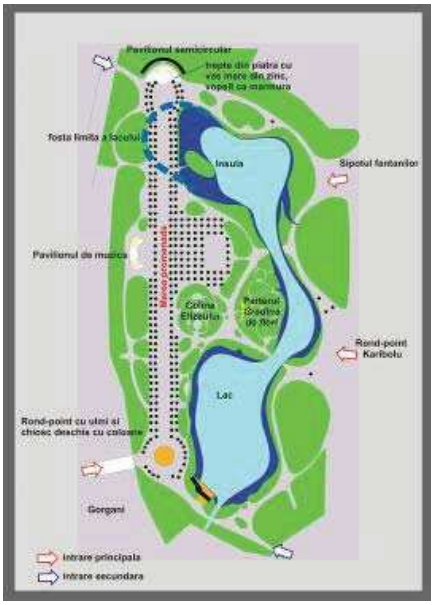


Figure 2. Knechtel's modifications over Meyer's design (El-Shamali, 2011)

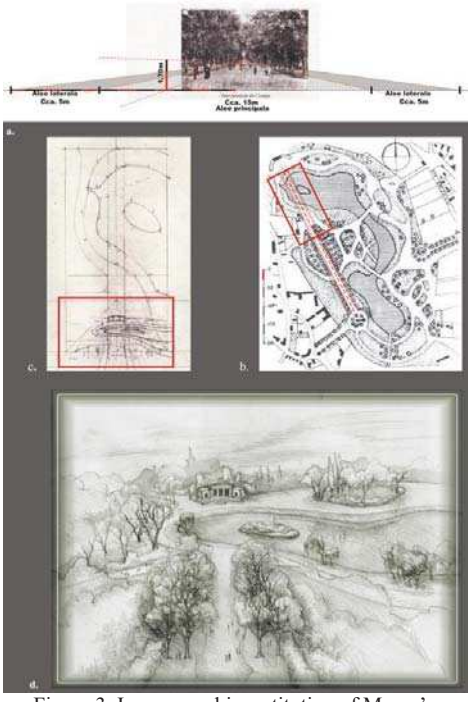


Figure 3. Image graphic restitution of Mayer's original design – Island of Diana (hypothetical statue), the lake and the Semicircular pavilion (El-Shamali, 2011)

During Rebhun's redesign plans, he changes Meyer's view of the main axis as he eliminates the central corridor in favor of a geometrical French style series of green parterres. He also cuts the white poplars and plants linden trees (*Tilia tomentosa*) and yews (*Taxus baccata*). The new formal, geometrical design is unappreciated both by the society and by the media (Apud. El-Shamali, 2011). The same architect also eliminates the *elm round-point* due to the construction of the Queen Elisabeth avenue and the Gheorghe Lazar high school and demolishes the semicircular pavilion on the other end of the garden and places a false ruin instead.



Figure 4. The main axis - original 19th century design (www.googleimages.com; www.orasulluibucur. blogspot.com)



Figure 5. The main axis between designs (www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com)

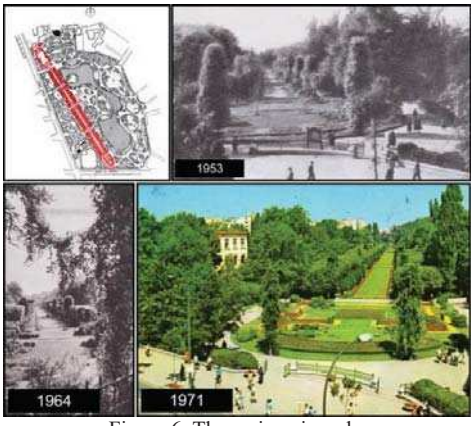


Figure 6. The main axis ends (www.googleimages.com; www.sanuuitam. blogspot.com; www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com; www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com)



Figure 7. The main axis - the false ruin (https://www.facebook.com/bucuresti.minus.50?fref=ts; www.googleimages.com)

B. The lake

The main lake of the garden may be divide into three major sections according to their limits - the stone and concrete bridges: the lake with the fountain, the intermediary lake (in between the two bridges) and Monte Carlo restaurant's lake.

When commissioned with the design of the garden, Meyer has dried up the swamp and re-planned the margins of the future lake.

Although the original outline of the lake is not the same today due to both technical and urban-architectural transformations under-taken both inside and outside the garden's limits, the romantic display of vegetation

around the lake's shores still remind of Meyer's design.

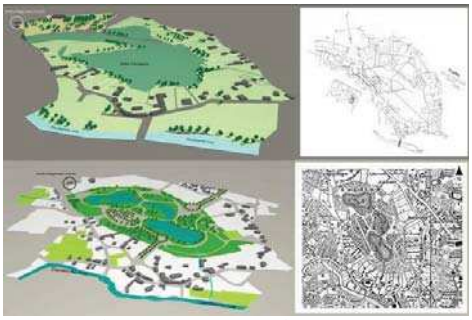


Figure 8. The swamp (1844) and Meyer's garden and lake (1852) (El-Shamali et. al., 2010)

The first segment - the fountain

The first segment was provided by Meyer with a wharf (on the southern side of the lake) which would be decommissioned alter after his death and changed with a new one which would be placed on the western side of the lake. Moreover, the lake will be later provided with another important feature that will come up to represent one of the main symbols of the garden - the rock fountain (approximately 1890).

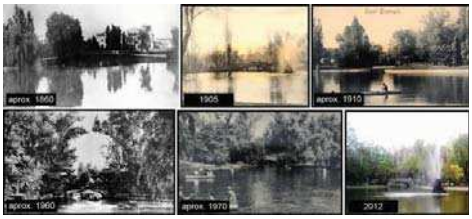


Figure 9. The fountain and the surroundings - before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; www.sanuuitam. blogspot.com; www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com; www.romaniapozitiva.ro)



Figure 10. The fountain and the surroundings (www.orasulluibucur.blogspot.com; www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com; www.pexacons.ro; www.only-romania.com; photo by iuliano www.googleearth.com)



Figure 11. The first wharf (www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com)



Figure 12. Future wharfs (www.miscarea.net; www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com; www.fiveprime.org; photo by iuliano www.googleearth.com; www.amfostacolo.ro)



Figure 13. The lake's margins - views and vegetation (www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com; www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com; www.viabucuresti.ro www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com; http://only-romania.com; www.googleimages.com; http://only-romania.com)

The second segment - the intermediary lake

The intermediary segment of the lake is, as mentioned before, bordered by two stone bridges - the large bridge and the walnut tree-like bridge, both the work of Swiss artists (built at the beginning of the 20th century).



Figure 14. Views over the intermediary section of the lake - before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.googleearth.com; photo by Al. Mexi)



Figure 15. The walnut tree-like bridge - before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.infopensiuni.ro)

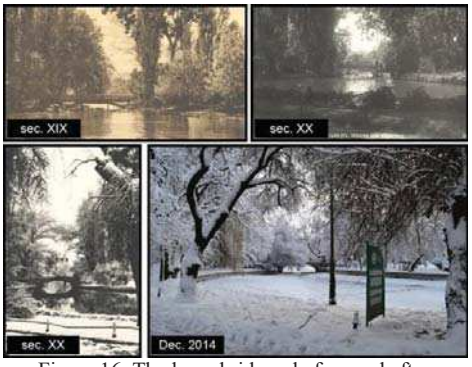


Figure 16. The large bridge - before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.only-romania.com; www.googleimages.com; photo by Al. Mexi)



Figure 17. The intermediary section of the lake - before and after (www.vederiro.blogspot.ro; photo by Ioan Manoliu www.googleearth.com)



Figure 18. The intermediary section of the lake - before and after (www.romania.ici.ro; photo by Al. Mexi)



Figure 19. The intermediary section of the lake - before and after (www.anticariatplus.ro; photo by Al. Mexi)



Figure 20. View from the walnut tree-like bridge towards the intermediary section of the lake (www.only-romania.com; www.panoramio.com)



Figure 21. View from the walnut tree-like bridge towards the 3rd section of the lake (www.only-romania.com; www.googlearth.com)

The third segment - the Monte Carlo island

The final segment of the lake is probably the one with the longest history of both outline and architectural transformations. To this end, whilest in Meyer's age, the lake should have held an island with a white marble-like statue of Diana with a deer, during Knechtel's transformations, the island becomes conected by a stone bridge with the lake's shore while the entire western outline of the lake is transformed and brought closer to the island. Moreover, at the begining of the 20th century, a new restaurant wih a floating island, designed by famous Romanian architect Ion Mincu is built on the island. However, the restaurant burned and several new restaurant designs took over the island.



Figure 22. Monte Carlo Restaurant - first models (www.centenarcaragiale.radio3net.ro; www. stiri.tvr.ro; www.googleimages.com; www.only-romania.com; www.googleimages.com; www.only-romania.com)



Figure 23. Monte Carlo Restaurant - before and after
(www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com;
www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com;
www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com)

C. The hill, the flower beds and the French monument

The original design of the garden consisted in numerous romantic spaces distributed around the garden. One of those subspaces was composed of a small hill of approximately 7 m, placed near the first segment of the lake and just above a flower parterre. The hill should have been provided an artificial grotto and a small waterfall. This original composition was supposed to offer wide perspectives over the flower beds up to the lake and to the dense plantation on the other side of the intermediary segment of the lake. Due to the nearby water (lake and waterfall), the intensity of the flowers' perfume would have been increased (El-Shamali, 2011). However, the original design is now lost, as the hillock was over-raised and a monument dedicated to the French Warrior stands it what should have been the flower beds and the newly (approximately 1961) planted vegetation enclose the original widely planned perspectives. The monument itself does not represent a contradiction of style but rather the coniferous trees planted behind the monument, as well as many other trees and shrubs planted on the Elizeu hillock do.



Figure 24. The hillock and view from the hillock towards the flower beds
(photo by L. Angerer, Biblioteca Academiei Romane)



Figure 25. The intermediary section of the lake - before and after
(www.googleimages.com; www.only-romania.com; www.only-romania.com; www.googleimages.com; www.panoramio.com; www.googleearth.com)

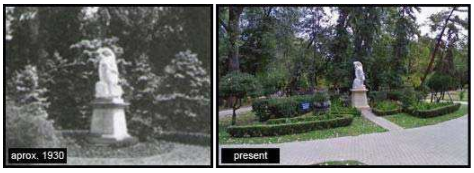


Figure 26. The French monument - before and after
(www.romania.ici.ro; www.googleimages.com)

D. The central area and the gazebo

Located in the center of the garden at the base of the hillock, the area surrounding a gazebo is the only flat geometrically planted matrix-like *Platanus* sp. grove. From Meyer to Rebhun, this area has been not been severely transformed. The main feature of this *Platanus* sp. "grove" is represented by the central gazebo. This building initially served as a mineral water pavilion and it is now used occasionally for small concerts given by the military orchestra.



Figure 27. The mineral water pavilion (the gazebo) - before and after
(www.smaraldelebucurestiului.wordpress.com;
www.googleimages.com; www.hailabord.com)

E. Cretzulescu palace and the small lake

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Cismigiu garden is expanded to the north by incorporating new grounds from the nearby Cretzulescu palace. Thus, the private palace gardens are redesigned and become public. Rebhun designs a new interesting area consisted in a small lake and zoo and a rose parterre. Other features introduced in this "annex" are represented by a new fountain placed nearby the former well from the

1800s - Eminescu's fountain, a frog-like fountain and a statue of Atlas. The new grounds are quickly appropriated by the society as the amaze mostly due to the exotic features represented by the birds and small mammals exhibited at the zoo. However, the new formal-classical design of the northern end of the garden is totally opposite to the romantic style imposed by Meyer at the middle of the 19th century.



Figure 28. Cretzulescu palace - view from the garden - before and after (www.jurnalul.ro; www.orasulluibucur.blogspot.com; www.googleimages.com; dumbrava laur on www.googleeath.com)

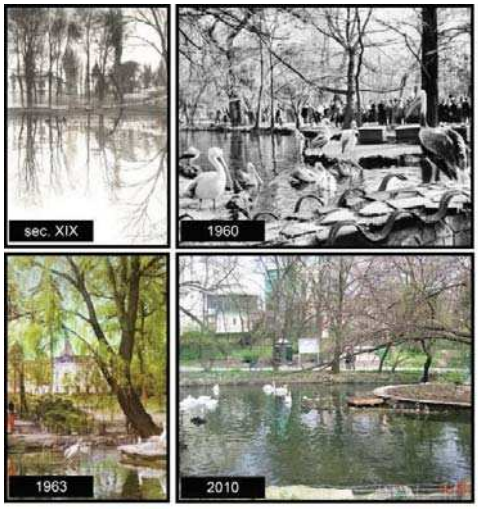


Figure 29. The zoo - before and after (www.only-romania.com; www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; raduconstantin on www.googleearth.com)

F. The Romanian Writer's Rotunda

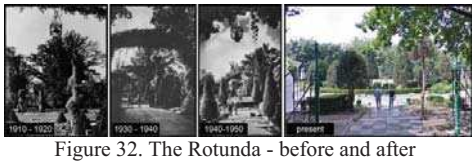
In the former placement of the Music Pavilion, a new formal landscape architectural design is planned. To this end, the decommissioning of the pavilion at the end of the 1800s offered the room for the construction of the Romanian Writer's Rotunda. However, the Rotunda's image will be fulfilled only after Italy, during the 1940's, will present Bucharest with a gift consisting in a series of 12 Carrara marble statues representing some of the most renowned Romanian writers. The specificity of this particular feature of the garden consists in the geometrical pattern in which geometrical clipped yews and hedges intersect with architectural elements such as marble statues, stone benches, columns, iron pergolas, stone and concrete vases etc. (Mexi et. al, 2013)



Figure 30. The Rotunda - (yews) before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.povestidinbucuresti.ro; www.googleimages.com; www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com; www.okazii.ro; www.sanuuitam.blogspot.com)



Figure 31. The Rotunda - before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; www.googleearth.com)


Figure 32. The Rotunda - before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; www.googleimages.com; www.googleearth.com)

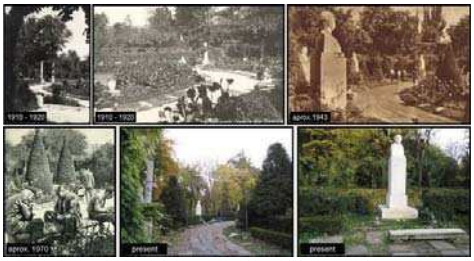


Figure 33. The Rotunda - before and after (www.googleimages.com; www.miscarea.net; www.googleimages.com; https://www.facebook.com/bucuresti.minus.50?fref=ts; photo by Al. Mexi; photo by Al. Mexi)

G. Pergolas alley

The Pergolas alley is situated at the western side of the garden and it owes its history to Rebhun's design from the beginning of the 20th century. Since then, the only modify-cation stands in the redesign of the pergolas.



Figure 34. Pergolas alley - before and after (www.googleimages.com; AlexRo on www.googleearth.com)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Though numerous transformations were undertaken in Cismigiu garden, this city center green public space in Bucharest was massively used by the city's inhabitants. Today, the garden is probably even more crowded than it used to be during the 19th and 20th century and this is due to many public manifestations that take place within the garden. While some activities such as ice-skating may be seen as traditional, others such as fairs are totally both historically and practically inappropriate to be hosted in an A class outdoor green public space monument. Moreover, some other massive public manifestations such as concerts may be seen as partially traditional according to the original plans developed by Meyer for the garden - the music pavilions or the concert grotto - but are highly inappropriate today due to improper and misplaced concert scenes and large crowds of people that take over much of the already improper managed and uncared for planted space. To this end, while the former main chapter offered and insight in terms of historical design transformations undertake in the architectural layout of the garden, this chapter aims to show how Cismigiu is currently used by the public. The following analyses will focus on both traditional and modern ways of today's society's garden use.

Traditional activities

Since 1853-1856, both foreign travelers and local writers describe different relaxing activities and sports competitions held in the Cismigiu garden. If activities such as swimming competitions or *oina* games (traditional Romanian sport), winter ice-skating is still appreciated today. However, some esthetically improper technical solutions for freezing the lake's water took place of the original natural way of creating an ice rink and creates a very rigid and manufactured image that alter the overall romantic design.



Figure 35. The lake - skating - now and then (www.vechiul-regat.blogspot.com; www.orasulm.eu; photo by Al. Mexi; www.vechiul-regat.blogspot.com; www.libertatea.ro)



Figure 36. The lake - skating - now and then (www.vechiul-regat.blogspot.com; photo by Al.Mexi; www.pexacons.ro; photo by Al. Mexi)

New improper (semi/non)traditional public manifestations

Due to mostly economical and political reasons, numerous fairs and both rock and traditional music concerts take place within the garden. Both the large crowds that take over the already improper managed planted space and the high noise alter both the visual image of the garden and the romantic, wild mood created by different areas from Cismigiu.



Figure 37. Fairs in Cismigiu garden
(www.rasunetul.ro; www.sorinoprescu.ro)

CONCLUSIONS

Cismigiu garden is a historical piece of urban landscape architectural design of Bucharest that has witnessed many different modifications undertaken by different specialists. Though not discussed in this article, none of the aforementioned transformations did affected the overall image of the garden as the last 70 years did, as both during communism and the last 25 years only a handful of poorly trained specialists ever took care of the garden and, instead of conserving its plants and architectural components, most of the garden's "masters" often tried to add new features that they believed will make the garden more beautiful and interesting.

From a romantic garden designed by Meyer to Rebhun's drastically transformations, few planting, architectural or layout modifications have been as damaging as today's improper actions that aim to "beautify" the already beautiful and coherent garden landscape. To this end, the current politics, though probably unconscious, continue the destructive actions firstly undertaken by the communists, and while before 1989, the actions aimed to exaggerate the romantic design of the garden, nowadays transformations mostly consists in the addition of several discordant design elements such as benches, banners, lighting poles, flower vases etc. and on the incoherent new planting design.



Figure 38. Protecting the garden - today's reality between signs and framings
(Photos by Al. Mexi)

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