



The memorial ensembles of Latvia

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Abstract. The study deals with the experience of Latvia in the creation of cemeteries and memorial ensembles. The novelty of the study is determined by the fact that in many places within the context of a dense town planning space, a need arises to expand the current burial zones or create new cemeteries. In the world practice, there are still being created memorials to victims of a variety of accidents and victims of conflicts. The results of the study can be used in the search for new project ideas, invitations to tenders for work evaluation and in the learning process for students.

Key words: destiny of the nation, memorial ensembles, cemeteries, the national tradition of garden architecture, memorial landscape space.

Introduction

Cemeteries and memorial ensembles are public landscaped areas which largely reflect the nation's ancient traditions and the national cultural and artistic peculiarities. Their location may be created both in a densely populated town planning zone and a scenic open space with distant views of the lines which emotionally enrich the landscape architect's idea how to perceive the form of the commemorative message. A successful location of memorial monumental ensembles and their context with the expressiveness of the landscape space commonly accentuated by the topography, water, tree plantations or meadows-create a psychological, strong emotional perception, thus strengthening the nation's dignity, love and memory, keeping in memory both gone in the eternity dead people and the destiny of the nation in the context of historical events.

The study methods relate to the examination of historic cemeteries and memorial sites specific to

the Latvian national identity, so evaluating the never-fading values implemented in the memorial ensembles, peculiarities of the functional and compositional spatial planning and the choice of the green landscape space or plants and the importance of the artistic sculptural works in the creation and raising of the emotional experience. In order to evaluate peculiarities of the memorial landscape space in Latvia in comparison with objects of other countries, traditions of cemeteries and memorial ensembles were investigated in the neighboring countries of Latvia, in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe. *The aim of the study* – to use the results of the study in training students of architecture and landscape architecture and local area planners, so inspiring and allowing the participants to evaluate the architectural landscape space in the next area planning tenders as well as allowing the local commissions to discuss the results of tenders.

The results of the study

Latvian oldest burial and cemetery creation traditions

By receding of the last icing in Europe, the ancient tribes of hunters and anglers followed the reindeer. In the territory of Latvia, in some parts there have remained burial sites of these ancient tribes which can be identified by historical commemorative signs readable as contours of boats marked by stones. By the climate becoming warmer, the ancient tribes of the farmers settled in this territory. For cemeteries, there were chosen pine-covered dry sand or gravel hills. The graves were marked by wooden plates on which there was carved information about the deceased. Proof, that in ancient times great attention was paid to the funeral rites, is the luxurious gowns and jewelry found in archaeological excavations, the white sand cover in grave pits under the ancient burials and traces of pollen which shows that flowers were given as gifts to the deceased in the afterlife [1].

Starting from the second millennium BC until the end of the 1st millennium BC, in the territory of Latvia the local tribes burnt their deceased. Across all the territory of Latvia, there have been found ash urn cemeteries for this period of history. Up to the present day, ash type burial sites in Latvia are called cremation graves.

After disappearing of the the traditions of cremation graves, until today, in the territory of Latvia there has survived a tradition to lay out a cemetery in overgrown with pine sand hills, placing the deceased in wooden coffins. In all the Latvian cemeteries, there are grave gates and graveyards. In stony areas around the cemetery, there is usually piled up a stone wall. In rural regions, the sun rays penetrate through the sparse pine wreaths which allows grave sites to be planted with typical of the Latvian farmsteads cold-resistant flowers and small flowering bushes. In the burial site

design, there is still seen the traditional white sand on paths and patches on the ground. By maintaining the traditional remembrance form, in the Latvian

cemeteries in the summer wind you can enjoy the smell of farmhouse flowers, especially the strong smell of phlox and lilies.

Cemetery traditions of German colonists in Latvia from the 13th to 20th centuries

In the 13th century, up the rivers of Latvia—the Gauja River, the Daugava River, the Lielupe River and the Venta River, the land with fire and sword was conquered by the German colonists, introducing the burial traditions specific to the German feudal era. They were created near the invaders' towns and estates and following the Germany's style, they were often designed around churches. If a church was not in the vicinity, there was built a mortuary where the deceased was placed before the burial. Both for German and Latvian cemeteries, there were built cemetery gate as a boundary between this world and the other world. The cemetery gate or a separate tower was equipped with a bell that with the funeral bell sounds accompanied the deceased to the other world. Such burial sites were planted with linden

alleys, elms with hanging branches and other deciduous and coniferous trees. In old cemeteries, you can also see individual family vaults with pits excavated in the ground and poured in concrete for foundations to place coffins. Such burials were dominating in the ancient German nobles' family cemeteries throughout Latvia, also in the Great Cemetery in Riga (1773-1967) where in the cemetery were buried the deceased of various nationalities—well-off, rich and with honorable positions. In some places in rural districts, even in small rural cemeteries, you can see that in the early 20th century, the grave sites of wealthy Latvian families were made by constructing concrete underground rooms for placing coffins [7].

The Forest Cemetery /Meža kapi/-an innovation of the 19th century in Europe

In the late 19th century, in Europe there emerged an idea of a new type of cemeteries which was designed in the forest with a scenic free compositional design. In the German city of Hamburg in 1877, the Olsdorf Cemetery was opened which was the first forest cemetery in Europe. The new burial zone trend in Europe spread very slowly. Therefore, even today in many parts of Europe—in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy,

Germany, etc., a trend has survived to place coffins in concrete pits— not only in the old cemeteries but also in the newly built ones.

The People's Park and the garden town “Mežaparks” were proposed by the the director of Riga city gardens Georg Kupfaldt (1853-1938) in 1901. Initially, the People's park was designed to be closer to the city, in the place that is currently occupied by cemeteries. This is evidenced by the



Fig. 1. G. Kupfaldt. The project of Mežaparks (1901) [9]

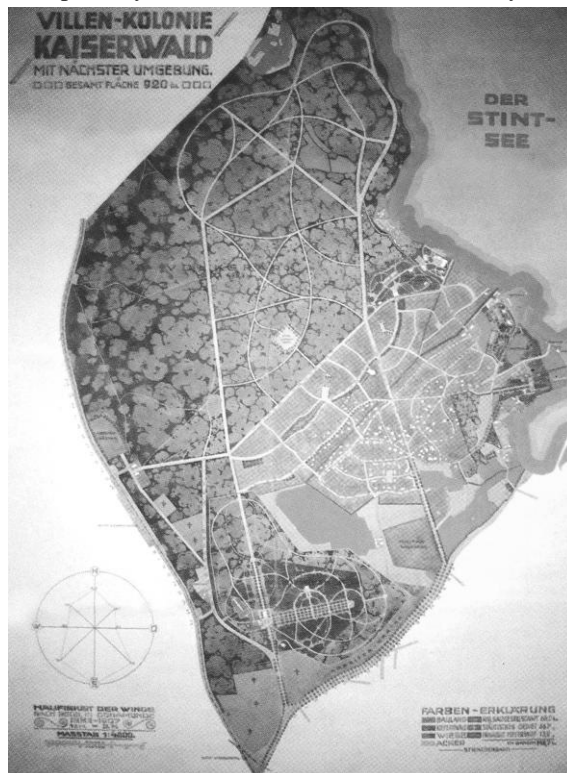
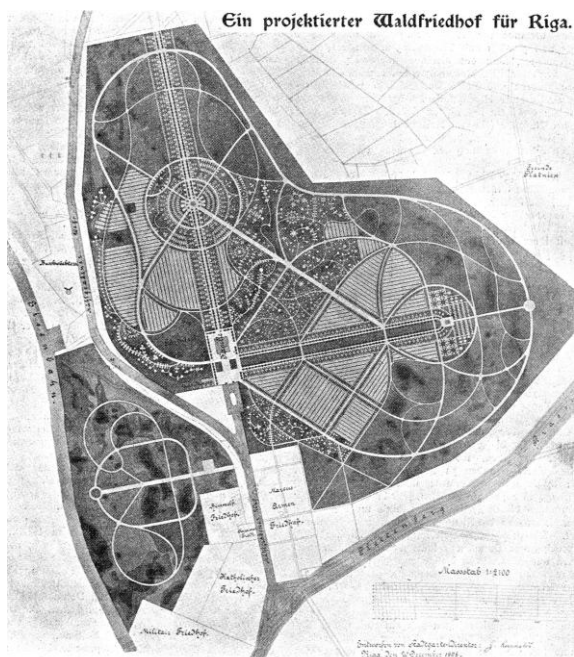


Fig. 2. G. Kupfaldt. The design of Mežaparks (1918) [9]



Meža kapu projekts. G. Kūfalts, 1908

Fig. 3. G. Kupfaldt. The design of the Forest Cemetery (1908) [9]

topographic plan in the Riga History and Navigation Museum with the name “The People’s Park” of the current territories of the Forest Cemetery and Riga Warriors’ Cemetery.

The original intention was changed and the Forest Cemetery was designed closer to the city with the project coordination in 1908. The construction works of the new, modern cemetery were commenced. The manager’s house, the cadavers’ house, the main alleys, the arc path, other paths and walkways were built. The large chapel was designed on the main axis of the entry path to the Forest Cemetery which ought to have a beautiful cemetery gate.

The director of Riga city gardens Georg Kupfaldt (1853-1938) designed the Forest Cemetery in Riga or the garden city “*Mežaparks*” in 1908. The Forest Cemetery was created as in the Great Cemetery in Riga there was no longer enough space for new burials and near the old burial zone a site for the new cemetery had to be found [6, 10].

In contrast to the relatively regular design of European cemeteries, in the Riga’s picturesque dune relief overgrown with pines-a new cemetery was designed as a memorial park where sculptors’ created tombstones for significant cultural, art and public people were designed for viewing from the walking paths in such a way as the cemetery would become a zone for exhibiting visually high-quality sculptural artworks if in the cemetery there is no longer be space for new burials. It is possible that the idea of G. Kupfaldt of the cemetery as a future “after life’s garden of souls” arose in 1906, desiring the abandoned Catholic cemetery in Riga to convert into a city park or the Piece garden [3, 7].



Fig. 4. A monument to the film director Juris Podnieks in the Forest Cemetery [Source: photo by the author, 1993]

Unfortunately, World War I broke out and neither the chapel nor the gate has been built. At present, functions of the chapel, as the case may be, are taken over by the Crematorium, located just outside the cemetery fence across the street.

The hilly dune relief was only slightly changed in the path places. In areas with a more pronounced relief, there were designed larger and more expensive family grave sites, winding the walkways over the relief depressions and hillocks. In the flat areas were planned blocks with straight walkways and smaller, cheaper grave sites for low-income families. The first burials in this cemetery were made in 1913. This was the first Forest Cemetery in Eastern Europe.

The garden director Kupfaldt acted quickly in taking care of the Riga Garden Directorate and the areas under its management, often getting the desired harmonizations later. The Board of Governors of the city officially harmonized the Garden City designed by Kupfaldt only in 1908. (Also the author of the Warriors’ Cemetery, the student of Kupfaldt and later the collaborator Andrejs Zeidaks in the same way, without waiting for official harmonizations, dealt with the construction works in the cemeteries, gardens and parks designed by them).

The project harmonization and construction works continued until 1913 when the new cemetery was officially opened. In the hilly former part of the dunes, in a free planning G. Kupfaldt designed very picturesque placement of grave sites. The access path network and the most expensive family grave sites with larger areas were located in the dune relief elevations, in such a way that even in the project

stage there were created picturesque view lines with freely in the relief positioned monuments and picturesque plant groupings [9]. In the plain, the grave sectors were designed with straight lines and for disadvantaged citizens. Throughout the entire cemetery there were forbidden metal or any other material fencing around the grave sites, high concrete borders atop the graves and it was forbidden to bring wreaths and bouquets made from metal or other artificial material into the place of the grave for the purpose of decorating it as well [7].

Riga Warrior's Cemetery Memorial Ensemble. Garden Architect Andrejs Zeidaks [8]

At the start of the First World War, the tsarist officials falsely accused the German architect G. Kuphaldt in espionage and he was evicted from Latvia [2]. G. Kuphaldt's talented assistant Andrejs Zeidaks (1874-1964) began working as the director of Riga city parks. He was born and raised on the banks of the picturesque Venta river in the ancient, beautiful town of Courland-Kuldīga. In 1891, after the compulsory school and some years of work in the factory's office, A. Zeidaks learned the landscape gardener's profession and worked as an apprentice gardener in laying out manor parks in Kurzeme designed by G. Kuphaldt. In 1895, G. Kuphaldt recruited the talented young man in his project bureau in the position of a draftsman. The young person's diligence and talents were so outstanding that the boss quickly allowed Andrejs Zeidaks to independently develop many

The drawings of the monuments and grave slabs had to be harmonized with the management of the cemetery as well. The rules of use of the new cemetery were in line with the ancient traditions of Latvian cemeteries. Most of the population accepted these rules without any objections. However, the cemetery managers carefully monitored compliance with these rules. For the needs of other faiths, nationalities and burial traditions, separate cemeteries were created where in the grave furnishings often could be seen disclosed habits characterizing other national identity.

manor park was the chief architect of Warsaw. In the Riga projects, keeping only the signing right to the projects.

During World War I, in one of the corners of the Forest Cemetery, in 1915, there were buried the Latvian riflemen who were killed in the first three fights for the freedom of Latvia. The war progressed and with the increase of the number of the killed in the battles, later a memorial was set up here called the Warrior's Cemetery. The site was selected, ideas and the design were proposed by the director of the Riga city gardens, the garden architect Andrejs Zeidaks. The author of the sculptural works is the distinguished Latvian sculptor Kārlis Zāle (1888-1942). For the architectural compositional shape of the burial ground, there was responsible the architect Pēteris Feders (1868-1936) who before World War I Warrior's Cemetery, there are buried

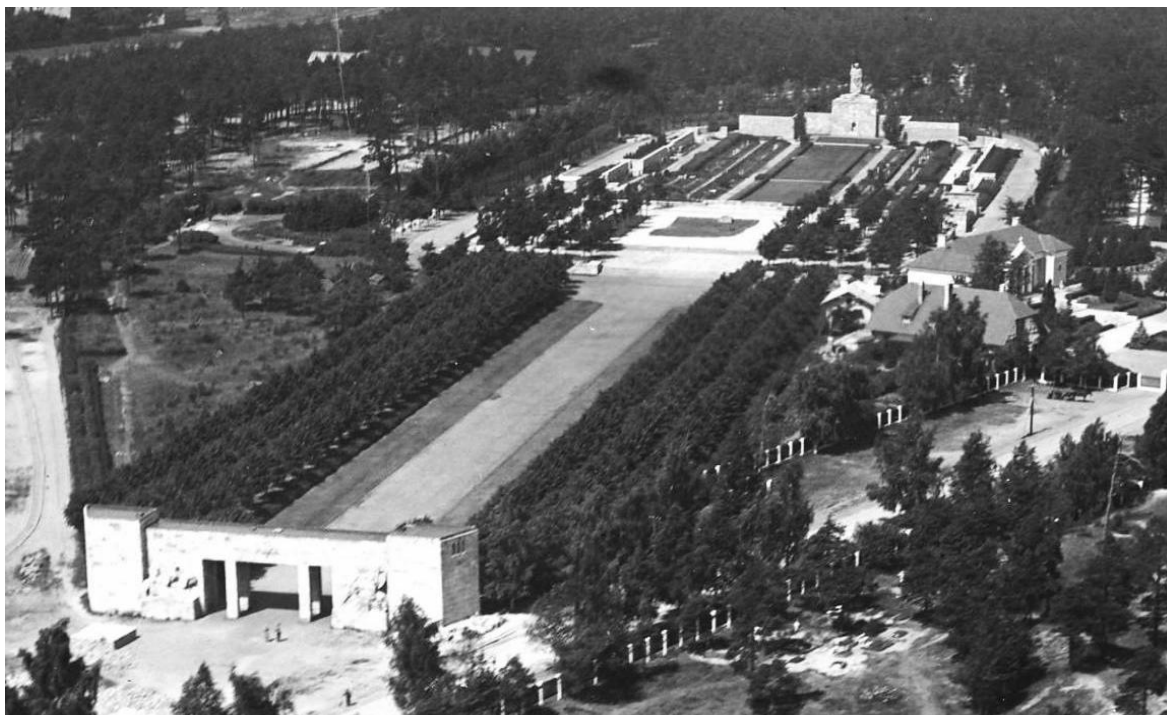


Fig. 5. A. Zeidaks, K. Zāle. The ensemble of the Warriors' Cemetery in Riga (1930) [9]



Fig. 6. A. Zeidak, K. Zāle. The central sculpture “Mother Latvia” of the ensemble of the Warriors’ Cemetery in Riga
[Source: photo by the author, 2010]

around 2000 soldiers who were killed in the fights for the freedom and an independent Latvia.

A. Zeidak created a powerful, three-part linear memorial graveyard landscape space stressed by symbolism included in the greenery and sculptural works which is visually similar to the mindset of the church and which is brightened by the bell sounds during the commemorative services. The Warrior’s Cemetery gate is expressively monumental and solemn. Before the gate, the entrance is guarded by images of grieving cavalymen. The central longitudinal axle of the composition is emphasized by the sculpture of *Mother Latvia* which is visible in the distant view line. When a visitor approaches a hill overgrown with an oak grove and the eternal fire, when walking along the monumental six-row linden avenue, the symbolic perception of the Mother’s image is raised even more powerfully. From the viewpoint of the Memorial Hill, the view lines overlook a blossoming graveyard field in the valley, the natural shrine altar wall and *Mother Latvia* who has bowed her head in grief over the killed sons. In such a synthesis of architecture and forms of art there is readable the ethnic originality of the Latvian nation which is most felt in folk songs and in the monumental simplicity, spatial composition, concerted details, proportions, scale and love of flowers peculiar to the farmstead [8].

Salaspils Memorial Ensemble [4]

The Memorial Ensemble to the victims-civilians of World War II, is located on the outskirts of Riga, in Salaspils, in the place of the extermination camp established by German Nazi. In the camp were killed over 50 000 people from all over Europe. The Ensemble was opened in 1967 and its authors are the architects Gunārs Asaris (1934), Ivars Strautmanis (1932), Oļegs Zakamennijs (1914-1968), Oļģerts Ostenbergs (1925) and the sculptors Ļevs Bukovskis (1910-1984), Oļģerts Skarainis (1923) and Jānis Zariņš (1913-2000).



Fig. 7. K. Zāle. The Warriors’ Cemetery in Riga. “The wounded cavalryman 2”
[Source: photo by the author, 2010]

The killed soldiers buried the Riga Warrior’s Cemetery were buried in straight lines, as once in line, going to attack or fight in the trenches. Throughout the graveyard field in straight lanes, there are planted shrub hedges that separate one grave line from the other one. On their background, in linearly parallel, long beds are planted perennial flowers, typical to Latvian farmsteads and rural cemeteries—primroses, irises, phloxes and goldenrods. On the world scale, in public greeneries, perennials as the main accent of space organization and composition appeared only in the late 20th century. Prior to that, a wider use of the perennials was met only in the manor house garden collections and in exhibits of botanical gardens. This was the first place where in public greeneries the perennials stressed the compositional idea of the landscape space.

Emotionally, the Warriors’ Cemetery is the most expressive and richest with flowers memorial ensemble in the world. After World War II, the ensemble served as a prototype of the World War II memorial ensembles for the victims of the Treptov park in Berlin (1949) and Piskaryov cemetery in St. Petersburg and many monuments, built for the killed soldiers during World War I and World War II in Latvia—in Krustpils, Asare, Cēsis, Ludza, Gulbene, Priekule, Salaspils, Vietalva and elsewhere, so continuing the traditions of the memorial sculpture, architecture and garden art of the Riga Warrior’s Cemetery.

The complex occupies an area of 25 ha in size and it is designed in a modern, harsh minimalist style where both the gate wall and sculptures are made from a rough molded concrete. Passing along a curving path through the pine forest, from a distance there is seen the symbolic boundary of the monumentally unwieldy life and death gate—a sloping concrete wall, which is 105 m long and 12 m high. One end of this wall slides into a trench of the earth, the other one—lifted and supported on a one-storey construction volume which is bordered with black



Fig. 8. Salaspils Memorial Ensemble. [Source: photo by the author, 2010]

granite slabs. The overall context of the color, form creation, materials and surface structure of the inclined to one side gate line prepares the visitor for a full of drama page of history in the nation's destiny [4].

Behind the walls of the entrance, in the huge open meadow landscape there are already visible from afar the monumental sculptures- *Unbroken*, *Solidarity*, *Rot-front*, *Oath*, *Mother*, each of them emotionally intensely symbolizes human feelings. The highest of the sculptures reaches 16 m in height. Bypassing the lawn along the ring road, they are shown at different angles. The linear simplicity of the concrete forms, roughness of the material and the scale grandeur of the sculptural work from the compositional point of view are well displayed in the monotonous plain meadow, so symbolizing indifference of the political power against human emotional feelings. The visual expression of the very dramatically heightened landscape space is not additionally accented by flower and hedge plantations that visually might impair perceiving the overall message of the sculpture works. On the way back from the memorial ensemble, we come to the podium of wreaths which is lined with black granite slabs. Here softly sounds the heart beat of a metronome. The route continues along a 4 m wide

corridor and stairs inside the concrete wall where in the upper part there is the opportunity to see the memorial lawn and sculpture panorama. The concrete gate incline closes with the museum's exposition.

In the memorial greenery, there are maintained the growing birches and pines. Wild roses (*Rosa rugosa*) are planted instead of the former barracks. The gateway motif, the simplified sculptural forms in the wide lawn and minimalism of other means of expression have grown from the simplicity of the traditional Latvian farmyard, the composition simplicity of the yard and minimalism of architectural decors and other means of expression of the Latvian folk art. As in the Riga Warrior's Cemetery, in this ensemble as well, there has not been applied the folk pattern decoration in order not to distract attention from the expressiveness of the forms and the constructive logic. This site is not a graveyard, this is a commemorative site of the way of torture, so here is not used the rich application of flowers and ornamental shrubs of the Riga Warrior's Cemetery. The wild roses in the place of barracks are in tune with the wild rose hedges in the linden alley of the entrance to the Warrior's Cemetery-as a reminder of a way of people through thorns [5].

The garden of destiny- one of the latest Latvian memorial ensembles

The ensemble of *the garden of destiny* is currently under creation in Koknese, on an island of the Latvian destiny river-the Daugava. It is created as a commemorative site of the people lost for Latvia during the last century's tragic events. The initiator and supporter of the idea-the entrepreneur Vilis Vītols whose family had to leave their homeland at the end of World War II in order to escape the fate of owners and entrepreneurs in Latvia who in 1940, and after the war in 1949 were shot or taken away in exile in stock cars to Siberia where in cold and starvation died many tens of thousands of Latvian families. On June 07, 2005,

there was founded the public organization *Koknese Foundation /Kokneses fonds/*, with the aim to create a commemorative site for the Latvians who had died and suffered in the 20th century. The number of victims exceeds 600 000 but the exact total number is not known. Alongside with the creation of the memorial site, Koknese Foundation wants to know the exact number of the the Latvians killed in repressions, deported, imprisoned in the death camps, killed in the war and driven into exile by force. By the support of UNESCO, there was announced an idea competition for the commemorative site. There were received 207

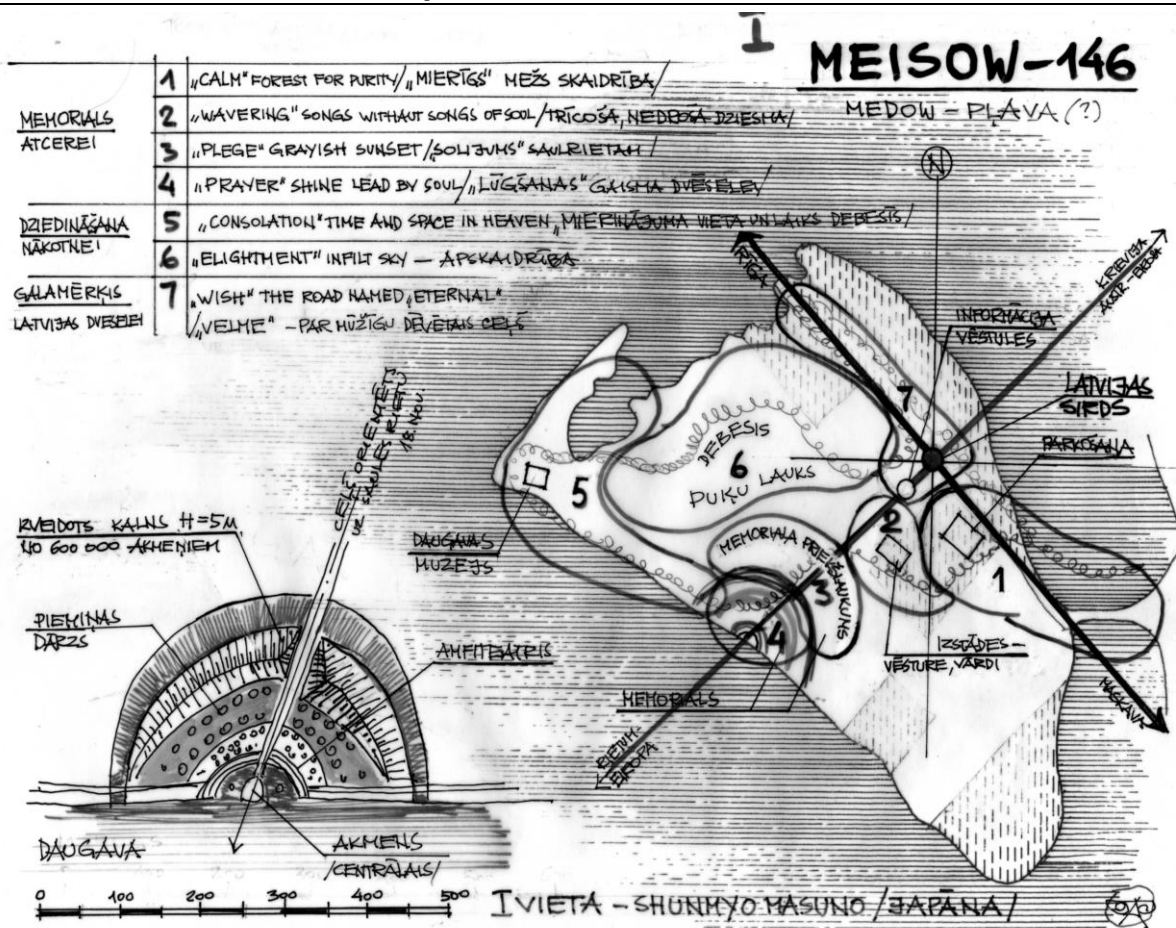


Fig. 9. "Garden of Fate" on the Krievkalns Island, in Koknese [Japanese garden architect Shunmyo Masuno, 2005]



Fig. 10. A view from "Garden of Fate" to the Koknese Church [Source: photo by the author, 2010]

Conclusions

The study summarizes traditions and compositional techniques of establishment of the earlier and contemporary Latvian cemeteries and memorial ensembles. Special attention is given to the architecturally landscaped design principles of these sights, techniques of the emotional mood creation, the use of the small form architecture and ornamental plants to create the mood and other issues that need to be followed in order to create corresponding to the traditions, philosophically sound and aesthetically appealing complexes of cemeteries and commemorative ensembles. The review of the examples and evaluation of the study once again vividly demonstrates that in the Latvian town planning environment or in the open landscape space there are well readable the trends of

the national identity and traditions that are reflected in the synthesis of the architectural and artistic form creation language-so highlighting the heritage of the nation's cultural and historical traditions. Just as honoring the Latvian folk song and devoting the Song Festival to it, a second parallel to the Latvians is paying a tribute to the person's life with the commemorative zone devoted to it with emotionally vivid remembrance events which are entangled in folk songs, dainas and beliefs.

Just as honoring the Latvian folk song and devoting Song festivals to it, a second parallel for the Latvians is a tribute to the person's life and a memory zone with emotionally vivid remembrance events in which there are entangled folk songs, dainas and beliefs.

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Kopsavilkums. Pētījums aplūko Latvijas pieredzi kapsētu un memoriālo ansambļu izveidē. Pētījuma aktualitāti nosaka tas, ka daudzviet blīvas pilsēt būvnieciskās telpas kontekstā veidojas nepieciešamība paplašināt esošās apbedījumu zonas vai arī izveidot jaunas kapsētas. Pasaules praksē joprojām tiek veidoti piemiņas memoriāli dažādu negadījumu un konfliktu upuriem. Pētījuma rezultātus ir izmantojami jaunu projektu ideju meklējumos, konkursu darbu izvērtējumos un studentu mācību procesā.

Pētījuma metodes skar Latvijas nacionālai identitātei raksturīgo vēsturisko kapsētu un piemiņas vietu izpēti, tā izvērtējot memoriālajos ansambļos realizētās nezūdošās vērtības, funkcionālo un kompozicionāli telpisko plānojumu īpatnības, kā arī zaļās ainavtelpas jeb augu izvēles un mākslinieciski tēlniecisko darbu nozīmi emocionālā pārdzīvojuma radīšanā un kāpināšanā. Lai izvērtētu Latvijas piemiņas ainavtelpu īpatnības, salīdzinot tās ar citu zemju līdzīgiem objektiem, tika izvērtētas kapsētu un memoriālo ansambļu tradīcijas Latvijas kaimiņvalstīs, Skandināvijā un citviet Eiropā. Pētījuma mērķis – pielietot pētījuma rezultātus arhitektūras un ainavu arhitektūras studentu un pašvaldību teritoriju plānotāju apmācībā, dodot ierosmi un arhitektoniski ainaviskās telpas izvērtējumu dalībniekiem nākamo šādu teritoriju plānojumu konkursos, kā arī pašvaldību komisijām konkursu rezultātu apspriešanā.