

Maja SIMONETI

## Should Urban Landscapes be Protected?<sup>1</sup>

Characteristics of urban landscapes, their functions in the city and importance attached to them by the citizens and the profession, demand active protection. In the process of deciding between construction and protection, the manner of judgement is always a difficult and demanding task. One of the instruments protecting from momentary and personal decisions, investors' pressures and ensuring a more sustained orientation of spatial image and ultimately significantly easing the town planners' work is the city plan – a document made with the aid of spatial planning – as a series of professionally tested and later confirmed platforms. Of course the target is a city plan that would be adaptable enough to enable acceptability of coincidences and simultaneous solutions; on no account is it good, especially for public areas and programmes, to be without a city plan.

### 1. Introductory Consideration

There is no simple or a commonly valid answer to the question posed in the title. The answer unites different items, the objective ones are joined by indicators of values that are difficult to measure, which are, in addition to all of this, changing in relation to time, spatial and social conditions. In short, a sum of variables and complex evaluation/assessment, which is impossible to be carried out consistently enough from one example to another, from one town planner to the next. That is why it is irresponsible to leave such a principle question unanswered. And it is in these irresponsible conditions, that maybe wrapped in somewhat more „valid documents“ experts are working in today.<sup>2</sup>

Urban landscapes, designed areas of open space and remnants of the primeval, are important bearers of a city's identity in terms of its image, spatial recognition as well as the experiential sense. It is characterised by unpredictable polyvalent contents which can be developed only in public open areas. Control over the way space is used is smallest on these areas, it is least defined by whom they may be used and how, that is why they are the most open/public and enable coexistence of different „users“. On the other hand these areas are the only ones that enable the development of nature in cities and are condition for an undisturbed activity of city ecosystems and links between them, and also enable the preservation of elements that have value just as they are. Recognising the values of particular urban landscapes just as they are without special programme usage and organisation is essential for their evaluation.

The acceptance of swampland in a city is the consequence of a quality leap from a society of organisers of relations into a society of arrangers of relations.

Considerations that treatment of space and environment adjusted to man is withdrawing, are wrong in the sense that they concern man's definition of environment. As regards „open/useless“ spaces the attitude of „confusion with the wilderness, the useless and the disorderly/unregulated – ac-

ording to recognised standards – are giving way to acceptance and more patient treatment. Organised green areas in cities are being joined by new, often renaturated landscapes of former city dumps, gravel pits, corridors of abandoned infrastructure left to natural succession, re-organised post-industrial areas in the hinterland. Green systems of large European cities are richer every year, because of the growing needs/demands of city dwellers for recreation and relaxation areas.<sup>3</sup> On territories inside cities remains of primeval landscapes are joined by diverse programme and formation solutions which testify about the importance of these and such areas for city dwellers. The demand for green city areas is growing in all spheres: in terms of structuring urban tissue and ecological niches and linkages, just as much as in terms of the city dwellers' recreational needs and primary contact with nature. The number of citizens cultivating their piece of land is increasing, even in the developed part of the world.<sup>4</sup> As it is true that with giving up agricultural cultivation there is a rise of new possibilities for urban landscapes, it is also true that building/changing the uses of urban landscapes mean that possibilities inside the urban tissue are being lost to programmes, uses and non-uses, whose bearers are or could be city green areas. It is characteristic of urban landscapes that changes of purpose affect them permanently.<sup>5</sup> Practise shows that no built up area can be returned to the previous condition.

Opponents of protection, i.e. its advocates often get their reasons from completely different sources. Opponents of protection point out that the problems of large open areas in cities from the aspect of complementing the urban tissue, safety<sup>6</sup>, public spending, opportunities for profits and warn that comparable areas exits on the city fringes, that nature alone can find its way into the city tissue in other/uninteresting areas. Advocates of protection point out that it is more difficult to replace the lost remains of the primeval of a city than to look for comparable locations of other usage, that more than one construction or growth season is required to form the image of an urban landscape, that driving out particular parts diminishes the potential of the whole in the primary natural sense as well as in the social, ecological and programme sense. Taking into consideration different spatial contexts both one and the other are partly true. However, the search for the answer does not stop at concrete spatial contexts. The debate about the measures required for the preservation of city green areas is a debate about the living quality and the public good. The most numerous consumers of urban landscapes, i.e. nature itself and citizens who mostly need these areas are without executive power or financial means with which to fulfil their needs. The absence of a legally binding obligation to conduct most of the public programmes taking place in green areas poses an additional problem. However legal obligations are the only ones that can ensure non-profit arrangements. It is difficult to translate the value of urban landscapes into a language of comparison by evaluating the same area for other uses, it is difficult if not impossible to express it in figures. Finally, because of the lacking economic interest for the preservation and establishment of the urban landscape it has to be taken care of by the city as an institution for the protection of public property. Of all that has been said what the town planner finds most important is the fact that progressive urban thought also treats the natural environment as a factor of sensible development, balanced functioning and harmonious image of the city.<sup>7</sup> That is why dedicated expert work is necessary to establish principle standpoints of protection which would be



accepted by the broadest possible public and become an unquestionable criteria of decision-making. Planning yes or no is not a question at all, methods of ensuring relations between particular structural city entities and especially means of ensuring the most broadly acceptable living conditions remain a part of the spatial practice. Depending on society's consciousness does not ensure living conditions for children, invalids and the elderly; nor can it prevent construction on the last city swampland. Coincidence and continuous response are in each case acceptable spatial practise only in connection with clearly defined system characteristics of urban landscape and comprehensive city image which take a long time to gain recognition and are supported by clear development goals. What is required is a city plan as an instrument of directing spatial development, of course modernised in its acceptability for including the unforeseen, i.e. with the capability for solving pending problems.

## 2. Examples as Illustrations of Conditions

Taking Ljubljana as an example, taking into consideration events and in connection with spatial practise abroad, it is possible to forecast, because of loose long-term spatial definitions, which urban landscapes will be abandoned by the city, left to be built up, and which will, like grey zones and otherwise uninteresting sites, appear as potential areas for the development of programmes carried out by urban landscapes. That is why areas in the city, which are linked to broader natural elements will gradually become built up urban tissues, while distant areas and former industrial sites will become not only ecological niches for nature in the city, but also important bearers of programmes for relaxation and recreation. In this way the present structure of urban landscapes will change in such a way that primarily the minute structure of vacant slopes of hills forests, wetlands, forests and meadows penetrating the city tissue will disappear. The value of these areas goes from the field of identity all the way to use potentials. Together with larger landscape elements these areas represent the structure of the Green System<sup>8</sup>, which has sensibly and justly been planned as a part of the city plan so that these areas may also be preserved. New areas that will appear on account of the abandoned industrial and infrastructure sites and which are lately emerging in European cities, should be joining these areas. The idea of substituting them is wrong and leads to the devastation of city image and worsening living conditions.

### 2.1 Agrostroj – Koseze reservoir

*An example of long-term protection for recreational purposes, which will be completed with a housing construction*

Under the provisions of the Long-term plan of Ljubljana the area should change its use from production to recreation. In the Green System of Ljubljana this location has been given new, concrete contents and definitions. The area bordering the most important green area in the city, the Tivoli-Rožnik-Šišenski hrib system, protected as a landscape park, with a high rate of daily visits, has been recognised as ideal for the programmes' accompanying activities that are already taking place in the area and its hinterland. The importance of linkage to the natural hinterland of Polhovgradec Dolomites through the area of Koseze reservoir and agricultural areas on the hills. The reservoir was especially pointed out as hav-

ing particular value and an independent programme, since it is a singular water feature in the city

Everything has changed with the actual withdrawal of production from the area: indebted owners, interests of banks, market interest for housing construction, thus the process for changing the land-use from the recreational to the housing use began. It was successfully concluded and on the basis of a public competition project documentation is being prepared. Space lost for public use and a system of urban landscape will become a housing neighbourhood which will influence living conditions in adjoining areas and indirectly additionally burden the landscape park and the reservoir with the hinterland.

### 2.2 Pod Hribom

*An example of a characteristic small/unimportant site*

The meadows at the end of Šišenski hrib and Rožnik are not protected by the Decree on the landscape park Tivoli-Rožnik-Šišenski hrib. Nonetheless, many of them were defined as potential recreational, vacant areas in the Long-term plan of Ljubljana. Pressures for development on these meadows on the slopes of the hill into the plane are arising on both sides (Šiška as well as Vič). The reason is the owners' interest. Town planners use expert testing to help them decide.<sup>9</sup> Practise shows that neither stressing the importance of preserving ties with the hill into the depth of the settlement, nor the ideas about the formation and spatial rationalisation of construction are not accepted. Preventing build up seems impossible, even planning of wholesome spatial solutions is undesirable and exaggerated.

How to be in favour of an empty, possibly slightly wet meadow as a valuable city element in need of preservation? It is difficult, especially if it means deciding about a particular part, a plot for three-four houses so that each time the importance of the parts for the whole is being denied, the importance of planned vacant areas is forgotten, the joint volume of such a built up area is blurred. There is no reason for protection from construction, unless the vacant area at the foothills and the Tivoli-Rožnik-Šišenski hrib system is important because of its indirect connection to the system and its effects on it. In such a case active protection of the landscape park demands that use of joining areas is defined. How to be in favour of spatial solutions' uniformity on account of emphasised individual housing architecture that also stands out, is a particularly difficult question not dealt by this text.

### 2.3 Šiška Stadium

*An example of elastic planning definition of a recreational area (R zones)*

The location of the recreational area between Magistrova and Milčinskega streets appeared somewhat unusual less than ten years ago. It was to become a kind of a local park. It was in the interest of the Šiška municipality, and sports societies also showed some interest in it. Different plans, always uniting public parking facilities and sports activities. In the meantime the area was appropriated by the neighbourhood population, that was busy gardening on it, and by the children from the nearby kindergarten. The middle of the area offered a pleasant shadow of big poplar trees and the



cohabitation of users was satisfactory; an ideal transition solution. The area was waiting to be „really“ regulated.

This happened with the European youth championship in athletics. The need to have a local park, combined with a sports programme was forgotten. All the vegetation and the upper layer of earth were removed so that additional ground of the Athletic stadium Ljubljana, hosting the important event, would be made. Not only did the championship pass before the works on the practising ground were finalised, the space is also frequently empty and one cannot understand when looking at the occasional users, why other uses have been completely excluded.

The trend in Ljubljana is predicting the loss of strategically located/distributed green areas, i.e. the part of structure of the green system that penetrates into the urban tissues and also brings most of the values to the city structure. Irrespective of the fact that what they are like today is a consequence of forgetfulness or of planned protection and management<sup>10</sup>, it is time to have a more active attitude towards protection, i.e. change of use. The described examples have been used as an illustration to discussion. It was by no means intended to focus on them and condemn them. The reasons for the made decisions are surely valid and are unimportant for this discussion. However by analogy it is possible to find that these spaces in Ljubljana and elsewhere are very similar, with similar pending fates. Thus the following are urgent: protection of vacant space from construction, the necessity for an undoubted separation between green areas and recreational areas, especially those where construction and active protection of „empty“ spaces are allowed. Following the events it seems that for the town planners work stricter criteria for and against the changes of use would be more welcome than those at their disposal in a given moment. The relative importance of property should also be pointed out. The practise in which land owners have such a significant influence on spatial use and image, may be and should be changed.

### 3. Concluding Ideas

In circumstances of consensual urbanism, as the present conditions of our spatial reality have been most frequently termed, there are no mechanisms that could prevent or stop changes and disappearances of urban landscapes. The impression that in this article I am in favour of unconditional protection of each particular green city area is not correct. What I offer are conditions in which we can envisage the disappearance of urban landscapes to the extent and in a way that arouses professional doubts. In known conditions, green areas are frequently subjected to pressures, usually successful ones, to change their use.

It is not important why society occupied with completely different problems remains unaffected by the disappearance of particular parts of urban landscapes. The town planner must have the support of professionally tested and accepted documents for his work, for they are the only ones enabling the position of protecting and directing development.

City green areas are most endangered in circumstances of consensual urbanism. Simultaneous decision-making about the importance and intended use of particular areas is the same as sentence for these areas. As public good/property,

what urban landscapes undoubtedly are, must be protected by mechanisms of spatial planning, i.e. by previously determined, tested and confirmed treatment. Without this, direct confrontation with investors' interests is always to the latter's advantage. In reality, the build up of a meadow on a forest border is not comparable in economic terms with an empty meadow on its own. What is valued is public empty space in connection to a broad city green element and in contrast to this, a proposal to build it up causing the break up of the existing ecological ties, the occupation of a potentially public area, the emergence of new traffic streams and indirectly burdening the hinterland. In such cases a town planner without principle determinations or a system of value is absolutely helpless. For a dialogue and a decision of this kind a document that reflects a broader social will and is of a more durable character must be at his disposal.

It is very wrong to describe city space today as a democratic space where open and built up space are equally present and emerging. We will be able to speak about democratic space only when all aspects of a democratic society will be developed. In the town planning sense, in analogy to the developed democracies, it is an active civil society in favour of public needs and public good. It is also a corrective and a weapon of pressure as regards ensuring public goods and the joint interest and common benefits against individualisation and exaggerated privatisation of urban space. We are no longer talking about public debates, but about organised groups of people who are joint by the topics and the problems, acting continuously or periodically as the third party in debates of the management and the investors. It is possible to prevent change of use from recreational to housing or from a swampy meadow into a built up site also by keeping a close eye on the city council by the public which demands its recreational zones and wilderness as a quality of living. Only then may relations between interests be easier to harmonise, but even then a sustained consensus reached in advance on the importance for the city and citizens will be most valuable. for city green areas and natural environments

Mag. Maja Simoneti, Landscape Architect, LUZ d.d., Ljubljana

#### Remarks

- 1 This text was made in direct connection to the text that assist. dr. Ana Kučan and I presented under the title Protection of urban landscape between plan and coincidence at the conference Protection of landscapes in Slovenia, organised on the twentieth anniversary of landscape architecture studies in Slovenia, Chair for landscape architecture BF, October 1997, Ljubljana
- 2 The assessment is based on the changed uses that have been made in particular areas of Ljubljana in the last five years as well as in system solutions brought about by the Supplement and changes of the long-term plan concerning green areas/recreational areas.
- 3 Galzer, Rudolf, 1987, Vergleich der Grunsysteme Europaischer Grosztadte mit jenem von Wien. Magistrat Wien, Beitrage zur Stadtforschung, Stadtentwicklung und Stadtgestaltung, Band 17
- 4 Urban Agriculture: Food, Jobs and Sustainable Cities. 1996, UNDP
- 5 More in Simoneti, Maja (1997) City Green Areas ZPS, Ljubljana, pages 41-48
- 6 An interesting debate on the traps of open spaces was given by Kos Drago (1996) in Understanding Open Urban Spaces.



- Designing open space in an urban environment, The Society of Landscape Architects of Slovenia, November 1998
- 7 From a discussion about the need to include protection of city green areas into the existing structure of spatial documentation instead of waiting for a new city plan in: Doležal, Mateja/ dr. Kučan, Ana, 1996, New contents and structures of open space. Designing open space in an urban environment, The Society of Landscape Architects of Slovenia, November 1998
  - 8 Ogrin, Dušan, et al. (1994) Green Systems of Ljubljana. Institute for Landscape Architecture BF, expert basis for making the city plan, ordered by the City of Ljubljana
  - 9 Bevk, Justin et al. (1993) Expert basis for deciding on the possibilities of construction on site ŠR 1/5 Tivoli Šišenski hrib – and Bevk, Justin et al (1998) Expert testing on the possibilities of construction for part of the site VS 3/1 Rožna dolina, ordered by the City of Ljubljana, Housing lands fund
  - 10 More on this in Gazvoda, Davorin (1998) Landscape in Cities, Architects Bulletin No. 139-140, July 1998, Year XXVIII, pages 6-9

#### Pictures

- Picture 1: A view of the Agrostroj area (Spring 1998)*  
*Picture 2: Removal of industry from the area, a vacant area of opportunities has been created (1997)*  
*Picture 3: Advertising the new planned image and use of the Agrostroj area (1997)*  
*Picture 4: One of the grassy areas under the hill (1996)*  
*Pictures 5 and 6: A manner of new construction characteristic of the area at the end of the system Tivoli – Rožnik – Šišenski hrib (1997)*  
*Picture 7: Overgrown in vegetation and organized space along Magistrova Road waiting for an urbanistic plan and used by gardeners and strollers (1995)*  
*Picture 8: The area after it had been prepared for the athletes' needs (1997)*

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