

# A Profession in Transition

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THE PROFESSION of landscape architecture as we know it today emerged during the growth of modern industrial economies. Whilst the origins of the traditional professions go back much further, the particular combination of specialist educational credentials, technical expertise and a concern for 'the public good' that characterises landscape architecture is primarily a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century phenomenon. The American Society of Landscape Architects celebrated its centenary in 1999, and at its annual conference in Boston that year I speculated upon the future of the profession.<sup>1</sup> The basic premise of my argument was that, just as the current model of practice had emerged in response to the dominant socio-economic characteristics of the modern technocratic society, so the future of the profession would be shaped by the social forces of the twenty-first century.

In this issue of *Landscape Review* we feature two substantial examinations of the American profession in transition. The first article is a retrospective look at the way in which the profession in the USA has attempted to gain social and political legitimacy, with varying success and consequences. Tim Baird and Bonj Szczygiel trace the social dynamics of the profession through its formation and growth, arguing that it is moving into a period where its aspirations for recognition may be coming to fruition. The authors close on an optimistic note, seeing growing relevance for the role the profession can play as an agent of cultural change.<sup>2</sup>

The second article takes a more contemporary perspective, and focuses upon the challenges and imperatives of globalisation of societies and economies. Drawing upon field work in Mexico, the authors Kyle Brown and Tori Kjer raise a number of questions about the moral and practical implications of practice in the expanding cities of the developing world. In particular, they focus upon urban communities that lie on the margins of the mainstream, and explore how landscape architects can, and should, contribute to social development.

In a sense, both these articles seek to address the challenge identified in 1999: how to retain and reconstruct a sense of common professional purpose and experience in an increasingly pluralistic society. Both see the future for the profession as an agent of change, albeit in different settings.

In the third contribution to this issue, Jacky Bowring provides a further example of professional activity as a social catalyst. Reflecting upon a recent conference in St Petersburg, Bowring explores the way that academics and professionals from diverse origins can influence the reformation of the profession in post-communist Russia.

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EDITORIAL

The final contribution, a review of Shenglin Chang's *The Global Silicon Valley Home: Lives and Landscapes within Taiwanese American Trans-Pacific Culture*, is also concerned with globalisation, although less directly focused upon the profession. Chang examines the phenomenon of 'shifting home identities' created by high-tech commuters who have homes in two countries. She concludes her study on a positive note, seeing opportunities for new forms of identity in a postmodern world. The review raises questions about some fundamental assumptions of theory and practice.

Taken together, these contributions progress what must be a continuing examination of how our profession and discipline responds to wider social and economic dynamics. The profession grew within the framework of the modern industrial nation state. How will it adapt to the global networks of complex city regions, nation states and trading blocs in the twenty-first century?<sup>3</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 Later published as Swaffield, SR (2002) Social Change and the Profession of Landscape Architecture in the Twenty First Century, *Landscape Journal* 21(1), pp 183–189.
- 2 As promoted by James Corner (1999) in *Recovering Landscape*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 3 The 2004 CELA conference adopted 'The Global and the Local' as its theme, and the proceedings included a number of explorations of the ways in which design and planning practice is adapting to globalisation trends. See *Landscape Review* 9(1), 9(2), 10(1&2).