


# Cultural heritage sites in Vilnius: a critique of selected interventions in landscape architecture

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**Abstract.** International researchers intensively explore the tradition of criticism in landscape architecture theories and practices from different angles: socio-cultural inquiry, historic prospective and retrospective, heritage perception and cognition, modern public engagement. Over the past two years, Vilnius City has witnessed a breakthrough in the public debate on urban open space, and several landscape architecture projects related to the revitalization of the cultural landscape have provoked the active public debate. Three selected cases have multi-layered evolution in which previous solutions have been deliberately or naturally denied by subsequent ones. The aim of the paper is to analyse and summarise the state of collective memory and tendencies of stakeholder's opinions that influence the creative process in landscape architecture projects. The paper analyses the opinions of three stakeholder's groups about the projects going to be realised: the public, the planning and design professionals and the client, with own regard to the project. The feedback material from the published articles, critical comments, record of public discussion and some other public and institutional media resources are analysed. The ecological, aesthetic and social-economic aspects of the feedback material are represented through the preselected criteria and the detailed indicators. The main conclusion of the study is the notion that early and a wide-ranging discussion with the public during the process of landscape revitalisation can harvest the best public acceptance of landscape change. In the analysed case, it showed the absolute stakeholder's preference for the multi-layered representation and interpretation of the authentic landscape material and its mental memories that promote the continuum of landscape development as a contemporary public interaction arena. The shorter was the lifespan of the place, the more outrageous debates took place with little consent in all aspects. In case of the longer timespan of the place, there were more consensuses between the stakeholders on the analysed aspects.

**Keywords:** landscape architecture, cultural landscape, collective memory, revitalisation, society

## Introduction

There is an active debate ongoing between the researchers and the practitioners of several fields of landscape, urbanism and architecture on what and how the real values of the place could and should be safeguarded and brought to life in the process of landscape modification. Meeting the public understanding and satisfying the needs of modern society is the other must for the cultural landscape projects of this kind. Local authorities expect landscape architects to develop the proposals that would correspond to public perception of local identity of a place in the best possible way. To get a deeper understanding of these trends in research and in practice we have gone through the state-of-the-art analysis of several projects of cultural landscapes in the heart of Vilnius City.

## Background

Memorial landscapes are proved to have multiple layers that should be reflected in the recent look of those places [11]. Researchers assess the differences in approaches to "landscape as a fact" in order to better reflect on landscape memory and its symbolic values [4]. The deeper review of essence – temporality paradigm discloses that practitioners and the stakeholders frequently debate about the ways to build on the permanent landscape qualities and take

them to the present day use [12]. Memories can be provoked even by the alternative – virtual "monuments" by empowering diverse sensorial experience e.g. by audio guiding tools [10]. Cognitive perception of historical urban skyline is an important process of landscape perception, and it may act as a mental sketch in the urban space experiences and be expressed by skyline drawing and multi-sensorial perception [2]. Analysis of the multiple commemorative roles that landscape can play shows that collective memory even of the painful events of the close past depends on the local culture and identity that needs to be addressed in landscape interventions in a creative way [6]. Providing the visitors of created landscapes with a complete cultural experience may be the critical factor in becoming a loved and visited site instead of political and ideological loads that authorities frequently drop on the memorial sites [8]. Religious landscape sites often find themselves in between of the memory and the value, and good governance models along with multidisciplinary analysis may be the way to bring their cultural legacy forward even in a situation when their original type of use is abandoned [3].

The selected criteria and their indicators							
Ecologic		Social		Aesthetic		Memorial	
Total protection	E1	Openness	S1	Neutrality	A1	Current	M1
Ecosystem	E2	Community	S2	Interpretation	A2	Multilayer	M2
Selective protection	E3	Recreation use	S3	Complexity	A3	Fragmented	M3
New plantation	E4	Representation	S4	Decoration	A4	Historic	M4

Researchers also apply the method of Design through Research (DtR) for facilitating participatory design, and they identify the professionals, the institutions and the community as three main operating sides shaping the built environment [1]. The reviewed resources illustrate the variety of approaches and research methods that when applied may bring one closer to understanding the essential processes within value making. The methodology of research and design and the criticism trend of landscape urbanism brings the new type of quality criteria and indicators mainly focusing on appreciation of natural values in the development of urban landscapes. There are experimental studies that use this methodology as a set of 14 criteria in four themes to assess the quality of urban landscape development in Vilnius City, and the results show absolute benefit of applying landscape urbanism methods and tools as compared to conventional approaches of the XX c. [14]. The authors of reviewed resources when analysing the participation theme usually involve three main groups of stakeholders into questionnaires and other participatory activities: landscape architects, municipality staff and community members [7]. Researchers raise the question whether we could better understand novel ecologies of existing sites as relational landscape if we take a closer look on their histories, memories and individual timelines [9].

### The method and the material

From the perspective of landscape architecture science, it is important to understand what causes differences of opinions about cultural memory preservation. This study responds to a problem raised by the IFLA-Europe discussion on Landscape as a Collective Memory, as to search for answers on reflection of memories in landscape projects and objects. How can we carry our inherited legacies to the future? How can we carry the traces of the past through the present and to the future? The challenges of maintaining historic gardens, especially those that have become public-use gardens, are today more and more reflected in a social and an environmental domain. The aim of the research is to summarize the state of collective memory and tendencies that influence the creative process and means of landscape architecture based on opinions stated by the public representatives in the public media: press, internet, and discussion meetings. The qualitative research analyses the press and critical comments, opinions and proposals from

the public on three landscape architecture projects and the recorded minutes of public discussions.

The research analyses and compares the opinions and positions of three groups of stakeholders regarding a project – the client (municipality and agency), the landscape architecture professionals who elaborated the project proposals, and the local public. That material is stored in the archive of Vilnius Municipality. For comparative analysis, documentation of design assignments is used to express the intended expectations of the client. Some members of this research study were directly involved in managing the process of creating the selected landscape projects under investigation. The consolidated opinion of landscape professionals was not available, as they have just expressed separate contradictive opinions. The analysis is based on four key dimensions: ecological, socio-functional, aesthetic and collective memory, – revealing through a variety of views of the criteria and several preselected indicators for each dimension and their weight distribution.

In the study, criteria were grouped to reveal differences of opinions expressed by different groups of stakeholders. As it was difficult to compare and structure different opinions due to their diversity and authentic nature of expression, we have converted the individual opinions expressed in public debates on the analysed projects into generalized criteria, which were grouped into four thematic categories: Ecologic, Social, Aesthetic, and Memorial [5]. We have distinguished the four most characteristic indicators in each set of criteria by giving them the code marks E, S, A, and M (Table 1).

### Three case studies

We have selected three case studies in Vilnius City that meet the criteria of recently designed areas with multiple cultural heritage layers in urban landscape provoking wide public discussion. The project of the Reformation Garden is 2,78 ha size site in the centre of Vilnius that is currently under implementation and regards the area that former Vilnius city authorities dedicated to the Cemetery of Protestant Reformers in 1639. At the beginning of the 20th century with the development of industry and growth of the city, the South-Eastern part of the garden area was leased for the construction of trade pavilions. Until the Second World War, the area changed little. In the post-war period, between 1950 and 1958, the area was left undermaintained and



Figure 1. a) The view of the Reformation Garden until 2018. Žiūra, S. photo. Source: <https://15min.lt> b) Visualization of the monument to the Reformation within the conserved Reformation Garden area. Authors Matulaitė, D. Balkevičius, J. Project visualization.

TABLE 2

The criteria distinguished through the analysis of public presentation of the project for the Reformation Garden conservation

Criteria groups	Opinions of different stakeholder groups		
	The public	The project professionals	The client (municipality)
Ecological	Save all existing trees Ecosystem protection Protecting biodiversity Avoid demolitions	Selective protection of trees New plants Terrain restoration	Trees inventory Terrain recovery Increasing green space
Socio-functional	Maintain existing transit No fencing Universal spaces	Internal path system Functional zoning Children's play area	Memorial function associated with short-term recreation
Aesthetic	Adaptation of existing concrete structures Refusal of decoration Stylistic unity	Relief recovery Removing concrete structures Abundance of elements	Relief restoration. Actualisation of Reformation cultural heritage by the artistic tools
Collective memory	The multi-layered story The educational role of living history	Priority for period of the Reformation cemetery Activities for public recreation.	Multidimensional reflection and honouring of the Reformation cultural heritage

consequently was abandoned by citizens, and soviet authorities have gradually demolished the remaining buildings. In 1983, this area was transformed into the square dedicated to honour Soviet soldiers, and the gigantic scenic monument was erected there without any consultation with the public. The idea of this monument was to form concrete-level terraces by drastically levelling the sloped site and digging out a large part of the ancient cemetery where the notable cultural persons were buried in the 17–18 c. In 1995, the monument from 1983 was taken away becoming probably the shortest 12-years' time standing memorial structure in Lithuania. The remaining concrete slabs then lost their original meaning and were left abandoned for quite a while attracting graffiti enthusiasts and becoming an underground gathering place (Fig. 1 a). The memory of destroyed cemetery stimulated considerations to find a relevant method for conservation of the Reformation garden, paying a tribute to the cultural achievements of the Reformation in Lithuania in 17–19 c. In 2014, Vilnius City

Municipality commissioned the project for the Reformation Garden conservation that was completed by 2018 (Fig. 1 b).

When the project was still in the early phases of development, it was met by strong opposition from the particular public groups. The authors have recorded, saved and analysed the material of numerous meetings, publications and internet discussions on the quality of the mentioned project. For this study we have used the material of Surveys (940 respondents) carried out in 2018 by the public initiative group. In addition, we have summarized the information provided on the web portals and the contributions of 39 active members of the public in Facebook group. The substantive opinions were identified based on the analysis of project's critique and were grouped according to the four groups of criteria. Having analysed the public opinions we structured the expressed opinions into four groups of criteria (Table 2).

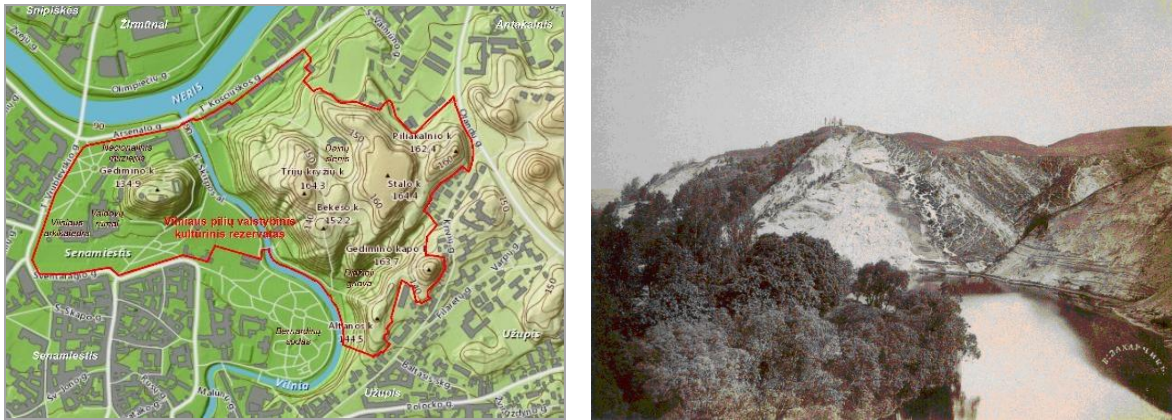


Figure 2. a) The location of Hills Park. Source: VilniuGo <http://www.vilniusgo.lt/2016/11/05/vilniaus-kalnai-kalnu-parkas/>  
b) Historic view to the Hills Park in the 19th c. Source: Vilniaus pilių valstybinio kultūrinio rezervato direkcija <http://www.vilniauspilys.lt/bekeso-kalva>

TABLE 3

The criteria distinguished through the analysis of critique of the project for the Hills Park conservation

Criteria groups	Opinions of different stakeholders		
	The public	The project professionals	The client (agency)
Ecological	Save all existing trees Protect present biodiversity Protect the slopes	Trees cutting for opening panoramas and paths Slope erosion management	Targeted tree cutting Protected biodiversity Reinforced slopes
Socio-functional	Application for visitors using the minimum measures and resources	Walkways, stairs and walking bridge between two ridges New recreational and sanitary facilities	Adapted to the flow of visitors, seeking convenience for all
Aesthetic	Minimalism	Variety of vistas Using the Baltic signs and symbols	Left to professionals to decide
Collective memory	The memory of pre-Christian culture, not excluding the later cultural layers	Neutral information system	Multi-layered expression of memory, highlighting missing historical information

The second case is the Hills Park covering the area of 33 ha, which is a part of Vilnius City Castles Historical Cultural Landscape Reserve. The area recently called a park in the early years of establishment of Vilnius City in the 14<sup>th</sup> c. was a holy forest with pre-Christian worship place. It is an impressive hilly landscape area with the remains of former medieval and earlier castles, archeologic remnants of ancient settlements and fortifications, eventually overgrown with forest and during the past decades used for public recreation and big events. Hills Park is in the city centre near the Old Town of Vilnius, at the confluence of the rivers Neris and Vilnia. The highest points of the area offer wide vistas and picturesque cityscapes (Fig. 2). The project for conservation of the Hills Park (2017 - 2019) has created quite a resonance between the citizens and the professionals in the field. In the case of Hills Park project analysis, the minutes of the two public hearings and three expert working group meetings were analysed, and the authors of the article took part in public meetings in person (Table 3).

The third analysed case is Sapiegos Park with the area of 8 ha. It is one of the oldest parks in Vilnius City, founded by the Grand Hetman of Lithuania Jonas Kazimieras Sapiega (1637 - 1720) in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. and built in Baroque style in the picturesque city district Antakalnis. In the 18<sup>th</sup> c., the park was expanded to the South, and the part of initial landscape plan was installed onsite. During the third development phase, French architect Joseph Poussier (1781-1821) has rebuilt the park and adapted it to the needs of a military hospital during the Russian occupation of Lithuania in 1810. Since the establishment of the military hospital, the park has been turned into an enclosed area used exclusively for the recreational purposes of the sick. In 2014, the former hospital buildings were adapted for innovative cultural and community activities. In 2014-2018, Vilnius Municipality has commissioned the project for conservation of the baroque part of the park. Although the conservation of the Sapiega Baroque Park was taken for granted for few years, and many landscape architecture



Figure 3. a) Project of the Sapiegos Park conservation. Source: Citify <https://citify.eu/> b) View of the Sapiegos Park main gate and palace. Source: BNS <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/1071730/vilniaus-istorijos-daugybe-aistru-keliantis-antakalni-sapiegu-parkas-ir-rumai>

TABLE 4

The criteria distinguished through the analysis of critique of the project for the Sapiega's Park conservation

Criteria groups	Opinions of different stakeholder groups		
	The public	The project professionals	The client (municipality)
Ecological	Save all existing trees Save present biodiversity Mind climate change issues	Partial tree cutting for restoration of the parterre, the paths, the fountains	Provide only the necessary tree cuttings Follow the principles of sustainability
Socio-functional	Adapted to local community recreation	Combination of representative, cultural, and recreational activities	Representative, cultural and educational activities
Aesthetic	Present environment with preserved authentic elements from the baroque period	Aesthetics of Baroque Gardens Art with new elements	Aesthetics of Baroque Gardens with some new elements
Collective memory	The present state shall dominate	Baroque period artefacts from the Sapiega period	Actualisation of values and heritage from the Sapiega period

practitioners and cultural heritage specialists have supported it, the local community opposed the idea of rebuilding the baroque park and Vilnius City Municipality halted the project (Fig. 3). In practice, Chiara Santini raised the same question that we met in the Sapiegos Park: “How to adapt a historic garden to contemporary transformations and challenges? To what extent is it necessary, in a process of restoration or rehabilitation, to consider these issues? [13]. In this study, we have analysed 155 recorded views of community representatives and experts on the conservation project and its implementation process (Table 4).

### Results and discussions

We reassigned the generalized and code-based criteria to each of the cases examined above. With this kind of derivative data, we were able to compare the distribution of criteria among the stakeholders (Table 5). The results of the study showed that in all cases opinions differ on ecological criteria as citizens prefer full protection of all existing trees in the present ecosystem. Moreover, professionals and clients prefer the selective tree protection when

valuable in all senses plants are maintained. In terms of social criteria, in the case of the Reformation Garden and the Sapiegos Park, the public members place emphasis on free open access of the territories and the diverse needs of various communities, and other actors give priority to the regulated access and the fragmented representation of the relics during the development timeline.

The results of this study reveal how opinions of three stakeholder groups distribute through the groups of criteria and indicators in the analysed landscape conservation projects. All stakeholders outlined the social indicator S4 “Representation” in most of the analysed cases. Environmental indicator E3 (Selective protection) and Aesthetic indicator A2 (Interpretation) was outlined in six cases. All stakeholders have mentioned the “Current memory” indicator M1 in the Memorial criteria only once. While accounting the matching or overlapping opinions, the Hills Park has collected most of overlapping responses – 12. Moreover, the Reformation Garden had collected least matching opinions – just five indicators matched in opinions of different stakeholders. The study showed that the

TABLE 5

The distribution of criteria among the cases and the stakeholders

Research objects	Reformation Garden			Hill's Park			Sapiega Park		
Time span	18 - 21 c.			12 - 21 c.			17 - 21 c.		
Stakeholders	Public	Designers	Client	Public	Designers	Client	Public	Designers	Client
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Summary for different stakeholder's groups									
Ecologic	E1 E2	E3 E4	E3	E1 E2	E2 E3	E2 E3	E1 E2	E3 E4	E3 E4
Social	S1 S2 S3	S2 S3 S4	S4	S1 S4	S1 S4	S1 S4	S1 S2 S3	S3 S4	S3 S4
Aesthetic	A2	A3 A4	A2	A1 A2	A1 A2	A1 A2	A1 A2	A3 A4	A3
Memorial	M2	M3	M4	M2	M2	M2	M1 M3	M4	M4

longer is the anthropogenic historic timespan of the place (from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> c.) the less controversy it brings for the stakeholders, as compared to most-recent manmade places. The longest historic timespan of the Hills Park brought relatively most of the general acceptance in social, aesthetic and memorial criteria (Tab. 5 col. 5-7). We could observe that during the long time the ecosystem to great extent has re-naturalised the place. The more recent is the landscape's timespan the more different and opposing opinions come from the public for its conservation project. The most recent Reformation Garden that date its last planning phase to the 90ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. caused most of controversial reactions from the public that was in general opposing to the methodic conservation and fragmented representation of the lost elements of the park (Tab. 5 col. 2-4).

From that perspective, we assume that the cultural landscapes with more development phases deserve extreme attention and professionalism of landscape architects as to work out and widely communicate the general aim, the concept and the methods of conservation during the preliminary design phase. In all three analysed cases, the ecologic criteria collected most common visions, and the aesthetic – least common assessment (Tab. 5). The rebuilding of *de-facto* lost natural or built elements by the new materials and technologies, as offered by the project designers but rejected by the public, should be generally avoided giving priority to the careful conservation and fragmental representation of the remaining authentic material. Treatment of the remaining original trees should mostly rest on a good maintenance and protection of their livelihood, sometimes using currently available technologies. Some gentle interpretation of the past periods and lost authentic material may be applied in such projects following careful and attentive public consultations.

### Conclusions

In all analysed cases, public discussions were mostly active at the final phase of the design work. The study shows that a wide-ranging discussion

with the public on the basic goals, principles and methods should start even before the planning and design process for landscape conservation begins. Discussions are intended to exchange opinions on public acceptance of the modern conservation paradigms, allowing for a more responsive and creative use of landscape architecture methods and tools. In a cultural landscape where, over time, memory acquires a generalized expression, it is worth limiting itself to minimal design means without destroying the remaining harmony of the represented memory. Multi-layered cultural landscapes require specific landscape architecture tools and techniques that by design means integrate all periods of landscape memory into a sort of a "reading story." The issue of managing the process of conserving historic parks is a major challenge where we face ecological and social priorities. It is very important to identify the needs of public space users and define possible contradictions between different stakeholders. Complex research and constant moderation of the dialogue between opposing sides can help to face those contradictions and prioritize certain design solutions. The science and professional practice of landscape architecture should continue to seek for the best principles and methods of landscape conservation while constantly communicating them to the general public, neighbourhood and also sharing it with professional community. The character of changes that each place has gone through in its lifespan as well as its location in respect to the city centre may have impact on the public interest in its future. The structured, professional and objective opinion from the landscape architects community that was missing is very important to reveal the qualities of the place and the proposals. The question of organising the public presentations, hearings and discussion meetings is a separate question with many important aspects to consider, e.g. balancing the representation of different public groups, and the authors will continue analysing these aspects in the following research. The analysed cases are in different phase of implementation and we expect that the expressed opinions will have positive impact on their quality.

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**Kopsavilkums.** Pēdējo divu gadu laikā Viļņas pilsēta ir piedzīvojuši izrāvienu sabiedriskajās debatēs par pilsētas atvērto telpu. Pētījumā analizēti vairāki ainavu arhitektūras projekti, kas saistīti ar kultūras ainavas atdzīvināšanu, kā arī izraisījuši aktīvas sabiedrības debates. Pētījumā konstatēts, ka agrīna diskusija ar sabiedrību, ainavu atdzīvināšanas procesā, noved pie pozitīviem lēmumiem par ainavas izmaiņām.