Lessons from the Past, Visions for the Future
Celebrating One Hundred Years of Landscape Architecture Education in Europe

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Applying LBSN data as a research resource to enhance landscape assessment skills in the wake of the European Landscape Convention

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Keywords: European Landscape Convention, landscape urbanism, landscape research, LBSNs (Located Based Social Networks), landscape perception

In 2000 the European Landscape Convention (ELC) was adopted by several EU member states and the European Council started promoting initiatives in order to raise awareness of European Landscape identity patterns and features (Council of Europe, 2000). The underlying idea was to preserve Europe’s territorial essence, and moreover, Landscape is a trans-frontier issue (Wascher & Pérez-Soba, 2004), enabling joint action to be taken for areas shared between two or more countries.

Based on evidence that landscape is an issue that bridges the gap between social, environmental and economic matters in research and government policy (Wascher & Pérez-Soba, 2004), the ELC represented a starting point for such initiatives — guidelines, regulations, urban and territorial planning document— concerning landscapes. From the outset, Europe comprised two distinct landscape perspectives. The first type of European country had a tradition in the practice and teaching of landscape as a specific subject necessary for spatial planning. The second type included countries with a weak tradition in landscape matters, beyond the protection of natural areas. In this latter case, new policies and training processes had to be implemented so that they could be incorporated into professional practice and into decision-making processes for planning and designing, which also included some degree of public participation. Spain is among the second type of countries.

In Spain, the study of Landscape as a specific subject, within the official training programmes for architects, was incorporated into the Polytechnic School of Cataluña (Bellmunt & Cervera, 2015) in 1982. In 1994, the Landscape and Urban Planning Journal published a special issue titled Landscape Architecture Education (1994; vol. 30), placing at the centre of the discussion reflections on the teaching/learning methodologies involving landscape architects training and professional practice (Vroom, 1994). Furthermore, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology has been integrated improving accuracy and making it possible to track the changing processes that occur at local and territorial scale (Appleton, Lovett, Süninenberg, & Dockerty, 2002; Covilla, Tabik, & Romero, 2015; Małczewski, 2006). Technological advances have brought new lines of research that focus on investigating new data sources, such as Located Based Social Networks —LBSNs— from which user-generated content can be extracted, showing user preferences and activities (Marti, Serrano-Estrada, & Nolasco-Cirugeda, 2017; Alivand & Hochmair, 2017).

This paper shows how data retrieved from different LBSNs — e.g. Panorámico (Figure 1) — have impacted research on landscape perception and how research has been applied to the urban studies courses in the Fundamentals of Architecture degree at the University of Alicante in Spain (Figure 2).

Since 2006, landscape urbanism tools have been introduced as an integral part of the urban studies program. They have been inspired by the specific measures included in article 6 of the ELC preliminary text (Council of Europe, 2000), namely: a) awareness-raising; b) training and education; c) identification and assessment; and, d) landscape quality objectives. Subsequently, an explanation is provided for how the proposed ELC measures have been incorporated into the teaching program of Urbanism 4 at the University of Alicante (García-Mayor & Pérez-Payá, 2014).

a. Awareness-raising: This is stimulated by connecting place experience with a multisensory and cultural understanding, as introduced by Yi-Fu Tuan in Topophilia (Tuan, 1990). Additionally, approaching landscape as a form of language, with all the specific characteristics, equivalent to structure, composition and function in word formation or speech parts


Figure 2.
Developing a technique to identify diverse professionals’ attitudes towards blue-green infrastructure

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Keywords: European Landscape Convention, new landscapes, landscape perception and preference, community resilience, blue infrastructure, BGI

The signing of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2000, with its concise definition of Landscape, provided a landmark moment in the examination of European response to their surroundings. The ELC defines landscape as ‘an area, as perceived by people, which character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’. (ELC, 2000). This definition has revitalised research related to human response to landscape in the field of landscape architecture and professional education. The landscape, in both its material and intellectual manifestation, is a dynamic phenomenon and therefore subject to consistent change (Antrop, 2005). It is critical to situate novel landscapes within the existing knowledge associated with landscape perception and preference as well as to introduce the next generation of landscape architecture students to such new knowledge. Without the sort of scientific knowledge, landscape professionals and future generations of landscape architects/planners risk creating new landscapes that may not meet multiple social expectations.

Climate adaptation strategies foster the emergence of blue-green infrastructure (BGI) as one response for coping with issues arising from climate change and resulting environmental impacts (Eggermont et al., 2015; Ham & Klimmek, 2017). Such new developments of BGI frequently have a different appearance that implies a different way of the design and the aftercare to traditional methods of dealing with water. The literature reveals that, in contrast to pipe-based grey infrastructure, the emergence of BGI has resulted in an alteration in the appearance of the landscape. As a result, a new range of uses, such as landform and water bodies, while the subjective perception is based on the landscape quality that ‘derives from the eyes of the beholder’. It’s a critical difference that it requires a new approach to physical landscape, but if it is subjective, no amount of such surveys will suffice - rather it must be based on an assessment of the community’s landscape preferences. Landscape perception and preference is an intrinsic psychological attribute of the tangible landscape components, such as landscapes and water bodies, while the subjective perception is based on the landscape quality that ‘derives from the eyes of the beholder’. It’s a critical difference that it requires a new approach to physical landscape. The next generation of landscape architecture students to new landscapes and their design and aftercare associated with BGI. Research suggests that a better understanding of the knowledge base, perceptions and motivations of individuals and groups is essential to the identification of factors that influence behaviour and the potential construction of social barriers to change. The landscape perception and preference theories that some human responses to landscapes appear universal while others vary and appear to relate to cultural differences (Appleton, 1975; Bourassa, 1992; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

The role of cultural experience in human response to landscapes has effectively revealed that people from different social groups respond to their environmental settings, while the landscape is ‘one form through which cultural differences become visible’ (Bourassa, 1992, p. 91). From this, people conceive different perceptions and preferences as well as its associated meaning linked with their values and identities (Kaymaz, 2013). Familiarity and the effect of expertise are viewed as two of the most influential cultural factors linked with people’s perception of a setting (Kaplan, Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, Kaplan, & Ryan, 1998). It is therefore particularly important to explore an understanding of different professionals’ responses to BGI, as these people often take centre stage and play a major role in appropriate planning, design and implementation of BGI. Such knowledge gaps about people’s responses to BGI produce uncertainties linked with how diverse BGI professionals with different discipline backgrounds view and value BGI, as well as what kinds of factors that influence the perceptions and motivations of different BGI professionals in the process of producing BGI. This paper seeks to develop a technique to investigate diverse professionals’ response to BGI.

Landscape is viewed as a complex phenomenon that inherently involves both mental perception (i.e. subjective) and physical reality (objective). According to Lothian (1999, p. 178), the objective position assumes that ‘landscape quality is an intrinsic physical attribute’ of the tangible landscape components, such as landscapes and water bodies, while the subjective perception is based on the landscape quality that ‘derives from the eyes of the beholder’. It’s a critical difference that its recognition can be measured and evaluated from surveys of the physical landscape, but if it is subjective, no amount of surveys can suffice. It requires a new approach to physical landscape, which is linked with the landscape professional’s preferences. Therefore, the objective position assumes that ‘landscape quality is an intrinsic physical attribute’ of the tangible landscape components, such as landscapes and water bodies, while the subjective perception is based on the landscape quality that ‘derives from the eyes of the beholder’. It’s a critical difference that its recognition can be measured and evaluated from surveys of the physical landscape, but if it is subjective, no amount of surveys can suffice. It requires a new approach to physical landscape, which is linked with the landscape professional’s preferences.

The study consists of three research strategies, i.e. experimental strategy, case study and qualitative methods. The first research strategy involves a Landscapes and Water Bodies Questionnaire (LWBQ) survey. The second research strategy involves a focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. The potential participants involve BGI professionals whose works and research activities are focused on different disciplines and practices regarding the design, planning and implementation of urban physical environment. The third research strategy involves a Landscapes and Water Bodies Questionnaire (LWBQ) survey, focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. The potential participants involve BGI professionals whose works and research activities are focused on different disciplines and practices regarding the design, planning and implementation of urban physical environment.

This paper seeks to develop a technique to investigate diverse professionals’ response to BGI. The study consists of three research strategies, i.e. experimental strategy, case study and qualitative methods. The first research strategy involves a Landscapes and Water Bodies Questionnaire (LWBQ) survey. The second research strategy involves a focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. The potential participants involve BGI professionals whose works and research activities are focused on different disciplines and practices regarding the design, planning and implementation of urban physical environment. The third research strategy involves a Landscapes and Water Bodies Questionnaire (LWBQ) survey, focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. The potential participants involve BGI professionals whose works and research activities are focused on different disciplines and practices regarding the design, planning and implementation of urban physical environment.