

INTERACTION AND REACTION BETWEEN LOCALS AND TOURISTS, AND THE NATURE SET UP AT THE SQUARE LEVEL IN THE TOURISTIC TOWN OF SIGHIȘOARA, ROMANIA

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Abstract: The research took place in a small urban setting, centered on a square type landscape unit, belonging to a town with obvious tourist inclination located in the way of locals and an important flow of tourists. The study started from a simple, yet modern premise: the extent to which the visitors and the “consumers” of a landscape-like set up unit are interested in the natural aspect of that unit. This is due to the context of the impression and strong attraction that the medieval fortress of Sighișoara (UNESCO site) and the myth of Dracula exert. The natural part of the square taken into consideration in the study is very well represented on categories, on a very small surface one being able to recognise from the simple vegetation components to combinations suggesting the ambient-landscape note. Apart from studying the ambient environment of the square and of the neighbouring environment, 112 subjects, locals, and tourists have been questioned. They expressed themselves orally, appreciating the natural elements featured in the square. From their statements resulted the fact that no matter the power of attraction a tourist site had, the appetite of the visitors of a landscape unit for nature and the states associated to nature is high, concluding that the direct or indirect attraction for nature is situated between 16-58%.

Key words: touristic town, landscape layout, landscape, nature, naturalness, visitors, confrontation

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„REACTIVATED” LANDSCAPES THROUGH NATURAL LANDSCAPING AND THEIR CONFRONTING THE NATURAL

Landscape design draws heavily on landscapes, since they are both the subject-theme and the resource and reservoir of natural components. Based on them a certain type of intervention and a recipe of architectural treatment are conceived and put into practise. Thus a cultural-aesthetic symbiosis is being created between the components and architecture, brought to the public by any means of communication (Molodkina,

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2007). Consequently, there are product-landscapes (parks, squares, private gardens etc.) incorporating processed natural substance, the trend towards natural in preserving or landscaping urban spaces being admitted by more and more specialists in the U. K., irrespectively 53% of the interviewees (Özgüner et al., 2007). The case of private gardens in particular becomes the aim of psychological well-being, the gardens being approached from the perspective of restorative environments (Gross & Lane, 2007). In all methods of landscaping design retraced from the Roman-Hellenistic times to contemporaneity, the keyword has been the dilution of the natural element (hedges, scrubs with ornamental bushes, greenswards, flowers, trees or forests, running or still water, soil, rocks) within an assembly claiming the natural as definitively included. For instance, the formula “nature garden” animates conservative tendencies, slightly different from the idea of landscape merged with nature as in Renaissance (Groening, 2007). In fact, we deal with forms of artificialising the natural, with giving in to dominance through visual memory of all that comes from nature. The main work is on some natural components, but orienting them technically and effectively through procedures such as gardening or actions like landscaping. Logically, all these actions are on the basis of nature offering those natural components to natural landscaping (Smyser, 1984), including the resort to Fengshui philosophical principles of natural landscaping of urban landscapes (Hong et al., 2007). The result is influenced by the provenience with which the landscaping is operated also bioesthetically (mineral or vegetal). That is the case of soil for landscaping in Moscow and its suburbs (Smagin et al., 2006), or of some trees in India (Seth, 2004), so that a garde or a space arranged will recall the contemplation in nature or a ribbon of nature (in miniature), through a model landscape. The examples are numerous and edifying (Figure 1). They can range from the Japanese gardens to minimalist ones, through the systematisation of work elements, scenes and amazing compositions made to stand out, close to nature and its close forms (Loxton, 2005), where water courses are brought into junction, cascades, pools, stone passages and stoned alleys, rock-gardens, terraces and parterres with embroideries of cut bushes or isolated trees, greenswards, pergolas and pavilions.

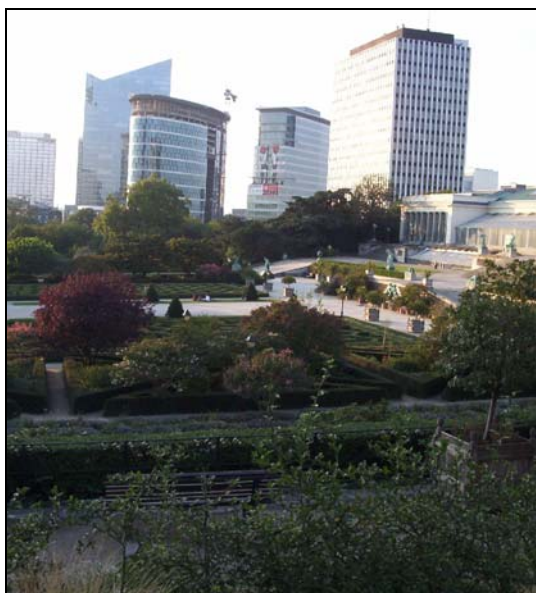


Figure 1. Park in the centre of Bruxelles with a landscaping composition potentiated and balanced through the insertion of *natural*

Especially in the case of Japanese gardens we deal with an understanding in excess, because of the symbolic charge of the natural. 'It appears that some of these gardens had decorative places, arranged as more natural - including even temples and sculptures...' (Iliescu, 2008, 26).

The aesthetic values and the affective reactions developed because of anchoring the observer in the part of the natural, and new designed and transformed landscapes, is formed starting from diverse elements of images, but peculiar ones, developed by the gear of components. We have in mind the configuration of some axes of vision, large (as view, delineated by main and secondary alleys), numerous structuring axes (starting from the limits of the objects in composition), sinuous lines and large areas drawn by the new relief and bushy-arborescent vegetation, harmonious transitions between the geometrised parts and those in natural style (Iliescu, 2008), all these through landscaping plans well-defined. There are to be added rigorous volumes from the prismatic ones (decorative vegetation, kiosks and even monuments) to flattened ones (ponds with water, rondes of flowers), an increasing plasticity from a sector to another and chromatic tones from sober to daring ones.

The norm of natural of these new operations of landscaping, although minimised a lot through an infusion of artificially, persists in the mentality of the viewer and consumer of neo-landscape, including through the display of the category of natural garden (Loxton, 2005, 88-94), leading to comfort, expressivity, vivaciousness, spiritual potentiation and emotion. There is also a certain difficulty in the visual separating the natural components and man-made components in case of landscaping green spaces near built spaces.

The circles of landscape experts still entertain the idea that the confrontation of natural versus artificial in landscape theory is done as a puzzle on very disputable restricted spaces: 'It is very likely that if you have a geranium in a flowerpot you will regard it as more natural than the white enamelled fridge on which it is placed'. The lack of a clear delimitation, the sway between natural and artificial may lead some people to recognise that assertions as the followings are natural: 'It would be enough to think upon the moss and the mushrooms when you have come along from a forest and the geranium will appear to you less natural' (Lassus, 2001, 3).

Despite the limitations brought along by an approach arising from landscape ecology regarding the term 'natural', the reasonable initiatives must be acknowledged. So is the recommendation stating that it is no longer possible for us to find refuge in natural spaces (Baudry, 1988, 30-31) due to space organising issues, where human activity is authoritative and of consequence, constituting itself as a perturbation source.

However, there are opinions totally against those who intrude the spirit of freedom in understanding a landscape, some exalting the natural, others the social (Berque, 2000).

The sense of liberty and openness towards opinions must be left to function regarding the way in which we outline and challenge the problem of landscape naturalness, inclusively. It should be added the way in which we delineate, compare, consume and dispute the landscapes engulfing a nucleus of natural. All these considerations refer, after all, to the nature's spirit of diversity, which we want integrated in the diversity of human nature.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The study starts from the fact that we see Nature everywhere therefore, a town/its parks are nature and each individual getting in touch with the park landscape allows being "manipulated" by this new transformed form of nature, and developed. Everything is connected to the ability to discover the personality of landscapes and the nature quality (Arler, 2000), the natural being in charge with explaining the diversity of landscapes allowing one of the juiciest allegations (Dincă & Sala, 2010). For a landscape-like developed unit according to carefully thought criteria and principles, a

unit located in a simple town, the manner of visual and reactionary “consumption” is framed within certain psychological-economic norms determined by certain variables. It is about the culture and thermal comfort (Knez & Thorsson, 2006), knowledge of animal species (Randler et al., 2007) and the interaction with pets, elements of design potentiating a certain traditional identity, including at the level of vocabulary used (Padua, 2007), culture and economics seen through the critical-aesthetic dichotomy between beauty and ugliness (Barrett et al., 2009).

Yet, when speaking about a town with a touristic function, those landscape-like set-up spaces with obvious urban valence definitely pours its expression and influence force upon people visiting it. This nature is, yet, differently seen when a small dimension park, in reality a square according to the metrics and organization specific to landscape, is being “auctioned”. This nature will be seen in a forcible and accomplice manner in a touristic town like Sighișoara. Beyond the evidence of touristic resources, a park with its «own nature» is differently seen and perceived by the locals and tourists, individuals manifesting themselves personally in speech under which his relations with that nature are seen.

The concrete purpose of the study is to observe the ways in which the locals or the tourists call, name, and use genuine phrases in which the notions of nature and natural are included. They will start from the geographical and environmental detail features of the physical part, from the data related to the location’s cultural aspect as well as the subjects’ level of education.

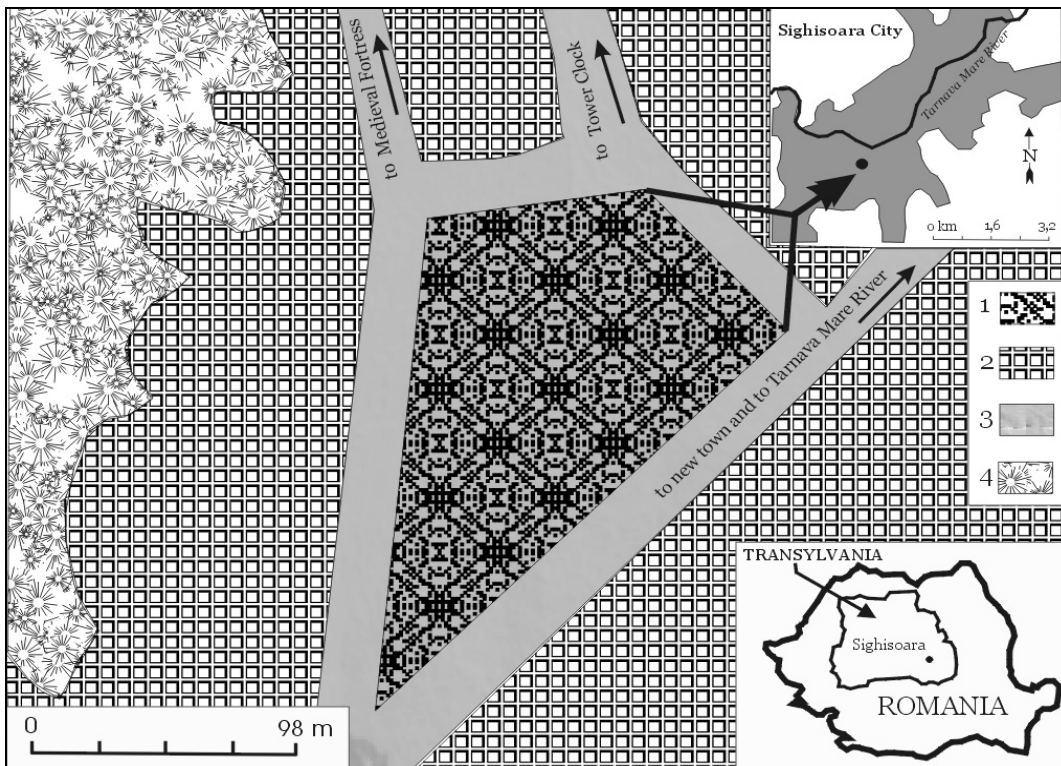


Figure 2. The square and the components of the urban space near the square. In the medallion: down right-the positioning of the town at the level of Transylvania and Romania; up right-the positioning of the square at the level of a touristic town. 1. Park (Square) Central; 2. space built, with old architecture; 3. streets and road infrastructure; 4. forest and bush vegetation

THE LOCATION OF THE RESEARCH UNIT

The study takes into consideration a square from Sighișoara, a small-average demographic sized town (a little over 36,000 inhabitants) situated in the South-Eastern part of Transylvania and, at the level of Romania, in its Central-South-Eastern part (Figure 2). Due to the general configuration of the town's relief, a support with a typical highland shaping, the highland town presents a town planning of narrow and storied spaces. Therefore, the green spaces, yet in a reasonable number, layout on small surfaces, either elongated or adapted to former polygonal small squares. Even the square making the object of this analysis is a small square from the outside of medieval fortress, a square set up as back as the 15th century (Spitzer, 1980), and perfectly integrated into the town's structure, being limited by the following streets: Hermann Oberth, Turnului and Morii.

METHODS

The research targets a square (called the Central Park - Parcul Central in Romanian), a square situated in the centre of the touristic town of Sighișoara, having a surface of about 0.3 ha. This landscape set up is improperly called a park by the locals. The size, the polygon shape, the position (a small intersection, with the predilection to develop of the South-Eastern part corresponding to the main street of the town), the patrimonial inventory and the compositional elements make it perfect for the category of squares. The results of the research were obtained starting from the following work stages: a. the field survey targeting the inventory of the natural components in the urban space and the neighbourhood; b. the inventory of the aspects of human and cultural geography in the town space; c. the thorough study of the landscape layout at the level of: dendrology and floral material, mineral material and furniture, and the solutions from an aesthetic and compositional point of view; d. the survey of 112 subjects who were asked open and closed questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The touristic, environmental, and urban context

Sighișoara is a town centred on cultural tourism, exploring some of the favourable natural, historical, and urban characteristics. This piece of information can be compared to the set of data related to the visitors and tourists' perception. It is the myth of Dracula that gives the tone to an effervescence at the level of tourists' search and information, even getting to create a genuine touristic brand to promote not only the town (Tayler, 1997), but Romania, too (Green, 2003; Cosma et al., 2007; Light, 2007). To these we add the potential economic benefits thought (yet not implemented, Moore Ede, 2002) by exploiting the myth of Dracula and that of Vlad Dracul in Dracula Park, an entertainment and entertainment touristic site (World Heritage 26 COM, 2002).

The attractiveness and favourability of the town, shared by the square, too, are filled by an infrastructure and history which quiver all over the place. They are based on numerous medieval romantic icons (towers, bastions and a fortified belt, arches, old houses). In this way, the town stands out with a special identity from a touristic point of view, generated by the aspect of the places combining the old with the new. The old, medieval aspect of the town can be found in the higher part of the town, where the position of the citadel/fortress of the town is dominantly integrated in the scenery. The oldness and the aspect of the buildings positioned in narrow streets and other elements have determined the inclusion of the town in the UNESCO patrimony in 1999

Out of the natural characteristics a morphology shaped by a hilly relief dominated by terraces (plateaus, out of which the inferior one of 40 m is connected to the park analysed) and the narrowness tailored by the Târnava Mare Valley stands out. To these we add the existence of some mature, compact broadleaf forests, important as surface area, which run down towards the town with some species, a part of them being integrated at the dendrology level by the unit studied. The square is hosted by a slightly inclined surface

from South to North (declivity of 7-8°), on light, sufficiently profound, with a good aerohydric capacity, well structured, with a glomerular texture and good to very good fertility glazed soil surfaces. Generally, the topoclimate is typically urban, with less vertically developed buildings and streets, more sheltered, with a modest-favourable access to light and good circulation and a moderate intensity of the refreshed air.



Figure 3. The square making the object of the research and the framing of the square in the small square surrounded by old buildings

The landscape-like layout of the square is made geometrically (Figure 3), with a central round and a sufficient network of access alleys. The central round is a barrow hosting a circular floral mosaic representing the chromatic virtues of different species of yellow, purple, white, red or dégradé pansies (*Viola tricolor*, *Viola wittrockiana*) which grow up to 10-12 cm tall and are arranged in star-shaped lines. In the rest, the chromatic ambiance is filled by the presence of some kerbstones and abatements in which pansies and rose bushes co-exist (*Rosa sp.*) cut at 60-70 cm height and organized according to a solution suggesting the influence of the baroque. The flagged alleys, sometimes arranged in storeys and 90-280 cm wide, are organized on a parallel or perpendicular line to the sides of the square. To this it is added their bisector orientation from the top of an angle to the opposite side of the square. The design of the alleys follows the harmonization with the surroundings and the shape of the small square which hosts the green space (Figure 3).

Viewed *in integrum*, this square has the stamp of a certain agglomeration from an aesthetic-compositional point of view, yet functionally it best comes up to the expectations of entertainment and delight for the consumers. The **natural part** is responsible for this which is dominant as compared to the mineral part and the furniture of the square. The dominant **Natural** is consigned by the groups of coppices, bushes, lawn, and hedges. The shortly-cut lawn at 7-8 cm high occupies all areas devoid of vegetation or participates to the mixed character of vegetation. The coppice catches the eye, emotionally inspires and motivates through the combination of crowns and the aspect of foliar apparatus of the large-leaf linden (*Tilia platyphyllos*), blue spruce (*Picea*

pungens) and silver spruce (*Picea pungens* var. *argentea*), mulberry tree (*Morus alba*), ornamental plum tree (*Prunus cerasifera nigra*) and ornamental apple tree (*Malus purpurea*). The bushes are integrated from a patrimonial point of view into the landscape with species of English yew (*Taxus baccata*) and white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*). The hedge made up of white cedar, 80-120 cm thick and 160 cm tall gives shape and personality at the level of adjacent spaces.

It is a square having reception and relaxation functions, with 4 entries-exits, without shaped functional sector structure. Yet, what really matters is the composition involving an interesting solution for details, the contrast of shapes, volumes, and colours. It is worth noticing: a. the central round as a dominant element of attraction; b. limited opening angles, yet with encouraging viewing axes allowing the view of some exquisite local attractions (like The Clock Tower - Figure 4). Other details related to the landscape design include:

- a. the positioning of the tree vegetation mainly on the side of the square;
- b. the interesting and relaxing, from the point of view of colours, mix of brush, bushes, and flags (green, bordeaux – pink and grey);
- c. the size of the vegetation is III, that is the species have inferior height (under 12 m tall), having a dominantly ovoid to columnar habitus of crown.



Figure 4. The viewing axes allowing the visitors in the square to visually interfere with certain objectives like “The Clock Tower” in the medieval fortress

The role and reflection of the *natural element* in satisfying the tastes of the park visitors

Such a landscape unit with a relatively small surface suggests first of all that it provides the visitors (locals and tourists) an ambiance in which the natural element is poorly represented. That is on a small surface the natural would be represented in a neglected manner, almost insignificantly. We must expect that other elements and features derived from the personality of these elements are frequently reunited in the visitors’ expectations and searches. We must not forget the fact that this square is located in the area of touristic influence of the medieval fortress (including the myth of Dracula)

and the subjects' answers could be decisively free of any of these reasons, letting much in the subsidiary the problem of natural and naturalness in the square.

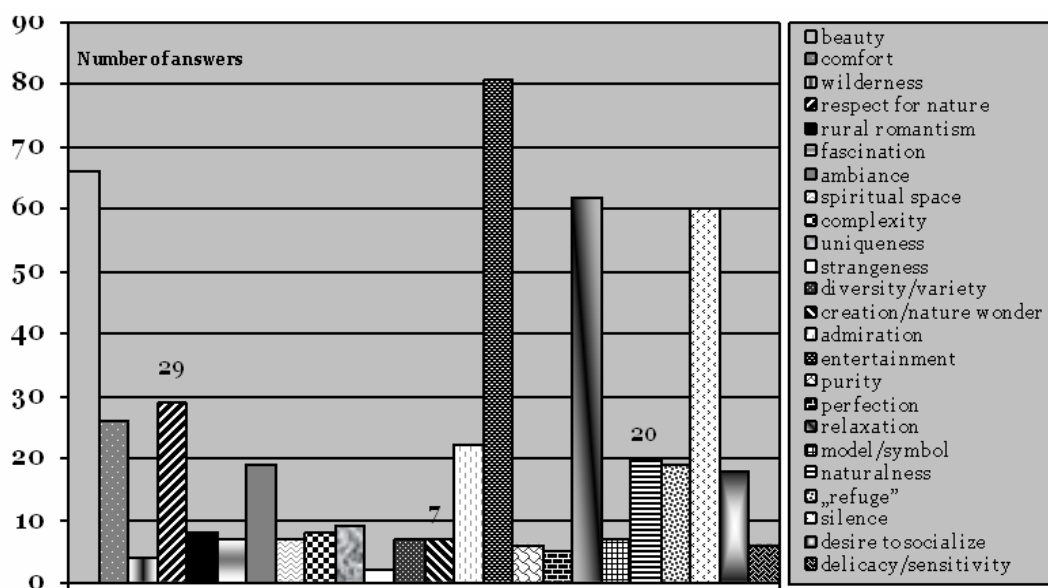


Figure 5. Representation of the answers to the first question of the survey and the situation of the answer options in immediate connection with the word *nature*

The concrete results could be found from questioning 112 subjects in direct contact with the square and using it for different purposes, specific to each user. The survey was designed to have a table top and a set of 6 questions. The table top has columns targeting to obtain information about the park/square/public square through location, the number of entries-exits, shape, the surrounding touristic sites. Also, there are data about the tourists regarding the age, origin, level of studies and the type of the subject (local or tourist). These table data are extremely useful being compared or corroborated with the answers given to questions.

Table 1. The word "nature" and his derivate forms – the processing of the answers of the questioned subjects on a series of criteria and subjects' feed-back

States assimilated by visitors due to the square	Analysis criteria for visitors	origin		age				level of education		
		Inhabitant	tourist	≤18	19-35	36-65	>65	primary school + secondary school	high school	university /college
	<i>respect for nature</i>	18	11	3	11	13	2	2	23	4
	<i>nature creation/wonder</i>	4	3	2	3	1	1	4	3	
	<i>naturalness</i>	12	8	2	7	8	3	4	13	3

In order to reach the purpose of the study, we used two questions of the survey, one closed and one open, obvious connections existing among the answers. The first question, closed, sounds like: *What kind of states does this park/public square suggest to you, what do you feel when you look at the park as a whole or parts of it?*

There were 24 options of answers, each respondent having the freedom to choose how many possibilities he wanted or he felt satisfied with taking into account

what the square offered him or what he had found in the square. The results of the survey naturally emphasize the overwhelming importance of the square in the visitors' conscience for the entertainment and relaxation functions as well as for states like beauty and silence (Figure 5). Yet, the research decisively targeted, beyond these states and functions, to catch the situations about the condition of the *natural* the inhabitants and the tourists deal with when visiting and staying in the square. The options having immediate connection with the word *nature* were chosen (Figure 5). The best represented state in the subjects; options was *respect for nature* (5th position out of the total of 24 options), followed by *naturalness* (8th position), the weakest being *nature creation/wonder* (14th -19th position).

There is a better understanding of the reality of the nature's configuration expressed in the square when the three answers incorporating states based on the variants of the word *nature* are dealt with based on certain analysis criteria (Table 1). Hence, there are several synthetic aspects: the inhabitants are slightly more attached than the tourists to the physical, palpable side of the components related to *natural*, to the intimacy of processes in which *natural* components, energy, and functionality are coagulated; the tourists appreciate the processed natural, having as benchmark the "product" they consume; the *respect for nature* and the *naturalness* are mainly showed by young people and adults; the idea of *nature creation/wonder* is supported by the majority of young people; considering the *level of education*, most of the respondents, that is those with high school education (to those we add the university graduates), have opted for *respect for nature* and *naturalness*, while those with the weakest level of education regard the nature of the square taking into account the success of the technical, landscape-like intervention.

Yet, the way in which the visitors and the "consumers" of components and the elements of the purely natural part of the square interact are not faithfully mirrored by assuming some options for the first question, because they do not nominate, do not capitalize that nature. The nomination, the capitalization is yet made by applying the second question of the survey, an open question: *What attracts you to this park/public square?* In this way, from the synthesis of the answers of the subjects there appear serious and enlightening reactions between the visitors and the condition of the *natural* in the square analysed (Figure 6).

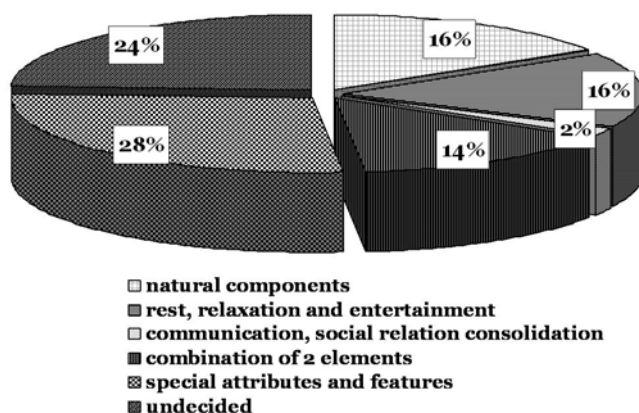


Figure 6. The attractiveness of the elements exercising upon the visitors and the condition of the *natural* in the square. The synthesis of the answers to question no 2 of the survey

The most numerous options of the respondents regarding the attractiveness of the landscape unit of Sighișoara (27.6% of the total of answers) are directed to certain *attributes and features of the elements and parts* of the square (e.g. beauty, simplicity, noises, shape, decoration, aspect, position within the town, scenery, naturalness, cleanliness, diversity of floral species, loneliness). The explanation resides in the fact

that the subjects, mostly adults and elderly people, less appreciate the concrete elements, being inclined to look for the particular and the special conditions, the functional and internal organization, in the last for the factual integration of detail and general into the planning of the place.

There are also a lot of *undecided respondents* (24.1% of the answers), being represented by all the age groups and with a more modest educational background, these people showing indifference towards elements or negligently designating them in order to be taken seriously.

The least of the subjects indicate the square as being eminently responsible for the generous offer for *communication and consolidation of social relations*. For them, what really matters regarding their staying in the square is chatting or meeting other people, chess playing, the exchange of ideas on political and economic problems etc.

Important percentages have the answers directed towards the *combination of 2 elements*, towards *rest, relaxation, and entertainment possibilities*, and, the most important for the subject of the research, towards the *natural components*. Although the last category is the most relevant for specifying the importance of the purely natural resource in the square (a percentage of 16.1% of the answers clearly and spontaneously indicates the *nature* of the square by mentioning the trees, bushes, the green spaces, the vegetation, the flowers), even the combination of 2 elements contains references to the natural resource. Here, we can include statements like: silence and scenery, silence and fresh air, beauty and flowers, vegetation and silence, the flowers and the benches, the shape and the trees, the flowers and the decoration, rest and green space, silence and vegetation etc. The subjects directly indicating these components with an obvious natural character have these reactions due to the superior inclinations towards the aesthetic-functionally integrated living, through education, ecologic spirit, and placements at the square level when being interviewed. Where the subjects indicate the attractiveness of the square starting from the combination of 2 elements, such an option is justified by the sympathy for the condition of the “living”, then for a derived effect or the improvement of the wellness through the effects of that part of the living indicated. It means that the visitors, that is those “consumers” of the square as a landscape and urban planning result, can see and perceive the condition of the “living” at the level of a *nature oasis* in a space endorsed by the transformations of a town at the limit between modern and medieval, “the living” interfering with a pronounced touristic flow.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the very small surface of the Central Park (Square), of the transformation of an urban landscape and of the overwhelming influence of a landmark touristic objective (the medieval fortress of Sighișoara – an UNESCO objective), there is plenty of space for the visitors to express their taste (locals and tourists alike) and the searches for what is *natural* or it is connected with the *naturalness* of the landscape assembly. Beyond the normal states, expected or suggested to the visitors by a park (entertainment, rest, beauty, silence etc.) there is an orientation towards situations and states connected to *nature* and to the element of *natural* construction (respect for the *nature*, *naturalness*, *nature* wonder). The locals prefer the physical, concrete, palpable part of the *natural* of the square, the tourists being attracted by the part targeting the preparation by decorating the *natural* of the square. In the end, there is this adjustment, a placement on rational bases of the tastes of the visitors when they explain the attraction to this square, meaning that directly (through *natural* components) or indirectly (the *natural* occurring in combination with other elements or stances), the vocation of the *natural* is manifested by the percentage of 58% of the total of answers of the visitors. The results emphasize the fact that no matter the size of the touristic activity at a touristic site, there is an attraction for the visitors where there is a landscape unit, no matter how small

this is. These people, locals or tourists, look for the benefits of the unit, in the first place, from the natural perspective of the elements, components, and the states associated to naturalness. In other words, they look for the *nature* expressed in subtle forms, more than for the admirable technical endowment of the same landscape unit.

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