

RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HISTORICAL PARKS AND GARDENS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Lucia (L.H.) Albers, Bert (N.C.M.) Maes

GOVERNMENT POLICY AND INDEPENDENT ESTATE OWNERS

The policy on historical parks and estates in the Netherlands takes the matching between park and buildings for a starting point. In 1997 the so-called Belvedere project has been started, meaning an integrated Government policy for cultural history and country planning. Regrettably the problems concerning the restoration of these parks is not dealt with in detail. On a practical level a whole set of regulations deal with parks and gardens only, or with only the buildings. A number of very valuable parks and estates are protected by their inclusion in the governmental monument list. Several more recent parks, dating from the 1850–1940 period have been recently added to this list. Such parks are entitled to grants in case of restoration.

The about 300 independent estate owners are united in an association named the Stichting tot Behoud van Historische Buitenplaatsen (Association for Historic Estate Conservation). This association gives advice, in both the culture history and ecology field.

A considerable number of parks and estates are owned by provincial or national nature conservation organisations and the Dutch Forestry Commission. In general these organisations are taking the values of cultural history and ecology into account.

Gardens, parks and country estates are all deliberately established sites of greenery. Therefore the values of culture history, aesthetic grounds and recreational possibilities usually prevail. This, however, does not diminish the spontaneous development of natural possibilities.

The ecological value or natural value is determined by the presence of spontaneously established plant and animal species. In case of parks and gardens the natural value is only accessory and depends entirely on the possibilities created by the layout and management. Room for natural development is also largely influenced by the natural conditions: the subsoil, hydrology and relief and their changes over the years, in many instances under human influence. A number of important issues will be discussed below in greater detail. Many parks

and estates have been laid out in transition situations: from river valleys to hill country and on transitions from polders and dunes and so on. This has caused many natural differences in the environment suitable for the occurrence of particular indigenous plants and animal species. Since the Netherlands as a whole are intensely cultivated these old parks have become the last refuges for some organisms. Combinations of old trees, ponds and meadows are important conditions for numerous bird, bat and dragonfly species, as well as other insects.

HISTORICAL PARKS OF THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands there are over 1100 historical country houses with their gardens and parks, and many historical cityparks and graveyards as well.

The parks of the Dutch historical houses are often quite small, unlike the ones in the UK, France, Germany or Estonia. However, they too need to be cared for and often restored as well. For it has been forgotten for about 40 years that they are works of architecture and art and not merely parks for pleasure, playing, production and the preservation of nature.

So far, about 450 of these historical parks are under the protection of the law for historical monuments. These are the most important ones. The others might be of historical interest as well. There are still unknown gardens to be discovered, some with the importance of a Rembrandt painting. For example, there are the little known princely gardens that once stood around Buren Castle.

The central government has created an organisation that helps private owners in the upkeep of their properties. For about 20 years there has been quite a lot of debate in the Netherlands about how best to restore historical parks and gardens.

TO RESTORE OR NOT RESTORE

The restoration of a garden or park cannot be undertaken within fixed rules. However, some general principles can be formulated. To my knowledge this has not been done before. In this article I will try to make a start. Examples are taken both from Dutch gardens and gardens from around the world.

The first question to be asked is whether it is worthwhile to restore a particular garden. Is the garden so unique that it is defensible to spend so much money on it? Ultimately every garden is unique. How many more are there in the same style? How much money is involved in the restoration and what are the

upkeep costs? How many visitors will it attract? One can think of many more criteria to take into consideration.

One should make a multicriteria decision analysis to decide which parks are to be preserved in the first place.

Once it has been decided that the garden is to be saved, restored or maintained, the question arises how best to do it.

According to the dictionary, to restore means "to repair, rebuild, renew, to bring back to its former place position, something which has faded, disappeared, been lost, etc.". However, the concept is not as simple as the dictionary suggests. Each period has its own specific concept of restoration. Conservation, repair, renovation and reconstruction are always part of the concept of restoration. Different emphases prevail in different time periods. In the following we discuss conservation, repair, renovation and reconstruction together with their application in gardens and parks.

WHAT RESTORATION IS NOT

Restoration is not a static process, but a dynamic one. The process of growth and decline is a continuing one. Attending this process and taking care that as many beauty spots as possible remain available is a labour requiring continuing attention, imagination and care. Restoration cannot be organised by a fixed set of rules because every park is different. A general recipe for restoration cannot be prescribed, but a number of principles may be used when restoring historical parks, gardens and graveyards. In the main, restoration does not mean the exact reconstruction of relics of the past. The discussion about what period of the past to select is a meaningless one. The historical data that indicate how to conserve or to restore are to be found in the terrain.

Historical elements can be anything over 50 years old. They might be eligible for protection under the law (*Monumentenwet*). Knowledge of the relative importance of components and selection of what is designed specifically and what has arisen spontaneously is essential. This requires historical research that characterises the different elements in the terrain according to their period of inception or rejuvenation. When studying paths, trees, borders and built-up elements one can ask oneself when they were built and whether or not they were part of the original design. Drawing maps of present or disappeared elements per period is difficult but useful. In this way one can try to construct an image of the actual situation in the past and how it changed over the course of time. Only when one knows the terrain in all its details and knows the period and the reason for the design of all the elements is it possible to determine what has entered the

design unintentionally. For example, trees might have been added by nature or might have been planted intentionally but according to other criteria than those of park-design, such as shooting or forestry.

NOT EVERY HISTORICAL GARDEN IS A REMBRANDT

Next one can investigate the relative importance of the park to be restored. Not every garden was so spectacular or unique that it has to be restored. The relative importance of the garden as compared to other gardens in Dutch garden history and to gardens in other countries determines the primary significance of the garden. Is the park important in the light of garden history? Will it function as a museum? Will it be an example of a historical style or is it permitted to add modern features? Has the park already functioned for a long time as a recreational park or is it only a place of natural interest, but with a history?

PINCIPLES OF RESTORATION

1. Restoration should proceed with as little interference and as much maintenance as possible. The most beautiful parks are those that have grown in a balanced way, have been permanently well kept and have not undergone periods of severe decay. The Schonbrunn Park in Vienna is a good example. The old *bosketten* and the high hedgerows, each consisting of many different sorts of trees, give the impression of having been continually cut while holes have been filled with new trees to complete the hedges. The continuity of history is palpably present. Young trees have been planted between old lime trees. The young trees help in conserving the old forms. Thanks to the old trees, the emotional value remains present. Hollow trees with birds' nests, bats, insects and mushrooms give character to a park. Continuing maintenance helps prevent the disappearance of whole structures that otherwise would have to be replaced as a unit.

2. It follows immediately from this basic principle that all present historical elements have to be maintained. This implies, for example, that old weak trees, which are an essential visual element, should only be replaced by young trees of the same kind, and only when the old trees constitute an acute danger. It is best that the original trees are rejuvenated over time, leading to a varied age structure. A varied age structure containing a relatively large number of old trees makes many discoveries possible and leads to a more intense experience of nature. On the one hand, the old trees represent history, the presence of the ages. The young

trees, on the other hand, take care of the continuity of the historical picture. This continuity contributes to the enjoyment of the feeling of being part of a long historical process.

When discussing restoration projects the matter of feeling is often not taken into account. However, the characteristics that make people attached to an old spot such as the quiet that emanates from such an environment contrasts sharply with overthrowing everything in order to construct a restoration of greater fidelity. This approach constitutes a reconstruction rather than a restoration.

3. If maintenance is impossible, restoration becomes a necessity. If the existence of valuable elements prevents the restoration of other elements one has to postpone this provisionally. An example is the situation in Frankendael, a park in the vicinity of Amsterdam.

If one were to rebuild the historical park one would have to eliminate beautiful old trees dating from a later period. A great number of the parks' trees would have to be destroyed and the grounds would only have a park function again for the next generation of visitors.

Reproducing important structures or the main structure that was lost is a subject that is forever returning. One generally agrees that details would be of minor importance. Often a modern solution is added, such as in Herrenhausen in Hannover. Behind the palace one finds a large old garden that fails to convey a feeling of being in the presence of history. New water gardens have been added and beautiful rows of trimmed lime trees have been planted according to modern ideas. Whilst beautiful, these features are misplaced in this location because the layman thinks that this is the way it was done in the past. Intermingling old and new design ideas can lead to confusion when it is not evident what is old and what is new. Many parks in the USA can serve as an example of how to avoid this trap. Unfortunately the garden of the Dumbarton Oaks Institute, which possesses the largest garden-history library, is not one of them. It is being restored but at the same time maintained according to modern ideas.

The management of Monticello at Charlottesville, Virginia, the park of President Jefferson is based on historical principles to a much larger extent. The aim here is to show how park management was done at around 1800. Although the slaves are long gone, the explanation of what kind of work they performed and how they lived is not left out. In President Jefferson's time, more than 250 different kinds of vegetables and herbs were grown at Monticello. An attempt has been made to recover the historical varieties in the collection grown there today.

In Sweden there is a similar ideal, but I have never seen this. My appreciation for the American way of managing parks is not prompted by my preference for

historical gardens, because the most beautiful modern garden I have ever seen is Inisfree Gardens at Millbrook, New York State. Initially this large park around a lake was designed around 1930 by the proprietors Waler and Marion Beek. After 1960 the park was doubled in size by Lester Collins, Dean of Harvard University School of Landscape Architecture. Only after searching for data on the park did I realize that it was designed by a famous architect and that he considered this park to be his magnum opus.

STARTING THE RECOVERY OF LOST STRUCTURES

Most often such a recovery project is a combination of restoration and reconstruction. As an example we point to the Ruiterberg near Doorn, where the work stands halfway between reiteration and reconstruction.

4. Reconstructing the old situation is only a responsible solution when the preceding solutions prove to be impracticable. Reconstruction is also permitted if an interesting garden was situated there in the past of which now little remains visible. The reconstruction of two paths at Beeckestein, perhaps even designing them from scratch, is an example of this. However, this is not a valid argument to rebuild a garden wall from around 1920, which would prevent the laying down of the historical garden of Clingendael (The Hague) from around 1690.

5. Renovation. If rebuilding the old situation is not possible any more, or not feasible because the reconstructed element has no function any more or cannot be well maintained, renovation is a defensible alternative. Adding values is permissible, leaving out values is only allowed if important considerations point in this direction.

Creating a new project is also to be recommended, when a new design or a new addition is desirable. When deciding on renovation one will often have considered reconstruction, but considered this to be undesirable because it was too expensive, not feasible, not functional or not maintainable.

Listing the above principles in the correct sequence:

1. Keeping up and maintaining historical elements;
2. Minimal interference, maintenance in good time;
3. First consider the possibilities of restoration, only then reconstruction;
4. Reconstruction precedes renewal with a modern/new elements;
5. Renovation (a new design) only when no other solution is feasible.

CRITERIA UNDELYING THE CHOISES

The above principles are starting points on the basis of which a final decision regarding restoration can be formulated.

The purpose of the object that has to be restored (whether cultural, natural, recreational or a combination of these with varying emphases) has a great influence on the method of restoration. In addition, it is necessary to consider whether the quality of the existing function, the functionality of the entire unit or parts thereof and the costs of building and maintenance play an important role. Lastly, it is important to consider the vulnerability of the object to be restored, and whether it will have any social management and supervision.

Of primary importance then is formulating a plan that starts from the requirements and possibilities of the historical park. Next one tries to meet the wishes and demands of the users. The demands of the users sometimes seem to be contradictory, but one has to try to put the historical content of the terrain first and to adapt the recreative activities to the existing historical aspects.

LANES

Using lanes as an example we can list these principles once again. Protecting historical elements: Existing lanes must always be left intact as much as possible.

Restoration: It might be a good procedure not to replace complete lanes but only parts of the lanes when old trees die. The lanes of oak and beech trees at the front end of Het Loo Palace are a good example of how to plant young trees in old lanes.

Reconstruction: Laying out new lanes seems to be evident. Nevertheless it is not always possible to follow this principle. The presence of old trees might make planting new young trees impossible.

Renovation: Sometimes one wants to plant a new lane because one desires more trees, or because it is necessary to diminish the scale or to create more possibilities for walking.

CONCLUSION

When restoring a historical park it is usually sensible to interfere as little as possible. Eliminating valuable elements is only permitted on the basis of very compelling reasons.

Frame 1

Often ditches and canals that were originally straight were given a winding shape. In addition, a winding path was often laid over the old straight one.

Frame 2

People often planted yews (*Taxus*) in states for shooting purposes, because pheasants and other birds love to pass the night in them. Screens of willows were often planted along the water's edge to offer a quiet environment for the birds and to hide the hunter or angler from view. Also one sometimes planted rows of willow trees in meadows, so that the space behind it becomes invisible which does not improve on the rural scenery.

Frame 3

In the park of the Rosendael castle the *Bedriegertjes*—waterspouts that can wet unsuspecting visitors—are still to be found, as well as a chainbridge over the water as elements for play. Formerly a Swiss bridge over a deep ravine existed. The ravine still exists but the corresponding Swiss landscape with pine trees and small winding paths has disappeared. Albers Adviezen did propose a plan in which pine trees and other trees are situated such that walking over the paths again produces surprise effects.

Frame 4

Prince Frederik Hendrik ordered the laying out of a set of lanes in Buren in 1630. These lanes, originally meant for shooting parties, were originally planted with deciduous trees. In the 19th century they were replaced by apple and nut trees. These are still present in the main and are cared for and replaced by the municipality of Buren. The original deciduous trees do not play a role any more, because the fruit trees have in the meantime become historical in the conception of the inhabitants and are greatly appreciated. From an ecological point of view it is much better to maintain the old trees as long as possible.

REFERENCES

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Picture 1. Rosendaal: Geometric ponds changed to make the English landscape style, 19th century map. Foto L. Albers.



Picture 2. Rosenburg: This parterre is an example for the one to be reconstructed