

POREČ BOTANICAL GARDEN, A CENTURY-LONG STORY

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Despite the story of the Poreč Botanic Garden being constantly featured in local monographs, books and in the lore of the local people, the history and circumstances that led to the establishment and decline of the Poreč Botanical Garden were never completely clarified. The aim of this research was to find records of its existence, determine the place and time of its origin, identify the persons responsible and explain the circumstances threatening the loss of the last remains of the garden. The result have shown that Poreč had a botanical garden a century ago, and point out the urgent need for its preservation and restoration.

Key words: Poreč botanical garden, park architecture, horticulture, education, Croatia

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Iako se priča o porečkom botaničkom vrtu generacijama provlači kroz razne monografije, knjige i među lokalnim stanovništvom, povijest i činjenice koje su dovele do njegovog osnivanja i propadanja nisu nikad do kraja utvrđene. Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je naći dokaze o postojanju botaničkog vrta, utvrditi mjesto i vrijeme njegova nastanka, identificirati osobe zaslužne za njegovu realizaciju i objasniti događaje koji su doveli do njegova propadanja te koji danas prijete nestankom njegovih posljednjih ostataka. Rezultati našega istraživanja potvrdili su hipotezu da je u Poreču prije 100 godina doista postojao botanički vrt i ukazali na hitnu potrebu za očuvanjem i obnovom njegovih ostataka.

Ključne riječi: porečki botanički vrt, parkovna arhitektura, hortikultura, obrazovanje, Hrvatska

INTRODUCTION

Croatia is proud of its botanical heritage and resources, and recognized for its valuable collections of indigenous flora, the third richest in Europe. Several Croatian botanical gardens develop collections of indigenous taxa, while arboreta keep collections of ornamental trees and shrubs, some older than 300 years (Kovačić & Stamenković, 2011). Botanical Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) reports 10 registered botanical gardens and arboreta in Croatia (BGCI, 2013), with a much larger number of other botanical collections, (school gardens and parks, museal and religious gardens, city parks etc., Kovačić & Stamenković, 2011). The region of Istria has no registered botanical gardens today, and there are no reliable records of any Istrian botanical garden in the past, yet Poreč is one of just a few locations with some indications that a botanical garden was once present.

Poreč is a town in Istria, the largest peninsula in the Adriatic Sea, located at the head of the Adriatic between the Gulf of Trieste and the Bay of Kvarner. The city is known for its rich cultural and natural heritage (Orlić, 1997). Scientific research in the natural

sciences in Poreč was linked in the past primarily to the foundation of the Eno-Pomologic Research Station in 1875 (renamed in 1887 the Institute of Agriculture) and the Agricultural School in 1882 (ORLIĆ, 1985). At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Istrian and particularly Poreč flora was well studied, and many important documents were published (MARCHESETTI, 1890; CALEGARI, 1897, 1899, 1903).

The story of the Poreč botanical garden was handed down by word of mouth through the generations. A few locations were mentioned as potential botanical gardens in the past. Data about Poreč botanical garden have been published only sporadically in an encyclopaedia (PERICIN, 2005), specialised articles (TRIPAR, 1984; BAKSA, 1984) and in certain books (ORLIĆ, 2008), but the first more systematic research was performed by Claudio Pericin in 2000. Most often mentioned as the founder of the botanical garden was the botanist, Matteo Calegari (1858–1929) and the year 1900 as the time of the foundation of the garden; still, many questions remained unsolved. So far researches were based on oral transmission and limited literature, but we decided to start an investigation with the aim of determining the facts about the place and time of the foundation of the botanical garden, the persons responsible for the idea and the realization, as well to reconstruct the circumstances that in the past were responsible for the status of botanical garden having been attained.

WYSE JACKSON & SUTHERLAND gave a definition of a botanical garden in year 2000 and according to it; botanical gardens are institutions holding public and documented collections of living plants for the purposes of scientific research, conservation, display and education. Botanical gardens have today an important role in science, education and ecological issues (HARDWICK *et al.*, 2011).

Although the legend of a botanical garden is widely accepted as a part of Poreč history, no study so far has clarified the facts of its past and the processes that determined the present situation, which threatens to bring about the loss of what remains of the garden.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Preliminary investigation based on personal knowledge, available literature and public opinion narrowed the possibilities for a botanical garden location in Poreč to three areas: park of the Mate Balota High School, park of the Anton Štifanić Gastronomy and Tourism College and the park close to the current bus terminal (Fig. 1). The past and development of these locations were researched from October 2012 to May 2013. We tried to collect the maximum amount of written information and personal records, and the obtained data are qualitative. In total, we searched for documents in 14 institutions and interviewed more than 30 persons in Croatia, Italy and Austria. Relevant documents from the following institutions have been surveyed: State Archives in Pazin, Institute of Agriculture and Tourism Poreč, Mate Balota High School Poreč, Land Registry Department Poreč, State Geodetic Administration / Regional Cadastral Office Pula / Poreč Branch Office, Conservation Department Pula, Rovinj Centre for Historical Research (all situated in Istria, Croatia), Faculty of Architecture of the University of Zagreb (Croatia), Botanical Garden Library of the University of Padua (Italy), San Michele all'Adige Institute of Agriculture (Italy), State Archives in Trieste (Italy), Carlo Cattaneo Technical Institute in Milano (Italy) and University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna BOKU (Austria).



Fig. 1. Poreč map with three possible locations of a botanical garden. A) park of Mate Balota High School, B) park of the Anton Štifanić Gastronomy and Tourism College, C) park close to the current bus terminal

Interviews were performed face to face, by phone and by e-mail. Participation was on a voluntary basis and only one question was posed: „What do you know about the Poreč botanical garden?”. None of the potential informants refused to answer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All data was collected, elaborated and following results were established.

Both school parks, of the Mate Balota High School and of the Anton Štifanić Gastronomy and Tourism College, were planted shortly after the opening of the new agricultural school building in 1907 or (most likely) in 1908, on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the reign of the Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Joseph I (1848–1916). During that year(s), parks in all parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were planted in honour of the emperor. At the time, these parks belonged to the Agricultural School and the Agriculture Research Station estate. On the map from 1924 the agricultural estate and both school parks are recorded (Fig. 2). The bigger park is documented also on several historical postcards and photos, starting from the 1920s (Fig. 3). Today the park of the Gastronomy and Tourism College is lost, with only a few remaining plants. The Mate Balota High School park is well preserved and the disposition of plants has not been changed (Fig. 4). Today, the professors and students who performed the inventory of the park recently (in 2012), maintain the park. In this park today 52 plant species grow, including the common yew (*Taxus baccata*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens* var. *pyramidalis* and var. *horizontalis*), paulownia (*Paulownia tomentosa*), crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*). Some species have been neglected, and some have been transferred to other parks, mostly the Brijuni islands (BAKSA, 1984). In both parks one old common yew is growing, a species not very common in Istria, and

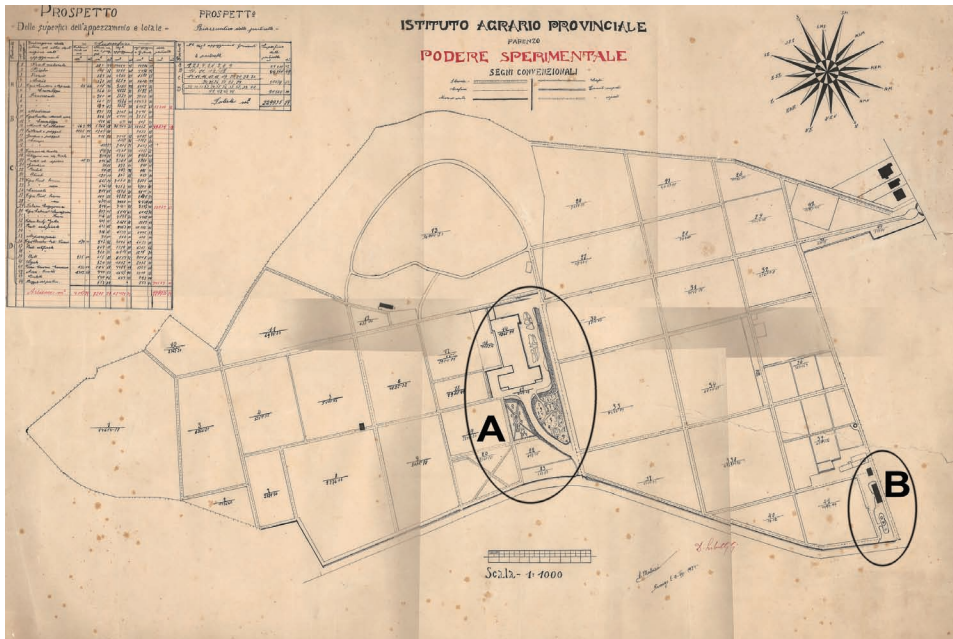


Fig. 2. Map of the Agriculture Research Station and Agricultural School property from 1924 with both parks (Collection of the Poreč Institute of Agriculture and Tourism). A) park of Mate Balota High School, B) park of the Anton Štifanić Gastronomy and Tourism College



Fig. 3. Postcard of the Agricultural School park from 1930s (Collection of the Museum of the Poreč Territory).



Fig. 4. Recent photo of the Park of Mate Balote High School (photo: B. Sladonja).



Fig. 5. Century-old common yews (*Taxus baccata*) in the parks of Mate Balota High school and the Gastronomy and Tourism College (photo: B. Sladonja).

external examination indicated the same age, approximately 100 years, confirming the theory of the common past (Fig. 5). Those two parks were not designed as botanical gardens, but as decorative and educative school parks.

The park next to the current Poreč bus terminal has a more complex history and it is, according to the interviewees, the most commonly suggested site for the lost botanical garden. At the beginning of the 20th century this area was known under the name St. Lucia, and it was privately owned by the Calegari family. The estate bordered the sea-coast, the Agricultural School and Agriculture Research Station, and the area known as „Tre ville“, due to the presence of three Secession villas. The exact year of the beginning of the planting of a garden could not be defined. However, after a thorough and accurate survey of many historical postcards, photos, letters and other written materials, and also thanks to the personal testimonies, we deduced that it was probably a few years after World War I. The initiator of the botanical garden was Doctor Virginio Calegari (1881–1943) (Fig. 6), an enthusiast for botany and agriculture. He, very probably, was supported by his uncle Matteo Calegari, a known botanist who published many articles about Istrian, especially Poreč, flora, misnamed in the literature as „Iginio“ (PERICIN, 2000). Both Calegaris were educated at universities in Austria (Vienna) and Italy, and worked in many European institutions, as well as in Poreč. Matteo Calegari was often said to be the most to be credited with the idea of a botanical garden idea due to his indisputable expertise. But he spent almost all his working life as a professor in Italian educational institutions and could not have been in charge of the day-to-day creation of a botanical garden. He returned to Poreč only after his retirement, five years before his death and in these years he was dedicated to political life, obtaining several functions. It was Virginio Calegari who took care of the family estate and the botanical garden from its establishment to the middle of the World War II. There is no written evidence of the

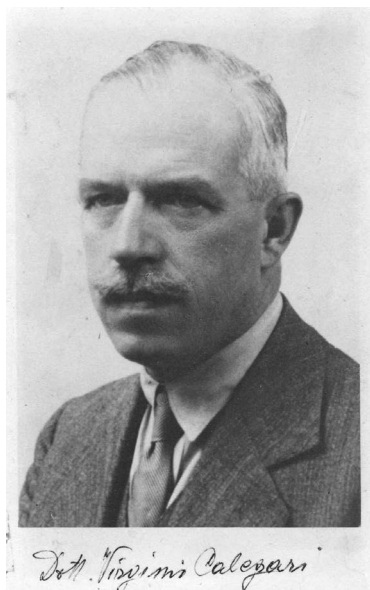


Fig. 6. Dr. Virginio Calegari, founder of the Poreč botanical garden (1881–1943) (Private collection of Ferruccio Calegari).



Fig. 7. The recent remains of Poreč botanical garden (photo: B. Sladonja).

number and distribution of plant species at that time, but the area of the garden diminished and the number of species fell drastically in 1967 due to construction works, when the city bus terminal was built on the present site. In fact, the area was proclaimed state property in 1962. Personal records affirm that before the bus terminal was built, the garden contained a large number of exotic and indigenous plant species, often purchased, and systematically marked and listed. Today, there are no written records that these plants existed. In the 1920s, the garden served also as an experimental estate for the Agricultural School and a place for school practice in botany (TRIPAR, 1984).

After its establishment, the garden was probably not opened to the public, but in the middle of the 20th century it became public (personal records). Today, from the original park only a small area behind the bus terminal is left, counting about 30 trees and shrubs (Fig. 7). The most distinctive are: silver fir (*Abies alba*), bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), goldenrain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*), photinia (*Photinia serratifolia*), thuja (*Thuja orientalis*), southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), yucca (*Yucca* sp.), Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*), Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*), windmill palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*, syn. *Trachycarpus fortunei*), date-plum (*Diospyros lotus*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), holm oak (*Quercus ilex*), strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*) and common myrtle (*Myrtus communis*) (PERICIN, 2000). Poreč postcards from the first half of the 20th century the outlines of the garden can be seen and some plants (e.g. cypresses) still present today can be recognized (Fig. 8). Unfortunately, today the park is not recognized as a valuable city site and the number of plants is decreasing continuously. This negligence could lead to the irrecoverable loss of the park.

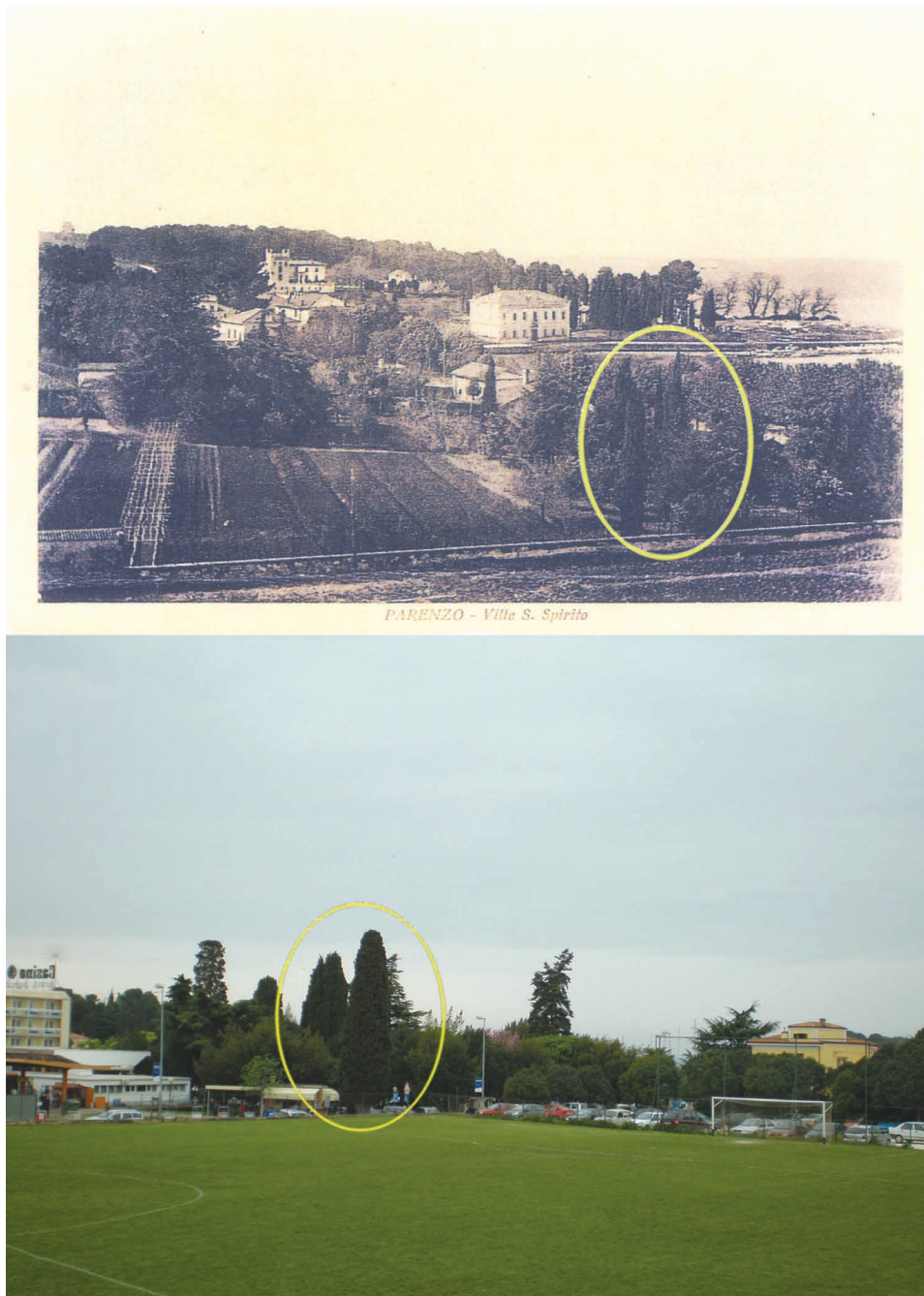


Fig. 8. Poreč botanical garden in the first years of establishment, in the postcard of the Ca-legari estate from 1930s (upper) and today (lower). Some plants can be identified on both photos (signed in circles) (Collection of the Museum of the Poreč Territory (upper photo) and B. Sladonja (lower photo).

CONCLUSIONS

It cannot be stated that the Poreč garden was ever registered as a botanical garden. In the political turmoils of the 20th century public and private documents recording the existence of a botanical garden have been destroyed. However, the present research did provide indubitable evidence that the garden in the past fulfilled all the postulates for the definition of a botanical garden in today's terms.

According to the local people who can remember the existence of the garden and to the living relatives of the founders of the garden, the collection of living plants was well documented. It was used for the educational purposes of the Agricultural School, and was open to the public at least in one period of its existence.

It can be thus concluded that our hypothesis is confirmed and that Poreč indeed had a botanical garden a century ago. Unfortunately, its remains today are not in a very good condition.

We are sure that ascertainment of the situation in the past will promote the implementation of a garden restoration project. This should include ecological management and better educational capabilities for the future. It is our wish to preserve the remaining plants, label them adequately with the scientific and common plant names and revive the memory of the people who, because of their love of botany, have left a token to future generations. The area of the former garden today is irrecoverably changed, but the idea is still alive. We hope that the Poreč botanical garden could be renewed at the same or some close location in the near future.

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SUMMARY

Poreč botanical garden, a century-long story

B. Sladonja & E. Poropat Pustijanac

Croatia is proud of its botanical heritage and resources, and recognized for its valuable collections of indigenous flora, the third richest in Europe. Poreč is a town known for its wealthy cultural and natural heritage and one of just a few places in Istria region associated with a botanical garden. The Poreč botanical garden is widely accepted as a part of Poreč history but so far, facts about the place and time of the origin of the botanical garden, persons to be credited with the idea and realization, as well as facts in the past which led to the degradation of the park have not been clarified. Our hypothesis was that Poreč did indeed have a botanical garden in the past. The aim of this investigation was to find proofs of its existence and explain the processes which led to the present situation, threatening the loss of the last remains of the garden.

We collected and elaborated all available qualitative data (documentation and personal records) regarding the botanical garden.

Even after extensive research no registration documents of botanical garden were found, most likely due to the political circumstances of the first half of the 20th century. However this research provided evidence that, beyond any doubt, the garden satisfied all the postulates defining botanical gardens today. Because of this valuable heritage it is high time to start activities for the preservation of the remains of the botanical garden for the benefit of future generations.

SAŽETAK

Porečki botanički vrt, priča stara jedno stoljeće

B. Sladonja i E. Poropat Pustijanac

Hrvatska je ponosna na svoje botaničko nasljeđe i resurse te prepoznata po svojim vrijednim zbirkama autohtone flore, treće najbogatije u Europi. Poreč je grad poznat po bogatoj kulturnoj i prirodnoj baštini te jedno od rijetkih mjesta u Istri u čijoj povijesti postoji priča o botaničkom vrtu. Porečki botanički vrt je široko prihvaćen kao dio gradske povijesti, no sve do danas nisu razjašnjene činjenice o vremenu i mjestu njegova nastanka, osobama zaslužnim za realizaciju, ni o događajima iz prošlosti koji su doveli do današnjeg stanja. Naša hipoteza bila je da je Poreč u prošlosti doista imao botanički vrt, a cilj istraživanja bio je naći dokaze o njegovom postojanju te objasniti procese koji su doveli do njegovog zapuštanja te današnjeg ignoriranja vrijednosti, koja prijeti potpunom nestanku njegovih ostataka.

Sakupili smo i obradili sve raspoložive podatke, pisani i slikovni materijal te usmenu predaju o botaničkom vrtu.

Vjerojatno zbog politički burne prve polovice 20. stoljeća, niti nakon opsežnog istraživanja nismo pronašli dokumente o registraciji tog botaničkog vrta. Ovo je istraživanje ipak utvrdilo činjenice koje bez sumnje potvrđuju da je tadašnji porečki botanički vrt zadovoljavao sve pretpostavke koje danas definiraju botaničke vrtove.

S obzirom na vrijednu prirodnu i kulturnu baštinu ovog vrta, potrebno je započeti s aktivnostima očuvanja ostataka botaničkog vrta u korist budućih generacija.