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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS IN A NORDIC CONTEXT
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LENNART NORD

Illustration on the front cover: Christel Lindgren. From the SLU Fuse Symposium Urkunder och husgudar in Uppsala in April 2012.”
Editors’ Notes
The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences arranged the symposium Urkunder och husgudar (Records and House Gods) in Uppsala in 2012. The theme was “Theory and intellectual traditions in landscape architecture in a Nordic context.” This is also the theme of this issue. The idea of the symposium, as well as this theme issue, is to contribute to the development of theory in landscape architecture – a discipline that can be described as young and practice-oriented. The focus is on the situation in the Nordic countries as a natural demarcation in relation to other language areas dominated by Anglo-American influences.

The theoretical basis of an academic discipline is revised more or less continuously. However, in the case of landscape architecture, as a young discipline in the academic world, much of this work is still to come. The literature that unequivocally intends to contribute to the identification and formation of subject theory of landscape architecture is severely limited. Some reviews have come in recent years in which fragments from various authors have been categorized into themes and then been commented. An exception is Michael D. Murphy’s Landscape architecture theory – an evolving body of thought, and a new edition is planned for autumn 2016. Landscape architecture theory: an ecological approach. Nevertheless, this literature is characterized by being dominated by Anglo-American sources.
Landscape architecture is here seen in the broad sense as a field of knowledge which is consulted both in management, planning and design. Knowledge is applied from a broad spectrum of natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities. This wide range may be a contributing factor to the scant supply on reviews of the subject theory, because it is a challenge to reproduce the spectrum in a simple and meaningful way. Landscape architecture borrows a variety of theories from different sources, however not randomly, but in relation to the need for knowledge in managing physical changes at a site in one or another scale. In addition to the mapping of the strategic selections of theory from other disciplines, is the development of unique subject theory ongoing. This is defined as the theory that no other discipline has reason to develop. Examples of such a theory are about space formation of plants and vegetation or about the spatial entanglement of the living structures and built structures in different scales from garden art to regional planning. Seven landscape architects who have held academic key positions within landscape architecture in the Nordic countries were particularly invited to the symposium. Their presentations are published in the anthology *Urkunder och husgudar – Pionjärernas litteratur och andra källor till landskapsarkitektur* (Records and House Gods – Pioneers’ literature and other sources of landscape architecture). Additional presentations and panel discussions were conducted at the symposium. In connection with the symposium authors were invited to write on the same theme and these contributions have resulted in the present theme issue. This issue includes eight contributions: three scientific contributions, four essays, and one debate. The scientific contributions and the essays have all been reviewed by two independent, anonymous experts. Three of the contributions were presented at the symposium, two others are reflections of the symposium and three are contributions more in general regarding the theme of this issue.

This theme issue takes a starting point in the literary education in landscape architecture and focuses on publications and writings as essential sources of information; this despite, or perhaps because of, an information transfer and knowledge generation that in many cases occur in other ways than through readings (master/apprentice exchanges, excursions to habitats and outdoor facilities, designers as role models, sketching etc.). While the anthology describes both the importance of “tacit” knowledge as well as the theoretical basis for the education and profession of these Nordic pioneers in landscape architecture, this theme issue is an attempt to document some of the written sources that have been used. The invitation to the symposium as well as the issue requested contributions concerning the following: Which writings have inspired you or made substantial knowledge in your professional career? Are there records that you want to highlight (books, articles, other publications)?

The issue begins with a study of the journal *Havekunst* conducted by
Nina Marie Andersen. The journal started in 1920 and changed its name to Landskap and later Landskab. The journal is seen as contributing to the tradition of landscape architecture and believed to have played an important role in the development of the discipline in the Nordic region. Andersen’s research question is about different forms of criticism that were developed in the journal. The second contribution, by Per Hedfors, is a compilation and analysis of the literature that the seven specially invited persons to the symposium expressed, which is documented in the anthology Urkunder och husgudar. The third scientific contribution comes from Anne Katrine Geelmuyden and Marius Fiskevold. The paper deals with the European Landscape Convention and it clearly links to the development of theory and intellectual traditions in landscape architecture especially in recent years.

The section with essays starts with three personal stories about literature and other influences that the different authors remember as significant in their careers. The first one is by Olav R. Skage, the first landscape architect in the Nordic countries who defended a dissertation. The following two essays by Anne-Karine Halvorsen Thorén and Karsten Jørgensen are natural continuations of Skage’s story. In an interesting way they bring two perspectives of the subsequent generation of landscape architects in the academic world. All three essays are contributions from Norway. The last essay has a different character and is a request for an outside perspective on the discipline of landscape architecture. The theologian and educator David Kronlid examines three perspectives from his own research related to the field of landscape architecture. This has been conducted through a reading of the contributions from the symposium, and thus raises thoughts on new fields of research. Finally, a debate by Lennart Nord is published, which criticizes the symposium, its theme and research question. The debate post makes the situation clear for the modest development of subject theory and the focus on the ability of professional performers. This contribution thus provides possible explanations for why the discipline is not developed more on a theoretical level, even though the subject theory is mainly for supporting the capacity for professional performers. Nord also made a draft of an essay, which still reveals that the theme of the symposium and the theme issue attracted his thought. We have chosen to publish a list of the literature that he claimed.

Through the issue different types of perspectives are highlighted, and the reader may perceive that different schools of thought emerge. The expectation is that it will contribute to new ideas and enables new theory by pointing to gaps in knowledge and needs of future research.

June 2016