Contemporary tendencies of shaping rural front gardens on the example of the winners of the contest for “The most beautiful village of Lower Silesia 2012 and 2013”.

Summary

Today, in the surrounding of contemporary architecture, the greenery located nearby is increasingly undergoing radical changes. Trends in its development are basing on the of urban and suburban gardens, consisting perhaps with currently prevailing trends, but in any way referring to the characteristics of rural landscape. Therefore, if we can still talk about traditional rural gardens? Or perhaps in the era of globalization, the border between what is rural and what urban becomes more and more blurred? This paper, on the example of two Lower Silesian villages - the winners of “The most beautiful village of Lower Silesia 2012 and 2013”, aims to present the contemporary tendencies of shaping front gardens in rural areas. Basing on field research the ways of developing front gardens in over 600 parcels were examined, the forms of their arrangement were demonstrated and predominant species selection was described.

Key words: Front garden, rural garden, rural areas, „The most beautiful village in Lower Silesia”

Introduction

Gardens accompanying buildings are an integral part of the Polish rural landscape and have long tradition of existence (Gawryszewska BJ 2007). An important element of rural garden and a kind of visiting card of a farm was the front garden. It was typically small area situated before the front wall of rural cottage, usually modest but performing both decorative and utility functions (Siewniak M., Mitkowska A. 1998 Czechowicz M., Kozłowska E. 2004).

Modern front gardens which are shaped according to rural tradition are characterized by big variety of colors and native plants. They form the basis of whole composition. Such plantings have nature of a half-wild habitat with various species of flowers blooming from early spring to late autumn. Such garden gives charm with delightful colors of flowers and the scent of herbs. A crucial element of the front garden which support idyllic and natural character of the rural house is the usage of traditional native plant species. Foreign species
artificially introduced into the area, which is not their natural habitat, threw their shape or character does not emphasize the values of the rural landscape.

Traditional elements appearing in the rural gardens were tall deciduous trees. Often it was a solitaire tree located next to the residential building, which formed the background for the front garden. This custom is rooted in Polish village traditions, according to which people avoided planting conifers, believing that their place is in the forest (Zątek W. 2003). Among the traditional planting in the vicinity of a farmhouse mainly dominated fruit trees like apple or pear trees, but also a melliferous species as linden were popular. The tradition of planting fruit trees came to Poland in the Middle Ages and it’s inextricably linked with arrival of the Cistercian and Benedictine orders to our lands. The monks coming also to the areas that are now the Lower Silesia, were the first to bring to the country noble varieties of fruit trees, than the custom and the species went from the monastery gardens to the farmsteads. Important issue in developing the surrounding of a farmhouse was using vegetation not only for aesthetic reasons. On the contrary the vegetation was planted mainly for productive role (fruits, vegetables and herbs) and protective - protecting buildings from spreading of fire (J. Szewczyk, 2012). Therefore, in the landscape of the village, the proportions of buildings in relation to the surrounding vegetation were different than now. In traditional village the vegetation towered over buildings, while today the vegetation often is barely noticeable in the silhouette of the village. In the second half of the twentieth century along with the development of cultivation techniques, including the development of horticulture, the changes in the selection of varieties came. Common in the interwar period, high varieties of fruit trees were replaced by annually fruiting stunted plants. Due to the easier collection and bigger amount of crops, the new varieties of plants are today more popular not only in fruit farms but also in home gardens.

Another layer in the composition of the rural garden were shrubs. They were primarily represented by lilacs, roses, forsythia, jasmine, viburnum and black lilacs. The complement of the composition where the colorful sets of annual plants, biennials and perennials, like: sunflowers, dahlias, asters, hollyhocks, bells, lilies, poppies, foxgloves, delphiniums, sweet pea, irises, marigolds, nasturtiums, universes, phlox, bells, hearts, zinnias, snapdragons, or mullein (Gargala M., Stompor-Horseradish E., M. Pisarek 2010). Often among ornamental plants in traditional rural garden the herbs and medicinal plants were introduced and had both decorative as well as utility functions. The examples of such species are: peppermint, chamomile, sage, catnip, thyme, wormwood, lemon balm, yarrow, rosemary, fennel, cumin,
coriander, black cumin. Historically important aspect in selection of plants to gardens was also their symbolism. In the literature since the nineteenth century there are mentions about the belief in the magical powers of certain plants (J. Szewczyk, 2007). Another group of plants was linked with rituals and religious cult. The one of the fests connected with plants was the Feast of Our Lady of the Herbs. Till today on this feast remained the tradition of bringing to the church the bouquets of herbaceous plants. Another tradition associated with celebration of the ordination of plants is the Corpus Christi Fest and the Whitsun. Tradition connected with the Corpus Christi Feast is blessing the wreaths with gospels written down on four separate pages, which are later buried by farmer in the four corners of his field, believing that this ritual will protect the crops from hail. Wreaths were weaved, mostly from medicinal herbs and twigs of trees that were supposed to protect from thunderbolts. After the blessing wreaths decorated the church for a period octave of Corpus Christi. After this period they were then to the farm to be hung above the door of houses and stables, buried in the corners of fields or placed into the foundations of new houses. It was believed that they acquire supernatural power. Herbs which were used to weave the wreaths later were used as a medicine for people and livestock. It was believed that the smoke from burnt wreaths protect from plagues and hail clouds. Cows during calving were incensed by the sacred thyme, lovage was used to heal sore throats and sacred hazel twigs, then, were supposed to protect from lightning strikes. (www.parafiawkotlowie.pl) The traditions of the Whitsun (Pentecost) are remnants of Slavic pagan rites. They refer to crops, appreciation of life-giving earth. During this fest the houses were decorated with green branches, mainly willows and birches. According to beliefs of that time this ritual was performed to protect the farm from evil spirits and ensure a good harvest. Animals were also decorated with wreaths made from twigs and flowers and incensed with smoke from burnt herbs. Once it was believed that sacred herbs will protect the crops from the woes of storms and hail stones.

Another group of plants used in the surrounding of farms were the Midsummer herbs: henbane, wormwood, burdock, broad beans, St. John's wort, stinging nettle, fern, birch, alder. Their aim was to guard humans, animals and crops from the charms of witches, as well as from diseases and natural disasters (Czechowicz M., E. Kozłowska 2004). Their prevalence characterize the villages in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. At that time the information with advices to encourage the cultivation of flowers and herbs appeared.

Another important part of the traditional rural gardens were also vegetable gardens. Due to the utility function they were often set in close proximity of a residential house to
ensure the housekeeper fresh ingredients for home-cooked meals. Even today it can be observed that still on many farms the vegetable beds are placed in the gardens just in front of the house.

In the past rural front gardens, beside practical and decorative functions, also had great custom importance. The front garden was a formerly kind of a visiting card of a farm and an advertisement of marriageable girls. The unmarried girls took care of the parents garden in order to grow special flowers for wedding wreath (W. Lozinski 1905). Well-cared-for domestic vegetation demonstrated the prestige and wealth of the farmers, inviting guests to come in (H. Plessner 1987).

Nowadays villages are undergoing dynamical changes, which, depending on the type of factor, run with varying intensity. They depend, among others, on the location of the village (distance from urban areas) and the type of its inhabitants work. As a result of these changes, the village loses its diversity and identity in terms of its functions, as well as in the character of the landscape (Whole A., Orzechowska I. 2007 ZątekW. 2003). Thus, the present rural garden changes dramatically. What is its contemporary role and the trends of shaping contemporary rural front gardens, authors try to bring in this article.

As research subjects the authors selected two villages located in the Lower Silesia, which have been the winners of the contest for "The Most Beautiful Village in Lower Silesia" consecutively in years 2012 and 2013. The winners were honored, among others, for the involvement of its inhabitants and their ability of cooperation in order of development of their village and at least for the idea of the inhabitants to create the unique character of their village. One of the aspects which determine the image of the village is its landscape, which consists of diverse mosaic of plots, buildings and greenery existing in the public spaces as well as in the private properties. For this research, the authors assumed that involvement of the inhabitants in the development of their village will be reflected in the way of development of each private property. Therefore, due to the fact that the chosen villages were considered as the most beautiful in the whole Lower Silesia province, the authors decided to check whether this distinction is reflected in the different issues considered in the evaluation criteria. Analyzed villages, although awarded in the same competition, are significantly different in their characters. The authors have therefore undertaken an attempt to find links between the way of the village’s development and the way of shaping the domestic green vegetation in front gardens.
Materials and methods

On the basis of field research the authors carried out reconnaissance and evaluation of more than 600 front home gardens located in the villages Pęgów and Goworów - the winners of the contest "Beautiful village of Lower Silesia 2012 and 2013". The study was conducted in the years when the competitions were held. During the site visits, the photographic documentation, sketches, situational inventory of land and vegetation, were made. Collected inventoried material was classified by adopted division (Podolska A. Serafin L. 2013) to 5 types front gardens depending on the height and character of planted vegetation:

- **Traditional front garden.** Dominating plants are here deciduous trees and shrubs, there are also annual, biennial and perennial plants, belonging to species traditionally present in rural areas. This type of front gardens can be often divided into flower and vegetable gardens.

- **Mixed front garden.** This type is characterized by the presence of plants traditional for rural areas both with the species foreign for the landscape of traditional village, that are typically associated rather more with urban spaces.

- **Contemporary dense front garden.** The dominant plants are coniferous trees and shrubs. Species are often high and densely planted, they are foreign in the landscape of the village.

- **Contemporary minimalistic front garden.** This category includes front gardens in which dominating element is vast lawn and plants participation is limited to dots of plantings consisted mostly of conifers or a single row of thuja's.

- **Not planned front garden.** Often it’s the utility farm yard or neglected lawn with a few bushes.

In addition, the analysis of evolution of the functional and spatial layout of the village, for both researched villages, was carried out basing on comparison of current maps with the historical messtischblatt maps, coming for Pęgów from the year 1943 and from year 1936 for Goworów. The researches were also based on the available literature.

**Objects of research**

The research objects there the front gardens in two villages located in Lower Silesia Voivodeship. The research was carried out in the village Pęgów, located in the commune of Oborniki Ślaskie in the poviat Trzebnica and in the village Goworów, located in the commune of Międzylesie in the poviat Kłodzko.
In the village Pęgów there are two types of rural buildings. First, traditional with farm buildings, the other - connected with modern, dense development. There are also two multifamily housing estates "Housing Communities" (housing estates which is the former State Agricultural Farm - 7 blocks 1 and 2-storey) (Czechowicz Dobrzyniecki, 1994).

Pęgów is currently very intensively developing. In year 1785 the village was inhabited by 177 people, in year 1840 – 388, in year 1905 – 377, in year 1993 - 1297. Today in Pęgów there are more than 2,000 people registered and still there is steady increase of the number of inhabitants. This tendency is related mainly with the attractive location of the village in the close neighborhood of a big city - Wroclaw, by the provincial road No 342.

The second village - Goworów, although it is one of the biggest villages in the southern part of the Kłodzko region and also one of the oldest, presents a completely different differentiation of the population and new development in relation to its history. In year 1787 in Goworów there were 504 inhabitants, in year 1880 this number almost doubled to 980 people, at the beginning of the twentieth century in year 1910 the number dropped to 681 people and now the village has only 395 registered inhabitants. This is the lowest number in the history of the village (village Goworów Reneval Plan for the years 2010-2017). In contrast to Pęgów, Goworów is located far from large urban centers in the southern part of the Kłodzko region in II functional part - industrial, recreational and tourist region. This is a typical chain village, extending approximately 3 km along the brook Goworówka. The element that is the same for both researched villages is that they have small percentage of residents engaged currently in agriculture.

Results

In Pęgów dominating front gardens development is modern minimalistic type (31%) (Fig. 1). The second most popular type of development is lack of planned front garden (26%). These category contains mostly farm yards, driveways for cars or neglected lawns. As often as this type in the village appears mixed type of front garden development (23%). In contrast, by far, the least popular option is front garden developed in traditional way (2%). The development of front gardens in Pęgów is similar both by the contemporary buildings and to those from before 1945. In all age ranges there is high proportion of front gardens developed in a minimalistic contemporary way and mixed. By the buildings dating from before year 1945 the largest share are front gardens without planned development. Such state is likely due
to the utility function which front gardens served by the farm buildings and due to the fact that some of the buildings of this age range along with its surrounding are neglected. An equally large proportion of front gardens without planned development can be observed by the buildings built after 1980. This refers to the fact that many of these buildings are still under construction so their surroundings is not yet to developed. The difference in the proportion of different types of front gardens between buildings belonging to the different age ranges appears only in the case of the traditional development. The older the plot, the greater the share of traditional front gardens. By the buildings built after year 1980 this type of front garden development development does not occur. This type appears only by the buildings that were built between 1945 and 1980. (3%) and slightly more often by the buildings dating before 1945. (7%). So marginal share of traditional type, especially by the contemporary buildings, results from the change in expectations in relation to rural home and garden. Today the surrounding of the house is rarely used for practical purposes, such as growing vegetables, and far more important issue are the aesthetics. Unfortunately conviction about the aesthetics is based mostly on urban trends, that’s why there is great popularity of conifers instead of the traditional ornamental plants (Fig. 2).

In the study also the presence of tall deciduous and coniferous trees on the property was analyzed (Fig. 3). Most of the plots (65%) have no tall trees. They occur only at 35% of all parcels, from which 16% of the parcels has coniferous trees, deciduous trees are in 9% parcels and 10% have both conifers and deciduous.

Due to the great popularity of front gardens with contemporary character, in Pęgów most frequently appear plants belonging to the species that are not traditional for rural gardens. Large part of the properties are just the trimmed lawns. Along the fences are rows of thujas planted in addition to double the insulating barrier from the sight of neighbors or passers-by. The other plants are usually collected in small, carefully delineated flowerbeds. Among them, most often can be noticed plants such as cypresses, junipers, non-native varieties of shrubs like Salix integra 'Hakuro-Nishiki' and ornamental grasses.

In contrast to Pęgów in the village Goworów dominating type of front garden is the traditional one (33%). The second most common is the mixed type (31%). There are also many utility yards or not planned front gardens. In Goworów, by far, the least popular way of front garden development is the contemporary style (8%), which positively affects on the visual perception of the village. Trends in the way of front garden development in Goworów present differently depending on the age of the buildings. By the farms dating from before
1945 the dominating type of front gardens is traditional one. Apart from them, there are often mixed types of front gardens and utility yards. The mixed type of front garden is the dominant category accompanying buildings dating from the period between 1945 and 1980, but also the traditional style appears by some of the buildings coming from this period. By contrast, by the plots developed after 1980, there are no traditional front gardens, the most common category is the lack of planned front garden. This is due to the fact that some new investments has not yet been completed. By the finished new buildings the front gardens are mostly developed in mixed and contemporary style.

Slightly less than a half of the plots (47%) have no tall trees in the vicinity of the plot’s buildings. They occur on 53% of all parcels of which 16% of the parcels have coniferous trees, 23% have deciduous trees and 14% of the parcels have both coniferous and deciduous trees.

In Goworów most often appear plants belonging to native species. Front gardens are rich in a variety of flowers. Most popular plant species found in front gardens in Goworów are:

- Perennials, annual and biennial plants, grasses: marigold, aster, periwinkle, hops, chrysanthemum, Canna, dill, snapdragon, poppy, marguerite, tomatillo bloated, miscanthus, columbine, fern, horsetail;
- Creepers: ivy, clematis, virginia creeper, vine;
- Deciduous trees: birch, maple, chestnut, oak, mountain ash, linden, alder, walnut, sumac, willow, cherry, apple, plum, cherry;
- Shrubs; chokeberry, elderberry, lilac, boxwood, dogwood White, forsythia, hawthorn, hydrangea, cotoneaster, juniper, Mock, blackberry, Weigela, privet, Mahonia, raspberry, Pyracantha coccinea, holly, quince, Chaenomeles, currant, rose, rhododendron, snowberry, spirea, euonymus, Kerria japonica;
- Conifer trees and shrubs: fir, larch, pine, spruce, yew, cypress, juniper, cedar.

**Summary**

The carried out research allow the authors to conclude that the form and composition of plant species planted in front gardens primarily depends on changes in the economic and social situation in surveyed villages. Pégów – rapidly growing suburban village, completely
lost its traditional character. The new inhabitants brought urban trends, which dominated the appearance of the private greenery. In many cases, the front gardens have lost its public representative function, changing in closed places, hidden behind tall, solid fences or dense rows of thujas. Different situation can be observed in Gaworów where population decline and only a slight increase of the number of new buildings can be observed. This fact together with the willingness of the inhabitants to referring to tradition – the weaving village, have resulted the village maintain the traditional form of plantings and have charm of a place where somehow "the time have stopped". Nevertheless, in each of the surveyed villages, there are modern forms and plant species alien to rural landscape introduced. Although the smaller the distance from large urban agglomerations, the faster the inflow of contemporary urban trends to the area. Unfortunately in both cases the regionalism and symbolism of plants are no longer relevant and choosing plants to front garden composition is dictated only by aesthetic considerations and individual taste.

**Literature**


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