

Beyond Borders: a SLU Landscape and Rhode Island School of Design exchange

Final Project Report Executive Summary

prepared by **Andrea Kahn, Professor of site thinking in research and practice, SLU Landscape (June 2018)**



Senior design teachers Nadine Gerdts, Landscape Architecture RISD, and Laura Briggs, Architecture, RISD, touring Alnarp Landscape Lab with SLU Landscape senior lecturer Allan Gunnarsson, in August 2017

The *Beyond Borders* exchange, funded by STINT, assembled architecture and landscape architecture researchers from SLU Landscape (SLU L) and RISD to explore how to more effectively teach and research at the intersection of design, planning, science and technology. At the outset, three activities were identified as key to the exchange: sharing teaching and research methods, cooperating on a design-research case-study about constructing sustainable urban landscapes, and planning a symposium on developing transdisciplinary knowledge for a sustainable urban future.

What activities were involved?

The project framework set up five exchange opportunities: two launch meetings, two workshop meetings and a field visit. All five visits were realized successfully. SLU L researchers and teachers participated in RISD courses multiple times; together with Brown University and University of Rhode Island researchers, they joined in community planning workshops organized by RISD and the city of Providence on sustainable transformation and equitable development strategies for the Providence coast. Using lessons learned from these activities, SLU L and RISD outlined topics for a symposium on Coastal Urban Futures, to be hosted by RISD in spring 2019.

Over an 8-month period, SLU Landscape staff

- contributed to **2 interdisciplinary RISD studios**: Beyond Borders, Designing Resiliency for the Urban Landscape (landscape architecture/architecture) and Clay in Context: Morocco- Pattern and Performance (architecture/ceramics)
- participated in **5 graduate seminars at RISD and Brown University**
- delivered **4 guest lectures at RISD**
- joined **2 sustainability workshops** with RISD, Brown University, and University of Rhode Island, and the City of Providence planning office, head of Sustainability
- held **3 high-level cooperation meetings** with RISD deans, program directors, the associate provost for Research/ Global Practice and head of Institutional Engagement



SLU Landscape staff Caroline Dahl, PhD fellow, and Movium Head, Tobias Emilsson, researcher, and Asa Bensch, landscape engineer and teacher, receive a tour of the RISD Nature Lab from its Biology Programs Director, Jennifer Bissonnette, in November 2018

What did the 2017-2018 activities achieve?

Multiple trips to Malmo and Providence, Rhode Island created circumstances needed to build a strong foundation for coopera-

tion. Repeated meetings with RISD and SLU L researchers, deans, and heads of departments built up a trust between institutions and provided the time necessary to collectively define, clarify and articulate mutually beneficial goals and motivations for extending the RISD-SLU L interdisciplinary landscape research cooperation beyond the initial STINT funding period. By project close, all the proposed immediate outcomes were achieved. During the exchange period, SLU established strong network connections to two additional institutions in the Providence region (Brown University and University of Rhode Island) and also forged connections at the higher administrative levels of RISD. Other key outcomes included:

1. Establishing contacts for RISD with SLU Landscape (SLU L) researchers, teachers, the Malmö city planning office, and Malmo City Environmental Department, to strengthen technological, scientific and research-based landscape design education at RISD
2. Creating an expanded network for SLU L at RISD, including RISD Deans, Program Directors, Nature Lab staff and making new contacts with Brown University and University of Rhode Island
3. Bi-directional knowledge sharing toward interdisciplinary landscape research and teaching: from SLU L to RISD, technical and scientific expertise on Swedish sustainable solutions and from RISD to SLU, on design method and teaching practices, to build design-research capacity and strengthen design education at SLU L
4. A two-year plan for continued exchange between SLU Landscape and RISD's Art and Architecture and Liberal Arts faculties.

By project end, all involved reaffirmed the importance of developing research and teaching cooperation that mix traditionally separate areas of focus (fine arts, design arts, engineering, natural science). Additionally, the exchange made clear to SLU Landscape participants that North American design researchers and urban sustainability planners recognize and respect Sweden's knowledge in the areas of "citizen participation in sustainable planning processes" and "sustainable urban development and design" and that these areas of Swedish urban landscape sustainability research and practice expertise are highly valuable and exportable.

What is the longer-term vision for this cooperation?

From the start, this exchange had longer term ambitions: to strengthen urban sustainability projects ongoing at both institutions by integrating knowledge inputs from

landscape science, technology, planning, and architecture; to develop implementable urban landscape strategies by combining design thinking and scientific expertise to mitigate climate change impacts; and to produce a framework for ongoing exchange between junior and senior researchers.

What is the immediate action plan to meet long term goals?

In May 2018, SLU Professors and STINT project leaders Andrea Kahn and Lisa Diedrich held high level concluding meetings with RISD teachers, department heads, deans and global researcher program directors, drawing on lessons from the exchange to finalize and formalize *an immediate next steps action plan*. The meetings produced a three-point program for further collaboration over the next two years. The agreed upon plan:

- initiates a **4-part 2018-19 knowledge-exchange lecture series on transdisciplinary landscape research and teaching challenges**. RISD faculty will travel to SLU and SLU faculty will travel to RISD to deliver open lectures on catalyzing collaborations across knowledge areas. The series launched 17 May 2018 in Malmo with: "The Bio-Design Maker Space/RISD" by Jennifer Bissonnette, RISD Nature Lab Biology Programs Director.
- commits to a **2019 RISD-led symposium on design research on climate change impacts in coastal cities** with participation by Brown University, University of Rhode Island, and SLU. The symposium, "Coastal urban futures/Beyond geographic borders: Malmö/Providence" is currently in the planning stages at RISD. (April 2019, exact date TBC)
- lays out concrete **plans for a 2019-20 RISD/SLU teaching/learning exchange**. Structural issues make course-based student exchanges between RISD and SLU difficult (Sweden and US have different curricular models, timetables and course structures, and use different tuition payment protocols) teacher exchanges are simpler to realize. Plans are already underway for RISD to offer a workshop at SLU L in the fall 2019 "Planning Project" course, Gunilla Lindholm, course leader).

This STINT project was initiated by Andrea Kahn and Lisa Diedrich of SLU Landscape, with Laura Briggs and Nadine Gerds, from RISD. SLU Landscape staff participating in project activities included Asa Bensch, Caroline Dahl, Lisa Diedrich, Tobias Emilsson, Ann-Mari Fransson, Allan Gunnarsson, Andrea Kahn, and Gunilla Lindholm.