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GULLINO P., FORNARIS A., DEVECCHI M., LARCHER F.

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The interpretation of the English Landscape Garden between 1815 and 1840 through Xavier Kurten's work in Piedmont (north-west Italy)

Keywords: cultural heritage; compositional features; design; historical garden; landscape architecture

Abstract

Xavier Kurten (? – 1840) was a Prussian landscape gardener who worked for the Savoy family in the Piedmont region of Italy in the first half of the XIX century. He designed or re-designed all royal parks, creating a specific style based on the English naturalistic garden approach. This research was performed with the aim of investigating the development of the English Landscape Garden in Italy. Historical documents relating to Kurten's biography and his work in Piedmont, including plans, were collected and analysed. We analyse and discuss the features that characterized his work: the relationship between the landscape - garden – house, the path system, the use of water, the vegetation, and the garden as a productive landscape. Kurten's style is compared with the projects of William Kent and Lancelot Capability Brown.

1. Introduction

1.1 Historical gardens as cultural heritage

During the last decades of the XX century, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) decided to draw up a charter on the preservation of historical gardens (The Florence Charter) (Añón Feliu, 2003). The document considered historical gardens as comprising both small and

large parks, whether formal or landscaped, and whether or not associated with a building (ICOMOS/IFLA, 1990). Moreover, it considered historical gardens as having significance to the public from the historical or artistic point of view and, therefore it was possible to classify them as monuments as defined by the ICOMOS statute of 1978. Later, historical gardens were classified as living monuments that required special and specific rules and protection measures (Ahmad, 2006).

In 2002, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established the importance of sustainability and the need for management plans for safeguarding cultural heritage (Gullino, Beccaro & Larcher, 2015). Through the analyses of the World Heritage cultural landscapes features, Fowler (2003) outlined the importance of parks and gardens in the European heritage. In fact, their influence beyond Europe was mainly due to aesthetic, architectural and art historical features. The historical garden can be considered one of the most complex and elaborate creations of man (Hobhouse, 1992). Regarding historical gardens, Scazzosi (1993) explained that in Europe during the 1970s people became aware of the value of historical gardens and their cultural importance. Moreover, Scazzosi (2004) explained how the European Landscape Convention (ELC) provided a favourable context for historical gardens and designed landscapes in several ways. ELC underlined that all landscapes, including historical gardens, required protection, management and planning, and that people have a legitimate interest in how this is done. The development of new interests about these themes can be traced through the XX century in the modification of both the concept and the field of historical heritage and cultural property. The conservation policies had long included churches, villas and castles as monuments, but recently considered also historical town centres, industrial archaeology, vernacular architecture and historical gardens. In this context, preserving cultural heritage is imperative for both conservation and management

processes (Blandford, 2006; Farhat, 2015). Moreover, identifying the historic features and values of historical gardens, and their evolution over time is a primary goal for European heritage preservation.

1.2 The birth of the landscape style in Italy

While in Europe garden style was changing, with the *parterres de broderie* gradually giving way to bowling greens and tree clumps, and straight alleys to curving paths, in Italy the Renaissance tradition of the semiformal terraced garden persisted till the second half of the XVIII century (Venturi, 1979). In a few places, a small portion of the park may have been redesigned in an informal style, with exotics and ruins, as happened in the ‘English Garden’ of Caserta. This garden was commissioned at the end of the XVIII century by the Queen of Naples, Maria Carolina, who decided to create a garden in the new style inside the palace park. She asked Sir William Hamilton, minister at the Naples court, to handle the project, and he consulted with Sir Joseph Banks, who sent John Græfer to design the garden in 1786 (Panzini, 2005). Græfer managed to create “a perfect English Garden”, introducing new compositional features, exotic species and varieties, especially herbaceous and perennial plants. The English Garden of Caserta was a laboratory for botanic acclimation and experimentation (Coats, 1972). In the same period, Jacob More designed and realized the ‘English Garden’ of Villa Borghese in Rome. He transformed the garden between 1780-1790, introducing new informal compositional features such as rows of trees, a private kitchen garden, an island with a temple, and meandering paths (Andrew, 1989-1990).

The main source of information about the landscape garden in Italy is the excellent treatise by Ercole Silva, ‘Dell’arte de’ giardini inglesi’, where he gives suggestions for designing a landscape garden and describes some English style parks in Italy (Silva, 1801).

One is the park of the Villa Ghirlanda Silva in the Milan province, where curving and straight paths run among groves and monumental elm trees, sunny and shady areas, as said by Silva, to be filled the scent of flowers, and ruins and columns are engraved with Latin inscriptions. One particular path, that Silva himself defines as “picturesque for its shape and for the arrangement of the plants”, seemed never to end, and brought the visitor to a hill with three features: one side is covered by woods hiding a grotto, another is crossed by paths among scented shrubs and on the last a Doric temple is built. Similar characteristics can be found at Villa Cusano (Milan province) where the picturesqueness is expressed in serpentine walks, informal groves, plantings and *fabriques* (buildings) (Silva, 1801).

Lancelot Brown is remembered as "the last of the great English XVIII century artists to be accorded his due and England's greatest gardener" (Brown, 2011). According to Phibbs, during his life, Brown changed and evolved, developing different garden and landscape styles (Phibbs, 2016). He designed over 170 parks and his creations changed the architecture of the English garden (Turner, 1985). In contrast in the European context the massive territorial interventions proposed by Lancelot Brown, the new idea of the informal garden, was never welcome in Italy, with the exception of the Savoy properties in the Piedmont region (Cornaglia, 2008). This exception occurred when, in 1815 (in circumstances that remain mysterious), Xavier Kurten arrived in Piedmont and started his career with the Savoy Kingdom of Italy (Accati, Fornaris, & Larcher, 2010). Despite, before Kurten's first works, there were already projects inspired mainly by English landscape gardens in Turin, such as some features represented in the drawings of Giacomo Pregliasco (1802) and Gaetano Lombardi (1826) (Comoli Mandracci, 1987). As the previous gardens were originally designed in the French style, Kurten instigated a complete makeover of the local heritage of Royal countryside properties, transforming them into Picturesque parks. According to Symes (2012), the “Picturesque” was an

aesthetic concept discussed between the end of XVIII century and at the beginning of XIX century. It was a way of viewing landscape and gardens, and judging them as if they were paintings. Furthermore, the type of scenery to be sought out and admired tended towards the wild and natural-looking (Cornaglia, 2008). The aim of this paper is to investigate the evolution of the historical garden in Piedmont between the 1815 and 1840 and to analyse the development of the English Landscape Garden in Italy through the study of Kurten's works and by the identification of their compositional features.

2. Materials and method

The evolution of the historical garden between the 1815 and the 1840 and the interpretation of the English Landscape Garden in Italy was investigated. As suggested by many authors (Pouya, Demirel, Çiçek Kurdoğlu, & Pouya, 2015; Gullino, Larcher, & Scariot, 2010) archives' documents were consulted. . Then gardens were analysed in their current *status*.

Firstly, information about Xavier Kurten's life and work were collected and studied. In this step, several documents such as *cabreos* (figurative registers of the landed estate of a given owner), cadastral maps, projects, iconographies, and cartographic maps located in Italian and French public and private archives were studied in depth. The archives and historical documents consulted were reported in Accati, Fornaris and Larcher (2010). In this paper, we indicate only the main historical references.

Secondly, for identifying Xavier Kurten's common features in Piedmontese gardens, a bibliographical research was also carried out in local ancient catalogues published by different Italian nurseries in the XIX and XX centuries. Through the collection and interpretation of the historical documents it is possible to recognize the historical and the compositional features.

The 1982 ICOMOS Florence Charter on Historic Gardens (Florence Charter) provided a guideline about architectural composition study (ICOMOS/IFLA, 1990). In particular, for analysing an historical garden and identifying historical and architectural features, several parameters should be investigated: plan and topography; vegetation, including species, proportions, colour schemes, spacing and composition; structural and decorative features; water, running or still and reflections of the sky. In this study of Kurten's gardens, we decided to compare his compositions through analysis of the listed parameters. Historical, landscape, botanic and hydraulic features of each Kurtens gardens were analysed and compared with the works of the two most famous English landscape gardeners: William Kent and 'Capability' Brown.

3. Results

3.1 The style of Xavier Kurten and his works

Through the analyses of the historical documents and published cartography it is possible to confirm the importance of Kurten's style for historical garden architecture in Italy. Xavier Kurten's birth date is considered a mystery and remains unknown (Salina Camerana, 1994). Regarding his education and development, the volumes *Guide du cultivateur* (1798) and *Essai sur les jardins* (1807) published by Xavier's older brother Maximilien Ernest provided important information about Xavier's life and his inspiration. Kurten's brother visited many gardens in Germany, Prussia and England and in his volumes, inspired by Whately's work and by the English treatises of the XVIII century, stressed the importance of knowing nature and its beauty as primal inspiration for the creation of a garden, and explained the need to design a "new" landscape garden. According to Salina Camerana (1994) Kurten was firstly nominated Inspector of the green areas by Turin Municipality during September 1811. Between 1819 and 1820 Kurten was

charged by Carlo Felice (King 1821-1831) to restore the Castle of Govone and in 1820 he became the Director of the Royal Park of Racconigi, Carlo Alberto's (King 1831-1849) favourite property, remained in post until 1840, the year of his death (Macera, 1987). Kurten designed or re-designed 17 parks in Piedmont region. In Table 1 all of Kurten's gardens are listed and identified (number code) along with their location (Figure 1). Among them there are the Royal parks of Racconigi, Pollenzo, Govone and Agliè, while the others were designed for the King's ministers and secretaries (Roggero Bardelli, Vinardi & Defabiani, 1990).

The present study allowed us to discover unpublished historical plans drawn by Kurten relating to some gardens that are not recognizable any more, or are in a state of poor management. These documents provided information about the original plan, the compositional features, and the botanical species used in the project. For example, the current owners of Castle of Monticello d'Alba, preserved the original plan of the garden, dated 1827 and signed Xavier Kurten (Figure 2). In this historical document it is possible to identify all the designed elements (landscape, botanical and architectural) specifically indicated and then realized. The original documentation for Ternavasso Park, designed in 1823, was also found and analysed in detail (Figure 3).

The main innovative features were identified and studied in Kurten's gardens, through a comparative study where the elements of the style, and not the parks, were the main focus. Several compositional elements identified theoretically by Ercole Silva (Earl of Biandrate, Milan 1756-1840) as landscape features, were realized by Kurten. The main compositional features described firstly by Silva are listed as follows:

- main entrance path leading to the front courtyard, that has the purpose of separating the house from the rest of the territory;

- development of the great park at the back of the palace, articulated in big irregular lawns, ponds, streams, curving paths;
- presence of *fabriques* defining the various ‘episodes’: hermitages, fisherman’s house, temples and ruins;
- artificial manipulation of the terrain to create hills and slopes to animate the landscape;
- existence of orchards and glasshouses.

The comparison of the different projects suggests that they can be grouped into two main types of designs. The elements mentioned above are differently interpreted mainly due to the topography of the site: flat gardens *versus* hill gardens. The main compositional difference is that the flat gardens are generally quite big and extend themselves on the back of the palace, which remains confined to the extremity of the whole property; instead, the hill gardens are characterized by the palace being on the top of the hill, and at the centre of the park that grows concentrically from the building. The analysis of Kurten’s designs in Piedmont also allows the identification of characteristics that are common to the various gardens. The main compositional features realized by Kurten in his works are listed below and include landscape, botanical and architectural elements:

- relationship between landscape, garden and house;
- use of water;
- paths system;
- plants composition;
- productive areas.

All these elements are shown in Figure 4, demonstrating their expression in different situations and conditions. As reported in Table 1, nowadays, fortunately, many gardens are perfectly conserved and still show distinctive features and unique elements.

With the aim of analysing the style of Xavier Kurten and the interpretation of the English Landscape Garden, each compositional feature was investigated.

Relationship between landscape, garden and house

Obviously, the landscape that surrounds Kurten's parks now is not the same landscape that surrounded them in the XIX century, but the relationship between the two elements remains clear considering the following aspects:

- the kind of landscape that surrounds the garden and its main land use;
- the location of the gardens and the presence of panoramic views or visual openings onto the surrounding landscape;
- existence of landscape design 'tricks' used by Kurten, such as the *ha-ha*;
- presence of natural elements in the garden that recall the spirit of the surrounding landscape (the use of local plants and native species and the presence of kitchen gardens, vineyards and orchards).

The gardens were designed and realized to allow the view of the rural landscape, and for this the structure of the site is important. In gardens such as Castle of Castagneto Po (Fig. 4a) or Monticello d'Alba, located on hilltops, viewpoints were realized by creating terraces or glades from where the visitor can see the hilly vineyards of the Monferrato or the river landscape. In the flat gardens designed, like Castle of SanSalvà (Fig. 4b) and Villa il Torrione, Kurten provided strategic openings in the tree clumps through which the crown of the Alps can be seen.

What is immediately striking about most of these gardens is the size of the glades, woods, and lakes. Actually, these elements are not necessarily larger than at Versailles or Vaux-le-Vicomte, but what tricks the eye is the different relationship between buildings and nature to achieve a goal which is actually a perspectival break-through. Regarding this

topic, the collaboration between Kurten and Pelagio Palagi is salient. The latter is the most important architect with Ernesto Melano in this period for Savoy Kingdom family (Matteucci Armandi, 1994). In the landscape garden usually the dominance of the palace is cancelled, and any axial correspondence between house and garden is erased. Woods and tree clumps besiege the castle, imitating brambles invading some ancient ruins. The visitor, losing themselves walking around on the serpentine paths, can easily forget the existence of the main house and is disoriented by the changing views in-between the plants. With the aim of creating an ambiguous effect around the house, Kurten interpreted this concept in different ways in his gardens. In the flat gardens, such as the Royal Park of Racconigi, the castle with its front yard dominates the central square of the town. From this side no one can imagine what actually happens at the back, where the castle, no longer the star of the scene, seems to run away from the Nature that relentlessly pushes on. In Castle of Sambuy and Villa il Torrione (Fig. 4c), for example, the mansions are, physically, completely enclosed by the gardens. In the hill gardens such as Castel of San Martino Alfieri and Castle of Monticello d'Alba, the castle dominates both park and landscape from the top of the hill but still, by creating land form and planting tall trees, Kurten wanted to completely hide the castle from external view. In both cases, park and house are, depending on the point of view, now the dominant element, now the accessory.

Use of water

Kurten had his particular way to use water. Between the XVIII and the XIX century water was considered, together with soil and plants, one of the materials offered by Nature to the landscape gardener. So, rejecting the French *canals* and the Italianate water features, Kurten created natural waterfalls, streams, lakes and rills. In each treatise on the English landscape garden there is a specific chapter about water and about the ways to use it,

imitating nature. The Count de Gérardin classified the natural shapes of water that are able to create a picturesque effect into five classes: impetuous waterfalls, gentle waterfalls, quick waters, rivers and peaceful waters. Each one of these, if used in the right context, gives the park a different feeling (De Gérardin, 1777).

According to this concept, Kurten often opted for peaceful water features such as lakes and ponds, where the temples and the willows could reflect themselves, in his designs. Ternavasso park (Fig. 4d) is characterized by a large lake surrounded by majestic hardwood trees. Alongside creativity though, must be also considered the great technological innovations that took place during the XIX century in England, that also involved hydraulics used in the gardens (Morel, 1802; Revelli & Cavagnero, 2009). Regarding hydraulics knowledge, Kurten's brother helped him to face and solve the necessary irrigation problems, by exploiting local water sources . The parks are usually next to a river, or a channel, from which Kurten derived the water needed in the garden. The internal hydraulic system and the canalizations are always hidden, and the visitor only sees the ornamental water features. In Villa il Torrione (Fig. 4e), for example, the lake is completely surrounded by plants and cannot be seen from the house or from most parts of the garden, but is so well located that, from its banks, the visitor can see how the palace reflects itself perfectly in the water. This lake is thoroughly surrounded by small canals for collecting the overflowing water and irrigating the cultivated areas, mainly cereal crops. In Castle of Pralormo (Fig. 4f) the lake is so perfectly integrated with its rural surroundings that it seems natural.

Path system

The paths in a landscape style park are fundamental, as they allow the visitor to reach what cannot be seen at a first view. If the French garden can be embraced totally in the view

from the castle, the English garden hides itself from the eye of the owner's abode, and to see it all one has to go and walk around it.

In Kurten's gardens three levels types of paths can be identified, which differ according to their width and purpose. The first level type is the main path that generally follows the perimeter of the park along its borders which was meant for carriages and horses. This path connects the house directly with the park. In Monticello d'Alba and San Martino Alfieri (Fig. 4g) this main path is a single line that takes the visitor from the entrance of the garden to the castle, while in Royal Park of Racconigi (Fig. 4h) it is a circular walk. The second level paths invite the visitor to get off their horse or carriage and walk through the tree clumps and shrubberies to explore the garden and discover the spatial episodes that usually are defined by particular features such as *fabriques*, monumental trees, ponds or an unexpected view of the surrounding. These features are actually 'surprises' in the park, that we would not be able to see without leaving the main paths. For example in Castle of Sambuy ((Fig. 4i) the networks of paths create different episodes and visual experiences. These episodes are crossed by the third level paths, thin lines that allow the visitor, now completely seduced by Nature and oblivious of the distant castle, to indulge in these gardens in the garden, losing themselves for a while. With the aim of amaze, Kurten often uses temples in his gardens, mostly on the banks of rivers or ponds, but he also liked to stimulate the visitor's feeling by creating features such as half hidden benches made with the local stones and covered in ivy.

Plant composition

Both the choice of plant species and their location inside the park are elements that characterize Kurten's style. According to landscape style rules, local species are considered the favourite plants (Silva, 1801; Kurten, 1798; Kurten, 1807).

There is, in his gardens, a very clear predilection for trees and shrubs over flowering beds, the latter are considered least important even in the project drawings. In fact the trees are painted with extreme care for detail and the species are often recognizable, while the flowering beds are just sketched.

The choice of plants, especially the trees, with their specific uses in the garden (formal *boulevard*, isolated as focal point and informal clumps) are maybe the most characteristic features of his work. Few of his signature species are *Platanus occidentalis* L., *Taxodium distichum* (L.) Rich., *Cedrus atlantica* L. and different species of oaks, that are always found in his parks but used in different ways. Trees are used in clumps or to create informal groves. In Cavour Park (Fig. 4l) Kurten planted a cedar, still standing today, for creating a splash of colour, also during the winter season. Examples of platanus planted in formal rows, characterized the park of Castle of Castagneto Po (Fig. 4m). By contrast, local and exotic species are used to create an informal grove in the park of Castle of Govone (Fig. 4n). Cedar trees, along with horse chestnuts and the oaks, are ideal for isolated features as focal points, such as the monumental oak in the Castle of San Martino Alfieri. *Taxodium* and *Salix babylonica* L. are the preferred species along the lakes, and the willows especially appear to be the most accurately painted by Kurten in his project drawings. As for shrubs, *Buxus sempervirens* L., *Juniperus communis* L. and *Jasminum humile* L. were the preferred evergreen species.

Productive areas

A peculiarity of Kurten's work is the coexistence of ornamental and productive areas, coherent with the concept of the park within a farm: an orchard, a vineyard or a cultivated field is always present in the garden, enriching it and strengthening its relationship with the surrounding rural landscape. Kitchen gardens and orchards are often included, at the side

of the park, and annexed to the gardener's house and stables, as with the two *jardins potagers* in Ternavasso park, or the small half hidden kitchen garden in the Cays Counts Castle.

However, in many cases the whole park is productive. The ancient and productive chestnut wood with monumental trees, associated with structures for nut drying and fruit conservation characterized Villa Garelli (Fig. 4o). In fact, in the XIX century, this territory was the most important area in Piedmont for chestnut wood cultivation (Gullino, Larcher, & Devecchi, 2010). In the Royal Park of Racconigi in 1834, a glorious neogothic glasshouse was built next to the area of the orchard and nursery (Fig. 4p), while the great lawns of the park were used for grazing. The Castle of San Martino Alfieri (Fig. 4q) has always been a rural farm, with vineyards surrounding the property, and the garden was created among them as a spiral around the walls enclosing the kitchen garden and the barn yard.

4. Discussion: Xavier Kurten and the English Landscapists

Some interesting elements emerged from this analysis of the work of Xavier Kurten, besides its peculiarity and originality. His work can be considered as a balanced mixture of the typical features characterizing the work of two major exponents of the landscape garden: William Kent and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown.

What characterized Kent's style was his interpretation of the garden as a place for learning, meditating and remembering the great people of the past. Regarding Brown's styles, Brown and Williamson (2016) identified common features that characterized his works: the structure's gardens, the irregular path system, the use of water (serpentine lakes), the presence of classic temples, and plant composition (circular clumps of trees). Several features used by Kurten, Kent and 'Capability' Brown are similar. Kent was

inspired by the Italian classical landscape and architecture as he went to Italy on his Grand Tour to study art and painting and was struck by the beauty and the “Picturesqueness” of its natural views, which had also been reinterpreted by the French landscape painters, such as Lorraine and Poussin, in the XVII century. However, William Kent was not a talented painter, and when he returned to England he started his career as a set designer and garden planner (Goode, 1986). In his view, the garden should not be affected by the formality of the French or the Dutch, but should be a representation of a natural landscape where ruins and people are but powerless witnesses of Nature’s might. The park features have to be reminders of the unimportance of human endeavour and make them wonder before this, as the Romantic should do. Classic temples and nymphaea appear among trees and shrubs, and informal hedges hide statues of Greek gods and fauns (Symes, 2012). These elements have the purpose of reminding the visitor of the Golden Age, and to make visitors desire to elevate themselves to the higher level of the ancient heroes and sages (Dixon, 2012).

Another feature that characterizes Picturesque gardens and Kent’s designs is the false ruin of a castle or another building, put in the garden and allowed to be overgrown by vegetation, as Nature is much stronger than the transient human creations. Such elements can also be found in Kurten’s parks, where temples, statues and ruins were considered fundamental elements to create spatial episodes, able to make the visitor ‘stop and think’ (Figure 5). The use of plant species is also an important element. In the XVIII century, plant hunters (mainly English and German) travelled through eastern countries and discovered many exotic flowers, shrubs and trees. Accati and Gullino (2010) showed how these beautiful plants were imported by nurserymen and introduced in private and public collections. In Kurten’s gardens some of the exotic plants introduced in that period in Piedmont still exist and now represent an important botanical and cultural heritage (Fornaris & Larcher, 2010).

Brown was a virtuoso garden designer, whose talent got him the nickname ‘Capability’. Analysing his works and designs, Brown and Williamson (2016) affirmed that the relationship between his gardens and the houses is one key feature of Brown’s style. In fact, this compositional feature also characterized Kurten’s gardens. Yet in contrast to Brown’s style, Kurten’s interventions had a territorial scale, and he never hesitated to completely alter the appearance of a landscape, transforming Nature to create Nature. He destroyed any trace of pre-existing formal designs, created hills on plains, transformed streams into rivers and marshes into lakes, totally changing the territorial asset of the areas he worked on (Loudon, 1835). According to Stroud (1975), the foundation of ‘Capability’ Brown’s landscape was intellectual; he created or recreated an ideal state of Nature, selecting representative forms and eliminating other elements. In the Royal Park of Racconigi, Kurten erased and removed the previous formal French style gardens that had been designed by André Le Nôtre in 1670, replacing the intricate and geometrical *parterres de broderie* with the huge lawn surrounded by tall freely growing trees: the straight axial sequence castle-alley-round pond was completely altered by erasing the alley and transforming the pond into an irregular lake that flows into streams here and there.

The early years of Brown’s career (1750-1760) influenced Kurten. An example is what Brown did at Blenheim (1763-1774), where he was able to transform a stream and a marsh into a river and a double lake by putting dams in the right places and moving large amounts of soil. Moreover, he also created garden buildings, waterfalls from scratch by positioning oppositely located stones to ‘break’ the water naturally. In the park of Ternavasso there is a large artificial lake, designed to collect the water running down the surrounding hillsides, which is separated from the property by a long dam. In Monticello d’Alba he designed a complex hydraulic system running underneath the castle and the

grounds, with a collecting basin hidden next to the building that was capable of filling the ornamental ponds on the first terrace for irrigation.

5. Conclusion

The question about the management of domestic and historical gardens can be considered an open challenge (Pouya et al. 2015; Dewaelheyns, Kerselaers & Rogge, 2016). According to several authors, for historical gardens, conservation and regeneration are fundamental phases (Catalano, & Panzini, 1990; Pozzana, 1996; Grbić, Čučaković, Jović, & Tripković, 2016). In this context, Cavagnero and Revelli (2009) outlined that the identification of historical remnants is the first step. With the aim of conserving and valorising these sites, several measures, strategies and actions should be developed and applied. Using the concept that "past and present is future history", Sales in 1995 defined the historical garden as metaphysical form, an expression of cultural heritage. The preservation and conservation of cultural and intangible heritage are international priorities (Beattie, 2016). Many Countries, for example the United Kingdom, are giving more attention to gardens and much more attention to the setting of historical or listed monuments (Whittle, 2009).

The gardens designed and realized by Xavier Kurten in Piedmont should be considered an important heritage, because they represent the Italian interpretation of the English Landscape Garden. The present study gives information concerning the condition of these private and public gardens. In particular, most of the investigated gardens have maintaining their style over time. Some of Kurten's parks, especially the Royal ones, are currently restored and open for visits, and only a few of them have lost their original aspect, because of design changes or poor management. Kurten's drawings survive and are an excellent source of information. It is curious that Xavier Kurten is one of the less well-

known figures in garden history, even in Italy where he worked. Even if he only operated locally, he was nevertheless the royal gardener and, as we hope to have demonstrated, he had a very personal style and created a unique heritage of landscape gardens in Italy. Most of his gardens are still popular. One of the reasons might be the limited uptake of the English Landscape style in Italy, where the tradition of the Renaissance gardens had always been rather strong, even after the formal 'French style' had gone out of fashion elsewhere in Europe.

In conclusion, we can affirm that Xavier Kurten was the only one to intervene on Italian territory as 'Capability' Brown intervened in the United Kingdom, giving life to a unique interpretation of the English Landscape Garden. His gardens, inspired by his brother's works, should be preserved and considered living monuments composed by botanic, ornamental, landscape, architectural and hydraulic features. According to Maunder et al. (2001), the traditional botanical garden and the historical garden are considered a cultural heritage for the conservation of plant species collections. Their studies are priorities and should be supported by specific management projects. This study is a step forward in the acknowledgement and conservation of the huge cultural heritage of historical gardens in Europe.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Tab.1 List of the 17 Kurten's gardens in Piedmont: code, garden name; realization date; localization; ancient client; actual owners and conditions; composition.

Code/Garden name	Date	Municipality Province	Ancient client	Actual owners and conditions	Type
1. Castle of S.Martino Alfieri	1815	S.Martino Alfieri (Asti)	Count Carlo Emanuele Alfieri di Sostegno	Private, visitable. In excellent conditions.	hill garden
2. Castle of Govone	1819	Govone (Cuneo)	King Carlo Felice	Superintendence for Architecture and Landscape Heritage. The park is being restored.	hill garden
3. Royal Park of Racconigi	1820	Racconigi (Cuneo)	King Carlo Alberto	Superintendence for Architecture and Landscape Heritage. Open and visitable.	flat garden
4. Castle of Sambuy	1820	San Mauro (Turin)	Count Camillo Balbo Bertone	Private, visitable. In excellent conditions.	flat garden
5. Ternavasso park	1823	Poirino (Turin)	Counts Thaon di Revel	Private, visitable. In excellent conditions.	flat garden
6. Castle of Monticello d'Alba	1827	Monticello (Cuneo)	Count Gennaro Francesco di Monticello, viceroy of Sardinia	Private, visitable. In excellent conditions.	hill garden
7. Castle of Pralormo	1829	Pralormo (Turin)	Carlo Beraudo di Pralormo, Minister of the Interior for Carlo Alberto	Private, visitable. In excellent conditions.	flat garden
8. Castle of Agliè	1829-1830	Agliè (Turin)	Savoy Kings	Superintendence for Architecture and Landscape Heritage. Open and visitable.	flat garden
9. Cavour Park	1830	Santena (Turin)	Marquis Michele Benso di Cavour	Municipality of Santena, public park in decent conditions	flat garden
10. Castle of Sansalvà	1830	Santena (Turin)	Count Vittorio Amedeo Balbo Bertone di Sambuy	Private park in excellent conditions	flat garden
11. Ricardi di Netro garden	1830	Carmagnola (Turin)	Ricardi family	Not existing any more, there is only Kurten's project in a private archive in Turin.	flat garden
12. Castle of Sommariva Perno	1831	Sommariva Perno (Cuneo)	Marquis Felice Carron di Saint-Thomas, mayor of Sommariva	Private, not open in bad conditions	hill garden
13. Castle of Pollenzo	1834-1840	Pollenzo (Cuneo)	King Carlo Alberto	University of Gastronomic Sciences. Open and visitable.	flat garden
14. Villa Il Torrione	1835	Pinerolo (Turin)	Count Carlo Canera di Salasco, Lord Lieutenant	Private, visitable. In excellent conditions.	flat garden
15. Castle of Castagneto Po	1835-1837	Castagneto Po (Turin)	Giambattista Giulio Cesare Trabucco di Castagneto, Royal Superintendent	Private, not open in bad conditions.	hill garden
16. Cays Counts Castle	1837	Caselette (Turin)	Carlo Alberto Cays	Private, not open in bad conditions.	flat garden
17. Villa Garelli	1839-1840	Mondovì (Cuneo)	Counts of Magliano	Private, not visitable. In excellent conditions.	hill garden

Figures Captions

Fig. 1. Localization of Xavier Kurten's gardens in Piedmont.

Fig. 2. Castle of Monticello d'Alba. Original plan of the garden (1827). Private Archive.

Fig. 3. Ternavasso park. Original plan of the garden (1823). Private Archive.

Fig. 4. The compositional features identified in Kurten 'works: Castle of Castagneto Po (4a), Castle of SanSalvà (4b), Villa il Torrione (4c), Ternavasso park (4d), Villa il Torrione (4e), Castle of Pralormo (4f), Castle of San Martino Alfieri (4g), Royal Park of Racconigi (4h), Castle of Sambuy (4i), Cavour Park (4l), Castle of Castagneto Po (4m), Castle of Govone (4n), Villa Garelli (4o), Royal Park of Racconigi (4p), Castle of San Martino Alfieri (4q).

Fig. 5. William Kent, Stowe gardens (1716-1740) (a) and Xavier Kurten, Royal Park of Racconigi (1820) (b).