Scales of Change

Book of abstracts

Commemorating 50 years of
Landscape Architecture study programme
at University of Ljubljana

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Track 2: Relation between design and planning

Chairs: Prof. Dr. Henrik Schultz, Dr. Tadej Bevk

Transformative Resilience - a chance to reunite landscape planning and design?

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The contribution follows the hypothesis that the concept of transformative resilience can be a driver in transdisciplinary processes bringing together landscape planning and landscape design. Combining processes of generating, structuring and spatializing knowledge on landscape functions and designing visions for sustainable landscapes on different scales benefits from the creative use of mappings.

According to Schmidt, Hahne, Kegler and several other authors, resilience describes the capacity and velocity of a system to cope with disturbance (Hahne and Kegler 2016; Schmidt 2020). Many authors emphasize that only analyzing bouncing back effects and aiming at restoring a landscape that had been disturbed, falls short. The notion of transformative resilience describes a process of socio-cultural change that is characterized through mutual learning and aims at „bouncing forward" and designing new landscapes (Kegler 2014; Meerow and Stults 2016). The discipline of landscape architecture, with its position at the intersection of natural science, social science, and creative practice, has the great potential to invent this bouncing forward. Global drivers such as climate change and land use change make it impossible to bounce back in many places anyway. It is therefore all the more important that the profession of landscape architecture makes suggestions as to what a bouncing forward can look like. To be able to do this, it is necessary to bring together the competencies of landscape planning and landscape design. It needs both the orderly, strategic of landscape planning and the concrete, tangible, sometimes daring of design.

The fact that Kegler focuses on the transformation process also makes resilience a task of planning culture and process-design. The question "How can the transformation to more climate resilience in cities be shaped?" needs not only fundamentals (What preconditions do we have to be able to respond to change?) but also a definition of goals (Where do we actually want to go?) as well as a process that shows ways in which dealing with disruptions can be cultivated and socially supported (On what paths do we want to walk together?). Transformative planning, which aims to combine insights into spatial characteristics and urban structures with "multi-actor settings" (Balz 2017) emphasizes that it is not so much a matter of setting a binding framework and managing prescribed procedures, but more about shaping a cultural, multi-actor process defined by unpredictability.

The goal of transdisciplinary processes is to combine scientific contributions to problem solving with strategic goals, in that impulses are set for urban society through information, consultation and cooperation. This research approach includes access to relevant actors, for example in administration and politics as well as to landowners, with the aim of implementing and stabilizing results. Thus, transdisciplinary science aims not only at scientific findings, but also at social changes. Therefore, it is necessary to make scientific results accessible for everybody involved.

To stimulate the often-transdisciplinary processes of transformation and to make scientific results accessible, visionary mappings proofed to be a helpful tool to help professional designers and actors envision sustainable landscapes. Mappings can be seen as an important tool of translating experiences and mental images into drawings and thus help planners, designers and other involved actors in the dynamic, relational nexus of urban landscapes to determine their position during the design process. New relations in this fabric can be revealed (Langner 2019). These mappings rely on, for example, data and facts about landscape functions. Unlike classic GIS maps, they highlight structures and elements that are relevant for sustainable landscape development from the perspective of the stakeholders involved. These mappings are thus a communication tool that helps actors involved in transdisciplinary processes to imagine and visualize what a bouncing forward might look like. As a map, they are - unlike photo collages or oblique aerial perspectives - compatible with formal plans, for example in urban land use planning.

The role of mappings in working with the notion of transformative resilience, and their capacity in connecting landscape planning and landscape design, could be shown in the transdisciplinary research study “Green fingers for a climate resilient city”, funded by the German Ministry of education and research (BMBF) that implemented a transdisciplinary process aiming at stimulating climate resilient city transformation. To the process of landscape planning with its well-known elements such as inventory and assessment, targets, concepts, and measures, elements of design have been added. The concepts were narrated and visualized on different scales in mappings in a way that addressed people of different backgrounds: The mappings helped to generate new mental images of “the city of green fingers”, understood as a multifunctional, strategically managed network of different green spaces and elements contributing to sustainable city structures with high-quality, biodiversity-rich urban ecosystems.