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## Can a Garden be the Place of Cultural Integration? Sacral Aspect of Contemporary Garden Exhibitions in Germany

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# Can a Garden be the Place of Cultural Integration? Sacral Aspect of Contemporary Garden Exhibitions in Germany

Agnieszka Wojcik-Popek<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cracow University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Institute of City and Regional Design, ul. Warszawska 24, 31-137 Cracow, Poland

awojcik.urz@gmail.com

**Abstract.** In the paper the author is trying to answer to the question 'Can a garden be the place of cultural integration?' The faith and religion is here considered as a repository of tradition and a pillar of social identity of communities. Therefore, the paper main objective is to recognize sacral aspect of different exhibition gardens. The studied group consists of 13 exhibition areas created during 8 exhibitions (3 international garden exhibition - Ger. *Internationale Garten Ausstellung*, abbrev. IGA, 5 national garden exhibitions - Ger. *Bundesgartenschau*, abbrev. BUGA): Magdeburg 1999, Potsdam 2001, Rostock 2003, Gera and Ronneburg 2007, Schwerin 2009, Hamburg 2013, Havelregion 2015 (exhibition areas in 5 different cities), Berlin 2017. The sacrum is present in garden exhibitions in various forms. They can be divided into following groups, large-scale green temples (functioning as permanent landmarks or spatial dominants), small architectural elements like chapels (functioning mostly as temporary landscape accents), theme gardens referring to different religions and cultures (as a small spatial element they do not have important role in the park structure), abandoned cemeteries as green areas, existing temples or chapels as a part of garden exhibition, other references to religious motives.

The presence of different religious motives within the exhibition programme proves that sacral sphere is recognized as an important element of human life which is worth to be discussed by artists. It is also proving that it is a vital part of landscape with strong social binding and culture preserving power.

## 1. Introduction

*A landscape born from titanic confrontations, violent encounters, the eternal fight between sea and earth, while time passes by. It is like an enormous growing process of signs, tracks or stigmas that mark the history of man, who at the same time cultivated, modified and transformed the landscape. It is the oldest and most complete archive of mankind; the most accurate testimony of its past. It contains the 'holy function of an unconscious telluric memory', [1].*

Sacral and profane spaces are interweaving in open and urbanized landscape: church tower crowned with cross seen from afar, accompanied by sound of bells; tiny shrine crouched at the intersection of old roads, a forgotten cemetery hidden among the green thicket... Both faith and landscape are a kind of a repository of tradition and constitute an important element of the identity of social communities. In multicultural environments, religion is a special element that determines the diversity of social groups, and the manifestation of 'foreign' religiosity meet with hostile attitudes. Can modern gardens become places of social integration where origin, skin colour or religion do not matter?



## 2. Can a garden be a sacral space?

The human's need to abide with God has always been realized in finding and arranging places that are particularly inspiring for prayer and meditation [2]. The search for divinity is as old as humanity and was relevant in all ancient cultures. Far Eastern religions and European pre-Christian cultures gave divine attributes to charming places, as well as powerful and beautiful elements of wildlife. Natural elements within landscape were worshiped and recognized as a tangible proof of the existence of the 'higher energy' [3]. According to M. Swaryczewska most worshiped were places representing the ancient natural archetypes of *sacrum* in the open landscape such as mountains (*Sacri Monti*), trees (especially mighty trees like oaks or ancient groves), water (among all springs) and emptiness (perceives as a space of freedom). Also in Far-Eastern temple gardens achieving the feeling of 'nothingness' was important factor in the process of shaping the garden [4]. The most important aspect of landscape that created the feeling of *sacrum* is the might and the sublimity of the space [5]. Sacred places exist as an important identity shaping elements in the collective memory of society, as an evident element of their common reality [6].

### 2.1. Temples and their sacred ground in the contemporary landscape

The unique, but still archetypal sacred dominants of temple towers (evoking *Axis mundi*) are specific signs in the landscape [7, 4]. Often, their characteristic line against the sky is an important element helping to locate oneself in the landscape [8]. Therefore temples often function as classical Lynch's landmarks [9], especially in the European open landscape [4].

Bogusław Podhalański emphasizes that temples used to be integrated with cultural landscape as they continued local building traditions and were created in formally important places. He also recognizes visual and compositional connections with landscape as the key feature of sacral objects - '*the lack of context disavow sacrum*'. However he notices that contemporary realizations are usually limited to the nearest surroundings of sacred buildings [10]. M. Swaryczewska also highlights the role of proper spatial development of sacred sites foreground and states that surroundings of new churches are often effect of pure pragmatism and low aesthetic aspirations [4]. Also J. Uścińowicz recognizes the '*pressure of pragmatism*' and proceeding dying of symbolic language that eventually will flatten our reality into two dimensional world of signs [11].

#### Ecumenical movement and its spatial expressions

Currently the belief that the contemporary, busy human beings can rediscover the 'Higher Order' in natural environment is gaining popularity. The ecumenical movement and changes in needs of Church members results in changes of sacral landscape. Therefore the pantheistic approach using universal symbols is more and more recognizable [3]. It is supported since Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican when it was emphasized that the Church does not recognize any of the styles as its own. According to J. Rabiej the temple space currently gains new functions. Beside spiritual it also plays social, educational and cultural role in the society. This functional integration can be seen as ecumenical opening to society [12].

Recently various ecumenical actions take place within the territory of Federal Republic of Germany, especially in its most multicultural city - Berlin. The religious plurality was typical for area of Central and Eastern Europe since late Mediaeval Ages. However, the raising ethnic and religious diversity in German society has been noticed in recent years<sup>1</sup>, mostly as a result of influx of successive waves of immigrants. In addition, the process of society secularization is proceeding. Currently more than 40 ecumenical associations and initiatives in Berlin are active eg. Café Abraham-Ibrahim, Cooking for Peace, Forum Dialog Berlin, franziskanische Initiative 1219. Religions- und Kulturdialog (Franciscan initiative 1219. Religious and cultural dialouge) even Interreligiöser Kräutergarten (Interreligious Herbal Garden). This associations organize together many events such as 'Lange Nacht der Religionen', 'Werkstatt der Religionen' and encouraging various ecumenical endeavours [13, 14].

<sup>1</sup> To the most significant religious groups in Berlin belong Christians (mainly Evangelicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodoxes), Muslims, Agnostics and Atheists, Buddhists, Sikhs and Hinduists [14].

The most interesting spaces of ecumenical meeting of religions in Berlin are: Raum der Stille (Room of Silence) in Brandenburg Gate, prayer and reflection room in Reichstag and 'House of One' - the interreligious prayer and educational centre for Christians, Jews and Muslims, still under construction [14]. They all simple and calm, using timeless and abstract symbols, universal and easy to decipher by all people.

## 2.2. Garden as a place of meditation

The first garden - Eden - combined divine and human factors - was created by God as natural, later shaped by the inspired human hand. 'Since then' the sacral landscape is often dominated by natural elements, composed and enriched by human hands [4]. The ancient gardens of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome very often accompanied places of worship - temples, shrines, sacred mountains, sanctuaries, oracles etc. These pagan sacred groves [5] later often marked also Christian temples in form of 'sacred circle' [10]. Also many plants itself were thought to have healing, protective or even magical properties [15]. It was partially consumed by Christianity in symbolical meaning of plants, which was the integral element of Mediaeval culture [5]. Today, most of these connotations are forgotten by the society. Therefore, the garden space in many cases flattens, becoming only a source of bodily pleasure, deprived of the former symbolic '*fifth dimension*' [16].

The idea garden as a paradise on Earth is common not only to three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but is also typical for other cultural circles [17]. The Christian image of Eden was highly influenced by older beliefs. It is thought that main principles of arranging Mediaeval *hortus conclusus* were adopted from Persian culture (e.g. quadruple division of garden space, the importance of water elements) [5]. In Japanese temple gardens the feeling of 'nothingness' and the simplicity of spatial arrangement helped in meditation [4].

In European culture circle the post-Mediaeval periods of history got inspiration both from ancient cultures, especially Greek and Roman and as a continuation of Christian traditions in different proportions. Renaissance and baroque gardens were full of connotation to ancient mythologies [17]. Agata Zachariasz in the article "The sacrum in a garden - the sublime and genius loci" extensively discussed the *sacrum* aspect in landscape gardens. The *sacrum* was present by introducing of artificial ruins of gothic churches and chapels, temples, hermitages or grottos. Also sepulchral forms like tombs, family mausoleums or even cemeteries were introduced. Another garden element that evokes *sacrum*, but still having also pre-Christian connotations is the labyrinth, symbolizing the 'image of the world', also connected to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem [5]. What is more gardens can function as a public space that present and contains the identity of the place, sometimes as a form of commemoration of whole communities. For example, Lartelare Park in Adelaide, Australia refers to the native Aboriginal Australians tribe Kaurna. It is full of various connotations to culture and believes of Kaurna tribe and nature of their land<sup>2</sup>[17].

According to A. Zachariasz gardens perfectly illustrate the sanctity of space. Especially the mysterious, sublime and peaceful atmosphere brings feeling of *sacrum* to the visitors [5]. Gerdi Nützel thinks that garden, especially evoking the archetype of paradise may be the place of ecumenical integration [14].

## 3. Garden exhibitions and *sacrum*

### 3.1. Exhibition garden as a special type of garden

Exhibition gardens are a particular type of garden '*designed to amaze visitors with bold solutions, fabulous colours and new plant varieties*' [18]. It is relatively new type of garden that was created in the first half of 19th century, [19, 20]. We should seek its origins in the centuries old tradition of collecting rare plant specimens. They were becoming more easily available with improvement of transport and development of botany and horticulture, which resulted in establishing first horticultural

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<sup>2</sup> In the central part there is a sculpture in a form of traditional shelter, which is very meaningful as their culture was destroyed by colonists, but afterwards decided to cherish their memory.

societies and organizing first exhibitions<sup>3</sup>. Initially they were organized as small, local events. Eventually some gained international importance - the first international exhibition in Europe was organized in 1837 in Gand, Belgium [20].

### 3.2. *Draft on German horticultural exhibitions history*

Within the territory of present-day Germany in late 1820's first horticultural societies like *Verein für Blumistik und Gartenanlagen* in Weimar were founded [21]. The horticultural exchanges and exhibition were very popular, gaining more and more importance. Initially, these were typical fairs presenting new varieties of garden plants and spreading the horticultural knowledge. Soon after, they were long-term shows with a wide cultural program. The exhibition in Hamburg, organized in 1869, is considered the first international exhibition held in Germany [20]. The second international exhibition organized in Hamburg in 1897 became the prototype of the modern formula of German horticultural festivals [22]. The plant compositions accompanying the exhibition pavilions were an integral part of the exhibition, raising the aesthetic level of the exhibition space. The duration of the event was extended for the whole growing season. Since then exhibitions gained the status of an important cultural event [20]. After the WWII, officially one of the main objectives of German horticultural exhibitions was to support the economy and regenerate destroyed areas [23]. Therefore since 1951 they are organized as an event taking place in different venues and different cities. When the exhibition expires its area is usually open to public as a municipal park. Currently the main aim of long-term exhibition influence is to raise the quality of life in the neighbourhood [19].

### 3.3. *Educational aspect of horticultural exhibitions*

Along with gaining popularity of exhibitions, their scopes were accordingly broadening - next to various useful and ornamental plants (also exotic), seedlings and saplings, front gardens and even public parks were presented. Therefore also the educational function of exhibition gained new levels. Firstly it concerned mostly new technical aspects of gardening and other horticultural novelties. Then new trends in landscape architecture and art were also presented as a source of inspiration not only for professionals, but also for amateurs. In the cultural aspect they were also considered as a form of entertainment, creating the possibility of co-experiencing an unusual event [19]. Currently the participation in garden festivals and exhibitions can be also considered as a activity connected with garden tourism [24]. With appearance of new types of exhibition gardens and growing interest of the society and the media it became very important and recognizable social event, bringing every time large number of visitors [20]. Therefore it is a great platform for open discussion over important issues e.g. environmental protection or local identity [18] as well as may be used to form future positive attitudes [25].

### 3.4. *Sacral elements in the exhibition landscape - analysis*

Currently the sacral aspect seems to be more and more visible in various architectural and horticultural exhibitions. Jan Rabiej in his paper "Contemporary sacred architecture of Christianity as the environment of the ecumenical unity of faith" brings the example of the Christ Pavilion presented at Expo 2000 exhibition in Hannover, Germany [12].

In this paper the author takes into consideration 13 exhibition areas in Germany that were created during 8 exhibitions in last 20 years: Magdeburg BUGA 1999, Potsdam BUGA 2001, Rostock IGA 2003, Gera and Ronneburg BUGA 2007, Schwerin BUGA 2009, Hamburg IGA 2013, Havelregion BUGA 2015, Berlin IGA 2017. All these exhibition areas were analyzed *in situ* by the author in 2013, 2015 and 2017.

First analysis included the recognition of sacral elements within exhibition gardens and its classification. Analyzed sacral forms were divided into following groups:

1. large-scale green temples (functioning as permanent landmarks or spatial dominants),

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<sup>3</sup> Società Botanica Fiorentina founded in 1716 is thought to be the oldest horticultural organization. First official horticultural exhibitions in form of flower festivals were organized by British Royal Horticultural Society in 1820's in Chiswick Garden.

2. small architectural elements like chapels (functioning mostly as temporary landscape accents),
3. theme gardens referring to different religions and cultures (as a small spatial element they do not have important role in the park structure),
4. abandoned cemeteries as green areas,
5. existing temples or chapels as a part of garden exhibition,
6. other references to religious motives.

**Table 1.** Presence of various sacral forms within exhibition areas. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2018.

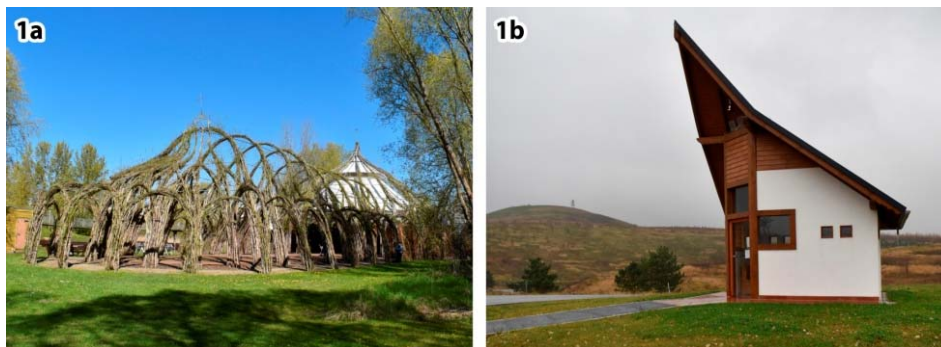
exhibition	sacral aspects					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1999 Magdeburg	■		■			■
2001 Potsdam						
2003 Rostock	■					■
2007 Gera					■	
2007 Ronneburg		■				
2009 Schwerin						
2013 Hamburg			■			
2015 Brandenburg		■	■		■	■
2015 Havelberg				■	■	■
2015 Premnitz		■				■
2015 Rathenow		■		■		■
2015 Rhinow/Stölln				■	■	■
2017 Berlin		■	■			■

Key to the Table 1:

■	1. large-scale green temples	■	2. small architectural elements like chapels
■	3. theme gardens referring to different religions	■	4. abandoned cemeteries
■	5. existing temples or chapels	■	6. other references to religious motives

Within the area of two garden exhibitions - BUGA in Potsdam in 2001 and BUGA in Schwerin in 2009 - the sacral references were not recognized. This should be related to the character of exhibition area. In Potsdam exhibition was organized at the area of former Soviet military base. Therefore, most probably the introduction of sacral elements in this space would not correspond with the identity of the place. In Schwerin the exhibition focused on restoration of palace baroque gardens and introduction of new architectural elements especially sacral would be highly inappropriate.

1. The most amazing references to sacral sphere are large-scale green temples: the Papeldom in Magdeburg and the Weidendom in Rostock. Weidendom resembling a gothic cathedral is thought to be the world's largest living construction (50 m long, 15 meters high). It is made of willow (*Salix*). It is the platform of ecumenical dialogue, the place of peace and contemplation made of natural, living elements in natural surroundings. Though it is crowned by cross, dove and fish symbols tightly connected to Christianity. (Figure 1a). Papeldom in Magdeburg is a special planting of poplar trees (*Populus*). The main reference to the sacrum is made through its size, verticality and name - the Poplar Cathedral.



**Figure 1a)** Weidendom, Rostock. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2017, **b)** Chapel on the spoil pile, Ronneburg. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2017

2. Chapels are more common in the exhibition landscape. They were present in 5 exhibition areas at the time of field research. The chapel in Ronneburg located on a spoil pile, becomes important sign in the landscape, overlooking the neighbourhood (Figure 1b). Chapels present in the different areas of BUGA 2015 Havelregion exhibition was deprived of vast landscape context. Their forms and symbols are also typical to Christianity (boat, cross) (Figure 2a) [23].



**Figure 2a)** Boat chapel, Brandenburg an der Havel. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2015, **b)** The motive of Water of Life, Christian garden 'Paths of Life', Hamburg. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2013

3. Theme gardens referring to different religions were an important element of IGA 2013 exhibition in Hamburg. 5 theme gardens invoked 5 great world religions: Hymn of Paradise - Garden of Islam, In the pure land of Buddha's - Garden of Tranquillity, Paths to divine unity - In the memory of Gandhi, Creation of the world - Jewish garden, Paths of Life - Christian Garden (Figure 2b). These gardens derive from profane and sacral culture of each religious circle. In the Garden of Islam, the characteristic elements are: the crescent moon, layout inspired by Alhambra gardens, traditional fountains and wells, the olive tree, the palm gateway and oriental cushions. The entrance to the Christian Garden is marked by cross. The Path of Life leads us through steps of Christian life: the birth and baptism symbolized by the arches with Water of Life (Figure 2b), confirmation, marriage and death symbolized by the labyrinth that is the path to the eternal life. Every step is followed by line from the Bible. This garden has also ecumenical element - the feast table that can unite Christians in the Holy Communion [26]. To the group of sacral related theme gardens also belong such gardens as *Garten den Besinnung* (Garden of Reflection) in Magdeburg (Figure 3a), French national garden in Gera with motive of Saint Denis church rosette, *Landeplatz für Engel* (Landing pad for angels) in Hamburg, *Eden Garden* (Figure 3b) in Brandenburg an der Havel, Japanese garden in Rostock (Figure 3c) or Christian Garden in Berlin (Figure 3d).



**Figure 3** a) The Garden of Reflection referring to the *Hortus conclusus* tradition, Magdeburg. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2017, b) Eden Garden, Brandenburg an der Havel. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2015, c) Japanese garden referring to ancient Taketori Tale, Rostock. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2017 d) Christian Garden, referring to mediaeval cloister gardens, Berlin. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2017.



**Figure 4** a) The motive of pointed arch made of plants, Brandenburg an der Havel. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2015, b) New arrangement of Alten Domfriedhof (Old cathedral cemetery), Havelberg. By A. Wójcik-Popek, 2017

4. Abandoned cemeteries were vital parts of BUGA 2015 exhibition parks compositions [23]. Thanks to the exhibition they were rearranged and beautified. New plantings, especially spring flowers were introduced (Figure 4b). Therefore, they were brought back to the society, regaining their special place on the city map and in the minds of citizens. Also during exhibitions there are organized competitions for sepulchral flower compositions [27].

5. Existing temples and chapels often became the part of exhibitions organized in inner-cities. The nearest surroundings of churches were rearranged and gained new image. Some churches like St. Johanniskirche in Brandenburg an der Havel or St. Laurentiuskirche in Havelberg were exposed and used as floral exhibition halls [23].

6. Other religious references are usually small signs and symbols like shape of pointed arch typical for gothic sacral architecture introduced in BUGA 2015 exhibition (Figure 4a) or religious motives on windows of 'Dialog der Kulturen' Pavillion at IGA 2017 exhibition.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The garden often contains secret, mystical content, referring to various archetypes. In this special place where nature and culture meets, the real and imaginary world of beliefs, traditions and fantasies are interweaving, creating new reality. Garden as an archetypal image of paradise common to the Judaic, Christian and Islamic religion can become a platform for integration for communities belonging to different cultural circles present in the multicultural space of European cities.

The educational values and impact of German horticultural exhibitions should be recognized as positive in terms of sustaining local and regional identity and presenting the heritage. The presence of different religious motives within the exhibition program proves that sacral sphere is recognized as an important element of human life. The faith and religion is an important element of local culture, also considered as a repository of tradition and a pillar of local identity.

It is also proof that it is a vital part of landscape with strong social binding and culture preserving power. However the majority of religious motives in the analyzed group focuses on Western European culture circle with strong references to Christianity. It may suggest that not all religions are equal. Also the inappropriate use of religious motives may induce superstitions and negative emotions instead of creating the platform of dialogue and respect. Therefore in the process of ecumenical gardens creation it is important to refer to timeless archetypes and universal symbols.

#### 5. Conclusions

The public park can be recognized as an ecumenical space for the integration of cultures and religions. It is the place of contact with nature, it is the space open to everyone, combining natural and cultural aspects. It's *sacrum* is usually very subtle. It can be perceived as beauty, harmony and sublimeness of views or in astonishing diversity of nature - the God's work.

The educational role of exhibition gardens in terms of cultural heritage should not be underestimated. The analyzed exhibition areas are often evoking different religious motives, mostly from Christian culture circle. Theme gardens presents also motives typical for other religions. Exhibition parks as a whole cannot be recognized as an ecumenical space. However their educational role is still very important, as 'The ignorance is the cause of fear' (Seneca).

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