

# Landscape: Beyond the View

**The Power of Landscape: case studies in Latin America and Colombia;  
LALI (Latin American Landscape Initiative), a novel idea to approach, to understand,  
to rediscover, to think and to interact with the landscape**

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*“As landscape architects we don’t always need to make design statements; some of our best work is invisible. The profession is about delivering creative and sustainable solutions to real problems.”* – Tom ARMOUR, Leader, Global Landscape Architecture, Arup, 2011

## 1 Introduction

**The Power of Landscape:** Case studies in Latin America and Colombia

Latin America, a region of recognized natural geographic and cultural diversity, is, *par excellence*, a territory rich in terms of landscape. This great wealth, combined with the exuberance of its biodiversity, offers vigorous surroundings to its habitants, whose enjoyment and stewardship did not require any effort in the past. This is surely one of the reasons why, until recently, interest in the care of landscape has not been taken into consideration in the region.

Many experts are concerned about the risks suffered by the vast natural resources of the region: the water, the fertile land, the unparalleled biodiversity, as well as the lovely villages and towns. All of them are under threat by the spread of inefficient land use and deforestation. The progressive, increasing and rapid deterioration urges society to rescue the landscape as a natural and cultural heritage. The Latin American society is fully aware of the need to stimulate regional and local initiatives through a resolution, establishing the landscape as a holistic tool for planning, managing and designing sustainable development, as well as protecting the past but shaping the future and recognizing the vital connections between government, people, culture, heritage, health and economy.

Landscape is important because it links culture with nature, and the past with the present. It has many values, not all of them tangible (such as sense of place); and it matters to people – it is people who create and value landscape – In this case, Landscape is more than greenery that heals decades of violence and fear, it is a strategically designed tool that opens civic society both physically and metaphorically.

Nowadays, Latin American is seeding new ideas and solutions. The landscape symbolizes a coming together of the natural world, human society and people’s needs. The cultivation of these initiatives demands a new type of professionals. For this reason, we need to work on the importance and power of the Landscape to accredit university courses, promote professional development, ensure that landscape architects deliver the highest standards of practice and promote initiatives to foster international, regional and local recognition of land-

scapes. Consequently, landscape and the landscape profession should be supported in order to inspire great and friendly places where people want to live, work and visit.



**Fig. 1:** Urban and Landscape design of the 93 Park in Bogota, Colombia, this project is about the recuperation and the preventive management of public space in one of the most emblematic parks of the city of Bogotá

The Latin American Habitat professions are in need of change. For many decades, certain professions have been protected from competition, while others have been marginalized or “not recognized” in certain countries. This ridiculous situation has led to a lack of specialization, a lack of competitiveness, and joblessness among Landscape professionals. In the meantime, some countries suffer a short supply of skills and knowledge in several areas of action. Landscape Architecture has been one of the least favoured professions, particularly in Latin America, Southern Europe, and Southern Asia.

After years of waiting for action from IFLA (International Federation of Landscape Architects), the body representing the profession Worldwide, a number of Landscape Architects have challenged the landscape establishment and have appealed directly to elected politicians to ask for Landscape Architecture to become a wide regulated profession.

Landscape Architects in Latin America are especially working on the social component. We have to return to the identity of people who shape the Latin American territory, People that are diverse, because they originated in diverse landscapes and we should house them, work them and use them. Landscape architects are closely linked to the design of environments in which humans live. Therefore, they are uniquely placed to contribute to the protection of existing ecosystems, to the improvement of constructed ecosystems, and to the regeneration of lost or damaged ecosystem services through thoughtful intervention, so the importance of the professional recognition.

The profession in Latin America is at a critical point. To stay strong, we need to work together; the profession needs to accommodate people with a diversity of skills and knowledge. At the same time, the importance of education and licensing standards, the stature this brings to individuals and the profession need to be recognized. Growing the Profession represents an important milestone in the development of landscape architecture in the region. We could say that education is the key with which citizens, the holders and trustees of the right to landscape, can fully access and enjoy its benefit and its value.

The dominant view of landscape design in the 20th century saw landscape aesthetics as a predominant area of study; today a socio-cultural and ecological value must lead the profession in Latin America. More recently landscape approach has re-examined the drivers of urban and rural landscape change, prompting questions of whether landscape “as a view” should be abandoned in favour of focusing on the common ‘Every – day’ as well as to the ‘Affordable Landscapes’.

The profession is gradually evolving away from aesthetics, gardens, parks, to a large scale urban, infrastructural, community wellbeing, resilience, and social ecological issues. Through projects, narratives in Latin America and especially in Colombia, I will illustrate how the role of the landscape architect is rapidly shifting towards a more social and human center approach

The notion of social landscape design revolves around putting pride back into a city. Through urbanism and landscape design, cities have the ability to transform on a societal level, with Bogota, Medellin, Colombia has stood as a true testament to this notion. By adopting an inclusive and innovative approach to urban renewal, Medellin has achieved what many cities have struggled to do: create a strong culture of transformation. With regard to peace, conflict prevention and reconciliation, culture-landscape-sensitive development that acknowledges diversity and promotes the ability of individuals to participate freely in cultural life and access cultural assets can contribute considerably to the building of a culture of “living together,” helping to prevent tensions and confrontation.

In this case Landscape is more than greenery that heals decades of violence and fear, it is a strategically designed tool that opens civic society both physically and metaphorically

This is why through our praxis we have a huge opportunity to make a difference, creating affordable landscapes, landscape of Happiness, where the most important resource is people; therefore we build for the happiness and wellbeing.



**Fig. 2:** Master Plan Palo de Agua, Colombia. It is project of country housing and it is based in the formulation of urbanism, which is a result of the local landscape.

## 2 The Latin American Landscape Initiative

LALI a novel idea to approach, to understand, to rediscover, to think and to interact with the landscape

*“LALI is a regional initiative, but its meaning goes much beyond the limits of the Latin America region: it signals the mobilisation of civil society for the safeguarding of important collective values, the ones that are represented by the conservation of beauty, of biodiversity, of traditional knowledge, of heritage in all its forms.*

*UNESCO praises the work that you have done during this meeting, and wholeheartedly supports the LALI initiative as a basis for an enhanced regional and international action that will lead to the development of more effective and universal policies, in collaboration with all the main United Nations Agencies, the international NGOs and national and local Governments of all the regions of the world.*

*Thanks! We look forward to an even greater global engagement for the preservation of Landscapes!” – Francesco Bandarin, UNESCO Assistant Director-General 2013*

It is clear that we are living through a moment of profound change in the way we value the material, social and cultural context of our lives. There is an extraordinary but fragile renaissance taking place as society. Governments and investors begin to appreciate the true value and complexity of the landscape within culture context.

Based on its mission to strengthen landscape architecture in the country, promoting the landscape dimension and its holistic approach, the Latin American Societies of Landscape Architects are working in order to increase the public's awareness of and the recognition, and appreciation of the landscape architecture profession. We are working in a very innovative way; bottom-up and putting people at the centre of our transformations. I fully believe that we need to work more on the social environment thought-provoking role, peace, conflicts prevention, reconciliation, happiness, and understand how LANDSCAPE can be the tool.

We are a continent with a historical and cultural unity and a changing social and economic reality. We are the territory in which the LALI began and it is developing day by day. In this vast territory with diverse morphologies, climates, ethnicity and development patterns, there are also strong and lasting unifying ties, such as a historical past and the bonds through which we built our present societies – moving together towards a promising future. In this context, landscape is the tangible expression of these constants of unity with diversity.

## **2.1 Background**

Following and inspired by the Third meeting of the workshops for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, in Cork Ireland, we have presented a proposal of an IFLA Global Landscape Convention/Charter at the World Council in Edinburgh. Since 2005, under the presidency of Martha Fajardo, and Teresa Andersen EFLA president, the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) has been promoting the idea of a Global Landscape Charter/Convention.

In 2010, during the World Council in Suzhou, China, it was agreed to call upon UNESCO's Director General to review the feasibility of a new standard setting instrument. On October, 2010, following the Resolution by the 47th World Congress of IFLA and its "Proposal to further enhance the recognition and conservation of landscapes globally (ILC)", the UNESCO Director-General organized an international "Expert Meeting on the feasibility of an International Landscape Convention" at UNESCO Headquarters.

IFLA's resolution for a Global Landscape Convention was submitted to UNESCO's Executive Board in spring 2011 but was not adopted. Instead, we were encouraged to work within existing frameworks. The strategy was to start the work in the regions – from the grassroots.



**Fig. 3:** Ronda Rio de Palo de Agua Park, Colombia. This Project is located in a residential area, different types of parks where created for the recreation and the civil participation.

Since then, IFLA International Landscape Initiative ILC has been promoted under the ILC Task Force direction: Kathryn Moore, UK, ILC Task Force Chair and today's IFLA President and Martha Cecilia Fajardo, Colombia, ILC Task Force Member and LALI Latin American Landscape Initiative Coordinator.

## **2.2 The Latin American Campaign**

In an environment where resources are decreasing while demands are increasing, collaboration has become even more essential. Projects, chairs, and programs, today, require extensive collaboration. When Creativity, Skills, and Inspiration, accompany Collaboration, possibilities are unlimited, doors are opened, capacity expanded, and success realized.

In 2011 and 2012, the Americas Region Landscape Architects and their Associations worked on National Landscape Charters through the Civil Society and Institutions. Latin America Charters have been developed by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela.

Then the transdisciplinary bottom-up initiative known as “The Latin American Landscape Initiative – LALI” was born signed and approved in Medellín, Colombia October 2012, by nearly 400 participants from 23 countries, which supported and endorsed the initiative. A follow up committee has been set up to develop the action plan for the implementation of the Initiative and the development of the Americas Landscape Observatory with the support of The Landscape Observatory of Catalonia.

LALI is a bottom up initiative. Is the result of the work of a diverse regional network of people, organizations, and institutions that participated in promoting and implementing the values and principles of National Landscape Charters. The Initiative is a product of year-long, regional, cross cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values. The drafting of the declaration involved an inclusive and participatory process of the 15 countries. After numerous drafts and the input of several people from the region LALI came to consensus in August 2012.

LALI aims the recognition, valuation, protection, management, and sustainable planning of Latin American landscapes. The initiative acknowledge landscapes as essential components of people's environment, an expression of the diversity of our shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of our identity; acknowledge the special capacities, responsibilities and leadership possessed by the civil society when intervening on landscapes; and commit to support the elaboration, execution, promotion and communication of the Declaration Strategic Action Plan through our LALI Clusters, Charter coordinators, and members.



**Fig. 4:** Anillo Vial Malecón Crespo, Colombia. The project was made as a solution to the urban articulation of the area

### 2.3 The Structure: Knowledge Networks

The structure of LALI is an associative woven form integrated by common interests, which are dynamic, flexible and versatile, to share strengths and opportunities. LALI is an inclusive, pluralistic, non-hierarchical initiative “emerged from” IFLA Americas, but beyond and open to the participation of representative groups at local and regional levels, and non-governmental organizations (NGO), which dedicate their work to landscape protection, management and planning.

LALI Network is a living organism, is multidimensional. Knowledge networks that intersect and overlaps are constantly changing over time. Knowledge networks generated from a common interest: the recognition, planning, management of the LANDSCAPE. Our initiative includes landscape architects, biologists, ecologists, architects, naturalists, urbanists, lawyers, leaders of community organizations, activists, economists, and leaders in international organizations. The recognition, valuation, protection, management, and sustainable planning of Latin American landscapes are fundamentally multidisciplinary, and the diversity in our collective honors this fact.

### 2.4 The Way Forward

The journey has just begun. LALI is still a baby; it is the threshold where youth meets adulthood. LALI is the beginning of a joyous occasion. It is a time to collect wisdom and we need advice and support. The journey may be difficult, but it is surely exciting.

It is only 3 years since the LALI began, and the enthusiasm and collaboration of its members has been remarkable:



- The 7 Clusters as the Core of the LALI (Education, legal, social, publications, best practices, communications, catalogues).
- 13 regional LANDSCAPE Charters (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela) + Canada Landscape Charter Initiative.
- The establishment of an AMERICAN Parliamentarian Network towards the Latin American LANDSCAPE LAW.
- The LALI BLOG: A well-established blog-platform of news and events regarding Landscape that reaches a huge Latin-American and worldwide audience [www.lali-iniciativa.com](http://www.lali-iniciativa.com).
- LALI WEBSITE: with the aim to become the Observatory [www.lali-iniciativa.org](http://www.lali-iniciativa.org).
- “What is LALI” Publication in Spanish, Portuguese, and English.
- Stimulating good practices by supporting the FRIST LATIN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE BIENNIAL, Mexico SAPM/UNAM June 2014.
- Creating the “FERNANDO CHACEL” Latin American Landscape Prize starting 2017.
- Four LALI Forums: Medellin 2012, Guayaquil 2013, Buenos Aires 2014, 2015 in La Paz Bolivia.
- LALI-IDRD VII International Parks Forum, Bogota October 2014.
- Organizing Conferences, symposiums, workshops.
- LALI agreements with The Landscape Observatory of Catalonia, the Spanish Landscape Society (AEP). The observatory has been a countless consultant to the LALI NETWORK on several topics; local observatories (Canada, Chile, and Colombia), progress on Landscape Charters (Colombia, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina), Landscape glossary. LALI is highly interested in the Catalan experience with a view to creating a Latin American Landscape Observatory which would serve to define measures to monitor, evaluate landscape policies.

The Initiative highlights the need to recognize landscape in law; we are working to bring landscape into its legal ordinances. We had an unprecedented opportunity to set the foundations for higher standards of landscape protection, management and planning regionally, nationally and locally.

From the convention we have been inspired that physical improvement cannot stand alone. Many people care passionately about their landscapes and take pride in their distinctive character and diversity. “Cities, towns, villages and the landscape are a reflection of their social, political, economic and environmental context. Consequently, any improvement should be part of the well-being of the people. Cities, towns and villages must make efficient and sustainable use of land and other resources; be safe and accessible by foot, bicycle, car and public transport; have clearly defined boundaries at all stages of development; have mixed uses and social diversity; have streets and parks, spaces that respect local history, the landscape and geography; and have a variety that allows for the evolution of society, function and design”.

This is the vision that I link with the European Landscape Convention.

Then, and only then, the pride we feel, as landscape architects will be matched by the quality of our contributions to this world.

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