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'Pays' - 'Land' - 'Yuan Lin'. The power of landscape (architecture) terms

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Abstract

In order to continue building a common body of knowledge, landscape architecture researchers and practitioners must refer to the same fundamental concepts – particularly in those instances where different words are used to describe them. This paper puts the focus on 'landscape', probably the most important and, at the same time, most ambiguous of landscape architecture's concepts. The emergence and implementation of the European Landscape Convention, ELC, has given rise to new discourses on 'landscape'. Customarily, such discussions employ only one word, landscape, thus assuming a predominantly 'Western View'. But there exist, even within Europe, several different connotations of 'landscape' and also different words to express these. How great the variety of such connotations might possibly be, and how many words are in use, world-wide, to describe 'landscape concepts' we have only just begun to grasp. This paper aspires to remind landscape architects of the richness that exists in the many different cultural concepts that relate to what we simply call 'landscape', suggesting that there is much work to be done for landscape architects to learn from each other and to 'come to terms' about their terms. In doing so, this paper suggests for landscape architecture to go beyond approaches that emphasise the physical and especially those that reduces landscape to measurable things. Landscape is also part of political, economic, social, cultural concepts, and it would be important to make use of their notions of landscape. Such notions help placing the emphasis on what people perceive and give value to in their surroundings, and how such perception might relate to common interest, to collective identity, and other concepts. By including the public's views into the landscape discourse, there might be richness much greater even than is assumed by scholarly wisdom. The suggestion is to introduce this wealth into international communication, first within the field of landscape architecture, but also in the wider fields of landscape study and policy, including those considering preparations for an 'International Landscape Convention'.

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Introduction

By unreflectingly using a singular landscape definition, and by not taking into consideration the idiosyncrasies of the world's many cultural contexts and languages, a real danger exists of losing the variety of the world's landscape meanings in a continuous flow of global mono-cultural colonisation. On the other hand, while landscape is becoming a loan word in some languages, such as is currently happening in, to name a few, the Middle East, China and South East Asia, its introduction might also extend or only partly replace existing landscape ideas. In Turkey, for example, the word '*Peyzaj*' (introduced from the French *paysage*) gradually superseded several existing 'landscape' words (some from Arabic). Initially, during the time of its introduction in the 1920s, '*Peyzaj*' was just a term referring to "scenery" and only later people began to also connect it with "garden" and "the land". Today the extending of the scope of new meanings is still in process while, simultaneously, some of the variety of previously existing words expressing a number of different aesthetic and territorial concepts is gradually lost. Similar processes may currently be observed elsewhere and, while inquiries into 'landscape' should closely be referring to the historical and socio-cultural context of individual regions, landscape concepts must not be transferred to such regions from a single Western perspective (Makhzoumi, 2002: 218; Noparatnaraporn, 2003). This paper aims to provide ideas for strategies that landscape architecture might adopt for the purpose of recovering, not only the "Substantive Meaning of Landscape" (Olwig, 1996), but the great wealth of the 'World's Concepts of Landscape'. Strategies to build specific landscape architectural 'landscape theory' include, among others, international 'landscape concept' conferences and doctoral level research that is collaboratively supported by research institutions from several different parts of the world.

'Landscape Concepts' of the world

Ironically it is at least partly due to the success of the ELC that the term 'landscape' is in the process of being adapted almost everywhere around the world. Fortunately, in this process new light was shed, mainly with the purpose of informing landscape architecture as an academic and professional field, on the richness of different European landscape words and their use (Drexler, 2010; Ueda, 2010; Bruns et al., 2012). At the same time, however, much of the abundance in their meaning remained unreflected. The cultural wealth these words harbour may ultimately be reduced - as can occasionally be witnessed during some academic and political discussions on 'visual quality'. Originally a Western phenomenon (Mitchell, 1994), landscape was, and still is, not only understood as territory ('a piece of land') or scenery (the appearance of a land; cf. Hard, 1969). Landscape "can also be conceived as a nexus of community, justice, nature and environmental equity, a contested territory…" (Olwig, 1996: 631).

Such concepts are also to be found in cultures that do not posses a singular landscape word while, at the same time, such cultures might possess landscape concepts that are missing in Western ones. In Thai cultures, for instance, the words '*baan*' and '*munag*' are used in people's daily life when referring to areas where strong links exist between community and place, and to areas that are conceptually defined by their common customs and social law, and by their cultural identity (Noparatnaraporn,

2003). These usages are reminiscent of the 'substantive meanings' that some European landscape words would also express. However, such meanings are not part of the semantic field of the term 'landscape' that Thai landscape architects have begun to adopt, mainly for the sake of convenience. On the other hand, the Western concept of landscape as a geographically defined area with clear limitations differs from South East Asian concepts that include, among others, undetermined entities without visible borders. In fact, until recently, the idea of drawing a border around a 'land' would have been unthinkable in these parts of the world (Winichakul, 1994: 75). If Chinese landscape architects refer to the Western term 'landscape' they might chose one of several connotations, one of them being '*Yuan Lin*', a combination of '(beautiful) enclosed garden/area' and 'trees/forest' (Zhu, 1985). This and a multitude of other meanings are completely missing in '*jing guan'*, a neologism that also is employed to translate 'landscape' into Chinese (Zhang et al., 2012). In China, with a culture that connects to special forms of environmental awareness, several specific terms exist to express different cultural and symbolic meanings that also reach beyond the Western ideas of 'landscape'. For example, the concept of '*shui tu*' refers to people and their adaptation to specific (natural) local environments.

The Western way of looking at a landscape from a geographically fixed point (a 'view point', such as often indicated at roadsides) in order to have a 'perfect view' (such as of 'the countryside') is not found in Asian and Arabian cultures. In China, even if appreciating a landscape painting, we are not looking at the landscape but immersing ourselves into a world that exists or is depicted as landscape. We may feel at liberty to move about and indulge in the nature and beauty of this world and, hence, there is no need for a one-point perspective. The world is our environment, we are inside of it and it is all around us. There is also no need for a pre-conceived reference for nature and beauty (such as the romantic, the sublime, etc.), and we are not attempting to 'de-code' a certain set of iconographic 'text' or 'scripture' (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988). We are, however, looking for 'potentials'. We are interested what the landscape 'affords' (cf. Jullien 1997). An Arabian experience of 'landscape' is also not simply a distant viewing experience: "It is appreciated bit by bit, through movement in space and time and an engagement of all the senses" (Makhzoumi, 2002: 222). In Arabian cultures the words equivalent to some of the Western landscape ideas may refer to a physical entity and, at the same time, also be conceived as a social and cultural construction, "signifying the way in which people engage with their world in a specific time and place". For example, the word '*jenna*' is, in Arabic, used for paradise, and it is also a word used for garden. "It is at once a physical place … and a conceptual space, a state of peace and contentment" (Makhzoumi, 2002: 218-220).

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is through understanding the world's multitude of landscape concepts that landscape architects may best start and learn how much more exists, out there, beyond physical space: things that can only be learned if we start to make use of constructivist notions of landscape (Burr, 1995; Ermischer, 2004.). The examples above suggest that, for the purpose of securing a cultural base that is both rich and inspirational, it would be prudent for landscape architecture to contribute recovering not only the "substantive meaning" (Olwig, 1996) of the term 'landscape', but also the great wealth of the world's

landscape (related) concepts at large. For striving to implement this aim we conclude that academic and professional exchange is needed on the subject of international 'landscape concepts'. A mixture of four types of strategies might be adopted (disciplinary and trans-disciplinary). Two parts of this mixture can be characterised as thematic and as network activities; the third and fourth parts connect to building suitable support systems.

The thematic parts would specify the different 'landscape concepts' and their relevance to different realms of planning and design. Theory and methodological foundations would be the subject of fundamental research. To implement this strategy, conferences, doctoral colloquia and seminars on methodology would be organised to help researchers develop their own disciplinary language. These activities would be collaboratively supported by research institutions from several different partners around the world. Thematic groups might be established that connect existing doctoral and other research programmes. This second strategy should seek to enhance the ability of landscape architecture schools to develop network activities in research and doctoral studies.

To facilitate and maintain discourse activities, existing networks might be used and extended. As a third strategic component this would need to include links with research communities outside landscape architecture. One aim would be to engage in transdisciplinary research, another would be to benefit from mature research cultures (Bruns, 2012). Since there is no justification for believing that the expert view might be representative of landscape perceptions, the fourth strategic component would establish links with the civil society at large; it would be participatory in nature aiming at including the public's views into the landscape discourse. When implementing these strategies it is important to be specific not only about 'landscape' and 'landscape concepts', but also about what contributes to the landscape architecture theory and methodology.

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