Editorial:
Landscape – Informed by Science, Shaped by Design

Landscape architecture and architects have long resided – with varying degrees of conviction and comfort – between "Art" and "Science." With feet firmly planted on either side of this conceptual divide, they have long worked – with varying degrees of success – to marry or hybridize the two.

This dichotomy is the theme of this year's 20th annual International Digital Landscape Architecture Conference, which will be held in Dessau, Germany, on the centenary of the Bauhaus. The conference title – "Landscape: Informed by Science, Shaped by Design"– suggests both the conjoined nature of science and design, and also suggests sequence, with "informing" preceding the "shaping."

This duality also connects to a critical contemporary issue in our discipline: the relationship between the "analog" (real) and the "digital" (artificial). For some time these issues have dominated discussions in landscape architecture theory, education, and practice. We hear questions such as "What can computers have to do with creativity?" and assertions like "Landscape architecture is more akin to painting than to biology." Even more vexing and urgent are the dilemmas faced by students, practitioners, and everyday global citizens as they wrestle with considerations of "What is real?", "What is timeless?", "What are appropriate technologies, for ideation, representation, communication, and construction?"

The breadth of topics in this edition of JoDLA, and the depth of the investigations, suggest that the marriage- and hybridization-efforts between science and design, and between analog and digital, are well underway. From "point clouds" to "smart regions," in education, research, and practice, from geodesign and BIM software and workflows, algorithmic approaches and mixed-reality immersive visualizations, terrain modeling, simulations of tidal floods and sea-level rise, landscape perception, cross-scale thinking, machine learning, and more – digital landscape architecture is alive and well!

Just as we know that in design there are no single right answers, we now know that there are no singular most effective design methods, technical workflows, or approaches to community participation, or best solutions to sea-level-rise mitigation, preservation of biodiversity, or achieving green, just, sustainable urbanism. Rather, there is an increasingly widespread and diverse global community addressing all the many pressing questions and challenges facing people, environments, and the planet, using all kinds of technologies, and increasingly exploring the many unfolding facets of digital landscape architecture.

The pre-digital landscape architect Frederick L. Olmsted understood that integrating social, technological, natural, and other systems was key to his radical vision of social good, public health, and the designed landscapes. The proto-digital Ian McHarg, too, insisted on the necessity of the conjoined viewpoints and contributions of the sciences together with design thinking. Today's emergent-digital landscape architects – for whom informing and being informed, shaping and being shaped, are familiar and necessary everyday acts – continue to marry design to science, and analog to digital. This year's DLA conference celebrates those marriages, through the lens of the digital – not in isolation, but in active partnership.

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