

What are the Big Questions for Landscape Architecture Now?

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The big question for landscape architecture now is how to apply results from landscape design research to the discipline. Research in landscape design is undertaken in different fields at different universities, but sometimes it appears not to be a part of undergraduate education.

How can research be integrated into landscape design through using academic techniques and skills in practice? Designers need to understand how and why developmental patterns and spaces are created and how they support different activities. They need to know how to describe these patterns and spaces, how they improve the ecological or economic viability of a space and form, and how they are used, modified and perceived. Designers need to evaluate and document the successes and failures of such developmental patterns and spaces.

How can more client input, through individual or group participation, be used for landscape design? An important research area in landscape architecture that can help in this understanding is environmental psychology. How can research results in environmental psychology be applied to landscape design?

Research in environmental psychology attempts to understand the inter-relationship between humans and their environment. This kind of research studies people–environment interactions and uses the knowledge gained to help solve a variety of design-related problems. This knowledge should be integrated into the landscape architecture curriculum because it will help the professional to design with a better understanding of a client’s perceptions. It should be undertaken for the purpose of informing future practice, policy, theory and education.

It is essential that we infuse scientific rigour into our curricula. Our universities expect it and accreditation demands it. An important example of research in landscape architecture is investigation in health design. Designing for health can accomplish many positive effects, either separately or in combination. Different names have been given to nature-based treatment efforts, but the most widespread is ‘healing gardens’.

The health effects of gardens or natural environments are caused by their restorative influence on cognition, emotions and an individual’s ability to make sense of (or find meaning in) things (Figure 1). The garden or natural environment may aid an individual’s healing process by helping them to:

- achieve a degree of relief from physical symptoms or an awareness of those symptoms
- relieve stress and gain comfort when dealing with a difficult situation
- improve their overall sense of wellbeing.

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REFLECTION



Figure 1: Gardens and natural environments have a restorative effect on human health, cognition, emotions and our making meaning or sense of things.

So how can planning and design disciplines worldwide integrate the research results of health design and healing gardens into practice? If we teach landscape architecture students to apply such research results in their professional lives, projects in all kinds of areas could be as successful as healing gardens and they could be everywhere – around our homes, on the way to work, in school playgrounds and on university campuses, outside hospitals, in prisons, in rich and poor areas. Such projects could be seen from the windows of all buildings. This would lead to more sustainable, beautiful, comfortable cities.

I hope that this field of work will grow and mature, generating significant results for the discipline of landscape architecture.