Landscape design education: challenges and proposals

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Abstract:
Landscape design is central in landscape architectural education. Teaching landscape design can't be just an execution of various landscape projects, where the teacher's role is more a practitioner and less an educator. We have to bring together, with the technical and disciplinary components, the pedagogic, methodological and psychological ones. Those conditions determine to deal with different domains, teaching strategies and opportunities. My doctoral research in teaching landscape design landscape, called attention for the importance to think about current practices and to create creative and sensible ways to improve it, trying to work against the prevailing conservative attitudes and routines. I reproduce here some proposals, related with pedagogical and methodological issues.

Keywords: Landscape design, education, pedagogical proposals, methodological proposals

1 Introduction

Landscape architecture education is an intricate process, explained by the complexity associated with the landscape and by the role of the landscape architect. It is characterized by a strong inter-dependence and articulation of knowledge's, practices and strategies. Landscape architecture is science and art, so it presumes objective and subjective approaches and requires large and inclusive knowledge. Those conditions determine to deal with different domains, teaching strategies, multiple activities, opportunities and case studies. All are fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge, experiences and reflections, which enrich the imagery, culture and sensibility of the student (Freire 2011).

The research on landscape design education has increased in the last decades. Schön (1987), Dutton (1991), Ochsner (2000), Owen (2006), Eaton (2006), Roncken (2008), between others, have called attention for the necessity of changes in design or in landscape design education, at disciplinary and educational levels. Schön (1987) early defended that those changes should be based in educators thinking critically and reflectively in what they do. This idea reflects our belief that, rather than recognized the curricular programs and the technical support, it is the perspective driving attitudes of educators and students, which are most fundamental in the landscape design education. In this approach, it is necessary a stronger application of disciplinary values, within the theoretical landscape architecture and educational fields, to structure the teaching landscape architecture and the landscape design.

Teaching landscape design can't be just an execution of various landscape projects, attended by the trial-error learning, where the teacher role is more a professional and less an educator[1].

How might an effective landscape design education strategy be shape and how might it be applied? In the current structure of educational practices in landscape design, there are no process-wide case studies, frameworks or strategies. There are some traditional and accepted methodologies, approaches and case studies, with certain success, but the usual is a single practice with no pedagogic support and with a weak disciplinary base.

Teaching landscape design integrates several domains, processes and aims. It is clearly related to technical procedures and original solutions, but larger and more conceptual than, it as to be related with several domains, reflections and educational strategies.

1 This usual approach and practice is mainly guided by teacher design process, conceptual ideas and sensibility.

That is, the knowledge, the principles and the practices used by the landscape architecture discipline and professional practice - which combined cultural, ecologic, aesthetic and ethical domains - as to be attendant with theoretical propositions and practical actions in pedagogy and psychology.

2 Methodology

The aim of my doctoral research was to identify the support of landscape design education - so, we delimited and characterized the object of study and analyzed theoretical framework that accompanies it: the landscape architecture, the architectural design and it's teaching and the landscape design and it's teaching.

In this paper we reflect upon some proposals, pointed out in the conclusions of my doctorate work (Freire 2011). We reproduced below some, the most related with landscape design teaching in studio. These proposals cover mostly the pedagogical and methodological domains.

Such challenges and proposals are include in an open model, adaptable to various situations and dynamics, based on the diversity and complexity that characterize our culture, as well as the nature of conceptual process in landscape design.

3 Challenges and proposals

1. Consider the landscape design teaching continually under construction at disciplinary, professional and pedagogical levels.

The studio, as an approach to professional practice, is naturally dynamic; it updates the requirements of disciplinary and professional innovations. Hence, we must emphasize the methodological approach and the didactics[2]. As so, we need studios more centralized in the field of perception, reflection and debate - translated into a greater attention to the process compared to the products - and more grounded in knowledge and motivations of each student - allowing it to investigate, experiment and reflect (so increasingly more appropriate, structured and reasoned, assisted by gradually less support). Such educational practices have to be sustained in everyday landscapes, garden art, and contemporary landscape design, always emphasizing the opportunities for reflection and critical think, combining with the objectives of the professional approach.

1. More integrated studios.

Confront the students with different points of view, shaped in others disciplines and also within the profession. Such selection should include standards of quality and diversity in diverse domains (technical, aesthetic and philosophical) (Fig 1). This practice should be complemented with student's reflection. More than this, together with them, we should refine the most significant aspects related with such events.

Fig. 1. Fundamental domains to converge in the idea of more integrated studios.

2. Improve studio didactics.

In order to facilitate the understanding of studio nature and scope, it's important to sustain each studio and all studio work at curricular level, providing on time adequate information (quantity and quality) with strong programmatic structure (well-defined and detailed).

Such clearness, fundaments and understandings are important in all studio levels and particularly significant in initial ones - the moment to emphasize the landscape design process and tools related.

In the inaugural landscape design, students should develop skills in landscape perception and landscape design knowledge and communication. A moment manifestly centred in the process, meeting landscape design tools, terminology and languages and also methodologies.

Such initial approaches should be applied in reference landscapes, contemporary landscape projects (specially significant in language, philosophy and values) and in landscapes related with garden art, for an effective understanding of the complex knowledge, domains and factors involved in landscape (Fig 2).

The methodology has to be base on field visits and complemented with study works (well defined and structured, requiring a deep analysis and assisted by meta-scripts) (Fig 2 and Fig 3).

2 A intend to be seen as an attempt to respond to the difficulties of studio education.

Fig. 2. Study trip to Gulbenkian garden – a reference to Portuguese landscape architecture.

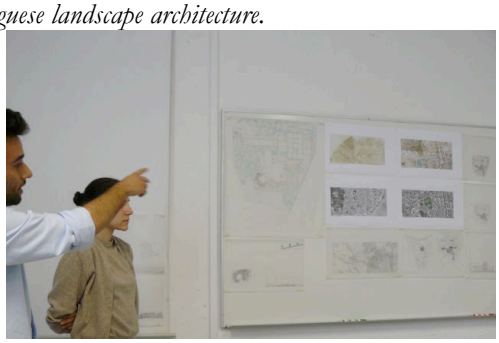

Fig. 3. Presentation of group work concerning the study of Gulbenkian garden.

3. Use models as the main tool and test the video.

The real space has four dimensions. This fact shows the utility of the models and video.

The models (already used in studio work and in the professional practice) are mostly used to show the final proposal, and not as a tool for research and testing solutions (such as working models) (Fig 4).

As so, the models and sketch are compulsory for all those who are initiated in the field of visual thinking. They are essential tools in the transmission of the abstract world ideas to physical spatial dimensions.

And the video can be an important possibility to represent the fourth dimension (Fig 5).

Fig. 4. *Students working model.*

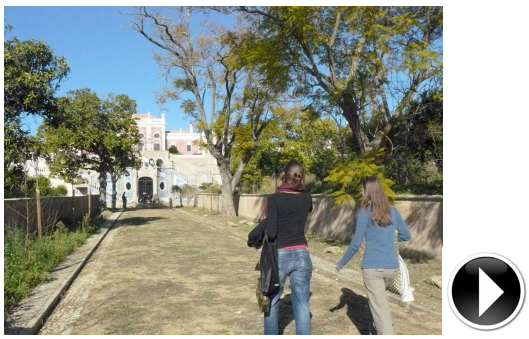

Fig. 5. A video work.

4. Teaching approach showing and reflecting on the concept of *global landscape.*

The traditional landscapes categories - urban, rural and industrial – are usual themes in landscape design courses (frequently the studio levels are organized or named based on these classifications). Concurrently the contemporary landscape is seen as a continuous and mixed multi-system - an idea present in the concept of *global landscape* (Telles 1994).

Thus, we defend the devaluation of the traditional teaching approach, by spaces categories, with the emphasising of the new concept. It these process the teaching has to attend to: the increasing complexity of case-studies; landscapes with controlled features, lower difficulty and smaller size, which converge fewer variables and less decisions are reconciled, simpler contexts, with the aim of exploring components, context and activate the linkage between scales.

5. Use diverse educational strategies.

The idea of diversifying the use of educational strategies can be justified by several aspects: the disciplinary field (both scientific and artistic); the existence of various design methodologies; the nature of landscape design education (learning by doing, tutorial and critical); the recent research on studio pedagogical issues; the heterogeneous students universe (origins and knowledge's).

Such openness fosters the integration of knowledge, understanding and skills. It means more opportunities to meet the interests, individualities and motivations of each student or group. Among these strategies we underlay the landscape design dairy, new technologies, small traineeships, research on design process, use of metacognitive scripts (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. A specific landscape design methodology, an example of the process and the products exhibition.

6. Exercise distinct design methodologies.

The landscape design work emphasising various design methods is important to illustrate the complexity of design process and the opportunities involved (Fig 6).

The traditional model 'analysis, synthesis and evaluation', the 'exploratory model', the 'concept-test model', the 'participatory model' are, between others, significant. In this sense it is crucial a methodology consistent with each studio work and, simultaneously, the respect for the opportunity of the students to develop its own methodology.

7. Enrich the reflection actions.

The common practice in studio is to ask for landscape transformation (based on a program or in some goals).

The reflection actions advocates for the integration of theory, research and practice, emphasising the process and the products of some reference work. This base will be the starting point for students to reflect and explore, in an applied mode, their own design process. An essential research for students finds the foundations of landscape perception and the main values to apply in future interventions.

8. Valorise the experience of place.

The idea is to strengthen the student's presence in the place and their emotional involvement. An approach to be explored through the creation of distinct occasions: the physical involvement with the place, as proposed Corajoud (2001), spending more time there than usual; promote the importance and significance of a deep knowledge and involvement of the designer with the place; make some proposals during the work visits; give the opportunity of research and experimentation *in situ* (Fig 7) - technical tests, simulating compositions, ambiences, paths, surfaces, textures or elements, with the participation of designers, decision-makers and potential users.

Fig. 7. Students working with models at the work place.

9. Emphasize, enhance and precise the singular domains in landscape design (aesthetic, cultural, ecological, ethical and pedagogical).

Landscape design involves diverse components, domains and tools, specifically: innovation; compositional standards, vocabulary and structural components (expressed in formal relations, spatial and systemic); typological meanings (space typologies and elements); historical precedents; practices of imitation and reinterpretation; moral and ethical attributes.

The most important domains are linked with the aesthetic, ecological, cultural, ethic and pedagogical, thus they must be strengthened.

Consequently, the teaching should be strongly supported by emphasize, enhance and detail such domains, expressed and structured by landscape components, in the perspective of landscape dynamic, multifunctional character and adaptable solutions. In this process it is also important the conditioned innovation, the state of confidence in their ability to solve the problem, the enrichment of landscape complexity and the contribution of potential users.

10. Develop the student's understandings of physical and psychological requirements and desires of an increasingly intercultural society.

From the perspective of the user, the quality of space is based on their physical characteristics (formal, functional and material) and the emotions it provides. The first one is more evident and easily visible in drawings and models; the second one, is more difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate through those representations. So is fundamental to familiarise

students in the study of components specially related with the sensitive field identifying and comparing the emotional responses to real situations; also significant is to explore tools and other circumstances that could make a closer simulation of idealized and sensitive response they generate.

11. Use technological and virtual environments.

The new technologies of information and virtual communication (*Internet* and drawing tools) allow increasing advances (information access, treatment and simulation objects and spaces). They should be continuously and gradually stimulated and developed through teaching strategies.

Such use should never assume a commanding role in teaching, the traditional practices in studio (practical knowledge, action mentoring and critical appraisal) and the techniques and tools of the project (analysis and interpretation of multiple factors, the experience of the place, by design communication, critical thinking the debate of ideas, synthesis and decision making, among others), have to be combining with these tools and communication opportunities.

12. Improve the tutorial and the critical.

In tutorial are central the engagement, motivation and skills of teachers and the didactic (Schön 1987, Ochsner 2000, Simão *et al* 2008). The success of tutorial depends on the tutor, the student and their relationship, obtainable through: the understanding of tutorial by both as a teaching moment, collaborative and mutually constructive; the language used (form and content); the time spent with each student; the teacher's pedagogical approach; the psychological relations established; the exact ideas that are motive of eventual critic; the global motivation of students and teachers; students assistance in the moment of reflection and discussing ideas; the respect and sense of mutual responsibility.

The traditional critical component should be built as a true teaching tool explicitly: use psychology knowledge; maximum objectivity, in order to reduce the more personal, speculative or partial components (usual in criticism); structural and critical adjustment to the educational objectives; ensure that the importance of the image does not compromise the evaluation related to other criteria and objectives under consideration; concept the critical more like a teaching moment and less as a moment of evaluation; reorganize, in the perspective of a group work, the physical disposition of jury and assistance in presentations.

4 Conclusions

Given the questions we dealt with, it is evident the necessity of interrelated educational, methodological and disciplinary strategies, to be continually assessed, in order to achieve greater success in teaching landscape design. Nevertheless, the issues addressed need to be continually tested, in extended situations, through experiment, comparison of results and reflection on them.

With these proposals we hope to give one more step, towards a different approach in teaching landscape architecture and, more specifically, in landscape design teachings. This step belongs to an initial stage, of a long way, that landscape architecture education must continue in the future.

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