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Recognizing or analyzing a site: the false dilemma of landscape architect

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Any landscape architect, who designs a project, meets a site that he ignores, small or large, rural or urban, natural or artificial. He must understand it, from the customer order - a landscape development or a landscape policy – in order to realize a development project.

In schools of landscape, two attitudes can be distinguished: the analysis of a site understood as its explanatory and interpretive understanding, and the recognition of a site understood as the inventive analysis developed by the landscape architect Bernard Lassus.¹ The analysis mobilizes knowledge of several disciplines: the sciences of nature, earth, life, man and society. It appears most often, to the practitioners and teachers, inexhaustible and troublesome as the accumulative erudition seems to have no limits.

According to some, it would become an obstacle to creativity, since the facts are explained or interpreted; the future of material spaces would operate only under predetermined geographic scenarios. For others, however, comprehensive analysis of a site would, among other skills, allow to identify socio-political stakes of a space and then to better act with the relevant information collected.

Among supporters of landscape recognition of a site, the analysis is not divorced from the action and the project intent. Information on a site generates ideas of project which then question it back. The concept of project – according to "conceptualist" designers – is developed by successive approximations before formalization, thanks to the inventive analysis of the site, as it is singular and unique.

Should we see in this opposition, a conflict of conceptual category: the concepts of science knowledge (the laws of economics or the flow of water for instance) incompatible with the concepts of project? Not being of the same epistemological nature – the first create scientific knowledge, the second meanings on project process - they do "not play in the same league". The not inventive analysis claims relative truths (falsifiable), while the inventive analysis (the landscape recognition) is not within the scope of evidence to be provided, but rather intentions to justify.

The world of knowledge verified by explanations or interpretations should not be confused with that of intention validated by collectives. In the frame of landscape architecture, they refer to the contracting owners, their advisors and technicians and the governance actors of the project.

Deciding whether the student must analyze a site or recognize it, is a false dilemma for teachers because the two approaches are complementary. The comprehensive analysis that uses concepts of knowledge helps to explain the likely fate of the site, to consider scenarios, to identify the causes of the landscape facts and to interpret texts and images that represent them. It uses multiple scientific disciplines, from the theoretical (such as history, geography and literature review) to the practical (law, economics) and the descriptive (description of works and savoir-faire: the engineering and landscape architect sciences). This analysis leads to a political understanding of landscapes and prepares the landscape recognition.

Used alone, the pluri-thematic landscape analysis does not or poorly generate the landscape architect's projects. It is more appropriate for formulating and establishing the project program. However, it may lead to practices related to geomeditation, geography, sociology, agronomy or ecology. In these cases, intentions are expressed in textual or mapping forms of requirements, or public policy co-produced with local actors (geography, sociology) or for technicians of local authorities (agronomy, ecology).

Whatever form it may take, the inventive analysis, which "is to overcome the first ignorance, in order to approach the site in its singularity (B. Lassus, op. Cit.) aims to "bring the non-visible to the visible then to the obvious". It may invent new directions for the organization and uses of the site by renewing the landscape

¹ B. Lassus, in *Mouvance, cinquante mots pour le paysage* (A. Berque et al., édit.), Paris, éditions de la Villette, 1999.

meanings that it can take for the public eyes. In many cases, the landscape recognition is based on several elements selected for analysis, including the site's history, its ecology, geography and its future uses.

Most landscape designers prefer the second approach, by relying on the first one, which use most often experts of the disciplines concerned. Opposing analysis and recognition in academic training therefore has no sense, since one cannot exist without the other, without harm to the credibility and justification of the project, at the contrary.
