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Qviström, Mattias ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6070-1744, Luka, Nik ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1804-4066, Butler, Andrew ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4928-1849, Castán Broto, Vanesa ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3175-9859, Doughty, Karolina ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1645-4010, Garlick, Ben, Hine, Amelia ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4832-1976, Kirby, Matthew ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7234-9373, Palang, Hannes ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1981-2071, Scott, Alister ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7551-5162 and Thompson-Fawcett, Michelle ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1725-3421 (2025) On moving ahead, staying put, and engaging fully with landscape studies of planning. In: A Research Agenda for Landscape Studies of Planning. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 179-186

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On moving ahead, staying put, and engaging fully with landscape studies of planning

Mattias Qviström, Nik Luka, Andrew Butler, Vanesa Castán Broto, Karolina Doughty, Ben Garlick, Amelia Hine, Matthew Kirby, Hannes Palang, Alister Scott and Michelle Thompson-Fawcett

Whither landscape studies of planning?

This final chapter arises from discussions across disciplines and research conventions, with the aim of developing an agenda for future work on landscape studies of planning that is also an open invitation for fruitful and 'undisciplined' interventions in landscape debates. The discussion is structured around three themes, starting with perhaps the most obvious one: Where to go next? What urgent matters call for the increased engagement of landscape and planning scholars?

[Mattias] To introduce the discussion with a general call, I would argue for further studies of planning practices: how do the planners take on and engage with landscapes? Our field seems haunted by a divide where landscape studies are either made for planning (in landscape science) or as a critique of planning (or even against planning), leaving no space for the ethnographic work of interpreting what planners actually do and the micropolitics of planning. Such studies could reveal a far more complex interplay between landscape and planning than landscape scholars often assume.

[Alister] Whilst I agree with the need for more ethnographic research, it should not be confined to studies of planners, but expanded to include all professions and sectors dealing with the built and natural environment. Understanding their world views and pressures could help us escape from the disintegrated policy landscape we often find ourselves trapped in, unlocking more holistic pathways that unite rather than fragment.

[Matthew] Indeed, I argue this requires going even further by also studying the public as a fundamental part of the planning process, including their agency and

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perceptions of landscape in planning. This is important given the increased focus on participatory approaches in planning research. One application of such an approach would be the ethnographic study of planning consultation and engagement events where the public and planners meet, and in many cases, clash.

[Vanesa] Yes, but we also need to scrutinise different approaches to landscape within planning. For instance, the landscape perspective is overlooked and ignored in studies of energy transitions and in cognate planning theory. Landscape is also misinterpreted because of the influence of the coevolution theory of technology, which reduces the landscape to that which remains beyond people's agency. This approach is at odds with landscape perspectives that incorporate people's dwelling practices and the politics that they give rise to. While there is a fruitful terrain of interaction between science and technology studies and landscape studies, this interaction needs to recognise the potential of landscape studies to enhance the power of a multi-perspective approach.

[Andrew] So, what do we mean by landscape in our planning studies? My experiences of working with Indigenous landscapes have made me aware of the tensions between different conceptions of landscape. There is a need to give voice to Indigenous perspectives. This does not just imply researching Indigenous communities and their problems, but also engaging with Indigenous scholars and their diverse world views. This would not only bring frequently subordinated voices to the fore, but also uncover the taken-for-granted perspectives of landscape planning scholars, exposing the processes and substantive theory on which landscape planning is built.

[Mattias] This is something that has come up several times in our discussion, along with calls for studies on and with the global South. But it is also striking that comments on this point are rather vague. This attests to our own limited expertise beyond Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand – but it also reflects a similar bias in landscape studies in general.

[Michelle] I would like to see research by Indigenous scholars into the persistence of everyday, informal, radical, and disruptive endeavours by Indigenous communities to bring about transformative change in surrounding landscapes (that is, landscapes that are ancestral standing places). Chipping away at the cracks in the system. Opening up landscapes that are ancestral standing places as spaces for Indigenous aspirations.

[Amelia] Actively engaging with Indigenous scholarship would also contribute to thinking about landscape materialities and agencies. These theoretical perspectives are much indebted to Indigenous world views.

[Ben] We can also scrutinise our own approaches, for instance, the Euro-American epistemic context that frames how landscape is theorised, for example as a 'way of seeing', and our understanding of how bodies and worlds intermingle. The result is that whilst the concept of landscape – and the associated scholarship – emphasises interaction, inter-agency, and process, it retains a residual dualism, bound up with the act of apportioning and delineating scenes, areas, and 'scapes, that reflects our perception of

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the world as in some way set apart from us. Do those inhabiting the contexts we are inclined to call 'landscapes' consider them that way? Would they necessarily choose that term? In many cases, not. Thus, 'landscape' is bound up with ways of thinking that are alien to alternative ontologies or linguistic frameworks. Creating space for alternative terms within study and planning is vital to subvert the exclusions (in thought, perception, and management) baked into the situated partiality of 'landscape' as well as those its usage can unwillingly enact.

[Mattias] This could lead to more than just self-reflection and self-critique by landscape scholars. It is also a way to sharpen our tools for scrutinising planning, as this practice is usually entwined with modern conceptions of abstract space which, in turn, are related to landscape as a 'way of seeing'. But perhaps we could also adopt such an open-minded or reflexive approach towards the novel landscapes emerging today, shaped by a new weatherworld and new seasonalities. We should acknowledge our role as beginners or even outsiders when grappling with landscapes tormented by the 'landscape explosions' that Hannes discusses. While previous landscape 'moments' often linger in one form or another, new landscapes will require novel approaches – and might give rise to new strands of landscape and planning theory too.

[Amelia] The idea of 'new' or 'novel' landscapes should be approached with caution, however. Such a framing runs the risk of overwriting histories and obscuring the fact that landscapes are always in motion, resituating them as static, passive recipients of human intervention.

[Nik] It might also be worth heading back home to situations we often overlook because they seem so very familiar during our explorations of remarkable cases. I would call for studies of unextraordinary, mundane, and everyday landscapes. The climate emergency is making short work of many of them, both directly through ecosystem change and indirectly by transforming human activity systems, including governance, valuation, and the very representations through which we try to make sense of what exists. Readily overshadowed by cases of the spectacular or where contestation is afoot in times of change, these 'normal' landscapes warrant our attention, too, although care must be taken to avoid drifting into nostalgic or fetishistic approaches.

[Alister] Indeed, it is these everyday local landscapes that are often the most valued due to their ease of access and use, but perversely, these values are poorly recognised in planning policy and ignored in planning decisions, often due to their lack of formal designation.

[Hannes] There are other pressing issues too, beyond our local contexts. We work mostly in democratic societies. Similarly, most of the theories our work is based on have been tested in democratic societies. However, increasing numbers of studies state in their introduction that the research work is based on some political agenda, treating it as a matter of fact instead of scientific theories. That planning is the expression of policy is not new; that democratic planning processes are being supplanted by un-discussed and

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non-transparent political decisions is a rebirth of an old, well-forgotten world. Will this lead to new theories or approaches in landscape planning? For example, in response to the growth of authoritarianism in general and, in some regions, the need to incorporate military considerations in planning decisions. Since we share the same world, and landscape is the expression of our culture (however it is defined), I think it is important to follow this process.

[Amelia] I would argue that increased recognition of the lack of transparency in political and planning decisions is not only about the growth of authoritarianism. It's also about recognising how decisions have always been made, and increasingly so with the growth of neoliberalism: through dealmaking behind closed doors and strategic alliances among elite state and corporate actors.

[Nik] There are indeed many important issues to explore. But when discussing the future, there is a tendency in scholarship to celebrate 'moving on' – borne of the modern thrust to innovate and explore new territories. A call for depth seems important to balance this, especially as venturing into new territories is hard to dissociate from the colonising impulse that is so characteristic of Euro-American approaches to landscapes. Instead of fixating on where we should go next, perhaps it would be better to stay put and dig a bit deeper?

[Mattias] This has certainly been stressed by several authors as an initial response to the question of where to go next. We should, of course, acknowledge that we are already working on novel and important topics.

[Alister] There are ways to stay put and yet explore new possibilities. Cumulative impact is poorly addressed in planning and landscape policy; it could be argued that it is neglected. What might happen if we assembled all the methodological knowledge presented in this volume into one overarching landscape study? Whilst each individual chapter has its own merits and should be read in its own right, there is additional understanding to be gained by considering the cumulative impact and overall message of the book in its entirety.

[Mattias] We might be able to combine some approaches by taking distinctive views of similar landscapes, but fruitful dialogue might also arise through studies of landscapes that are fundamentally different. Some of the chapters question fundamental conceptions of landscape, opening up conversations rather than overlaying new knowledge onto an existing knowledge base. In any case, we can certainly learn from each other to a greater extent than we do today.

Can we step up?

Our second question concerns how landscape scholars should engage in planning discourse. Much of this has been left for landscape science, but surely landscape studies could be more visible, too?

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[Karolina] Both scholars and practitioners will need to develop and practice so-called 'boundary-crossing competences' to create constructive dialogues that help us respond to urgent global challenges that increasingly affect human and non-human life in towns and cities around the world. The diversity of approaches within the landscape studies field is necessary to capture the complexity of relationships between humans and places and to highlight the diversity of consequences and impacts of planning practices. However, boundary-crossing doesn't happen automatically; it requires intentional efforts to open up ways of thinking and systems of practice.

[Matthew] I agree. To do this requires stepping up and demonstrating not only the need for more landscape approaches in planning, but also the added value that these contribute to addressing complex planning challenges, especially in contested landscapes and landscapes in tension. Here, the application of landscape approaches in planning at the science–policy–practice interface is especially important.

[Nik] The contribution to planning can also take the form of a constructive critique of how landscape is used to greenwash, gentrify, displace, colonise, and/or destroy.

[Alister] Indeed, there is also a need for more critical policy discourses, dealing, for instance, with the impact of neoliberalism on landscapes and decision-making. The issues of social and environmental justice are also are important as landscape policy is often focused on place-making rather than place-keeping, resulting in landscape enhancement and gentrification that benefit the well-off in society at the expense of more vulnerable groups less able to mobilise support. Furthermore, current planning policy fails to tackle inequity in any meaningful way and thus equity issues can lie neglected or hidden in contemporary landscape studies.

[Mattias] Given the pressing matters we have discussed, why are landscape studies approaches so often absent from these debates? Could it be that the 'undisciplined' quality of this polyvalent suite of approaches is not just a tension but a key reason that it remains untapped?

[Amelia] One factor may be the complexity inherent in the concept of landscape and – simultaneously – its vagueness. It is hard to mobilise effectively around something so nebulous.

[Mattias] There are also reasons for hesitating to respond to a call to step up. There are dangers in such a call. For example, any tightening of focus onto what are conventionally identified as 'important issues' might reduce our collective capacity to scan broader future horizons. Stepping up could entail 'scaling up' and moving away from mundane matters; such requests seem to go against the very grain of landscape studies.

[Nik] Also, this sort of thinking very easily leads to instrumental approaches. Disciplinary rigour, professionalisation, and agenda-setting might seem the right way to go, but they can also kill the momentum of something very interesting. Are there ways to play a more crucial role in planning without sacrificing the ambition to capture rich, messy, and contested landscapes?

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[Amelia] One can also question the extent to which landscape scholars should anchor their work in planning and adjust their activities accordingly. There is a need for planners and policymakers to listen more carefully and respond to the work being done by critical scholars – the onus to adapt does not entirely lie with landscape studies. I would advocate for a more active dialogue that engages planners and policymakers in the key issues addressed by landscape studies.

[Ben] The answer might lie precisely in continuing to make the case for landscape studies (in all its complexity) in dialogues with planners. Contemporary crises – simultaneously political, economic, and environmental – can be hard to categorise. The study of 'landscapes' and how they manifest themselves, change, or endure, can shed light on the many ways in which those crises emerge from, affect, and are worked through in different places. The value of landscape, particularly in a time of environmental crisis, lies in its capacity to direct our attention towards questions of how lives and environments are made through practice and process under particular conditions and in specific locations. Notwithstanding the term's cultural specificity or exclusionary tendencies, the terminology of landscape carries a sense of holism that seems especially vital (and practical) at a time when working across disciplinary boundaries is a fundamental necessity, in order to address critical points of intersection and tension among different perspectives, and to grasp and respond to the scope of contemporary challenges.

[Mattias] Given our different disciplinary backgrounds, it is hardly surprising that some are reluctant to engage with planning while others are already doing it. However, in some respects, our answers are quite similar: we all call for action (i.e. an engagement in practice rather than a delivery of models or methods) without letting go of an anti-essentialist understanding of landscape, and without compromising on the critical reading of planning. Stepping up in landscape studies might then be something different than stepping up within landscape science.

Can we stay undisciplined?

The third discussion addressed the question: How can we foster an open, constructive dialogue with planning that does not undermine the 'undisciplined' nature of landscape studies?

[Karolina] There is growing recognition of the fact that we need to develop and practice 'boundary-crossing competences' to meet urgent global challenges, such as climate change, and threats to the health of humans and ecologies in diverse contexts. However, to cross a boundary, one must first find oneself on one side of it. Thus, boundary-crossing requires a solid understanding of where one is situated – conceptually, practically, politically, and so on – before one can reflexively open up to other, perhaps competing,

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realities. Translated to a scholarly context, this means that there is an ongoing need for 'disciplined' subfields where niche work can be done.

[Mattias] The tension between specialisation and interdisciplinarity is evident in landscape studies today, and the argument seems to work both ways: increased specialisation nurtures the need for collaboration across disciplines and discourses. But what if we raise our ambition and go beyond multi-, and inter-disciplinarity? At least one such area comes to mind: practice. Is it more fruitful to meet in and through (planning) practice than in academic conversations?

[Nik] Several advantages can be seen here. For one thing, the spaces of practice outside academia tend to be more porous and transdisciplinary, even if they are often messy. Certainly, planning, as a professional field, has tended to be multidisciplinary and perhaps even anti-disciplinary, aside from a prolonged flirtation in the mid-twentieth century with rigid methods and norms. Similar convictions about the need to remain 'undisciplined' define the 'nearby' field of urban design, where decades of experimentation with curated consolidation in university programmes only ended up reinforcing the field's multiplicity, elusiveness, and 'anti-disciplinary' stance. The analogy with urban design is also useful in a negative sense, since landscape studies need not bear the same normative burden of instrumentality that afflicts its intervention-driven, practice-focused cousin.

[Michelle] Most Indigenous communities have a strongly integrated and holistic understanding of the world and its changes. The interwoven understanding of physical and metaphysical elements in Indigenous thought effortlessly crosses conventional academic disciplinary boundaries. For many Indigenous communities, working in systems that defer to disciplines is unbearable, as is the tendency to recognise disciplinary professionals as the principal experts, rather than those with expertise derived from living in the local landscape for millennia. Conversations across disciplines, knowledges, and types of expertise can and have made some important advances – and often in Indigenous spaces, led by Indigenous communities.

[Alister] Landscape is best understood through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary lenses and enhanced by approaches that span natural, social, and political sciences, as well as arts and humanities. The key, in my mind, is to build stronger conceptual frameworks at the science–policy interface to unlock the potential of landscape studies, as evidenced in our periurban chapter. The danger in such processes is that one discipline always wants to be the lead or champion, which dilutes the holistic perspective that we seek and yet often fail to deliver.

[Ben] In uttering the word 'landscape' in connection to our studies of some empirical object or other, we are also always summoning, or connoting, a set of ways of thinking about the environment and our relationship to it. Whether it is done explicitly or implicitly, in this way, landscape constitutes a kind of bridge. It is thought and thing conjoined: an articulation of a relation between specific conceptual interests, on the one hand, and geographical, historical, and/or empirical interests, on the other. Crucially,

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> if landscape is a bridge, then it is one akin to those sometimes encountered within major urban centres, wide enough to accommodate sitting, eating, reading, even market trading. Thus, the landscape-as-bridge materialises the space (conceptual, institutional, financial?) for convergence, collaboration, and possibly new forms of relation.
>
> [Mattias] So, does landscape bring us together? This volume covers several quite different approaches to landscape. It strikes me that landscape theory has done a great job in mapping the terrain of different conceptions of landscape, and this roadmap could be very helpful when discussing landscape with a heterogeneous group of scholars. But what about our differences in ways of understanding and approaching planning? What about the different understandings of the landscape–planning interface? This needs to be mapped out too, if only to foster a greater variety of planning studies and allow landscape studies to stay undisciplined, whether for or against planning.

If landscape refuses to be disciplined, landscape scholars seem to need a nudge to remain in that uncomfortable zone. To stay undisciplined requires active effort, especially given how much more comfortable and safe a disciplinary approach can be. The undisciplined qualities are not just present in landscape studies but need to be nurtured to preserve and develop their critical edge in response to siloed thinking and acting. This might be precisely the kind of contribution that landscape studies of planning should offer, by convening discussions and meetings across the various landscape and planning discourses.

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