

THE COMPOSITIONAL SOLUTIONS OF THE HISTORICAL PARKS IN LATVIA

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Abstract

The information about gardens of the Duchy of Courland in the 17th century is scarce and fragmentary, as part of documents is lost or exported abroad during the war. The time of the Duchy and its baroque gardens is attributed to reign of E. J. Biron in the first half of the 18th century, when impressive palace ensembles were created the help of architects F. B. Rastrelli and S. Jensen, building of summer residences in Rundāle, Vircava, Svēte, Luste. They served as summer amusement gardens or parks. In their arrangement, a compositional connection with the palace, the front courtyard, outbuildings and the garden was sought. These summer residences were located in rural plain areas, thus, the features of natural area - water, floodplains, terrain, nature of plantations and materials were used. The choice of planting materials was influenced by the climatic conditions - harsh winters, short summers, late spring frosts or early autumn frosts. Therefore, in the Duke's time gardens, there are no delicate plants such as jays, boxwood plants, peach and mandarin fruit trees imported from the Western Europe. The local trees and shrubs, fruit trees, spice plants were used, vegetable beds made. The study examines two of the Duchy's summer residences at Vircava (*Würzau*) and Svēte (*Swethof*), the study of which, as already mentioned, is made difficult due to the relatively scarce information.

Key words: landscape protection zones, central axis, compositional structure, cultural heritage, historical landscape.

Introduction

Like at Rundāle, in the construction of the Vircava palace in the 70s – 80s of the 18th century, the architect S. Jensen and the sculptor J. M. Graff were also invited by the Duke of Courland E. J. Biron (1690 – 1772). The Svēte palace was built under the control of his son Peter Biron in the period from 1774 to 1775. The style of S. Jensen and J. M. Graff is also felt here. After 1775, J. M. Graff leaves the Duchy of Courland. The creative cooperation of both has been admired to the present day, that is, for more than 250 years. In addition, the masterful and highly artistic level that has been achieved in the visually appealing external image of the palace never ceases to astonish us. It is also attributed to the architectural form of the Vircava and Svēte palaces, as well as to the emerging park's space, and, of course, to the natural elements that are already in front of us. There is the scale, proportion and harmony of the form of the language, maintaining style trends of that time. Undeniably, it is based on talent. The study includes the aim, which is linked to a detailed research of the cultural heritage, evaluating the compositional structure of the outdoor space and transformation processes. The examples of the landscape space of the Vircava and Svēte palaces are used.

The main assignments of the study are related to

- The mutual connection searches of the compositional structure of historical building, park and natural area;
- The assessment of the impact of the anthropogenic load on the historical values of the landscape space;
- The possibilities of the planning areas to regulate the landscape protection zones, not defined in the municipal planning tasks.

Materials and Methods

The methodology of the study includes the description of the historical archives, the comparison of engravings and photographic materials from the beginning of the 18th century to the present day, where under the effect of the economic and political conditions the values of the historical landscape space have been transformed. Over the last century, both ensembles of the palace have been severely affected by political battles. Partly, it is due to the proximity of the Svēte and Vircava palaces to Jelgava, which easily served for military purposes. Three other Duchy's summer residences are built far from cities, and they are not affected by political passions. They are positioned at Rundāle that is near to Bauska, Zaļenieki which is not far from Jelgava, and Luste that is close to Dobeles. Today, the landscape is well shaped by the old tree planting sites and recognized by the compositional concept in the construction of the garden. It also allows to assess the impact of the transformation processes on cultural values. For further progress of the study, it is required to recover the historical paths, the pond line, the foundations of the park's tea house in nature. According to the basic principles of the compositional structure of the space, both the Vircava and Svēte buildings have an expressed longitudinal axis and transverse axis, which connect the palace to the park and natural area. The establishment of the Vircava park was mentioned in 1721, when E.J. Biron wrote to the chamberlain P. Bestuzhev-Ryumin to the Court of Duchess Anna Ivanovna, "... with this I report that during my absence the gardener has planted 300 linden trees. On Saturday and Monday, there are planted 700 more linden trees and 200 cherry trees ... I have ordered the folks to bring another 500 linden seedlings here, as without



Figure 1. The location of the Vircava palace is restored at present park (author’s scheme).

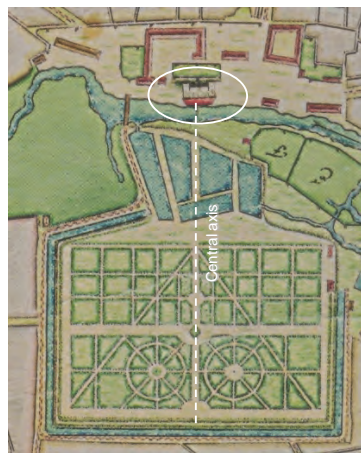


Figure 2. The central longitudinal axis as a view line across the river from Vircava palace to the (Janelis, 2010).

the mentioned ones we need much more. I mercifully beg you to deliver 1000 seedlings from the rest of the manors”. During the inventory in 1793, this park was named “Duke’s great amusement park and orchard” (Rundale palace museum, 1991).

Opposite the building of the Vircava manor, 250 m in length, the river Vircava forms a clear linearity, which is confirmed by the left bank slope. Here one might say-a bluff, if such a comparison could be attributed to the Zemgale plain. The flow of the river is slow and alongside with the manor garden forms a romantically expressive landscape space both upstream and downstream. The garden of the palace was often ruined by spring floods, as the right bank of the river was much lower and formed a floodplain.

The map drawn in 1779 by J. G. Schulz shows the compositional structure of the palace’s ensemble (Janelis, 2010), where the symmetry of the common structure of the ensemble is readable, consisting of the palace building and the baroque garden (Fig.1). The map shows the intersection of the two main axes: one

of them connects the palace and the park, where the expressiveness of the axis is intensified by a tree alley (Fig. 2). The second axis of the composition is the riverbed, as well as the linden transverse alley, which is perpendicular to the first one. The longitudinal axis and the intersection point of the river is a dominant, where the palace was positioned. The culmination was complemented by a tower built in the central part of the palace by S. Jensen, as well as the side blocks of the palace. The expressiveness of the park and the palace is intensified by the linden alley, without reaching 100 meters in length (Fig. 3). On both sides of it there are ponds, and the alley forms a kind of a green bridge, leading across the pond system. In the sight line from the palace through the alley, one of the five park ponds serves as a culmination. Behind it – a wide regular garden, which adds expression to the central axis. The other summer residence belonging to the Duchy – the Svēte palace, which is about 7 km away from the winter residence, located alongside the river Svēte, which is winding and rapid, and in springs and rainy

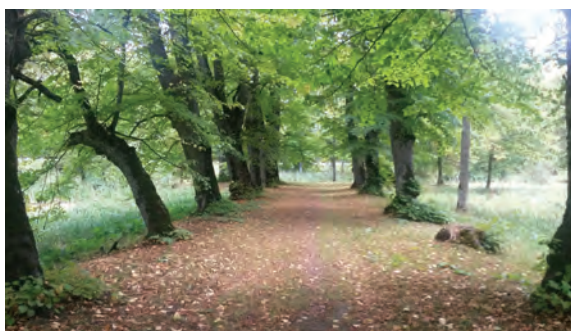


Figure 3. The historical tree alley on the longitudinal axis of palace Vircava (author’s photo, 2015).

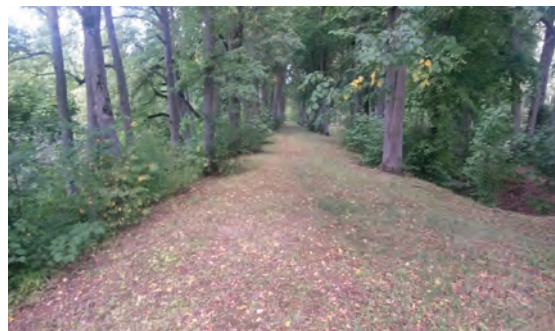


Figure 4. The alley with a rampart along the western side of the canal of parks Vircava (author’s photo, 2015).



Figure 5. The location of the old Vircava bridge and the road (author's photo, 2015).

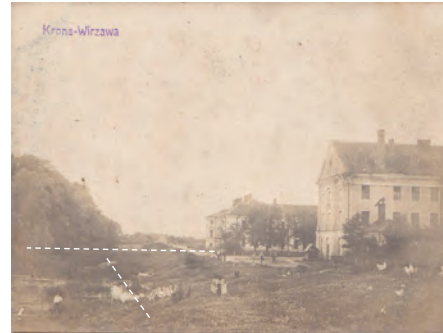


Figure 6. The intersection of two compositional axes: one axis – the Vircava palace and the park, the other axis – the riverbed (author's scheme).

summers forms extensive flood areas. Therefore, the river Svēte is characterized by huge floodplain meadows, but the building on its banks is distanced. Possibly, that is why the location of the old palace was chosen there, as the natural picturesqueness and the view from the right bank is really impressive. In spring, when the river turns into a huge lake at this place, tremendous amounts of migratory birds can be seen here.

Results and Discussions

By studying the spatial structure of the Vircava ensemble, it is concluded that its central axis had several depth plans, which formed an overall composition, counting from the northern part of the axis -

- The inner courtyard part of the palace;
- The palace and the left bank slope of the river, which is characterized by the Southern exposure to the sunlight;
- The picturesqueness of the river flow and shading on the right bank from the park trees, thus, creating a contrast game for both banks; the aspect should be taken into account that the right bank is lower and more inclined, thus emphasizing the greatness of the palace;
- The part of the alley, which is shady and mysterious, and during the summer sultriness pleasant, is located between the ponds. The plantations of tree rows bring a rhythmic dynamics to the park;
- A pond closing the alley, which is full of sunlight and forms a contrast with the shadowy alley. There is also the shift of the scale of the space from a closely-dense tree line parallelism and the tree canopy coverage – to a widely open and light, and exhilarating part of the park that should be mentioned.
- The northern part of the garden with a front square, where the paths of the two garden diagonals meet, coming from the corners of the perimetral rampart. The Baroque garden design is based on a strict regular path layout with plantings. On both sides

of the promenade in the southeastern edge of the park there were two salons (intersection points of the alley), where in one of which there was a round pond, visible even now. In the second garden salon, there was a hillock, which was destroyed, when a new highway was constructed. Initially, in the garden alleys (17th – 18th centuries) cherries, currants, gooseberries, birch trees were planted. All this, except the birch trees, had low enough height, so as the garden would be well seen from the left, the high bank of the river Vircava (Janelis, 2010).

The park around the perimeter was concluded by a ditch, the ground was piled inside of the park to create a rampart, dividing the park. Along the sides of the rampart, rows of trees were planted to form an alley with a walking path (Fig. 4). The Vircava neighborhood is typical of fertile clay soils that provide a good tree and shrub root development. In the park's western and northern sides, ramparts, the steep edges of the ditches, rows of tree plantations along the rampart and the walking path on the top of the rampart are well readable. On the opposite side of the ditch, on the west side of the park – the old highway and bridge (Fig. 5). It was the most direct way of communication between the Salgale and Vircava churches. From the old bridge site, a view opens along the river up to the floodplain meadows, in turn, from the bridge to the east - a view to the palace building ensemble and the river downstream. The sight line from the former bridge location marks the above mentioned compositional axis, which is parallel to the river. No matter how weird it would sound, but there has never been a bridge opposite the palace that would connect it to the park. The river Vircava close to the palace is as a unique parterre (Fig. 6). Today, the park's northwest part, like the entire park as a whole, has lost much of the historic tree plantings, the path network, the pond banks, creating a sports ground in this place. The southwestern part of the park is crossed by a road and a bridge. The road bed was built (1931) through the park's diagonal path location. Only



Figure 7. Sight line towards the location of the old road Svete (author's photo, 2012).



Figure 8. Stage bank of the Svēte river in front of the Svete palace. Taking away of the tree overgrowth in order to expose the distant sight lines (author's photo, 2012).

individual 100-years old larch trees still tell about the plantations of the historical park. In the northeastern side of the park, the pond sites are bogged up, but the park is overgrown, and it is hard to pass it through. The ditch surrounding the eastern part of the park and the rampart have survived, as well as the old road along the outer edge of the park. Between the river and the northern part of the park, there is a floodplain meadow, giving the possibility of distant sight lines from the left bank of the river to the northeastern part of the park. The Vircava palace is built close to the driveway that ran along the left bank slope of the river, creating approximately 5 m distancing between the slope and the building. Researching the riverbed of the river Vircava upstream and downstream of the palace, it is evident that the flow of the river in this historic place is expressly straight. In turn, the upstream and downstream at the palace is winded. Until today, the Vircava park retains its historical scale that allows to recover its compositional structure. In 1870, the Duke's summer residence was transferred to the military department (Lancmanis, 1991). The palace was burned down in 1919 during the attack of the army of Bermont, and only a fragment of the eastern passage of the palace has survived. There is an intention to initiate the restoration of the palace, but it will be partly prevented by the distribution of land ownership. The Baroque garden of the palace was begun to be built (but, maybe, renewed) around 1736, which by its magnitude is charged to small gardens (Janelis, 2010). There is no cartographic material of the 17th, 18th centuries about Svēte; therefore, it is not known where the palace was located, which was probably pulled down in the 18th century before the last construction of the palace. And, perhaps, it had a closer connection with the compositional longitudinal axis of the garden (Janelis, 2010). Like the ensemble of the Vircava palace, the Svēte palace and the park

also have two compositional axis. The central axis or the main sight line from the driveway to the place is formed by the landscape space. It is like the foreground – in the view from the historic road in the northern part of the palace, which consists of a broad floodplain. The depth plan is concluded by the palace, which is well readable in the K. J. R. Minckelde's engraving (the beginning of the 19th century, Fig. 9). This broad sight line is preserved even today. The second axis connects the park part with the palace's longitudinal facade in the part of the inner courtyard, where the driveway to the palace is located. The connection of the parts of the park has been formed in the eastern part of the palace with its regular planning. Like the park of the Vircava palace, the Svēte park was also delimited by a ditch around the perimeter and a rampart with tree plantation lines, creating walking paths. Compared to Vircava, the delimiting ditch of the Svēte park is shallower and the rampart is more inclined. In the southeastern part, this axis winds in the direction of the Vircava palace, over the so-called Ruļļu kalni (Reel hills), where even today the old road through the Lapu krogs (Lapu pub) is apparent. In the beginning of the 20th century, from the palace's garden side the road had a linden alley (Janelis, 2010). The Swethof palace was built from 1774 to 1775 (architect S. Jensen). In 1799 – 1800, barracks and stables were built in the manor, but in 1875 the palace was rebuilt, completely destroying the interiors and facades (Fig. 10). A rough idea of the palace's park is given by the survey of 1876, showing a square four boskets created by cruciform alleys. J. Bernoulli, who saw the palace in 1778, wrote: "Near this amusement palace, there is ... a great, with waters rich garden which the Duke ordered to look more beautiful with pleasing English-style formations" (Rundale palace museum, 1991).). There was also a stone pavilion with 6 columns and a small gallery above the roof in the park.



Figure 9. Svēte palace Gravure K.J.R. Mincelde
20th of the 19th century
(Rundale palace museum, 1991).



Figure 10. Places unclosed with walls of the
historical window of Svēte palace
(author's photo, 2004).

A serious transformation of the historical area of the Svēte palace dates back to the middle of the 19th century, when a new road between the palace and the park was built, as well as in the central part of the park horsemen cavalry barracks and stable buildings were built for the Imperial Army needs. The opulent conservatory was rebuilt, minimizing the window, door and floor height. This also applies to the central hall, which disappeared after the rebuilding. In the second part of the 19th century, solid long barracks were built in the courtyard side of the palace. The length of the perimetrally located building volumes is competing with the palace building. Their position is symmetrical against the palace and its courtyard, in the center creating the green area of a stretched form with a detour road. Following the above, it is apparent that the ensemble of the Svēte palace consists of three main compositional spaces – the floodplain grasslands in the northern part of the palace, the park in the southeastern part and the palace's courtyard in the west. Each of them has a different nature and scale of the construction. Here, another aspect should be mentioned. 1 km away from the park, the Vilce road is located in the southern direction, where in the far sight lines across the pasture, the park of the palace is readable, since the mentioned road is positioned in the terrain's elevation or the so-called neighborhood of the Ruļļu kalni with the level difference against the position of the palace - about 12 m. In the perception of the historical landscape space, it plays a big role. Over the centuries, with the transformation of the functional meaning of the buildings, the composition structure of the historical building is broken. The park's northern, eastern and southern side edge with the line of the historic trees. Part of the park has survived and may be renewed. In turn,

in the park's western edge, both the ditch and the tree plantation line have disappeared. The central part of the park has been transformed into a housing area. Industrial buildings with a wide hard coverage area and a residential building are situated here. The

military function of the palace remained until the 90s of the 20th century. As a result of the above conditions, the historic area of the park is away from the palace, so it is impossible to connect both cultural spaces. The unity of the palace and the park is recoverable only to the condition if the preserved historical road along the left bank of the river Svēte is renewed, thus bypassing the historic landscape space. These stable buildings (the second half of the 19th century) are positioned transversely to the longitudinal axis of the park, thus breaking the historical structure of the park. The rest of the industrial buildings (90s of the 20th century) have a standard metal frame that is easily dismantled and removed from the park (Fig. 11). The northern end of the palace is located very closely to the right bluff of the river. Here, the similarity is found both with the location of the Vircava palace near the river and the nature of the river bluff. It is a rare feature of the natural area, which can be found in rivers of the Zemgale Plain. For the area of the ensemble of the Svēte palace, 5 cultural room transformation periods of time are readable:

- The end of the 18th century – the time of the construction of the palace and the park (architect S. Jensen);
- The mid-19th century – rebuilding of the palace for military needs;
- 60s of the 20th century – high-rise residential building;
- 90s of the 20th century – establishment of industrial areas;
- The beginning of the 21st century – privatization of the northeastern part of the park and building of a mansion.

When studying the protection zones of the palace and the park's landscape, we can see that the eastern part of the park is surrounded by mansion building, but on the southern side there is a small agricultural area, which is possible to transform into a building area in a perspective. It would not be permissible, as then the sight line from the Vilce road would be hidden. The

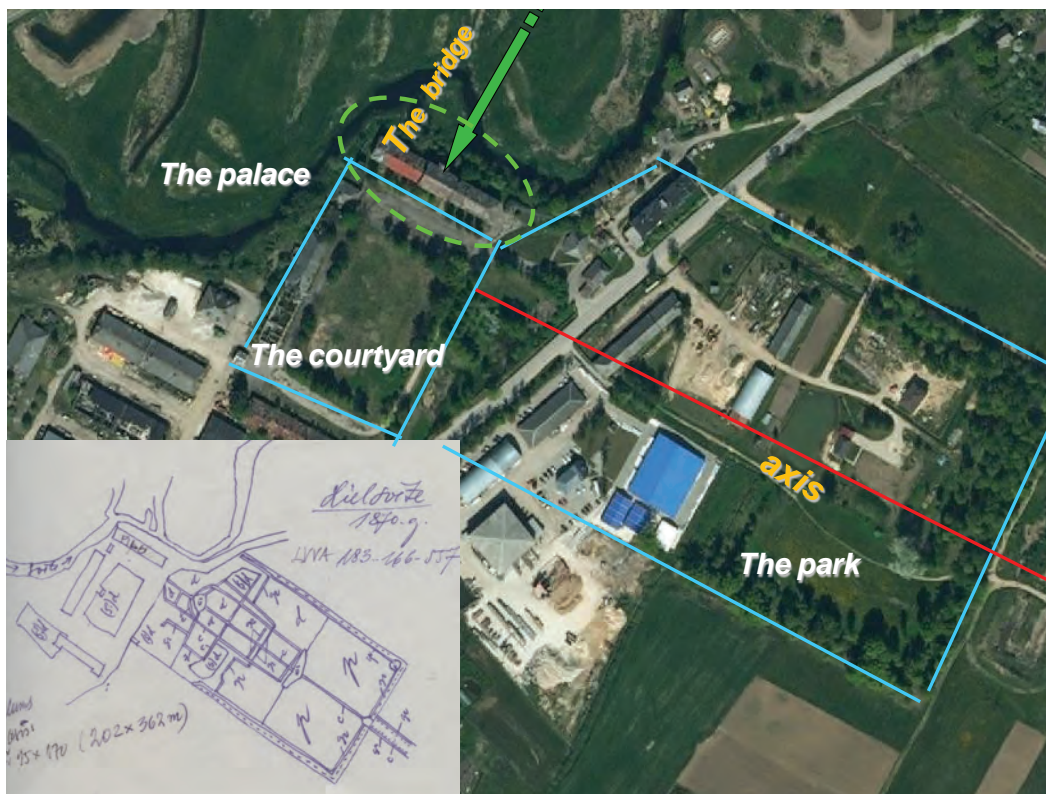


Figure 11. The comparison of the plan of the historic manor lands (1870) and today's situation (author's scheme, 2015).

current industrial area in the park is on lease, which is harmonized with the monument inspection. Thanks to the large areas of the floodplain of the river

Svēte, the landscape space of the northern part of the palace is not threatened by the load of the wave of the building intensity in Jelgava, which would block the silhouette of the palace. This is only possible on the right bank of the river, where the mansion building of the Svēte village tends to merge with the city's building areas. Like the ensemble of the Vircava palace, the ensemble of the Svēte palace consists of two compositions axes. The longitudinal axis of the park unites the longitudinal facade of the palace, touching the palace's entrance zone. The second axis is positioned perpendicularly, and within the inner courtyard of the palace. It forms the nature of the longitudinal axis of the courtyard. The courtyard has a form of a stretched rectangle, where the stables are positioned in the northern and western edges. In the middle of the courtyard, there is a wide, green area. Both axes do not unite the park and the part of the courtyard of the palace, as each of them is shifted. The northern end of the palace is located very closely to the right bluff of the river. Here the similarity is found both with the location of the Vircava palace near the river and the nature of the river bluff. It is a rare feature of the natural area, which can be found in

rivers of the Zemgale plain. The building of the Svēte palace was rebuilt several times, but not destroyed, and its restoration is possible. However, the park has vanished. In its place, there is a huge industrial zone. The old trees have only survived along the historic canal, so giving the opportunity to read in the park's volume in nature. The palace was rebuilt several times and adjusted to military purposes. This sight point should be a landscape protection area. In the spatial development plan, the construction is not permissible, as it would block the sight lines. The Svēte valley is readable here as from a unique platform. The difference in the terrain is most accurately readable from the old burial mound located in Ruļļu kalni (Reel hills).

Conclusions

Given the current situation of the landscape space of the Svēte and Vircava manors, it is noted by two different visual sides of quality.

1. The landscape space of the Swethof palace retains its historical expression in the northern part, which for centuries has been protected by the character of the natural site or the flood plain of the river Svēte, which fills with water in springs. It has allowed to retain the historical sight points to the palace, which are not obstructed by building construction

- and tree plantations. Consequently, the character of the historical engravings of K.J.R. Mincelde is readable in nature even today.
2. The southeastern part of the Swethof palace ensemble or the area of the historical park is almost gone as it is exposed to a strong industrial building construction. The sight points of the landscape space on the plain from the Vilce road are not interrupted by tree groups; therefore, the production area is readable in the silhouette.
 3. The character of the bank line, the volume of the old Vircava park, the park's ditch and pond system have remained in the landscape space of the Vircava manor ensemble. The palace is lost, but its location is not built over and in the sight points from the palace's historical location, the upstream and downstream of the river Vircava are well readable. New building volumes have not interrupted these sight angles. Naturally enough, this is not true for the road through the park built in the 30s of the 20th century.
 4. In the case of the reconstruction of the landscape space Vircava, it is possible to restore the historical bridge and the lost road bed that are now clearly readable in nature.
 5. The restoration of the Vircava manor park is realistic with the recovery of the historical sight points of the tree alleys, rows and groups of individual tree plantations, as well as cleaning up ditches and old ponds.
 6. The building and construction of the Vircava and Svēte manors once again prove that the expressive compositional solution of the two ensembles is based on the architect Jensen's masterly understanding of the expression of the existing natural site, connecting the architectural spatial form of the buildings to it. It should be mentioned that the natural site at the Svēte palace has an expressed form of plastic lines, where a regular garden form is brought in. In the compositional overall image of the landscape space, S. Jensen has introduced the turning angles of sight points, view line lengths, side wings and the depth cue, thus increasing the expressiveness of the overall landscape space.

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