

The creative life and achievements of the landscape architect Alfons Ķišķis (1910–1994)

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Abstract. In the period of the post-war policy when the creative expressions were restricted, the landscape architect Alfons Ķišķis designed squares, gardens, parks and memorial ensembles, based on a detailed, in-depth and thorough study of the local traditions and the existing natural conditions.

Key words: memorial ensembles, compositional solutions, spatial structure, sculpture, painting.

Introduction

The family of the Latvian landscape architects must know and remember those talented people who already in the '20s – '30s of the 20th century actively have studied and worked in Latvia in favor of the independent Latvian state, who survived the war danger, the Siberian exile years, the Soviet-year period and despite the persecution, prohibitions and restrictions of the ruling system, created remarkable masterpieces of the landscape architecture. These talented people in seminars and conferences have actively shared their knowledge with colleagues about the world's latest, greatest landscape architectural creative achievements and the contemporary garden art in the world.

Materials and methods

The study of the creative work of the eminent landscape architect is based on the biographical data and the highly rated work of A. Ķišķis in the society. The enormous personal sufferings during the war and exile, as well as the postwar fate of Latvia, gave a serious hardening for the creative work, which is brightly apparent in the created memorial sites, new squares and parks in the urban construction space. The landscape architect's work was evaluated with high honors, which was rare in the Soviet state for those people who did not support the Communist regime and had endured the years of exile in Siberia.

The post-war years of the Soviet life have left a deep impact on many members of the creative profession - writers, artists and architects. It is a time when the thought of freedom and independence has to be concealed between the lines of poetry, in the plot structure of paintings, in the composition of sculptural works, where their dual structure is evident. In order to evaluate the creative life of A. Ķišķis, several of his works are discussed.

Despite the prohibitions of the Soviet power, at the end of his life, his professional work got a very high evaluation. The peculiarities of the creative achievements of the master, the applied

functional solutions, the composition of the spatial structures and a very rich and subtle application of ornamental plants in the designed ensembles can be better understood if we raise the first steps and further twists and turns of his career.

Results and discussion

Alfons Ķišķis was born on August 26, 1910, in Lithuania, at Žeime (Žeimeitis), 18 miles to the south of the Latvian and Lithuanian border town Bauska. His mother – Latvian, born Eferts from the Vāne parish in the Kuldīga rural district. His father – Lithuanian, from the Ūbišķi village in the Birži rural district. His father was a medical person – a feldsher.

At the start of the war, in 1915, he was mobilized into the army. During World War I, the family fled to Saratov and in 1919 returned to Latvia, when the war ended. In 1926, he finished the Bauska high school and in 1927, A. Ķišķis joined the three-year Ziedoņi horticultural school (the former Bornsminde Manor on the left bank of the picturesque Lielupe River).

At school, gardening and horticulture were taught by educators who had completed special horticultural institutions in Russia and Germany, agronomists from the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Latvia, as well as clever, experienced gardeners from the former manor gardenings. The old gardeners shared with school students not only their gardening wisdom, but also their practical experiences.

After the school completion – work at the Apgulde agricultural school as a gardener and a practical work teacher in the subject of horticulture. This practice gave a significant experience in the organization of the school curriculum and the practical work, which was then published in several articles in journals published by the Latvian Horticultural Society. In 1931, Alfons Ķišķis began his studies at the



Fig. 1. Alfons Ķišķis with colleagues
from Latvia and Lithuania

[Source: material from author private archive]

Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Latvia and while studying he worked in Riga, in greenhouse gardening in order to earn money for studies.

While studying, he participated in the student group "Green Land" of the Academy of Fine Arts, where the later famous painters and sculptors – Viļumanis, Melnārs, Šulcs, Mednis, Megnis, Sprīģis, Zariņš, K. Zemdega (then still K. Baumanis), K. Dane, etc., developed their creative work.

Cooperation with the young artists very significantly deepened the understanding of art, painting and sculpture. The future landscape architect actively visited art exhibitions and his creative archive contains many photos from exhibitions of sculptural works of different periods. In his later work, designing both large ensembles and small squares, the master collaborated with talented sculptors and in the centers of the compositions of his projects he placed sculptural works created by outstanding masters.

During the period of the first independent state, after graduation from the faculty, he worked as a horticultural instructor at the District Department of Talsi-Ventpils of the Latvian Chamber of Agriculture. The field of work was versatile and interesting. The young specialist had to organize courses, lectures, tutorials and large agricultural exhibitions. A republic-wide recognition was repeatedly received for the outstanding results of his work. Greenery projects for farmhouses, urban gardens and public green areas were also drawn. After the project designed by A. Ķišķis, a square at the Lutheran church and a new cemetery were built.

After receiving a diploma in agriculture (1936), A. Ķišķis visited a grand horticultural exhibition in Dresden. An active participation in Latvia's major agricultural exhibitions was immediately started, for which numerous awards and recognitions were received.

In 1937, Alfons Ķišķis started working at the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture as a Deputy Head of the Horticultural Department. Laws and regulations were written to facilitate future development of the horticultural sector of the Latvian State. The work was started to organize centralized large fruit and vegetable warehouses, marshalling yards and packaging yards to prepare the Latvian produce for large-scale trade and exports. Voluntarily – also editorial work in the gardening and beekeeping magazine, significantly improving the appearance and the content of the magazine. In 1938, a new outfit to the magazine and articles on his own experience, as well as articles translated from German, English, Russian and Lithuanian for Lithuanian gardening magazines were also placed there. For an outstanding performance, in 1938, A. Ķišķis was awarded with a scholarship of the English organization "British Council" for one year postgraduate studies in England, the University of Bristol.

During this period of studies, he intensively worked – studying and carrying out practical work in scientific research with apple seedling rootstock. A dissertation was prepared on the role of genetics for stock selection in fruit growing. In England, the opportunity was provided for the students to become acquainted with the English horticultural training and testing institutions, botanical gardens, museums and cultural and historical sites and other professional and comprehensive programs.

In 1939, as a successful foreign student A. Ķišķis represented the University of Bristol in the President's residence in London, at 10 Downing Street, where the students were welcomed by Mrs. Chamberlain.

Winston Churchill, in turn, was an honorary rector of the University of Bristol. During the celebrations, in connection with awarding the honorary doctor's degree to Sir Kennedy – the U.S. Envoy in London, father of President John F. Kennedy, A. Ķišķis had the opportunity to listen to both Kennedy and Churchill's academic speeches, where they warned of the coming war and called to defend the homelands inherited from the ancestors.

At the start of the war, all the trials with the rootstocks were stopped and the doctoral dissertation remained unwritten. But since then, A. Ķišķis had many good friends from many parts of the world, who in later times sent to Latvia both the latest magazines and good, very useful specialty books.

In 1940, A. Ķišķis returned to Latvia and after the establishment of the Soviet power remained in the previous post in the Ministry. After traveling to Moscow and visiting the People's Economic Achievements Exhibition, it was clear that in Russia agronomy was at a considerably lower level than in Latvia. At the end of 1940, the Chamber of Agriculture was liquidated, the old personnel were replaced by new ones – the necessary for the party – members and A. Ķišķis as had studied in the wrong country, was dismissed from work.

After July 01, 1941, when the German troops entered Riga, A. Ķišķis was taken back to work in the Ministry, he was also asked to manage the Pūre Horticultural Experimental Station. It was necessary to narrow the fruit-growing section and to expand vegetable production. In 1942 and 1943, in his post Alfons Ķišķis variously contributed to the research work, published information booklets, coordinated cooperation with Estonia and Lithuania and organized the annual Latvian public garden day. Even discussions were held about the establishment of a new scientific – research center in Jelgava at the Latvian Academy of Agriculture.

In 1943, A. Ķišķis wrote a scenario for the documentary film "Let's go to the garden", directed by Pūce and L. Gaigals being the cameraman. The filming was funded by the consumer union association "Turība"/Prosperity/. The fate of the film is not known.

In 1944, A. Ķišķis was conscripted into the Latvian Legion. In his autobiography A. Ķišķis wrote that he was fighting with the Germans, just as it was done at the beginning of the last war by the Finns to defend their land, so as "the grim year" does not repeat in Latvia. There was still a quiet hope that the scenario of 1919–1920 could repeat and Latvia would regain its independence.

On June 11, 1948, A. Ķišķis was arrested and sent for 25 years to the corrective labor camp in Irkutsk. A. Ķišķis worked in forestry jobs, the village construction works and later in his specialty as a camp gardener. In two camps, he built a greenhouse and arranged greenery, he began an intensive work at the Pūre Horticultural Experimental Station as a scientific worker in the greenhouse sector, where he was preparing to defend a dissertation on labor consumption in greenhouses.

The next job was at the Latvian Society of Horticulture and Apiculture, where for two years A. Ķišķis worked as a scientific-technical manager. After the incident at the flower exhibition with the tulip variety "General Eisenhower", he had to look for a new job again as the new selected variety in the Soviet State a "wrong" name was given.

In 1966, at the design institute "Latkomunprojek" after the projects developed by A. Ķišķis,



Fig. 2. Sanatorium "Ķemeris", architect E. Laube, 1936
[Source: www.zudusilatvija.lv]



Fig. 3. Sanatorium "Ķemeris", parterre by A. Ķišķis
[Source: http://www.pirtslietas.lv/web/?id=400872]

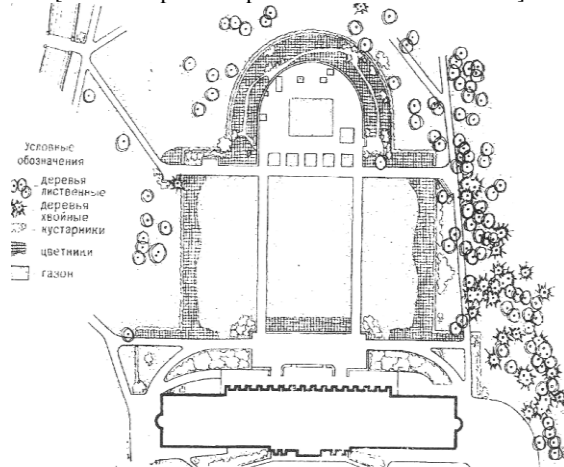


Fig. 4. Sketch of territory, parterre by A. Ķišķis
[Source: material from Ilzes Indriksones private archive]

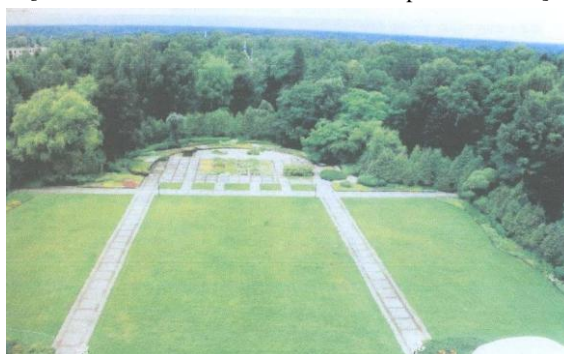


Fig. 5. View from sanatorium roof to the parterre
[Source: photo by Ilzes Indriksones private archive]

the Warrior's Cemetery at Bulduri and Ķemeri, the modern rebuilding of the large parterre of the sanatorium "Ķemeri" and the redesign of the sanatorium park, squares at Dubulti and Majori, the memorial ensemble at the Ančepāni hills near Rēzekne and the memorial ensemble "Krasnij Luč" in Lugansk area of Ukraine were implemented. Several of these projects were awarded with both the Latvian and the Soviet Union awards.

At the People's Economic Achievements Exhibition (TSSI) in Moscow, each republic had to design and then arrange a "portion of the park", which in essence was a large and multipurpose square.

The project, implemented at the TSSI exhibition, in all the 15 brotherly republic competition won the 1st place and the Great Exhibition Prize. The author of this article, at that time a student majoring in architecture at the Faculty of Construction of the Riga Polytechnical Institute, chose the Jūrmala office of the design institute "Latkomunalprojekt" as the practice place as considered A. Ķišķis to be the most outstanding landscape architect of the Soviet Union. It was a great school - day by day delving into the ideas of these projects and their implementation.

In 1967, at the scale of the Soviet Union, the minister of Agriculture of Lithuania offered the recognized, talented landscape architect to move to Vilnius, establish and then run the Greenery Design Office of the Lithuanian Institute of Land Use Planning in the newly built modern building, while also giving a comfortable flat in a new residential area.

In Lithuania, in the office of A. Ķišķis, both under his designing and managing projects of the staff of the office, around 300 greenery projects for various large and small sites were developed.

Only the projects where the site management agreed to the author's supervision of the setup works were implemented more or less in line with the expectations. These include the most interesting implemented projects:

- the village and the park of the Pergale collective-farm "Skaistgiris" of Joniški district;
- the experimental village of the Soviet farm "Dainava" of the Leonpole village of the Ukmergė district (awarded with the State Prize of the USSR);
- the greenery of the sanatorium "Lina" in Palanga;
- the greenery of the sanatorium "Egle" in Druskininkai;
- the Junkaiči experimental farm village and its greenery at the Šilute district (Lenin Prize in 1988);
- the greenery of the Vilnius greenhouse plant (Council of Minister's prize of the USSR);
- restoration of the Voke historic park in Trakai, the Vilnius district. In 1897, the park was designed by the famous French garden architect



Fig. 6. Junkaiči ciemata kultūras nama apstādījumi pēc A. Ķišķa projekta [Source: <http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis>]



Fig. 7. Junkaiči greenery at the Šilute district by A. Ķišķis [Source: <http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis>]

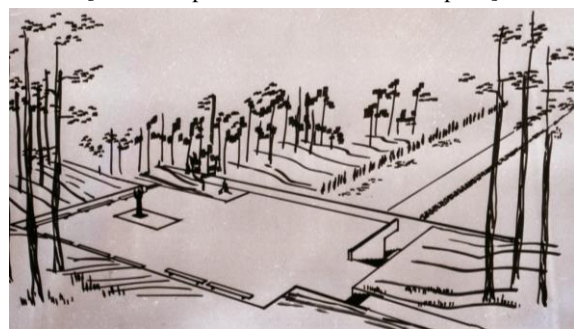


Fig. 8. A. Ķišķis. The plan of the Ančupāni Memorial Ensemble [Source: material by author private archive]

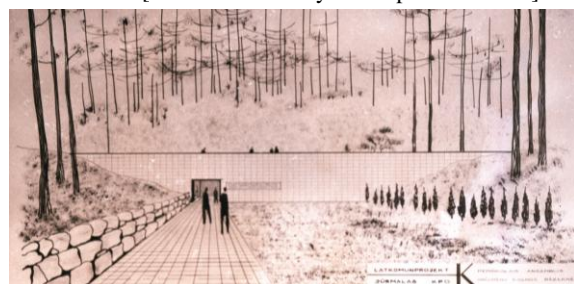


Fig. 9. The entrance of the memorial to the symbolic gate [Source: material by author private archive]



Fig. 10. The symbolic road of eternity [Source: www.panoramio.com/photo/106616419]

Eduard Andre, who had designed several parks in Lithuania for the family of Earls Mickiewicz;

- The experimental village of the Soviet farm “Dainava” at the Leonpole village of the Ukmerge district (awarded with the State Prize of the USSR), in 1988 Alfons Ķišķis was awarded the title of the honorary architect of the Lithuanian SSR. Alfons Ķišķis was also a member of the Lithuanian Union of Architects.

After retirement in 1983, the Mažeikiai district leadership invited A. Ķišķis and his wife Rūta to design greenery of the city’s streets, squares and a large park of the newly built residential district.

The park – like many other A. Ķišķis sites – is decorated with a number of sculptures.

On May 25, 1990, finishing his autobiography, Alfons Ķišķis writes: “Now, when life is almost over, I am looking back to my life and I am glad that it was so rich in events and adventures, that something has remained, that a lot of planted trees still grow, that my sons have grown up and are decent people and that it is my good fortune to see my grandchildren to be born, too.”

As his wife Rūta writes – Alfons Ķišķis has often remembered a sentence from a short story written by J. Ezeriņš: “And isn’t a man like a wonderful plant that blooms in the face and the hands of which are like leafy branches”.

The spatial location of the Ančupāni Memorial Ensemble

The planning composition of the memorial ensemble, built in 1973, emphasizes the historical plan of this commemoration site, which has been a forest road in a hilly area of Latgale near Rēzekne where during World War II the German army soldiers led to shooting the captured red Army soldiers and peaceful inhabitants of the village of Audriņi - for cooperation with partisans.

Turning away from the highway, a car park is provided, from where a road through a pine forest flatly leads uphill, which is blocked by a monotonous, gray plaster wall with a closed, narrow aisle of the entrance – symbolizing the last gate behind which people's destinies have abruptly stopped. In the view point from the main entrance road, successfully in the composition is played out the terrain and the wall’s slowly curved line, so emotionally increasing each man's feelings. The light tone of the wall plaster well contrasts with the green tones of a forest parcel in the background and the sides. The drama of the place is increased by the tops of the giant spruce toward the sky, which, from the whole of the forest is as if separated by the memorial wall. In the center of the memorial – the sculpture “Mother – apple tree” created by the sculptor R. Kalniņa-Grīnberga – a mother who is holding a child in her hands – the continuation of



Fig. “Mother - Apple tree”, R. Kalniņa-Grīnberga (1973)
[Source: <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/106616327>]

life. In this ensemble, like in many other A. Ķišķis designed sites, the main in the composition is a remarkable sculptural work, which strengthens the emotional perception of the ensemble. The cast metal work, its structure, scale and the color scheme are artfully incorporated in the background of the dense cover of spruce trees. Huge heavy overhanging spruce branches increase the feeling of the tragedy of the war and the fragility of human life. The drapes of the sculptural work, cast in metal in dynamic lines, well harmonize with the background of the dark green spruce branches.

Undoubtedly, the emotional vein of the memorial is drawn from A. Ķišķis own fate by drawing parallels to the cruelty of the Soviet power towards the deported to Siberia and the front, where in front of the eyes – the war fire devoured thousands of people.

The view line of the ensemble continues across the terrace to the support wall of the relief, which consists of a course rubble masonry wall, so symbolizing the shooters. Behind the support wall, a gully can be viewed on the opposite side of which opens a line of junipers, symbolizing the people brought for shooting – partisans and local population, who were suspected for collaboration with the partisans.

The emotions are raised by the continuation of the movement in the direction of the realm of the dead along steep stairs toward the junipers, boulders and the peaceful lawn plane between them. Passing the rows of boulders, it is possible to continue the journey through the pine forest. Returning back to the terrace, the view lines overlook the world of Eternity.

The creative achievements of the landscape architect Alfons Ķišķis are based on the fact that a mix of heredity of genes plays the main role – his father and mother come from the Lithuanian and Latvian families. In the biographies of many outstanding people, this factor is often highlighted. The development of talent might also include contingency – at the age of 16, raised in an intelligent townspeople family the young man found himself in a traditional Latvian farmstead, where with great

love the hostess sowed, planted and cultivated not only the agricultural crops for the needs of the farm, but also the Latvian traditional flower garden near the dwelling house. The Latvian folk belief reads, "If flowers glamorously blossom at the farmstead – you will succeed in life, if all the flowers languish, all of the farm is also set to decrease." One summer in the Latvian farmstead changed the future plans of the talented young man. He began to study landscape gardening and agronomy. When entering the university life, heredity and the good upbringing were the reasons why the young man spent the years of study in the best possible way – intensively accumulating knowledge and practicing in the chosen profession. Another coincidence was the opportunity to get to know the art of sculpture in the years of study. In further projects of landscape architecture and memorial ensembles, placed in the center of the compositions, the outstanding sculptural works leave original, memorable impressions when viewing all the designed ensembles of the parks and memorial sites even today.

References

In this full paper all materials, biographic data are used from Rūtas Ķišķes, Ilzes Indriksones and author private archive.

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Kopsavilkums. Latvijas Ainavu arhitektu saimei ir jāzina un jāatceras tie talantīgie cilvēki, kas jau 20. gs. 20.–30. gados aktīvi studēja un strādāja Latvijas brīvvalsts labā, kas pārcieta kara briesmas, Sibīrijas izsūtījuma gadus un padomijas laiku, un par spīti valdošās sistēmas vajāšanām, aizliegumiem un ierobežojumiem, radīja izcilus ainavu arhitektūras šedevrus.

Izcilā ainavu arhitekta radošā darba pētījums balstīts uz biogrāfiskajiem datiem un A. Ķišķa realizēto darbu augsti novērtēto atzinumu sabiedrībā. Smagi personīgie pārdzīvojumi kara gados un izsūtījumā, kā arī pēckara gadu likteņgaitas Latvijā, deva radošajam darbam nopietnu rādītāju, kas spilgti izpaužas piemiņas vietu, jaunu skvēru un parku izveidē pilsētībūvnieciskajā telpā. Pēc A. Ķišķa izstrādātajiem projektiem realizēti Brāļu kapi Bulduros un Ķemeru (1966. g.), sanatorijas „Ķemeru” lielā partera moderni risinātā pārbūve un sanatorijas parka pārprojektēšana, skvēri Dubultos un Majoros, Memoriālais ansamblis Ančupānu kalnos pie Rēzeknes un memoriālais ansamblis „Krasnij Luč” Luganskas apgabalā Ukrainā. Vairāki no šiem projektiem tika apbalvoti gan ar Latvijas, gan ar Padomju Savienības godalgām.

Maskavas Tautas saimniecības sasniegumu izstādē (TSSI) realizētais projekts visu 15 brālīgo republiku konkurencē ieguva 1. vietu un Lielo izstādes godalgu. No 1967. g. Lietuvā, A. Ķišķim gan pašam projektējot, gan vadot nodaļas darbinieku darbus, tika izstrādāti ap 300 apstādījumu projekti dažādiem lieliem un maziem objektiem. Interesantākie realizētie projekti: Jonišķu rajona Pergales kolhoza „Skaistgiris” ciemats un parks, Ukmerģes rajona Leonpoles ciemata padomju saimniecības „Dainava” eksperimentālais ciemats (apbalvots ar PSRS Valsts prēmiju), sanatorijas „Lina” apstādījumi Palangā, sanatorijas „Egle” apstādījumi Druskiņkos, Šilutes rajona Juknaiču eksperimentālās saimniecības ciemats un tā apstādījumi, (Ļeņina prēmija 1988. gadā), Viļņas siltumnīcu kombināta apstādījumi (PSRS MP prēmija), Viļņas rajona Traku Vokes vēsturiskā parka restaurācija. Parku 1897. gadā projektējis slavenais franču dārzu arhitekts Eduards Andrē, kas Lietuvā projektējis vairākus parkus grāfu Mickeviču dzimtai). Ukmerģes rajona Leonpoles ciemata padomju saimniecības „Dainava” eksperimentālais ciemats (apbalvots ar PSRS Valsts prēmiju), 1988. gadā Alfonam Ķišķim piešķīra Lietuvas PSR Nopelniem bagātā arhitekta goda nosaukumu. Alfons Ķišķis bija arī Lietuvas Arhitektu savienības biedrs.

The creative collaboration with the equally talented graduate of the Bulduri school, the gardener Rūta Zariņa, later his wife Rūta Ķišķe, was another key to success of Alfons Ķišķis. Bulduri Horticultural School gave the ability to logically and decoratively design compositions of trees, shrubs and flowering plants that perfectly complemented the ideas of planning of parks, squares and memorial ensembles designed by Alfons Ķišķis.

Conclusion

During the Soviet period, Alfons Ķišķis creates many sites, both in Latvia and Lithuania. In his works, brightly characteristic compositions with slab pavings and picturesque greenery are recognizable. The entire A. Ķišķi's oeuvre clearly reflects the stylistic trends of landscape parks of the '50s – '70s of the 20th century. The garden and landscape sites created by A. Ķišķis should be preserved and maintained as the monuments of garden art of the last century.