



Transitional Landscapes

Edited by
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scales to mitigate the conflict between biodiversity and urban growth have been conducted in Sydney, Los Angeles and Washington DC.²³ Because the peri-urban has been overlooked by urban design theory and practice for so long, there isn't a body of evidence or precedents concerning methods of working effectively with the forces that shape it. Additionally, as reinforced by the Transect of new urbanism the peri-urban falls into a gap between old ideas of nature (landscape/wilderness) on the one hand and culture (urbanism) on the other. This then translates into a dualism between conservation and development which is then played out in the form of our cities whereby ecological values are seen as incompatible with economic values. This research— "The Hotspot Cities Project"— seeks to bring urbanization and conservation into the same frame of reference and in doing so bring the fields of scientific conservation and urban design closer together. In their 2013 book *Landscape Urbanism and its Discontents* Duany and Talen argue that "nature" is best kept in national parks whereas "culture" works best in uninterrupted urban grids. Duany and Talen dedicate their book to the urbanist Jane Jacobs on the one hand and the proto-environmentalist Rachel Carson on the other. The reason for this dual dedication, they write, is because neither of them ever '... confused the urban with the natural' – the insinuation being that so called "landscape urbanists" do confuse the two, and it is this confusion that leads to poor urban design outcomes. Indeed, in some cases where land-

scape architects forget the forest for the trees, they have a point. But it is profoundly problematic that for new urbanists, the evolution of urbanism is essentially arrested in the Nineteenth century and the possibility of cities becoming more sophisticated ecological systems is foreclosed. The dichotomy between conservation and urbanization can be overcome by envisioning urban design as a process of compromise and invention in which both urban logistics and the ecological imperatives perform as a single system, each adding value to the other. This requires a deep and culturally specific understanding of how both the ecosystem and the urban development system function as well as incentives to mobilize change away from the status quo of socially and ecologically irresponsible growth. Over the last 50 years architecture, landscape architecture and urban design have been largely preoccupied with old city centers. It is now time to shift our focus to the edge of cities, to try and understand its culture and its ecology. As Harvard ecologist Richard Forman writes: "You can have a small impact in a city center, but if you want to have a big impact, go out to this dynamic urban edge where solutions really matter for both people and nature."²⁴

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24. Richard T. T. Forman, "In Conversation with Richard T. T. Forman", in *LA+ Interdisciplinary Journal of Landscape Architecture* 1 (2015), 114–117:115.

23. See: <https://hotspotcitiesproject.com>

Transitional Landscapes / Reversed Landscapes

Daniela Colafranceschi

Nothing like landscapes have ever been transitional: they are transitional, but they are transitional above all culturally. As a professor of Landscape Architecture at the Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, I have to say that these latitudes have taught me a lot about the value of landscape, and they have also taught me a lot —for 30 years—about how to think about its design. It is a reality for which, during our teaching, research and study activities, an operational attitude and a culture of reading landscapes, interpreting them and designing them have been modified over the years. It is a geography that responds to the concept of "Transitional Landscapes" and which note their being in transition culturally, to the point that, rather than a Transit, there is a real Reversal in the way of thinking about and addressing landscape issues; in their concept and project. This is the key word on which to reflect: the reversal, i.e. the one inherent to marginal territories, abandoned areas, urban fringes, which are now assuming centrality of thought, when in recent history they were simply "rejected" areas that were simply not considered either by landscape or cultural thought. The concept of Landscape has not only evolved over time, but like environmental phenomena that are gradually undergoing a transformative acceleration —with direct consequences on natural systems, biodiversity, territorial dynamics, etc. — it has strongly expanded its Ethical statute, before being aesthetic, deeply affecting our sensitivity and our sense of responsibility, when we have to think about the project, the intervention. Therefore, the concept of the landscape today does not define a discipline, but a multidisciplinary field of knowledge which —as can be seen from the topics on which this round table is called to reflect —requires programs and projects that are attentive and sensitive to the identification of multi-scalar, inclusive and plural actions. Landscape in the contemporary world takes on a transcultural value because it is fed by systemic, relational, spatial, and social characters that are complex and determined by phenomena and ac-

tions responding to processes, that imply passages, that imply time, that imply reactions and relationships. The project functions in this case as a device. The same could be said of the city: the city is no longer a single, unitary organism, but is in relation to, in dialogue with, many other things, and it is precisely this relation and dialogue that defines a concept of the "contemporary city". From an idea of a compact and physically concluded city, ideologically clear and defined, we have moved on to read the city from other points of view, though other concepts such as those of "network", of interrelation, of "city systems", on a much larger and conceptually different scale, which in fact implies a theme of relationship and dialogue, under which it would be impossible for there to be a complete urban form closed in on itself, because all together and only together can define that "evolving urban organism" that speaks of complexity, of multiplicity, where cities co-participate in each other. I believe that it is only through being "networked" to form a "system" that our cities make sense and above all have a future. What infrastructures a network of cities is the idea of "process"; the idea that their future project is not a completed, finished project, but many intervention strategies together: that is, an "open project", open and multidisciplinary. To understand this, we owe it to the landscape. Because what infrastructures cities is landscape. The evolution of a Landscape dimension helps us to understand how territories/cities/urban design, before being a political fact, are a cultural fact. As an inclusive discipline, the landscape gives us a key to interpreting issues concerning space and those who inhabit it. Knowing how to read our towns and cities from this point of view is something we owe to the landscape entity. It is through the landscape that we have been able to understand, interpret, those cultural values that inhabit our territories: because it is the landscape that infrastructures all this, it is from the landscape that we can read and interpret our



1-2. Il valore identitario riferito al paesaggio, non è più attribuito ad ambiti di riconosciuta bellezza, ma diventa il presupposto sostanziale per quei paesaggi marginali o dimenticati da una incontrollata urbanizzazione o infrastrutturazione del territorio, oppure quelli in transizione, la cui identità è subordinata alle trasformazioni in atto e rispetto alle quali non esistono valutazioni attendibili sull'entità dei mutamenti e degli esiti a questi conseguenti. La fumara del Calopinace a Reggio Calabria, e, in cresta, il quartiere di San Sperato sono il paradigma di questi paesaggi in transizione. Fotografie di Daniela Colafranceschi.



urban, territorial, geographical, and not least, social realities.

The evolution of a landscape concept has given us a new point of view, a new pair of glasses, to be able to see the contemporary reality: to know how to interpret it and know how to intervene in it.

An interesting ideological reversal rather than modification has therefore occurred.

There is a reversal in the use and concept of the "value" of landscape, which is very interesting and can help us to identify our future attitude towards its design.

We have shifted to valuing what we did not consider before; or we have shifted to giving a positive value to what was considered negative, meaning that only by reversing the point of view do we find the best way to operate.

At first, we have talked about architecture and the city, about how harmony, balance, and the composition of architectural elements shaped cities; the buildings, the fabric of the building, the volumes, the "fullness" that gave meaning to the urban organism. Now we have understood — on

the contrary — that it is the "empty" space between the buildings that has always been the "full" of meaning, that which records the history of a society and culture; it is what speaks to us and measures its contemporaneity and the condition of the present to which it belongs.

It does so through the life, emotions and behaviour of the people and communities who, over the course of time, have inhabited and live in that space, which is only apparently empty. In recent years we have learned to read our cities not through the (full) built-up space, but through the "open" one, precisely enhancing those qualities of identity and culture that these "empty" spaces do not make them at all.

We could say that open space, public space have become the visiting card of cities.

Another example of this overturning of the point of view is the change in the vision of town planning. We have understood that town planning has given us a discipline, which until yesterday was the numerical and quantitative application of standards, indices, codes, and rules, mostly abstract, which

were superimposed on the territory. They landed on it, without necessarily adhering to or responding to its real vocation. We have learnt that we must operate in reverse: it is not an (urban planning) programme, a plan, that decides on the use of the land, but it is that part of the land, as experienced by the social community, that expresses its best vocation for use; that invokes the project programme that will best reflect its character and identity.

Lastly, from the recent ratification of the European Landscape Convention, descends the need to think of the landscape not in reference to single parts of the territory, but to the whole territory and its resources, as a result of the secular influence of the anthropic activities that have followed and stratified here, emerges clearly.

This new instance brings with it two fundamental consequences: the first, which is basically quite revolutionary, is that it overturns the concept of "landscapes of quality", directing it instead to the "quality of the landscape": the quality, obviously, of the entire landscape, insofar as it is the product, the image written on the ground of a society and a culture. The second consequence is that this meaning in itself identifies/indicates/refers to areas that are not homogeneous; and therefore the landscape to which they belong is not simply the physical expansion of territorial areas contained within its perimeter, but in a completely new logic, the recognition of a "mixed landscape", complex, hybrid, for which there are no boundaries, limits, borders and where one cannot distinguish an inside from outside. It is an open system, geography of local and global, plural and specific responses of aesthetic, emotional and social expressions.

So, to return to landscapes in transition, degraded landscapes, discarded landscapes, landscapes in waiting, and landscapes at risk, I would go back to considering an "inversion" in the point of view, even for these types of landscapes.

We have always seen the "dispersed" city as something negative and conflictive. Fringes, peripheries, intermediate territories, without meaning, without identity. Now, on the other hand, we have understood that this is where the great bet for the future of our cities and landscapes lies; a bet that we cannot afford to lose.

From territories of conflict, convert them into spaces of dialogue.

These "no man's land", abandoned areas, those to which the city has turned its back, are dimensions that exist in many realities; indeed, I would add that these neglected, rejected territories have the advantage that they all resemble each other, they have similar characters, which is very import-

ant when thinking of a strategy of intervention, which can bring into dialogue networks, precisely and systems of cities, thinking of the project as a process of sharing.

Therefore, to overturn the point of view, in this case, is to be able to see these common characteristics as a value, as potential when formulating a strategic intervention project, the landscape project as a device, capable of interpreting and activating strategies that generate urban quality, which is social quality, capable of building places more than spaces.

The point of view in the evolution of this discipline of Landscape over time has therefore been reversed and it is also clear why: Landscape is a complex entity, which is constantly changing, because it is dynamic, because it responds to a cultural as well as a political condition. We could say that nothing is more transitional than Landscape. It tells us about people, communities, cities, and societies. It does not only speak to us of the public, but also of the community.

It is essential to put people at the centre, and this implies, or rather means, learning to shift our gaze, our attitude, our way of working from tangible values (numerical, quantitative, objective, evident) to intangible ones such as those relating to the quality of the habitat, identity and social awareness. To think therefore more in the form of a "process" than of a "product", which certainly requires great sensitivity.

I therefore believe that "reversing the point of view" is always a necessary operation; seeing the city from the landscape —physically and conceptually speaking —from the logic of the landscape, is a possible prospect for a future development of city, country, urban reality, in a logic of understanding and conceptual inclusion.

(Not from the city towards the periphery, the expansion areas, the areas left open, but from these dimensions of landscape towards the city).

So, in conclusion, I think that transforming neglected, marginal territories means recovering a continuity of relationships.

This continuity does not necessarily mean "transformation", it does not mean "project" in the canonical sense of an intervention that brings it back into a formal or linguistic contemporaneity, but I think it means "Innovation", understanding the project as a "Device" a "Decoder" — that picks up, translates signals, emits them according to another modality —and the instruction thereof a process that gives these areas a sense again, a meaning of relationship and interaction; it gives them the status of a place again (territories+people/space+society).

Weaving relationships brings the landscape back to the centre, because it is from the logic of the landscape that this process builds continuity and a sense of relationship.

Today we speak of intermediate landscapes, between city and landscape, also understood as “intermediaries”.

We have the possibility to delineate with the landscape project, “buffer zones” between two different conflicting areas, as buffer zones that represent “third spaces” as areas where the landscape welcomes the reconciliation between the two,

through third things, third solutions, third new landscapes that represent innovation. They are areas similar to “ecotones”, where two distinct physical entities such as water and land find a dimension between them that is other and much more than a meeting between the two, because it is different and richer.

Intermediate spaces as proximate geographies, which are comprehensible to us because we know and recognise their meaning, and because they are strongly experimental of this being an inter-scalar device physically, conceptually, socially,

A Design Approach to Transform Contemporary Landscape through Different Timing as a Tool to Improve Public Space in the Cities

Michel Desvigne

A landscape architect can intervene over a significant period. His knowledge and awareness concerning natural rhythms help him or her better understand how a city and territory continually evolve over time, like a living organism. In supervising and guiding the transformation of a territory, its conception in terms of a finished product is excluded from the start. These abilities are efficient because they are concrete and tangible. This focus on physically mastering the various mechanisms at play in transitional landscapes is based on an experience with spatially and temporally large-scale projects. In return, it has numerous implications at all the urban scales.

Interlocking Scales

The territories we are called to act on pose complex and multiple problems, sometimes on vast scales. In this, we, landscape architects, are confronted with the difficulty of seeing, understanding, measuring, and arbitrating. Perceiving large-scale urban phenomena is difficult, as each creates a personal mental image, an abstraction that obscures reality. Thus, maps of a large territory rarely express a physical reality.

Which city in which territory? What boundaries? What are we measuring? These are the same types of questions that scientists ask themselves at the cellular level. When I compare our approaches to some of their work, concerning equally complex phenomena, I realize how fragile we are and the risk of being satisfied with symbolic, ideological, or even commercial approaches, as well as our distance from actual environmental problems.

In my opinion, perceiving the scale and bringing the appropriate answer to the proper dimension is the key to the success of a project. The physical coherences sought are specific to each scale of intervention, and articulations are necessary for their continuity. The development of a territory cannot expand or contract homothetically. Creating a public space or an urban project at the scale of a neighborhood differs from intervention on an agglomeration or, moreover, on a large territorial landscape.

In terms of method, a permanent calibration is necessary, just like the systematic adjustments made on old cameras. Calibration requires that all scales be approached at the same time: implementing a development strategy on a vast territory, carrying out reflections on smaller scales (about 300 hectares), for places where we are really going to build districts, and carrying out concrete experiments on even smaller scales (about ten hectares). This simultaneity of work on variable scales forces our gaze to adjust constantly. In this way, each new point of view informs or questions the previous one and allows the evaluation of the hypotheses formulated for future development.

The Euralens project (2010–2019) that we have been developing for more than ten years, explicitly mobilizes this strategy. The stated objective of the project was to use the momentum generated by the construction of a satellite of the Louvre Museum in Lens (France) to revitalize this former mining territory. The brief was to create a “centrality” for a geographical area of 400,000 inhabitants spanning three municipalities. The cavaliers, paths running along embankments formerly used as transport lines for mine materials, but which have now fallen into disuse, are seen as a potential network of links and walks that simply need to be revealed, reinforced, and completed for them to become a system, linking to existing public parks and amenities and capable of integrating those that may be added later.

The proposed transitional landscapes in Euralens form a “system” in the way that their components are coordinated and articulated across the different scales of intervention. As it deploys, the system works its way into the folds of the territory and extends to the housing estates, into their scattered gardens, and along their paths. Then its principle is extrapolated to the entire former mining basin.

Successive Transformations

We contribute to the transformation of cities and territories that are already highly modified and artificialized. Most of this built environment dates from the second half of the Twentieth century. If