

Procedural Theory – Mental activity progressions, sketching and drawing procedure during the design process.

PETRA THORPERT, STEFAN SUNDBLAD, MUSTAFA FARTTOOSI, MOA LANDSTEDT, JESSICA STENEBO, IRINA BORODINA, SARA KARLMARK PERSSON, ANNIE KOUNS, BARBRO BRELID, EBBA GALLON, BIANCA HABÉN.

Introduction

Landscaping is the act of taking a piece of land and analysing, evaluating, and beautifying it, while focusing on maintaining and increasing sustainability, functionality, and usability for people in a cost-effective way.

The course *Urban Landscape Design* (LK0400) is a bachelor's level course focusing on design of urban green spaces, offered at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, and run by the Department of Landscape Architecture, Planning and Management (LTV faculty). The course is run as a stand-alone course for national and international students and as a programme course in the Landscape Engineer Programme at Uppsala and Alnarp, and in the Garden Design, Landscape Engineer Programme at Alnarp.

The course deals with elements that, in various ways, affect the interaction between analysis and development of methods and concepts through studies of design theory via sketching to the final design proposal. Landscape visualisation is an important theme throughout the course, and contributes to increasing the student's awareness of the interplay between contextual relations and concept development. The students are encouraged to apply experimental approaches, where analyses and evaluation are mixed with theoretical reasoning. The main aim of the course is to use different ways of working with design in the urban environment, and – supported by design theory and good examples – apply, document and present design processes, both individually and in group work.

This factsheet is the product of the students' work with *Procedural Theory* in the course *Urban Landscape Design* during the spring term of 2022. The aim of the assignment is to reflect on and communicate urban landscape design working processes,

by studies of procedural theory. The assignment deals with elements that, in various ways, affect the interaction between method development, analysis and conceptual statements via sketching processes to the final design proposal.

The procedural theory or design process is a step-by-step procedure that takes a problem-solving approach to landscape design. Procedural theories aim to describe and explain design processes. In this factsheet, the focus is on clarifying the individual mental activity and sketching procedure during the design process. Three examples are presented of the process around design work, and the focus is mainly on mental activities that are considered central to the different stages of the design process.

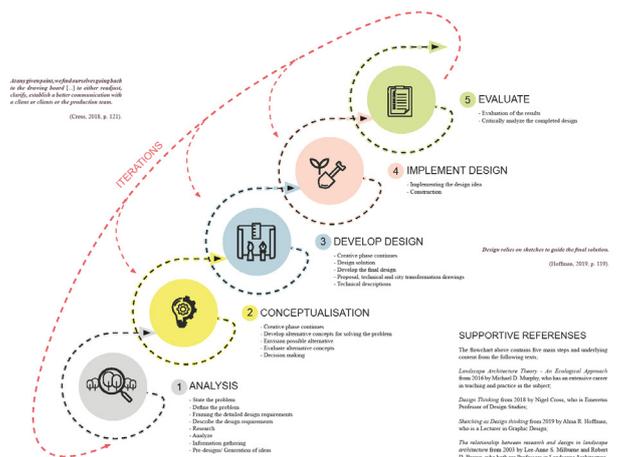
The following abstracts and poster presentations present the students' thoughts and reflections through visualisations and descriptive text, and show an attempt to verbalise the design process steps/phases. The assumptions made and described in this factsheet are based on literature studies of procedural theory, as well as on the students' previous experiences of the design process and through individual and group reflections and discussions.



Our literary studies of procedural design theory in Urban Landscape Design LK0400 at SLU, has shown us that the design process can look in many ways. Influenced by four of these texts, the members of our group have together agreed on five main steps in the design process that match the experiences we have when it comes to landscape development. These five steps are illustrated in the flowchart below.

Five kinds of thinking are essential in the formulation of a design: creative thinking and rational thinking. Designers are aware of completely opposite attitudes about the way things should be done and cannot ignore it. It is better for completely rational because there are too many things that we do not know.

(Osipov, 2016, p.186)



The Procedural design process

By Mustafa Farttoosi, Moa Landstedt & Jessica Stenebo

The design process is divided into distinct phases, the first of which involves broad thinking and research. Through definition it is narrowed down to a focus on design objectives to deliver a viable design solution. This phase consists of seeking inspiration and gathering information to understand the context and factors to be considered. It is important in this phase to describe the design requirements to be met in solving the problem as a set of logically related performance specifications.

The second phase is for designers to identify the problem and look at ways to establish the most important priorities to help address the problem. Definition thus determines the design brief and presents the challenges to the design/development team. It is during this phase that alternative concepts are developed, by combining the different solutions with the least amount of compromise needed to satisfy the overall design requirements. This design phase usually refers to the process of creating drawings or sketches. By this stage there should be an existing-condition survey, photographs, measurements, and a statement of construction cost.

The third phase is when the design is developed, tested, revisited, and refined. Various options are analysed, and components are identified, designed, and tested. This process results in a set of drawings, calculations, and reports. The drawings include floor plans, exterior building elevations with representative openings and finishes, building sections, and typical wall sections.

The fourth phase is when the design is delivered and feedback gathered. The final design is selected, approved and finalised. By now we have a final design from which to start preparing construction drawings, notes, and the necessary technical specifications. The documents included are annotated sections, wall sections, elevations and floor plans, all dimensions, structure, drawings, and electrical power and lighting plans, etc. It is also this phase where the permit application is processed. During construction, the design will be built as per the design intent. If changes are needed, the changes and options will be discussed with the client.

The fifth step is to evaluate your or your team's work. This is where you will critically analyse the completed design. This is done by comparing how well the design fits the information regarding the problem and the design requirements, whether it meets client requirements and the needs of the users, and whether it fits appropriately into the conditions of the environment. This is an opportunity to evaluate the design delivery and implementation process. The results of evaluation after the process is finished provide the basis for improved design quality and future service delivery.

The last thing to empathise with in the design process is the iteration of all these steps. Cross argues that even if the design and/or creative process can be outlined in steps, this does not necessarily mean that this process is linear. Instead, it is a complex process with many overlaps, going back and forth, and a web of connections and ideas.

Supportive references: Cross, N. (2018); Hoffman, A.R. (2019); Milburne, L-A., Brown, R.D. (2003); Murphy, M.D. (2016).

Comprehensive Approach in the Design Process

By Irina Borodina, Sara Karlmark Persson & Annie Kouns

A design process is a sequence of activities, from detecting a problem that requires a new design to the finished project. Between these, various factors influence the outcome of the project. Three kinds of mental activity are involved in formulating the design ideas – envisioning, representing, and evaluating.

In this context, representing is to illustrate a mental vision in different mediums. Drawing symbols is an example that encompasses a variety of tools and techniques included in the activity. Illustrating is a way to gain a better understanding of the ideas and to communicate them to others. It is easier to evaluate and reflect when looking at the representation of a thought. An illustration can be any kind of visual media, for example, a drawn symbol.

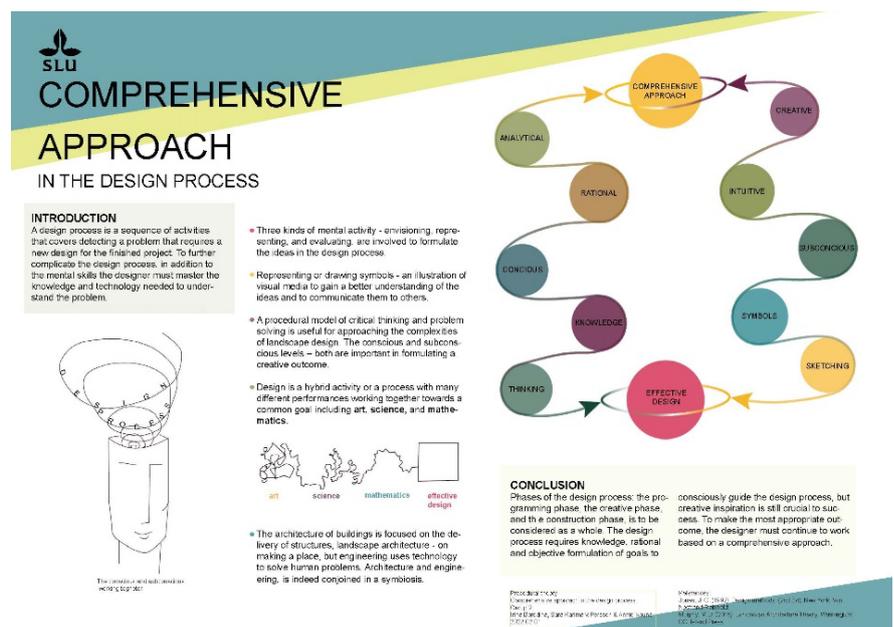
To further complicate the design process, in addition to mental skills the designer must master the knowledge and technology needed to understand the problem.

In the mid-twentieth century, along with the intuitive artistic methods of self-expression, ideas for rational and objective formu-

lation of goals entered the design process, an innovation in design thinking. However, as early as 1926, social psychologist G. Wallas developed a procedural model of critical thinking and problem solving that is particularly useful for approaching the complexities of landscape design. He acknowledged that effective design thinking takes place at both the conscious and subconscious levels, and that both are important in formulating a creative outcome. It is now known that the design process requires knowledge and a thorough understanding of key considerations and context to consciously guide the design process, but creative inspiration is still crucial to success.

One of the first to describe the design as a comprehensive process was landscape architect Norman Newton, who defined the process as a series of practical actions to facilitate the creation of form. He defined the three phases of the design process – the programming phase, the creative phase, and the construction phase – to be considered as a whole.

Design is a broad concept, and is considered a process with many different performances working together towards a common goal. Considering this within a comprehensive approach context, it rests on three types of implementations: art, science, and mathematics. The engineering designer John Chris Jones described design as “a hybrid activity, which depends for its



Attempts to rationalise the process and divide it into clear steps have proved to be difficult, as it contains to varying degrees parts characterised by an intuitive process (ref). The intuitive process takes place on an unconscious level, which still plays a not entirely unimportant role in the work of many designers (Murphy 2016).

The students' presentations emphasised the importance of the sketching process, even if it takes place to varying degrees, as a means of releasing the landscape planners' perception, abilities, and the opportunity to try out ideas and communicate them both with himself, with colleagues and other parties involved. The students' work shows the need to communicate in different ways in the design process, and emphasises the importance of sketches and drawings. The work also illustrates processes that are not easily explained but enable the necessary communication between different actors at different stages.

From the perspective of a group activity and the task of working with a personalised process, the students have performed well and been successful in demonstrating the ability to extract the principal ideas of Procedural Theory. The presentations in this factsheet show the students' increased understanding of their own assumptions in the design process, and development of their critical approach. We, as teachers on the course and practicing landscape architects, would also like to take the opportunity to thank the students for interesting and fruitful discussions about the mental progressions, sketching and drawing procedure during the design process.

Further information about the course Urban Landscape Design, see

<https://www.slu.se/en/education/programmes-courses/course/LK0400/30239.2122/Urban-Landscape-Design/>

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- The fact sheet has been prepared within the LTV faculty's area Department of Landscape Architecture, Planning and Management
 - Responsible: Petra Thorpert, course leader and examiner for the course LK0400 Urban Landscape Design
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