3 MAPS: Crisis, Knowledge and Action

There are three different but related maps I’d like to share with the IFLA community (1) The first, titled ‘crisis’ shows the largest and fastest growing cities in the world’s most biodiverse regions – the so-called biodiversity hotspots (2). The second, titled ‘knowledge’ shows the global location of schools of landscape architecture, and the third, titled ‘action’ shows all the large-scale ecological restoration initiatives going on in the world today. Taken together, these three maps are full of portent for landscape architecture in the 21st century.


2 In 1988, Norman Myers first identified 10 global hotspots featuring exceptional concentration and endemism of plant species under unusual threat of destruction. According to Myers, E.O. Wilson has said hotspots were “the most important contribution to conservation biology of the last century”. Norman Myers & Russell A. Mittermeier, “Impact and Acceptance of the Hotspots Strategy: Response to Ovadia and to Brummitt and Lughadha,” Conservation Biology 17, no. 5 (2003): 1449-1450. There are now 36 recognized hotspots. Together, these areas contain at least 50% of the world’s total plant species and 42% of the world’s terrestrial vertebrates as endemic. The original and unique habitat in these hotspots is at least 70% depleted and is under imminent threat of total destruction due to habitat fragmentation.
1) Crisis

On this map the yellow dots represent cities (of 300,000 or more people as per the UN’s definition of ‘city’) projected to sprawl into remnant habitat in the world’s biological hotspots (3). To make the map 2030 urban growth projections for each city are overlaid on top of remnant vegetation data from the Global Land Cover Facility (4) and the IUCN Red List of ranges for endangered species (5) From this analysis we conclude that 383 of the 422 cities (92%) are and will in all likelihood continue to sprawl into the world’s most valuable biological territory. Additionally, when we look to each of these cities to see whether they have any planning that takes this destructive growth into account we find that an overwhelming majority do not. If landscape architecture is a profession as capable of reconciling conflicting land uses as it repeatedly claims then this map identifies places where that expertise is most needed. To be effective in this territory, landscape architects need to develop techniques of working in volatile peri-urban landscapes which are not typically administered through transparent, centralized planning mechanisms. But before we even consider the tools we might need and methods we might deploy in these landscapes, we need to actually be there! Which leads to the second map, ‘knowledge’.

---


2) Knowledge

Marked by green dots, this map shows the locations of the world’s current landscape architectural education programs. It also shows the nations who are members of the International Federation of Landscape Architecture (IFLA) and the locations of the administrative and field offices of the major conservation NGOs. These locations can be read against the shaded zones demarcating the world’s biodiversity hotspots. Whilst the profession and academy of landscape architecture has flourished over the course of the 20th and early 21st century, the map reveals the extremely uneven geographic distribution of landscape architectural education and a disconnection between where landscape architecture is taught, and where, from a biodiversity perspective, it is arguably needed most. The map also shows that the global conservation movement has organized itself geopolitically in a way that landscape architecture has not.

3) Action

The creation of knowledge is one thing but translating that knowledge into practice is quite another. Generally speaking, in the 20th and early 21st century the profession of landscape architecture has effectively translated design theory into practice in the urban contexts of the first world. It has been far less successful in translating large-scale planning theory, in particular M'cHarg's notion of stewardship, into a scale of practice commensurate with the planetary environmental issues of the times.

Alternatively, as this map showing all the major landscape restoration projects going on in the world today makes clear, the global conservation community is taking bold action to restore, rewild and reconnect fragmented ecosystems. Seen against the background of having already secured over 15 per cent of the world's terrestrial area as formally protected land, the global effort to implement major restoration projects - whilst not without its detractors and its problems- is by any measure an extraordinary achievement. Whilst communities have cared for certain landscapes in various ways throughout history, the scale and purpose of these connectivity projects is unprecedented and suggests that humanity is beginning to appreciate and attempt to manage the planet as a garden.

***

What these three maps suggest is that an expanded 21st century future for landscape architecture lies in tackling the structural dynamics of urban growth, building our educational capacity in the global south and aligning with the global conservation community on restoration projects of a planetary proportion.
15 September 2018

This article comes from Professor Richard Weller a member of IFLA Advisory Circle. IFLA’s Advisory circle members are experts in a range of topics. Professor Weller passes on his advice to IFLA members on Urban Growth.

Events from around the World: http://iflaonline.org/events/
Browse the latest job opportunities here: http://iflaonline.org/job-adverts/
Become a Friend of IFLA http://iflaonline.org/home/friends-of-ifla/
Support IFLA’s work here: http://iflaonline.org/sponsorship/donate/
why did I get this?
unsubscribe from this list
update subscription preferences