

ABOUT VISIONARIES – PRECURSORS OF CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: USA, ENGLAND AND POLAND

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ABSTRACT

This article describes life and achievements of three creators – people of action: the American Frederick Law Olmsted, the Englishman Ebenezer Howard and the Pole Henryk Jordan. They are people who created and implemented their works in the second half of the 19th century. Their fates seemingly so distant and different from each other, are, however, extremely convergent. My intention is to present the profiles and achievements of three visionaries who created their greatest works in the second half of the 19th century, constituting the foundation for contemporary landscape architecture. By developing new ideas and models of objects and realising their goal, they were genius self-taught people, contributing to the development of modern landscape architecture. In this study, I would like to emphasize the commonality of their fates and interests, and take a look through the profiles of the heroes of the period when modern landscape architecture was born. It is also my intention to highlight the significance of Henryk Jordan and restore him to his proper place in the history of Polish landscape architecture.

Key words: genesis of contemporary landscape architecture, F. Law Olmsted, E. Howard, H. Jordan, Central Park, Jordan Park, city-garden

INTRODUCTION

It is a story about people born on three corners of the world who, at first glance, do not have anything in common, but all are different. They come from different countries, have different education, practice various professions, do not know each other personally, they have never met¹. They were united by their interests, disagreement with evil, and most of all by a passion realised against all odds. They created, independently of each other, completely unique and original works that became the basis of contemporary landscape architecture. The characters of this story are three creators – people of

action: the American Frederick Law Olmsted, the Englishman Ebenezer Howard and the Pole Henryk Jordan. They are exceptional people, creating and implementing their works in the second half of the 19th century. The fates of our heroes, seemingly so distant and different from each other, are, however, extremely convergent. It is worth getting to know them better, because their works, despite the passage of over 100 years, constantly influence the current landscape architecture. Our characters share a common destiny, difficult childhood, family dramas, turbulent youth, similar passions and interests, social activism, searching for their own path, stubbornness to improve the existing world.

¹ There is no information that they ever met, although theoretically it could have happened because they were in New York (United States) at the same time and were interested in similar things, they were fascinated by the public park movement and the playground movement.

Their activity, perhaps for the first time in history, drew attention to the social importance of green areas for the health and quality of life of city residents. Research shows (cf. Maas Verheij, Groenewegen, de Vries & Spreeuwenberg, 2006) that the beneficiaries of richly and diversely equipped public parks, playgrounds for children and adolescents, city gardens are primarily people with a low socio-economic status. Hence the conclusion that the consistent and rational development of green areas should occupy one of the central positions in the spatial planning policy of each city. The development of these ideas is the latest model of the city of the future – a biophilic city – proposed by Timothy Beatley (2010).

PURPOSE AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

My intention is to present the profiles and achievements of three visionaries: Frederick Law Olmsted, Ebenezer Howard and Henryk Jordan, who in the second half of the nineteenth century created works that were the foundations for contemporary landscape architecture. I would like to point out that their greatest achievements, for which we respect and admire them, were achieved in a field not related to their professions which they performed with success (a popular and respected journalist, inventor and talented clerk of the House of Commons and a professor at the Jagiellonian University and a famous gynecologist). Developing new ideas and models of objects and implementing their goal, they were genius self-taught people, contributing to the development of modern landscape architecture.

In this study, I would like to emphasize the commonality of their fates and interests, and take a look through the characters of the period when modern landscape architecture is born. It is also my intention to highlight the significance of Henryk Jordan and restore him to his proper place in the history of Polish landscape architecture.

I conducted my research using the comparative case studies method (Yin, 1994; Francis, 1999), also known as the multiple comparative case study method

(Niezabitowska, 2014). The comparative method is based on comparing phenomena, activities, things, concepts and statements with each other. According to Niezabitowska, the advantage of this method is the setting of the studied cases in a broad context, the use of multiple data sources, which allows to explain the cause-effect relationships of the studied phenomena. For this reason, the results of these studies are suitable for theoretical generalization. As a result of the comparisons, one gains the partial or complete identity of the things being compared with each other (Pieter, 1967).

DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD, NOT EASY YOUTH

They were born in the first half of the 19th century, known as the age of steam and electricity. The civilised world is undergoing an industrial revolution, cities are rapidly industrialising and expanding. Chaotic urbanisation is progressing due to the mass migration of people from the countryside to the cities. The population of New York increases five times in 50 years (between 1850 and 1900). London, which in 1850 was the largest city in the world, grows almost twice, as does Kraków². Cities have no sewage system, sewage flows through exposed gutters. Workers employed in industrial plants live in overcrowded, stuffy and dark apartments. The population density breaks all records. Living in cities becomes terribly difficult. Overpopulation, city pollution, unemployment and poverty of this big city jungle are watched closely by Władysław Reymont, who in the summer of 1894 sets out on his first foreign trip to London. The city appears to Reymont as a dangerous monster that is drowning in fog, rain and mud. London smog was particularly troublesome because the poisonous fumes were extremely lethal. This is due to the combustion of carbon rich in sulphur compounds. Typically, when carbonaceous smoke was emitted, significant amounts of sulphur dioxide were released into the atmosphere, which reacted with the water in a moist mist to form a slurry containing sulphuric acid. The later Nobel Prize winner writes about poorly constructed houses, the lack of proper sanitary

² According to Wikipedia, New York City's population grows from 300,000 at that time to over 1.5 million, London from 2.35 million to 4.5 million, and Kraków from 40,000 up to 85,000.

conditions and ubiquitous dirt. The narrow and smelly streets look like gutters, while the houses are “black, half-broken sheds, windows closed with rags, doors hanging on one hinge. People wander like shadows and dogs sniff and kick in heaps of rubbish [own transl.]” (Reymont, 1952, p. 409). The buildings are dripping with dirt, everything smells disgusting. The sensations he notes with all his senses become unpleasant and sharp for him. They are disgusting “gin and brandy smells [own transl.]” (Reymont, 1952, p. 409), blood and garbage smells. London, seen through the eyes of a sensitive young traveller, is “the city of hell [own transl.]” (Reymont, 1952, p. 409). Such conditions result in disease and epidemics. In London then, several outbreaks of cholera between 1831 and 1854 killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Of course, this collapse of the nineteenth-century capitalist city is also observed by other, first of all, its most enlightened inhabitants. In Europe and America (the United States), remedial proposals appear independently of each other. Modern urban planning is born. These ideas are about replacing chaos with order. How to save the city from disaster. The most aware people began to wonder where to build factories so that smoke would not go to residential areas. How to plan roads and railways so that they are not burdensome and at the same time serve the best. Or which

vacant land should be allocated for development and which should be undeveloped, otherwise the city will suffocate. New ideas emerged calling for healing cities. Healers, sometimes doctors themselves, are eager to use medical terminology. They talk about “urban tissue”, “bloodstream”, “circulation” and “lungs of the city”. They wonder what can be done to save the city. In Poland, the most famous was Dr. H. Jordan, the initiator of parks for children and youth. He founded in Kraków the first park of this type in the world. In the United States, one of the loudest demands for remedial action is the successful journalist Frederic Law Olmsted.

Frederick is just four years old (Fig. 1) when his mother, Charlotte Law (Hull), dies. At the age of 15, he succumbs to sumac poisoning, almost loses his eyesight and has to abandon his dreams of studying. He has various jobs: he is a salesman, clerk, sailor, farmer (Martin, 2011).

Henryk is not doing better. Boniface Jordan, Henryk’s father, dies prematurely. Henryk is a sickly child. He attends secondary school in Tarnopol and Tarnów. In 1861, as a 19-year-old, he takes part in national demonstrations, for which he is at risk of being expelled from school, so in 1862 he goes to Trieste, and a year later he passes the secondary school-leaving examination in Italian with honors (Bujak, 1907).

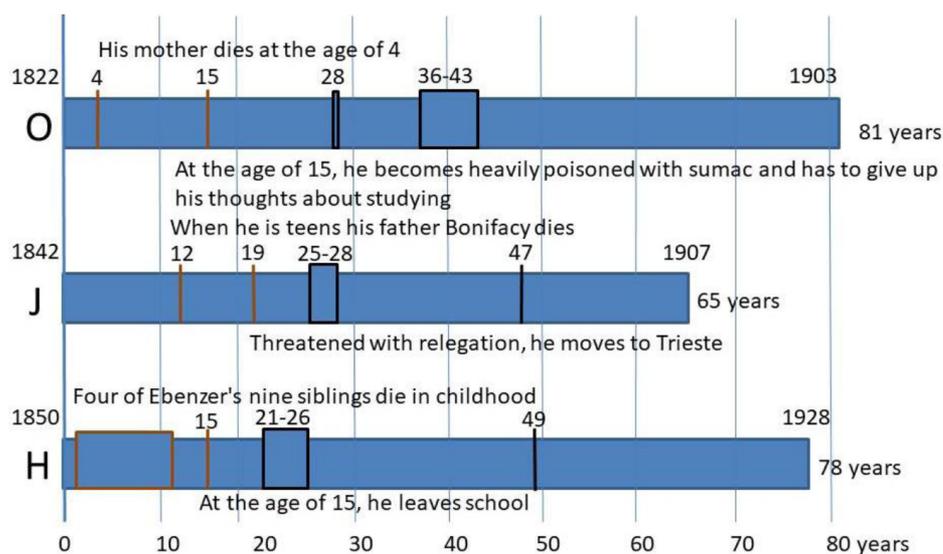


Fig. 1. Difficult childhood, not easy youth: Olmsted (O), Jordan (J) and Howard (H)

Little Ebenezer also experiences misfortune. Four of Ebenezer Howard’s nine siblings died in childhood. Howard leaves school at the age of 15 to work as a clerk in London. He often changes clerical jobs (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2021).

INCUBATION – TURNING POINT – TRAVELS

The turning point in young Frederick’s life is the journey. In 1850, he and his brother and friend go on a six-month tour of Europe and the British Isles (Fig. 2). He is fascinated by the parks and private estates viewed, as well as picturesque landscapes. In 1852 he published his first book entitled *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*. In December, as a reporter for the New York Times, he travelled south, describing social relations and criticising the slavery system. In the years 1855–1857 he is a partner of the publishing company G.P. Putnam’s Sons and editor-in-chief of the company’s monthly magazine. He becomes a valued and well-known journalist. He calls for the construction of a central park in New York.

The journey is also a turning point in the life of Henryk Jordan. He finished his studies in 1867. Due to health reasons and difficult financial conditions, he interrupts his preparation for the final diploma examination. He leaves for Berlin, where he makes a living by tutoring. After a few months in Germany, he leaves

for New York. Initially, he earns money by playing the piano in restaurants and in Swedish gymnastics for girls. There, for the first time, he gets acquainted with the issues of physical education. He is fascinated by the American Playground Movement (APM) and the American Park Movement (Olmsted). At the same time, he begins his obstetric and gynecological practice. He sets up a school of midwives, which is highly appreciated by the attendance. In 1870, after almost two years in New York, he returned to the home through England and Berlin.

Ebenezer Howard is also a restless spirit. In 1871, at the age of 21, partly under the influence of his farmer uncle, he goes with two friends to the USA. There, he buys a farm in Nebraska only to find out quickly that he is not suitable for this job. So he moves to Chicago and works as a court reporter. After an unsuccessful attempt to become a farmer in Nebraska, he finds employment as a stenographer in Chicago, in a city just rebuilt after a fire. He is interested in political and social issues. He establishes contacts with the poets Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He reads the works of Tom Paine and begins to call himself a “free thinker”. Over time, Howard begins to wonder about the possibilities of improving the living conditions of the inhabitants. He is impressed by the accomplishments of Frederick Law Olmsted, especially his Riverside suburb design and the APM.

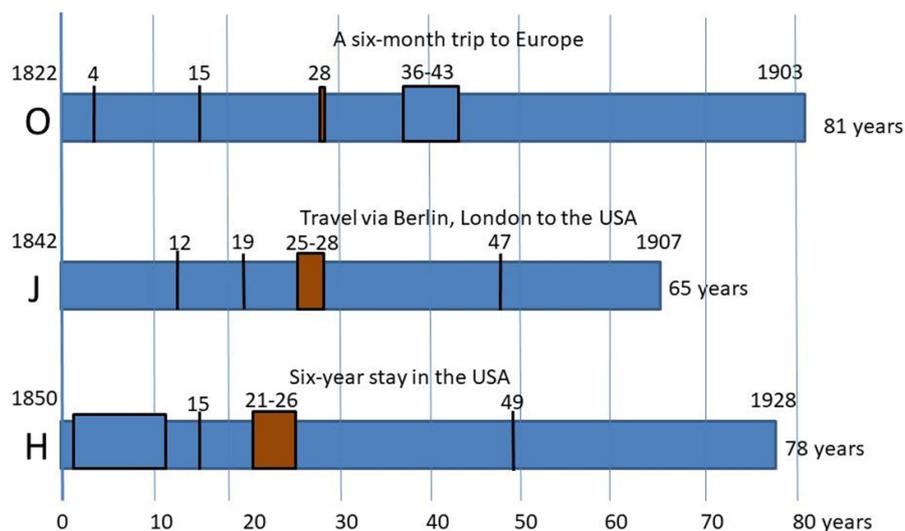


Fig. 2. Incubation – turning point: Olmsted (O), Jordan (J) and Howard (H)

Already then he starts talking about “Garden City”. Upon his return to England in 1876, he was appointed to a seat in parliament. He becomes an inventor and almost managed to sell the Remington Variable Space Mechanism he had developed, but their offer was too sparse.

ILLUMINATION – THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

The journalistic successes of Frederick Law Olmsted allowed him in the fall of 1857 to become the curator of the still non-existent Central Park in New York. In 1858, Vaux and Olmsted entered a competition to design the park, with the idea and the name Greensward (Fig. 3). In March, they win the competition for the design of the park. Olmsted is widely regarded as the father of American landscape architecture, although many believe that this title belongs to Andrew Jackson Downing (in 1841 his first book *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America*). It was the first book on this topic in the United States. In 1850, Downing travelled to Europe for an exhibition of Englishman Calvert Vaux’s landscape watercolours, which caught his attention. He encouraged Vaux to emigrate to the United States and they successfully opened a design office in Newburgh. Downing and Vaux worked together for two years.

Together, they designed many significant projects, including the area around the White House. In 1852, Downing was killed in a river accident. He and his wife and extended family sailed on a steamer on the Hudson River. The boiler explosion quickly spread and the steamer sank along with 80 other people. Vaux asked Olmsted to take Downing’s position in his firm.

Almost simultaneously Jordan after returning to the Kraków as a practicing doctor notices the harsh conditions in which Kraków’s children and youth live and grow up. Influenced by American ideas, he decides to remedy it. On 26 March 1888, at an extraordinary meeting of the Kraków City Council, Dr. Henryk Jordan submitted an application for the arrangement of a park for children and youth in Błonia areas. In his application, Dr. Jordan wrote: “I undertake at my expense to arrange a wild English park on the square after the national exhibition in Błonia and to put there about 40 burst of deserved men in Poland (...), I am asking for permission, due to the delayed it is time to start planting trees in this place, before this matter is resolutely resolved, with the proviso that in the event of a negative resolution, I will remove the planted trees within 2 months at my own expense and restore the soil to its original state. The City Council was very sceptical about the doctor’s proposal, withheld the final decision to give the land for the park, agreed

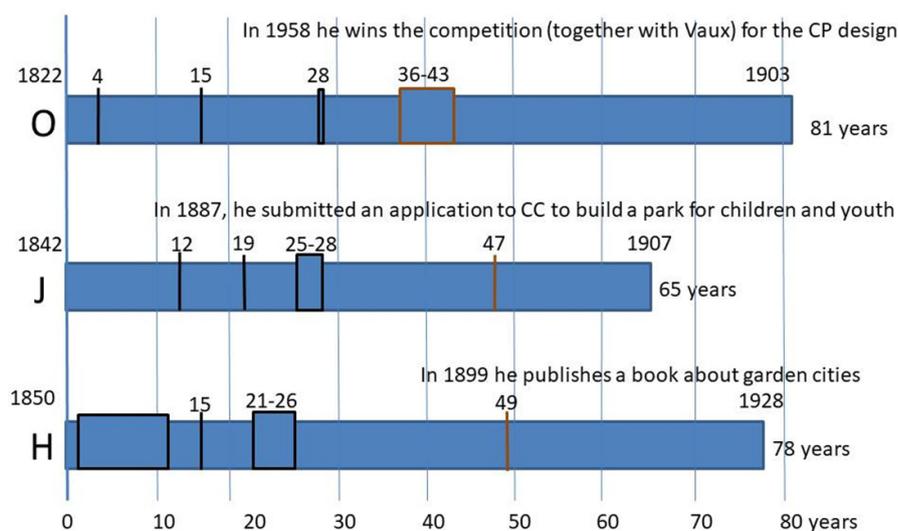


Fig. 3. Illumination – the birth of an idea: Olmsted (O), Jordan (J) and Howard (H)

only to plant trees [own transl.]” (Świat: Dwutygodnik Ilustrowany, Rocznik 1, 1888). Not discouraged by this decision, Dr. Jordan began construction works on the park arrangement at his own expense in April 1888. Now everything depended on the city councilors. A stormy press discussion broke out. Until the long-awaited important day finally arrived. At an extraordinary session on 21 June 1889, the Kraków City Council passed the foundation act for the construction of a park for children and youth by Dr. Jordan: “The Municipality of Kraków takes ownership of the eight marble breasts by Alfred Daun (...) donated by Dr. Jordan (...) The town commune temporarily gives the land in Błonia, occupied by an exhibition in 1887, for three years, from 1 July 1888 to 1 July 1891, to Dr. setting up the English park at Dr. Jordan’s own expense [own transl.]” (Piasecki, 1907, p. 2).

Meanwhile, Howard continues to think about easing the unfortunate situation of city dwellers. After his unsuccessful adventure with agriculture, he goes to Chicago – a city that has just been rebuilt after a fire. He works as a stenographer, while at the same time observing the planned reconstruction of the city. He

observes the intertwining of houses, businesses and parks. He then establishes contacts with the poets Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Over time, Howard begins to think about the possibilities of improving the living conditions of the inhabitants. Already then he starts talking about “Garden City”. After returning to England in 1876, he continues to think about this concept. He reads about social reforms and shares the views of his contemporary radical reformers. Then, in 1889, he discovers Edward Bellamy’s book *Looking Back*. The book’s protagonist, Julian West, who lives in Boston, travels forward in time to the year 2000 and discovers that people in the United States live in a socialist utopia. Howard decided that he would build model cities that would ensure a good life for everyone. He became one of the most famous of the many calls for saving cities in the late 19th century.

IMPLEMENTATION

From 1859, during the next seven years, Olmsted was mainly the administrator of large enterprises: first the chief architect of the Central Park (1859–1861),

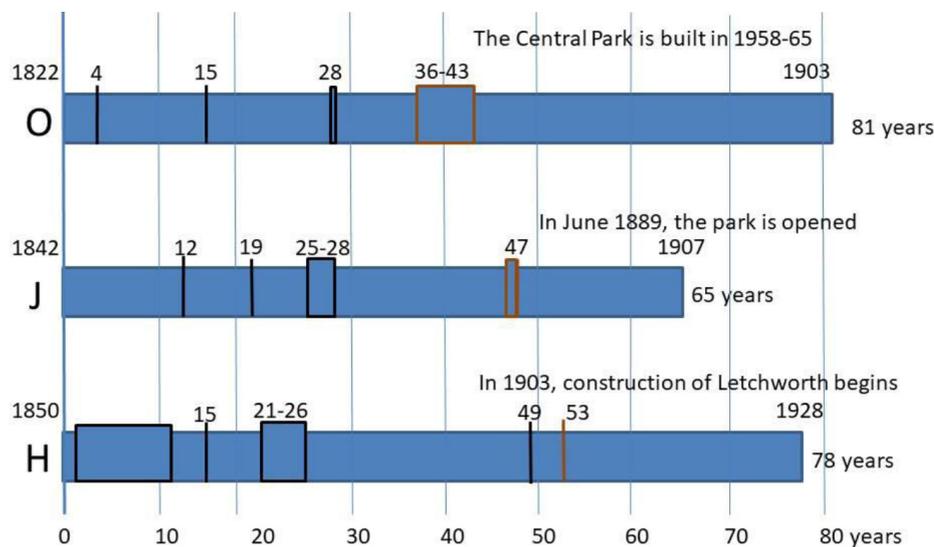


Fig. 4. Implementation: Olmsted (O), Jordan (J) and Howard (H)

³ Despite having no formal education, he had the right skill set for the endeavour. He knew geodesy, understood topography and mapping; he knew the basics of agriculture, appreciated the value of good drainage and soil preparation, and the need for good management of his employees (Tishler, 1989).

responsible for the construction of the park³ (Fig. 4), then during the Civil War, the director of the American Sanitary Commission (1861–1863), (the first achievement of the American Red Cross) and finally the manager of the Mariposa Estate (1863–1865) of a large gold mining company in California (gold rush). At the age of 41, when asked what he does, he replies that he practices landscape architecture.

Jordan Park was the world's first public playground for children up to 15 years of age. It covered almost 9 ha. There were 12 sports fields richly and variously equipped in the park. Moreover, in the garden there were: health paths, classrooms, showers, changing rooms, and warehouses. From 1906, workshops for polytechnic classes and a garden cultivated by children – experimental plots and a “dairy” for feeding children. The designer of the park was the city gardener Bolesław Malecki, but the initiator and, to a large extent, the founder of the facility was Dr. Jordan. Already in April 1888, at his own expense, the doctor began work on arranging the park. One hundred thousand trees and shrubs were planted. Sidewalks were laid, a dozen or so playing fields were arranged, avenues were planted and busts of national heroes were set up. Throughout his life, Jordan proved to be a great patriot. He personally conducted patriotic talks by the busts of great Poles.

Ebenezer Howard in 1889 writes *To-morrow a Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, which was reprinted in 1902 under the new title *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (Howard, 1902). The book is a huge success. The city proposed by Howard and colleagues was intended for 30,000–32,000 inhabitants and was to be surrounded by a green zone with farms and parks, and in its ideal form it was to be located on about 2,500 ha. That the population density was to be around 1,300 people per 1 km², which is much less than in the cities of that time. The cities shaped in this way were to form a network. That same year, Howard founded the Garden Cities Association in England and laid the foundations for the two garden cities of Letchworth and Welwyn (Czyżewski, 2009).

CONTINUATION

The ideas (concepts) created by Olmsted, Jordan and Howard outlasted their creators, and although they evolved, they had a huge impact on the shaping of contemporary theoretical landscape assumptions, they are still a model and affect the imagination of urban planners and landscape architects.

Frederick Law Olmsted was very ambitious about the profession of landscape architect. He believed that landscaping can play an important role in improving the quality of life of Americans. His extensive travels in the pre-Secession South, his two-year stay in California and travels in the British Isles, Europe and China provided him with an extraordinary range of experiences, and his career as a writer, journalist and publisher helped clarify his views on a whole series of questions about art, politics, economics and social organization. Established in the fall of 1857, the Olmsted Company, in the years 1872–1895, before its founder and boss Frederick Law Olmsted retired, completed 550 projects. These projects included, among others universities, housing estates, reserves, parks, the Capitol. In late 1895, he suffered a mental breakdown and spent the remaining years in an asylum in Waverly (Massachusetts). He died in August 1903. But while he was still alive, an American professional organisation for landscape architects was formed. The beginning of landscape architecture is considered to be 4 January 1899, when in a New York office on the corner of Broadway and 26th Street, an eleven-strong group of leading American architects, planners, engineers and garden designers⁴ decided to establish the world's first landscape architects association – the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). A year later (1900), Harvard University opened the world's first studies for this field. However, it took 20 years for people to realise the importance and range of Olmsted's work.

Jordan's work was a model for Poland and the world. The idea of this foundation found many fol-

⁴ American Society of Landscape Architects was founded in 1899 by 11 founding members: Nathan Barrett, Beatrix Jones Farrand (only woman), Daniel W. Langton, Charles N. Lowrie, Warren H. Manning, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., John Charles Olmsted (nephew and adopted son by Frederick Law Olmsted, the first president of the ASLA), Samuel Parsons, Jr., George F. Pentecost, Jr., Ossian Cole Simonds, Downing Vaux (son of Calvert Vaux).

lowers in the country and abroad. Examples include foundations in Lviv, Cieszyn, Vienna, Bern and some major French cities (Stolper, 1903). Professor Guttman, a well-known German educator, wrote: “This institution has reached such perfection that, as far as I know, we do not meet it anywhere [own transl.]” (Smarzyński, 1958, p. 234). The Rau gardens in Warsaw were also modelled on Jordan’s achievements. 100 gardens of games and activities for children and teenagers, commonly known as Jordan gardens, an idea that has survived to modern times, and still playgrounds for children are called Jordan gardens.

The first two city-gardens built according to Howard’s concept (Letchworth and Welwyn) became a model for similar projects around the world, including cities such as Reston VA and Columbia, MD in the United States, the capital of Austria – Canberra, Hellerau in Germany, the town of Tapanila in Finland or Mežaparks in Latvia and many others, including Poland. Howard’s concept gained enormous popularity in Poland, which was reflected in the pages of magazines from that period. Its wide publicity was due, on the one hand, to the realisations of the city garden city in England and Germany, and on the other, to Polish youth studying in these countries. Ząbki, Młociny, Podkowa Leśna, Komorów, Czerniaków, Żoliborz Oficerski, Italy, Pogórze Leśne in Młociny, Adamów-Zalesie, Wawer-Anin, Jabłonna are just some of the realizations of garden cities in Poland built before World War I and in the interwar period. The concept he created had a huge impact on the shaping of contemporary theoretical assumptions. The American philosopher Lewis Mumford recognised that Howard’s book did more to change the direction of town planning and heal cities than any other (Mumford, 1946). Howard is primarily treated by urban planners and landscape architects as a precursor of the idea of a city paying special attention to nature. It is worth emphasizing that Howard, in his idea of garden city, in fact proposes a new order in both the social and ownership dimensions (the urban space should to belong to the community). According to Bartłomiej Gutowski (2006), author of a monumental monograph devoted to ideal cities, “This proposal was at the basis of the formation of modern green city and eco-city projects, becoming one of the progenitors of the ‘New Urbanism’ movement. It gained popular-

ity at the end of the twentieth century, and it consists in combining nature with modern urban planning. This does not mean, however, that Howard’s proposal was forgotten earlier in the 20th century [own transl.]” (Gutowski, 2006, p. 97). Sun, fresh air, contact with nature, hygienic lifestyle and all living comforts have become an obvious and necessary postulate for today’s inhabitants of the city. Howard’s idea did not solve all housing and urban problems of contemporary cities, but neither did the “modernists” – the supporters of Le Corbusier and Bauhaus. The fabric of the garden city are houses with gardens, which are the embodiment of the archetypal human dreams – of close contact with nature. That is why it is worth recalling the Howard idea and being inspired by ties with nature in order to more effectively and better protect and defend green areas, parks and gardens, squares and allotment gardens, which are constantly being attempted by decision-makers (city administrators), developers and less aware architects and town planners. Take care of the existing aeration wedges, school’s and kindergarten’s playgrounds and gardens, defend them against buildings and wild privatisation, continuous cutting and building up of urban greenery.

CONCLUSIONS

- The characters of this story are typical “self-made men”, that is people who owe everything only to themselves, their abilities and their own diligence. They are united by a common destiny, disagreement with evil, social empathy, a willingness to help and to remedy evil. The key to success is persistence and passion (against all odds).
- Although they have remarkable achievements in their profession, the most successful ones that have made history are in a field other than their profession. They were brilliant self-taught amateurs who laid the foundations for modern landscape architecture. Their works played an enormous role, which cannot be overestimated, in the development of urban planning and landscape architecture. They are the precursors of modern city planning.
- Their greatest achievement was to draw attention to the social importance of urban green areas for the health and quality of life of city residents.

- They were the creators of a new type of facilities: Olmsted – a multifunctional and large-area public city park with a very wide and varied program, after World War II called in Poland – park of culture and recreation), Jordan – a facility rich in terms of social and educational profile, completely a new and previously unknown model of a playground for children and teenagers, and finally Howard – a concept of a garden city realised in 1903 north of London under the name of Letchworth.

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O WIZJONERACH – PREKURSORY WSPÓŁCZESNEJ ARCHITEKTURY KRAJOBRAZU: USA, ANGLIA I POLSKA

STRESZCZENIE

Bohaterami artykułu są trzej twórcy – ludzie czynu: Amerykanin Frederick Law Olmsted, Anglik Ebenezer Howard i Polak Henryk Jordan. Są to osoby tworzące i realizujące swoje dzieła w drugiej połowie XIX wieku. Losy naszych bohaterów wydawałoby się tak odległych i różnych od siebie, są jednak niezwykle zbieżne. Moim zamierzeniem jest przybliżenie sylwetek i dorobku trzech wizjonerów, którzy w drugiej połowie XIX wieku stworzyli swoje największe dzieła, będące podwaliną pod współczesną architekturę krajobrazu. Byli genialnymi samoukami, którzy opracowując nowe idee i modele obiektów oraz realizując swoje cele, przyczynili się do rozwoju nowoczesnej architektury krajobrazu. W opracowaniu tym chciałbym podkreślić wspólnotę ich losów i zainteresowań oraz przyjrzeć się poprzez sylwetki bohaterów okresowi, kiedy rodzi się nowoczesna architektura krajobrazu. Moim zamiarem jest także podkreślenie znaczenia postaci Henryka Jordana i przywrócenia mu właściwego miejsca w historii polskiej architektury krajobrazu.

Słowa kluczowe: geneza współczesnej architektury krajobrazu, F. Law Olmsted, E. Howard, H. Jordan, nowojorski Park Centralny, Park Jordana, miasto-ogród