

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND PRESERVATION OF THE LIPTHAY MANSION PARK IN LOVRIN

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Abstract: The Lipthay Mansion in the village of Lovrin, once owned by the Lipthay noble family, is a representative example of architectural and landscape heritage in Banat, Romania. Within the broader regional context, where over 70% of historical landscapes have been significantly altered or completely destroyed during the political transformations of the 20th century, this site stands as an exceptional example of preservation and historical continuity. This study analyzes the evolution of the mansion and its park based on historical research, topographic maps, cadastral surveys, and direct observations of the current state of the estate. The research examines and documents how the site has maintained its spatial integrity and original boundaries despite significant political and social changes in the region, while most similar properties have been severely damaged or fragmented. The study identifies factors contributing to the preservation, including the estate's integration into the urban fabric of Lovrin. The findings contribute to broader understanding of heritage conservation practice in the Banat region and offer recommendations for preservation plans that respect historical authenticity while accommodating contemporary needs of the local community and strengthening local identity.

Keywords: historical garden research, landscape conservation planning, cultural heritage preservation, architectural restoration, Banat historical landscapes

1. Introduction

The historical gardens and parks of Banat represent a significant but increasingly threatened cultural heritage resource within Romania. According to comprehensive surveys conducted between 2010-2017, more than 70% of historical gardens in the region have been either significantly altered, fragmented, or completely destroyed during the political transformations of the 20th century (Ciobotă, 2012). Of the 40 documented historical and

non-historical gardens in the region, only few maintained their original boundaries, and merely 3 preserved significant historical landscape elements (Harhoiu, 2015; Hegedüs, 2018). The Lipthay Mansion and its surrounding park in Lovrin stand out as an extraordinary example among these few preserved estates due to several distinctive characteristics: its complete retention of original spatial boundaries, preservation of key

architectural features including facade arrangements and portico, maintenance of historic vegetation patterns, and successful integration into the evolving urban context of Lovrin.

The Liphay family, one of the oldest noble families in Liptó County (now Slovakia) with a lineage dating back to the 13th century, acquired the Lovrin estate in 1772. Under Frigyes Liphay's leadership in the early 19th century, the mansion was significantly expanded and the surrounding landscape transformed according to the aristocratic design principles of the era (Lotreanu, 1935). This included the creation of a formal avenue in the western village part and the development of a sophisticated park with circulation patterns, vegetation arrangements, and spatial hierarchies that reflected contemporary landscape design practices. The estate thus offers a rare and intact example of the functional-spatial structure that characterized noble residences in 19th century Banat.

This research aims to accomplish two primary objectives:

1. To document and analyze how the Liphay Mansion and park have maintained their spatial integrity and character-defining features despite political and social transformations that destroyed similar properties, identifying the specific factors that enabled this exceptional preservation
2. To assess the current condition of architectural and landscape elements, developing a detailed inventory of preserved historical features that can inform conservation decisions

These objectives address a critical gap in heritage conservation practice in Romania, where there are few successful models for integrating historical properties into contemporary contexts without compromising their integrity. By examining the Liphay

estate's remarkable continuity—evident in historical maps from the Josephine Topographic Survey (1769-1772) through present-day cadastral records—this research provides valuable insights for planners, designers, and conservation specialists working in similar contexts.

Unlike properties such as the Csekonics estate in Zsombolya, the severely altered Mocioni Mansion in Foeni, or the fragmented Ambrózy estate in Timișoara (Hegedüs, 2018; Kovács, 2018), the Liphay estate offers a rare opportunity to study the initial functional-spatial organization of a noble residence in its near-complete form. The study systematically analyzes circulation patterns, vegetation structures, spatial hierarchies, and the relationship between built and natural elements that characterized the original design. This analysis reveals sophisticated design principles that can inform contemporary landscape architecture practice in the region, particularly for projects involving historical properties.

The findings of this research have direct applications for current planning and design practice in Lovrin and throughout the Banat region. By demonstrating how the Liphay estate's integration within Lovrin's urban fabric has contributed to its preservation, this research provides valuable lessons for community planners seeking to incorporate heritage resources into contemporary development while strengthening local identity and cultural continuity.

Through this multifaceted analysis of the Liphay Mansion and park, this study aims to contribute not only to heritage conservation scholarship but also to active planning and design practice that thoughtfully balances preservation and adaptation in historical landscapes.

2. Materials and methods

This study employs both historical analytical methods and conservation planning approaches within the framework of cultural landscape conservation as defined by the European Landscape Convention (European Council, 2000). Data collection combined historical document analysis of archival sources documenting ownership changes and interventions, cartographic comparison of maps from 1769-2024 to identify spatial evolution, field observation documenting current architectural and vegetation conditions, comparative analysis with other Banat gardens, and stakeholder consultation. Building on historical analysis, a values-based conservation approach (Ciobotă, 2012) was applied to identify character-defining features, assess significance, evaluate conditions, and develop treatment recommendations based on international conservation principles.

3. Results and discussion

Geographical and Historical Context

Lovrin is located in Timiș County, Romania, along national road DN6. The Liphay Mansion sits in the village center with frontage on both the national road and a park behind the mansion. This location has remained consistent throughout history according to historical maps (**Fig. 1**).

From Lovrin's first documentary mention in 1466 until the Liphay family's acquisition in 1792, the village experienced tumultuous history including invasions and repopulations. In 1777, the family received the estates from Emperor Leopold II, and in 1817, Frigyes Liphay began improvements, creating an avenue in the western village part and developing the mansion's park comparable to Timișoara parks (Borovszky, 1911; Lotreanu, 1935; Munteanu, 1998).



Fig. 1. Ortofotography of Lovrin (2024), showing the Liphay Mansion complex boundaries (white contour). The preservation of original dimensions is rare among regional historical estates, particularly given the widespread subdivision during post-communist era.

Spatial Evolution and Urban Context

The village of Lovrin developed along a west-east direction following the national road. The mansion's location near the center, towards the eastern side, opens onto both the national road and a park extending to a parallel street. The mansion is bordered by the Roman Catholic Church to the west and villagers' houses to the east.

This strategic position has remained unchanged through documented periods of settlement development, beginning with the second military topographic survey of the Habsburg Empire. The site has a regular rectangular shape distinguishable in older

representations from the Franciscan Topographic Map onward (Fig. 2. A, B). This spatial continuity is significant as it demonstrates how the estate's integration into the urban fabric has facilitated preservation.

The site has constant flat topography with no significant slope, typical for the village. Two distinct landscape zones are identifiable: the front vegetal area serving as buffer between mansion and road (appearing only on later maps), and the rear park area currently populated with tall vegetation, denser toward the mansion's back façade and thinning toward the northern boundary (Figures 3-4).

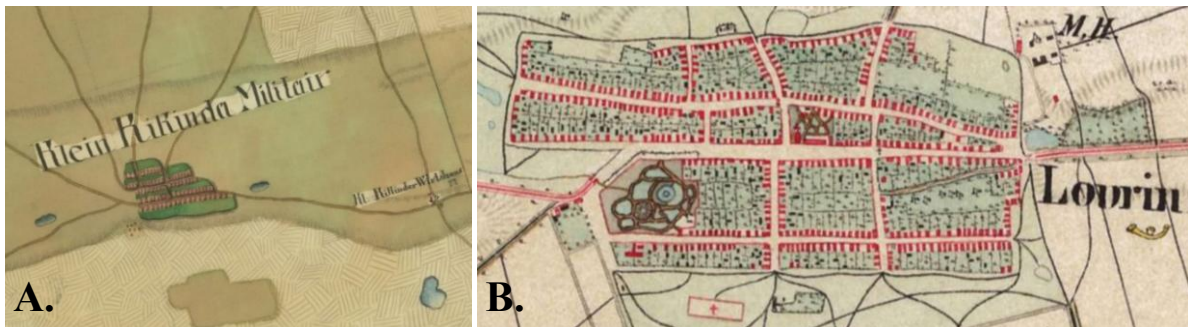


Fig. 2. A. The Josephine Topographic Map from 1769-1772 (source: hungaricana.hu), showing early settlement before mansion construction; **B.** The Second Topographic Survey (1806-1869) (source: hungaricana.hu), first clearly documenting the mansion and landscape with visible paths and vegetation patterns.

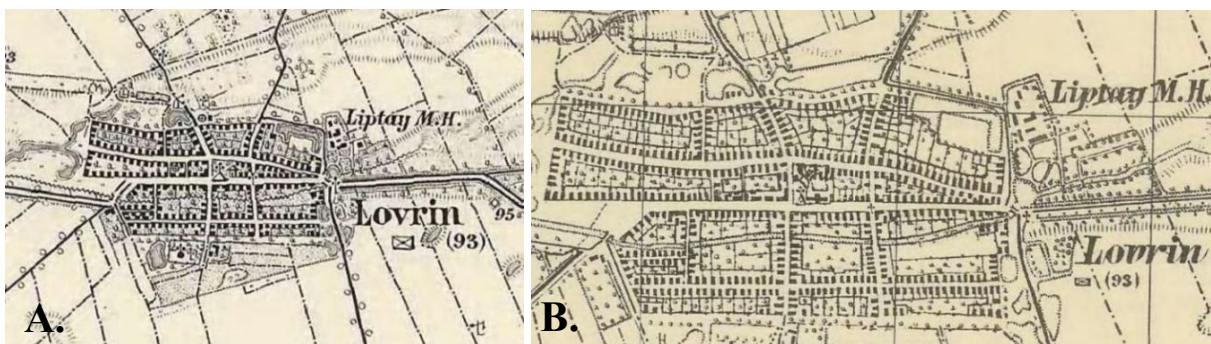


Fig. 3. A. The Franciscan Iozefinian Topographic Map of 1869-1887 (hungaricana.hu); **B.** The Kingdom of Hungary Map of 1869-1887 (hungaricana.hu)



Fig. 4. Fragment of cadastral map from 1899 (The Office of Land Registry and Real Estate Advertising Timiș), providing detailed information about property boundaries (A.), vegetation patterns, and built structures that have informed our understanding of the estate's historical organization and subsequent preservation (B.).

Functional Zoning and Spatial Organization

The second military topographic survey of the Austrian Empire signals both the functional zoning of the site and the presence of major constructed and landscaped elements on the site. On the southern side of the site is the mansion, while the rear and lateral areas contain auxiliary buildings serving complementary functions necessary for the noble estate.

Regarding the arrangement of major elements on the site, the cadastral map of 1899 shows changes in the rear area of the estate compared to earlier topographic maps. The representative alleys depicted in the

topographic maps disappear, and the cadastral map instead shows areas with dense vegetation arranged in a circular pattern, suggesting intentional landscape design with tall vegetation and "alleys" or paths that were planned and can still be identified today. This evolution reflects changing landscape tastes and functions, yet remarkably, the basic spatial organization has been maintained (Figures 5-6).

At present, while the original functional zoning is no longer strictly observed, the spatial organization remains remarkably intact. The mansion has been currently renovated, with efforts made to respect its historical character.

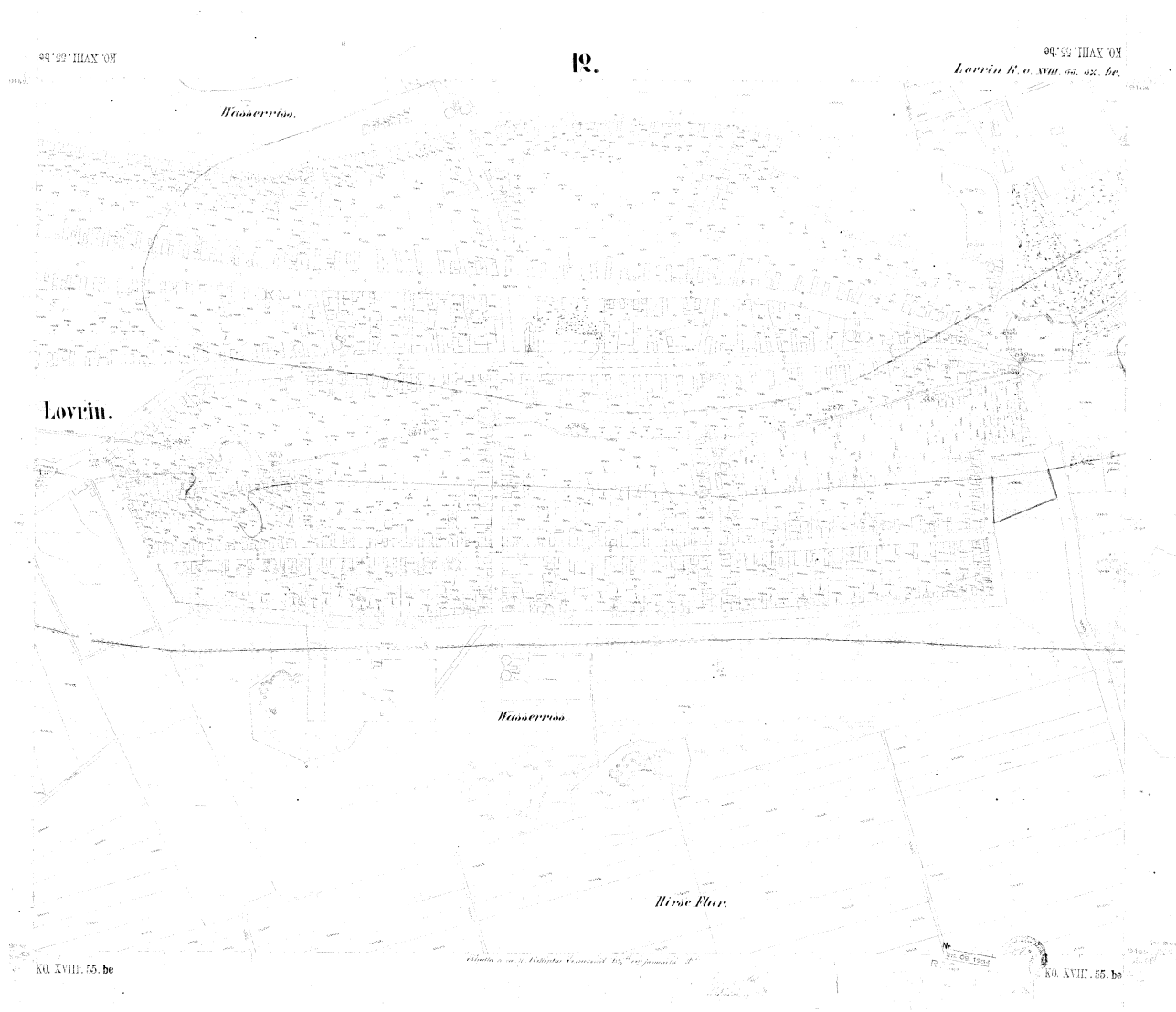


Fig. 5. Fragment of cadastral map from 23.09.1954 (The Office of Land Registry and Real Estate Advertising Timiș) documenting the estate during the early communist period, a time when many similar properties were significantly altered. The retention of the original boundaries during this period was crucial for the site's long-term preservation.



Fig. 6. Fragment of cadastral map from 1988, Scale 1:2000 (The Office of Land Registry and Real Estate Advertising Timiș), showing minimal changes to the estate's organization in the late 20th century, further supporting the site's value as an example of exceptional preservation in a period of rapid change.

Access Points and Circulation Patterns

Access to the site is from the eastern side of the estate, specifically from the right side of the mansion. Currently, access from the left side of the mansion is not possible, as the mansion is adjacent to the property boundary, next to the Roman Catholic Church.

It is assumed that this property boundary, which separates the mansion from the church, did not exist when the mansion was originally built, so access could have been possible in a circular fashion from both sides of the mansion. This assumption is supported by the second topographic survey, where the position and rhythm of the alleys seem to correlate with the location of the church and the space that existed inbetween, approximately identical in width to the space on the right side.

On the other hand, the existence of a possible access from the north, serving the auxiliary buildings and staff, is not excluded. Currently, such access exists in the form of a

pathway linking the northern side of the site to the mansion's park. It is uncertain whether this secondary access represents the remains of a former arrangement, as there are constructions shown on the rear side of the site in the second and third topographic surveys, which later disappear from the cadastral maps of 1899. These changes in circulation patterns reflect the evolving functional needs of the estate over time, while still maintaining key historical pathways.

The park's alleys are still visible today. One can observe the main pedestrian and vehicular paths leading to the mansion's access, located on the rear façade, oriented toward the park and characteristic of the period in which the mansion was built. Access to the mansion can also be made from the main street, as the building has an entrance on the main façade, but the fence in front of the building prevents direct access from the street. This dual access system is a significant preserved feature that

illustrates historical approaches to estate planning and social hierarchy.

Architectural Features and Preservation

Both the second and third military topographic surveys, as well as the map of the Kingdom of Hungary, show the mansion with its rectangular plan, without any changes to the layout over time. The mansion has not undergone additions or extensions, thus maintaining its original form both in terms of its floor plan and volume. This architectural continuity is exceptional in the region and contributes significantly to the site's heritage value.

Regarding the façades and openings, the alternation between solid and void is

rhythmically executed, with equal intensity toward both the national road and the park, although the significant visual opening, intentionally designed, was oriented toward the park (**Figures 7-10.**). The configuration of the openings suggests the existence of direct connections between the interior and exterior through doors, as well as visual connections facilitated by large windows oriented toward both the park and the public space, toward the main street that passes in front of the building. These design elements demonstrate sophisticated architectural principles that integrated the building with its surrounding landscape.



Fig. 7. The main facade of the Liphay mansion in Lovrin (2016). This photograph documents the condition before recent renovation efforts, showing the classical architectural elements and the symmetrical organization of openings that have been preserved throughout the building's history.



Fig. 8. The main facade of the Liphay mansion in Lovrin (2023), after renovation. The preservation of original architectural details during renovation work demonstrates increasing recognition of the site's heritage value and the implementation of appropriate conservation approaches.



Fig. 9. The rear facade with main access to inner courtyard (author's photo, **A.**) compared with 1903 postcard (**B.**), illustrating remarkable preservation of architectural features over more than a century



Fig. 10. Secondary access on the rear side of the property (**A.**) and the organization of existing pathways (**B.**) (the author's photos)

Conservation Significance and Planning Recommendations

The historical gardens of Banat have suffered extensively during political transformations. During the study of heritage-protected and non-heritage gardens in the Banat region, the Lovrin garden presents a unique case where no drastic area reduction or significant landscape modification occurred over time. Within this context, the Liphay Mansion park represents an exceptional preservation case.

Unlike the nearby destructured estates, the Liphay Mansion and park offer a rare opportunity to understand design principles of 19th century noble estates (Kovács, 2018). The site remains one of the few gardens in the

region that has not undergone original area changes, appearing identical in size to its original form.

Analyzing the garden, the current condition assessment identified conservation issues which, are requiring attention: monumental chestnut trees showing disease signs requiring arboricultural care, historical pathways suffering erosion, historical viewsheds obscured by unmanaged vegetation growth, and lack of interpretative elements communicating historical significance.

Based on site characteristics and regional context, recommended conservation approaches include: a preservation zone for immediate mansion surroundings, a rehabilitation zone for the main park area

preserving character-defining features while allowing compatible community uses, and a restoration zone for specific elements like the historical pathway system.

Implementation strategies include enhancing the site's community role through educational programming, developing a cyclical maintenance program, formalizing boundary protection, and prioritizing interventions beginning with the most vulnerable elements.

The climbing plants have disappeared from the mansion's walls, but decorative low

vegetation can still be observed along the alley parallel to the mansion's northern side. These detailed elements of the landscape design reveal a sophisticated approach to integrating architecture and plantings that deserves recognition in conservation efforts. The historical photographs (**Fig. 11**) provide valuable documentation of the estate's condition during the mid-20th century, revealing both preserved elements and changes that occurred during the communist period, offering important insights for contemporary conservation approaches.

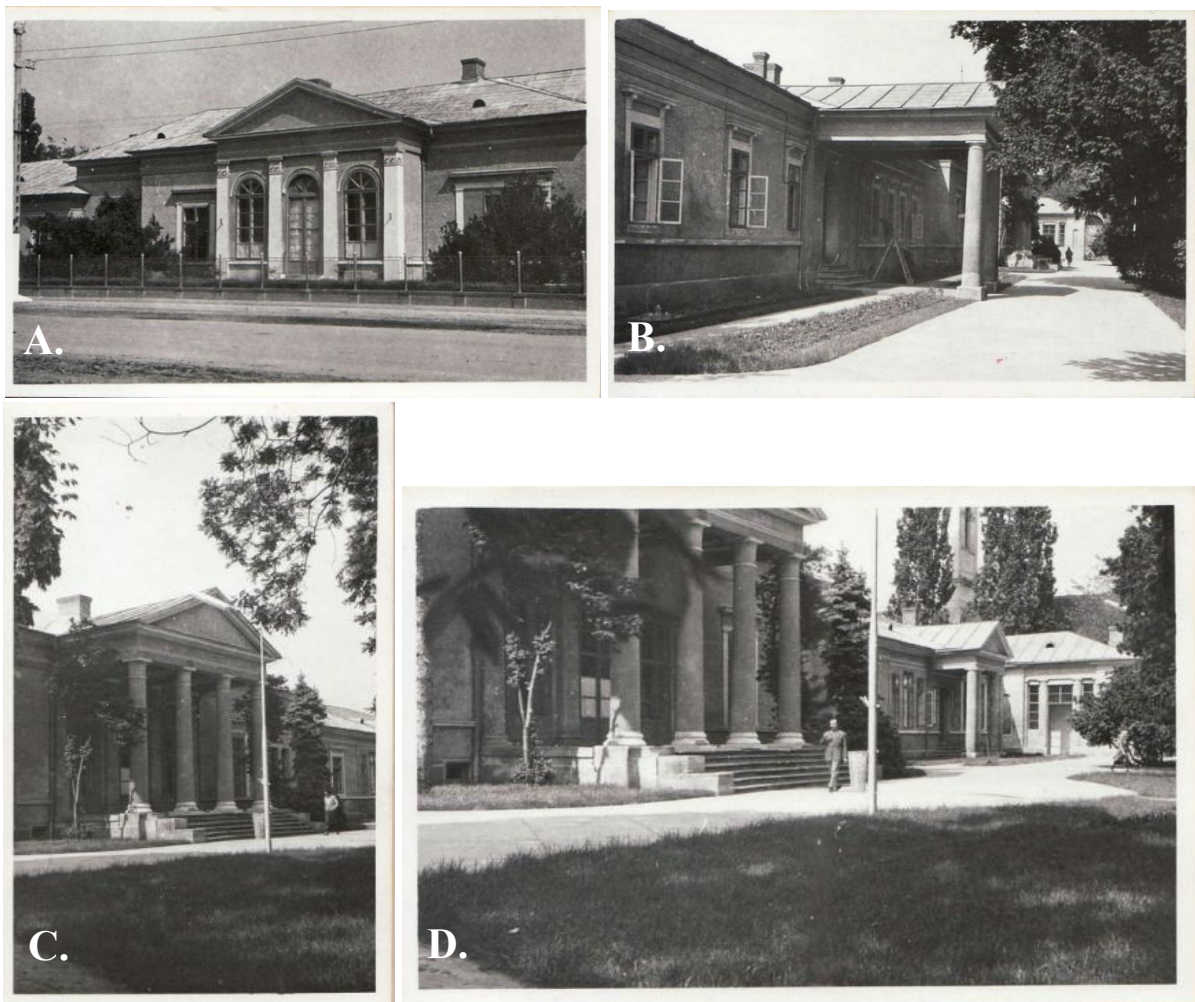


Fig. 11. Vintage images of the main facade and rear facade from 1965 (Photos: Velescu Oliver)

The cadastral map from 1899, as well as the map from 1954, do not make exact references to the arrangement of the rear park, but they do indicate it graphically as a distinct

area. This consistent documentation of the park as a defined space has likely contributed to maintaining its boundaries over time, unlike

many similar properties that were subdivided or repurposed.

On the site, a few monumental chestnut trees can be observed. These chestnuts may be of considerable age, but their exact age cannot be determined at this stage of the research. These mature specimens represent living botanical heritage and provide continuity with the site's historical character, warranting special protection in conservation efforts.

In terms of ornamental landscape objects, no specific historical items or park furniture have been identified. However, it is worth mentioning the memorial stone of Horia N. Groza. This stone is located on the right side of the site, in immediate proximity to the mansion, near the main access to the estate. Its position is designed so that it remains visible from the main road. The addition of this commemorative element represents a later layer of cultural significance that has been integrated into the historical landscape without compromising its integrity.

Regional Context and Comparative Significance

The historical gardens of Banat have suffered extensively during the political transformations of the 20th century. The historical gardens in the region were documented (Hegedüs, 2018), of which only few maintained their original boundaries, and merely 3 preserved significant historical landscape elements (Hegedüs, 2018; Harhoiu, 2015). Within this context, the Liphay Mansion park represents an exceptional case of preservation, maintaining both its original spatial boundaries and key design features despite the tumultuous history of the region.

The Liphay Mansion and its park offer a rare opportunity to understand the design principles, spatial relationships, and planting strategies that characterized noble estates in 19th century Banat (Hegedüs, 2018; Kovács,

2018). This exceptional state of preservation elevates the site's significance beyond its architectural merits to a position of regional importance for landscape heritage.

Current Condition Assessment

The Liphay Mansion park remains one of the few gardens in the region that has not undergone changes in the size of its original area. It appears identical in size to its original form today. This spatial continuity also holds true for the built environment, as no significant modifications have been observed over time. The initial image of the historic garden is still discernible in the current arrangement, which shows visible traces of historical design in terms of vegetation patterns and pathway organization.

However, the current condition assessment identified several conservation issues that require attention. The monumental chestnut trees show signs of disease and require professional arboricultural care. Historical circulation routes are visible but suffering from erosion and lack of proper drainage. Some historical viewsheds between the mansion and key landscape features have become obscured by unmanaged vegetation growth. Additionally, the site lacks educational components that would communicate its historical significance to visitors.

Conservation Planning Framework

The conservation approaches recommended based on the site's specific characteristics and regional context include a preservation zone for the immediate surroundings of the mansion, including the formal entrance area and portico connection to the park, which should be subject to the highest level of preservation, maintaining all original materials and spatial relationships. A rehabilitation zone for the main park area that would benefit from a rehabilitation approach

that preserves character-defining features while allowing compatible uses that support community engagement, and a restoration zone where specific elements, such as the historical pathway system and selected planting arrangements documented in historical photographs, should be considered for accurate restoration based on historical evidence.

Conclusions

The Liphay Mansion in Lovrin represents a remarkable example of the preservation of a historical estate in Banat, Romania, that has remained nearly unchanged over the decades despite profound social and political transformations that have devastated similar sites throughout the region. This exceptional case of continuity offers both scholarly insights into 19th century landscape design practices and practical lessons for contemporary conservation planning in Central Europe.

The research demonstrates that the Liphay estate's significance extends beyond its architectural merits to encompass historical value as a tangible connection to the aristocratic landscape tradition of Banat and the cultural influence of the Liphay family, design value as an example of integrated mansion-park design principles characteristic of 19th century landscape architecture, rarity value as one of very few intact historical gardens remaining in the region, and educational value as a resource for understanding historical spatial planning, plant selection, and construction techniques.

This research has documented several key factors that have contributed to the site's exceptional preservation, including the estate's consistent boundaries and spatial organization from the 19th century to the present, the retention of key architectural features, particularly the facade arrangements and portico, the preservation of major landscape elements, including mature trees and historical

pathway configurations, and the site's integration within the urban fabric of Lovrin, which has provided context and protection.

Compared to other similar estates in the region that have undergone fragmentation, inappropriate modifications, or complete abandonment, the Liphay Mansion offers an important case study in heritage continuity. Its preservation provides valuable insights for conservation strategies for other historical landscapes in Romania.

This study demonstrates the critical need for an integrated approach to historical landscape conservation that combines rigorous historical research to understand the site's evolution and significance, technical condition assessment to identify conservation priorities, stakeholder engagement to ensure community support and sustainable management, and appropriate design interventions that respect historical authenticity while accommodating contemporary needs.

The conservation planning recommendations presented in this study offer a framework not only for the preservation of the Liphay Mansion and park but also a methodological approach applicable to other threatened historical landscapes in the region. By implementing these recommendations, the site can serve as a model of heritage conservation that balances preservation with community engagement.

The Liphay Mansion and park represent not only architectural and landscape heritage, but also embody cultural memory and regional identity that deserve protection for future generations. Their preservation and thoughtful integration into contemporary community life would contribute significantly to cultural continuity and place-based identity in a region that has experienced substantial loss of its built heritage.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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