RESCALING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

Large-scale landscape architecture currently tends to shift into a planning - or descriptive - discipline by loosing its idiosyncrasy architectural attitude. This loss may originate both in the suspicion of megalomania and in the boundaries of spatial ‘internal differentiation’ (T. Sieverts) in large-scale designs. The discipline seeks refuge in approaches, which understand landscape as processes, systems, and performances. This reduces landscape to pictorial or functional conditions. Formal spatial relations, the structure and the shape of the landscape pass from view.

This paper reports the attempt to widen the scale of landscape architecture in the proper meaning. It shows an elaborated method both in education and research that scrutinises and redraws those boundaries of material design located between the scale of 1:5.000 and 1:25.000. The approach composes four working steps:

1) Drafting Analysis: A multilayered map of morphological and hermeneutical landscape structures

2) Experimental Analysis: Several doubting, creative, critical and subversive ways to serendipities

3) Conceptual Designing: Discourses about aims, models, attitudes and programmes on landscape

4) Landscape Designing: Master plans or studies as holistic landscape designs; in this last step, as in the first, the use of hatchings, colour fields, symbols, legends is prohibited; the design only composes with materialized, perceivable spatial qualities, with landscape elements, structures and typologies.

Introduction:

After the Nazi-Dictatorship with its tall axis and territorial conquering plans and the following destruction of European cities and landscapes by radical-modern sprawling, Urbanism and Landscape Architecture avoid the ‘big plan’. To a pluraiistic society, big plans seemed to be political incorrect and artificially unsexy. So, large-scale landscape architecture shifted into a planning - or descriptive - discipline. What got lost, was its idiosyncrasy architectural attitude.

Not only in Germany but also worldwide, the renaissance of landscape comes because of the rise of suburbia. But now, as an urban discipline, to design urban landscapes, the boundaries of spatial ‘internal differentiation’ (as Thomas Sieverts pronounces it) in large scale appear. It is difficult and unknown, to develop concrete spatial structures, visible landscapes for the everyday life, in a scale wider than 1:5.000. The discipline seeks refuge in immaterial approaches that understand landscape as processes, systems, and performances. This reduces landscape reduced to pictorial or functional conditions. Time tables, flood diagrams, situational images, system analyzes, satellite films and functional matrices substitute the ground plan whereas formal spatial relations, the structure and the shape of the landscape got out of the focus.

Against this, the contemporary *urban landscapes* shows plainly, that functional optimizations separate and sprawl the landscape into single parts and layers and produce self-sufficient, opportunistic spaces, but not those worth living landscapes, the global urbanization process calls for. This explains the increasing demand on landscape architecture by urbanists, architects and publicists. To answer this burning question, to place the ‘missing link’ (C. Girot), landscape architecture needs to rescale its methodology. One designing focus has to widen from place to space, from facility to landscape, from object to structure, from segregating function to differential form. The challenge is to re-*materialize* large-scale landscape in the professional approach.

Urban Landscapes:

The dissolution of the evident distinction between city and landscape, between urban and rural areas, is leading to a development of a new form of city and a new form of landscape not only in terms of building and infrastructure but also concerning lifestyle and social relations. Specific urban landscapes appeared. Still urban functions are stored in the landscape like waste disposal sites, sewage plants, housing estates and supermarkets. At the same time former urban structures transform into urban landscapes since city centres turn to shopping malls and inner city quarters are perforated or neglected. Processes of suburbanisation do not only materialize in the peripheries but also far apart from urban centres. Huge infrastructural complexes with a need for wider space, specific topographic demands and burdening emissions, like airports or military training areas, conquer remote landscapes and bear urban infrastructures, jobs, communities and lifestyles in the country-side. All in all a new type of space occurred during the last decades with its own distinguish characters, where people live, work an spend their leisure time but which structure is not satisfying in ecological, economic, social and aesthetic terms. Large-scale landscape architecture adds to the classical elements of a cultural landscape all

constructional and infrastructural elements belonging to urban landscapes as equal tools in the designing process. Modern land uses like motorways or commercial estates are recognized not as environmental intervention but as new elements that have to be integrated in existing landscapes.

Rescaling Analysis:

An analysis that aims at landscape qualities in existence and equally in potentials has to understand, to explain and to design the landscape as a concept of structure. Landscape means: a spatial structure, an open entireness where diversity and differences are immanent qualities and where coherence could be generated. To achieve knowledge, interpretation and notion, a three-dimensional approach of hermeneutics, empirics and designs needs to be applied in analysing morphological as well as social aspects. For that purpose qualitative methods will serve as a methodical access in analysing and designing landscapes. The qualitative method investigates the *why and how* of decision making, not just *what, where, when*. Qualitative methods will not search for differences but for common grounds. The criteria are not determined before, the aim is to reach a wide perspective, to find new categories and finally come to an abductive conclusion. Deduction proves that something must be; induction shows that something actually is operative; abduction merely suggests that something may be. Qualitative approaches have the advantage of allowing for more diversity in responses as well as the capacity to adapt to new developments or issues during the research process itself.

Such a landscape analysis forms the fundament of research projects and design studios where students have to cope with urban landscapes as described above. The students have to work out large-scale design that brings together abstract objectives of spatial and environmental planning with local design concepts in a kind of structural landscape framework or master plan on a regional scale. Working in a regional scale evolve a certain complexity and insecurity which shall be overcome by a precise methodical procedure which organizes the approach in four working steps. All steps were never taken separately, but in interaction and always with the intention to design.

Working steps in large-scale landscape architecture

1) Drafting analysis – maps and meanings

Topographic and historical maps on different scales and time, as well as areal images are the basic material in the drafting analysis. Transparent paper is used to trace characteristic, formative or hidden elements. By sketching specific local structures were found and recurrent, characteristic types were established. What is there left over or shines through? Like a palimpsest (A.Corboz) landscape consist of sequenced overlays. Whenever spaces are rebuilt or remodeled something remains. Each development adds another layer of spatial structure that leaves traces that may be used as basics for further planning and design ideas.

These sketches were digitalized and brought together with further digital data of spatial information about geological facts or land uses to find the constituent parts of the explored space. In the beginning each

group focuses on a specific spatial issue (layer). For example: morphology, barriers, views, paths, roads and motorways, settlements, utility services, land uses, woods and biotopes or waterscapes. Interchanging the different layers step by step a holistic image of landscape occurs.

To understand the meanings of landscape it is useful to investigate historic plot names and descriptions as well as contemporary literature on the site - including travelogues and internet blogs. To explain the conditions and qualities of the landscape, literature on geomorphology, historic and contemporary land uses and settlement history should be considered.

The aim of the drafting analysis is to understand the project area and to define a specific landscape by describing a spatial structure of spatial characteristics, boundaries, continuities and sequences. This leads to a development of what we call “spatial bubbles”, a dense and particular description of landscape far away from predetermined categories of analysized spaces. The result is a multi-layered map of morphological and hermeneutical landscape structures. It interferes the historic and thematic layers of the landscape morphology on the one hand and, a dense description of the landscape character on the other. All this provides the material for the following design task.

2) Experimental analysis – creative and critical

The results of the drafting analysis are compiled and sharpened in an experimental manner using texts, pictures, maps or films. According to their skills or talents the students use different ways to express their ideas. In an individual approach the developed image or issue should reveal a new perspective of the analysed landscape in a critical or subversive way. The chosen topic may be a qualitative analysis of clusters by searching and combining relations concerning spatial, cultural or natural phenomena in simple and complex order or cultural studies where dense descriptions of exemplary social issues or observations of specific aspects in everyday life were produced. A further issue lies in creating atmospheres. Here situational interactions of appearance and perception deal for example with different kinds of movement or different qualities of wideness. Dealing with colours is also a major concern. Out of soil investigations or aereal images a specific colour chart of the landscape is created. Another topic is to reduce landscape to single, abstract forms or components or to a single quality to get indications for designing.

3) Conceptional design - attitudes and concepts

This conceptional stage serves as some kind of meta-level. To generate planning ideas and design concepts objectives of landscape development have to be devised in addition to the analysis. Specific approaches for example to enable public open space, to create collective places that allow social interaction or to create a comprehensible and readable landscape are deduced from these general objectives. Regional planning models, programmes and guidelines have to be evaluated and discussed in context to the specific spatial, historical and political background in order to develop a spatial attitude and suitable design principles.

4) Landscape design – structure and form

For the final landscape design a regional landscape or regional issue is chosen to create a comprehensive regional master plan of spatial structure and form. Based on the conceptional background the design has to compose with landscape elements, with materialized, perceivable spatial qualities. Instead of only imposing ideas from outside, the design has to respond to existing structures and should work with given typologies, which were discovered during the drafting analysyis. The point is to enhance landscape qualities and to improve ecological, social and aesthetic conditions in urban landscapes. To become aware of spatial qualities and relations it is important to develop a perception of space as well as to create a permeability of space to reach physical and signifying connections between constructional, infrastructural and landscape elements.

It is not enough to fix planning regulations and to fill the plan with green figures. Therefore the use of hatching and symbols is prohibited. The design should reveal morphological qualities.

Conclusion

This approach tries to reembed an architectural attitude into the regional scale and puts formal spatial relations, the structure and shape of the landscape back in focus. We understand landscape as a complex system of interrelated parts. These parts should be discovered, verified and brought together in defined connections to create a stable structure of landscape elements which could serve for further urban or infrastructural development. Doing so we get away from a distinctive and conservative landscape term to an open and differential landscape term. Large-scale landscape architeture achieves more than providing functions. It saves form, combines spatial issues and creates functional and visual relations between all elements in urban landscapes.

Further research:
What could landscape structures fulfil in urban landscapes?
Methods of qualitative analysises of landscape structures
boundaries of spatial ‘internal differentiation’ (in the design process and in graphic implementation)