

RE-DESIGNING A RURAL PARK SQUARE AND CHURCHYARD IN POĽNÝ KESOV, SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

The Rural Green Space Design Studio is a subject in the master cycle in the Landscape Architecture study programme that focuses on the renewal and/or re-design of open spaces in rural settlements. The subject applies project-based learning and since rural landscapes belong to our main research domains at the Institute of Landscape Architecture, it also applies research-led teaching and research through design teaching. In recent years, this design studio has always been taught on direct assignments by rural municipalities, which has led to good and mutually enriching cooperation and exchange between the university and local governments. The task in 2020/2021 was to develop a design concept on the main square of the municipality of Poľný Kesov located in south-western Slovakia and the churchyard, which is in close vicinity to the square. Both, the square and the churchyard consist mainly of open green spaces, which were missing a general design concept. Within the design studio, we mapped, analysed, and evaluated the current situation of these central open spaces and developed three different design solutions, which are presented and interpreted in more detail in this paper.

Key words: countryside, green infrastructure, landscape architecture, open space, rural landscape

Introduction

An important challenge of contemporary landscape architecture in the Slovak countryside is restoration of public and special green and open spaces and an overall enhancement of the local green infrastructure (Tóth, Štěpánková and Feriancová, 2016). According to Tóth (2020), green infrastructure can be considered an important strategic concept and approach in planning and designing (rural) landscapes. Kuczman (2018) has tested and verified a wide range of landscape architectural strategies on applied research and design of rural landscapes. According to Kuczman and Feriancová (2019), it is very important to integrate regional specificities in landscape architectural works when designing open spaces in the countryside. An important part of evaluating greenery in public open spaces of rural settlements, as well as in open agricultural landscapes (Tóth, Kuczman and Feriancová, 2016) is represented by the inventory and evaluation of woody plants (Bechera and Kuczman, 2020), including fruit trees (Biľušová et al., 2021). Rural landscapes and open spaces are highly important for sustainable tourism and recreation (Tóth et al., 2014; Biľušová, 2019). The design assignments and challenges in rural landscapes can be highly variable, from designing memorial landscapes (Halajová et al., 2016), through re-designing environmental education centres (Tóth et al., 2018) and transforming central zones (Čibík et al., 2020), up to restoring historical sites and waterfronts (Čibík et al., 2019). Design can be also effectively integrated with research into “research by design” or “case study research” that has a high potential for landscape architecture design research in the context of the Slovak countryside (Tóth, 2020; Čibík and Štěpánková, 2020). One of the most recent tasks in the Rural Green Space Design Studio at the Institute of Landscape Architecture of SUA Nitra was to develop a design concept for the park square and churchyard in the historical centre of the rural settlement Poľný Kesov, located in southwestern Slovakia, in the Nitra District and Nitra Region (Tóth et al., 2021). This paper will present some of the design approaches and outcomes.

Material and methods

The assignment within the Rural Green Space Design Studio was to develop a design concept for the two most important open spaces in the centre of the municipality of Poľný Kesov (southwestern Slovakia, Danube Lowland, Nitra District, Nitra Region) – 1) the main square, which has the character of a park square with a prevalence of green spaces and woody plants, and 2) the churchyard / church garden, which in terms of users is a special green space, while from the point of view of accessibility and ownership, it is a public open space. The method consisted of two main parts – 1) analyses (wider relations, historical a., urban structure a., functional and spatial a., transport a., landscape a., green space a.), and 2) design (students worked in three design groups, which developed three different

design concepts – “Sunny Centre”, “Connections”, and “Water as Value and Identity”) (Tóth et al., 2021).

Results

Outcomes of the design studio were published as a design booklet (Tóth et al., 2021), presented and submitted to the municipality as a basic document for decision-making and discussions on the future of open spaces. Even the design of the cover page of the book was one of the assignments of the students (see figure 1).

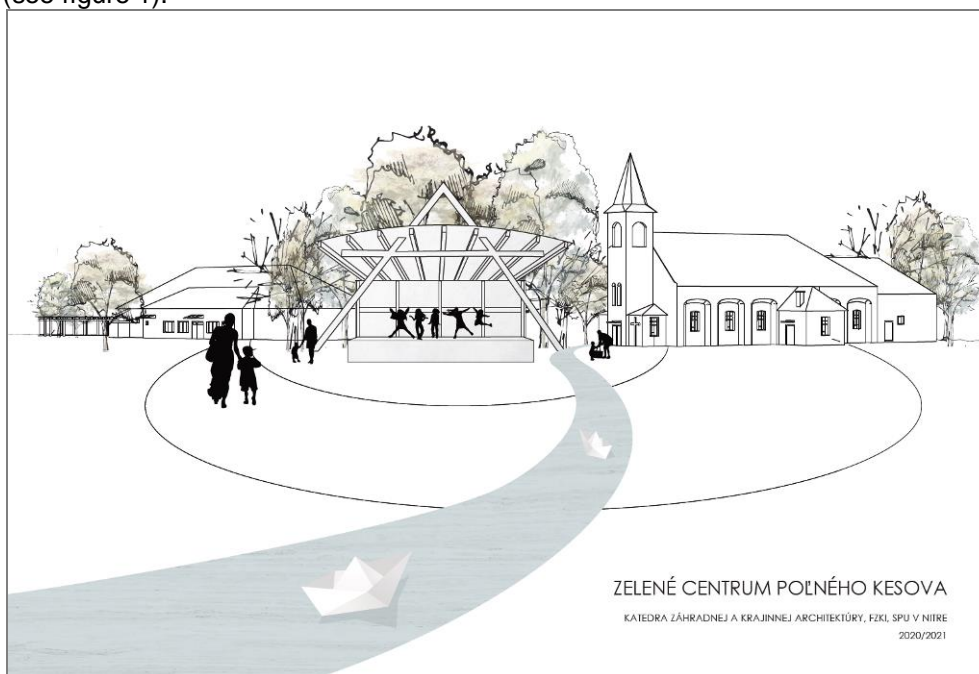


Fig. 1: The cover page of the design booklet designed by Andrea Zajacová is an abstract stylisation of the main landmarks of the village centre (Tóth et al., 2021, p. 1).

The main part of the design assignment was the park square, which is divided into two parts by the main road. This rural square is surrounded by the most important public buildings, including the mayor's office and the cultural centre. The eastern part of the park square serves especially cultural and gathering functions. There is the cultural centre, a small square and an open-air podium. The western part of the square is linked to the mayor's office and a new restaurant. In their design concept, students developed new pedestrian connections, a playground for children with dynamic terrain, an open-air gallery and an amphitheatre in front of the open-air podium (see figure 2).

The other open space, which was part of the design assignment, was the churchyard / church garden, which is owned by the municipality and is publicly accessible. The church used to be a distillery, which is reflected by its architecture. The main axis of the church continues towards the main road and ends in a baroque roadside cross from the 18th century made of sandstone. Students designed open-air Stations of the Cross in the churchyard and replaced some of the unsuitable woody plants. They designed perennial beds and new parking spaces. They suggest connecting the churchyard with the park square with an alley, see figure 3.



Fig. 2: One of the three design solutions developed for the park square by Anna Kulperová and Andrea Zajacová (Tóth et al., 2021, p. 64).

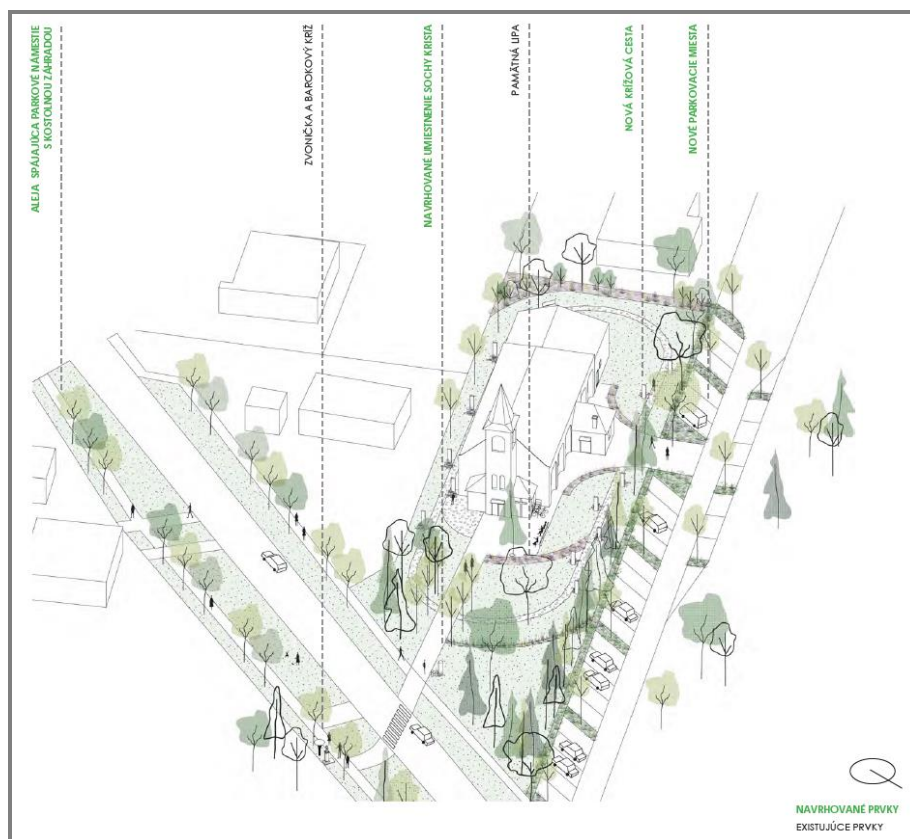


Fig. 3. Design of the churchyard / church garden by Anna Kulperová and Andrea Zajacová (Tóth et al., 2021, p. 71).

Discussion

All three design teams have integrated diverse elements of green infrastructure into their landscape architectural designs as suggested by Tóth, Štěpánková and Feriancová (2016). This project has been used as a case study in the long-term research by design teaching on rural open spaces and landscapes at the Institute of Landscape Architecture in Nitra (Tóth, 2020; Čibík and Štěpánková, 2020). The three design teams have managed to integrate regional specificities of the rural lowland landscape (Kuczman and Feriancová, 2019), while integrating also novel elements of open space design, inclusive design and nature-based solutions.

Conclusion

The presented landscape architectural project includes a set of analyses and three different design solutions for the park square and churchyard in the municipality of Poľný Kesov. Their results have been further elaborated into a design booklet (Tóth et al., 2021), which can be used by the municipality for enhancement of their central open spaces and develop the designs into more details and technical solutions. The high quality of the student design projects is reflected by the fact, that one of the student teams (presented in figures 2 and 3) succeeded in the Laurus 21 international competition, where they managed to get into the finale.

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Souhrn

Úkolem v roce 2020/2021 v ateliéru designu venkovské zeleně bylo vypracovat koncepci návrhu hlavního náměstí obce Poľný Kesov na jihozápadě Slovenska a kostelního dvora, který se nachází v těsné blízkosti náměstí. Náměstí i hřbitov tvoří převážně volné zelené plochy, kterým chyběla celková koncepce návrhu. V rámci designérského studia jsme zmapovali, analyzovali a vyhodnotili současný stav těchto centrálních otevřených prostranství a vypracovali tři různá návrhová řešení, která jsou v tomto článku podrobněji představena a interpretována.

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