

University of Pécs Doctoral School of Music and Visual Arts

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# **Interpretation possibilities of a gardening project**

*The roundabout vineyard in Szekszárd*

DLA Dissertation

Theses

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In 2020, after the complex exam, it was definitively decided that the topic of my dissertation, which was only broadly understood at the time, would be a gardening project implemented in one of the Tolna county roundabouts on highway no. 6, in which I have been actively participating for the 12th year now. When I first started to develop the table of contents, I still thought that I would write about the general social embedding and assessment of Hungarian contemporary fine art in the light of the lessons learned from the project. As a matter of fact, I was primarily concerned with the question – also in connection with my own creative activity – of what is the social benefit of contemporary fine art, and whether there is such a thing at all. It made me wonder who, apart from art collectors, the limited audience of galleries, and the institutional system that serves them, can have a significant impact on public life and public taste, as well as the impact of contemporary visual arts. Are artists able to get involved in the discourses that affect and interest the majority society, or are they able to shape it? Are they able to influence people's thinking and taste in any direction with their works?

The research carried out for the development of individual chapters resulted in a slight change of direction, which significantly altered the focus of the dissertation over time. From the moment that I began to interpret the plantation as a garden during the preparation of the detailed presentation, completely new possibilities opened up in the description and evaluation of the project. On the other hand, the compulsion to try to justify the significance of the project by simply showing art historical and art theoretical connections was dissolved in me. From the new point of view, the question no longer arose as to what art critical arguments could be used to support the nature of the roundabout vineyard as a work of art, or where it belongs in the systematics of fine art genres. Rather, what and why people today consider outstanding performance. Do they perceive performance in products whose value and usefulness cannot be determined objectively? Is the creation considered work?

The roundabout plantation can be considered a "work" to the extent that it was not created by "natural" needs in the everyday sense, but by emotional and intellectual considerations that go beyond or even precede consumption needs. How irrational it is is proven by the fact that, despite the high maintenance costs and high labor requirements, the project does not generate a profit. The fact that the person performing the maintenance work is the same person who covers the related expenses also makes the business similar to self-serving, or at least irrational artistic creative activity. In the meantime, all aspects of the work in the area of the roundabout are determined by reasonable agricultural regulations. The production goal is, of course, only formally valid, since the wine grape is classified as an ornamental plant in this place, and the

plantation as a garden. Namely, as a community garden, since the roundabout is public space. This realization led me to examine different versions of community gardens that produce crops from the perspective of history. This is how crisis gardens, war and victory gardens, school gardens, as well as wildlife parks, urban recreation gardens and cemeteries related to these came into the scope of the dissertation.

In connection with the description and formal analysis of the project, the general characteristics that apply both to the plantation and to a well-defined group of fine art manifestations emerged. To a certain extent, the similarity also exists with regard to ordinary grapes, since they also have a characteristic structure and rhythm, and undoubtedly represent an aesthetic quality. That's why I thought that, for the sake of clarity, it would be worthwhile to review the moments in the history of the local grape and wine culture that had an impact on the development of the Szekszárd cultural landscape. I filtered out the connections relevant to the topic from oenological and local history studies. The evolution of landscape quality may have reached its peak around the 18th-19th centuries. The more or less organic development up to the 20th century was then interrupted several times, and especially as a result of the economic and political reorganization following the World War II, it suffered - along with the entire vertical of Hungarian environmental culture - serious, hard-to-repair damage. It is important to note that aesthetic development is not parallel to the evolution of productivity, profitability and general living standards. Even though, for example, in the middle of the 19th century, many more people lived from grapes and wine than today, this activity did not provide nearly the same standard of living for the farmers of that time as for the few who live from winemaking today.

The traditional method of cultivation of the circular plantation, i.e. the narrow spacing between trees and rows, the bare pruning, the support with stakes evokes authentic, in some elements, archaic forms of production. From the point of view of erosion protection, the grassed row spacing would still be practical on those steep hillsides whose cultivation was abandoned a long time ago due to economic considerations. In this sense, the plantation commemorates the past. It was once hard work to make a living from the small, hard-to-cultivate plantations, relying solely on human and animal power. Yet this venerable combination of physical and mental performance and experience gained through observation of nature may be the basis of local identity.

Unjudgmentally, perhaps no one would give up their current living conditions to pursue such an exhausting but pure and actually sustainable lifestyle. And yet we, concerned about the issues of biodiversity and climate change, would expect exactly this from societies that have a closer

relationship with nature, but according to our own terms live at a lower standard of living. We would like them not to harvest the remaining continuous forests, not to overfish the seas, not to turn habitats into lunar landscapes for valuable mineral resources. The key lies in limiting our rights to the harm of nature and creating a new balanced relationship, as suggested by Michel Serres in his book *The Natural Contract*.

As early as the development of European and American cities in the 19th century, ideas were formulated about settlement forms suitable for restoring and maintaining the harmonious relationship between man and nature. At the cross-section of urban and rural life, the residential building with a garden connection, as well as the suburbs and garden cities formed by such buildings, are suitable for alleviating most of the mental and social problems associated with living in a big city. In one of the chapters of the dissertation, I wrote about the development of these alternative forms of settlement with the aim of broadening the interpretation possibilities of the roundabout plantation through its lessons.

Despite the fact that I tried to expand the field of theoretical interpretation during the writing of the dissertation, the basis of my findings related to the roundabout project is the physical work performed there, the documentation, and the empirical experiences gained through the public survey. In this way, a pragmatic approach related to the nature of artistic creative activity (which I cannot deny) inevitably gains ground in the written work. The substantial achievement behind it takes shape in the facility itself, in which my own role is perhaps only psychologically significant. According to my hopes, by writing the dissertation I was able to add value that was only possible from my own perspective in this form.