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VILLA GARDENS ARCHITECTURE BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA ARCHITEKTÚRA VILOVÝCH ZÁHRAD V MEDZIVOJNOVOM OBDOBÍ V ČESKOSLOVENSKU

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The study focuses on appearance and development of villa gardens which were established in the interwar period in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic. In the introduction I outlined the historical context, which – to a certain extent – contributed to the development of villa gardens. Furthermore, in the introduction you may find a basic range of the current research work in the field. A special focus is dedicated to archive material retrieval. The field research chapter provides basic information on historical gardens preservation. The facts retrieved from archives and the field research define function, composition and contents of villa gardens. Varied range of information serves as basic literature which will be further exploited while formulating methodology procedures which can be adopted in conservation and maintenance of villa gardens in the period of the First Republic.

Keywords: garden architecture, First Republic, villa, garden architects, specifics

Garden architecture between the wars in the territory of the former Czechoslovak Republic is scarcely researched period in the development of the entire garden and landscape arts.

The theme reacts to the current need to restore, conserve and deepen public awareness of culture and national resources which we inherited after garden architects of the First Republic. It is similarly necessary to retrieve information on all circumstances that enabled the development of garden arts in the former Czechoslovakia.

If you take into account the fact that interest in both structural and garden architecture of the First Republic is still on a rise, you can see a strengthening effort to restore and conserve architecture of the period. There are several successful reconstructions of the villa gardens. To name a few which have been done recently: the Muller Villa and its garden in Prague, the Tugendhat villa and its garden in Brno. Further reconstructions have been initiated: the Villa Cerych and its garden in Ceska Skalice, the Villa Stiassni and its garden in Brno.

In terms of public administration, I can say there is definitely an interest in the First Republic architecture coming from municipalities. Recently, the Center for Conservation of the 20th century Architecture has been established. The project has been implemented by the National Heritage Institute which focuses in on research and education in terms of restoration, conservation and maintenance of the real estate from the period of '20–'40s of the 20th century. Of course, garden architecture is an inseparable part of the project (see more on www.copabrno.cz).

Faculty of Horticulture of the Mendel University in Brno started up in the year 2013 along with National Museum of Agriculture a research project called Garden Architecture in the Context of the First Czechoslovak Republic. The target of the project is to map and evaluate artwork of the major garden architects working in the territory of the First Republic in the years 1900–1950.

Apart from the above listed projects, there was a little attention paid to research in interwar period related to

garden and landscape architecture in the territory of the former Czechoslovak Republic. So far published works have focused mostly on concrete themes rather than general situation, or on early artworks. Apart from several dissertation theses or several articles published in technical journals, there is no general outline of the Czech or German architects and their artworks. Non-existence of such a thorough study makes further research more complex. Therefore, it is rather difficult to deposit and renew this specific part in garden architecture development.

Related to the subject, let me name one of the most significant theses compiled by Zalakova in 1992, entitled Evaluation of the Most Distinctive Czech Orchardists in the first half of the 20th century. While studying certain aspects, it is similarly possible to draw information from thesis compiled by Ottomanska in 2011, entitled Use of Trees in Selected Period of Garden Arts. I tried to capture garden architecture during interwar period in my thesis entitled Garden Architecture in between the World Wars (Zamecnik, 2012).

Material and methods

Archives research

However, the most valuable source of information on interwar garden architecture and its authors is family archive, family heritage, map and urban plans collections or photography collections. It is also possible to find personal items of distinctive garden architects in the Map Archives or the National Museum of Agriculture in Prague. Some of the interwar garden architects were originally builders or architects. Despite the fact, they were very active in garden architecture (Otokar Fierlinger, Jan Kotera). That is why I can retrieve information from the Archives of Architecture and Building Industry of the National Technical Museum in Prague. Sometimes, family archives have been well kept by other family members. Many family archives are deposited in



Figure 1 Air view picture of the garden. The '30s of the 20th century. The Military Geographic and Hydrometeorologic Institute. Garden owned by František Schnöbling located in Strančice near Prague

Obrázok 1 Letecký pohľad na záhradu, tridsiate roky 20. storočia, Vojenský, geografický a hydrometeorologický úrad. Vlastník záhrady: František Schnöbling, lokalizácia: Strančice pri Prahe

regional or land archives. It is rather exceptional that family archives have been kept by descendants up to present days.

In order to restore a garden, it seems most feasible to find original project documentation. However, it is not always the case. Sometimes a fragment can be found in local Building Office. If that is the case, it is necessary to determine the realized image of the garden which could have been different from the originally projected one. Apart from field research, garden architects can use varied means such as period photography, films, witnesses that can document the real state of the garden after its completion. It is also a well known fact that projects found in family archives are the truly realized ones compared to those found in architect's archives.

The specific source of information is represented by direct witnesses who are still alive as we talk about the period between the world wars. However, discussing the garden appearance over the plans is not fully sufficient. The field work with them on site seems to be the most effective method. The best way how to preserve their testimony is camera shooting in the garden.

As the gardens were established approximately 80–100 years ago, it is possible to retrieve information from air view photography. The first air view photography of the former Czechoslovak Republic territory was shot in 1935. The service is still provided by the Military Geographic and Hydrometeorologic Institute in Dobruska (East Bohemia). The pictures taken in the Slovak territory are currently deposited in the Topographic Institute of the Slovak Army in Banská Bystrica. In general, air photography helps a great deal to analyze the development of the gardens. Thanks to it, you can see the general layout which helps to determine taxonomy and development of the trees in the course of time. When studying air photography, you need an expert author who knows the specific garden. It is similarly necessary to take into account the territorial topography, shadows and season of the year.

Field work

Field work enables to determine to what extent an original garden has been kept. It verifies the realized appearance of a garden. It helps to recover a detailed picture of a garden in terms of its composition, planted vegetation, but also technical structure. Field work is always preceded by detailed archive research. Having carefully studied all available archivalia, you get a basic knowledge of the garden function and composition. Realizing field research – destructive and non-destructive – you either confirm or reject the projected appearance of a garden. It is possible to identify original footpaths, green houses, hot houses, summer houses, irrigation system, tennis courts, walls, pergolas etc., including later alterations or adjustments.

Field work also comprises standard dendrology research which requires a sound knowledge of the period assortment and the period composition trends. Apart from taxonomy, you may reveal fragments of original fences. However, it is far more difficult to determine original herbs through field work. In some cases, you may discover fragments of original perennials.

In the territory of the Czech Republic, the field works were conducted in selected villa gardens established in the period of 1918–1939. Variety of the gardens was one of the criteria. The gardens differed in the area – some of them just hundreds of meters large, others up to several hectares. Also their incline differed – some of them having been established on a plane, others on steep inclines. Some gardens were established in towns, others in country or in a complete seclusion. Similarly, the architecture of the villa itself was taken into account – either historical villas or fully functionalist ones. Also, investors varied – there were bankers, factory owners, doctors, pharmacists, lawyers etc., but also various garden architects. In most gardens it was possible to detect original garden plans or even period photography through the field research. In some unique cases, it was possible to set up an ideal form of the garden thanks to period camera shots, air view photography or direct testimonies.

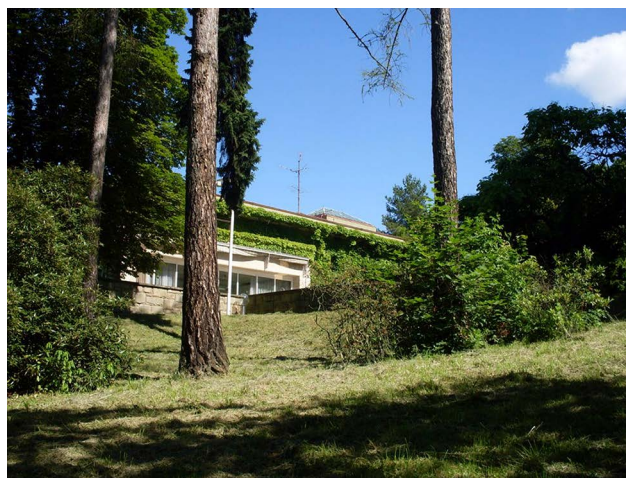


Figure 2 Villa Stiassni Garden, Brno
Photo: Zamecnik, 2012

Obrázok 2 Záhrada vily Stiassni, Brno
Foto: Zámečník, 2012

Results and discussion

The field work and information retrieved from archives confirmed multi layered structure of the original gardens in most cases. The tree level features the greatest extent of origin, supposing owners provided at least basic care. On the other hand, flower border lines seem rather dim. In many cases, the network of footpaths was considerably changed. Construction features called petty garden architecture, also show damage. Sometimes it is possible to track them only by on-site archeological survey. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect various fragments such as pavements, sculptures, iron products, forms, bricks, etc., which can considerably help to reconstruct the garden.

There is a consensus among the experts participating in garden reconstruction to preserve all valuable and usable features of the garden.

The conducted surveys of the preserved elements enable to create a clear picture of what the garden architecture in between the wars looked like. The idea is based on real facts that constitute a sound base for future preservation.

The period shortly after the Czechoslovak Republic was established (i.e.1918) was to a certain extent influenced by the previous development. Therefore, interwar gardens feature mostly formal motifs. Gardens in the '20s and '30s of the 20th century were viewed as representative and were closely linked to general layout of villas. In terms of assortment, the borders must have been beautiful to look at and featured mostly summer season plants. The borders were clearly separated from the surroundings. They constituted an inseparable part of the garden. The garden user of the period moved around in a clearly stipulated garden programme which usually started in front of the villa with a flower border and then continued along perimeter wall. The lawn – as well as flower borders – was understood as an element to be looked at. In the remaining area of the garden you may find petty garden architecture, including sculptures or formal water features. Garden axis was closely linked to the building itself. Everything appeared sumptuous and decorative. One of the best representatives



Figure 3 Flower parterre by the Villa Stiassni. The '30s of the 20th century

Photo: Rudolf de Sandalo. Museum of the City of Brno
Kvetinový parter pri vile Stiassni, tridsiate roky 20. storočia

Obrázok 3

Foto: Rudolf de Sandalo. Muzeum města Brna

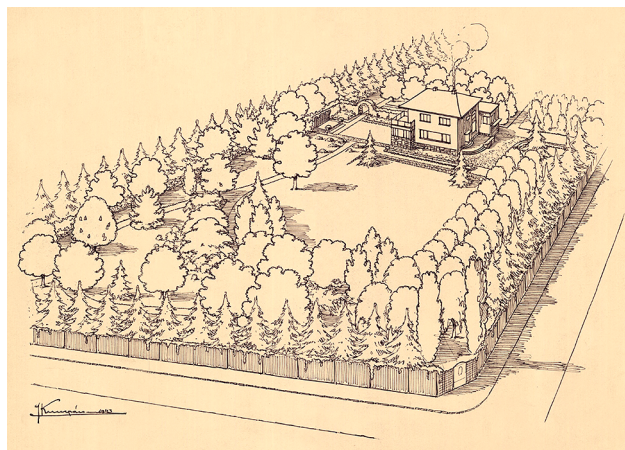


Figure 4 Visualization of the garden rendered in a free landscape art

Source: National Museum of Agriculture, Prague

Obrázok 4

Zdroj: Národní zemědělské museum, Praha

of this philosophy was Josef Vanek, the garden architect born in Chrudim (see Family Archives of Josef Vanek).

It was only at the beginning of the '30s that garden composition was not so tightly linked to villa. Perennials started to be planted rather than high cost summer season flower borders. The flower parterre began to gradually change into lawn which was not so difficult to maintain as flower borders. In many cases, such lawn was used as a playground for children or a relaxation zone for adults (garden parties). Until then, the garden was viewed as fully representative. Therefore, it featured rather complicated elements (Vanek, 1920). Starting in the '30s, the garden transformation began in reaction to gradual change in lifestyle of the the inhabitants. For instance, gym features started to be introduced in the gardens. This related to a growing awareness of a healthy lifestyle. The residential function of the gardens was emphasized. Also, there was a decline from unnecessary decorations. Other functional details began to be introduced, such as contact stones located around the lawn or directly in the border. Since then, lawn and borders have stopped being considered view points. The user could search flower borders in their immediate vicinity.

In the course of the '30s, new rational architecture took over. It was influenced by modern trends in living which inevitably caused changes in garden architecture, too. In Czechoslovakia of the time, there were many studios specializing in rendering the gardens. Some architects still preferred historical motifs in a formal lay-out, featuring many decorative elements. On the other hand, there were architects who attempted the new concept. Landscape architect Otokar Fierlinger (1888–1941) was a typical representative of the modern concept. Apart from garden architecture, he was engaged in urban planning, too. His gardens combined maximum function with high esthetic quality. Otokar Fierlinger brought the new ideas to Czechoslovakia from the United States where he studied. He came up with a completely new approach to urban planning, park and garden architecture (NTM, Fierlinger Fund). He managed to address modern generation of architects who shared the new artistic values – such as impressionism,

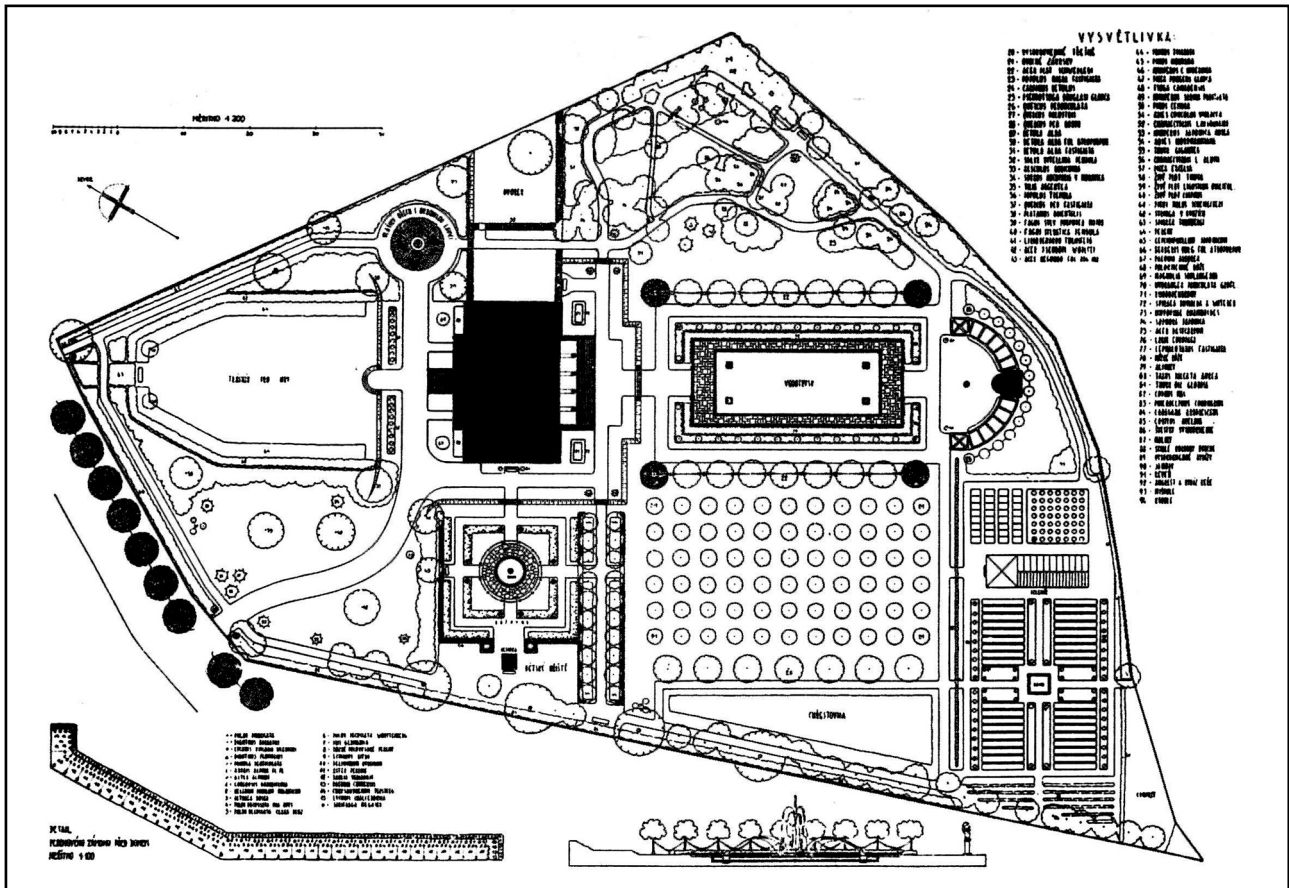


Figure 5 Formal Garden Layout
 Source: KUMPAN: Modern Gardens, 1938
Obrázok 5 Formálny návrh záhrady
 Zdroj: KUMPAN: Modern Gardens, 1938

which brought a new perspective of nature changing atmosphere in every season of the year. Furthermore, it was expressionism that strongly manifested itself in abstract concept. Last but not least, cubism introduced functional and formally clear means of expression (Fierlinger, 1938).

Apart from the above mentioned Josef Vanek, it was Josef Kumpan (1885–1961) who was the most requested garden architect of the period. His gardens were related to axes, closely linked to a house. The gardens consisted of three parts: representative, residential and utilitarian. One of the indicators of his architecture was the summer houses he used to locate in almost every garden. Most gardens he architected contained a regular parterre which was – unlike the ones by Vanek – simple and modest, and did not constitute a major part of the garden (Kumpan, 1925, 1938). Works of the above mentioned architects are probably the most researched. Of course, they were not the only ones who operated in the territory of the former Czechoslovakia. There were Josef Miniberger, Julius Krysa, Jan Kaspar, Leopold Jopp, Zdena Kosakova, Albert Esch and Otto Eisler among others. Despite a great variety of garden architecture, it is possible to mark out the basic principles of the period which tend to recur in most gardens of the monitored period.

In essence, there were two basic approaches in modulating the gardens: free and geometric (Miniberger, 1925, 1934). Free style is typical by irregularly conducted

network of footpaths with trees planted in an open lawn. Garden – rendered in free style – was closely linked to the house itself. On the other hand, geometric style is typical of regular network of footpaths that separate different functional parts of the garden. The garden in geometric style was based on axes. However, the two styles sometimes combined: the garden was regularly composed in an immediate vicinity of the house, whereas far from the house the green parts were irregularly dispersed and created so called insulation. The combination of both styles featured several advantages. Free space around the structure enabled villa to show off its beauty. In the garden, you could find terraces, staircases with landing, resting places, and summer houses. From all these points visitors could view and admire the villa. Sometimes, garden penetrated the house through creepers and ramblers which were most popular in functionalist structures. Dispersed and insulating high vegetation around the villa constituted a lovely counterpoint to sunny and airy parterres which were designed to represent the owner. In some villa gardens, you could find sports ground situated farther from the villa. Usually, it was a tennis court. Some owners preferred swimming pools. Although pools were designed to refresh the residents or their guests, they also played an esthetic role (reflecting sun on the water surface). Almost every garden comprised utility grounds, such as hot houses, green houses, orchard, vegetable borders, etc. You could find these elements both in small gardens and the

large ones. Functionally different parts of the garden were separated from each other by fences, flower walls, planted trees or petty garden architecture elements such as pergolas or treillage.

Summary

In between the two world wars, the housing culture was rapidly on a rise. Similarly, many technical journals on modern architecture, urban planning, design, and villa gardens architecture were published. There was a general awareness of villa gardens and their importance. They were viewed as an inseparable part of the structure. Their contribution to healthy lifestyle of the residents was also acknowledged. This text attempted to outline one époque in the garden architecture of former Czechoslovakia. However, the liberal development in between the wars was forcibly interrupted by the Communist coup d'état in 1948. This historical fact makes the restoration and conservation process more difficult. In this sense, the dissertation entitled Procedures and Specifics of the Interwar Villa Gardens Restoration can be viewed as the first step in defining the historical circumstances which enabled such phenomenon as villa gardens. The next step – based on archive research and retrieved information – will be to define specific methodology principles in interwar villa gardens restoration. The comparison of the original appearance of a garden with its current state will enable us to specify principles which can be adopted in villa garden maintenance and its conservation for the future.

Súhrn

Príspevok sa zameriava na vznik a vývoj vilových záhrad, ktoré boli založené v medzivojnovom období na území Československej republiky. V úvode je načrtnutý historický kontext, ktorý – do určitej miery – prispel k vývoju vilových záhrad. V úvode je tiež obsiahnutý základný rámec súčasného stavu vedeckého bádania na tomto poli. Dôraz je zvlášť kladený na získavanie archívnych materiálov. Kapitola pojednávajúca o terénnom výskume poskytuje základné informácie o zachovanosti historických záhrad. Údaje nadobudnuté z archívov a terénny výskum určujú funkciu, kompozíciu a obsah vilových záhrad. V úlohe základnej literatúry je široká škála informácií, ktoré budú neskôr využité pri formulovaní metodologických postupov. Tieto postupy môžu byť zavádzané pre konzerváciu a údržbu vilových záhrad z obdobia Prvej republiky.

Kľúčové slová: záhradná architektúra, Prvá republika, vila, záhradní architekti, špecifická

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