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LANDSCAPE AS EXPERIENCE

DOŚWIADCZANIE KRAJOBRAZU

Abstract

Landscape is a complex construct with its own form and spatial dimensions, containing traces of the past while remaining in a continuous process of change. These phenomena influence both the experience of landscape and its design. Reference to the three dimensions of landscape content together with examples of how they are addressed in design practice, highlights the role and impact of design on the shaping of the multisensory experience of landscape.

Keywords: *designing the experience, naturban, place attachment, tactilescape, visualscape*

Streszczenie

Krajobraz to konstrukt złożony posiadający swą formę i rozmiary przestrzenne, zawierający ślady przeszłości i pozostający w procesie zmian, jakie nieustannie w nim zachodzą. Te zjawiska wywierają wpływ na doświadczanie krajobrazu, jak również na jego projektowanie. Przywołanie trzech wymiarów krajobrazu oraz przykładów uwzględniania ich w praktyce projektowej wskazuje na rolę i wpływ projektowania na kształtowanie wielozmysłowego doświadczania krajobrazu.

Słowa kluczowe: *naturban, projektowanie doświadczania, przestrzeń dotyku, przestrzeń wizualna, więź z miejscem*

1. INTRODUCTION

> As landscape designers or landscape lovers it is always necessary to breathe in and get feeling of the particular nature of the site when visiting it for the first time, the nature of the site as the inherent qualities of this land and the original physical arrangement of its natural elements. At this first moment the one we should know is the most revealing and inspiring before any process of intervention. We need to be completely in tune with the precious and generous art of observing nature, intimately connected to the gift of listening to nature[1].

This is how Teresa Moller, an eminent landscape architect, writes about the experience of landscape. Her works constitute a fusion of art and nature. They reflect careful listening to the landscape and integration with its structure on many levels. The author sees in the act of experience a source of inspiration which, undisturbed by any ideas or preconceptions, allows one to come closer to knowledge of a place. This knowledge makes us "become attached only to what is essential."[2]

[1] T. Moller, *Reflections in the landscape,* Arquine, Amsterdam 2021, p. 77.
[2] *Ibidem*.



Ill. 1. *Being under the trees* by Teresa Moller, arrangement made for the IGA Berlin exhibition, 2016, photo: U. Forczek-Brataniec

Landscape is a cultural construct. It is one of the attempts to name that which surrounds us, a comprehensible fragment of the world. The complexity and multidimensionality of the environment referred to as landscape are also manifested in the multitude of its interpretations across different disciplines and professions, from the exact sciences to philosophy. This complexity is likewise reflected in the ways in which landscape is designed, remaining dependent on the views and awareness of its author.

Landscape is an area that is perceived, but it is also an area containing the full range of effects of the actions of nature and human beings; landscape is also the processes taking place within it[3]. For those experiencing a landscape, its appearance is important, but equally important are its temperature, humidity, surroundings, character, and the season of the year. For we experience landscape with our whole selves. We experience it visually, responding to form and matter; we experience it mentally, sensing the atmosphere of a place and establishing a relationship with it; we also experience its change, observing differences and evolution, while at the same time changing our own views of what we see. This complex experience of landscape manifests itself in a complex process of discovering it, and this in turn influences the way landscape is designed. Design that is conscious of the view, the identity of a place, and takes into account its variability.

[3] *Europejska Konwencja Krajobrazowa*, Dz. U. z 2006 Nr 14, poz. 98.

2. SCALE OF PERCEPTION

Visual perception is regarded as one of the primary ways of apprehending space. Today's "image culture" intensifies this phenomenon, while the ubiquity of beautiful views – even as screensavers – seeks to transport us to visually beautiful places. Yet it turns out that a beautiful view is not everything; visual perception is more complex. It depends on scale, the distance separating us from the object of perception, and the context of the place from which we look. Bernard Lassus, a French landscape architect, distinguished between experiencing landscape as physical presence and as visual presence, differentiating between the scale of the view and the scale of touch[4]. The scale of the view extends across great distances; we are able to perceive an object from several hundred kilometres away, while objects located more than one hundred kilometres away may still be clearly visible. Such distant views usually evoke admiration and delight, as the very distance itself inspires a sense of wonder and awe in the observer. The scale of the view thus creates extraordinary design possibilities. It allows us to incorporate external views – "borrowed views" – into our own compositions. The use of the characteristics of visual perception and the design of spatial form through geometric analysis thus become key tools of landscape design. The language of geometry makes it possible to construct landscape and create both axial and free compositions, as well as to re-order existing space[5]. Landmarks or spatial accents have the power to impose a new structure of visual relationships upon an existing one[6]. Restoring or shaping new visual compositions has played a key role in design, both in urban spaces and in open landscapes. A view enriches the context, situates a place, and establishes a network of compositional relationships with its surroundings. This was understood both by the designers of palaces connected with gardens and by the modernists. Le Corbusier's drawings reveal that he understood visual relationships and skilfully employed them in his designs. Secondary ordering becomes a fundamental tool in relation to sites that are being reused through adaptation and adjustment to new functions, in the form of reuse. A new composition, reconstructed on a post-industrial or former military site, gives it new meaning and transforms it into a contemporary park or garden[7]. A new composition introduced into chaotic suburban areas can reorder them and impose a renewed sense of structure[8].

While the distant scale is primarily experienced through the sense of sight, the immediate surroundings engage multiple senses, becoming a *paysage mille-feuilles*[9]. The material qualities of space then assumes an important role: its material, texture, temperature, and humidity – properties that we come to know through touch. When looking into the distance, we remain aware of what is close at hand, and the way we experience the scale of touch determines the way we experience the visual scale. A sense of safety, comfort, and well-being influences our relationship with our surroundings, fostering openness and a desire to explore or look further.

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[4] B. Lassus, *Tactice Scale-Visual scale*, [in:] D. Colafranceschi (ed.), *Landscape + 100 words to inhabit it*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 2007, pp. 171–172.

[5] D. Cosgrove, *Liminal Geometry and Elemental Landscape: Construction and Representation*, [in:] J. Corner (ed.), *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York 1999, pp. 103–119.

[6] K. Lynch, *Managing the Sense of a Region*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1976.

[7] E. Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes,* Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, Basel 2015.

[8] K. Lynch, *op. cit*., p. 47.

[9] B. Lassus, *Tactile Scale…*, *op. cit*., p. 171.

Conversely, a sense of uncertainty, threat, or discomfort experienced within the scale of the immediate surroundings may separate us from other sensations and impose an interpretation of the environment, relegating even the most beautiful views to the background. This subject is developed in Jay Appleton's theory of "prospect and refuge."[10] According to this theory, people prefer spatial configurations that allow them to observe their surroundings while remaining protected from what may be present within them.

This issue is addressed today in theories of creating inclusive and safe spaces, also referred to as feminist approaches to spatial design. Research indicates significant differences in the way space is experienced, for example, according to gender – differences that determine how space is used. Awareness of these differences can have a significant impact on design while also helping to address problems related to limitations, exclusion, and inclusive access to the urban public realm[11].

Lassus emphasises that even a small intervention can radically alter the way a landscape is experienced, stating that the task of the designer is rather to direct the observer's attention than to transform the space entirely[12]. This is demonstrated in the projects of Australian landscape architect Marti Fooks. Focusing on the use of public spaces, she works with statistical data to address inequalities in access to shared spaces through design, demonstrating that standard models of safety may overlook the experiences of groups who use the city in different ways[13].

3. TRACES

The perception of landscape engages the observer and leads from sensory experiences to mental and intellectual ones. These are directly connected to the material object that is the landscape, to what can be read within it, and to the relationship that emerges between the landscape and the observer. R.B. Riley emphasises that landscape is not merely a physical arrangement of elements; it is the setting for human experience, which over time becomes imbued with memory, emotions, cultural meaning, and personal history[14]. He formulates the concept of "place attachment"[15] to describe the emotional relationship between a person and a place that extends beyond mere cognition, preference, or evaluation.

This applies not only to spectacular or exceptional landscapes, but also to everyday landscapes experienced routinely. In his work, Riley also emphasises the significance of landscape that emerges through the relationship between people and landscape, both at the level of creation, where it becomes a material trace of culture, and as a framework for experience and action[16]. As a place of continuous activity that leaves material traces, the landscape becomes

[10] J. Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, Wiley, London 1975, pp. 63–73.

[11] Navarrete-Hernandez P., Vetro A., Concha P., *Building Safer Public Space: Exploring Gender Difference in the Perception of Safety in Public Space Through Urban Design Interventions*, "Landscape and Urban Planning" 2021, no. 214, art. 104180.

[12] B. Lassus, *Echelles, différences et hétérogénéités*, "Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine" 1993, no. 61, pp. 137–140.

[13] M. Fooks, *Safe and inclusive spaces are driven by meaningful process*, "Scape" 2026, no. 4, pp. 68–71.

[14] R.B. Riley. "Attachment to the Ordinary Landscape", [in:] I. Altman, S.M. Low (eds.), *Place Attachment*, Plenum Press, New York 1992, pp. 13–35.

[15] See: T. Moller, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[16] L. Scannell, R. Gifford, *Defining Place Attachment: A Tripartite Organizing Framework*, "Journal of Environmental Psychology" 2010, no. 30(1), pp. 1–10.

"history congealed." The lives of people and their stories can be traced in the textures of the land[17]. These textures and forms, in turn, become a palimpsest, a material composition, and a source of spiritual experience. This connection between material composition and spirituality was present in Chinese garden art, to which the Swiss landscape architect Paulo Burghi refers. According to the creators of Chinese gardens, one of the purposes of visual garden composition was to transport the viewer into a spiritual realm beyond the material view, into a world of meanings, reflection, and contemplation extending beyond the horizon of visual experience[18]. Burghi addresses this in presenting his concept for the geological observatory in Cardada. Creating a place for observing a spectacular panorama, he places elements on the viewing platform that allow us to reach beyond the visual qualities of the beautiful view. He draws attention to the different times of rock formation, separated by thousands of years, and to the geological past in the form of traces of the sea. Through a formal interpretation of the site, he invites the observer on an intellectual journey into the depths of history, drawing attention to the traces of this history and suggesting how to interpret them. The aim of this activity is to encourage deeper understanding and a conscious experience of the place and its past, allowing for wonder, delight, and contemplation of the beauty of the world.

4. TEMPORALITY

R.B. Riley's view of landscape as a setting for experience and action is further developed in Tim Ingold's theory of "Temporality of the Landscape." Ingold transforms the traditional understanding of "landscape to be viewed" into a "taskscape," developing the concept of taskscape, which emphasises the relationship between temporality and landscape and its change over time. According to him, landscape is a process that cannot be reduced to the pictorial stasis of the "world at rest."[19]

Moreover, if we look at the etymological origins of the word landscape, this relationship of active shaping is inscribed within it. The element "scape" is related to the word shape, meaning to form or construct. Thus, in this understanding, landscape is rather a place of interaction and the construction of a living environment than the shaping of visual compositions governed by a visual regime. In this context, the tasks facing landscape architecture seem to be returning to the original meaning of the word landscape. The meanders of treating landscape as a beautiful setting and decoration, stripped of ecological and environmental functions, are gradually moving beyond the mainstream, which is returning to a fuller understanding of the relationships occurring within landscape.

To this end, wild areas with limited human access are once again being designated in order to create space for natural processes. In urban design, the continuity of green spaces is taken into account so that these processes can be strengthened and incorporated into the creation of a healthy living environment. Landscapes are being created through management,

[17] T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Routledge, London 2000, pp. 132–150.

[18] U. Forczek-Brataniec, *Chinese tradition of visual design and its presence in contemporary spatial compositions of China*, [in:] A. Zachariasz (ed.), *The genesis of the art of gardening and the modern landscape of China*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 2016, pp. 119–140.

[19] P. Gruppuso, A. Whitehouse, *Exploring Taskscapes: An Introduction*, "Social Anthropology" 2020, no. 3, pp. 588–597.

where interventions take the form of targeted actions intended to continuously adapt a place to current needs, with the main emphasis placed on harnessing the forces of nature.

This approach to shaping the landscapes around Girona was introduced by the Catalan landscape architect Martí Franch Batllori (EMF), reversing the sequence of traditional design practices. Action is initiated on the basis of observation and is then adjusted and repeated in a new form following further observation. In this context, the project becomes a process of continuous adaptation to changing conditions and newly acquired knowledge[20].

On the basis of these practices, the concept of "naturban" emerged, referring to a mosaic of nature and the city and legitimising the presence of wild nature within urban environments. As the role of these processes becomes better understood, the aesthetic canon and the way we perceive the beauty of nature also change, particularly the beauty of green spaces, giving rise to the term "naturban aesthetics." Given the history of changing perceptions and definitions of beauty, this phenomenon is by no means exceptional. In aesthetics, it is widely acknowledged that we generally see in nature what we have learned to see in it, and we see it in ways shaped by the prevailing style of a given period. "The way we perceive things depends on our knowledge or belief."[21] As our knowledge of the object of observation changes, so too does the way in which it is evaluated. This relativity requires designers to remain attentive, to observe carefully, and to create in a manner that is open to change and new circumstances. Moreover, the dynamics of this process make it possible to respond to change and continuously adapt the shaping of the landscape, which, in the face of accelerating change, points to a valuable direction for contemporary design.

3. SUMMARY

Landscape as a multisensory experience, a paysage mille-feuilles, as a record of the past and the setting for processes unfolding over time, is at the same time a remarkable field for creation.

Its design often takes on the character of an experiment. The projects discussed had to fight for the possibility of adopting an original approach that went beyond predictable implementation procedures. They constitute examples of the integration of art, engineering, and environmental knowledge, which seems to be an appropriate formula for landscape design suited to our times. Landscape design is the shaping of form and processes; it is an awareness of interactions and future needs. In this context, it is also the ability to refrain from transformation in favour of preservation or protection.

By determining the future form of the landscape, the designer also shapes how it will be used and interpreted. By influencing its appearance and its relationship with its surroundings, the designer creates the framework for the multisensory experience of landscape. By sharing their own experience, vision, and knowledge, they suggest to the observer a way of perceiving it. This is a great responsibility, but also a gift: to have the opportunity to share one's own experience of landscape with the user of the designed space.

[20] M.J. Franch, *Drawing on Site: Girona's Shores*, "Journal of Landscape Architecture" 2018, no. 13(2), pp. 56–73.

[21] J. Berger, *Sposoby widzenia*, Aletheia, Warszawa 2008, p. 8.

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