

CIȘMIGIU GARDEN
AND THE *BEAUTIFICATION* OF CULTURE.
THE ROLE OF VEGETATION
IN THE COHERENCE
OF A LANDSCAPED ENSEMBLE

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Abstract: The second oldest public garden in Bucharest and a historical landmark of the city, the Cișmigiu Garden is gradually turning into a partially vegetal, partially mineral ruin. Although apparently protected by law and taken care of through architectural-landscaping restoration projects, it is visibly and, most likely, irreparably damaged. To this end, this paper proposes to approach Cișmigiu from a critical perspective regarding the way in which the garden has evolved and declined, starting from the second half of the 20th century, but mainly throughout the 21st century, investigating the causes that have led to this state of affairs, while also providing a vision of how this part of national heritage could be recovered and saved from its current condition. In this paper, we will discuss the main problems the garden has faced during its history, as well as the latest actions targeting its image, its architecture, but especially its vegetation.

Rezumat: A doua cea mai veche grădină publică din București, după grădina Kiseleff, Cișmigiu reprezintă atât unul dintre cele mai complexe ansambluri peisagistice de secol XIX din capitala României, cât și una dintre cele mai cunoscute grădini istorice din țară. Listată ca monument istoric (cod LMI: B-II-a-A-19655), grădina Cișmigiu se află în prezent într-o stare avansată de degradare ce include atât obiectele de artă și arhitectură, cât și componenta vegetală a grădinii. Cauzele acestor degradări sunt multiple, însă situația în care se află grădina în prezent persistă datorită, în mod special, următoarelor două probleme: (1) confuzia datorată faptului că atât ansamblul istoric reprezentat de grădina Cișmigiu, cât și componentele ale acestuia (ex: statui și monumente de arhitectură) sunt protejate prin lege și sunt incluse în Lista Monumentelor Istorice din România, înțelegându-se astfel că doar componentele construite ale Cișmigiuului reprezintă monumente cu valoare istorică și (2) datorită faptului că Ministerul Culturii nu a realizat deocamdată o procedură care să permită atestarea unor experți din rândul specialiștilor cu studii de specialitate în gestionarea vegetației din mediul urban (ex: peisagiști, arboricultori etc.). Această lipsă de interes cu privire la vegetație și lipsa înțelegerii importanței acesteia în imaginea unui ansamblu istoric de tip parc-grădină nu este caracteristică doar parcurilor și grădinilor din România, însă reprezintă o problemă cu atât mai delicată cu cât afectează puternic delicatele vestigii verzi ale trecutului nostru.

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Introduction

The second oldest public garden in Bucharest after the Kiseleff Garden, Cișmigiu has one of the most complex landscaping designs of the nineteenth century in the capital city of Romania and is one of the most famous historic gardens in the country. Listed as a historic national monument (LMI¹ code: B-II-a-A-19655), Cișmigiu is currently in an advanced state of degradation which applies to both its architectural and sculptural decorations and its vegetal components. The causes of this decay are numerous, but the situation persists due to mainly two issues: (1) the confusion induced by the fact that both the garden in its entirety and its parts (such as the statues or monuments) are protected by law and included in the List of Historical Monuments in Romania,² thus implying that only man-made artificial elements are valuable historic monuments and (2) the fact that the Ministry of Culture has not developed an attesting procedure in order to generate experts in interventions on monuments among the professionals that understand and work with plants within the urban environment (landscape architects, arboriculturalists, etc.). This disregard for the vegetation and the lack of understanding of its importance in generating the character of a landscape design ensemble is characteristic not only for historic gardens and parks in Romania, but it is all the more critical because it is threatening the delicate green vestiges of our past.

Thus, this paper will concentrate on some of the oldest and most spectacular vegetal structures specific to this public garden, investigating the causes of their current state. Following the historical study and based on the conclusions of these analyses, we propose some recommendations on how to intervene on these green elements while showing how the image of Cișmigiu would change irremediably, should we not pay due attention to the vegetal composition of this piece of national heritage in the following period. The article investigates the historical aspects of Cișmigiu Garden using both scientific literature and archival sources (bibliographic documentation specific to the field of landscape architecture), and a analysis of its landscape architecture by means of direct, *in situ* documentation.

¹ The List of Historical Monuments in Romania, <http://patrimoniu.gov.ro/monumente-istorice/lista-monumentelor-istorice>.

² Code LMI B-II-a-A-19655 for Cișmigiu Garden and code B-III-m-B-20032 to B-III-m-B-20050 for different elements of the garden.