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PHD REVIEW: *WATERSCAPES AND LANDSCAPES AS ACTORS IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: MAPS AT THE INTERFACE BETWEEN PLANNING PRACTICES*

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Kristine C. V. Holten-Andersen. *Med vand- og landskab som aktører i byudvikling: Kortet i mødet mellem planlægningspraksisser* (Waterscapes and Landscapes as Actors in Urban Development: Maps at the Interface between Planning Practices) (370 pages).

Industrial PhD dissertation developed at the Royal Danish Academy – Architecture, Design and Conservation, with Kristine Jensen Landskab & Arkitektur as industrial partner and with financial support by Innovationsfonden, 2023. Supervisor: Jonna Majgaard Krarup

As suggested in the title, Kristine C.V. Holten's PhD dissertation investigates the potential of conceiving landscapes and waterscapes as key actors in urban planning practice. The importance of such an approach, as stressed by the author, stems from current global trends and challenges posed by: (a) urbanization, urban growth and densification and the increasing pressure on public spaces / recreational spaces, (b) climate change and the urgent need of engaging landscapes and waterscapes in urban planning, (c) the current biodiversity crisis, which highlights the importance of planning green urban spaces from a multispecies perspective.

With that point of departure, the dissertation addresses the question: *Can methods of landscape architectural practice be applied to urban planning practices – methods through which the agency of waterscapes and landscapes is brought to the fore?*

As implied by this research question, the central contribution of the thesis is at the level of methodological development. Through the analysis of selected cases, the dissertation makes a valuable contribution to reduce the methodological gap between the practices of landscape architecture and urban planning and to show how methods of landscape analysis used in the development of landscape architectural projects can be applied in planning practices, with the intention of drawing attention to landscape conditions, structures and dynamics.

Through an abductive approach, the author engages positions from Actor Network Theory (ANT), landscape architecture theory (notably the work of Denis Cosgrove), mapping theory (with reference to the work of James Corner) and design theory to investigate the potential of applying methods from landscape architecture in urban planning. These theoretical positions are actively brought into the development of three case studies, but some of those positions are arguably more important for the study, namely ANT, which could have been further engaged to shed light on how the agencies of waterscapes and landscapes structure and transform the different types of practice analysed in the study. On the other hand, the extent to which the contribution of the study consists of “research through design” is questionable and one could argue that design theory is of lesser relevance for the analysis.

The dissertation is built on the analysis of three cases in a Danish context:

1. The first case, entitled case LARK, analyses methodologies developed in landscape architectural practice, notably the use of maps, by the Danish landscape architectural firm, Kristine Jensen Landscape & Architecture (KJLA), where the author worked as a landscape architect. Here the author identifies elements in landscape analytical methods to be potentially applied in urban planning.
2. The second case, entitled case PLAN, is based on the author’s participant observation in the development of the “Blue-Green Structure Plan” for the City of Aarhus, in view of investigating the challenges related to the application of landscape analytical methods in planning practice.
3. The third case, entitled case DEMO consists of a demonstration of the potential of applying landscape architectural methods to urban planning practice. This case is carried out with the involvement of planners from the Aarhus Municipality and employees from KJLA.

In the three cases, landscape analytical methods are discussed in the context of specific localities and in relation to particular networks of practice. The author stresses the importance in this connection and the need of adopting a contextual and situated research approach, where the project's analytical framework is articulated and adapted through the development of the study.

The framework for the analysis of maps is based on Dennis Cosgrove's theoretical work and his conception that "To map is in one way or another to take the measure of a world, and more than merely take it, to figure the measure so taken in such a way that it may be communicated between people, places or times"¹

Building on this framework, the author operates with three levels of analysis of landscape architectural practice:

- **Object conception:** *How are waterscapes and landscapes conceived and defined?*
- **Form of investigation and assessment:** *How are relevant landscape and waterscape conditions selected and how are they investigated?*
- **Representation and agency:** *How are landscapes represented and how do participants interact with representations/maps? (p. 85)*

With a point of departure in these questions, the author carries out landscape analyses in the two cases of PLAN and LARK in relation to their respective practice fields. In both *spaces of practice*, the development of "blue-green structures" is in focus, and the author shows that the analyses are largely guided by conceptions and approaches specific to their respective *spaces of practice*.

Case LARK

This case focusses on the use of maps to represent landscapes and waterscapes in five architectural competitions developed by KJLA. Through the analysis of drawings and through semi-structured interviews, carried out with landscape architects who have worked on the selected projects, the author provides a detailed investigation and discussion of the methods used to bring into play the agency of waterscapes and landscapes in the design process.

Through her analysis of case LARK, the author shows how landscapes are conceived and thematized in the development of narratives that inform and guide the development of landscape project proposals.

The analysis of this case creates the foundation for one of the dissertation's main theses: that methods developed and used in the "project space" of the landscape architectural office (KJLA) can be used in the "planning space" of urban planning practices.

1 Cosgrove, D. (1999). Mapping meaning. In D. Cosgrove (Ed.), *Mappings* (p. 1-2). Reaktion Books.

This case also brings into focus the context in which the dissertation is developed, namely as an industrial PhD programme, where the relevance of investigating the potential of the application of landscape architectural methods to urban planning, notably at the larger scale of the urban district or municipality, is further emphasized.

Case PLAN

Case PLAN involved participant observation in the development of what was then a new type of thematic plan, as part of the City of Aarhus' Municipal Plan 2021. This cross-sectoral plan focused on the blue-green structure of the City of Aarhus. This so-called "Blue-Green Structure Plan" had therefore a strategic character with the aim of prioritizing blue and green elements at the municipal planning level.

Case DEMO

In case DEMO, the author creates a demonstration space in which to carry out an investigation into landscape architectural methods. The author develops this case in four stages, namely probing, prototyping, demonstration and evaluation. By focusing on an urban district in the City of Aarhus, the author develops a series of maps to investigate and understand conditions and relations pertaining to landscape (topography, geomorphology), waterscape and historical conditions, amongst others.

Through a series of sessions under the heading of prototyping, the author invites urban planners from the City of Aarhus and landscape architects from KJLA to participate in workshops, site visits and mapping sessions, focusing on the agency of waterscapes and landscapes and the potential for use of maps to engage such agency in planning processes.

The prototype phase brings together analyses from case LARK and case PLAN. Here a series of maps and readings are developed and presented to serve as a basis for a dialogue between participants. The district selected by the author as a focus for case DEMO presents urban planning issues where the landscape/waterscape play a key role. The selected study area, located in the south-west of Aarhus (Viby, Højbjerg and Holme) comprises large, topographical water-catchment landscapes.

In this prototyping phase, five deep landscape maps and five landscape readings were produced covering the following themes: (a) the landscape space, (b) historic landscape relations, (c) water and wet areas, (d) green connections, (e) spatial connections. This could be said to be the culmination of the research project and its central contribution. The production of these five deep maps (in the prototyping phase) by the author builds convincingly on the analytical work carried out in the previous chapters. The use of those five deep maps in the workshops with professionals

brings into play narratives anchored in the agency of waterscapes and landscapes that can inform planning practice. To be sure, the planning practice presented in case DEMO is staged and curated by the author, but nonetheless very relevant from the point of view of methodological development, which is a central contribution of the dissertation.

Through her detailed analysis in connection with these workshops, the author makes a convincing case for how methods from landscape architectural practice can be used in urban planning practice. Here, the author insightfully describes site-specific entanglements through mappings informed by a landscape architectural sensibility, where their potential to inform urban planning practice becomes visible.

But more incisively, to the extent that Kristine Holten-Andersen, in her dissertation, brings into urban planning the perspective of waterscapes and landscapes as central actors, she engages a level of long-range agency that has deep implications for this field of practice – implications that transcend the scope of mere methodological development to involve strategic concerns and long-term urban planning.

The issue of engaging waterscapes and landscapes as actors in urban planning is closely related to bringing into play a long-term time frame, which is intrinsic to their agency. And this move clashes with short-term agendas, the four-year cycle of the municipal plan and the making of the plan's strategy.

The author is aware of those implications when she writes, in relation to her participant observation in the development the “Blue-Green Structure Plan”:

Tidligt i mit følgeskab med BG-planen bliver jeg klar over at den massive fortætningsdagsorden i Aarhus Kommunes planstrategi og kommuneplan (Aarhus Kommune, 2017, s. 19-22) bevirker at mange muligheder for at klimatilpasse og håndtere vand i byen forsvinder i stor hast. (p. 240)

The author further elaborates on this issue when she writes:

Jeg blev klar over at vandhåndtering og klimatilpasning endnu ikke indgik i de strategiske overvejelser vedrørende byens udviklingsprocesser. Derudover så det ud til at selv om informanterne ihærdigt forsøgte at bringe vand- og landskabsaktører til planlægningsbordet, blev de betragtet som mindre 'realistiske' at tage hensyn til end de 'normale' aktører som presser på for øget fortætning. Aarhus' "Planstrategi 2015" og "Kommuneplan 2017" kanoniserer en "klog strategi" (Aarhus Kommune, 2016, s. 6) for udvikling af en "kompakt by", som et overordnet

middel til at Aarhus by kan vokse økonomisk og befolkningsmæssigt uden at vokse (meget) geografisk (Aarhus Kommune, 2016, s. 6, 2017, s. 15). (p. 339)

This discussion, even though strictly beyond the scope of the analysis carried out in the PhD project, points the way forward for further research, to the extent that, as argued above, the agency of waterscapes and landscapes inherently engages the long-term dynamics of transformation of the urban territory. And in this connection, the author pertinently raises the question:

Hvilke alternative transformationskoncepter vil en strategisk-strukturel planlægning der tager udgangspunkt i aflæsninger og vurderinger af vand- og landskabsstrukturer og -processer, kunne frembringe? (p. 339)

As pointed out earlier in her dissertation, the author provides the tools – notably the five deep landscape maps – and convincingly demonstrates their potential through DEMO. Through her analysis, the author engages the long-term time frame and brings the long-term dynamics of landscape transformation into the field of urban planning practices. Through her analysis, Kristine Holten-Andersen not only makes a valuable contribution to the application of landscape architecture methodology in urban planning, but also demonstrates and documents the potential of implementing a paradigmatic urban planning approach, where waterscapes and landscapes figure as key actors in long-term strategic processes of urban transformation.