

## УРБАНІСТИКА

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### VERNACULAR GARDEN AS URBAN LANDSCAPE ELEMENT (COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KYIV AND PREŠOV CASES)

**Background.** The aim of the paper is to compare the vernacular gardening within urban landscapes in Ukraine and Slovakia through its ability to enhance resident engagement and reduce levels of indifference and alienation.

**Methods.** I apply Lehtinen's idea of urban aesthetics as a compromise, highlighting the significance of engaging with city imperfections to achieve urban harmony, as well as Jackson and von Bonsdorff offer contrasting perspectives on the landscape concept and urban environment, respectively. Cureton introduces the concept of "vernacular landscape," while Macauley emphasizes the embodied experience of walking in the city. Fenner's insights on gardens enrich the discussion by highlighting their historical resonance and aesthetic allure. Additionally, the text explores the interdisciplinary approach to analyzing vernacular gardens, drawing on concepts from Foucault and Heidegger to provide a comprehensive understanding of their socio-cultural and aesthetic significance within urban landscapes.

**Results.** Vernacular gardens in Kyiv's Rusanivka microdistrict play significant role in intertwining private and public spaces through the lens of care. Amidst the backdrop of war in Ukraine, these gardens symbolize resilience and resistance. Contrasting vernacular gardening practices in Kyiv and Prešov, it highlights their distinct characteristics reflective of their urban landscapes, with Kyiv gardens representing individual initiatives against Soviet traditions and Prešov gardens seamlessly integrating into the urban fabric with a focus on post-Socialist architecture and individual creativity.

**Conclusions.** The study of vernacular elements of the urban landscape, in particular – the vernacular garden and the practice of vernacular gardening, implemented through a combination of different approaches and disciplines: urban, negative and phenomenological aesthetics, cultural anthropology and cultural studies around the landscape, vernacular landscape and cityscape, as well as practical interview methods and walking the combination of different approaches made it possible to define a vernacular garden precisely as a place created by a creative subject within the urban landscape. It acquires the status of a heterotopia and a place that allows you to get involved in the urban environment, identify with it and feel its atmosphere.

**Keywords:** atmosphere, city, environment, garden, urban landscape, vernacular.

#### Background

This text is based on the research I conducted during my internship at the Institute of Aesthetics and Art Culture of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Prešov. As part of it, I conducted a workshop in which my task was to investigate the elements of vernacular design and art (particularly garden beds and other gardening elements) in the city of Prešov from the standpoint of aesthetics. The goal of the workshop was to explore, together with colleagues and students, the aesthetic potential of city walking as a method, as well as to apply Heidegger's ideas for the aesthetic analysis of city yards and their creative elements.

The workshop included a preparatory stage, consisting of both theoretical and methodological parts, and a practical one, where I spent a considerable amount of time walking around the city and entering courtyards to gain an experience of city living. This experience was specific: despite being a guest in this city, I focused on walking through the courtyards and observing their decoration, which revealed much about the lives of local residents.

The main purpose of this text is to present the results of this practice and to conduct a comparative analysis of specific spaces in Ukrainian and Slovak cities. Ultimately, I aim to combine the aesthetic dimension of the analysis with the ethical one. I believe that an aesthetic analysis of space can increase residents' engagement (as per Arnold Berleant's term) and reduce indifference and alienation. In understanding modern Ukrainian cities, I perform an aesthetic analysis of vernacular creative practices in city courtyards, particularly gardening, through the concepts of care and resilience (or its stronger mode – resistance).

The comparative analysis is based on defining key concepts within urban aesthetics and urban cultural

studies: landscape, environment, and place. Additionally, it involves determining the place of the vernacular garden as a locus and vernacular gardening as a practice within the vision of the city as a landscape—a complex of human practices within a city and the possibilities of its aesthetic evaluation. Accordingly, the tasks of this article are to highlight and describe key concepts that distinguish and correlate the concepts of landscape, environment, and place in urban space; to determine the place and status of the vernacular garden and horticulture in the urban space within this context; and to conduct a comparative analysis of vernacular gardens in Ukraine and Slovakia, based on case studies of gardens in Kyiv and Prešov.

#### Methods

Today, urban aesthetics faces numerous challenges, including the complexities of implementing "field research" in city spaces. The practice of city strolling, incorporating concepts like landscape, body, and place, as discussed by David Macauley, serves as a foundational framework for such studies. Additionally, the role of "the flâneur" (Ch. Baudelaire, W. Benjamin) in aesthetic analysis is pivotal.

In my research, I draw upon Sanna Lentinen's concept of Urban aesthetics "as compromise," which delves into macro- and micro-level perceptions of the city. Lentinen highlights the importance of acknowledging urban imperfections and explores strategies of interaction such as alienation, compromise, and the cultivation of sensibility and empathy to achieve "urban harmony." This thesis finds relevance in analyzing cities during periods of martial law, where societal consolidation amid prolonged conflict becomes crucial. The empathetic experience of urban space can have therapeutic effects for both residents and internally displaced persons affected by hostilities.

Lentinen distinguishes between two levels of aesthetic city studies: the macro layer and the micro one. The macro level encompasses how the city is represented, including its most recognizable features. This level often reflects a distanced, landscape-oriented approach to urban aesthetics, capturing the city's commercial image, historical landmarks, and central streets from a bird's eye view.

Instead, the micro-level concerns the everyday experience of a city dweller—it "zooms directly into the multisensory, bodily engaged modes of experiencing urban environments" (Ibid., p. 366). Speaking about the micro-level, Lehtinen refers not only to the urban landscape but also to the environment, thereby emphasizing the more subjective perception of the city by its inhabitants. Such perception is full of "impressions," which are "non-linear, accidental, and full of glitches." It can only be formed through the long-term and dynamic experience of the city, specifically through walking through it, which contributes to the development of a complex and multilayered experience and includes both positive and negative impressions (Ibid., p. 368). A vernacular, i.e., a amateur garden, appears as one of the elements of the city's diverse environment, which contributes to the standard-level perception of the city.

According to Lehtinen, the achievement of urban harmony is facilitated by the experience of being in the city on a micro-level, because such immersion in the urban environment allows one to experience the city's dynamics and diversity. The question lies in Lehtinen's use of the concepts of "landscape" in relation to the external view of the city as a picture and "environment" in relation to the complex experience of being in and walking around the city every day. Currently, there are numerous studies on the landscape that go beyond the traditional understanding of this concept, which was often identified with the aesthetic concept "picturesque" and marked the view of the landscape as an object of aesthetic evaluation. Instead, within the realm of environmental aesthetics, the environment is contrasted with the landscape, as it negates the Kantian opposition of the subject and the perceived object distant from it: the environment assumes that the subject is involved in the object and even becomes its integrated part, and therefore cannot oppose itself to it (Berleant, 2011).

One of the pioneers of an expanded and detailed cultural view of the landscape concept was J.B. Jackson, who problematized it as follows: "Environmental designers, I have noticed, avoid the word landscape and prefer land or terrain or environment or even space when they have a specific site in mind. Landscape is used suggesting an aesthetic quality of the wider countryside" (Jackson, 1984, pp. 3-4). Going beyond the modern-aesthetic understanding of landscape, Jackson interprets it in a cultural and historical way, defining it as "a concrete, three-dimensional shared reality" and "a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence" (Ibid., pp. 5, 8). He unfolds the understanding of the landscape not only in the spatial but also in the temporal dimension, taking into account history as a concept itself and the historical cultural context, which allows us to understand landscape as a way of seeing the world, society, and oneself within these structures. A separate place is occupied by agricultural activity, which shapes the boundaries and content of a particular landscape. Accordingly, the role of a vernacular gardener, who, on her own individual initiative, transforms the urban landscape, is expressive and indicative for understanding the city and its socio-cultural value.

Pauline von Bonsdorff examines the urban environment through the prism of the concept of "affordance" from the psychologist and forerunners of the phenomenology of J.J. Gibson. Affordance itself, according to von Bonsdorff, is one of the key characteristics of the environment, along with Enticement ("environmental promise"), Generosity ("mirroring the care of inhabitants for their environment"), and Recognisability ("indicating a perceived quality of how an environment is inhabited") (von Bonsdorff, 2007, pp. 72-74). With these characteristics, the concept of the environment in Bonsdorff's application is tangential to Jackson's landscape. However, the difference lies in that the environment removes the subjective perception of what is designated as an urban landscape, emphasizing the ability to exist, live, move, and be involved in a particular landscape ("habituality").

The modern researcher Paul Cureton singles out the concept of "vernacular landscape," which can be studied through the "everyday' spatial practices of inhabitants." This is defined as time-based observations of sequences and movements in a landscape and the design and sequencing of the fieldwork evidence into meaningful urban data" (Cureton, 2014, p. 13). According to the researcher, the key elements of the vernacular landscape are practices and places that should be explored through the progressive practice of moving around the city and making a map of such elements. In particular, "unstructured parks" can be singled out as places created by amateur gardeners.

David Macauley analyzes the history and modern view of the practice of flâneurism and the experience of moving through the spaces of the modern city, based on the relationship between the concepts of "landscape," "body," and "place." The practice of walking through the city is indicative because it implies a type of experience that inscribes the subject (due to the dynamics of their body) in the city environment. Thus, we can note that the vernacular garden seen by the pedestrian is a place inscribed in the urban landscape that opens up to the subject through the experience of bodily involvement. It is not only about the practice of walking: if I see a vernacular garden inscribed in the urban landscape, I wonder, stop, start looking at the plants, smell the flowers, taste the fruit and berries, communicate with the gardener, etc. Thus, I begin to be involved in the place multisensory and even socially, thereby fitting it into the urban landscape (exactly from Jackson's meaning). As Macauley notes, "Without availing ourselves of regular walking, places are bypassed and effaced. In the process, we are courting topoclasm, place-alienation, and the creation of non-places: sites without life" (Macauley, 2007, p. 104). Therefore, it is precisely the discovery of places within the urban landscape with which the subject can form a socio-cultural and aesthetic-value connection that turns it into an environment in which there is a desire to be and live. The vernacular garden is one such place.

In this context, it is also appropriate to analyze the concept of urban atmosphere as proposed by researchers Adam Andrzejewski and Mateusz Salwa, who define it as "a relational feature of a site, that is, a feature that is ascribed to it based on its empirically accessible objective characteristics and comes into being (appears) only when people sensorially experience the site" (Andrzejewski & Salwa, 2020). Here, the term "site" refers to a place lacking the permanent attachment of the subject, a place not intended for staying or observation but potentially for contemplation (sightseeing). Nonetheless, the concept of atmosphere, as a specific characteristic of a place formed

only through the sensory experiences of the engaged subject, is pivotal in understanding the significance of a place within an urban (vernacular) landscape. A vernacular garden is one such place that acquires its atmosphere through the evident engagement of the gardener, a local resident, a passerby, etc.

The subsequent task involves determining the conceptual and methodological boundaries for characterizing and defining the vernacular garden as an element of the urban landscape. It is worthwhile to commence with the understanding of the garden as a form of art. In contemporary aesthetic discourse, this issue is elucidated in the writings of David Fenner. In describing modern gardening as an artistic practice, Fenner identifies the following characteristics: "Fully engaging the visitor," "Care of living objects," and "Cooperation with others" (Fenner, 2023). Furthermore, Fenner draws attention to the mythologeme of the Garden of Eden, a motif permeating human cultural history, and notes that "the dual effect of Eden's influence on both gardens and 'moral cosmogony' came about because it needed to be something that it could not be: a garden and not a garden" (Fenner, 2022). Consequently, the garden and the practice of horticulture have had and will continue to have a potent aesthetic and moral significance, rendering them significant components of the urban landscape and contributors to the creation of a sustainable and comfortable urban environment. Vernacular garden spaces also play a crucial role, as they provide enterprising city dwellers with the opportunity to create gardens in their yards or near their homes, thereby fostering greater potential for attracting the local community and residents at large. Therefore, the methodology used in researching this object of aesthetic evaluation and socio-cultural integration holds significant importance.

Michel Foucault's "heterotopia" concept, particularly his notion of "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces that are in themselves incompatible," and Martin Heidegger's "dwelling" are crucial for my research. This approach serves as the key to the aesthetic analysis of a place and facilitates the transition from its experiential state to objectification and transformation into something familiar and evident (V. Vihanninjoki).

In heterotopia, Michel Foucault attributes characteristics such as juxtaposing several spaces within a single real place, which are inherently incompatible. These spaces presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and renders them penetrable, unlike public places, they are not freely accessible but rather meticulously arranged (Foucault, 1984, pp. 48-49). Foucault himself classifies the garden, especially a garden in Islamic culture, as a heterotopia, exemplified by a garden woven into an airplane carpet that transforms into another place. However, in my opinion, the yard of a residential building and its surrounding areas, where vernacular gardens are typically located, can also be classified as heterotopias. This space is neither entirely public (being hidden behind the house from the view of most passers-by) nor completely private (as it is common and accessible to passers-by). To enter the residential yard, one must pass through a portal such as an arch and change their walking route from the street, directing attention to the locus, equipped and covered with dicots of the house, where the vernacular garden becomes the exact point of attention and aesthetic attraction for visitors.

Upon making this transition, a passer-by finds themselves in a space that can be designated as a place of residence. Here, I turn to Martin Heidegger's concept

of dwelling to analyze such a space as the urban courtyard where vernacular gardening is practiced. "Spaces open up by the fact that they are let into the dwelling of man," and "when I say 'a man,' and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells" (Heidegger, 1971a, pp. 156-157). Therefore, Heidegger defines dwelling as an essential characteristic of Dasein, which thinks of himself as living in certain place. This can be compared to how Jackson presents the concept of a landscape consisting of elements to which the subject acquires an attachment and attachment, which he thinks as his own.

Researcher Vessa Vihanninjoki turns to Heidegger's terminology for the analysis of place and phenomenological aesthetics. Particularly, she references his term "a piece of equipment (Zeug, Zuhande)" as a "gesture of objectification" of the subject's everyday space. In the work "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger describes how the object, as equipment, loses such a property when depicted in art, transitioning from the "ready-to-hand" mode to the "present-at-hand" mode (Heidegger, 1971b). According to Vihanninjoki, an important question of modern urban aesthetics is how the everyday experience of being in the city can be assessed aesthetically: the question of significance and context of familiar, evident: "aesthetic dimension that is of crucial importance in the initial arrangement-and the potential re-arrangements-of people's multidimensional and dynamic relationship to their environment. It is through the "aesthetic means" that people experience their home as their personal place for living, the nearby park as a shared extension of their personal place, and the city as a multiplicity of places, manifesting the diverse values of its heterogeneous inhabitants" (Vihanninjoki, 2020; Vihanninjoki, 2021, p. 469). Thus, phenomenological aesthetics operates a toolkit for analyzing the value and role of such places as the vernacular garden, which constitute the everyday environment of urban dwellers.

It is also worth noting the importance of disciplines such as cultural anthropology and its methods (visual studies, (semi-) deep interviewing) in the study of the vernacular garden as an element of the urban landscape. In particular, Alla Petrenko-Lysak and Tina Polek conduct research on vernacular elements of urban space in Ukraine, as demonstrated in the article "Balcony Space: Cultural Anthropological and Sociological Study," where they consider it "a reflection of everyday life, which can become a key to the study of post-Soviet everyday practices, enabling a closer understanding of modern Ukrainian urban culture" (Petrenko-Lysak & Polek, 2021, p. 152). Therefore, for a more comprehensive understanding of such an aesthetic and socio-cultural phenomenon as the vernacular garden in urban space, I propose a cross-disciplinary approach.

### Results

The proposed range of theoretical concepts and methods, along with practical approaches such as individual involvement, semi-in-depth interviews, and city exploration, allowed me to conduct a comparative analysis of two cases of vernacular gardens: one in Kyiv (Ukraine) during 2021-2022 and another in Prešov (Slovakia) in 2023.

I discussed the specifics of perceiving the garden in the Rusanivka microdistrict (Pic. 1), attempting to elucidate the integration of the private into the public through the concept of care, which was derived from personal aesthetic experience (Butsykina, 2023). The garden, as both an object and an element of the urban landscape, amalgamated the experiences of the gardener and the

observer. As an observer, I could not perceive the garden independently of the thoughts of those who created and nurtured it, considering their motivations and intentions for planting specific flora. A closer examination of the plants,

flowers, and fruit trees cultivated there reveals the gardener's aspiration to transform an estranged area into one filled with affection.



Picture 1. Vernacular gardening at the Rusanivka district, Kyiv, Ukraine

Source: author.

The aesthetic perception has changed given the circumstances of the full-scale war in Ukraine, which brought terrible suffering, fear, and anxiety to the Ukrainian people (Butsykina, 2021). The meaning of the garden has changed significantly. Corine van Emmerik writes about the 'minor practice' of gardening in a refugee camp setting. It would seem that these are opposite situations: she writes about the gardening of people who were forced to flee from home, presenting the Palestinian concept of Sumud which means resilience, a trait often attributed to Ukrainians today by the media (van Emmerik, 2021, p. 216). The vernacular garden in Kyiv is a small practice, which is one of the elements of resilience. It corresponds to one of the popular slogans of the Ukrainian people in this war – "we are on our land". The desire to take care of a little garden is one of the million ways to proclaim this idea, which gives Ukrainians support. This is a feeling of strength and rightness because we do not take away and do not capture someone else's; we defend our own and will do it, no matter what. That is, the aesthetic experience of this garden has become inseparable from the political context.

In view of the above methodological guidelines, I define the following characteristics of Kyiv vernacular gardening:

- An antithesis of the Soviet practice of home gardening, which had a centralized complexion (the dachas located outside the city).
- Alienation of residents made to live in buildings segregated from the rest of the city.
- Individual dwellers are taking the initiative to transform such local public spaces through their own practices, gardening in particular.

- Peculiarity of the practice, which contrasts with Soviet practice as well as the present-day practice of creating communal gardens.

- Use of reused and recycled objects and materials for gardening decoration.

- Individual approach in choosing plants and decorative elements.

- Individual practice albeit for the welfare of the community and to keep alive a space of relationships.

If we turn to vernacular gardening in the city of Prešov, such gardens are usually located in the yards of residential buildings (Pic. 2). Unlike Kyiv gardens, the key characteristic of vernacular gardens in Prešov is their inclusion in the overall urban landscape. Such gardens are not isolated, as in Kyiv, and are more typical and adjacent to each other, not creating a contrast of public space (or heterotopia) with individual gardening practice, which brings a private element to such a space. That is, Slovak vernacular gardens do not form a contrast with the general urban landscape. Characteristics of Prešov vernacular gardening:

- Historical context of the gardening – post-Socialist architecture (with such vernacular elements (e.g., poles for drying clothes, garages).

- Place of individual creative practices (micro-level) integrated into collective stable practices (macro-level).

- Use of improvised objects and materials, although not reused and recycled.

- Individual approach in choosing plants and decorative elements.



Picture 2. Vernacular gardening in Prešov, Slovakia

Source: author.

### Discussion and conclusions

Urban aesthetics encounters challenges in conducting field research in city spaces, with the concept of city strolling and the role of the flâneur being central to such studies. Lehtinen's idea of urban aesthetics as a compromise examines macro and micro level city perceptions, highlighting that engaging with city imperfections and fostering empathy can achieve urban harmony, particularly relevant during times of societal challenges like martial law. J.B. Jackson provided a cultural understanding of the landscape concept, viewing it as a three-dimensional shared reality and a composition of man-made spaces shaping collective existence, beyond its traditional aesthetic connotations. Pauline von Bonsdorff, on the other hand, explores the urban environment through the lens of "affordance," emphasizing its characteristics such as enticement, generosity, and recognizability, which highlight inhabitants' care and engagement with their surroundings, delineating a nuanced perspective distinct from Jackson's landscape concept. Cureton introduces the concept of "vernacular landscape," focusing on inhabitants' everyday spatial practices, while Macauley emphasizes the embodied experience of walking in the city, highlighting how interactions with vernacular gardens integrate individuals multisensorily and socially into the urban landscape. The vernacular garden, examined through the lens of David Fenner's insights, embodies both artistic expression and moral cosmogony, enriching the urban landscape with its historical resonance and aesthetic allure.

This integration of diverse concepts, including Foucault's heterotopia and Heidegger's dwelling, highlights the garden's multifaceted significance as a space of socio-cultural integration and aesthetic contemplation within urban environments. Drawing on Heidegger's concept of "dwelling," the urban courtyard where vernacular gardening thrives exemplifies spaces intertwined with human

existence, shaping Dasein's lived experience. This interdisciplinary approach, incorporating phenomenological aesthetics, cultural anthropology, and visual studies, enables a comprehensive analysis of the vernacular garden's socio-cultural and aesthetic significance within the urban landscape.

The analysis of the vernacular garden in Kyiv, particularly in the Rusanivka microdistrict, reflects a deep understanding of the intertwining of private and public spaces through the lens of care. The significance of these gardens is further underscored by the context of full-scale war in Ukraine, where they serve as symbols of resilience and resistance, thus illustrating how aesthetic experiences become inseparable from political contexts in times of adversity. The vernacular gardening practices in Kyiv and Prešov exhibit distinct characteristics reflective of their respective urban landscapes. In Kyiv, these gardens serve as a counterpoint to the centralized Soviet gardening tradition, representing individual initiatives within segregated urban spaces and featuring reused materials and personalized plant choices, emphasizing community welfare alongside individual expression. On the other hand, vernacular gardens in Prešov integrate seamlessly into the urban fabric, with a focus on post-Socialist architecture and a blend of individual and collective practices, utilizing improvised materials and showcasing individual creativity within the broader urban landscape.

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## ВЕРНАКУЛЯРНИЙ САД ЯК ЕЛЕМЕНТ МІСЬКОГО ЛАНДШАФТУ (ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ПРИКЛАДІВ У КІЄВІ ТА ПРЯШЕВІ)

**Вступ.** Метою статті є порівняння вернакулярного садівництва в міських ландшафтах України та Словаччини через його здатність посилювати залучення мешканців і зменшувати рівень байдужості та відчуження.

**Методи.** Ключовою для дослідження є ідея С. Лехтінена про міську естетику як компроміс, що підкреслює важливість взаємодії з недосконалістю міста для досягнення міської гармонії. Дж. Джексон і П. фон Бонсдорф пропонують контрастні погляди на концепції ландшафту та міського середовища. Кертом вводяться поняття "вернакулярний ландшафт", моді як Маколі наголошує на вітленому досвіді прогулянки містом. Думки Феннера про сад збагачують дискусію, підкреслюючи його історичний резонанс та естетичну привабливість. У тексті застосовано міждисциплінарний підхід до аналізу вернакулярних садів з оперттям на концепції Фуко та Гайдегера, щоб забезпечити комплексне розуміння їхнього соціально-культурного та естетичного значення в міських ландшафтах.

**Резулювати.** Вернакулярні сади в кіївському мікрорайоні Рusanівка відіграють значну роль у перетині приватного та громадського простору через призму турботи. На тлі війни в Україні ці сади символізують стійкість і спротив. Протиставляючи вернакулярні практики садівництва в Києві та Пряшеві, автор підкреслює їхні відмінні характеристики, що відображають відповідні міські ландшафти. Київські сади представляють індивідуальні ініціативи на противагу радянським садівничим та містобудівним традиціям, а пряшівські сади плавно інтегруються в міську тканину з фокусом на постсоціалістичній архітектурі та індивідуальній творчості.

**Висновки.** Дослідження вернакулярних елементів міського ландшафту, зокрема – вернакулярного саду та практики вернакулярного садівництва, реалізується через поєднання різних підходів і дисциплін: урбаністичної, негативної та феноменологічної естетики, культурної антропології та культурних досліджень навколо ландшафту, а також практичних методів інтерв'ю та ходіння містом, дозволило визначити вернакулярний сад саме як місце, створене творчим суб'єктом у міському ландшафті. Він набуває статусу гетеротопії та місця, яке дозволяє зануритися в міське середовище, ідентифікуватися з ним та відчути його атмосферу.

**Ключові слова:** атмосфера, місто, середовище, сад, міський ландшафт, вернакулярний.

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