

INTRODUCING A BOOK FULL OF DESIGN EXERCISES: What have we been doing without?

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Abstract

Theory in landscape architecture is still very eclectic and therefore not beneficial to define a coherent landscape design field. Excerpts of theories from adjacent scientific fields such as ecology, psychology and architecture exist, they are however hardly ever transcribed to fit the demands of landscape architecture. Development of theory may seem to be an obvious priority in establishing good scientific foundations, but will most likely fail to create an obvious framework to help the struggling designer while designing. Theory could very well become a paper utopia that will relieve academics of their responsibilities and scare designers that still have to figure out how to implement all these nicely formulated theories.

Besides theory, the science of landscape design must be constructed by methodology and practice. The practice of landscape architects is undeniable a source for many methods that have slowly accumulated into a reasonably consistent set of assumptions: a methodology. The strong bond between practice and methods is what establishes a distinctive landscape design field. We should therefore collect and define these methods and articulate their common characteristics to establish a methodology of landscape design.

A very pragmatic routine and test for the validity of design methods is by creating design exercises that deal with specific design methods and

practical assumptions. While developing such exercises for the bachelor curriculum in Wageningen (the Netherlands) I was very surprised to notice that examples of design exercises are very rare. There are however a few handbooks that deal with essential landscape design principles that can be tuned into exercises. In the exercises I have developed a specific 'Wageningen' method of landscape design and a more general method is also distinguishable.

I will gladly share some of these exercises including the student results and evaluations. Design exercises not only proved to be valuable in quality time during lectures and studio work, they also created a transparent and deep understanding of the methodology that defines landscape architecture alongside other design and research disciplines.

Keywords

Design education, methods, exercises, student work

References

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