

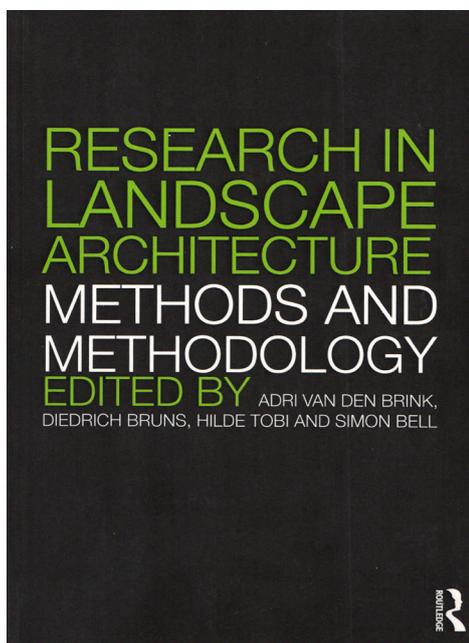
## A Book Review

# Research in Landscape Architecture: Methods and Methodology

## Seizing the Concepts in Favor of a Pragmatic Stance

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**Research in Landscape Architecture: Methods and Methodology.**

**Editors:** Adri Van Den Brink, Diedrich Bruns, Hilde Tobi & Simon Bell.

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The book of "Research in Landscape Architecture: Methods and Methodology" which first published 2017 by Rutledge is produced by 28 authors and edited by Adri van den Brink, Diedrich Bruns, Hilde Tobi and Simon Bell. As stated behind the cover, this book tries to provide a path for defining a research question, describing why it needs to be answered and explaining how methods are selected and applied in landscape architecture. The ap-

proach of this book is different from the other two well-known research books- Architectural research methods and Landscape Architectural Research: Inquiry, Strategy, Design. This book is more "operational" than those two books which, by separating the three levels of paradigm, strategy, and tactic, explain the theory of constructing a method. Indeed, if those books are principles, this book applies those principles in order to advance landscape architecture academic potential and play its different role to produce valid systematic research in the structure of the current European scientific standards.

The book aims to support doctoral students, supervisors, and research-oriented landscape consultants. The contents of the book have been presented in 4 parts totaling 16 chapters. Parts 1 and 2 are about research foundational definitions and concepts. Part 3 discusses six selected approaches and methods and part 4 addresses some of the grand challenges which are considered important in landscape architecture research. So the book starts basic concepts and gradually progresses to real examples in practice. In this structure, it seems a chapter focusing on techniques is missed. As in chapter 6: "assessing research priorities and qualities", there could be a chapter called "assessing technical priorities and qualities". A chapter that analyses common tests in peer-reviewed journals such as parametric and non-parametric statistical and theoretical tests and their related analytical software. It also seems that more graphs and graphics could be used to describe the text.

In addition to these two simple suggestions –a suggestion in the domain of internal validity-

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there is an opportunity to ask questions about the overall thinking of the book: a "pragmatic" stance. In fact, this book proposes a pragmatic approach for the distinctive features of landscape architecture research and its specific difficulties, which is the focus of the present review.

As presented in this book, landscape architecture research will always be at the borders of natural, social and art empires. This is why it is called inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary. It also, by separating "project research" from "research project", defines academic research and separates it from non-academic research. Academic research must necessarily be evidence-based, accurate and creative. Hence it may be both challenged and enriched by the fact that landscape architecture research is interdisciplinary in nature. Because the difference between the paradigms, jargons and skills of the three empires involved may confuse the researcher. This feature can both lead to creativity and failure (wishy-washy). For this problem, the suggestion of the book is a process approach. That is, instead of focusing on paradigmatic differences, focus on the research question. It is the research question that determines the choice of study design and consequently the distinctions between different -and sometimes conflicting- research methods hardly exist anymore. In this regard, the authors, in several chapters, explicitly propose a pragmatic stance and refer to Table 4.1 of the book for their explanation. A table that based on the Cresswell paradigms used to describe RTD. In the book, "Research Design" -meaning construction of conceptual and technical framework- is separated from "Design Research". "Design research" includes three types of research about / for / through or by design. Among these three types, research through design (RTD) is a new field that is also emphasized in this book as a distinctive aspect of landscape architecture to deal with landscape uncertainties. But the book does not express its stance on uncertainty. For example, it is not well explained how design can better deal with landscape uncertainties than mathematics and engineering; More on this, the design history is discussed (the evolution of RTD). It should be noted that the RTD situation is similar to that described for "critical theory" in this book. Critique exists in all three empires of natural sciences, social sciences, and arts, but its meaning and implications are very different. Thus, as in this book RTD is well divided into four types (Table 4.1 of the book), adopting a pragmatic stance to it is very different from adopting a pragmatic stance. However, in discussing about a kind of intellectual war between "objectivists" versus "subjectivist", there is a kind of postmodern relativism in the proposed pragmatism of the book that seems to be irresponsible.

This book tries to be disinterestedness or scientific. It says all empires are valid and everything depends solely on the research question. Of course, this argument may be rational, but not enough. In pragmatism, as opposed to functional-

ism, there is a kind of combined view and rejection of any ideology, while paying attention to theory. Something that according to Rorty, claims to be a bridge between continental and analytical philosophy. So while focusing on the function, techniques and attention to the theory at the same time, it considers the final criterion for validity as ability to solve the problem. The weakness of this stance for landscape architecture is better visible in the part where the book with reference to Blackburn (p.42) calls positivism out of favour today, and brings the controversy to the level of objectivists and subjectivists. In the book, various current positions concerning the conflict between the objectivists and the subjectivists have not considered. In fact, the book calls pragmatism the only option to get out of this confrontation and does not, for example, highlight the position of radicals or the theory of resistance.

The book seems to have an inadequate interpretation of Lyotard's suggestion: "the postmodern world had become incredulous about grand narratives". Because, the book puts forward the idea that different methods, without any preference, can be combined in practice depending on the best answer to the discipline's consensus question. This is a kind of consensus and agreement that resistance theories have shown its weaknesses well. The most important of these weaknesses is the assumption of disinterestedness possibility and disregarding petition (Ranciere theory). Doesn't landscape architecture research relate to hidden discourses and power? While research projects are defined by Power institutions, investors, or other financial mechanisms, how academicians and professionals can be disinterested? If landscape architects want to transform the cities, does it not have any relation to the capitalist structure and apparatus? Do they, like the early Fukuyama, believe in the end of history? If they believe in Kuhn's normal science then what is their response to the thought of Nietzsche, Foucault, Agamben, Harvey, Badiou and Rancière?

Although the book considers Foucault's "problematizing" or Meyer's landscape architecture theory (p.70) but by adopting a pragmatic stance, it somehow gets away from them- Without sufficient explanation. For example, while asking what to do when there is a difference between local and global knowledge, it cannot reveal the power of landscape architectural theory. It cannot be constructivist (objective / subjective). It cannot project a suggestion outside of local and global dualism to reveal the internal differences of each landscape. Outside of the dualism that, for the two concepts of research and design in Chapter 4, is relatively good mentioned. Of course, the book has some practical suggestions for the above question: "transferring research results in the form of design guidelines", "transferring questions instead of solutions" and "acting as facilitating experimenter rather than distant observer". But little attention is paid to the mentioned features such as "intellectual agility", "intuition", "something

other than mechanical data and logical reasoning" and "accounts of subjective experience, rather than subjective accounts of experience" - Concepts that are the beginning of understanding inoperative architecture - and it can be said that they have been seized in favor of a pragmatic approach. The book asks a valuable question: what can those with a landscape architecture training and outlook offer in terms of research insights or approaches that others cannot? According to the apparatus and hegemonies, the answer to this question is: from a constructivist point of view, the position should not be pragmatic but emancipatory to project the fundamental difference of landscape architecture. Because it can unfold the landscape own objective/subjective potentiality.

Nowadays, scientism and operative architecture -which are dominated by hidden apparatus, powers, and existing theories- are pervasive. That is, there are still preoccupations for prevailing suppositions and practices that keep operations from ethical shift and being something else. This book has not yet been able to show the emancipatory different fea-

tures of art-based and design-based researches in comparison to natural and social sciences. This, of course, requires strong theoretical foundations and related bio-politics that do not appear to boast in the West, and especially in Anglo-Saxon philosophy because of their existing dominant system. As a result, the book's pragmatic stance may find its corresponding professional position in the style of other imitation sciences -Like the current Medical sciences- but it can never project its different potentiality and looking for Arche. According to McHarg, being human does not mean dominating others, but nurturing others with itself. Thus, pragmatism in the capitalist system means allowing domination even if it does not create domination itself. That is, it is a kind of compromise and does not take into account the serious criticisms of the current functional structure. And that means advocating the current rational structure! This cannot cope with the urge of transforming landscapes. So it cannot be accounting the unseen and be performing its singular topologic difference. That is a restless movement without finality (rendering inoperative).

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