

# Foreword

## The landscape path to spatial justice: questioning, rather than fixing, the definition of landscape democracy

This book, as the title suggests, is concerned with definition: not definition in the sense of being *definitive*, but as an exercise in definition through practice – practice that provokes questions that demand *ongoing* searches for provisional definition rather than once-and-for-all answers. Thus, as Andrew Butler puts it in his chapter, ‘Landscape assessment as conflict and consensus’, any truly democratic participation in landscape assessment ‘would move away from defining an ultimate definition of a landscape to focusing on common ground and developing shared meanings’ of landscape as ‘an entity developed through everyday practices created in the public spaces provided by landscape.’<sup>1</sup> ... Such an approach can only be sustained if the assessment is recognized as a learning process rather than just a means for informing decision-making’ (p. 91). The book undertakes this exploratory exercise in definition by providing a forum where landscape architects, architects, planners and geographers reflect upon the meaning of the relationship between landscape, democracy, space and justice in relation to their professional practice. This reflection is important because it raises significant and difficult-to-answer questions concerning just what is meant by these key, and somehow related, concepts that play a significant role in defining vital elements of what might be considered a good society. It is especially important at a time when more and more of us live in environments that have been affected by landscape planners and designers who work largely behind the scenes in planning offices and architectural studios (often for powerful developers and politicians), creating the scenes within which we act.

How democratic is the landscape they plan and design, and do these landscapes provide a path to ‘spatial justice’? These are the key questions asked in this book – by those who work inside the system as designers and planners, those who examine it from the outside as analysts and social theorists, and frequently those who are both. When the answer is ‘no’, as it often is, it seeks to both understand why, and raise further questions that will help us think about what to do about it.

Asked to reflect on the connection between landscape and democracy, the authors confront the questions in differing ways, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly: to what degree is their profession ‘democratic’, and what relation does it have to the elusive concept of spatial justice?<sup>2</sup> The concepts of landscape, democracy, space and justice do not admit easy definition and are highly contested. Given that the editors and contributors are primarily landscape architects and planners, ‘landscape’ is naturally defined in relationship to their

professional practice. Landscape is thus first and foremost *something* that can be evaluated, planned or designed as a physical space, rather than, for example, a political landscape – a social, political and legal phenomenon (Olwig 2013) whose material place may challenge spatial definition in the normal Euclidean sense of the space of the map and plan (Olwig 2011). This means that, with some exceptions, the ‘landscape’ treated in this book is only marginally the ‘landscape’ of many landscape historians, archaeologists or geographers, who are usually concerned with substantially non-planned or non-designed places that are the historical expression of their shared polities and their representative and governing institutions and economies, as well as the oppressions, forms of exploitation, exclusions and violence that such institutions and economies license (Mels and Mitchell 2013; Mitchell 2007); in other words, the ‘political landscape’ (Olwig and Mitchell 2008).<sup>3</sup>

Historically, in fact, a landscape was a prototypical democracy defined as a people and their place, as governed and shaped by customary law, and as formed by representative institutions that were concerned with *things that matter*, and hence not as defined by landscape planners and architects as *things as matter* (Olwig 2013). For researchers engaged with the historical landscape, the question of democracy is likely to be intertwined with the evolved customs, laws, and forms of governance of these places (however inclusionary and exclusionary), and not something related to the design or planning of a given enclosed space in accordance with, for example, the wishes of individual stakeholders who are often property owners or who have an economic proprietorial stake in the land. This issue is raised particularly in the chapter by the geographers Benedetta Castiglioni and Viviana Ferrario called ‘Exploring the concept of “democratic landscape”’. It focuses on an area of Northern Italy that in many ways seems to represent the direct opposite of a planned and designed landscape, even if, ironically, it is in the region where, some would argue, the idea of landscape as a planned and designed space originated with the pioneering work of the Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (Cosgrove 1993). These un-designed places are governed relatively democratically and valued as the landscapes of home by many ordinary citizens who, due to industrialization and the availability of affordable suburban housing, have enjoyed an improved standard of living, whereas the Palladian landscape was created through enclosure and the dispossession of the commoners in the interest of the wealthy (Olwig, K.R. 2016).

Another way of expressing the issue raised by Castiglioni and Ferrario can be illustrated by two different examples. One concerns a space called the Sheep Meadow in New York’s Central Park, originally designed in 1858 by the pioneering landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (with Calvert Vaux) as an intentionally ‘democratic’ space, adjoining prime real estate, for urban recreation and for urbanites to experience grazing sheep and milk cows (but which is now mowed by groundskeepers). After responsibility for the design and management of Central Park was handed from the formally democratic, public City of New York to the private, wealthy-benefactor-controlled Central Park Conservancy in 1998, it has been managed as scenery for passive recreational use, and largely closed for democratic uses such as protests and demonstrations (as ‘the Official

Caretaker of Central Park', the Conservancy bans outright all 'organized sports and gatherings', despite the Meadow's history as an 'iconic gathering spot for New York's counterculture, including anti-War protests, peace rallies, love-ins, be-ins, draft card burnings, Earth Day celebrations, and popular concerts'.<sup>4</sup>

The other example is meadowlands created by the activity of sheep and shepherds on a historically unmapped and undivided commons according to customary law in an ordinary everyday working environment, as in England's Lake District (which is simultaneously a recreational space pioneered by working-class ramblers, and an exclusive, outstanding, scenic space for many well-heeled holiday property owners) (Olwig, K.R. 2016). Both might be perceived as an expression of 'landscape', and both are seen as expressing democracy, but in what sense do they share the same meaning as 'landscape' and how do these differing ideas of landscape relate to justice and space? The book thus opens the question of to what degree the concept of landscape, and the accompanying concept of democracy, as generated by professional landscape architects and planners who are intentionally engaged in *doing* landscape as a planned and designed space, is compatible with places whose value as landscape is difficult to calculate in such intentionally spatial, planning and aesthetic terms.

This book is, as noted, concerned not only with the definition of landscape, but also with landscape's definition in relation to democracy, justice and space. Although a number of the authors undertake definitions of democracy and justice in relation to landscape (if not space),<sup>5</sup> democracy and justice, of course, are nevertheless enormous topics and the subject of volumes of books and scholarly disciplines, and in the end many of the authors' takes on democracy follow the conception of landscape expressed in the European Landscape Convention (ELC).<sup>6</sup> The ELC, as a European convention, is largely rooted in Western notions of democracy and it advocates public participation in the professional evaluation, protection, management and planning of landscapes. This makes sense, of course, given that these are the societies to which the ELC largely applies and the countries in which Western landscape architects and planners practice their profession. This is well illustrated in the chapter by the geographer Michael Jones, 'Landscape democracy: more than public participation?', which traces the strengths and weaknesses of different forms of public participation in the planning process, based upon his long personal experience in Trondheim, Norway.<sup>7</sup> The reflections of the landscape architects and planners in Western societies are of relevance to both professionals and laymen living in these societies, who presumably will comprise the primary readership of the book. A valuable aspect of this book, however, is that it also includes articles by authors who do not share these assumptions.

It is common in Western Europe and the Americas to refer to the concept of democracy practiced in these areas as 'liberal democracy'. This term reflects the historical fact that it was the 'liberal' economic and political movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that overthrew the monarchies of the time and introduced modern Western democracy. They also, however, enclosed the common lands of Europe and America, and took them from the commoners and the native populations – even as they used the fruits of such enclosure,

dispossession, and, indeed, enslavement to construct the landscaped parks and stately manors that comprise at least one vision of the landscape ideal (Said 1993). Liberal democracy, such as that famously championed by America's Thomas Jefferson, was, despite his own slaveholding and patrician practices, strongly linked to the individualism expressed in the notion of 'one man – one vote', and the idea of individually owned bounded properties, which initially defined who could and who could not vote, the latter including Jefferson's slaves, who were themselves property (Olwig 2005).<sup>8</sup>

One critic of this notion of democracy is the landscape architect Tim Waterman, who writes in his chapter, 'Democracy and trespass: political dimensions of landscape access': 'To know one's place in a democracy is to know that one's place is often on the other side of someone else's fence. Trespass is necessary to the defence of democracy, as is the idea of utopia: the dream of a better world beyond those boundaries' (p. 147). An example of how landscape architects and planners have been concerned with crossing someone else's fence to achieve a better world is provided in the chapter by Richard Alomar, 'Invisible and visible lines: landscape democracy and landscape practice', which is about the Afro- and Latino-American gardens in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and East Harlem and Lower Manhattan, New York. Other examples include: Joern Langhorst's 'Enacting landscape democracy: assembling public open space and asserting the right to the city'; 'Landscape as the spatial materialisation of democracy in Marinaleda, Spain', by Emma López-Bahut and Luz Paz-Agras; and Eva Schwab's 'Landscape democracy in the upgrading of informal settlements in Medellín, Colombia'. However, the most trenchant critique, as might be expected, comes from authors from 'non-Western' societies, notably in this case from the Middle East, where there are still nomads, various forms of extended family that supersede the individual and the individualized nuclear family, and centuries-old commons where enclosure has not yet entirely prevailed, despite the efforts, for example, of the current Turkish regime's authoritarian developmentalism.

Indeed, the view from within Turkey – as from within other authoritarian developmentalist regimes – is important because the struggles over the *political* landscape there disallow simple bromides about the wonders of liberal democracy. In her chapter, 'Learning from Occupy Gezi Park: redefining landscape democracy in an age of "planetary urbanism"', the Turkish landscape architect Burcu Yiğit-Turan, now based in Sweden, argues that the terminology relating to landscape democracy in policy and scholarly texts is based upon the 'concepts of participation, consensus and conflict reduction' which are rooted in the 'conventional liberal conception of democracy' (p. 210). She then goes on to argue that 'neo-liberal politics, and consequently urbanism, exerts sophisticated control over the meaning of any spatial development; it manipulates every possible medium to propagate the message that there is no alternative to that which it proposes, and uses participatory planning mechanisms to legitimise its envisions' (p. 211; for similar arguments in 'Western' contexts, see Almendinger and Haughton 2012; Mitchell et al. 2015). The Turkish government's appropriation of a public park in the service of neo-liberal interests exemplifies, for Yiğit-Turan,

how landscapes have been transformed ‘at a planetary scale during the past century, and this change has gained pace in recent decades, with all social and ecological layers of the planet having been altered by neo-liberal models of urban development, changing social, mental and environmental ecologies on Earth’ (p. 212). It is ‘through this “development”, [that] the links between people and landscapes have been severed. People have lost any power for making and connecting with landscapes, losing their biological, physical, social and symbolic relationships with them – that is, their “right to the landscape”’ (p. 213).<sup>9</sup>

In another chapter, ‘Landscape architecture and the discourse of democracy in the Arab Middle East’, the landscape architect Jala Makhzoumi, of the American University of Beirut, pursues a similar critique of Western liberal democracy, arguing that landscape democracy is necessarily ‘concomitant with the call to de-link democracy from its Western association and enable bottom-up, culture and place specific discourses’ (p. 31). Makhzoumi argues that “Landscape” contextualizes the abstract, universal ideal of democracy, just as “democracy” serves to emphasize the political dimension of landscape’ (p. 31). She illustrates this with a case focusing on the de-facto state enclosure of a rural commons to make space for intensive forestry, and argues for the need to recognize indigenous notions of conservation if democratic land management is to succeed. In this case there is a happy ending, but in others the enclosure of indigenous commons in the name of conservation has resulted in a form of land grabbing that integrates former commons into an enclosed and layered planetary space of property, stretching from the local to the global (Olwig, M.F. et al. 2015).

Yiğit-Turan’s and Makhzoumi’s chapters thus raise the question of to what degree the practice of Western European and American landscape planners can divorce itself from the spatial, proprietorial premises of liberalism and its globalized variant, neo-liberalism? A key premise of liberal democracy was the enclosure and privatization of the commons so as to create the individualized private property regime that is foundational to liberalism (Blackmar 2006). This meant the transformation of places governed by use rights into uniform Euclidean spaces governed by property rights, including the property rights of the state, that are bounded within the space of the cadastral map, as carved out at various spatial scales from the local to the global (Blomley 2003). This criticism problematizes whether design and planning, in practice, are capable of working outside the box of the scaled space of the map writ large as a ‘plan’, a small-scale form of map, and whether participatory design and planning is necessarily bound to the stakeholders who have pounded their proprietorial stakes into an earth upon which this map has been engraved? This book indeed raises many questions – questions that are difficult to answer, but no less important for that.

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## Notes

1. Or, as in the case of locations where there are few or no public spaces, as described in the chapter by Eleni Oureilidou, 'Planning the cultural and social reactivation of urban open spaces in Greek metropolises of crisis'.
2. A good example of an approach taken from the 'inside' is the chapter by Paula Horrigan and Mallika Bose, 'Towards democratic professionalism in landscape architecture'.
3. An exception is Charles Geisler, in his chapter, 'Shatter-zone democracy? What rising sea levels portend for future governance', which is concerned with the conflicts arising between the physical landscape of rising sea levels and the planned landscape of property and governance.
4. See <http://www.centralparknyc.org/things-to-see-and-do/attractions/sheep-meadow.html>. The treatment of Central Park as a kind of inviolable artwork, within which play is repressed, is relevant to the more general issue concerning the relationship between democracy and public art addressed in the chapter by Beata Sirowy, 'Democracy and the communicative dimension of public art'.
5. For example, Jørgen Primdahl et al., in their chapter on 'Rural landscape governance and expertise: on landscape agents and democracy', and in Lillin Knudtzon's 'Democratic theories and potential for influence for civil society in spatial planning processes'.
6. For example, Morten Clemetsen and Knut Bjørn Stokke, in 'Managing cherished landscapes across legal boundaries'.
7. See also Deni Ruggeri's chapter, 'Storytelling as a catalyst for democratic landscape change in a Modernist utopia'.
8. On liberal democracy, see also Lillin Knudtzon's chapter on 'Democratic theories and potential for influence for civil society in spatial planning processes'.
9. For a contrasting questioning of the role of democracy in park planning, see the joint chapter by Lilli Lička, Ulrike Krippner and Nicole Theresa King, 'Public space and social ideals: revisiting Vienna's Donaupark'.

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