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Characteristics of modern landscape architecture and its education

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Abstract

Landscape architecture must keep the advantage it has gained because of its wide use of the knowledge of landscape which no other related disciplines have. Detailed landscape design, creation of new spaces—new landscapes, and use of characteristic, alive landscape material as well as nature protection, landscape ecology and regional landscape planning require both a creative and a scientific approach. The essential ability that landscape architects have, i.e. the capability of switching between concrete details and even global landscape interactions—enables them to achieve different and often better results than might be developed by architects, artists, urban planners, biologists, ecologists and other colleagues when dealing with similar landscape problems. Examples of our work, deriving from "the layer-cake method" and applied to recent studio projects, are used to illustrate key statements in the paper. A link to the teaching process is made in order to offer small but important solutions on how to teach landscape students the most characteristic and useful landscape basics.
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1. Introduction

The peculiar character of the landscape architecture profession requires landscape architects to be familiar with both a wide range of knowledge from the field of natural sciences and artistic creativity at the same time. The dichotomy between art in the landscape architecture on one hand and science on the other is often quite clearly demonstrated in a broad range of our works. Landscape architects who call themselves land artists create art installations. It is a creative act of expressing their understanding of the world and not a process of solving spatial problems. On the other hand, there are many works done either by colleagues coming from "related disciplines" or by landscape architects who deal with specific themes to such an extent that they could also be called civil engineers, ecologists, computer scientists, etc. They can focus on natural processes, preserve the nature but fail to create a new interesting space when needed. In both extremes, the products are problematic. They are too partial, addressing few tasks and not try to incorporate the core of the profession: the essential basic knowledge of natural science combined with artist's creativity.

Landscape architecture is a complex and interdisciplinary profession. Dealing with spatial problems inside certain societal requirements, how can we actually define the subject of our work—the landscape with its characteristics and requirements? What is the specific knowledge that defines landscape architecture in relation to other disciplines? What is the basic knowledge we need to teach students in order to successfully deal with the landscape as professionals?

In order to find the answer to these questions, the present paper is based on the following hypothesis:

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there are specific landscape architectural methods and techniques, developed over the last 30 years, which have upgraded much older garden architecture approaches and distinguished our profession from other related disciplines. At the same time, landscape architecture has combined a broad range of knowledge deriving from the character of our object—the landscape as its entire complex, on-going natural- and human-caused processes require. Our methods are exact, transparent, explanatory and very communicable in order to communicate not only with related disciplines but also with the public. A creation of new landscapes requires an intuitive creative ability landscape architects need to combine with analytical systematical approach.

2. Methods

2.1. What is landscape architecture?

It is simply impossible to offer a systematic and analytical overview of landscape architecture with detailed and correct definitions of landscape architectural terms because there is no such thing. In order to do that the best thing would be to compare several landscape architectural dictionaries in different languages from different countries and compare definitions. However, because we do not have them yet maybe a negotiated agreement between European countries should offer a satisfactory definition of landscape architecture. Although ELCER (2000) includes many positive and valuable demands for better common landscape the landscape architecture is completely ignored (not even mentioned). It doesn't exist as a profession not even in chapters where education is discussed. Slightly better is definition of landscape planning: "landscape planning" is the formal process of study, design and construction by which new landscapes are created to meet the aspirations of the people concerned. It involves framing proper planning projects, more particularly in those most affected by change and badly damaged areas (for example suburbs, peri-urban, industrial areas and coastal areas). The purpose of such planning projects is to radically re-shape the damaged landscapes. Hopefully, objections of the ECLAS committee and proposals of new definitions and especially introduction of landscape architecture would in future enhance and modernize the mentioned convention.

To continue from the two extremes mentioned in the introduction, this paper shall rather try to look for a set of keywords, terms and products, and later search for a clear method that could distinguish our profession from the others instead of clarifying existing or non-existing definitions of landscape architecture.

A landscape architect, who is educated and trained in the field ranging from landscape planning and ecology to landscape design and techniques, can think of various subdivisions of our professions based on the actions we take, the scales we use and the products we make as shown in Table 1.

Obviously there is a great amount of different knowledge that well-educated landscape architects must master. The basic methods we use are a combination of artistic intuition and creativity with strong graphic expression on one hand and systematic, scientific analytical thinking on the other. The most characteristic examples are as described later, with the intention of highlighting methods from related disciplines that are directly usable in the field of landscape architecture. The selection of examples and use of terms is personal and can be extended or revised.

2.2. Creativity in landscape drawing

The basic mode of landscape architectural expression is graphical in the same way as in architecture. Garden art was parallel to architectural development; architects, great gardeners and later landscape architects would develop drawings to present ideas of future park and garden design. Graphic presentations and the use of drawings in landscape plans were at a very high level. Not only that plans looked like paintings, new gardens were often illustrated by famous painters of the time. Landscape painting was certainly developed before garden art and landscape architecture and for that reason, it seems important to start the investigation of the creative process from landscape drawing and painting in fine art. To compare painting and landscape architectural drawing one should analytically study a process of painting first. When painters create a painting they usually keep it at a very personal, intimate level. The process of making a painting is not important for the spectator—only the final product, the painting. Therefore, the artist often does not

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