

GREEN SPACES AND URBAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CRAIOVA MUNICIPALITY IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

As component of any urban system many green spaces such as parks, botanical or zoological gardens, and urban forests have a role of protection and improvement of the environmental quality standards in the cities, and are attraction poles for the inhabitants as well as for all the types of tourism (leisure, cultural, business tourism, congress and meetings tourism or mix tourism forms). However in Romania, the tourist function of green spaces is not yet considered as building the city image. After setting the framework of urban tourism and destination marketing, and the insertion of the green spaces within the urban tissue, we discuss the principles that make a place attractive for tourists. Taking the example of the town of Craiova we try to identify the green spaces that may appeal to tourists, the required characteristics for a green space to become a touristic place and how to further develop the tourist function without hindering the other functions. The case of two parks we consider remarkable and attractive from the touristic point of view is analysed from this point of view.

Keywords: urban tourism, green spaces, remarkable gardens, tourist function, destination image

1. INTRODUCTION

The renewed interest in urban tourism since the beginning of the 1980s has changed tourism trends and practices to a high degree. Therefore, the cities with a historic past and cultural heritage have become tourist attractions, visitors rushing into museums, cathedrals and castles. Heritage, whether cultural or natural, is a very popular issue nowadays. A number of sites have worked hard to get international recognition and be labelled World Heritage. The majority of sites (745 out of 962) are cultural sites. Searching the World Heritage List database for the word 'garden', we had a result of 102 properties (mostly gardens located in the historic centre of a city, or gardens that belong to a castle or to an already labelled site), among which none is labelled only for its garden. Such a result is not surprising in so far as gardens are either public gardens located in the city's historic centre, as an important element of the urban morphology, or are private, belonging to an extended property that consists of a building and its surroundings usually planned as green spaces.

As statistics show, tourism is the privilege of urban areas. Many cities play the tourism card, investing a lot of money in new equipments and urban regeneration projects, in order to change the unappealing image of certain neighbourhoods and turn them into touristic targets. For many, *tourism is a cornerstone of a policy of urban development that combines a competitive supply able to meet visitors' expectations with a positive contribution to the development of towns and cities and the well-being of their residents.* (EDGTU, 2000:9) Such an approach has its advantages, both for the residents and the tourists, in terms of safety and security, sanitation and salubrity, hospitality and social interaction. Tourist attraction strategies lie on promotion campaigns which present the “urban offer” (tourism resources, leisure equipments, urban environment and urban quality of life, etc.). (Vlès, Berdoulay, Clarimont, 2005:7) In this respect, promoting the image of a “green, sustainable city” has to be ensured by the existence of natural amenities (i.e. gardens and parks) and non-polluting equipments. This type of marketing builds a “narrative city”, where each place has a story to tell, a message to send. Of course, such a marketing strategy will be most effective in terms of tourist attraction, but the risk is “narrative reduction” (the construction of an impoverished image, that is based on a depleted historic background). (Vlès, Berdoulay, Sylvie Clarimont, 2005:64)

In this context, tourists have become more fastidious and look for unique experiences. New types of tourists have appeared: globe trotters, city breakers, tourists coming for niche tourism practices. Consequently, the destination marketing that has traditionally been aligned with growth oriented strategies is now changing course for a responsible marketing approach preserving the resources of a tourist destination as well as providing a high quality visitor experience. (Meredity Wray *et. al.*, 2010:24)

Accordingly, the present research analyses the potential of tourism development in Romania's 6th important city - Craiova municipality – (fig.1), aiming at highlighting the specificities of cultural tourism, especially the potential that green spaces hold and the tourists they may attract.



Figure1. Craiova municipality localization

We shall focus on green spaces specificity, adopting an in-depth approach to the parks and gardens with touristic potential in the Craiova municipality.

2. ANALYSIS TEMPLATE – THE INSERTION OF GREEN SPACES IN THE URBAN TISSUE

Tourism as a phenomenon raises interesting questions regarding the relationship between tourism and the city, more specifically, the urban dimension of tourism. Consequently, the quality of a

place, its status (public or private) and the touristic value it has already acquired are becoming important issues that affect the number of its visitors.

Considering destinations as dynamic places, we tried to build a spatial organizational model of the touristic space circumscribed by the urban space. Hence, the following questions arose:

- How does a place become tourist attractive? What elements make it attractive to tourists?
- How does a touristic place function? What are the relations between touristic sites and other locations?

The touristic space (fig.2) is individualized by its organization (a touristic organization in this case), achieved through distinguishable and successive planning techniques that result in a new organization, in accordance with social and touristic needs, as well as the environment carrying capacity.

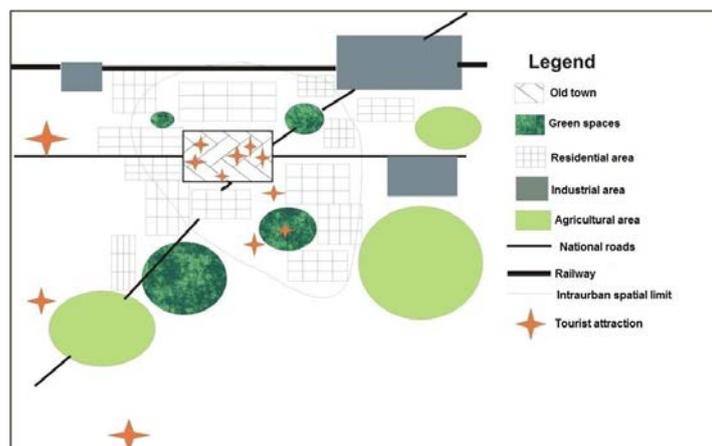


Figure 2. The choreom of the touristic space integrated to the city's functional zoning

source: A.C. Popescu, 2011

However, the touristic space must be considered through visitor flows, which transform the existing space, thus rearranging it according to their needs. *Through time, certain touristic polarities appear, others are reinforced, but the touristic space is clearly delimited within the city.* (MIT Research Team, 2002, cited by T. Saint-Julien, R. Le Goix, 2007:49)

Usually, the old town attracts most of the visitors flows, which are then distributed towards peripheral places, depending on the importance that peripheral sites have from a touristic viewpoint, i.e. the distance from the historic centre or the means of transport that connect the sites. Therefore, for the city's touristic space to use its full potential, it is necessary that the touristic attraction should be conceived as an integrated visiting system of interconnected networks, with efficient public transportation. As a consequence, the sites need good logistics in terms of tourist access and reception, without which the attraction function is bound to remain theoretical.

To put it in a nutshell, the touristic phenomenon has the capacity to structure the territory, imposing a spatial organization suited to the tourist function. Consequently, the touristic space is specialized, having its own functional organization, its own shaping forces and phenomena.

3. VISITING GARDENS AS A LEISURE AND TOURISM ACTIVITY

The first pleasure gardens appeared in England as early as 1661. They were leisure places where people spent their time listening to music, taking part in theatrical performances or simply strolling along tree-bordered walks. (Racine, David, 1994:19)

A strong movement of garden recognition and visiting developed in Western Europe during the 20th century, when gardens became known for their cultural, as well as for their tourism resources. Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Italy developed trusts and associations in

charge of protection and management of historical gardens. Moreover, the associations and the authorities conducted promotion action plans with the purpose to arouse public interest in gardens (i.e. Visit an English Garden in England, Visit a Garden in France and The Garden Month in France). Gardens soon became heritage, and the Florence Charter (1981) adopted a year later by ICOMOS, strengthened this status by defining historic gardens and setting the parameters for their maintenance, conservation, restoration, reconstruction and use.

Article 1 of the Florence Charter, defines a historic garden as *an architectural composition of interest to the public from the historical or artistic point of view. As such, it is to be considered as a monument*. As may be seen from the definition above, the historic garden is assimilated to a monument, a natural monument more precisely, just like a landform, a geological feature or some outstanding scenery. However, being man-made, a historic garden is closer to an architectural monument. This idea is further developed in the fourth article of the Florence Charter where the characteristics of a historic garden are detailed: *The architectural composition of the historic garden refers to its plan and its topography; its vegetation, including its species, proportions, color, schemes, spacing and respective heights; its structural and decorative features; its water, running or still, reflecting the sky*. The mediating position of artistic gardens is also found in the fifth article *“...as an expression of the direct affinity between civilization and nature [...] a testimony to a culture, a style, an age, and often to the originality of a creative artist”*. Thus, the Florence Charter clearly states the heritage value of gardens and acknowledges the importance of the landscape artist who tamed the elements so that his work should be perfect and everlasting.

However, from a lexicological point of view, *the word “garden” is a particularly large, ambiguous, a dreamlike term which encloses a large number of green spaces*. (Racine, David, 1994:9) As the reader has observed, the literature uses the expressions: pleasure garden, historic garden, artistic garden, remarkable garden as interchangeable phrases, even if, out of context, they are not exact synonyms. For example, a pleasure garden can be considered as a historic garden only if it is a certain age and if its amusement facilities are original and cannot be found replicated elsewhere. It is the case of the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, which to some extent may be considered the predecessor of the amusement parks. If historic gardens are clearly remarkable gardens, because these characteristics brought them the label of “historic garden”, gardens may be remarkable without being historic.

Moreover, the Florence Charter specifies in the sixth article that *the term “historic garden” is equally applicable to small gardens and to large parks, whether formal or “landscape”*. Therefore we propose a typological distinction of green spaces in general and of gardens with tourism potential, before taking the Craiova municipality in Romania as our case study (see §4.1.).

3.1. Green Spaces’ Functions

Green spaces fulfil different functions within the urban system:

- An environment improvement and conservation function as they purify the atmosphere, reduce pollution and have a moderating effect over the urban microclimate;
- A social function as they create natural surroundings with relaxing effects;
- A leisure function developed as a consequence of the limited spare time of the working people who prefer to spend it in the open, but within the city or very close to it;
- An aesthetic function as their purpose is to embellish buildings and to highlight their architecture (Ana F Iliescu, 2003:91-104);
- A touristic function reflected by the number of visitors that come to such sites because they are attracted by the historic heritage of gardens and parks, design style, flora, entertainment facilities, etc.

Particularly significant to our study are the leisure, aesthetic and touristic functions of the green spaces. The touristic function, however, includes the other two, because leisure facilities and the aesthetics of a place are the main motivations that drive tourists to visit a place.

For instance, from the tourism point of view, parks and gardens can develop a touristic function because, on the one hand, they have the attributes (aesthetics, historical background, design style, landscape) that may make them tourist-attractive and, on the other hand, their surface area is large enough to allow the planning of different attraction points.

Visiting parks and gardens is a form of cultural tourism. The cultural value of parks and gardens is the result of their aesthetics, history, social and scientific importance. The development of green spaces from the touristic point of view was first supported by castle gardens and royal domains. Hence, through time, the visiting circuits of such cultural sites were conceived so as to integrate the visit of the gardens as well as the buildings.

According to the interest they generate, gardens can be classified as follows:

- Historical gardens;
- Botanical gardens;
- Landscape gardens. (Rialland, 2003:32)

As to parks, they emerged in 15th century Italy during the Renaissance. They were large green space units, usually orchards that developed into decorative parks - trees were aesthetically clipped, lawns mowed, flowers artistically arranged. Unlike a garden, a park surface area should exceed 20 ha so that the recreation infrastructures should be more diversified than in a garden. Park planning has to comply with specific planning rules. Accordingly, in recreation parks, the visitor will always find the following sections: a passive recreation section, an adults' entertainment section, a children playground, sports grounds, historic and naturalistic sections, etc. This functional zoning is necessary to prevent different activities from overlapping and causing disturbance and overcrowding. (Filoftoia Negruțiu, 1980:105-108)

The design components of parks and gardens comprise natural and artificial elements whose associations result in the visual and functional aspects of the planned area. The natural elements are landscape components (micro-landscapes, streams, swamps, meadows, rocks, soil, and vegetation), to which we add the circulation (walks and alleys), the decorative and functional constructions (terraces, pergolas, colonnades, bridges, kiosks, wharfs, restaurants, and open air theatres), outdoor furniture and sport equipments, that make use of the natural elements, highlighting some particular features: height, depth, width, etc.

Park and garden touristic exploitation can be developed via a specific offer for this form of tourism and promotion in specialized guides so that these sites become visible. The development of parks and gardens, which increases tourist awareness, is based on animations (festivals, exhibitions, fairs, etc.), organized all year round. Animations related to vegetation (flower fairs, gardening workshops and Ikebana courses) are perhaps the ones that have the strongest impact on the public and are in keeping with the specificity of the green spaces. (Watkins, Wright, 2007:59) Other activities that can take place in such sites are music concerts, painting exhibitions and theatre or opera shows.

The offer for green spaces has to:

- Ensure the public's access to the site;
- Provide reception infrastructure and touristic organization of the gardens;
- Conceive thematic circuits that offer a quality tour to the tourist;
- Introduce an integrated tourist infrastructure in parks and gardens (informative panels, maps, direction pointers, etc.);
- Present diversified tourist animations;
- Introduce light vehicles for a greater freedom of movement (bicycles, carts, segways);
- Monitor park entrances and exits;

- Create a green space touristic network.

3.2. Tourists' Attraction Towards Green Spaces

There are gardens for tourists just like there are, in every town, restaurants for tourists, places considered prestigious and 'a must' for those who really want to experience a city. (Sansot, 1995:82)

It is true that we tend to visit the most popular and well-known place in a destination. But, when it comes to green spaces, they are like a welcomed description passage in the urban narration. Either small squares or large gardens, they all have the same effect of relaxation upon the visitor. We can even consider them necessary from the tourists' point of view because they offer the perfect setting for relaxing after having visited a museum.

Among green spaces, historic or remarkable gardens are by far the most visited. They are visited for pleasure, for the impact they have on one's senses, because they satisfy people's need for beauty. Tourists visit gardens because they are interested in plants and landscape planning or they may be looking for interesting ideas for their own garden, be interested in garden history, or want to discover the destination's heritage in a different way (looking for the unique experience).

Even though there may be tourists with an interest for heritage gardens circuits, garden visits are also adapted to proximity tourism. Garden visit is a phenomenon generated by the urban way of life and by the fact that mineral spaces dominate within a city. Therefore, garden visit may be considered a form of 'green' tourism practised within the city.

In connection with the way of life, we can observe that the garden trend returns at the same time as the wish to reset one's living space and daily practices develops. Garden visit is especially the consequence of private ownership that has been developing in the past 30 years, to which we can add ecological awareness. (Racine, David, 1994:10)

4. REMARKABLE GARDENS IN CRAIOVA IN THE LIMELIGHT OF URBAN POLICIES *

It is obvious that not all the green spaces of a city are remarkable and thus visited as such by tourists with the same motivation. The green spaces of the city centre, usually squares, fulfill the function of an "oxygen pump" within a mineral environment of concrete buildings. Such green spaces, even if not remarkable are much frequented because they are located in the neighborhood of touristic sights and offer a suitable place of relaxation. In the case of Craiova municipality, there are green spaces situated in the city centre which fulfil such a function (fig.3).



Figure3. The territorial disposal of green spaces in the Craiova municipality

There are also parks and gardens which are historic and have the status of a monument. They are being visited by tourists because of their historic and aesthetic importance.

Lastly, there are the parks situated at the outskirts of the city that occupy a large surface and are frequented mostly during the week-end.

Other distinctions between green spaces come from their different size, degree of complexity, biological diversity, and function. In the field of territorial planning, green spaces represent a functional category in the city and its outskirts, a space occupied primarily by vegetation and secondly by facilities designed for relaxation and outdoor sports.

Planning parks and gardens is equally important for tourists and for residents. Therefore the planning vision has to combine the entertainment function and the cultural heritage. The actions of intervention in the landscape for the development of the tourist function have to take into consideration the style and the natural characteristics of the site. In order to optimally develop the entertainment and tourist functions of green spaces, we have to consider the fact that people visit parks and gardens to unwind in a natural environment, to walk or jog, to spend quality time with their friends and families, to socialize, to enjoy the view and breathe fresh air.

At the city level, the policy of developing green spaces targets not only the ecological, entertainment, social, aesthetic and tourist functions, but also the improvement of the city's image (a city with many green spaces is considered cleaner and more pleasant to live in).

4.1. Green Spaces' Characteristics

The surface area occupied by planned green spaces on the territory of Craiova municipality totalizes 680 ha. Related to the city's population (322,000 inhabitants), each inhabitant has 21,25 m²; related to the city's total surface area (6250ha), the surface occupied by planned green spaces is 10.88%, which is very little if we take into consideration the European Commission recommendation of three quarters of green spaces for the total intra-urban territory.

The territorial record of green spaces in Craiova (fig.4) highlights the existence of green spaces in residential areas - approximately 41% out of the total surface of planned green spaces, followed by parks 36% (243ha), and only 6% (38ha) represented by public gardens, the remaining 17% being other types of green spaces. (Development Strategy for Craiova municipality, 2006: 111-113)

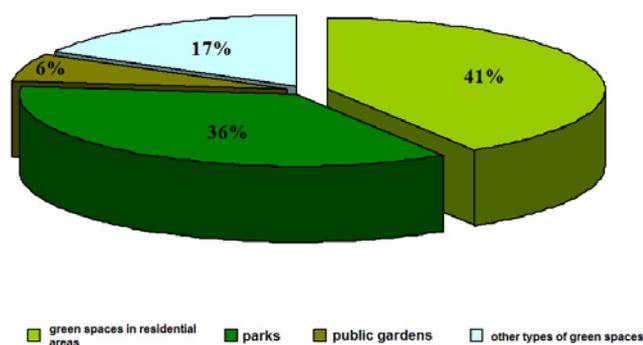


Figure 4. The territorial record of the planned green spaces of the Craiova municipality

source: A.C. Popescu, 2011, after *Development Strategy for Craiova municipality*, 2006

The disposition of green spaces within a city may be intra-urban, represented by parks, gardens, squares, or extra-urban, such as recreation areas represented by forests and amusement parks. (Ciangă, Deszi, 2007). In Craiova, all the green spaces are located in the city, and on its outskirts,

but their distribution is patchy and unevenly spread on the city's territory. On the map below (fig.3) it may be observed that the majority of green spaces are located in the city centre. In spite of the concentration of the green spaces in the centre of the city, the green space ratio is small, because of the reduced surface they occupy in comparison to the built space. These green spaces located at the centre of the city are usually squares or small parks that accompany public institutions (the City Hall and the English Park, the Prefecture and the Central Square, "Marin Sorescu" National Theatre and the National Theatre Park) and were designed to highlight the abovementioned buildings.

The parks that are located at the periphery are larger and more complex, as lakes and rich vegetation are the major components.

4.2. Parks With Tourism Potential In Craiova

In this part we chose to present in detail two parks in Craiova that hold touristic potential. We chose these two parks because their surface exceeds 20 ha and hence they have the capacity to retain the visitor's interest for at least half an hour. Secondly, they were planned by the same landscape planner – Eduard Redont around the same time, but their evolution was very different. They were both part of the urban development politics of the beginning of the 20th century and meant to respond to the functionalist concept of *Volkspark* (Folk Park). (Cortesi, 2000:33) They are both situated outside the historic centre, in the south western part of the city (The Youth Park), and in the south eastern part of the city (Romanescu Park), more easily accessible. The differences between them come from a clearly more elaborated landscape planning, as well as from a development of the city in the south-eastern part rather than in the south-western part. Their roles are complementary.

The Youth Park (57ha) replaced the old, derelict and obsolete leisure area of Lunca Jiului (Jiu's Meadow). Planned by Eduard Redont, but located in the south-western periphery of Craiova, this park was initially conceived as an urban forest. Starting from 1990, however, the area was settled by gypsies and socially stigmatized and even avoided ethnic groups. As a stage of urban reshaping and revival of the district in which it is located, it was rebuilt and opened in 2009. Now it provides children playgrounds equipped with modern urban furniture, sports grounds. But the transformation of this park is indeed remarkable, due to its landscape planning, fountains and many topiary figures (fig.5). It thus fulfils the two functions of relaxation and touristic attractiveness.



Figure 5. View of the Youth Park, Craiova

source: A.C. Popescu, 2011

In the conscience of the inhabitants of Craiova, *Nicolae Romanescu Park* is one of Craiova's oldest parks, a complex landscape plan spreading over 96 ha in 1903. It is remarkable and a heritage monument because it has kept its original landscape planning - plans and sketches (fig.6) designed by Eduard Redont and awarded the golden medal at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 in

Paris. It is one of the largest and most beautiful parks of Romania, and one of the few parks in Europe that preserves the romantic composition style it was designed in.



Figure 6. 1900 Bibescu Park (Romanescu Park former denomination) Landscape Planning

source: Romanescu Park Administration Archive

Nowadays, out of the 96 ha total surface area of the park, 90 ha are occupied by vegetation, 4 ha by a system of lakes, the rest being occupied by a hippodrome, a velodrome, a wharf and a small zoological garden. The romantic buildings that are integrated to the park and that spotlight its romantic style are: a medieval castle, rocky groupings, rustic bridges and a suspension bridge (fig.7). A series of waterfalls connects the lakes, creating a complex hydrographical system which combines vegetation elements on the islands, hydrographical diversity and a varied fauna. It may be considered a heritage garden according to the Florence Charter and labelled as such, but for the inhabitants as for the tourists it is a “remarkable park”.



Figure 7. The suspended bridge and the castle of N. Romanescu Park

Source: <http://www.judetuldolj.ro/dolj>

These two parks answer to the two criteria of being the green lung of the city as well as an attraction for both the inhabitants and the visitors.

The threats that endanger green space distribution are uncontrolled urban sprawl, pollution, land returned to its owners, which may be plots belonging to parks (it is what happened in the cases of

Cornițoiu Park and Hanul Doctorului), and the change of category of the land (from a park to a supermarket). (fig.3)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The patrimonial value that a place holds is the one that determines its attractiveness. However, for a place to become touristic, it needs to be accessible, visible (with efficient road signs) and to offer enough activities so the tourist may be induced to visit it. Moreover, the marketing strategy should focus on offering a diversified touristic product, so that the tourists may have the possibility to choose and combine in different ways the touristic amenities and services offered by a given destination. That is what makes a destination competitive and market efficient, when the image created has the power to attract and transform the potential tourist into an effective tourist.

The potential of green spaces for tourism has not been exploited in Romania yet. Personally, we consider that green spaces tourism should be an important part of a destination promotion, especially in those places where gardens and parks with historic value can be found. Nicolae Romanescu Park is the example that best illustrates this statement. Its importance for Craiova is related to its social and leisure function, appreciated by the citizens who acknowledge its cultural value. Yet, its image as a cultural tourism attraction is only vaguely mentioned in some guidebooks.

Integrated to the urban green space system, together with other historic gardens and parks, N. Romanescu Park may become a decisive touristic site within cultural and thematic tourism circuits that should be promoted in Craiova. In the future, the tourism offer for Craiova will have to take into consideration the tourism function of green spaces if it intends to promote Craiova as a sustainable tourism destination.

In conclusion, the present research is a starting point for the fully-fledged analysis of the tourist function that certain green spaces may have, aiming to determine the attractive elements, the green spaces which can develop such a function and the way in which the tourist function is to be promoted. Our analysis is qualitative, based on thorough observation and documentary research and we do consider that visiting remarkable gardens is a tourism niche market that can be successfully tested by the Craiova municipality.

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