



Dreaming of Africa

Hardly returned from a nine-year-stay in Kenya, Ingrid Duchhart is now part-time-interim-manager of the faculty of Landscape Architecture. Besides that she's the only employee of the faculty, who's working on a doctoral degree. In this introducing article, Ingrid Duchhart shares some of her experiences and lessons she learned abroad.

Ingrid Duchhart

Leerstoelgroep landschapsarchitectuur
Ingrid.Duchhart@wur.nl

The Start

The start lies way back in 1979 in my own studies. My colleague student and friend Hanny Heetman and I were challenged to spend some time in another culture and explore the meaning of landscape and potentials of landscape architecture. We ended up in Kenya and worked for 4 months on a large-scale irrigation scheme. Kenya was followed by study trips to northern parts of Africa, southern Europe, Indonesia, and a bit of the United States. I assisted Prof. Vroom and Prof. De Jonge in developing exchange programmes with American and Australian universities. This challenged quite a bit of students to undertake master-thesis projects abroad. Some of them went to Colombia, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Egypt, Sudan, and others to European countries like Greece and Spain. In 1984, I was in Indonesia. Even though, the island Java was of an astonishing beauty, I understood only partly the incredibly complicated cultural, political and social environment. The students I was with, prevented that I would make the wrong moves and say the wrong things. While I was enjoying a breath-taking view of a sunrise over the Javanese *sawas*, I took the decision that if I was to make a real difference I had to focus my personal work on Kenya. By that time, I had built up some understanding of the workings of the Kenya government, gained a certain insight in the rural communities, and the urban setting of Nairobi City.

The First Lessons

We were stubborn, Hanny and I insisted to visit the project site. We were locked up in Nairobi and our project site was 500 kilometres away. Nobody understood why we were so eager to visit the bush along the Tana River. The physical planners were making their designs from their desk, so why couldn't we do the same? We kept bothering them and after a month or so, we flew in a small aeroplane to the site. After two landings, where we had to ask for the way, we arrived. Imaging the sight, when two 25 year old women stepped out of a plane visiting an irrigation construction site in the middle of nowhere.

Fortunately, the British engineers working there were kind and showed us every-thing: how people lived in the vicinity of the scheme; the beauty of the riverine forest and its amazing bird life, monkeys and crocodiles; and the technicalities and the history of the scheme. Once back, we at least had the feeling that we understood the landscape and a little of the people who lived there. We had done a full visual analysis, a perception study, and mapped it all. We studied cycles related to water-borne diseases, flight distance of the mosquito, and flight routes of the pesticide planes. We made detailed plans! We even thought about how to involve the schools in tree planting and maintenance activities. A couple of years later, I had the opportunity to visit the site again. The villages, 23 of them, were built as we had designed. The irrigation scheme had flooded as we predicted. However, not one single tree had been planted. It was an incredibly shocking sight – bare and desolated villages at the will of wind and dust.

What had we overlooked? There was no formal institutional body that was responsible for tree planting and maintenance in projects like this. We simply had expected that presenting our design to the irrigation board was enough to get it done. We thought about everything. The trees were not interfering with the irrigation system nor hindering the aerial spraying on the contrary soap-berry bushes were to prevent bilharzia, wind breaks to keep out wind and dust, trees to improve the climate, and the undergrowth was to provide firewood. The design was open, clear, straight forward, and easy to implement. Nothing of all these ideas and details materialised as simply nobody made it his/her responsibility.

Institutional Set Up in the Eighties

At that time, landscape architecture or landscape planning was unknown in Kenya. The Ministry of Lands and Settlement planned and designed town plans. Tree planting often was a personal interest of a highly placed officer. For example, the District Commissioner of Nakuru planted thousands of pepper trees

along Nakuru's main roads. In the earlier days, the British colonial government planted trees and flowers in most cities along main roads and on the roundabouts. Prisoners were used to carry out maintenance work. Local Government normally would have a cleansing department to collect garbage and sweep the most important streets of the city centre. At the University of Nairobi, the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Land Development, Frederique Grootenhuis and later Helene Weeda (both Wageningen alumni) were teaching landscape-architecture courses to architecture students. Later, Japanese and Canadian projects provided courses in landscape architecture and landscape studies. Few students pursued further specialised education in landscape architecture in, for example, the United States. One even obtained a PhD at Berkeley and is currently attached to Kenyatta University. Others started a private practise as a (landscape) architect. It was not until the nineties and under the influence of the global United Nations Conferences, that at Kenyatta University, a faculty of Environment was set up. Under the responsibility of this faculty comes several environmental departments, such as environmental science and environmental planning. As we write, courses in landscape analysis and planning are in the process of being set up.

Frederique and Heleen also worked with architects on smaller and middle-sized upmarket housing estates. For example, Frederique designed the landscape plan for the housing estate Lake View that was to be built in a small eucalyptus forest. She worked here with view lines on the lake and was able to preserve many of the trees. This was not done before in Kenya, and Lake View became one of the most wanted housing estates (and now 20 years later still is a great success). Availability of plant material was a real constraint. Not much later, Frederique worked for a large World Bank funded middle-income housing estate. This is a suburb of Nairobi. Again, by and large only the housing plan was implemented, but hardly anything of the planting plans.

Meanwhile, Melanie Richards (a landscape architect with an American education) had settled in Kenya and started her own practice. Melanie was quite active in the IFLA. Two regional conferences were organised in Nairobi. Meanwhile, a Landscape Charter was added to the Architects Register. Frederique, Melanie and I were under the founding members. Currently, there are still only a handful of fully educated landscape architects. There is a larger group of garden architects who make beautiful gardens and often have their own tree nursery. In conclusion, the driving force behind tree planting in the Kenyan towns and urban centres seemed to be largely based on private interest.

Some Experience in the Rural Areas

Meanwhile, I worked with students in the rural areas. We collaborated from 1983 to 1985 in a joint ICRAF/ Wageningen University agroforestry project. Here, we worked directly with the farmers. The students who carried out the fieldwork lived for six months in a local village. They developed a good sense of the farmers' felt needs. The intervention instruments were agroforestry techniques, such as alley cropping and planting (fruit) trees on a plot level. The innovating contribution of the landscape architects to the agroforestry project was the design approach through the most relevant scales. The landscape analysis brought forth environmental concerns, such as serious land degradation that could not be ignored as it was to sweep away the scarce farmland. Together with the farmers and the ICRAF staff, the student landscape architects were able to locate specific agroforestry techniques simultaneously sorting out the issues on plot level as well as on a landscape level. In this way, the short-term farmer's needs were addressed as well as the long-term ecological sustainability of the area. Interesting enough the resulting landscape plan looked like the "casco"-designs for the eastern part of the Netherlands. The nature based "casco" followed the natural gullies and river beds and was aimed at the restoration and stabilisation of the landscape. A man-made "casco" was to provide shade along the main roads and act as a visual



focal point in the urban centres. Twenty years later, the area was turned into one of the most beautiful dry-land landscapes. The institutional framework regarding tree planting in the rural areas was and still is quite extensive. Several ministries had departments that co-ordinated tree planting. Their objectives varied, for example, trees are planted for soil conservation, energy purposes, or to support agricultural production. Each ministry has extension workers informing farmers about the best planting techniques and tree nurseries. In addition, many NGO's set up tree nurseries and extended their work to schools. Working directly with the farmers and a mid-term commitment of the ICRAF staff proved successful, while follow-ups were relatively easy because of the available institutional network. It remains to be noted that an institutional network related to the implementation of the overall landscape plan lacked.

The Turning Point

Somewhere around 1986, Frederique and I advised a small NGO-run (non-governmental organisation) slum-upgrading project. Around 1988, the director of the urban development unit of the Ministry of the Kenyan Local Government visited the place and fell in love with the design that was largely based on water harvesting and urban agriculture. Mind you, ultimately, it was the long-term, patient, and people-oriented approach of the project leader, Kuria Gathuru, that gave rise to the model village it became, not forgetting, the funds provided by Habitat, the Netherlands.



Anyway, the director felt that Kenya should learn more of this approach. Three young adventurous landscape architects (Han Beumer, Marjanska Leeuwerik, and Carmen Aalbers) lived together with their counter-parts from the ministry, in three villages in the western part of the Kenya for about 6 months. Frederique and I co-ordinated and assisted the process. All of us worked closely with the local relevant government and non-governmental institutions. The resulting Environmental Development Plans were to improve the environment of the small urban centres. The plans were presented to the decision-making politicians and District Commissioners, local and central governments. Local government nor NGO's took any initiative to implement the plans, even though, a whole series of easy to implement, small projects were included. Except for one or two interested physical planners, teachers, or foresters, who carried the reports as little bibles around, the reports basically disappeared in the drawers. Nevertheless, the ministry wanted environmental development plans for all towns in the country. I helped them to write a proposal for a training project, that had the objective to train central government staff in landscape planning who would then be able to train local government staff in order to make their own environmental development plans.

Seen, my previous experiences, it is not surprising that the starting points of the project were related to:

- Institutional embedding of the training effects on all relevant levels;
- Active learning, Kenyan people love to talk and to discuss;
- Local knowledge as a starting point and build from there;
- Building a reference framework through

“real-life” examples and videos;

- Participatory learning and design so to develop an ownership of the ultimate plans; and
- Awareness creation so to form a sense of responsibility and environmental care.

‘Green Towns Project’

The whole of the nineties, I worked together with Frederique and many others on the development and implementation of the training programme that was soon baptised as the ‘Green Towns Project’. The responsible counterpart ministries were the Ministry of Lands and Settlement, Ministry of Local Government, and the Government Training Institute Mombasa. We trained about 80 people of which only about 50 graduated as a trainer. They went out and trained 35 communities (including government officers but who participated in their position as a town inhabitant) in smaller and larger urban centres spread out over the country. Each training programme resulted in a self-made environmental development plan for the town including an action plan. The 35 communities started action groups that were responsible for the initiation of the implementation of the action plans. These actions could include smaller projects, such as, planting of tree lanes, constructing bus stops, setting up tree nurseries and composting, or public awareness in schools. Clean-up activities were nearly always included. By the time I left, that was in 2001, the groups implemented nearly 60 small projects. A challenging element in the training programme was the development of training materials. The programme was built around videos that were to stimulate discussion, enlarge the reference framework and the confidence of the trainees. We even implemented three larger designs (from the earlier environmental studies in the pilot towns), a market, a park, and an urban drainage to be able to film “real-life” examples. In a typical 3-day training, the trainees would be coached through a design process that by and large takes the following steps:

- Familiarisation with the natural landscape and the built-up environment. They would make a base map, showing roads, and buildings. In this map, they would draw landscape units as they see and understand them.

- The workshop participants identify environmental problems and order them in causes and effects. They will also stick the identified and confirmed problems on a problem map.

- The group then identifies possible solutions that they verify in the field. The solutions are also mapped.

- The workshop participants then work in small groups on suitability maps, zero-plans, and environmental protection maps. This gives rise to a realistic debate (all stakeholders are present) and conflict areas are mapped out. Compromises and solutions must be found.

- Solutions and compromises are now pulled together in a plenary process and sketched into the final environmental development plan (a kind of structure plan or concept).

- In order to initiate the implementation, actions are identified and prioritised. An action group is elected.

To overcome some future institutional barriers, we helped the three counterpart ministries to set up environmental units who also worked on a participatory basis. We organised for example several sensitisation workshops for the senior-most governmental officers, including ministers, permanent secretaries, and most departmental heads. Nearly all central government physical planners were trained, while they are in the process to train the district planners. Currently, these units still run training programmes and assist in implementing action plans. Some of the units developed ministerial policy papers, that act as guide-lines to among others, physical planners. These guidelines include working with the ‘Green Towns’ training. In addition, we trained university staff and regularly involved them in our project activities. The videos were used in their teaching. It was crucial that the physical planners were at least familiar with the environmental participatory design and planning approach, otherwise new staff members on the environmental units would not be easy to fit in. A large-scale public awareness programme, including mass walks, television and radio programmes and competitions accompanied the entire project. Many groups came together - among others in the suburb where Frederique worked in the early eighties - to beautify and maintain their own open spaces.

The Last Lessons

What had I learned up to now, as landscape architects, we are good at:

1. In observing, analysing, understanding the landscape - even without maps;
2. In ordering and combining local and 'desk' knowledge into a structuring framework;
3. In visualising and integrating the found information in sketches, maps, and cross-sections;
4. In inter-linking relevant scale levels – from individual (farm) household to regional scales, but more importantly finding a common thread;
5. In Kenya – the design can hardly ever be the end product or a blue print. The design is more like a common vision on the future of a wider group of stakeholders;
6. I learned that I could not do it alone. I needed the local people to get to know the environment. I needed colleagues in my own field but also in the areas of physical planning, climatology, erosion control, economy, land classification, land ownership, process management, and health;
7. I needed good partners among the politicians, decision-making governmental officers, universities, and non-governmental organisations.
8. What I learned was that success of a design lays in the commitment of the local community. Their involvement, as we saw in the agroforestry project or in Frederique's Lake View design, was crucial. The involvement does not stop with the design process, but includes responsibility for the actual implementation.

So - the traditional inventory, analysis, plan, and implementation steps broke up - we went for 'Planning for Action'. True, in the design process described here, limited attention is given to the ultimate form. Form, environmental enhancement and beautification, however, are addressed while implementing. That is the moment, that the community chooses trees, location and form whereby in the selection beauty and shape are important arguments. Through my work abroad, my interest in finding landscape forms that are functional, durable, ecologically sustainable, economically viable, healthy, and pleasant to live in, was strengthened. Beauty results from there. My pride and sense of success became linked to the pride and the success of the community.<<

Uitverkoop in de Mema

Waarom naar het buitenland...

Is het binnenland niet groot genoeg...

Is Nederland echt vol dan...

Meestal erger ik me aan mensen die zonnig naar een ander land moeten om daar te leren hoe het gras groener kan worden. Voor vakanties heb ik daar niets op tegen, ook niet om een liefde buiten de deur te hebben, maar alle andere vormen van buitenlandse uitwisseling vind ik hoogst verdacht. Ik vertrouw niet op de kennis die - door even rond te neuzen in het buitenland - in het korte geheugen opgeslagen ligt. Het doet mij teveel denken aan het maken van een plan door in leuke blaadjes de leuke plaatjes uit te scheuren en als een valse collage van vloekende beelden bij elkaar te plakken. Scheuren en plakken is verdacht. Ik denk dat ik daarmee bij de oude garde hoor, wat me helemaal niet stoort. Het oude vakmanschap is gebaseerd op overdracht van leermeester op leerling door langdurig en tot vervelends toe stichtelijk contact.

Het is maar een hype, die zogenaamde toegevoegde hedendaagse waarde van multiculti vreet maar wat je niet kent en kijk niet in de spiegel vlucht neiging. Koop gewoon een Urker vissersboot en plant een es, een wilg of zoek een kievitsei, want dat is de uitstervende Hollandse Glorie. Er is meer in Nederland dat vreemd en uitgestorven lijkt dan in het buitenland. Het buitenland... daar hebben we allemaal hetzelfde eentonige beeld van door de glossy magazines, de videoclips, bioscoopbezoekje, Joop van den Ende successen. Mondialiteit is als een grote Hema, omgevormd tot 'Mema', de Mondiale eenheidsmaatschappij.

Ik snap het werkelijk niet. Aan de ene kant roept de maatschappij om identiteit door streekeigenheid en aan de andere kant apen we elkaar wereldwijd na. Nog even volhouden en de split personality die hiervan het gevolg is, muteert tot een genetisch overdraagbare eigenschap.

In 1920 was er ook al een hoos van uitwisselingen met de orient en ideeën uit het wijze oosten en het zwoele zuiden. Niks nieuws onder de zon. Het lijkt eerder nog op een sinister plan van doctor Evil die de gehele mensheid in wil pakken met doorzichtige trucs en direct consumeerbaar vergif. Bah. Hoe meer ik erover nadenk, hoe argwanender ik word. Ik heb denk ik hulp nodig. Ik zal mijn Zweedse vrienden maar eens vragen wat zij ervan vinden...

Paul Roncken