

PARK OF CHOCOLATE: DESIGN IDEAS FOR A HISTORICAL VILLAGE PARK AT A CHOCOLATE FACTORY

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Abstract

Ivanka pri Nitre is a small rural municipality situated close to the regional capital city Nitra in western Slovakia. The core of its green infrastructure consists in a historical park located in the centre of the village. In recent years, a chocolate factory was built in the northeastern part of the park and the factory alongside with the municipality aim at redesigning the park to meet the needs of users and visitors. The Institute of Landscape Architecture integrated this assignment in the Public Green Space Design Studio to develop design ideas in a research-led teaching process, using research by design. The studio generated seven different design scenarios that vary in philosophy and design morphology - 'the Park of Happiness and Joy', 'The Path to Chocolate', 'Green Island', 'Colourful Park', 'Park of Senses', 'Park of Chocolate', and 'Park of Fantasy'. All scenarios work in different forms and ways with the theme of chocolate and aim at enhancing the open space quality through colours, plants, programme, equipment, and furniture. Representatives of both the municipality and the factory were involved in the design process. Now they are seeking opportunities and schemes to implement the outcomes of the process.

Keywords: design teaching, green infrastructure, landscape architecture, research by design, research-led teaching

Introduction

Parks are core components of local green infrastructure and important open spaces for everyday recreation and social interaction (Biľušová et al., 2020). They are hotspots of local biodiversity in built-up areas and thanks to a high concentration of trees and woody plants, they significantly improve microclimate and provide a wide range of ecosystem services to inhabitants and visitors (Biľušová et al., 2021; Bechera et al., 2022). Public parks in rural areas enhance the local biodiversity through the species composition of trees, which often includes non-traditional and rare species (Bakay, 2015; Hus et al., 2021). Re-designing and revitalising parks in rural municipalities is one of the main tasks of landscape architects (Čibík et al., 2020; Tóth, 2022; Tóth, 2023). This task includes the reconstruction, restoration, or redesign of historical parks and gardens, which have a high concentration in rural municipalities in Slovakia (Tóth and Feriancová, 2016; Van den Toorn et al., 2019). The municipality of the rural settlement Ivanka pri Nitre along with the Lyra company have commissioned the Institute of Landscape Architecture at the Slovak University of Agriculture to develop design ideas for the public park located in the village centre, where recently a new chocolate factory was built in its peripheral part. The assignment was elaborated in 2021-2022 within the Public Green Space Design Studio and results were processed in a booklet in 2023 (Tóth et al., 2023).

Material and methods

Ivanka pri Nitre is a small rural municipality situated close to the regional capital city Nitra in western Slovakia. The core of its green infrastructure consists in a historical park located in the centre of the village. In recent years, a chocolate factory was built in the northeastern part of the park and the factory alongside with the municipality aim at redesigning the park to meet the needs of users and visitors. The Institute of Landscape Architecture integrated this assignment in the Public Green Space Design Studio to develop design ideas in a research-led teaching process, using research by design as the main design-teaching method. The Institute of Landscape Architecture was commissioned to develop a landscape architectural study of the public park located in the centre of the municipality. The first design phase started with field works and mapping and continued with the analysis of wider spatial relations, historical development, landscape context, urban structure and transportation, functional and spatial characteristics, built structures and technical infrastructure, and vegetation. The main methodological approach applied was research by design, while developing seven possible scenarios. The process was communicated with representatives of the chocolate factory and the municipality and final outcomes were presented to the municipality in 2023.

The 3-hectare park was established in English landscape style, but the original composition of the park has not been preserved, see figure 1.



Fig. 1: The public park in the centre of the municipality – historical situation in the early 20th century (left) and situation before the construction of the chocolate factory in 2021-2022 (right) (source: ZB GIS Slovakia).

Building the new chocolate factory in 2021-2022 has significantly changed the character of the park, yet it has generated a new local identity and development potential. Therefore, authors of the design concepts have worked with the chocolate theme in their design ideas and inspirations, see figure 2.

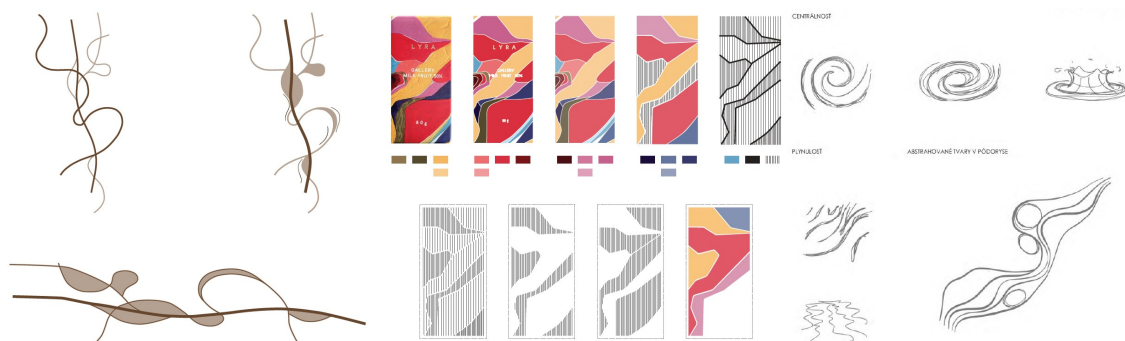


Fig. 2: Chocolate was the main inspiration or theme in most of the design concepts. Some authors were inspired by chocolate flow, its diverse forms or the branding style and colours (authors of sketches and diagrams: A.Kulperová, D.Smutniková, A.Varga, supervisor: A.Tóth, 2021-2023).

Results

The studio generated seven different design scenarios that vary in philosophy and design morphology - 'the Park of Happiness and Joy', 'The Path to Chocolate', 'Green Island', 'Colourful Park', 'Park of Senses', 'Park of Chocolate', and 'Park of Fantasy'. All scenarios work in different forms and ways with the theme of chocolate and aim at enhancing the open space quality through colours, plants, programme, equipment, and furniture. Representatives of both the municipality and the factory were involved in the design process. Now they are seeking opportunities and schemes to implement the outcomes of the process.



Fig. 5: The design concept Colourful Park enhances the park with a wide range of vivid colours inspired by the visual branding of the chocolate produced in the park (author: D.Smutniková, supervisor: A.Tóth, 2021-2023).

Discussion

Design studio as a method of project-based and research-led teaching has proved to be an efficient way to address current challenges of open spaces through design teaching and learning (Čakovská et al., 2019). The studio has generated seven different redesign scenarios (Tóth et al., 2023), which were presented to representatives of the municipal board. Thanks to the diversity of solutions, a vivid discussion was enabled, which shall lead to a prospective reconstruction of the park in the future. It has a great potential to become the most important public open green space in the village, providing a wide range of ecosystem services and benefits to inhabitants and visitors (Bihuňová et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Solutions generated within the design studio include a set of analyses and design ideas for the centrally situated park in the municipality of Ivanka pri Nitre. The outcomes of the design studio are currently being used as a basis and starting point for a long-term process of a comprehensive redesign, that has already started through an intensive exchange between the municipality and the chocolate factory. The municipality of Ivanka pri Nitre is currently seeking for opportunities to apply for fundings for the reconstruction of the park, with Lyra company as the main partner.

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Souhrn

Ivanka pri Nitre je malá venkovská obec ležící v blízkosti krajského města Nitra na západním Slovensku. Jádrem její zelené infrastruktury tvoří historický park, který se nachází v centru obce. V posledních letech byla v severovýchodní části parku vybudována továrna na čokoládu, která se spolu s obcí snaží park upravit tak, aby vyhovoval potřebám uživatelů a návštěvníků. Ústav krajinářské architektury začlenil tento úkol do Ateliéru navrhování veřejné zeleně, aby rozvíjel návrhové myšlenky v rámci výuky vedené výzkumem s využitím výzkumu prostřednictvím návrhu. V ateliéru vzniklo sedm různých scénářů návrhu, které se liší filozofií a morfologií návrhu - 'Park štěstí a radosti', 'Cesta k čokoládě', 'Zelený ostrov', 'Barevný park', 'Park smyslů', 'Park čokolády' a 'Park fantazie'. Všechny scénáře různými formami a způsoby pracují s tématem čokolády a jejich cílem je zvýšit kvalitu volného prostoru prostřednictvím barev, rostlin, programu, vybavení a mobiliáře. Do procesu navrhování byli zapojeni zástupci obce i továrny. Nyní hledají možnosti a schémata, jak výstupy procesu realizovat.

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