Plants and plantation as design material in contemporary landscape architecture

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Abstract

This paper aims to research the use of plantation as a design material in landscape architecture from the perspectives of practice, theory and research. Plantation is together with water and ground, one of the three classic design materials in landscape architecture. For ages, people have been using plantation as a material to make gardens, parks and landscapes. Although there is a lot of knowledge on this subject written down in articles and books, most of this knowledge is based on experience and is mostly in the 'heads of designers'. This is what we call 'implicit knowledge'.

The research question for this paper is how to make this 'implicit knowledge' explicit so that it can be used by a larger group of designers in day-to-day practice. The research approach and method in this paper consists mainly of the case study method and precedent analysis.

The case-study method is by now rather well known in disciplines design (Francis, 2001; Yin, 2003) and other research domains. Precedent analysis forms the core of the research methodology used in different case-studies in order to make them comparable. Precedent analysis is based on an explicit analytical framework, in this case it especially developed for use in landscape architecture.

The analysed projects are from Holland, all case studies are based on plans that have been designed and realised in the last part of the 20th century.

The conclusion of the research is primarily that plantation as design material can be applied at different levels of intervention each with specific criteria. Plantation plays a different role at each level of intervention, yet still being part of the landscape as a whole. The second point refers to the design process; it is important to define the goals for the use of plantation depending on the program, the site and the design idea in the very beginning of the design process. Finally, the results will make clear the sheer vastness of this rich source of plants and plantation as a design material.

Key words: plantation, design material, landscape architecture