

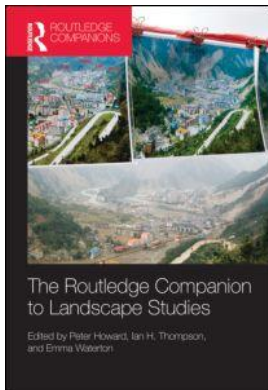
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### **Navigating the global, the regional and the local**

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# Navigating the global, the regional and the local: researching globalization and landscape

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Research on landscape and globalization traverses a vast terrain, reflecting the array of relationships between the immutability of physical place and the fluidity of ideas. The theories that coalesce in this field of research are coloured by the complex nature of what it is to be human, and the enduring question of how we relate to where we are. The very core of our collective and individual identity is bound up in landscape, heightening feelings about threats of obliteration and change that are often associated with globalization. Counter to this are beliefs that the effects of globalization on the landscape are simply inevitable, or even welcome.

As a means of charting the field of research, this chapter travels through three distinctive realms: the global, the regional and the local. Rather than stepping through the scales incrementally, the two poles of this research spectrum are explored first – the global and the local. These extreme positions vividly illustrate the breadth of theory implicated in any consideration of landscape and globalization. At one extreme the acceptance of a global commonality generates theories that transcend particularity. And, at the other, there is a kind of denial, where ideas such as local distinctiveness seek to avoid the consequences of global flows of ideas. Having explored the two poles, the chapter proceeds to a theoretical equator, a midpoint – that of the region. As something smaller than the globe but larger than the locality, the region provides a point of negotiation between the extremes.

While the sequence of global to local to regional provides an itinerary, the vehicle for exploration is that of design – especially landscape architecture – allowing for a focus to be found within the immensity of the field of landscape and globalization. Two major recent conferences on landscape architecture and globalization illustrate the areas of investigation, with the contributions reflecting the breadth of the discipline, ranging from landscape ecological considerations through to the impact of globalization on design (Bowring and Swaffield 2004a, 2004b; Stewart et al. 2007; Swaffield and Bowring 2005). Landscape architecture is motivated by a vital need to engage with understandings of the local, the regional and the global, as it is a discipline which is not simply scholarly, but one which influences the very nature of the environment through translation of ideas and values into physical form. Design offers a unique research method, where the ‘experiment’ is the design itself. ‘Design as research’ is an emerging

research approach for design disciplines, where both hypothetical and actual problems are explored and tested, generating new knowledge and critical understanding. Even when not conceived of as design as research per se, a work of design can provide unique insight into a problem, and this chapter will allude to design experimentation alongside more conventional research.

## The global

Research on the relationships of landscape and globalization from a global perspective challenge orthodox understandings of 'landscape'. The idea of a 'global landscape' could even be seen as something of impossibility, given the etymology of landscape and its conceptual dimensions within cultural geography (Corner 1999; Jackson 1984). Landscape is rooted in a place-based understanding of the environment, whether through the cultural milieu of *landschaft* or the scenic view of *landskip*. From the panoptic viewpoint of the global, this physical particularity of place fades out of focus, becoming instead constituted by flows of people, information and material, as in Castells' conceptualization of the 'space of places' being replaced by the 'space of flows' (Castells 1996). These flows are the source of concerns over globalization's effects, including the 'disembedding' from the local (Giddens 1990).

Some researchers adopt a perspective on globalization which can be seen as acquiescent, even cynical, where the globalised environment becomes a potent domain for design. Rem Koolhaas's provocative theory of the 'generic city' is at the core of thinking about landscapes in this way, a vision which he portrays as liberating, allowing the 'straightjacket' of identity to be removed (Koolhaas 1995). The de-localising that is embodied in the concept of the generic city is echoed in research by Dutch practice MVRDV into landscapes derived entirely from data (MVRDV 1999). The so-called datascape elevate information as the basis for design, with landscapes constructed solely from data providing experimental demonstrations of extreme scenarios, such as Metacity/Datatown – 'A city that wants to be explored only as information. A city that knows no given topography, no prescribed ideology, no representation, no context. Only huge, pure data' (MVRDV 1999: 58). Information and data are inherently global phenomena – they epitomize Castells' 'space of flows' – and represent the embrace of a globalized apprehension of landscape, far from the inflected particularity of the local.

Research on datascape reveals one of the most pernicious effects of globalization on landscape – a detachment from experience. Visual culture is the primary conduit for globalization, with ideas travelling with ease across the Internet, on television, films and in print media. Inevitably, this leads to a reduction in the range of sensory experience to almost a single sense, where sight and sometimes sound become the sole means of relating to landscape. The focus on the visual – or ocularcentrism – is one of the threads of research that informs the tension between the global and landscape (Bowring 2007). Ocularcentrism is not a recent practice, but has influenced the landscape for centuries, with the overemphasis on the visual gaining ground through theories like perspective and the picturesque, and the rise of viewing-based practices such as museums, zoos and tourism. Reclaiming the landscape from an ocularcentrist perspective is one of the imperatives for those seeking to resist the homogenising influence of globalization. Research on hapticity marks an important dimension of this field, notably in the work of Finnish architectural theorist, Juhani Pallasmaa (see Holl et al. 2006; Pallasmaa 2000, 2005a, 2005b). Pallasmaa provides one of the most potent warnings of the effects of ocularcentrism, pointing to how through:

the power of the eye over the other sensory realms, architecture has turned into an art form of instant visual image. Instead of creating existential microcosms, embodied

representations of the world, architecture projects retinal images for the purpose of immediate persuasion. Flatness of surfaces and materials, uniformity of illumination, as well as the elimination of micro-climatic differences, further reinforce the tiresome and soporific uniformity of experience.

*(Pallasmaa 2000: 78)*

Design is one of the most potent vectors of globalization, and geographically nimble design disciplines such as fashion and industrial design can easily go with the flow, moving around the globe via the primarily visual medium of popular culture. Architecture is slightly more resistant to global flow, in terms of the practicalities of the physical environment, but the particularities of place can often be mitigated through technology. For landscape architecture, the physical environment provides more of a necessary rootedness in place, but even for this discipline ideas can be fluid. As noted above, the picturesque is implicated in the globalization of ideas through its visual appeal, influencing landscapes throughout the British Empire and beyond (Smith 1989; Park 2007). Research shows that formal landscape styles, too, were transported globally, as in the design for Peterhof in St Petersburg, which was known as the ‘Versailles of the North’ (Bowring et al. 2009). Although undeniably a locally responsive design explicitly acknowledging its maritime setting, Peterhof was also a ‘Russianisation’ of Baroque garden design. Peter the Great wholeheartedly adopted the ideas of the West and grounded them in place at his palace – perhaps not so cynically as Koolhaas’s generic city, but still with an explicit acknowledgement of borrowing from elsewhere, of becoming part of the global flow of ideas.

A more recent globalised landscape is that of the golf course, where the generic aesthetic that has become the ‘default’ is one associated with a lush Florida-style landscape, rather than the windswept fairways of golf’s home landscape of St Andrews in Scotland. Thayer (1989) has written on the environmental hazards of a globalised landscape being imposed upon an incompatible bioregion, where:

[i]n the low-desert Coachella Valley of California ... there are 74 golf courses – so many that the entire microclimate of the valley has become more humid and water resources are stretched to the limit, and as a consequence substantial chemical intervention was required, with at least one documented case of death due to Malathion poisoning of a golfer at a military golf course.

*(Thayer 1989: 103)*

## The local

Switching scales to the local, and for the moment bypassing the regional, research in this area investigates issues of identity rooted in place and provides a strong counterpoint to the championing of globalization. Founded on research such as that on place and placelessness, the local is conceptualised as belonging, of identifying with a locality – of the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider’ as theorised by Relph (1976), who established that ‘to be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with place’ (Relph 1976: 49). Allied fields explored in this volume, such as tourism and heritage, yield research relevant to the localized dimension of globalization and landscape (see contributions by Harvey and Knudsen et al. in particular: Chapters 13 and 25). Some of the most potent critiques of globalization stem from its effects upon the local, as exemplified in Tillman’s (2009) assessment of the impact of global businesses on the particularity of a Latin American plaza. The clichéd signs of globalised landscape – McDonald’s, Walmart and Burger King, for example – are

identified as the forces eroding the qualities of the local, so that ‘historically distinct places become increasingly similar in their outward appearance’ (Tillman 2009: 353).

As an approach which might be called ‘localization’, research in this area includes local distinctiveness and the politically charged militant particularism, which are set in opposition to the perceived homogenising forces of globalization. A term coined by British organization Common Ground, local distinctiveness refers to the very fine scale of the neighbourhood or parish. Local distinctiveness elevates the unique qualities of place into having a special status, insulating them from globalization or even nationalization, with directives such as: ‘Oppose monoculture in our fields, parks, gardens and buildings. Resist formulaic and automatic ordering from pattern books which homogenize and deplete’ (Common Ground n.d.). At the same time as local distinctiveness resists the effects of homogenization, it recognises that the local is not a static condition and that landscape is cumulative, with ongoing change bringing ‘new layers of particularity to different places’ (Clifford and King n.d.). Militant particularism, which was theorised by Raymond Williams and David Harvey, also champions the local, but does not seek to detach from global forces, instead pushing ideas that are developed in local settings (including the environmental movement) into the global arena (Williams 1977; Harvey and Williams 1995; Harvey 1996).

The amplification of the local as a means of creating place identity in an homogenized world is explored by Ashworth, emphasising the value of belonging as part of a person’s wellbeing (Ashworth 2003, 2008). Ashworth develops the understanding of landscape as key to this sense of belonging, and in particular the value of heritage as a core to local identity. However, there is also a potential for even the attention to the local to become homogenised, as governmental directives can have the effect of a blanket approach that becomes standardised. As Ashworth explains, the cumulative effects of localization can become incipiently globalised: ‘The local may become global in its reproduction of the same local features and conversely the global may itself be a universalization of what was originally local’ (Ashworth 2008: 193).

Conceptualising the local in opposition to the global is addressed in recent work by Primdahl and Swaffield (2010), who explore this dynamic in the context of the agricultural landscape. They extend the debate over the global and the local to a consideration of what – in the modified landscape of agriculture – could be termed ‘the local’. This problematises the frequent conflation of the local with a *natural* baseline, an elision which is common in many landscape ecology studies, and, like Clifford and King above, Swaffield and Primdahl emphasise the need to recognise that local conditions are often the product of cumulative and extensive landscape change (Swaffield and Primdahl 2010: 245).

The content of the local is core to theories of the vernacular, where local idioms respond to the necessity of the given conditions. The work of landscape architect Laurence Halprin and architectural firm MLTW (Charles W Moore, Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull Jr, and Richard Whitaker) at Sea Ranch in California is an exemplary design experiment of working with the local. While not making an explicit statement about eschewing global influences, their work at the site scale amplifies the potency of the local. Vernacular landscapes are derived from the needs and materials of a local setting, and in his reflection upon Sea Ranch Donlyn Lyndon uses the term ‘qualified vernacular’ (Lyndon 2009: 81). Studies of the local context including the biophysical and cultural landscape underpinned the design response at Sea Ranch, and exemplify the intimate attention to place via a microscopic mode rather than the detached panoptic view of the global. These detailed studies constitute a fundamental stage in the research, captured in the evocative analytical drawings made by Laurence Halprin (2006). Lyndon’s and Halprin’s writings exhibit a vital component of how design can be research – a critical reflection on the process and outcomes of the ‘experiment’. The critique of outcomes by

either the designer themselves or an external critic allows for the extraction of new knowledge, a mining of the design itself.

The local is at once both an inviting and treacherous counter to the global. Mitchell (2001) highlighted this through reference to the double-edged title of Lippard's (1997) book *The Lure of the Local*, where the 'lure' is at once a 'siren song' and a 'hook [for] the unwary'. In focusing on the opposing pole to the global, the embrace of the local in research foregrounds the importance of identity rooted in place, but also how even that is subject to homogenization through replication. The itinerary now proceeds to a possible middle ground – that of the region.

## The regional

At the scale of the regional, research grapples with the dynamic potential of globalization and landscape. In his comprehensive anthology on architectural regionalism, Canizaro states that '[r]egionalism is never a single theory or practice but is most often a means by which tensions – such as those between globalization and localism, modernity and tradition – are resolved' (Canizaro 2007: 16). Lefaivre and Tzonis, two of the founding theorists of critical regionalism, explain how regionalism 'stands for the local and the specific to a region, that is to a unique, distinct geographical area occupied homogeneously by similar objects or objects having similar characteristics' (Lefaivre and Tzonis 2001: 2). Although the region offers a seemingly straightforward way of defining a geographical armature for identity, Lefaivre and Tzonis caution that such divisions are infinite, and it is only humans' need for definite boundaries that facilitate such divisions – and because of this, regions embody all of the biases that underpin their delineation.

One of the main approaches to defining a region is biophysically, as in the concept of the 'bio-region', a scale of particular relevance to landscape architecture. Theorists Robert L. Thayer and Michael Hough have contributed to the development of this field, where the bioregional is a counter to places that are 'usurped by machines, sprawled out by the automobile, homogenized by consumer culture, seduced by the globalizing economy, trivialized by television, and disconnected from deep wisdom by the shallow superficiality of the "electronic superhighway"' (Thayer 2003: 3). The bioregion or 'LifePlace' is a 'naturally bounded region or territory' (Thayer 2003: 4) and includes defining elements such as watersheds (Hough 2004).

Lefaivre and Tzonis outline a range of culturally informed regionalisms that range from the sentimental 'Picturesque' and 'Romantic' through to the chauvinistic 'Commercial' regionalism, which appropriates regional characteristics as a kind of commodity – as a form of 'architectural pornography' (Lefaivre and Tzonis 2001: 6). The region can be far from being a benign carrier of identity, being appropriated as a form of exclusion, most tragically in the instance of the Nazi promotion of *blut und boden* (blood and soil) as defining qualities. Thus, through an over-emphasis on the ways in which identity is founded upon the local or the regional, the landscape can become complicit in destructive acts of elimination, both culturally and ecologically.

The theory of critical regionalism was developed as a means of transcending the suffocating sentimentality of a romantic regionalism that was in denial of global forces and the fascist promotion of regional specificity, and at the same time moderating the potential erosion caused by globalization (Frampton 1983; Lefaivre and Tzonis 2011; Tzonis et al. 2001; Tzonis and Lefaivre 2003). Instead, critical regionalism proposed a 'mediation' between the global and the local, between Ricoeur's 'civilization' and 'culture' (Frampton 1983: 16). The operation of the 'critical' component is explained by Tzonis and Lefaivre (1996: 488) as a form of reflexivity, where on one level the works are critical by 'providing contrasting images to the anomic,

atopic, misanthropic ways of a large number of current mainstream projects constructed world wide', and then on another level 'they raise questions in the mind of the viewer about the legitimacy of the very regionalist tradition to which they belong'.

Critical regionalism amplifies the role of the landscape in inflecting design, primarily through the advocacy of phenomenology and the concomitant heightening of the experiential dimension of landscape. This dimension of engaging with the region is advocated by Frampton (1983) as a promoting of the tectonic over the scenographic, the tactile over the visual. Frampton describes how these factors amplify experience as the most potent way to relate to place, it is something that cannot be reduced, and cannot become part of the global flows of information since it is rooted to location. Frampton asserts that '[t]he tactile and the tectonic jointly have the capacity to transcend the mere appearance of the technical in much the same way as the place-form has the potential to withstand the relentless onslaught of global modernization' (Frampton 1983: 29). Critical regionalism also relates to landscape through defamiliarization, through working with the qualities of the region by 'identifying, decomposing, recomposing' a process which 'makes them appear distant, hard to grasp, difficult, even disturbing ... It disrupts the sentimental "embrace" between buildings and their consumers, "de-automatizing" perception and thus "pricking the conscious" ...' (Tzonis and Lefaivre 1996: 489).

## And in-between

The global, the local and the regional provide an efficient itinerary for exploring the field of research on landscape and globalization. But there are many paradoxes and contradictions which constantly enliven the research domain and test the boundaries of ways of relating to place. Massey's notion of the 'global sense of place' emphasizes the fluidity of relationships between people, landscape and identity. How can identity stem at once from the global and the place-based (Massey 1994)? Dislocation from one's homeland poses research problems that further trouble the consequences of globalization for landscapes of memory and identity, as foregrounded in the work of Boym (2001) and Armstrong (2004). Yet, even under the trying circumstances of dislocation, the landscape emerges as resilient, not only in terms of its immutability in physical terms, but that which is carried in the mind or in representations – the portmanteau landscape of 'home'.

Global, regional and local can also be embedded into ideas of 'centre' and 'periphery' – relative locations implied in the theory of critical regionalism. Eggener, in his seminal critique of critical regionalism, pointed out that notions of the 'centre' and the 'periphery' are in fact constructions of the west, casting itself as the centre (Eggener 2006). Those on the 'periphery' may not be resisting the 'centre' at all, but simply engaging with their landscapes as they have always done, oblivious to the construction of a geographical hegemony. Till and Wigglesworth's (2007) research also challenged the centre-periphery power differential, through highlighting that the margins are a place of strength. Recalling the work of Rural Studio's Sam Mockbee, Till and Wigglesworth take from his legacy an idea of working beyond the limits, in the margins. From the margins you can see the centre, they explain, how the 'center should disperse to accept the multiple values and diverse cultures that the margins address' (Till and Wigglesworth 2007: 430).

Further contesting the dominance of the centre over the periphery is the creativity with which the global might be inflected by the local. It emerged as a paradox in the study of St Petersburg that locals had so wholeheartedly embraced seemingly generic and homogenized landscape elements as part of a street pedestrianization (Bowring et al. 2009). On closer examination, it became clear that the locals had overlaid the formulaic globalised street with their

own narratives and superstitions – things that may only be apparent to insiders, while outsiders read the landscape as yet another place made placeless through the adoption of a standard design language. The relationships of landscape and globalization can be subtle, and close reading and immersion is necessary to avoid overlooking the ways in which the landscape – both physical and cultural – persists and provides a grounding in place.

## Future research

This chapter has traversed a range of research on landscape and globalization with a particular focus on design. As a body of theory which has the potential to actively influence future landscapes, design represents one of the most pressing realms for future research. Through developing and exploring theoretical approaches to designing landscapes which respond to globalization, future research needs to deepen understandings of the relationships between the global, the regional and the local. The connections between the scales represent what Harvey calls a ‘central confusion’ and he points to the writing of Neil Smith as an illustration of the need to grasp this connection. Smith (cited by Harvey) illustrates the problem through the example of Tiananmen Square – an emphatically political landscape – and asks was the brutal repression of the space:

a local event, a regional or national event, or was it an international event? We might reasonably assume that it was all four, which immediately reinforces the conclusion that social life operates in and constructs some sort of nested hierarchical space rather than a mosaic. How do we critically conceive of these various nested scales, how do we arbitrate and translate between them?

*(Smith cited in Harvey 1996: 93)*

In the context of landscape, and particularly for design, the impact of the scalar relationships is vital, as it provides the frame for identity. As with Tzonis and Lefaivre’s (1996) instruction to ‘identify, decompose, recompose’, at what scale does this happen? And even if the scale is described as regional, what does that mean? Stobbelaar and Pedroli point out that even the ‘interaction between region and nation has not yet been fully covered’, and with reference to Lowenthal’s 1994 work, provide a reminder that nationalism itself can be a suppression of regional identity – let alone that of globalism (Lowenthal 1994; Stobbelaar and Pedroli 2011: 330). They add that ‘[i]n times when the world is getting smaller, and Europe does not yet feel like a safe haven, people are keen to identify with their local environment, in which they feel the basis of their regional identity. Thus globalization increases the need for the regional identity’ (Stobbelaar and Pedroli 2011: 330).

Future research into landscape and globalization must therefore join with the field of identity, as well as memory and phenomenology, which are also explored in this volume. As landscape is vital to the construction and apprehension of identity, the influence of global forces requires further understanding, particularly in the ways in which it may affect the vulnerable traces of memory in the landscape. And, as a means of foregrounding the fact that landscape is not simply a visual domain, further research on experiential landscape – on landscape phenomenology – is vital, including design experiments which explore and demonstrate the potency of multisensate approaches.

The breadth of research on landscape and globalization demonstrates the complex relationships between the physicality of place and the more fluid nature of culture and ideas. Exploration of these relationships traverses a wide spectrum of value judgements and ideals, from the



socialist underpinnings of militant particularism to the indifferent attitude of the generic city. For landscape architecture and allied disciplines engaged in analysing and intervening in the landscape, this breadth of research is reminder of the need for an ethical approach to practice. After all, design is inherently political, and perhaps nowhere more so than in how it responds to the global – whether embracing it, denying it, resisting it, or even attempting to mediate it.

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