

# Editors' Introduction

## RESEARCH IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, 2.0

In our introduction to *Landscape Journal* 33:1 we discussed a number of environmental and social changes underway that will most certainly influence research in landscape architecture. In our editorial comments at the beginning of *LJ* 33:2, we laid out a series of research non-negotiables—those important factors that define research and, if missing, undermine the reliability, validity, and utility of our work in promoting new understandings regarding the questions we are examining. In this essay, we once again proclaim the surety of rapid change and ask how should landscape architectural research respond in future? We believe design research will increase in relevance and importance in the years to come.

## Historical Case for Landscape Architectural Research

In order to gaze into the future of design research, we set the stage with a little history. From the mid-1960s through the early-1980s, landscape architecture's quest to redefine and better understand itself led to two important documents now considered historic: Albert Fein's 1972 report entitled *A Study of the Profession of Landscape Architecture: Technical Report* (commonly referred to as the "Fein Report"), and the *Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture 1980 Conference Proceedings: Research in Landscape Architecture*. Both documents highlighted the need to bolster the profession's stature and effectiveness by building interdisciplinary partnerships. Fein commented on a significant knowledge gap within the natural and social sciences about landscape architecture and its capacity to offer solutions to the pressing challenges of the age (1972, 79). In his opening address to CELA 1980, held at the University of Wisconsin, Professor Ervin H. Zube stated, "It rapidly became clear . . . that the intuitive approach to problem solving was not adequate unto itself to convince others of the efficacy and veracity of the landscape architectural contribution" (1981,

7). Although Ian McHarg and others gained respect by developing analysis methods to better incorporate scientific information, the state of landscape architectural research at that time offered little assurance to other disciplines that the profession had developed a theoretical and intellectual core. Zube noted that landscape architecture fell short of the criteria associated with all mature and credible professions that "a profession [must be] learned and based on knowledge." His goal was to substantially increase the quality and quantity of our scholarship because he firmly believed that "the profession of landscape architecture will never realize its natural potential without a strong and firm commitment to research" (1981, 8).

## The Central Purpose Remains the Same

Although those initial discussions took place 35 years ago, we continue to ask: Why is research important to landscape architecture? To answer that question, as editors of *Landscape Journal*, we believe it essential to reemphasize Zube's foundational argument.<sup>1</sup> We do not engage in research only to promote and tenure faculty—although we recognize that the mentoring of young scholars of landscape architecture is a critical function of *Landscape Journal* as the flagship journal in landscape architecture. We do not seek sponsored research only as a means of replenishing academic coffers—though programs around the world could use the economic boost. *We conduct research to help the profession achieve intellectual maturity and contribute to a growing knowledge base, which increases the profession's capacity to join other professions in solving complex problems through design, planning, and management of the land.*

## What About Design?

The future of research in landscape architecture cannot ignore design because the practice of design is at the heart of what the profession offers. Professor Zube

suggested that design is “ideographic”; focused on images rather than words or numbers and is frequently “unique to the situation and the individual” (1980, 2). In most cases designers are not clear about the hypotheses they are examining and offer little upon which to build future research agendas. While Zube’s comparison of design and scientific methods holds true today, over the years landscape architects have broadened their approach to research beyond his nearly unilateral focus on the scientific method. Comparative examinations of multiple case studies, art historical methods, grounded theory, phenomenology, typology, and other methods are frequently applied today by those scholars who submit manuscripts to *Landscape Journal*.

These additional approaches to research and the necessary and continuing preeminence of design in landscape architecture have inspired the CELA Board of Directors to consider a third annual issue of *Landscape Journal* focused on design research. We will study the potential of that idea over the next several months and offer a report of our findings to the CELA Board as we depart our editorship at the end of 2016. While the importance of multi-, inter-, and even trans-disciplinary collaboration to the future of the profession has increased dramatically since 1981, the general knowledge, about who we are and what we can contribute, has not. We believe that the development and rigorous consideration of design as a mode of research will help us better explain our work and, consequently, increase our stature among the other professions and disciplines with whom we collaborate. The mysticism surrounding the landscape architectural design process does little to nurture understanding or clarify misconceptions among other disciplines in academe.

### **The Time May be Right**

While knowledge of landscape architecture is low, general interest in design is increasing rapidly. In January of 2013 Bloomberg Businessweek published its first ever “Design Issue.” Design thinking and related terms such as co-creation, creative problem solving, and strategic innovation continually surface in business, education, and marketing. New PhD programs in design focus on cross-disciplinary studies and emphasize the importance of analyzing patterns, the use of new technologies, systems thinking, and advanced participatory research (Davis 2008, 71–72).

Landscape architecture should embrace the opportunity to contribute to this growing international emphasis on design research. While we believe an annual design issue may allow us to make headway in that arena, design research must be accomplished like all credible research with a focus on questions and hypotheses, the use of acceptable and appropriate methods, an effective presentation, a reflective critique, and rigorous peer review.

### **ABOUT THIS ISSUE**

This omnibus issue presents a collection of five articles whose subject matter ranges across: historiographical analysis of an individual’s role in shaping the design of particular places and consequently the evolution of village movement in American landscape design; an assessment of themes emerging among articles published in three English-speaking journals; and a multiple case study analysis of five communally managed urban farms as public space. The articles also include an elaboration on how baroque design strategies can structure the creation of resilient and ecologically productive novel urban ecosystems grounded in a critical and local aesthetic of ecological complexity as well as a call for a hemispheric studies approach to the making of Latin American landscapes as well understanding American landscapes.

In “Mary G. Hopkins and the Origins of Village Improvement in Antebellum Stockbridge, Massachusetts,” Kirin J. Makker, Assistant Professor of Art and Architecture at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, delves into a history of social activism, moral reform and theories about taste occurring in Stockbridge, MA, the Berkshire mountains and New England between 1800-1853. Makker examines these issues in the context of their influence on the evolution of village improvement societies. In addition to discussing the role of Mary G. Hopkins in the evolution of this movement, the study also traces the origin of village improvement movement’s origins in the fields of scientific farming, landscape gardening, sermons from the pulpit, and literary arts.

Debra Cushing, Lecturer and Alayna Renata, Associate Professor at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, report in “Themes in Landscape Architecture Publishing: Past Trends, Future Needs” on a review of abstracts for 441 research articles published in *Landscape Journal*,

*Landscape Review*, and the *Journal of Landscape Architecture* between 1982 and 2013. Content analysis of the abstracts indicates that “history” is by far the most prominent research theme among the published articles, followed by “social and cultural processes and issues” and “aesthetics.” Several themes—such as “sustainability and green infrastructure,” “participation and collaboration,” and “research methods and methodologies”—have become more prominent in recent years.

N. Claire Napawan, Assistant Professor at the University of California-Davis, presents a multiple case study analysis of five communally-managed urban farms in San Francisco. Her article “Production Places: Evaluating Communally-Managed Urban Farms as Public Space,” evaluates the ability of these farms to operate as areas for both food production and public space. It also identifies the conflicts and compatibilities between the use of urban farms as both production and public spaces.

Associate Professor Catharina Sack of the University of Western Australia presents a strategy for sustaining biological diversity in the urban landscape of Perth, Australia. In her article “A Landscape Neo-Baroque: Design as a Cultural Strategy for the Restoration of Urban Ecosystems,” Sack proposes neo baroque design strategies as a potential cultural framework for creating resilient and ecologically productive novel ecosystems that are grounded in a critical and local aesthetic of ecological complexity.

Finally, in his article “Wider Horizons of American Landscape,” Brian Davis, Assistant Professor at Cornell University, calls for a hemispheric studies approach that involves renewed, vigorous, and sustained engagement with indigenous and Latin American landscapes in understanding the tradition of landscape-making found throughout the Americas. Drawing from existing literature and fieldwork, Davis proposes four concepts that are critical for the study of American landscapes, including transculturation, genesis, discontinuity, and conflict.

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## REFERENCES

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