

“THE ISLE OF ANGELS” – THE FORGOTTEN PARADISE ON THE MORII LAKE IN BUCHAREST

“INSULA ÎNGERILOR” – PARADISUL UITAT DE PE LACUL MORII DIN BUCUREȘTI

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Abstract: A vital element in the architecture and aesthetics of the city, a public space contributes to human development through a multitude of benefits when properly used. This study suggests the rearrangement of the park situated on the Morii Lake Island in Bucharest in order to put it back into the natural circuit of landscaped green spaces intended for rest and relaxation. The Morii Lake Island known as the Island of Angels and situated in the northern part of the lake is connected to the shore by a narrow strip of land. The proposal aims to revitalise the currently abandoned site by introducing new attractive functions matching the relaxation and leisure needs of the residents and other people in the area. We also aimed to make the most efficient use of the area by creating a multifunctional recreational space that would maximize the potential of the island.

Key words: landscaped green areas, landscape rehabilitation, recreational area

Rezumat: Element indispensabil în arhitectura și estetica orașului, spațiul public contribuie la dezvoltarea umană prin multitudinea de beneficii pe care acesta le poate aduce atunci când este valorificat corespunzător. Lucrarea de față propune reamenajarea parcului de pe insula Lacul Morii din București în vederea redării acestuia circuitului firesc al spațiilor verzi amenajate peisagistic destinate odihnei și relaxării. Insula Lacul Morii, denumită și Insula Îngerilor, aflată în partea de nord a lacului, este conectată de mal printr-o fâșie îngustă de pământ. Propunerea vizează revitalizarea sitului, în prezent abandonat, prin introducerea de noi funcțiuni atractive care răspundă cât mai bine nevoilor de relaxare și de petrecere a timpului liber a locuitorilor din zonă și nu numai. Totodată s-a urmărit utilizarea cât mai judicioasă a zonei prin crearea unui spațiu multifuncțional de agrement care să valorifice la maxim potențialul insulei.

Cuvinte cheie: zone verzi amenajate, reabilitare peisagistică, zona de agrement

INTRODUCTION

Since the earliest times of the mankind, the man has intensely felt the need to connect with nature, respect and understand it deeply so that its presence could be felt through a sense of belonging. The connection with nature has always given people an inner balance. Today, this need has not changed; on the contrary, it has intensified due to stress caused by a fast pace of living, daily rush, and growing pollution of the environment.

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Green areas are essential and even vital for the continuously developing urban areas as they improve the quality of air, play a crucial role in reducing noise pollution, contribute to biodiversity preservation, mitigate the urban heat island effect, foster interpersonal relationships, and impact physical and mental health through the design of relaxation and recreation areas. Additionally, they add a touch of elegance, beauty, and fresh air to the urban environment that contribute to higher quality of life (Cojocariu, 2018).

Today, green spaces get diversified and such new elements as green roofs and facades, community gardens and avant-garde urban green spaces have appeared appearing alongside the traditional parks and public gardens. Moreover, there may be noted an increasingly practical use of green spaces by means of multifunctional areas used for relaxation, recreation, as well as for food production or for teaching or educational purposes (Hangan *et al*, 2023).

Another important role of green spaces is related to their economic benefits, the most important ones including attraction of tourists and investors, higher property prices and lower public health costs through promotion of healthier and more active lifestyle.

In general, a designed green area aims to integrate nature into the built environment in a harmonious and lasting way. Through the use of appropriate plants and intelligent design, a comfortable, pleasant, and sustainable environment could be achieved (Tomescu, 2007). Landscaping of outdoor spaces involves the creation of places for passive or active recreation. It could be achieved arranging promenades, areas for sports, recreation, games, gardening, cultural events, tourism attractions, etc. (Dascălu, 2016). Green spaces contribute to the identity of human settlements, in the design of which, natural elements attracting people instantly are used (Ilieșcu, 2006).

Specifically, recreational areas are general use green spaces with unlimited access for the public. They can be developed on surfaces of different sizes, their arrangement aiming to match the recreational and entertainment needs of various categories of people. The recreational programs developed in these areas provide organised, structured, and enjoyable activities for all ages (Cojocariu, 2018).

Therefore, there are multiple benefits of green areas in urban environments targeting physical, psychological, ecological, social, and economic aspects. Plus, the aesthetics of these spaces plays a significant role in enhancing such benefits. So, if we want to create a pleasant and functional environment, the landscaping of a space should take into account functional, ecological, and aesthetic considerations.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study material of this study includes the Morii Lake Island in Bucharest. Today, the almost abandoned site is crossed by the deteriorated pedestrian pathways and by the aged vegetation, including species of invasive plants. In this context, the redevelopment of the area is more than necessary. The research

methods that had been used to formulate the proposal for the redevelopment of the park on the Morii Lake Island in Bucharest include: a general and specific documentation, the analysis of the site and review of case studies suitable for the research, identification of a concept meeting the needs of the residents and also ensuring a suitable framework for increasing the biodiversity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The studied island is bordered by the shores of the Morii Lake and has an area of 32,723 square meters. There is a story hidden behind an idyllic image. The lake emerged from the need of preventing the periodic flooding of the Dâmbovița River, two schools, a church, a cemetery, and over 400 houses having been demolished for its construction and arrangement. It led to true tragedies among the affected individuals, who had been forced to abandon their homes and relocate their deceased relatives. Right after the completion of the works, legends began to circulate about the souls that were unable to find peace because their graves had been desecrated. For this reason, the island is also called the Island of Lost Souls. Also, the demolition of the St. Nicholas Church on a significant Orthodox Christian holiday intensified the dark tales associated with the curses. It was the oldest construction in the area. According to the inscription inside the church, it was built in 1564. The church was not only a place of prayer but also a strategic location. It was due to the marshy terrain around it, and the church could only be accessed through a bridge, which could be raised if it was needed. An artificial island was arranged on the newly created lake, which was intended to become an extremely attractive area. Unfortunately, after the fall of the communist regime, the authorities neglected the area, the entire area falling into oblivion and indifference (<https://historia.ro/>).

After completing the documentation, we found out that people belonging to different age groups and professions live in the neighbourhoods adjacent to the studied area, starting from pre-schoolers to students, individuals working in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, as well as retirees, all part of a diverse community in the area.

In the middle of the island, on a central axis of composition, there are two constructed elements, an old fountain and a pavilion (fig.1). The fountain, which used to be a point of attraction for island visitors, is now completely non-functional. The architectural and structural elements of the fountain have undergone changes over time, being damaged both due to neglect and the passage of time.

The pavilion, the main point of interest that may provide not only shade but also a magical frame for photographs, also shows visible signs of decay.

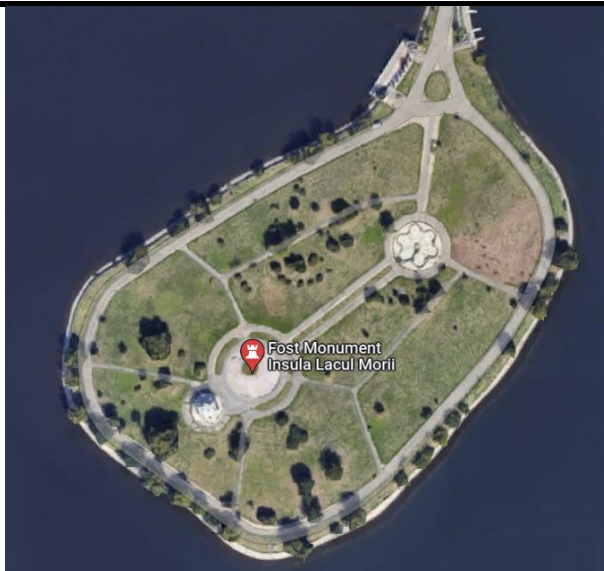


Fig. 1 Island sketch – existent (Google Earth)

There is a network of pedestrian paths on the island that serve a dual function, being used both by pedestrians and cyclists. However, like other existing elements, they require appropriate interventions in order to regain their integrity and become safe for use.

The vegetation consists of a variety of species of trees, shrub and flowers. Such tree species as *Salix babylonica* are quite common along the shores of the island, while *Tilia cordata*, *Populus alba*, *Populus nigra*, *Ulmus sp*, *Fraxinus sp* may be found in the center of the island. Also, we may find species like *Cornus flaviramea* and *Corylus avellana*. The island is surrounded by reed (*Phragmites australis*), conferring a magical and timeless frame to the site, breaking away from monotony. The existent floral assortment comprises several sporadically appearing on the surface of the island species. So, we may distinguish from one place to another *Bellis perennis* and *Viola odorata* in spring, and *Papaver rhoeas* flowers along the island's shore in early summer. Except for the beauty of the island's natural setting, lack of facilities for various recreational functions makes the time spent by visitors be less significant. Therefore, it is highly significant to put back the functions the site and reintroduce it into the natural cycle of landscaped green spaces intended for resting and relaxation

This proposal comprises functional zoning that would utilise space most efficiently and address several categories of people. The proposed functions will be divided by zone, as follows:

- the exhibition area represented by the pavilion near the entrance;
- the children's area, kite-flying and group-game area comprising a place for children's games and a free area for launching kites and for organising other events, such as badminton or outdoor fitness;

- skate park area for young people and teenagers;
- the area where the Ferris wheel will be placed, and the area where the floating islands of vegetation will be located;
- and hammock area;
- the pontoon area from where people could admire the city view that will provide suitable spots for rest and relaxation;
- the entertainment area that will be the central point of the island with a stage and seats arranged around the stage.

The design concept has kept the central axis of the composition, in which, the two existing architectural elements, namely, the pavilion and the fountain, will be restored and highlighted once again. The central placement of these elements leads to use of a symmetry in the design concept (fig. 2). Being a morphologically significant element in landscaping, water will still be present in the composition beyond the static basin fountain at the foot level located on the main axis (Dascălu and Cojocariu, 2016). Its long, canal-like shape will direct the gaze towards the main event area in front of the pavilion. The rest of the circulation will be subordinated to the central axis, which will also serve as a symmetry axis

In planning the functional zones, circular shapes were adopted for spaces designated for specific functions, while square or rectangular shapes were used for the zones where objects were placed. This selection of shapes was made in order to meet specific functional and aesthetic criteria.

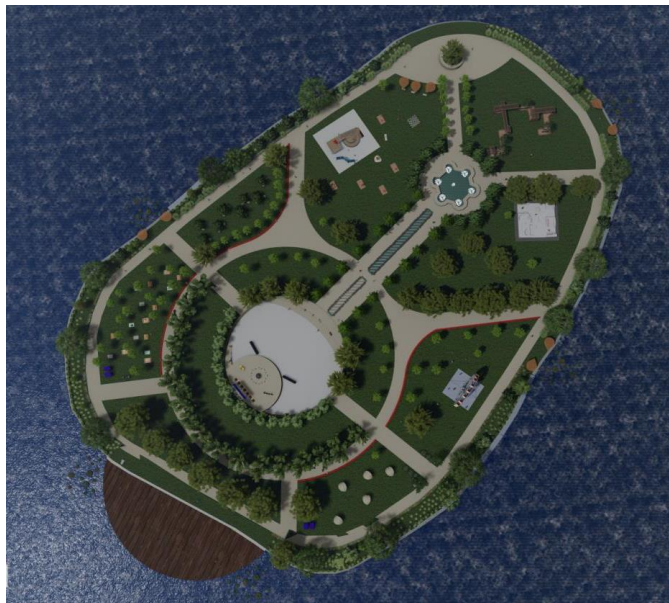


Fig. 2 Island sketch – proposal (concept and drawing by Ciceu Adriana Giulia)

Adjacent to the circular walkways in the event area, continuous strip seating with spotlights has been proposed to provide additional lighting, and especially a fascinating setting at night (fig.3).



Fig. 3 Continuous belt-type seats (concept and drawing by Ciceu Adriana Giulia)

The source of inspiration for this piece of furniture is the Red Ribbon Qinhuangdao Park in China, a Turenscape Group project. (<https://www.turenscape.com/en/project/detail/4696.html>). The red colour chosen for the finishing makes these seating places a strong visual landmark. In the rest of the design, in addition to the green shades of the vegetation, neutral, natural colours predominate, maximising the impact of the red colour of the seats.

The wooden pontoon designed in the shape of a semicircle placed at water level contributes to the creation of an enchanting setting offering to people a unique experience.

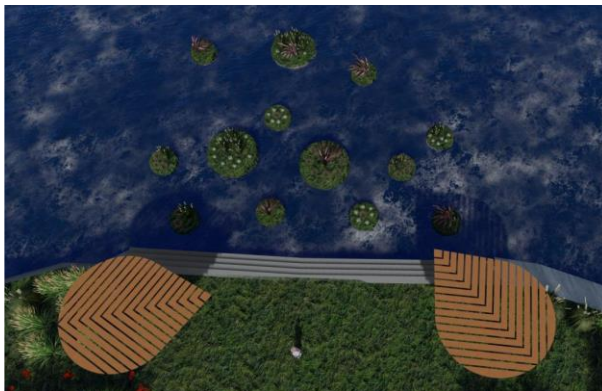


Fig. 4. Floating islands – sketch (concept and drawing by Ciceu Adriana Giulia)

From one place to another, especially along the lakeshore, wooden pergolas on a metal structure were placed to supplement the areas providing shade. Their leaf-like shapes make a smooth transition from built to natural elements.

Floating islands of vegetation, purifying the water and providing a suitable habitat for wildlife, were used as special features on the water surface around the

site (fig. 4). From an aesthetic point of view, the floating islands with specific vegetation add value and beauty to the natural setting of the study area.



Fig. 5 Floating islands – view from the water (concept and drawing by Ciceu Adriana Giulia)

The plants used for plant compositions on the islands are the following: *Pennisetum setaceum* ssp.'Rubrum', *Pennisetum alopecuroides* ssp.'Hameln', *Carex testacea* and *Carex oshimensis*. Trees such as *Salix babilonica*, *Elaeagnus angustifolia*, *Crataegus monogyna* and *Populus tremula* were used as protective barriers.



Fig. 6 Ferris wheel (concept and drawing by Ciceu Adriana Giulia)

The island has also been fenced with decorative grasses such as *Miscanthus sinensis*, *Cortaderia selloana*, *Calamagrostis acutiflora* that play a fencing role and give the island a double meaning of wildness and order at the same time.

In the interior of the island, we used the following tree species *Acer campestre*, *Acer saccharinum*, *Populus tremula*, *Gleditsia tricanthos*, *Crataegus*

monogyna, *Elaeagnus angustifolia* and *Betula pendula*, as well as shrub species *Cornus alba* 'Ivory Halo', *Ilex aquifolium* and *Euonymus japonicus* 'Aureus'.

Another particularly attractive element is the Ferris wheel (fig.6) providing visitors the opportunity to try a special visual experience of an open view over the island and the neighbourhoods near the lake.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Due to an increasingly hectic pace of daily life, the need of reconnecting with nature to get rest and relax has become more and more pressing. Pollution and environmental destruction in densely built-up areas are increasingly affecting the quality of life. In an ever-developing urban landscapes, landscaped green areas provide highly important green spaces for physical and mental recovery.

2. The study proposed a solution preserving to a great extent the natural setting by introducing appropriate plant elements that bring harmony and keep the specific vegetation of the city. The zoning involved a careful functionalisation of the entire island by creating playgrounds and places for resting and recreation.

3. There were arranged areas for picnics, places for placing a hammock, playing games by children, youngsters and adults. The arranged spaces may become iconic for the island, such as the Ferris wheel and the fountain (now a historical monument), the space for cultural and artistic events, the central elements of the island being underlined by the red-colour seats, along with the architectural elements (leaf-shaped pergolas and the exhibition pavilion) and the supplementary features attracting wildlife (floating islands of vegetation).

4. Therefore, the proposal aimed to make a good use of the studied site that would give to everyone a sense of belonging.

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