

A Study of Core Approaches in Landscape Architecture and Its Position in the Context of Related Disciplines

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I. Introduction

Urban areas are experiencing rapid rise of city population and uncontrollable growth which is causing alarming environmental stress and inevitable degradation of green urban spaces (Cheng *et al.*, 2021). Today, landscape architects face, and have ability to solve, a variety of challenges, such as provision of resilient landscapes to mitigate climate change and rapid urbanization, planning adaptations for natural disasters, and ecological restoration (Yang *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, landscape architects are playing a significant role in maintaining the human environment and management of landscapes. They aim “to organize the complexity of the landscape into comprehensible, productive, and beautiful places to improve the function, health, and experience of life” (Cheng *et al.*, 2021). They seek to create ‘good’ places, in both aesthetic and ethical aspects, through planning, design and management (Thompson, 2000).

However, mentioned wide-ranging reach creates an unclear domain of the profession within urban management due to its interchangeable preference for function and aesthetics. Another problem is a fragmented knowledge base, and lack of explicit conditions in which theory was constructed (Swaffield, 2006). Landscape architecture rarely focuses on research and expanding theoretical knowledge, what severely limits its intellectual growth (Cushing and Renata, 2015). This lack of evaluation of effectiveness opens the profession to consistent repetition of the same mistakes (Brown and Jennings, 2003). For this reason, further in-depth analysis and synthesis of basic theories of landscape architecture is needed.

This research aims to comprehensively compile main theories and approaches to effectively determine fundamental values in

landscape architecture and its productivity compared to related disciplines.

II. Theoretical Background

Contemporary age is marked by intense human impact on every aspect of the environment, thus the dualistic concept of nature and culture is being discarded. Nature is no longer a separate notion from humans, as living things cannot live apart from the environment (Prominski, 2014) and re-examination of the relationship between humanity and its environment is further incentivised by the fast approaching environmental crisis (Thompson, 1998).

As an applied discipline, landscape architecture actively participates in shaping living conditions, and to do so, it “must connect cultural ideals, aesthetic codes, and social actions with the biophysical and spatial realities of sites, ecosystems and regions” (Swaffield, 2006). Therefore, it is possible to derive three fundamental value categories in landscape architecture: environmental, aesthetic, and social.

Environmental values are acquired as humans take an interest in certain landscapes, which means that humans are *loci* of environmental value (Morito, 1995). This can be explained through functionalism and belief that entities which fulfil their function are ‘good’ in both moral and aesthetic sense (Thompson, 2000). Moreover, Hackett (1971) describes healthy and productive landscapes as ones with ultimate value for humans (Thompson, 1998). On the other hand, Colvin (Thompson, 1998; 1970) equates ecologically balanced landscape with beautiful landscape, because aesthetic satisfaction provided by landscape is a by-product of its health. Nevertheless, with the impending environmental crisis, professionals need to have a

balanced view of the environment and its relation to human's welfare. Although landscape architects can be considered as homocentrists due to their utilitarian approach to stewardship over nature (Thompson, 2000), Hourdequin (2018) highlights that professionals have a moral obligation to non-minded beings not to violate their interests outside of need to satisfy society's basic needs. Further, Purser *et al.* (1995) points out that cultural development is acceptable only when ecological integrity and ecosystem health are preserved in a sustainable way. Moreover, landscape architects have the responsibility to engage in anthropological research to learn about locality to ensure cultural and social sustainability (Rotenberg, 2011).

It can be said that all approaches and values are intrinsically interwoven and cannot be observed independently, nor can one be considered better than others. For that reason, further research and conversation with professionals within the discipline is needed.

III. Methods

This research will be conducted through literature review followed by in-depth interviews of landscape architects. First part of research will consist of a theoretical background covering a variety of base theories and approaches on what are the fundamental values of landscape architecture as an independent discipline. Data will be acquired and analysed through detailed literature review using methods of record keeping and semi-systematic review.

Second part of research will be based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with landscape architects, both in professional and academic fields to ensure diversity and integrity of gathered data. Questions will be concerned with topics of what are values of landscape architecture: how professionals see landscape architecture as an autonomous profession, as opposed to its position compared to related professions (architecture, engineering, ecology etc.); how that interrelation affects credibility of landscape architecture; and how it can be changed or improved.

IV. Expected Results and Discussion

Qualitative analysis of interviews might indicate that landscape architecture can be considered as an autonomous

discipline among related professions, which would be in accordance with Ogrin's (1994) statement. Further, analysis will most likely hint towards the existence of a variety of interpretations of functions and purposes of landscape architecture. Existing literature (Ogrin, 1994 ; Swaffield, 2002) lists a variety of reasons for lack of unified professional 'culture' - different backgrounds and experiences within the profession, rapid expansion of professional activities, and highly heterogeneous regulations and policies in individual countries. Further discussion with relevant professionals will deepen the understanding of current dissidence. Moreover, chronic problems concerning its perceived value in society due to little direct evidence of that value and effectiveness (Kapper and Chenoweth, 2000) are expected to be proven.

V. Conclusion

Landscape architecture in contemporary times has various responsibilities to ensure a comfortable and balanced environment for humans and ecosystems. Due to diverse backgrounds of professionals and unclear range of functions, landscape architecture is severely lacking structured and comprehensive theoretical background, what is limiting its further academic growth and decreases its perceived value in both the professional world and society. Literature review of existing approaches and perspectives indicates three main categories of values in landscape architecture - environmental, aesthetic, social. These values are equally important for healthy and sustainable landscape management, so they cannot be weighted against each other. However, more theoretical research is needed to create a comprehensive framework which would aid and guide professionals in field work on individual projects. Moreover, in-depth interviews with various professionals within the discipline will further suggest what are current trends regarding values and core functions of landscape architecture, especially in the context of rapid urbanization, alarming rates of climate changes and ongoing value crisis. Additionally, discussion about the seemingly undervalued position of landscape architecture in relation to associated disciplines will aid its future establishment as an irreplaceable source of knowledge and solutions for a wide range of problems.

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