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THE FORMER URBAN SCHOOL GARDENS

DAWNE MIEJSKIE OGRODY SZKOLNE

Abstract

In the studies, the subject of the so-called central school gardens which were founded in interwar Poland was undertaken, thinking about the pupils of all schools in a given city, irrespectively of the level of learning. The character of the gardens was determined by the goal they served, as well as by the user for whom they were founded – they were, first of all, demonstration gardens, based on the model of university botanic gardens. From among the whole group of school gardens which were founded in great quantities at that time, they were distinguished by their relatively large scale, often with access for the wider public and by a “park nature”; therefore, their layout, architectonic details, and partly their plant selection, are not only the reflection of the requirements, being imposed by their didactic function but also a picture of contemporary fashion or standards and rules for the design of gardens and parks.

Keywords: Bydgoszcz, central school gardens, Łowicz, Poznań, Waclaw Zaykowski

Streszczenie

W badaniach podjęto temat tzw. centralnych ogrodów szkolnych, które zakładano w Polsce międzywojennej z myślą o uczniach wszystkich, niezależnie od szczebla nauczania, szkół danego miasta. Charakter tych obiektów był zdeterminowany zarówno przez cel, jakiemu służyły, jak i adresata, dla którego je zakładano – były to ogrody przede wszystkim demonstracyjne, wzorowane na uniwersyteckich ogrodach botanicznych. Pośród całej grupy licznie wówczas zakładanych ogrodów szkolnych wyróżniają się stosunkowo dużą skalą, często także dostępnością dla szerszej publiczności oraz „parkowym charakterem” i dlatego w ich rozplanowaniu, detalu architektonicznym, częściowo również w doborach roślinnych – odnajdujemy nie tylko odzwierciedlenie wymogów, jakie narzucała ich dydaktyczna funkcja, ale również obraz ówczesnej mody czy norm oraz zasad projektowania ogrodów i parków.

Słowa kluczowe: Bydgoszcz, centralny ogród szkolny, Łowicz, Poznań, Waclaw Zaykowski

1. Introduction

School gardens, a somewhat forgotten type of didactic garden today, were very popular during the interwar period. They were founded in big cities, as well as in small towns and villages. “The central school garden” was, however, a type of school garden strictly linked with the city, and especially with the big city – where many schools with different levels of learning were functioning.

The central gardens were an alternative to the “workplace-related” gardens, that is, created irrespectively of each other, at every school – the alternative being utilized, first, due to a lack of appropriate, undeveloped plots in the direct neighbourhood of big city schools, and due to the distance from school to “living nature” as well as due to saving money. “School gardens in big cities – if they exist – are usually small [...], hence, there has emerged a necessity for creating central gardens in big centres which would have a systematic plant community, with biological and geographic groupings, but consisting of appropriate plants, being selected especially for school purposes” [1, p. 145].

The establishment of didactic gardens for children and school youth resulted from the changes in education system which, from the second half of the 19th century, was based upon explanatory methods of teaching. In the field of teaching natural science, the excursions and field observations played an increasing role. Some of the observations were conducted in the classrooms, utilizing “parapet cultivation”, or in school gardens (the children could conduct experiments and acquire basic gardening skills). Forests, meadows and fields were *terra incognita* for children, so organization of lessons in open territory was very important and not easy. In certain cities, some of the lessons on nature were carried out in urban parks; the plants were accompanied by plates with the species name of a given plant (e.g. in Lublin, in the Saski Garden, or in the Urban Park in Grudziądz). In other big cities, the problems of limited access to natural non-urban habitats and the absence of the possibility of creating school gardens at each school were solved in such a way that central gardens were founded, and they were supplementary to nature laboratories, also central, common for many schools. These gardens could combine two basic functions – they were garden repositories, which supplied fresh, live plant material for lessons on nature, performed in the classrooms; and they were simultaneously “demonstration gardens”, “living museums” where the pupils could familiarize themselves with the morphology and systematics of the plants and their biology and physiology. The explanatory and scientific (at the same time) nature of the central school gardens made them similar to university botanic gardens in respect of their form and programme; although their structure was simpler and the collection of the plants was more modest, they were adopted to the needs of young people and the financial possibilities of the cities.

2. The aim of the studies

In the present paper, the characteristics of the central school gardens, founded in the interwar period in Poland, are given. On the grounds of the analyses conducted, the most important elements, distinguishing these gardens, as compared to other didactic gardens, are indicated. Based upon the preserved information, the outline of the history of founding such gardens, as well as selected examples, the analysis of their composition is carried out.

3. Definitions

It is difficult to find an *explicite* definition of the “central school garden” in the literature dating back to the interwar period in Poland. More frequently, this term was defined within the classification of the term “school garden” at that time. The “central garden” may be found among demonstration gardens, being defined as a place where “it is possible to show the pupils different plants, which often are absent even in the direct vicinity, and where we may collect plant material for lessons in classroom [...] [such] a garden could be called a small-scale botanic garden” [2, p. 90]. The creation of collective gardens as early as in 1921 was justified by Władysław Szafer, as indicating that “striving at creating a botanic garden at each secondary school separately would not be – obviously – harmful, but it would intrinsically lead to the creation of a small number of average gardens, whereas the real advantage for schools could be provided only by good and not too small botanic gardens” [3, p. 28]. Then, Szafer mentioned that “botanic” gardens, that is, scientific gardens, should serve not only secondary schools but also common schools. In the classification published by Antoniewiczówna central gardens were distinguished as one of four groups of school gardens, next to district gardens, school-adjacent gardens and small flower beds, and were described as collective gardens, being founded for all schools in big cities, demonstration-scientific in nature, often supplemented with a “garden-store place” [4].

4. Characteristics of the central school gardens

Two important factors, emphasized in all the sources cited above – the similarity to university gardens and the demonstration characteristic, have affected the high standard of “central gardens” among other didactic gardens; this role resulted in rendering them the appropriate plastic setting and park composition which was consistent with the fashion of that time; they were often designed by known planners of the period. The aesthetic role of school gardens – apart from the educational, social and hygienic roles – was unquestionable in all cases. “The indispensable feature of the school garden, apart from practical distribution of its particular sections, is a special consideration of the aesthetic aspect [...]. The garden must be beautiful and this is a necessary requirement [...] it must also affect (by its architecture) the child’s mind, develop a sense of beauty and generate – in the child’s soul – the need for harmony and beauty” [5, p. 204].

From among the authors of designs of central gardens, we meet outstanding garden planners such as Edward Ciszewicz (garden in Łódź), Stanisław Zadora-Życieński (in Białystok), Waclaw Zaykowski (in Łowicz), managers of urban gardens – such as Marian Güntzel (in Bydgoszcz), Władysław Marciniak (in Poznań) and, probably, Paweł Sallmann (in Katowice). Academic professors such as Rudolf Boettner (at the same time, the co-author of the conception of the first part of garden in Jeżyce district in Poznań) or Jan Muszyński (in Vilnius) cooperated with the authors of the abovementioned conception in respect of the selection of the particular sections and plants for emerging gardens. In the project work, the members of the Polish Pedagogical Society of Natural History (PPTP)¹ also participated.

The active involvement of the municipal authorities and district school education offices in the creation of central gardens is a successive feature, distinguishing this type of didactic gardens. The aid consisted not only in financing for the investment but firstly, in leasing the land, support during the stage of the project's development, and later maintenance of the garden. It was just one of the reasons for which urban parks were transformed into central botanic, natural, biological or zoological-botanic gardens. There were just the communal parks where the central gardens were created: in Łódź – in Park Źródłiska, in Piotrków Trybunalski – in the southern part of the J. Poniatowski Park and in Białystok – within the limits of the Zwierzyniecki Park. They were also often created in Katowice, Łódź, Warsaw and Vilnius, which was already mentioned in the name of the garden; they were not only gardens which presented flowers but also animals. The discussed school collections became, with the passing of time, the precursor of urban zoological gardens such as for example, in Vilnius and in Warsaw where – during the transfer of the garden to Dobra Street – the city authorities decided to create a separate independent administrative unit which took over the whole so-far existing zoological section of the school garden. Thus, the Warsaw Zoological Garden was created (and has existed until now) [6].

The successive common feature of the central didactic gardens consisted in the fact that they were open to a wide public. They could be attended not only by children and teenagers during lessons on nature, but also by adults. In this last case, small fees were introduced with the aim of covering at least a small part of the expenses borne on the maintenance of plants and animals.

¹ PPTP was founded in 1925 in Warsaw. The Society established the Section of School Gardens; it developed designs for school gardens. The activity of the Society was connected with the foundation of the Central Biological School Garden in Warsaw (situated at 3rd May Avenue) [6]. Probably, the later garden as organized at Dobra Street was also founded on the grounds of the plans developed in the Section of School Gardens, as the site was found all the time under the care of the PPTP. The methodical demonstrations intended for teachers were also organized there [7].

5. History of founding the central school garden during the interwar period

The first attempts at establishing a garden which would serve the pupils of many schools within the borders of the future Second Republic of Poland² (known also as interwar Poland) were undertaken as early as at the end of the 19th century in Poznań. In 1898, in the territory of urban plantations – nurseries of trees and decorative shrubs, the so-called “botanic section” was founded; it was a material store place where plants were prepared for conducting some nature classes in people’s schools (the lowest degree of school education). As early as 6 years later, this “section” was transferred to a new site in the Jeżyce district and at this location – before World War I – apart from the “storage place”, demonstration collections of domestic plants were arranged. In 1925, a school garden was opened there; in the first stage, it was designed by Prof. Rudolf Boettner [9, 10]. The garden in Warsaw was the first demonstration central school garden, founded directly after Poland regained independence. Initially, in 1918, it was situated at the territory, purchased by the City with the aim of building the National Museum and later, when the building of the Museum was commenced (in 1927), it was transferred to a non-developed plot at Dobra Street. In the 1920s, the following central school gardens were also established: Vilnius (1921), Katowice (1923), Łódź (1925), Lwów (1927), Piotrków Trybunalski (1927) and Cieszyn (1928). Further gardens were founded in the thirties – in Białystok (1930), in Bydgoszcz (1930), in Siedlce (before 1933) and in Łowicz (1934).

The territories where – during the interwar period – there were the central school gardens, play various functions today. In Łódź, the former school garden still remains a part of the park, but is not utilized as a didactic part. In Białystok, the territory is utilized for social care purposes: within the limits of the former school garden, a childcare home and home of social care are arranged. In Cieszyn, Katowice, Siedlce, Warsaw and Vilnius, no trace of these gardens remains; their territories were devastated during the Second World War and there were new post-war constructions erected. In Lwów, the former central school garden does not exist today, although the building of the school exists and plays its educational functions. Two objects, situated in the Wielkopolskie district have changed their role and now they fulfil the function of university botanic gardens (The A. Mickiewicz University in Poznań and Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz). In Łowicz and Piotrków Trybunalski, during recent years, attempts to restore the splendour of the former school gardens have been undertaken; in the first one, the composition of the garden was reproduced but it is kept as a green urban area; the second one is an urban botanic garden. Neither of these gardens, however, fulfil their primary didactic function; the role of “garden-workshops” was not returned to them; they play the role of a “curiosity” for tourists and inhabitants.

² Within the contemporary borders of Poland, there was also another, earlier founded garden which played a role as the Urban Botanic School Garden (established in 1887 in Wrocław). Today, its area lies in the territory of Szczytnicki Park. The garden was rearranged in 1912 during the preparations for The Centennial Exhibition. The pupils could take advantage of the crops of the garden at the site – during excursions, or in their own classes as the plants were brought from the garden to all interested Wrocław schools 4 times a week, after the previous order [8].

6. Composition

The composition of school gardens was strictly connected with their function, locality and size of the territory. The scientific nature of the garden had the primary role, affecting the spatial layout. From among all the documented former school gardens, which fulfilled the function of collective gardens (central), we may distinguish three basic groups. First there are the demonstration (scientific) gardens which were established based on urban parks and which were managed as institutions being financially and organizationally independent of schools (Łódź, Poznań, Bydgoszcz, Piotrków Trybunalski). The second group consisted of the gardens which, apart from demo sections (plant systematics, biology, medicinal, industrial, economic and decorative plants), also had practical sections – pupils' beds and experimental plots (Cieszyn, Łowicz). The third group contained the garden in Białystok which primarily played a double function – a garden situated at school for children suffering from tuberculosis and a central garden for all Białystok schools; due to this reason, they included demo sections as well as practical parts which supplemented sport areas and areas for children to play.

In all gardens, irrespectively of their classification as mentioned above, the scientific demonstration sections were organized. Depending on the site possibilities (the size of the area), apart from the typical parts, containing collections of thematically arranged plants, found in geometrically determined plots, we could find an arboretum together with community gardens with groups of aquatic and swamp plants and the so-called rockeries, or more generally, collections of the plants from mountain habitats. There were just the arboreta in combination with habitat groups which resembled a park in respect of their composition.

The earliest central school gardens referred distinctly to the naturalistic “calligraphic” trend, a style fashionable in design of parks and gardens at the turn of the 20th century. The application of the groups of aquatic or mountain plants is also characteristic of the contemporary architecture of landscape, however, in this case, the direction of the influence is rather reverse, that is, the first was the interest of botanists in the relationships between the living conditions and organisms living there and then, there were attempts to reproduce the system based on natural communities (phytocoenosis) in university gardens and then, in park composition. The central gardens which were created in the interwar period referred to a modernistic solution in respect of their composition and layout, with their transparent composition and distinct emphasis on main points. Similarly, the equipment of the gardens (pergolas, arboreal basins, retaining ledges and field stairs) corresponded to modernistic aesthetics in respect of form and material. The details of these compositions may be analysed owing to the preserved plans and, first of all, photographs.

According to “modern style”, two Wielkopolskie gardens were designed: in Poznań and in Bydgoszcz (based upon Poznań) [11]. In the both cases, the characteristic differentiation was employed, being stressed by stairs and retaining ledges, levels of the particular parts of the garden; all was designed as a simple composition based, first, on a rectangular division of quarters, subject to the main axes. In the preserved photographs, we may see



Fig. 1. Bydgoszcz. View on the entrance to the garden, with rest place and solar clock.
Card dating back to ca. 1940, [19]

all the characteristic parts, elements and architectonic details of both gardens – pergolas and trellis, emphasizing the division of the area into particular functional parts, and the appearance of squares and form of entrance gates (Fig. 1). In the Poznań garden, a vast, oval-shaped section of plants' biology, with a central basin and two squares distributed on the main axis of the garden and arranged in a form of pergola on their peripheries may be recognised as a very characteristic part of the garden.

The garden, established on the grounds of the project of Waclaw Zaykowski³ of 1933 and situated in the peripheral district of Łowicz – Bartkowice, is an interesting and lesser known object.

³ **Waclaw Zaykowski** (born on 25.09.1875 in Warsaw, died on 16.11.1941 also in Warsaw), from 1923 employed in the Ministry of Religions and Public Education, in the Department of Common Education as a clerk; from 1928 – ministerial counsellor, was the main – and for many years. The only specialist who *develops plans of school territories* [12] Education – gardener-planner, he graduated from the Pomological Institute in Proskau (Prószków near Opole). After studies, he participated in the arrangement of Skaryszewski Park. For 2 years, he was the manager of the botanic garden at the University in Dorpat; 3 years of work in the Ministry of Education in Moscow, one year at the Alfred Frenzl company in Germany. From September 1919 until 1921, he was an inspector in the Ministry of Agriculture and Public Estates (during this period, he took care of the Royal Łazienki Park; from 1 IX until the end of November 1919 as a senior gardener and then, from 1.12.1919 to 7.01.1921, he was the manager of the Royal Łazienki Park and garden at Belvedere. Together with W. Kronenberg and T. Chrzęński, he conducted the technical-irrigation office "Plan-Garden". He is the author of *inter alia* a competition project for the territory of the Mory experimental station near Warsaw (1913), implemented the competition project he won for the garden at the K. Szlenkier school in Warsaw (1914), project of the school garden at the E. Orzeszkowa Teacher Seminar in Warsaw (ca. 1920), the project of territory around 7-class common school in Puszcza Mariańska (Mariańska Forest) (1923), Inter-school Nature Garden in Łowicz (1933). According to his projects, there were established: The H. Sienkiewicz

The initiator of its arrangement was Władysław Stanio, the teacher of nature subjects in Łowicz college (teachers' seminar). The garden was arranged in the years 1934–1936. The principal part of the work was performed by the pupils of the seminar, and a part of the plants – according to the requests, dispatched by Stanio, were obtained from the nurseries of the period⁴ of decorative plants. The official opening of the garden took place on 7 June 1936 and was a part of the ceremonies celebrating the 800th anniversary of Łowicz [18]. The plot, as received from the town, had an irregular shape and area of ca 1000 m². The whole territory was divided into three parts: basic, the greatest one was destined for collections of decorative plants, arranged in a form of vast grass lawns



Fig. 2. Urban Inter-school Natural Garden in Łowicz. Central, decorative part of the garden, 1938, [20, p. 20]

Park in Łowicz (1924) and Vistula Riverside area “Kościuszko plantations” in Warsaw. In 1922, the brothers Zaykowski (Wacław and Stanisław) obtained the first award in the project of Peoples' Park in Łódź. The elements of this park were considered in the project, compiled by W. Rybski, coming from two pieces of work: the project of the Zaykowski brothers and project of E. Ciszkievicz. In 1928, Zaykowski developed the project for management of the area of the Institute of Physical Education near Bielany. He was a member of the Society for the Support of School Gardens, as established in 1925 [12–16].

⁴ From among the donors there were included the nurseries of Zamoyski-Estate in Podzamcze, and nurseries conducted by “Kozłakowski and Żaglewski” in Płock, by Freege (Cracow), by Stanisław Przedpełski (Płock), Katriel Eizyk (Kutno), specialising in the production of roses, and by W. Garnuszewski (Warsaw) seed trade company in Hale Mirowskie and Natural Garden in Vilnius. A part of the plants derived from the own plant nursery, established by Władysław Stanio and his pupils at Teachers' Seminar in Łowicz [17].

with flower borders, with groups of shrubs and trees in peripheral parts of arboretum. The first part included also the sectors of medicinal and industrial plants; the composition of the discussed part was based on two concentric circles and perpendicular main axes; in the western part, a rockery was planned; the eastern part was intended for basins for aquatic plants, fish, reptiles and amphibians, and *filicetum* (a collection of ferns). The crossing of the axes was stressed by the flowerbed on the plan of a circle, with a pedestal on which an agave was placed as if it was a flower and solar clock at the same time (Fig. 2). In the demonstration-decorative area, there were also placed cages for small animals: *insectarium*, an aviary for singing birds, and cages for small mammals. The second part of the garden was situated on the northern side in relation to the first one. It was devoted to practical sectors – pupils' beds, nursery and experimental plots and the indispensable gardening material support (seedbeds, coldframes, compost heap, and a store for tools). It was intended for the "summer class", where the pupils could have some of their lessons; due to financial reasons, it was not implemented. The last part, the third in the school garden, was destined for the sector of mass cultivation, that is, the so-called "plant-storage site".

7. Summary

The former school gardens which have scarcely been preserved until today are, first of all, the pre-war central gardens which served the whole society of a given city. The role of these gardens was not limited exclusively to a didactic function; they were objects which, like urban parks, were also used for recreation. There was heed paid to the high aesthetic standard of their composition; they were planned, as a rule, by garden planners in accordance with contemporaneous fashions, and trends in the design of parks and gardens. The implementation of these projects was favourable for them due to the aims imposed for the central school gardens – scientific purposes which among many sectors, established in school gardens, emphasized first of all the sectors of decorative and medicinal plants, systematics and biology of plants and community groups and arboreta, and the fact of frequent widening of the exposition to animals; all this created a very attractive place for the visitors.

Their further existence may be perceived in their high similarity to university gardens as objects which have survived until now, and were those which were easily adapted to academic needs in the post-war reality in the situation where the social interest and the need for their further function existed.

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