

# **Social Landscape Architecture : The Integration of Social Research in Landscape Architecture Education.**

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## **Abstract**

*Landscape architect is an occupation dealing with physical environment and people. Many schools start their trainings with the ‘Beaux-Arts’, then adding other approaches into their curriculum included ‘Modernism’ of space designers like Burle Marx, Garrett Eckbo, and Dan Kiley, to the more ‘Multiplism’ like ‘Landscape Alchemy’ where the cultural construction of meaning through dynamic, interactive and exultant landscape (Hargreaves, 2009), to what GIS was developed later from ecological approach like ‘Design With Nature’ (McHarg, 1969), and recent ‘Sustainable design and planning’ and ‘environmental consciousness’ practices, etc and combining them to serve for diverse demands so-called ‘Eclecticism in Landscape Architecture Education’.*

*This paper aims to present the importance of ‘social landscape architecture’ education in addition to the already mentioned approaches, in order to amplify the voice of actual space users both directly and indirectly. Therefore, the development of a project should require extensive public involvement from various domains (De Sousa, 2002)*

## **1. Introduction : Landscape Architecture Education - L.A.E. - in Thailand.**

The landscape architecture education in Thailand ages approximately three and a half decades[1][2], started in 1977 after the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (B.LA) curriculum has been approved by The Ministry of University Affair and one year later Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University had the first B.LA admission and became the only university in Thailand teaching B.LA for 20s years, then Maejo University, Kasetsart University, and Thammasart University have started the B.LA programme, and Silpakorn in the year 2009 started their M.LA. Programme.

Now there are around 200 newly graduated landscape architects each year; which includes those from M.LA programme from Chulalongkorn University. While architecture has two vocational degrees, which are eligible to apply for registration, landscape architecture industry has composed the other fields of professions as well. They are B.S. (Landscape Technology), B.S. (Horticulture) and diploma in landscape architecture (higher vocational certification). Recently, there have been another 2 universities (Mahasarakam and Chiangmai) preparing the B.LA. Programme launched in the next academic year (see table 1).

**Table 1 : List of Landscape Architecture Schools in Thailand  
(2010 academic year)**

University	Degree	Infos:
Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University	Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (5-yr)	<a href="http://www.land.arch.chula.ac.th">www.land.arch.chula.ac.th</a>
	Master of Landscape Architecture (1.5/2-yr)	
Faculty of Agricultural Production, Maejo University, and	Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (5-yr)	<a href="http://www.landscape.mju.ac.th">www.landscape.mju.ac.th</a>
	Bachelor of Sciences (Landscape Technology) (4-yr)	
Faculty of Architecture, Kasetsart University	Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (5-yr)	<a href="http://www.arch.ku.ac.th">www.arch.ku.ac.th</a>
	Master of Landscape Architecture (1.5/2-yr)	
Faculty of Agriculture, Kasetsart University	Bachelor of Sciences (Environmental Horticulture) (4-yr)	<a href="http://www.hort.agr.ku.ac.th">www.hort.agr.ku.ac.th</a>
Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Thammasart University	Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (4-yr)	<a href="http://www.arch.tu.ac.th">www.arch.tu.ac.th</a>
Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University	Master of Landscape Architecture (2-yr)	<a href="http://www.arch.su.ac.th">www.arch.su.ac.th</a>

\* not include Mahasarakam University and Chiangmai University

## **2. Landscape Architecture Teaching and Training : Recent Approaches**

Most of Landscape Architecture educators in Thailand are from top American schools, such as Harvard, University of California-Berkeley, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, University of Pennsylvania, University of Washington at Seattle, University of Texas A&M, etc. Therefore, the teaching and training approaches are based on so-called American Modernism. The major courses are divided into a.) Design Studio, b) Construction and Technology, c) Professional Practice, d) Supporting Courses, and e) Main Electives, from those courses, Design Studio courses are already credited about 40% of them.

Structure of the LAE in Thailand reflects the approaches and products or the graduates. The Thai graduated especially in the practice, show an outstanding design works and have been employed in many international design firms, especially in Hong-Kong, Singapore, Australia, and USA. Thai landscape architects are good at hand rendering, CAD and 3D rendering, and conceptual design.

The teaching approaches in LAE can be categorized in this paper into five different approaches:

### **2.1. Beaux-Arts**

This style influenced Architecture and Landscape Architecture in the 1900s, it was founded by the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts [3], the art-school in France in 1795. Beaux-Arts style is a combination of grand, lush, and picturesque design of the elements. Beaux-Arts has been taught as part of foundation courses such as Design Studio in the first year design studio, Principles of Design in Architecture, Architectural Drawing and Presentation. Briefly, this approach focuses on the esthetic/beauty and the composition with fewer factors involved.

### **2.2. Modernism**

Modern landscape architecture started from Frederick Law Olmsted when it distinguishes from gardenesque design. Works by modernism of space designers like Roberto Burle Marx, Garrett Eckbo, and Dan Kiley, which showed an outstanding landscape architecture direction from the esthetic to the more functional ones. The modernism landscape architects have strong design methodology and contribute to the LAE in several schools. Immediately, in between the modernism and the landscape alchemy,

modernism seemed to be too plain and during 1980s-beginning of 1990s, some newer generation landscape architects looked for the more jazzy design and popped up with Post-modernism and De-constructionism. Modernism approach has been in all design studios, and especially as a core theory of LA Design Theory, Site Planning, and Intro to LA courses.

### **2.3. Multiplism / Landscape Alchemy**

This approach was introduced by George Hargreaves [4] - Hargreaves Associates through his 25 years experiences in practicing and teaching at GSD, Harvard. Recently, the instructors in LAE and practitioners in Thailand are most influenced by this approach by their education. In addition, Hargreaves was the keynote speaker for the 32<sup>nd</sup> IFLA World Congress 1995 in Bangkok [5], his lecture was entitled “Landscapes in Motion” and was impressed by Thai landscape architects until today.

Multiplism approach seemed to imply the different layers considered in design such as history, ecology, and environmental phenomena. Hargreaves also stressed in his book “Landscape Alchemy” that:

“...the built work of Hargreaves Associates privileges the cultural construction of meaning through dynamic, interactive and exultant landscape. Whether reductive or rich, highly programmed or passive, culturally interpretive or teeming with the phenomena of nature’s own systems, the built landscapes of Hargreaves Associates seek the power of connection to our day-to-day lives.”[4]

The design studio courses with more complicated factors have been instructed using this approach for more than two decades.

### **2.4. Ecological approach / Sustainable design and planning**

This approach was first introduced by “Design with Nature” by Ian McHarg [6] and this book and McHarg become an all time landscape idols. The book has been republished and used as text book for all LA schools and included in “Wiley Series in Sustainable Design.”. It described in the introduction about this approach as following:

“This book emphasizes on human cooperation and biological partnership in design, the author explores the relationship between the built environment and nature to illustrate how both can be used to their full potential without being detrimental or destructive to each other...”[6]

In transition between manual analysis and computerized tool, Harry L. Garnham [7] emphasized a process for determining and identifying the diverse context of a place by using overlaying technique.

Later, another LA educator in the 1990s, Dr. Carl Steinitz, a Harvard professor of urban planning and landscape architecture, outlined a conceptual framework for how GIS could be integrated with geographic design and planning. Steinitz now becomes a present day idol for LAE using GIS as a tool. This is a rational methodology in large scale landscape planning, and has been trained the last years of under-graduated B.LA curriculums and in graduate level.

## **2.5. Eclecticism**

Eclecticism approach serves for diverse demands, it does not rely to a single paradigm or theory but instead upon various ones. The educators in this approach were trained with different theories and methodology and perhaps experienced the chaotic of landscape movement in another culture from where they were trained. The most significant examples can be seen in Asian Countries LAE, which the west (education) meets east (culture), such as designing an urban plaza may not fit to the hot and humid environment like in Thailand, pedestrian need shaded shelters than a dry sunny space. The LAE may urge to have another local idol LA educators,

“Social landscape architecture” is a subset of eclecticism; it focuses on the holistic approach and integration of LA theories with the multidisciplinary. Social landscape architects are not the design idol but modest enough to work with people from all walks of lives.

## **3. Why : Social Landscape Architecture / Participatory Landscape Architecture?**

Social study and research is based in Humanity and Social Science, but LAE is usually a part of School of Design and Planning / Art School or Environmental Science School. While, the new trend of LAE tries to integrate several theories and approaches together, but Social Research is lack in the curriculum. In practices, landscape architects assume the demands and user requirement from their experiences and spend less time in doing field survey on the user analysis. Under the time constraints and background education of most landscape architects, social research has not yet well recognized in design process.

The mega-projects or public landscape projects involve many stakeholders, there have been many “controversies” [8][9]from both sides of inputs and outputs in order to reach the most acceptable solution, and to amplify the voice of the minority of users both directly and indirectly. Therefore, the development of a project should require extensive public involvement from various domains [10]. The concept of planning is intensive and extensive in that is also includes the values and actions of citizens groups – in this sense the concept contributes to what others have called ‘culturalist planning’ [11] or participatory planning (this is for example requested by almost all research studies carried out in the above mentioned EU Interregio Program). Gender issues and Universal design has played an important role in public space design, and social research should interact with this trend.

### **3.1. Great Cities Institute – GCI Model**

The author of this paper was granted a visiting scholar Fulbright scholarship to an university wide research institute at University of Illinois at Chicago : Great Cities Institute – GCI [12]. At this research institute, research staff compiled with social researchers, PA scientists, urban planners, engineers, architects, and designers, working under city of Chicago commitments and engagement in its community. GCI model is an example of how education can contribute to the well-being of urban life by several ways including teaching, research and service programs.

GCI model was introduced to Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute – CUSRI [13] when the author was appointed to be administrative board and deputy director of CUSRI in 2008. She also applied the model to 3<sup>rd</sup> year under-graduate students of Department of Landscape Architecture, Chulalongkorn University through “Advisors-Advisees Relationship Project”. It aimed LA students to be able to understand people from all walks of lives and learn from other scholars who are not landscape architects or have totally different education background. We invited community leader of Mahakarn Fortress Community[14] to be our lecturer. The project did not require students to design or plan a place but to understand the social value of the others who share our same environment – to be inspired by the common people, local wisdom, and throw away their arrogance and be user-friendly landscape architects for Thai Society in the future.



**Figure 1 : The 3<sup>rd</sup> Year LA students listened to Mahakarn Fortress Community leader.**

### 3.2. 2011 IFLA APR Student Charette

2011 IFLA APR Student Charette activity [15] is the international students workshop. It was originally planned to offer opportunities for landscape architecture students from Asia Pacific countries to think about the value of local communities and natural environments and the effect from a rapid growth of tourism developments. In addition to landscape architects (lecturers, and practitioners) students were instructed by social researchers and local artist to explore the vernacular landscape of Central Thailand and visited fruit orchards, mangrove forest, and local villages including fishing villages. The workshop did not require students to produce a marvelous design like other design workshops do, but in the two days duration, the students learned and experienced another side of the LAE, fulfilled with social, artistic, and environment values which they rarely find from formal LAE in design school.

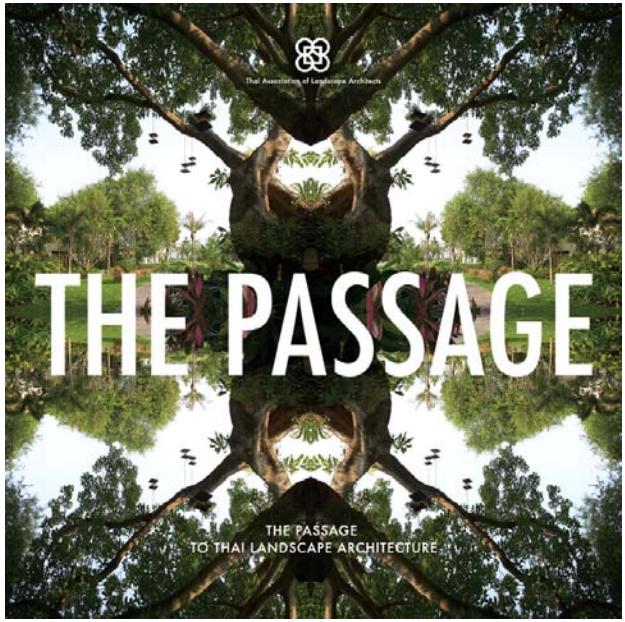


**Figure 2 : 2011 IFLA APR International Students Charette listened to Klong Kone fisherman village community leader.**

### 4. Challenges facing the LAE

Many “mega projects” have bloomed in Bangkok and other big cities in Thailand. The involved organizations usually planned for a single purpose, land utilization decisions are made without regard for neighbors, other involved organizations, or essential needs, which create further more under-utilized space and urban sprawl [1]. Unfortunately, landscape architects in Thailand have not yet much in-charged of designing these public projects, the reasons for this are generally project consultant teams have been lead by architects and engineers, with few landscape architects in the teams. And in addition, most of the works done by Thai landscape architects are private owned projects like hotels and resorts and housing and commercial land development [16].

This is a significant challenge facing the LAE, how the teaching and training would inspire the newer generation landscape architects to work in their own mother-country and contribute to the public more than in the past. Approach focuses on social landscape architecture should bring more effective engagement among all stake-holders and designers and reduce controversies in design and planning.



**Figure 3 : “The Passage To Thai Landscape Architecture” publication by TALA listed out various examples of LA projects in Thailand.**

## 5. Conclusion

Asia-Pacific region countries have their own uniqueness in culture and social values. The study of Social Landscape Architecture approach in LAE does not want to eliminate other theories and approaches, but the author would appreciate if younger generation landscape architects in the region would find another way to service their countries. The landscape architectural services with public minded and participatory consideration can cost priceless and impress all users and can be well integrated with the other design theories to make the projects more notable worldwide.

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