

WORKSHOP 1

April 22 Alnarp

At the first workshop we discussed student works, with examples spanning from design studio work to bachelor's and master's projects including a design component. Based on the work presented, we developed a discussion on how we approach design within teaching and research at the LAF and SOL departments. We had 9 invited discussants, who had selected projects, and prepared short presentations, addressing the questions:

- What is the significance of design in the project?
- How is knowledge generated through the design?
- What characterizes the knowledge generated?
- What possibilities and challenges do you see in the ways we support knowledge generation through design?
- What contributions to creating sustainable urban landscapes can you identify? How does embodied, lived, affective understandings of landscape, expressed through design, contribute to creating sustainable urban landscapes?

Participants

Peter Dacke, artist, lecturer, LAF

Malin Eriksson, landscape architect, lecturer, SOL

Johan Wirdelöv, architect, PhD, lecturer, LAF

Gunilla Lindholm, landscape architect, associate professor, LAF

Marie Andersson, artist, lecturer, LAF

Victoria Sjöstedt, architect, PhD, lecturer, LAF

Zara Persson, landscape architect student, LAF

Monika Gora, landscape architect, artist, GORA art&landscape

Lisa Diedrich, architect, PhD, professor, LAF

Below are summarized some of the themes that emerged in the discussions and questions raised following the presentations.

Heterogeneity

What do we mean when we speak of design research? What is the design research aspect? How to understand artistic development work and research through design? In our discussions we realized that we operate with a broad palette of approaches, ranging from reflective practice to design research. This broad span of approaches we identified as a strength, and keeping heterogeneity we identified as something in need of careful attention. Here continuous discussions, articulating our different positions and understandings of design research, seem vital.

Knowledge, insight, experience

How to characterize knowledge from artistic and scientific practice? Knowledge, insight, experience were terms brought up in the discussions. Clearly we operate with different kinds of knowledge, as for instance expressed by: episteme: theoretical-scientific knowledge; techne: practical knowledge, skill; phronesis: practical experience/insight/ethical judgement (Krupinska, 2014).

"[...] artistic research seeks not so much to make explicit the knowledge that art is said to produce, but rather to provide a specific articulation of the pre-reflective, non-conceptual content of art. It thereby invites 'unfinished thinking'. Hence, it is not formal knowledge that is the subject matter of artistic research, but thinking in, through and with art." (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 44).

Tensions and disagreement

In our discussions, tensions surfaced between the different approaches and positions represented in the group. The reflective practice side expressed skepticism towards design research, as they saw research, theory and theorization as “academisation” of design and artistic practices, restraining artistic expression. On the other hand, academia also tends to treat design research with skepticism, expressing anxiety about the results of such research. Design research operates in the borderland between art/design practice and academia. While this relation is uneasy, the tension can also (potentially) be productive, and influence how we think about both domains (Borgdorff, 2012).

Practice-theory relations

A specific tension seems to involve practice-theory relations. How to establish a dialogue between artistic experience and academic theorization? The way practice-theory relations are understood, seem crucial in terms of positioning oneself in relation to design research (see Borgdorff’s categorization of practice-theory relations, from instrumental, interpretive, performative to immanent perspectives, influencing our beliefs about art-science relations and our perception of research in the arts). Academia sees a need of theory to open up the material and reach broader relevance. The reflective practice side expresses anxiety that theory interferes and shuts down and disrupts artistic processes. This risk of closure seems important to discuss and verbalize, as well as ways to reach openness, following practice/following literature.

Progression of design skill

How do we support students’ development of design skill? How do we ensure progression through our courses? How do we encourage students to integrate design in their bachelor’s and master’s projects?

To enable and encourage students to integrate a design component in their bachelor’s and master’s projects, design skill, is crucial. In our discussions, we identified some weakness in the way we ensure progression in students’ development of design skill, such as gaps between courses, and gaps between bachelor and master level. Links between master level design courses and master’s projects could also be strengthened. Studio courses provide a rich setting for formulating and exploring research questions, with potential to support master’s projects involving design. Encouraging students to publish their master’s projects in publications outside of SLU, was also mentioned as a way to support students’ development of design research skills.

Practice-led bachelor’s and master’s projects

The bachelor projects discussed, involved sketching as an explorative method for site specific investigations and careful site readings. The master’s projects discussed were more elaborated, setting up frames for making repeated observations, collecting site impressions and experiences from site visits in nuanced ways. Clearly the artistic experiences gained from fieldwork oriented the literature search. The explorations were practice-led. In an open and critical way, artistic experience oriented the projects.

How artistic experience and academic/scientific theorization interact, guide and influence one another, we also discussed. Site specific experiences have capacity to guide theoretical formation of knowledge. And “[...] theory born from reading thinking debate gives direction to artistic experience. Otherwise the scientific and artistic experiences remain either detached or completely mute to one another.” (Hannula et al., 2005, p. 59).

To support knowledge generation through design

Questions were raised about the format of the bachelor’s and master’s projects. Is there enough space and acceptance for design explorations and use of artistic methods? Is the frame too narrow?

The exhibition format was suggested. Without exhibition space, it is difficult to fully appreciate visual material and design artefacts. With our current format, visual material tends to get hidden away.

We also discussed evaluation and assessment. The lack of consensus among teachers assessing projects involving a design component, was brought up. Students need guidance. They take risks when using artistic methods. To support knowledge generation through design, critical assessment needs to be developed.

Towards a FORUM for reflective practice and design research

In the workshop we discussed strategic ways forward towards a **“Forum for reflective practice and design research”**. The work has already started with this website, displaying and communicating design work, addressing questions such as: How do we get quality? What do we see as quality? What do we perceive as valuable? What is forward looking? What do we see as our strengths and assets?

As we are building up this website, starting mainly from teaching, we are gradually collecting our arguments, articulating how design, and the knowledge gained through design, can contribute to address societal challenges. Landscape architecture as an interdisciplinary field, operates within established power structures, in which the science perspective still dominates. Objective knowledge, seen as neutral, has been given status in society, while subjective experience, has not been given the same weight. To address our societal challenges, however, artistic reasoning also needs a place.

References

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WORKSHOP 2

August 22 Ultuna

At the second workshop we continued discussing student work, with examples from design courses from the SOL department, and bachelor's and master's projects. We had 7 invited discussants, who had selected material, and prepared short presentations, addressing the questions:

- How is knowledge generated through the design?
- What characterizes the knowledge generated?
- How does the example support the progression of design skill within the landscape architecture program?

Participants

Malin Eriksson, landscape architect, lecturer, SOL

Marina Queiroz, landscape architect, lecturer, SOL

Bodil Dahlman, landscape architect, lecturer, SOL

Tomas Eriksson, landscape architect, lecturer, SOL

Vera Vicenzotti, landscape architect, PhD, associate professor, SOL

Victoria Sjöstedt, architect, PhD, lecturer, LAPF

Gunilla Lindholm, landscape architect, PhD, associate professor, LAPF

We summarize our discussions below. Speaking from student work, we seek to identify examples of student work generating knowledge through design.

How does landscape design contribute to knowledge generation?

From the design courses presented, we discussed the use of sketching and model making to generate ideas, and uncover and make visible ideas about a place. We spoke of sketching as an embodied way of exploring a site. Through drawing and model making, students develop an understanding of their sites. "Students draw sections and illustrate how the plants grow, and how the spaces change over time. Their capacity to imagine the dynamic transformations of the landscape matures. Students write reflections to articulate their experiences with the design process." (Dahlman, 2022, workshop Ultuna).

To articulate the design process in words, and collectively discuss experiences of the often messy creative design process, was emphasized as an important social learning moment. Design skill develops in conversation and dialogue, within environments that are generous and permissive. The social context matters, in order to support students to learn to deal with uncertainties in the creative design process, gain the courage to follow ideas, dare to stay in the uncertain and try things out. We spoke of landscape design as a collective practice, based on personal responsibility, courage, independence and trust.

What characterize knowledge generated through design?

"The design process, within research, what does it mean? What sort of knowledge is generated through design? What kind of knowledge can design research produce? What status does this knowledge have? How does it relate to curriculum? What claims regarding knowledge generation can we make? What are the perspectives for the future?" (Vicenzotti, 2022, workshop Ultuna).

We discussed ontological, epistemological and methodological characteristics of design research. How does it differ from academic or scientific research? Design is future oriented, it is something that perhaps will exist (ontological question). Design generates knowledge about specific places. The knowledge is not generalizable. The character of design knowledge, is not a "knowing what", but it is a "knowing where" (Ammon, 2017). In our discussions we spoke of knowledge generated through design as site-specific, embodied, experiential, poly-sensory, tactile, emotional, personal/individual,

and to a certain degree non-verbal. We repeatedly returned to using words such as insight, understanding, familiarity and experience (epistemological question). Design involves the methods of the landscape architect, it involves artefacts, which themselves embody knowledge and have agency. Knowledge generation is practice-led and linked to making (methodological question).

What happens when we design? What happens when we draw? We spoke of the importance of studying what designers do, question mystification, and use writing in order to understand one's thinking and doing.

Why is this knowledge important?

Design has capacity to deal with uncertainties and address complex problems. It is a synthesizing activity, it involves inter and trans disciplinary efforts, something much in demand by policy makers today.

Design can help establish better communication with society. Representations and artefacts act as affective arguments, with capacity to engage and involve people. Visual argumentation impacts discourses and narratives about what is important. Design can affect and be transformative.

Knowledge gained through design can give orientation to designers' practice, and contribute to create understanding for what people experience, supporting careful actions, and carefulness with people's environments. Design can cultivate, strengthen and expand empathy. For long-term sustainable development, ethics and empathy, as approach in practice, seem crucial.

Design and creative processes have capacity to reformulate problems, and open possibility for shifts of perspective. Design skill together with design research competence contribute to training "[...] more reflective, sensitive and critical designers" (Oles, 2014, p. 21), urgently needed, given our societal challenges.

"Forum for reflective practice and design research"

With this website we seek to collect arguments for how a forum, gathering teachers, students, researchers and practitioners, can support reflective practice and design research at SLU. We see this as in line with SLU's strategy document saying: "Vi ska också bidra till att utveckla en fördjupad förståelse av hur vetenskapligt och konstnärligt baserad kunskap kan leda till förändringsprocesser i samhället." (the SLU strategy 2021-2025).

Reflective practice and design research need a social context for vivid and open discussion. A forum can establish such conversations and discussions at the academy, and act to clarify and position reflective practice and design research within SLU.

A forum can strengthen the design subject within SLU, and be a face outwards to the professional field, attracting attention from outside of SLU, communicating the unique and diverse landscape design project portfolio that we have.

Sustainable development research projects increasingly involve design and art. These are research projects we have possibility to join, provided our design and design research competence is clearly articulated. A forum can support applications in this direction.

A forum can also help us gather strength and critical mass. We imagine the activities in the forum in the format of directed initiatives with concrete outcomes, such as for instance publications.

References

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