

Ian McHarg's Foundation at 50

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When you turn 50 you can reflect on what you have achieved in the past but you still need to make careful plans for your future. And so it is with the Washington based Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF) which on June 1st 2016 celebrated its 50 anniversary.

The LAF was started in 1966 with a 'Declaration of Concern' (a manifesto) written by Ian McHarg along with Grady Clay, George Patton and Campbell Miller, Charles Hammond, and John Simonds. The Declaration stated that an age of environmental crisis was upon us and that the profession of landscape architecture was a key to solving it. 50 years later we must reflect honestly on how we, as a global profession have so far 'lived our life' and what we hope to achieve in the future.

To do this, on the 10th and 11th June the LAF and the University of Pennsylvania Landscape architecture department convened a gathering of over 700 landscape architects from around the world in Philadelphia to discuss the future of the profession.

Let me give you some brief highlights: Kongjian Yu of China argued for a practice of landscape architecture which manifests 'deep form' not superficial decoration. He said we must "think like Kings but act like peasants" – meaning of course, that we need large scale landscape vision, but that we should utilize basic, time-honored landscape management techniques such as one finds in pre-industrial agricultural societies.

Alpa Nawre (India/USA), Martha Fajardo (Colombia) and Mario Schjetnan (Mexico) all stressed that in the 21st century landscape architecture can not just be focused on rich, first world cities but that it must more actively engage in the developing world. This is a challenge for both IFLA and the world's major educational institutions.

The importance of landscape architecture gaining a greater influence in the developing world was reinforced by David Gouverneur (Venezuela/USA) whose research concerns how landscape and infrastructure can be used to direct (but not stop) the informal growth of poor cities in South America and Africa.

Kate Orff (USA) presented a case for ways of working which are more connected to local communities and less connected to developers. Her design method is about prototyping new ecological systems and making the entire design process from data collection to construction, open to and educational for local communities.

Christophe Girot (Switzerland) discussed how our ideas of Nature have changed over time and recommended that landscape architects remember their design traditions, for it is our design skill that distinguishes us from other professions such as ecologists and engineers who are also involved in shaping the contemporary landscape. Along a similar line, Marc Treib (USA) invoked the Japanese garden and concluded that the creation of beauty should always be our highest aim.

As one would expect in an age of global urbanization, many speakers - Kelly Shannon (USA), Chris Marcinkoski (USA), Henri Bava (France), James Corner (USA) and Charles Waldheim (USA) among them - all focused on the city. Indeed, under the rubric of 'landscape urbanism' the forces and processes of urbanization and how landscape architects should engage with them, has been the dominant topic in global landscape architectural discourse for at least the last decade.

Shannon showed how its no longer just a matter of McHargian planning where we decide to build here and not there, but stressed that urban design itself can be



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transformed if the ecological landscape is understood and used as a guide. James Corner presented the idea that the whole city is a garden, a theatre and a place of imagination. For Corner, the city is not just material and money, it is first and foremost about our cultural imagination. Chris Marcinkoski argued that we have worried too much about natural systems over the last 50 years and that if we really want to influence the shape of cities in the future we need to better understand the economics and politics of development. Finally, by referring to historical examples from Frederick Law Olmsted and a range of contemporary designers, Charles Waldheim declared that "landscape architects are the urbanists of our age".

But in all the talk of 'the city' something is being mistaken. It seems to me as if the city is still being portrayed as something distinct from the larger landscape. I would argue that we need to now understand the 21st century city as a global system, and as such we can no longer say where it really starts and stops. The city and its infrastructure is woven through the entirety of the world's ecosystems. The city then, is a new global nature.

Therefore, if landscape architects are really 'the urbanists of our age' as Waldheim says then it follows that we need to engage not just with typical urban design projects such as waterfronts, plazas and streets, but with global resource flows and global conservation.

At the LAF event this expanded role for the landscape architect was best expressed by Dirk Sijmonds from Holland whose research concerns the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy and Nina-Marie Lister from Canada whose research concerns the formation of large-scale landscape connectivity so that biodiversity can migrate in response to climate change.

Which brings me to the immediate future. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) with which Japan and 195 other nations are in agreement, aims to reach a target of 17% of the earth's terrestrial area as protected habitat by 2020. We are currently at 15.4%. So by 2020 we need to legally protect another 1.6% of the world's landscape. This amount might, on first impression, seem very small but 1.6% of the earth's terrestrial surface is 2,327,800 km², the equivalent of 695,835 Central Parks. That's a Central Park that stretches 70 times around the world!

The big issue is not just the amount of land we set aside (the great biologist EO Wilson believes we should give 50% of the earth to biodiversity) it is also about trying to connect all the fragments of protected habitat into a continuous landscape matrix. It is also important to understand that 17% protected area can't just be in one place, according to the Convention it must be 'representative', which means ideally that 17% of each of the world's 867 ecoregions would be protected.



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At the University of Pennsylvania, we are examining how the world is performing in terms of meeting these targets. Due to its mountainous terrain Japan is actually doing very well in this regard; with 19.1% of Japan's landscape under some form of protection Japan exceeds the CBD target of 17%. However, if we break this down to each of Japan's 9 ecoregions we find that only 5 of the 9 have 17% or more land protected. The 4 ecoregions which do not reach the CBD target are the Taiheiyō montane deciduous forests, the Taiheiyō evergreen forests, the Hokaido evergreen forests and the Nihonkai evergreen forests. Landscape architects in Japan might consider studying these landscapes and ask not only how they can protect (or recreate) more habitat but how they can connect the protected areas into continuous landscape systems which function along with other land-uses.

Whereas Japan is doing well with regard to its protected lands, many nations are not. But Japan is not an island! Its future depends on the world's future and the world's future depends on how we design our cities in relation to the large scale landscapes they depend upon. That is the primary task for landscape architects in the 21st century.