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Urban Forestry & Urban Greening

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ufug



Original article

Garden culture as heritage: A pilot study of garden culture conservation based on Norwegian examples

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 September 2016
Received in revised form 6 March 2017
Accepted 6 March 2017
Available online xxx

Keywords:

Conservation
Garden culture
Heritage
Norwegian garden
Private domestic garden
Value

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness of garden culture conservation. In current garden conservation frameworks, garden owners' values of their heritage gardens are rarely considered. What do garden owners value the most? What does it mean to heritage conservation? What are the objectives of garden conservation when taking garden owners' views into consideration? Using data collected through qualitative interviews in Norway, we discover that garden owners most value the interaction with their garden and the feelings gained from the interaction. Also, we find the term 'cultural heritage' is confusing to the interviewees, since over half of them do not perceive their gardens as a cultural heritage. We compare the values of the interviewed Norwegian garden owners with those extracted from historic garden conservation charters and the values of gardens in a broader literature. The comparison shows that the values realised through the interaction between people and gardens are largely missing from current conservation approaches. Next, using theories from David E. Cooper, David Phillips and the Living Heritage Approach, we argue that the values embedded in the interaction between people and gardens are crucial in terms of fulfilling the goal of heritage conservation, and that garden owners' values should be considered in conservation guidelines. In the end, we present a new approach to conserving garden heritage: garden culture conservation. By replacing the term 'heritage' with 'culture', we avoid the confusion of the meaning of 'heritage' to the public and extend the area of conservation to include both historic and ordinary gardens, as well as both tangible and intangible dimensions. Garden culture conservation aims to reinforce the connection between people and gardens, thus keeping alive garden culture in society.

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1. Introduction

Gardens comprise one category of our cultural heritage. Historic gardens as excellent examples of human culture have long been the focus of garden conservation (ICOMOS, 1981). The first international guidelines on historic garden conservation, 'the Florence Charter', defines historic garden as 'an architectural and horticultural composition of interest to the public from the historical or artistic point of view' and a monument that 'must be preserved in accordance with the spirit of the Venice Charter' (ICOMOS, 1981). This means the focus of conservation is to preserve the physical fabric and cultural message of gardens of high historical or artistic value. Along with the development of heritage studies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the meaning of heritage has expanded. Garden heritage conservation in this stage also starts to

include more 'ordinary' gardens that represent the life of broader societies in all periods as well as the related intangible factors such as skills and craftsmanship.

Identifying values of a cultural heritage is the initial stage of heritage conservation, which solves why and what to conserve. There are several methods of evaluation in national and international guidelines related to historic gardens. For example, *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* identifies a historic environment as having evidential, historical, aesthetic or communal values (English Heritage, 2008), while the Burra Charter refers to a place of cultural significance having aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren) identifies the values of historic gardens as knowledge and source values, experience values and use values (Riksantikvaren, 2008). Except for social and communal values that are applicable to a limited group of people, all values above are the heritage values that represent a public interest in places, regardless of ownership (English Heritage, 2008).

When the focus of garden heritage is mostly on historic gardens, above evaluation systems work well. However, when the meaning

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2017.03.010>

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of heritage expands and begins to include gardens from all societies and all periods, such evaluation systems show their shortcomings, especially when dealing with private domestic gardens still in use. On the one hand, private domestic gardens are not only the carrier of cultural heritage but also private property. While heritage values reveal the public and professional interests towards such gardens, how their owners value their property is not yet included in current conservation frameworks. On the other hand, unlike historic gardens that are preserved in a relatively static manner and therefore can be recorded by registration or survey, private domestic gardens are places for living and thus change more often according to their users' demands. The registration system can catch a single moment but is incapable of recording the evolution of the gardens.

These facts make us question current garden conservation approaches: Have they taken into account all significant values of garden heritage? What is the best way to conserve garden heritage that would cover both historic and ordinary gardens, both tangible and intangible dimensions?

Here we present a pilot study that deals with these questions. We first study the opinions of a group of garden owners in Norway who own a domestic garden with heritage values. By interviewing the garden owners, we want to know how they value their gardens and how they think of their gardens as a cultural heritage. In the following, three questions are discussed: What are the differences among the values we collected from Norwegian garden owners, values of historic gardens and values of gardens in general? How important are garden owners' values to heritage conservation? What term better presents the objective of garden conservation without confusion? At the end, we introduce a new approach to conserving garden heritage: garden culture conservation.

2. Voice of Norwegian garden owners with 'unique gardens'

2.1. A brief review of Norwegian garden culture

Garden history in Norway goes back to medieval times, when monks first introduced gardens to monasteries on the west coast. At that time, a monasterial garden often had fruit trees and medicinal plants (Bruun, 2007). Gardening further developed and spread to the broader society after the 1750s by interested and educated priests and the bourgeoisie as a means of popular education and improvement, since well-educated landowners were willing to introduce new agriculture methods and species to farmers (Dietze, 2006). However, because Norway was ruled for a long time by Denmark and Sweden in the past, the number and quality of large manorial gardens and estates in Norway are significantly inferior to its Nordic neighbours. As a result, Norwegian garden history is rarely known by international readers.

Norwegians have had a growing interest in gardens in the past few decades. According to national statistics, 85% of the population age 16 and older had a garden or plot in 2015, an increase from 77% in 1997 (Statistics Norway, 2015). This ratio is almost equivalent to, and likely to exceed, that of the UK, a country with by far the highest number per capita of any nation in Europe—and gardening is the nation's most popular and widespread leisure activity (Gross and Lane, 2007; Hope, 2009). In Norway, a private garden is believed to be an important part of good living conditions. It is common especially for a Norwegian family with children to own a house with a garden (Eliesen, 2005; Statistics Norway, 2015).

The conservation of gardens in Norway began in the early 1920s, based on the book on historic gardens by the art historian C. W. Schnitler in Schnitler in 1916. In the 1960s, with funding from the Norwegian Agricultural Scientific Research Council, researchers at the Norwegian Agricultural University in Ås (later called Norwegian University of Life Sciences) carried out a registration that

included about four hundred important historic gardens. In 1978, the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage promulgated 'the Norwegian Cultural Heritage Act', enabling the protection of historic gardens. This was earlier than the first international charter on historic garden conservation, 'the Florence Charter' (1981). In the 1990s, a new programme called 'landsverneplan project' asked for all state-owned buildings and properties to undergo an evaluation, in which the most important sites were listed and management plans required. This list mainly included architecture and buildings, but for the first time addressed the relation between buildings and gardens (or parks) on site. The list covers both 'star monuments' and selective examples which represent ordinary lives from the broader society, such as farmer's houses and industrial buildings. Despite the attention to historic gardens starting early, there is not a registration system that specifically addresses gardens in Norway. It was not until 2006 that the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage, together with three regional councils, did a pilot study to register historic gardens and parks (Riksantikvaren, 2008), which aims to cover all kinds of gardens, especially the types that are not on the previous lists, like smaller private gardens. Following this pilot study, all counties are required to carry out a registration, which aims to provide an overview of gardens of high heritage value in the entire country, regardless of their formal status. The project is scheduled to be completed by 2018.

2.2. Methodology

In order to collect garden owners' value of heritage gardens, as well as their experience of creating and maintaining such gardens, we needed to find gardens that are both privately owned and have some special characteristics that have given them the potential to be 'heritage' gardens. Since the definition of heritage is subjective and arguable, we tried to avoid using the words 'heritage' and 'historic' when defining the gardens we are looking for. Instead, we asked people to recommend a 'unique garden'. To illustrate a unique garden, we provided a few examples, including those with a long history, a nice design, a good collection of plants, or a unique setting, but pointing out that a 'unique garden' is not limited to the above qualities.

By asking 'Do you know a garden which is unique in the area?', we first found several gardens through the recommendation of our colleagues and friends, and then discovered more gardens through the garden owners we interviewed. Altogether, we conducted twenty-one interviews between 2014 and 2016. Nineteen of them are in south-east Norway (Oslo and Akershus region), and two in mid-west Norway (Trondheim). Figs. 1–6 illustrate some of the gardens we visited. Fig. 7 is a diagram showing the types of all the gardens, from which we can see that almost all of them contain cultural significance in at least one aspect of history, aesthetics or botany.

We chose to use semi-structured qualitative interviews. All interviews were conducted in English. The interviewer first had a walk with the garden owner(s) and let them talk freely. After the tour in the garden, the interviewer and garden owner(s) sat down and had a conversation led by fifteen questions. We used the same set of questions in all interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to prepare for data analysis.

2.3. Interview results and analyses

The interview questions can be divided into three groups: facts related to creating and maintaining the garden, values of the garden, and perceptions of the garden as cultural heritage.

In the first group of questions, regarding the creation and maintenance of gardens, we wanted to know what influences the garden owner to create a unique garden. We therefore asked, 'How did

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