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The What, Why and How of Landscape Education for Democracy

Il cosa, perché e come del Landscape Education for Democracy

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The Landscape Education for Democracy project emerged at a particular time in society. Sustainable development is being redefined in terms of its ability to be socially just and transformative, and the project partners wanted to ensure that design and planning education addressed this demand by integrating discussions of democracy, social justice, participation, co-creation, and strategic thinking into the educational experience of young professional and future leaders in the profession. As any Participant Action Research project, the goals and ambitions were clearly stated from the beginning, as was a framework for assessing progress toward the first co-created course for and about landscape democracy.

Il progetto "Landscape Education for Democracy" è emerso in un momento particolare della società. Lo sviluppo sostenibile viene ridefinito in termini di capacità di essere socialmente giusto e trasformativo, e i partner del progetto hanno voluto garantire che l'educazione alla progettazione e alla pianificazione rispondesse a questa richiesta integrando le discussioni sulla democrazia, la giustizia sociale, la partecipazione, la cocreazione e il pensiero strategico nell'esperienza educativa dei giovani professionisti e futuri leader della professione. Come qualsiasi progetto *Participant Action Research*, gli obiettivi e le ambizioni sono stati chiaramente definiti sin dall'inizio, così come un quadro per valutare il progresso verso il primo corso co-creato per e sulla democrazia del paesaggio.



Worldwide, cities are attracting new residents. This unprecedented urbanization pressure demands new urban development models that are respectful of the ecosystem and resourceful. Yet it is becoming also clearer that alongside technological innovation, there is a need for policies and efforts to make cities more livable, cohesive, and welcoming to all kinds of residents (Ruggeri 2017). New tensions are emerging between the values and meanings new and old residents associate with the landscape, its aesthetic qualities, and the functions and benefits it is expected to perform. The recently approved United Nations' Urban Agenda calls for a 'right to the city,' i.e., the notion that every city should be supportive of all residents, and that future planning and policies should be the result of democratic, participatory processes (United Nations 2015). At the scale of the individual and communities, scholars have called for a 'right to landscape' (Makhzoumi et al. 2011) a human right to have access to places that are not only accessible and supportive of human health and delight but also representative of the values, beliefs, and ambitions of society.

The adoption of the European Landscape Convention in 2000 has further solidified the notion that landscapes are critical infrastructures in support of the lives of residents and communities. It has defined landscape as the result of the the actions and interactions of people and community, and has entrusted them with their collective future management. The ELC has also reminded us that expertise in matters of the landscape should be grounded in the knowledge and perceptions of all those who inhabit it (Dejant-Pons, 2004). The epistemological shift required by the ELC's landscape definition requires re-thinking the way landscape planning and design laws, regulations and processes have been performed in the past. Top-down decision-making processes need to make room for bottom-up participatory efforts involving all residents in deciding

goals and strategies that may ensure their long-term livelihood. Worldwide, governments are implementing policies that have tried to put into operational terms this philosophical understanding of landscape and landscape change.

In 2008, Norway translated the ELC's mandate into a new planning act requiring openness, predictability, and participation in municipal planning (Regjeringen). Calderon (2014) has shown that despite many government's official commitment to implementing more democratic landscape change processes, the practice of participation continues to occupy the low reaches of Arnstein's 1969 ladder of participation, taking the form of information-sharing and placation efforts, rather than a true partnership in co-design and citizens' control. Co-design and co-creation of the future democratic landscapes require new conceptual and practical frameworks for planning, designing, constructing and managing community landscape assets. Participation must become more than just a technique, but an ethical stance toward greater ecological democracy in landscape change (Hester 2008). Landscape architects and planners must create new ways to make participation both more effective, meaningful, and be engaging (DelaPena et al. 2017, Ruggeri and Szilagy-Nagy, forthcoming), including the use of new digital technologies and e-participation to support deep and continued commitment by the residents (Donders et al. 2014).

The compounding of the effects of the policies and processes set into motion over the past few decades call for the redefinition of landscape planners and environmental designers' professional competences. Democratic landscape transformation requires design and planning practitioners to partner with communities to activate and build upon local knowledge and wisdom, recognize landscape injustices, engage diverse stakeholders, collaborate with related disciplines, and contribute to landscapes

that will become resilient signs of a community's deep sense of ownership and stewardship. Although 18 years have passed since the ELC's implementation, little has changed in academic programs, where designers continue to be trained according to beaux-arts inspired curricula and pedagogies. Discussions of democracy, social justice, and participation rarely make their way into landscape architecture and planning education.

Participation remains a small niche in design and planning practice, as well. In a professional practice where social justice and landscape democracy are low on the list of priorities, participation does not figure among the preferred skills and experiences needed to succeed as landscape planning professionals (ASLA 2004). Not only have they limited knowledge about the theories and methods of community engagement, but they often see participation as an obstacle to their creative abilities and to the timely and successful completion of projects. Most of all, they are often unaware or 'blissfully naive' about the consequences of their actions and visions on the well-being of the communities they are seeking to serve (Hester 2008). For Landscape Democracy to achieve its full potential, education must be re-envisioned to offer future design and planning professionals to test their skills in recognizing challenges, opportunities and ethically and responsibly intervene to shape a socially sustainable next city that supports the ambitions and desires of all through democratic decision making and dialoguing.

In 2015, scholars from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Nürtingen-Geislingen and, Kassel University in Germany; Szent István in Hungary; the University of Bologna in Italy; and the LE:NOTRE Institute in the Netherlands began to envision a new course that would focus on landscape democracy. They sought fund by the Erasmus Plus programme of the European Union, which aimed "to

support the development, transfer, and implementation of innovative practices as well as the implementation of joint initiatives promoting cooperation, peer learning and exchanges of experience at European level"(<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus>). The Landscape Education for Democracy (LED) programme adopted a Participant Action Research framework, whereby the course would be emergent out of the interactions and active participation of the project partners and students enrolled. The goal was to inspire a transformation of landscape planning education both at the European level and within the partner universities, engender a new culture of engagement and social responsibility, and prepare students to serve as catalysts of democratic landscape change across cultures and geographical contexts.

In 2016, 2017 and 2018, the Landscape Education for Democracy (LED) programme attracted approximately 180 students from the five academic partners and an equal number and auditors from other world universities. The course introduced an interdisciplinary student body from Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture to knowledge and skills required for them to be successful in engaging the public in democratic landscape design and planning processes and co-design strategies and goals for the future of communities. The program embraced a 'blended learning' pedagogical model, consisting of an online seminar for both individual and group-based learning activities and on-site intensive summer programs to be organized by some of the partners.

The online seminar used Adobe Connect, an online platform for the delivery of the learning activities---lectures, group and individual presentations, and student-run discussion sessions. The Spring 2016 online seminar enrolled 45 from Europe, Asia, Central and North America to collaborate on a strategic vision for resolving a landscape democracy

challenge within their communities. Twenty of those students would later participate in a ten-day intensive summer workshop where they could test their newly acquired skills and knowledge to design for and with the residents of the immigrant community of Zingonia, Italy address challenges related to livability, food security, and environmental justice. The city served as a case study for on-the-ground testing of the theories and methods covered in the online course. The second LED workshop took place in July 2017 focusing on the multicultural community of the Nordstadt, a workers district in the German city of Kassel. In June 2018 the LED Team will travel to Törökbalint, a small town in the metropolitan area of Budapest, Hungary challenged in its social identity by the growing pressures of new residents seeking a more affordable and livable place to call home.

The project aimed to be transformative of academics--i.e., students and scholars involved in the pedagogical experiences--as well as civil society--i.e., the local communities it engaged, from civil society to professional organizations. While the LED project aimed to strengthen the presence of democracy and social justice within landscape planning, its adoption by the partner universities was mixed and diverse. While Bologna and HfWU integrated the course into their curricula, other partners were only able to offer it as an elective, often placed in direct competition with sessions aimed at improving their professional skills, rather than critical-thinking abilities. Dissemination of project activities and findings occurred through presentations, webinars, and intensive workshops offered as part of conferences in Europe and North America.

The impact of the course activities on the participating students and faculty was measured through the implementation of pre-post exposure surveys aimed at measuring any shifts in perceptions and values prompted by their participation in the course activities.

The following chapters introduce theories, pedagogical activities, and the results of students assessments of the seminar components and their reflections about the mainstreaming of participation and landscape democracy.

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