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Decentring landscape: rethinking landscape analysis with a relational ontology

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ABSTRACT

Landscape theory has frequently been used as a base for scrutinising landscape characterisation and landscape analysis. However, this paper argues that if we aim to understand action-oriented methods for landscape analysis, then landscape needs to be decentred in favour of studies of the enactment of the landscape-project interplay. Relational ontology offers a fruitful ground for such examinations. Following a conceptual discussion, the paper draws on an in-depth interview with a senior landscape architect on his practise. The conversation captures how a complex set of theories on landscape, planning, methodology etc. is informing his methodological approach. Second, the interview shows how he centres the unfolding of relations through which the project and landscape can be understood, to identify what matters for the siting of the project. While this methodology remains constant, it requires different ways to enact landscape. This calls for further studies of the relational nature of such methodologies.

KEYWORDS

Action-oriented landscape analysis; landscape theory; landscape planning; methodology; ontological politics; practising landscape architecture; relational ontology

Introduction

Landscape architecture is a profession in which the need to contemplate landscape *as such* rarely arises. Instead, landscape architects engage with a landscape through a specific project and its requirements and examine the specific landscape to find an appropriate solution for its location or design. Yet, landscape architects' (and other professionals') understanding of landscape has traditionally been interpreted through the academic lens as different ways of thinking or seeing landscape as such, or what Mol (1999) labels *perspectivalism* (see e.g., Jones, 1991; Jones & Daugstad, 1997; Morillo-Rodríguez, Fuster, Mesa-Pedrazas, & Susino-Arbucias, 2023; Meinig, 1979). Despite the recent turn in landscape research towards an understanding of landscape as enacted, this has not yet come to influence literature concerning the practice of doing landscape analysis. Consequently, Olwig, Dalglish, Fairclough, and Herring (2016) capture the methodological approach of the papers in a special issue on landscape characterisation by arguing that the key question for improving the practice is to dwell on the definition of landscape. By referring to this definition as 'the elephant in the room', they stress not only its importance but also its awkward status in the field. In a similar manner, Fairclough, Sarlöv Herlin and

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Swanwick (2018) use a discussion on the complexity of the landscape concept as a means to differentiate methodological approaches to landscape analysis (see also Simensen, Halvorsen, & Erikstad, 2018; Stahlschmidt, Swaffield, Primdahl, & Nellmann, 2017). By doing so, these studies follow a familiar path in landscape theory over the past three decades: they depart from *the idea* of landscape and use it as a lens to examine landscapes, methods or practices.

The meta-discussion on landscape has been of crucial importance for the vitality (and expansion) of landscape research as a field (see e.g., Wylie, 2007, Vicenzotti, Jorgensen, Qviström, & Swaffield, 2016). In many cases the concept of landscape is indeed an elephant in the room that needs further examination. Yet, when used to interpret the practice of landscape architects and other practitioners within environmental planning this theoretical approach might be less useful or even not make sense at all. This becomes evident in the interviews conducted in Antonson and Åkerskog (2015), where the authors characterise professionals as confused, with vague and varying conceptions of landscape and limited knowledge of specific methods for landscape analysis. Furthermore, Antonson and Åkerskog (2015) argue that practitioners do not seem to agree at what stage or to what scale landscape analysis should be done, nor for what reason. However, while their paper clearly reveals the absence of the instrumental use of methods, the quotes in the paper also hint at an explanation, as the interviewees stress the importance of context. The interviewees argue that 'The analyses are very much about putting it in relation to what you want to do, of course' (anonymous, cited in Antonson & Åkerskog, 2015, p. 52), and the method 'should be "case specific" or "project specific"' (anonymous, in Antonson & Åkerskog, 2015, p. 53). Thus, practitioners may not be confused after all, nor disagree, if they were discussing the same project rather than the idea of landscape or landscape analysis on a meta-level (see also Löfgren, Nilsson, & Johansson, 2018). The main drawback of Antonson and Åkerskog (2015) and similar studies is not that they question the competence of the practitioners. Of greater concern is that they do not provide the means for landscape architects and other planners to reflect on and sharpen their understanding of landscape or methods, as their situated or relational approach is not acknowledged.

The need to move beyond perspectivalism is perhaps most evident when studying a vaguely defined set of methods labelled *Action-oriented landscape analysis*. This term has been used to distinguish academic characterisations of landscapes from action-oriented explorations of the interface between a specific landscape and a coming intervention, usually a clearly defined project such as a new road or a new settlement (Stahlschmidt et al., 2017). When moving from a contemplation of landscape characteristics to action-oriented landscape analysis, something happens with the elephant in the room. Landscape is no longer the focus. The key question, instead, is the *relation* between the landscape and the project. This shift in focus has implications for how to understand the practice and the use of the landscape concept. This paper aims to discuss some of these implications, especially the need to decentre landscape (and landscape theory), by interpreting an interview with a practitioner with the support of the relational ontology of Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

ANT has proven useful as a means to rethink taken-for-granted modern categories, such as the divide between object and subject and (equally modern) geographical tropes, such as scale, size and space (Law, 2002; Murdoch, 2006; Yaneva, 2017). This has implications for how to interpret, for instance, the use and role of maps and other tools and representational techniques in the practice of landscape architecture. For instance, as post-representational scholars within cartography have argued, the ways in which maps are drawn and used does not automatically imply Euclidean thinking (Kitchin & Dodge, 2007; November, Camacho-Hübner, & Latour, 2010). Grasseni (2004) offers an account of a local initiative for making a tourist map and how this results in a geography that can neither be classified as place nor space. Such an ethnographic and relational approach is further developed in Büscher's rich study of how landscape architects move through and visualise a landscape when performing a landscape assessment (Büscher, 2006), as well as in Gunn's accounts of the practice of architects and landscape architects when

encountering landscapes (Gunn, 2020, see also Hedegaard Møller, 2018). This literature highlights the gap between instrumental textbook methods and a situated practice. However, while other ANT-inspired studies have explored how concepts and policies become translated (i.e., negotiated and revised) when transferred from one site to another (e.g., Joks, Østmo, & Law, 2020; Murdoch, 2006, Söderström & Geertman, 2013), this strand of research has not yet resulted in examinations of how the practice or methods of landscape architects shift with a new project or place.

Furthermore, ANT's relational ontology has crucial implications for the conception of the landscape-project interplay. Conventional assumptions of a given setting, with a 'context', inside and outside, and actors with predefined roles, would deviate from such an ontology (Latour, 2005). With relational ontology as a guide, landscape cannot be regarded as the stage upon which planning as an external force intrudes. Instead, it has to be understood as enacted and shaped in many different, conflated and sometimes conflicting ways, *with* planning (c.f. Yaneva & Mommersteeg, 2020). This is captured, for instance, when Nadaï and Labussière (2015, p. 77) take inspiration from ANT to 'follow the evolving practice of landscape planning over the course of wind power development in a French region so as to understand the extent to which this development triggers changes in the way planners approach and implement landscape protection'. In their study, a certain wind power landscape *unfolds* through a winding planning process, an observation which may have been overlooked if the focus was placed on how planning made an impact on the landscape (see also Beauregard, 2015; Qviström, 2018; Yaneva & Mommersteeg, 2020).

Following such an understanding of reality as performed and therefore multiple, and 'historically, culturally and materially located' (Mol, 1999, p. 75), practices *maintain* or *transform* reality. The creative work of the landscape architect, acting as a 'boundary-spanner' (van den Brink, van den Brink, & Bruns, 2022) or enacting landscape as a boundary object (Opdam, Westerink, Vos, & de Vries, 2015) in landscape analysis, could therefore be understood as matter of ontological politics, in the sense that the project makes a certain reality, a specific landscape—project interplay, manifest (c.f. Mol, 1999; 2002, Valve, Lazarevic, & Pitzén, 2022). Thus, the ontological focus within ANT facilitates not only attention to the creative boundary making *in* the landscape, as discussed by van den Brink et al. (2022), but also observations of how the operationalisation of landscape is at stake in the analysis.

The following study draws on the experiences of previous ANT studies, but also on relational ontology as a theoretical lens through which the empirical material is read. Rather than providing a detailed account of one analysis, the study aims to illustrate the role of landscape for the analysis—and how it is affected by shifts in site or due to the nature of the project. With this in mind, I approached a practitioner to discuss the practice of doing landscape analysis in as many and different projects and settings as possible.

Material and method

The study is based on an in-depth interview with a senior landscape architect with decades of experience in action-oriented landscape analysis. Landscape architect Bengt Schibbye was chosen as he has not only practised landscape analysis but has also been frequently invited to talk, write about and frame the use of landscape analysis, especially within the transport sector.¹ This shows that his practice, as well as his reflections on it, are highly respected within the field. He started his studies in landscape architecture in 1972 after a year of studies in civil road and water engineering. Following a short period as a research assistant, he worked for seven years at the County Administrative Board (where he gained detailed knowledge about planning legislation), several years at VBB (a major consultancy company), as a co-owner of a firm, and then finally in his own practice, where he has been active since 1995. While he emphasises his broad

engagement in all types of landscape architecture and landscape planning, he has come to play a key role in landscape analysis in Sweden by co-authoring a textbook on the subject (Schibbye & Pålstam, 2001; see also Clemetsen & Schibbye, 2016); he has been commissioned on several occasions by national authorities to develop various guidelines on how to work with EIA, landscape analysis, and cultural heritage in large-scale infrastructure projects.

Following an ethnographic approach, the paper seeks to understand and interpret Schibbye's practice rather than offer a critique. In line with Kvale's elaborations on semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1997) and Holstein and Gubrium (2004) call for 'active' interviews, I regard the interview as a joint attempt to tease out Schibbye's theories and methods in collaboration, guided by my questions and final interpretation. Prior to the interview, Schibbye was asked to forward a number of examples of his landscape analysis work that captured the scope of his practice. The projects concern the location of wind turbines, of second homes, of new railways and motorways, and a regional landscape characterisation. These reports were also used to frame questions and to anchor our conversation in the actual practice. The reports were available during the interview, and we frequently referenced these projects, occasionally glancing over maps and images in the reports together. The interview lasted ten hours in total over the course of two days. During the evening of the first interview day, I went through my written notes and rephrased questions, which in some cases had not yet been answered, but more importantly, I focussed on the most fruitful themes of our discussions so we could return to them the following day.

The prepared questions were divided into five broad themes: career background, reflections on the development of the practice of doing landscape analysis, the characterisation of a successful landscape analysis, experiences from specific projects, and questions regarding the concepts landscape and landscape analysis. The greater part of the interview focussed on the actual projects, with questions informed by a reading of the documents that he had sent prior to the interview. The overall question informed a dynamic conversation on what it actually means to do a landscape analysis, with an aim to grasp and reflect on concrete examples of the practice.

The interview was recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded. In line with Silverman's critique of the dominant, piecemeal analysis of selected quotes and cataloguing of content in current research (e.g., Silverman, 2017), I have focussed as much on the entire transcript as on the result of the coding. For instance, I have returned to the full transcript to scrutinise our interplay and to be able to situate examples and quotes as part of our ongoing conversation.

Inspired by the aforementioned ANT studies, I tried to avoid generic questions on methodology, in order to instead tease out his theories and methods (or methodological assumptions) through concrete examples. While a short interview can force the interviewee to take shortcuts and put a label on a method rather than to describe what actually happened, we had no time limitation and could therefore elaborate on, and come back to, cases or approaches discussed.

In the analysis, I have searched for how Schibbye practises theory and to identify what shifts and what remains constant between the different projects. What comes to the fore in the interview is a rather complex set of interdependent theories. The following sections are structured according to four theories that Schibbye comes back to throughout the interview; on landscape, on methodology, on planning, and on narratives/public participation. While these theories are independent of the specific project, the operationalisation of landscape is not, which is elaborated upon in the final section before the discussion.

An 'undisciplined' landscape

Ten hours of conversation is a long time. Yet, Schibbye was highly engaged with the topic; he dove straight into it and stayed close to the theme throughout the interview. What, then, makes him so engaged? While the concern for the environment was one of the reasons for ultimately

becoming a landscape architect, he certainly cares for other aspects as well. For instance, he was sure to highlight the importance of landscape as scenery—but only to talk as enthusiastically about history, or ecology, or geology in the next sentence. Decades of practice-oriented landscape studies have resulted in extensive knowledge of, especially, geology and hydrology, biotopes, and landscape as scenery, but what is equally important is his detailed knowledge of technical requirements, especially in railway and motorway engineering projects. We engaged in a meandering discussion on landscape in which Neolithic history, the movement of continental shelves, sensitive ecotones, settlement patterns, scales, cultural heritage sites, visual experiences and the conditions for railway engineering were all brought into the equation. As a landscape architect, I enjoyed our conversation which echoed much of my education in the 1990s, but as a scholar in landscape theory, I started to get seasick: too many entries into an understanding of landscape were brought up in the same conversation. For instance, Schibbye clearly declares the importance of an aesthetic approach to scenery, but also the need to understand landscape as a historical process. His language is saturated with cartographic concepts, but the crucial role of maps and a top-down scalar approach does not seem to stand in the way for an engagement in public participation. These entries into a discussion on landscape are not necessarily contradictory, and Schibbye refers to the European Landscape Convention for a useful umbrella definition of the concept. Yet, its very broad definition of landscape ‘as such’ provides limited guidance on how Schibbye works methodologically with the landscape. However, when discussed *in relation to the planning system*, the contours of an undisciplined or avant-garde understanding of landscape comes to the fore. Schibbye denounces the silo thinking within spatial and environmental planning as suboptimal and as an obstacle to public participation. He argues that landscape can offer an alternative:

I don't want to end up in a silo. Landscape is not a discipline next to nature, culture ... it is not land use, it is not an interest, it is a concept we should take care of precisely because it can, it has the explosive force to be explanatory, the unifying, it can make us somehow recapture ... the story of the landscape as both physicality and identity, so to speak.

Throughout the interview, Schibbye characterises his landscape approach as a ‘cuckoo in the nest’, a position as difficult as it is rewarding. With this metaphor he emphasises the need to grasp the complexity of the landscape beyond a disciplinary analysis of specific functions, objects or designated areas earmarked for one interest:

... the landscape is not an aspect, not an interest, not an additional layer of aspects to be protected or something one should avoid somehow, it is a story of that which we have to deal with, in practice so to speak.

[interviewer] ... so that is the cuckoo in the nest [that you have been talking about]?

That is the cuckoo in the nest!

[interviewer] So it doesn't fit into the system, and you were a bit ambivalent as to whether it should fit into the system ...

No, it shouldn't!

[interviewer] Okay right! So you argue that this offers some kind of neutral ...

Yes, platform

[interviewer] Platform, right

[or] game board.

He contrasts his ‘undisciplined’ understanding of landscape with an analysis where designated areas of special importance for different interests (or disciplines) are discussed. Such an analysis only provides a fragmented arena for experts, as they will have a say about the designated areas that fall into their field of expertise, but not beyond those patches on the map. This expert-led analysis, which echoes the rationale of the Swedish Environmental Code, provides no arena for the layman, or resident to intervene, he points out. When the analysis goes from mapping objects of interest to searching for a more general understanding of the landscape, it also offers an entry for the citizens to discuss their everyday landscape:

I have attended a lot of meetings where many have said: I wish I was a frog. You are obliged to consider the frogs, but you can ignore us just like that because we are not an interest. And I understand their position, I understand that they feel that way because they are not listened to. So, when interests are mapped, and it is only in your surroundings [your place isn't marked as being of special interest] and if you are nothing [not on the map], then you don't have a say. They are not given an arena, but the landscape is that arena, or that is what we claim.

In this example, his conception of landscape resembles an understanding of it as an integrative framework. Yet, the metaphor of the 'cuckoo in the nest' hints at something else. Schibbye characterises his undisciplined position as inconvenient when confronted by 'disciplined' practitioners or a siloed administration, but also a demanding position as such as it isn't a ready-made alternative method to complement the disciplines. While his criticism against the siloed planning is consistent, his approach to landscape is open ended and contingent on the project, with the 'arena' mentioned above as only one of several possible ways to enact the landscape.

Searching for relations that matter: a methodological approach

Even if Schibbye's understanding of landscape comes forth as rich in our discussions on various projects, something other than impressive descriptions of the complexity of the cases is at stake in his landscape analysis. Schibbye clearly takes a stand against a multi-criteria analysis: he does not claim that his analysis is the result of combining numerous aspects of landscape into a synthesis. What he emphasises, instead, is the importance of *understanding* the landscape:

And that search [for an understanding] is always the most exciting phase so to speak, before one understands a landscape. Once you understand it, then it is more like, well, the next question is: How do we use this [knowledge]? What does it mean for my project? But now I understand what this landscape is, from where it comes, why it looks the way it does ...

Schibbye talks about landscape as a riddle to be solved and describes this challenge as the most inspiring part of his work. Consequently, to convey his understanding is a key part of his analysis. Yet, through his examples, it becomes evident that the understanding of landscape refers to a search for a *relation*, for example, how topography and hydrology relate to the location of the old road-network, a relation that can inform the planned location. Thus, it is a matter of understanding the landscape in relation to the project in question. He follows up by asking: Is this understanding useful? Every analysis he does has a very clear focus: Does it matter in relation to how to locate or design the project?

... you try something and watch: is there an effect? No, there is no effect, then you try something else and notice: ... this doesn't show anything, we don't get useful background material [for a decision], it doesn't work. Then you have to take another loop, and another loop, and another loop.

The process of the 'loop', that is, returning to square one to try out other variables that might differentiate the relation between the project and the landscape, is described by Schibbye as a key to his methodology. The crucial aspects are never identified from the start, he emphasises; he always has to step back, erase, remodel, with sketches, drawings and maps.

What makes a difference? This is the key question for Schibbye. This is not simply a matter of what is of high value, as one of his examples illustrates. In this case, a motorway should be located within a landscape with a very rich cultural heritage. The marked areas of special interest for cultural heritage made it look like the landscape 'had measles', he says. However, if everything is marked at the highest value, then it does not facilitate a differentiation of the landscape in a way that makes the analysis meaningful. In other words, such an aspect becomes impossible to handle in a decision process: 'No matter what I do, I will have to run over the cultural heritage. Okay, then I will do that!'

In another project, the viewshed analysis of different locations for wind turbines revealed little visual impact in a forested landscape. As a result, the visual aspect was set aside and other factors were sought in order to understand the relation between the turbines and the landscape.

If and how it makes a difference comes to the fore by trying it out:

[interviewer]: So you are saying you have to do an analysis of the topography as such and of the watercourses?

I have to sketch. I have to sketch! ... See if it works. Does it work or doesn't it?

[interviewer] If it works?

Well, I mean, does it mean anything if I do this analysis? Or does it not mean anything [for the result]?

Schibbye searches for the 'riddle' of the landscape, and sketching is one important method in finding that, but so are long walks, reading and talking with inhabitants. The material and methods vary, and he aims to avoid an instrumental method in which predefined schemes and checklists frame the analysis. 'I don't want to be enslaved by the method', he says. Furthermore, he is ambiguous in claiming a methodological approach, as he relates this notion to systematic inventories according to predefined categories. Yet, the search for relations that matter does offer a consistent methodological approach throughout his accounts of his practice.

'Being in the house'—a planning theory

So when does something matter? This is not simply a question concerning landscape values vs the technical requirements of, for instance, a railway, as the engineering of the railway is part and parcel of a wider planning context. Schibbye repeatedly returns to Bryan Lawson's model of design constraints, which describes how various kinds of internal and external constraints provide a framework for the design (see e.g., Lawson, 2005). He refers to this as the *decision house*:

'What we produce is a base for decision-making. Then, we argue within ... the house of decisions; the environmental quality norms are the floor, the environmental goals the roof, the place is one wall, and the project is another wall, and they are mobile. Within [the house], there is an ongoing debate'.

One of his examples concerns how the location of a switch can limit the possibilities for alternative locations of a high-speed railway. The factors that make up the walls of the decision house are clearly heterogeneous, from institutions and legal frameworks to maps and technical components.

However, Schibbye does not describe the house as a static framework; on the contrary, the ability to negotiate its 'walls' is a key element in his analysis. Schibbye discusses two cases in which the landscape analysis questioned the given framework of the 'house'. The first case concerned the location of a new railway. The project team had decided on the corridor within which they would search for a suitable location, but his understanding of the topography and settlement structures led him to another conclusion: an initial detour to the west well beyond the taken-for-granted corridor would help avoid tunnels and bridges, and thus adapt it to the landscape and cut the budget. The other case concerned the location of a new motorway, where a number of different 'national interests' made a reasonable location impossible. National interests are defined by the state and are a means through which the County Administrative Boards can intervene in planning. While national interest designations are usually taken for granted, their status can be revised. In this case, Schibbye discovered that one of the national interests protected an outdated infrastructure for telecommunications that, when in use, was very sensitive to vibrations and therefore prohibited a new road in its proximity; by questioning these walls in the 'house', new options for the location of the motorway emerged:

So, the basic conditions for the project—just, gone! ... So, when I am working with landscape data, you know, [the questions are] where are the limitations, where is my own cognitive bias that makes me sort of not see what I should see, the conditions that are there but not [yet] included.

The power of narratives: a theory on representation

As Schibbye shows, the walls of the decision house are not only set by rules and regulations, but also of conceptions and expectations of the landscape and the project. One way to open up for other solutions is to bring in new knowledge of the landscape, especially if it is done with a compelling story. Schibbye believes in the transformative power of storytelling: it is a means to raise understanding and awareness of (certain aspects of) the landscape, which in turn can affect the perception of it:

'... when I talk about the landscape ... then what happens is that people's appreciation of the landscape changes' ... 'So, valuations change when you get new knowledge or participate [in a planning process].'

The stories also provide a means to engage with local actors and to let them into the conversation. Schibbye contrasts this approach to a quantification of landscape values which doesn't open up for a dialogue with the citizens:

I believe that letting people express their view is a very good way to find the multidimensionality in the societal planning we are dealing with. We are working with processes of change in the landscape, and I believe, to do that with numbers ... is to use a professional role that is very difficult to examine, difficult to relate to for the public. But if we talk with them, then they are just as good at talking, it is more evenly matched.

While quantifications and designations on a map offer an arena for experts, stories invite other voices. Therefore, stories are a matter of representation in two respects; they capture the character of the landscape, and they open up for conversations with those who represent the landscape.

Enacting different landscapes

The four themes (and theoretical approaches) described above help Schibbye to centre the project-landscape interplay and to identify a useful story that can inform the design or siting within the given 'decision house'. This also means that landscape 'as such' is not centred in the analysis. Furthermore, as he aims for an open-ended search for how to interpret the project-landscape interplay, an interpretative flexibility of both the project and the landscape is valuable. As a result, the operationalisation of landscape shifts depending on the project. This section captures Schibbye's shifting conception of the 'base' of the landscape in order to show how landscape is, in effect, *enacted* differently as a result of the specific project-landscape interplay.

While the process of teasing out the story of the landscape is not given, maps (and a cartographic language) usually play an important role. Notably, thinking through scales was mentioned as a key tool when solving the riddle of landscape. As expressed when discussing one of the projects:

... you need a higher altitude [to grasp the landscape], so we went for 1:250000, and bang we nailed it, you know. Then we could see the connections ... and this is one of the cores, so to speak, of the landscape analysis: finding the right level that corresponds with the assignment and selecting scale based on what kind of assignment you are working with.

His comments on scale, however, reveal something more than what November et al. (2010) would have referred to as navigating through and with maps. It hints at how the project *draws in landscapes of different kinds*. In a similar manner as scale, platform and base are frequently referred to by Schibbye, as in the following quote:

... when you build a [GIS] model, then you need a base, and it [geology] is the base which we stand on. So the understanding of these processes is very important in my work. [interviewer] But how much do you think this is due to the fact that you are working with roads and railways?

It is probably very important. If I had been working with vegetation or something like that, then I would of course have taken ... told another story.

The ontological understanding of geology as being fundamental comes to the fore in other descriptions as well, even if he readily admits that 'other layers' on top could mean that geology is not an important factor. However, an examination of his cartographic understanding of landscape would lead us astray as it does not capture the breadth of his use of these terms. In another quote, scenery is described as a base, and in yet another case, the storytelling about the everyday landscape is described as the 'platform' that facilitates a participatory dialogue:

... they [the previous consultants] were not allowed to study anything but the [predefined and narrow] corridors ... With this limitation, an arena was created for experts, you know, but not for the rest who live in the landscape. ... But the story of the landscape creates an understanding which offers a common arena. The landscape as arena is, I think, one of the major levers in planning ... the landscape is the joint platform.

The quote shows how platform could refer to an arena for conversation. This is even more clearly pronounced when he criticises the use of numerical representations and argues for the use of representing landscape with common language:

... And if we have an arena, if we have offered a game board, which we can talk about in a way they understand, and we talk about their borough and not about nature values ...

The concepts scale, base, platform, arena and game board are *not* used to invoke the essence of the landscape but the *fundamental relation* between the landscape and the project. This, I argue, is why the 'base' shifts so often and differs so radically, not within but *between* projects. For instance, claiming geology as a base opens up for an expert analysis with limited public involvement, whereas the game board suggests that conversation with the public is key. This is undoubtedly a consequence of emphasising the relation between landscape and project rather than landscape as such.

Discussion

This paper has argued that in order to better understand the concept of, and methodologies for, action-oriented landscape analysis, there is a need to question the perspectivalism of landscape theory, and to decentre landscape theory as *the* base for the interpretation.

The latter request is less demanding. It only requires that we are open to the possibility that the methodology of the practitioners studied is based on more than just a discussion of landscape. Given the planning context, and the importance of the specific project in question, this is not unlikely to be the case. In the conversations with Schibbye, he conveys a strong idea of his methodology, based on a certain planning theory (the 'decision house'), ideas and ideals concerning public participation and communication, an acknowledgement of the creative process in detecting key relations, and an open definition of landscape informed by a critique of contemporary planning and its siloed thinking. Schibbye repeatedly returns to this set of theories, in different projects, which suggests a constant methodology. His *enactment* of landscape, on the other hand, shifts.

A second step to decentre, and rethink, landscape theory is to follow the practitioners in how they centre relations between the project and the landscape rather than the landscape 'as such'. In the case of Schibbye, this doesn't come to the fore as a matter of forging two predefined entities, a landscape and a project, together. Rather, he describes creative and open-ended processes of *unfolding relations* that matter for the siting or design of the project (see also Büscher, 2006; Nadai & Labussière, 2015, Yaneva & Mommersteeg, 2020). It is these relations that determine how landscape (and the project) are operationalised. Consequently, the operationalisation of the landscape (and in effect: how landscape is understood) varies depending on the project. This is

evident in how Schibbye describes the ‘base’ or ‘platform’ offered by the landscape, as this base shifts in character depending on what a landscape analysis can offer in the specific project. This flexibility in how to operationalise landscape and the project, I argue, should not be understood as accidental, but as a crucial component for the creative process of finding possible solutions for a project (c.f. Opdam et al., 2015).

Even if the study presented in this paper does not capture the full complexity of the practice of doing a landscape analysis, as it is based only on an interview, it hints at some of the benefits of exploring the methodology of a landscape architect by focussing on how theories are enacted. In the case of Schibbye, his method is heterogeneous and yet reductionist, situated and yet framed by general conceptions of planning and the practice. He is simultaneously scanning the scenery, the actors and the planning process in a way that defies conventional disciplinary approaches. Following the textbook rationale on landscape analysis, including the one co-written by Schibbye, this would be described as an eclectic approach, that is, a *combination* of methods rather than as a method as such. In this textbook tradition, the eclecticism is acknowledged, but focus is set on defining, refining and systematising the methods and concepts used, rather than engaging in the messy practice that is concealed under the banner of eclecticism (see Simensen et al., 2018., and the final chapter in Stahlschmidt et al., 2017). Such an approach, I argue, does not help landscape architects to better understand the challenges and potentials of their practice. Studies in how theories are put into practice offer a possibility to scrutinise the methodology that is disguised under the notion of eclecticism (e.g., Büscher, 2006, Yaneva, 2017); by doing so, they offer a more suitable base for methodological development. However, as this paper emphasises, we also need to learn from different kinds of projects, and different settings, in order to interpret the method beyond the specific case, to capture its shifting nature and the *ontological work* of the analysis. There is a need for ethnographic studies that follow the fluid concepts and shifting approaches from one site and one kind of project to another, to better capture the nature of the practice, its methodological challenges and contributions.

Note

1. I have chosen not to anonymise the interview given the seminal role Schibbye has played within Swedish landscape architecture. Schibbye has commented on the selection of quotes and the general argument of the manuscript at an early stage. He has read the final manuscript and has thereafter approved that he is mentioned in the text.

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