

**Site Seeing:
Interpreting Site in Landscape Architecture**

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ABSTRACT

In landscape architecture, sites are commonly portrayed as being the inspiration behind practitioners' ideas; lending a sense of legitimacy to projects seeking to connect people and place, and strengthening local identity by 'coming from the site'. In landscape design theory, a site's history, genius loci (spirit of place) and its physical and cultural contexts are considered to be highly significant shapers of material form in contemporary landscape architecture. Furthermore, professional practice renders the site survey as an exercise in data-gathering and/or as searching for the site's 'je ne sais quoi'. Students are encouraged to conduct these investigations neutrally and objectively before any analysis or interpretation.

Such conceptions appear to rob novice designers of the confidence in their own decisions because they presume the site must 'tell' them what to do. Primarily benefiting students and early-career practitioners, the thesis challenges established ways of understanding and working with sites, as revealed through the embedded knowledge and expertise of experienced designers. It is an investigation into the circumstances and motivations that shape how landscape architects interpret sites and make design decisions, applicable to education and career-development.

A pilot study of 109 award-winning landscape schemes and twenty four in-depth interviews demonstrates how sites are interpreted in light of a complex web of factors and ideas, and not simply 'known' through surveys or consulting the genius loci. It shows that the ideas, experience and knowledge brought to each landscape project are key to a landscape architect's creativity. The study also reveals that sites are interpreted collaboratively, and that stakeholders have very different ideas about sites, all of which can impact working relationships and design decisions. Communication and listening are found to be key factors in professional practice. This research acknowledges the professional importance of the genius loci but reframes it as a name for the process of interpretation and decision-making undertaken by practitioners, based on their skills, knowledge and experience.

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PART ONE

Part	Chapter	
	1	Does Site Matter?
	2	Professional Practice
1	3	Theorising Site
	4	Operationalising the study: Journey, Questions and Method
	5	Delving Deep into Site
2	6	Results A Landscape Architecture Way of Seeing
	7	Whose Site is it Anyway?
3	8	Site Seeing: Contextualising the Findings
4	9	Interpreting Site: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

1

Does Site Matter?

“For the disciplines and professions concerned with design of the physical environment,
site matters.”

(Burns and Kahn 2005: viii)

Site matters in landscape architecture because it constitutes the principal environment of the discipline. It is variously thought of as the forum in which we operate, the profession’s muse, the material with which we sculpt, or the canvas onto which we paint. The intrinsic value of site to landscape architecture is such that our abilities in “site-reading and editing” were acknowledged by Meyer as “establishing landscape architecture as a discipline separate from architecture, engineering, and horticulture” (2005: 94). In practice, the site benefits from all manner of close inspections: from survey to analysis, through design to construction, the site is at the forefront of the landscape architect’s mind. This does not however, mean that it is well-explored or understood.

The manner in which practitioners, policy-makers, students, teachers, clients and financiers understand and conceptualise site apparently “exerts a powerful force in design” (Burns and Kahn 2005: xv). This thesis responds to Burns and Kahn who call for “an articulate comprehension of site” (2005: viii), by examining the disparity between site’s importance in landscape architecture and its habitual and simplistic definition as “an area of ground” (Christensen 2005: 336). Without denying the prosaic understanding of site, this thesis looks beyond technical concerns about “the site’s physical fabric, its context and configuration” (Moore 2010: 76) which customarily occupies much of the discipline’s discourse. This focus on technology

hinders the need to address the fundamental question ‘*what is site?*’ at a time when the profession’s profile as one concerned with bold, forward-thinking ideas, artistic practice and the creation of thoughtfully-designed places is being actively encouraged.

Landscape architecture tends to be split into theory and practice: with the former examining individual subjects (the *genius loci* for example) without exploring how they affect actual design decisions; and the latter focusing on general practice as if all landscape architects were a homogeneous group. The strength of the discipline lies in its diversity and subtle complexity because this demonstrates a thriving and dynamic profession which is seeking out opportunities, and is responsive to shifts in societal, cultural, artistic and political landscapes.

Recognising the environmental, economic, political and cultural value of the landscape, the Landscape Institute – governing body of the profession in the UK – have put much effort into promoting the discipline’s role as the keystone in the industries connected with the landscape (see LI 2011b, 2012c). Partly due to the ratification of the European Landscape Convention, landscape is on the socio-political agenda. Influential thinkers such as Sir Terry Farrell acknowledge that:

“the design and stewardship of landscape is valued as much as, if not more than, buildings. In towns and cities throughout the country, it is the streets and pavements that are most highly valued ... These priorities are often completely the reverse for the development community and built environment professionals ... it is aspects like the heights of buildings and their style and appearance that have become the big issue. I can count on one hand the number of [Design Review] panels where landscape and the ground plane became the passionate focus for debate”.

(Farrell 2014a: 14)

It is therefore crucial that we have the best tools with which to help shape discourse, policy and practice. This means that we have to be clear about the link between site and landscape and not simply rely on inherited norms and unquestioned assumptions.

Landscape is defined by the Council of Europe (2000) as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. The significant detail in this definition is that landscape is a human construct, and as such, landscape does not exist apart from human consciousness expressed through culture. *Landscape* is different from ‘the land’ and encompasses the richness of accrued relationships between nature and humanity. If an expansive term such as *landscape* exists within the professional arsenal, why does *site* need to be similarly stretched? Why can’t *site* remain as a Cartesian locale, the physical location within which landscape architects practice, and allow *landscape* to carry the torch for the inspiration and creativity of landscape architecture?

The key to this issue lies within the practice of the discipline. Although the profession is called *landscape* architecture, and, at its best, practitioners do indeed engage with landscape in its fullest meaning, there is a sense in which the landscape needs to be captured and brought onto the drawing board or computer screen. It is at this point that landscape becomes site so that the work of a landscape architect can be related to a specific area and a specific brief. In a sense, *landscape* architecture becomes *site* architecture. Acknowledging that landscape and site are closely linked, this thesis argues that, just like landscape, site is a social or cultural construct, and expanding the work of Moore (2010), is not a neutrally objective entity which we can supposedly observe from a detached point of view. In seeking to address the relationships between theory and practice, the research will draw on three contextual sources: academic literature; professional guidance and policy literature; and the experiences of practising professionals.

This thesis examines how landscape architects interpret site by exploring the factors which shape how they see and understand a site, and show how these factors impact their design decisions. Interviewing practising landscape architects and a selection of collaborating stakeholders, it aims to demonstrate that landscape architects have particular ways of seeing site that reflect the inherent contextual complexity of the discipline. The literature dealing with professional practice in landscape architecture focuses on the technicalities of the profession and rarely

addresses the impact of working relationships on how site is interpreted and design decisions are made. Uncovering what Burns and Kahn label “tacit knowledge about site in design” (2005: xiv), it is anticipated that this study will reveal and make connections between this knowledge and the implications it has for how we understand and work with sites.

Cosgrove suggests that “landscape is a way of seeing the world” (1998: 13) whereby different groups have “framed themselves and their relationships with both the land and with other human groups” (ibid: xiv), uniting groups of people around a common understanding and shared outlook. When examining how landscape architects seek to understand a particular site, is it possible that they are demonstrating – to misquote Cosgrove – a “landscape *architecture* way of seeing the world” which is particular to the profession? The site survey is the primary way that landscape architects ‘get to know’ a site, and this thesis locates the traditional site survey as a “way of seeing” that is a vitally important aspect in the process of understanding a site. In this study, a ‘landscape architecture way of seeing’ is an interpretative perspective based on the expertise manifest through a specific discipline.

A number of key terms used in this thesis are explained below:

Construct/Construction	In an industry concerned with the building and construction of landscape schemes, it is important to differentiate building-construction from social, cultural and relational constructs. Following Burns and Kahn (2005, et al.), this thesis proposes that site is a construct inseparable from human comprehension in the same way that landscape is described by the Council of Europe (2000). The action of building-construction will be made obvious where relevant.
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Way of seeing	After Cosgrove (1998), this term describes how a group of people (landscape architects in this thesis) comprehend, articulate and approach a subject.
Site-seeing	Following on from the above, this term is used as a way of conveying an approach to site from the perspective of an individual or group (of landscape architects).

Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into four parts as set out below (figure 1.1). Part one, of which this introduction is the first chapter, sets the context of the study and includes the literature review and methodology. Part two sets out the results of the research in sequential and iterative stages, and part three draws the research together for discussion. Completing the research is part four which outlines its conclusions together with recommendations for theory, practice and education.

Figure 1.1 Thesis structure

Part	Chapter	
1	1	Does Site Matter?
	2	Professional Practice
	3	Theorising Site
	4	Operationalising the study: Journey, Questions and Method
2	5	Delving Deep into Site
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	7	Whose Site is it Anyway?
3	8	Site Seeing: Contextualising the Findings
4	9	Interpreting Site: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

Part 1

Following this introduction (chapter 1), chapter 2 sets this study within landscape architecture's professional context. Drawing on the literature which governs the professional practice and education of the discipline, this chapter outlines the key concerns which shape landscape architecture and influence how we understand and work with site. It gives an overview of the profession, locating this study primarily within landscape design and demonstrating that site is customarily 'known' through the lens of certain standardised assessment tools.

Chapter 3 is an examination of the wider inter-disciplinary literature pertinent to the study. The chapter starts with an exploration of three inter-connected terms which frame the study of site and shows how their similarities and differences add to the complexity and ambiguity of site as a subject of enquiry. Drawing on discourses from architecture, urban design and geography, as well as the academic enquiry associated with landscape architectural theory, this chapter examines a number of different theoretical approaches to site and shows how their constituent parts impact landscape architectural practice. The remainder of this review focuses on ways that landscape architects interact with site as part of their professional practice, establishing how the site survey is based on particular ways of seeing site.

Chapter 4 begins with a narrative of the research journey associated with this thesis. It shows how the project began and how it developed over the course of a number of years into its current form. The research questions associated with this study are set out and explained, before attention turns to the methods used to address the investigation. This part of the chapter begins by situating this research in a Pragmatic, interpretative framework of enquiry, building upon that of Moore (2010). A phased approach to the research is outlined, beginning with a pilot study which led into three sets of interviews. The focus of each set of interviews was directed at unlocking further insights from the previous phase of research in an iterative process designed to deepen knowledge and follow specific threads of

enquiry. The chapter details the methods used to select interview candidates, conduct the interviews and analyse the subsequent data.

Part 2

Part two is divided into three chapters covering each stage of this research's data-gathering phase. Chapter 5 begins with a brief report on the pilot study which set the scene for this research project and revealed that professionals' understandings of site required further investigation. The results of this pilot study are detailed in Appendix 1. The remainder of chapter 5 sets out the results from interviews with five high-profile designers who have worked with historical landscape interpretation. Demonstrating that site-history cannot be viewed in isolation from other aspects of site which also influence design decisions, these findings lead directly to the instigation of the second set outlined in chapter 6. In this next chapter, fourteen interviewees are asked about how they 'get to know' a site by focusing on a number of key factors as revealed in the literature review. To conclude this study, chapter 7 explores the influence and impact of different stakeholders on how landscape architects interpret site and make design decisions within four landscape projects. Together with the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3, all of the data gathered in part two of the study is read, analysed and investigated iteratively and forms the basis for the discussion set out in part three.

Part 3

In chapter 8, the findings from parts 1 and 2 are drawn together with particular emphasis on demonstrating how the situations in theory and practice inform one another. Beginning with an exploration of the conceptual basis of what we mean by site in landscape architecture, this research shows how practitioners' ways of seeing site are at odds with the simplistic portrayals of site in much of the technical literature. The chapter turns to look at how site is a construct rather than a neutrally objective entity, before showing how landscape architecture can be understood as a particular way of seeing which informs our ideas of, and responses

to, a site. Finally, the discussion examines how communication within working relationships is seen as a key component in the conception and interpretation of a site within landscape architecture.

Part 4

Chapter 9 brings the findings of this research project together, drawing conclusions which relate to the research questions which are briefly set out below. These conclusions show how the understanding and interpretation of site in practice differs from that outlined in the technical literature, as well as demonstrating how some of the more fecund conceptions of site found in the academic discourse relate to professional practice. Finally, recommendations are made with specific reference to enabling students to more fully explore sites within the context of design studio projects.

Research Questions

The research journey (chapter 4.1) outlines how the evolving course of this study has developed, resulting in these questions set out below. That same chapter also sets out the questions more fully (4.2), with an explanation of the rationale and aims which underpin them. In this chapter, they are simply introduced as:

- How does site shape landscape architects' design decisions?
- What factors affect how landscape architects interpret site?
- How do these factors impact design decisions and outcomes?

2

Professional Perspective

This chapter explores the contexts which shape landscape architecture and how these in turn influence how we understand and work with sites. The history and development of landscape architecture shows how approaches to the discipline have changed over time and how current site-thinking sits atop accrued layers of thought and practice. Following a brief historical overview, this chapter focuses on two contemporary documents which set the context for the profession in the UK and how these guide how we understand 'site'. The remainder of this chapter examines what the Landscape Institute (the UK profession's governing body; responsible for the Royal Chartership and for accrediting university courses and professional development of landscape architects in the UK) decrees as being essential for all landscape architects to be taught. This gives a base-line for the industry – showing what is important to the profession – and in doing, shapes our understandings of, and approaches to, sites.

2.1 Historical perspective

“Landscape architects create places where people can live, work and relax and they create places where plants and animals can thrive.”

(www.iwanttobealandscapearchitect.com)

This definition could easily apply to the common endeavour of settlement and civilisation of humanity in all its variety, insofar as seeing all those engaged in shaping the surface of the earth in ages past as architects of the land (Jellicoe and Jellicoe 1998). The archaeological record shows that over time the land has been

variously shaped for agriculture, religion or ceremony, trade, habitation or to demonstrate power and/or wealth. The creation of private gardens or paradises as pleasure grounds for the wealthy upper echelons of society broadly differed from other land-shaping because skilled designers were employed to alter the land on behalf of their clients rather than the populace shaping the land for their own, often prosaic or functional, requirements. These specialist land-shapers were the forerunners of landscape architects, and their single-minded endeavours the origins of landscape architecture (Jellicoe and Jellicoe 1998, Thompson 2014). From this perspective, the term 'site' is synonymous with 'location' and can be understood as a locus for humanity's numerous and varied endeavours, whether they be based on culture, power, wealth, ownership, ritual, religion or conflict.

According to Jellicoe and Jellicoe (1998) and Thompson (2014) it is generally agreed that landscape architecture had its roots as a recognisable discipline in Europe as it flowed from the fashionable large-scale land-shaping projects amongst the European elite during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, typified by the works of André Le Nôtre (1613-1700) in France or Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783) in England. Later, these emerging principles of landscape design began to be employed for the public good, such as Joseph Paxton's (1803-1865) design for Birkenhead Park. These more egalitarian roots spread to the United States in the nineteenth century where they were famously taken up by Fredrick Law Olmstead (1822-1903) and Calvert Vaux (1824-1895) who, according to Thompson (2014: 1), were the first to describe themselves as landscape architects in their 1858 design for New York's Central Park. Each of these early pioneers saw the notion of site differently. For example, at Versailles, Le Nôtre sought to overcome the site's considerable physical challenges as a way of demonstrating his client's (Louis XIV) – absolute monarchical power and authority. In contrast, Paxton saw the site in more democratic terms, as an opportunity to ameliorate man's degradation of nature and to provide open public access (Jellicoe & Jellicoe 1998).

With increasing numbers of practitioners specialising in "shaping the places in which we live and work" (Thompson 2014: ix), the worldwide formalisation of

landscape architecture as a distinct discipline began in the United States with the establishment of the American Association of Landscape Architects in 1899, and the Institute of Landscape Architects (now the Landscape Institute) in the United Kingdom in 1929 (Thompson 2014). With increasing pace, over the last century the number of nations across the world with similarly established professional bodies has risen to stand at 70 according to statistics from the International Federation of Landscape Architects (figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 National Delegates of the International Federation of Landscape Architects.



(<http://iflaonline.org/organisation/executive-council/>)

2.2 Landscape architecture in context

As landscape architecture has become increasingly professionalised and internationalised, so certain central tenets have emerged which impact how site is understood and interpreted at a local level. Each of the national bodies (fig. 2.1) represents the coalition of landscape architects around a common core, but it is important to note that the particular context and expression of the discipline varies from nation to nation. Thompson notes that “in some countries, landscape architecture is taught in association with horticulture, agriculture or gardening. In

others it's the bedfellow of architecture, planning and urban design. Elsewhere, it may be found in a school of forestry or environmental sciences" (2014: 12). Within this diversity there is a common core of minimum requirements for the achievement of professional recognition. Such requirements, although interpreted differently according to nation, institution and area of expertise, nevertheless give a basis to those areas deemed vital to the discipline and therefore to how site might be understood (see EFLA & ECLAS 2012, Landscape Institute 2012b, QAA 2007 for details).

The diverse and inter-disciplinary nature of landscape architecture means that it contributes to – and is impacted by – a whole spectrum of concerns. Within the UK this inter-activity is seen most clearly in two relatively recent initiatives: The European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe 2000), and The Farrell Review (Farrell 2014).

The European Landscape Convention

"'Landscape' should not be the exclusive preserve of specialist scientific and technical bodies. When members of the public are able to take responsibility for what happen in the landscape and influence their surroundings, they can reinforce local/regional identity and distinctiveness, leading to greater individual, social and cultural fulfilment."

(<http://www.landscapeinstitute.org/policy/EuropeanLandscapeConvention.php>)

[viewed 30/9/2014]

The ratification and interpretation of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in the UK – as demonstrated by the Landscape Institute's response, above – clearly reflects what is important to the profession within its societal, cultural and economic contexts. According to the Landscape Institute, in the UK, the ELC "provides a people-centred and forward-looking way to reconcile environmental management with the socio-economic challenges of the 21st century and to help people and communities re-connect with place" (ibid). In landscape architecture, this is manifest when designers look carefully at a site and its residents to

understand and provide evidence of how an identity has built up over time so that this identity can be used to connect people and place. In this sense, the site is seen as a smaller component-part or a segment of a larger landscape to which current attention is directed for the purposes of understanding and unlocking a unique local identity as perceived by human-kind.

The Farrell Report

This report, an “industry-wide review of architecture and the built environment” (Berman 2014) was commissioned in 2013 by Ed Vaizey, the Minister for Culture, Communications and the Creative Industries, to examine how these industries might best respond to the increasing pace of change and scope of development within the built environment over the next twenty years and beyond (Farrell 2014a). The report cements the role of landscape architecture within the context of a “holistic way of viewing the built environment” (Farrell 2014b: 3) under the acronym PLACE (Planning, Landscape, Architecture, Conservation and Engineering). The Landscape Institute’s response to the Farrell Report suggested that achieving high standards of design within the built environment “requires a thorough understanding of a site’s social, economic and environmental characteristics i.e. its landscape context” (Landscape Institute 2013d: 7). Expanding the Farrell Report, which identifies the importance of the built environment’s cultural heritage to a society and its identity, the Landscape Institute asserts that it is also “landscape, spaces, places, views, vistas, landmarks, routes, boundaries, geological and manmade features [which] give places their character and helps to define their local distinctiveness” (Landscape Institute 2013d: 11).

In responding to this report, the Landscape Institute clarifies how landscape architects contribute to the PLACE context by understanding and approaching sites thus:

“Designers, including architects and landscape architects, are trained to start by assessing the context and local character of the site, the quality of the natural environment and the contribution of historical and landscape

features to the 'sense of place'. Good designers will take the best from the past and make good use of existing resources and assets on a site, to create development that is sustainable.”

(Landscape Institute 2013d: 12-13)

Both of these documents show how individual sites are seen as part of a larger, culturally-valued landscape context which contributes to people's sense of identity.

2.3 Educating professional landscape architects

The Farrell report identifies the importance of cross-disciplinary education, recommending a common first-year curriculum for all built-environment students (Farrell 2014b). At the time of writing, the education of landscape architects is geared towards the requirement to work towards Chartership set out by the Landscape Institute (Landscape Institute 2012 a & b and 2013b), and as such, this part of the chapter examines the core aspects of the discipline as defined by the Landscape Institute and used as the basis for all LI accredited higher education courses in the UK. It is important to acknowledge the existence of an alternative set of requirements whose impact on the UK profession's education is as yet untested, but which may be taken on-board by the Landscape Institute depending on whether commonality with European institutions becomes necessary or desirable in the future. The *Minimum Requirements for European Landscape Architectural Studies to Qualify for Professional Recognition* drawn up by EFLA (European Federation for Landscape Architecture) and ECLAS (European Council for Landscape Architecture Schools) suggests that landscape architecture students “have knowledge, understanding and abilities in 5 areas:

1. Landscape Architectural Practice
2. Theory and Precedent
3. Technology and Sustainability
4. Physical, Ecological, Social and Cultural Processes

5. Professional Ethics and Values”

(EFLA & ECLAS 2012)

Although these areas of ‘knowledge, understanding and abilities’ are structured differently to the Landscape Institute’s curriculum and Chartership syllabi, there is much commonality and agreement of content, approach and ethos across all examples. This chapter will therefore focus solely on the Landscape Institute’s documentation because it remains as the official pathway through landscape architectural education and Chartership in the UK.

The LI is very clear in all of its documentation that there is “diversity of landscape as a profession and as a discipline” and encourages each accredited university programme to “have its own clear identity and emphasis” (Landscape Institute 2012a: 9). This thesis is written from within the context of Birmingham City University’s accredited landscape architecture programme and so the focus of this chapter on the Landscape Institute’s *core requirements* – rather than “its academic interpretation” (LI 2012d: 9) – gives a clearer picture of what landscape architecture students are taught across the UK. What we teach our students is a reflection of the concerns of the discipline as it interacts with, and addresses, the wider socio-political context of today’s world, and thus also contributes to our ideas about site.

2.3.1 Landscape architecture’s key components (according to the Landscape Institute)

“Attempts to define the discipline usually fail... Most of them are prolix and wordy, trying to capture all of the assorted activities in which landscape architects are engaged.”

(Thompson 2014: 23)

According to the Landscape Institute, landscape architecture can be understood as an umbrella term for a spectrum of interrelated and overlapping specialties which

include “all aspects of the science, planning, design, implementation and management of landscape and their environment in urban and rural areas” (Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered). The Landscape Institute outlines the scope of the discipline in its document *Landscape Architecture: elements and areas of practice; An Educational Framework* (Landscape Institute 2012b). This publication sets out to “inform the LI’s educational processes by describing what is involved in the day to day chartered practice of landscape architecture and the main broad areas of practice in the profession” (un-numbered) and can thus be taken as a guide to the core aspects of the discipline, namely: landscape design; landscape management; landscape planning; landscape science and urban design.

Within the industry there are practices and individuals who specialise in one of these areas and others whose portfolios cover multiple aspects. This research is primarily concerned with landscape (and urban) design but it is important to understand the other areas of practice as they influence the overall structure and foundation of the discipline, and in turn how this shapes practitioners’ understanding of and approach to site.

Landscape Design

“The world is moving into a phase when landscape design may well be recognised as the most comprehensive of the arts.”

(Jellicoe and Jellicoe 1998: 7)

Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe make a significant observation about the discipline by highlighting a subtle distinction between landscape *design* and landscape *architecture*. Landscape *design* is sometimes used as a way of distinguishing this aspect of the practice from its other components (planning, management and science), and sometimes because it is a more readily understood term in everyday parlance. In the UK, landscape architecture is generally introduced as “an aesthetically based profession” (Holden and Liversedge 2014: 8) and so landscape *design* has a more immediate connection with the individual sites that make up our towns, cities and countryside because they can be seen and experienced every day.

The Landscape Institute defines this area of practice thus:

“Landscape design is the holistic process of shaping the natural and built environment to create desirable places for people to live, work and play and environments for plants and animals to thrive.”

(Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered)

Formative concepts of site through landscape design

The design of the landscape as a reflection of the trends, concerns, policies, beliefs and economies of a culture, shifts over time and from place to place. A striking example of these shifts in approach and attitude can be seen in the near contemporaneous dichotomy between the English poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and the French landscape architect André Le Nôtre (1613-1700). In England, Pope wrote of the desire to emulate nature; for the landscape architect’s work to blend into the scenery thus, “He gains all points who pleasingly confounds, surprises, varies, and conceals the bounds” (Jellicoe and Jellicoe 1998: 233). In stark contrast, across the Channel at Versailles, Le Nôtre sought to dominate nature, to demonstrate man’s control over the natural world through the imposition of a tightly controlled formality over nature’s wild informality, described by Jellicoe and Jellicoe (1998: 188) as “the most splendid expression of absolute monarchy in history”. This dichotomy in approach – between *blending in with* a site versus *standing out from* a site – has been part of the landscape design discourse ever since, with practitioners and academics variously arguing for gradations between one or other position.

Pope’s approach still appears to be the predominant position in landscape design:

“the traditional way of working with landscape spaces is to ‘consult the genius of the place’ as Alexander Pope put it – that is to soak up the natural atmosphere of the locale and somehow to work with it, designing in tandem with what might be considered the presiding spirit of the place, atmosphere or space-flavour”

(Richardson 2008: 34).

Along with Pope's *genius loci*, the other enduring approach to landscape design is Ian McHarg's (1920-2001) influential *ecological method*. This approach is based on the surveying and mapping of all the different components of a site; geological, historical, cultural, biological etc. and the layering of this mapped data to build up a picture of the site to provide an empirical basis for design decisions. McHarg called his method "the sine qua non for all landscape architecture" (McHarg 1967: 41). Later developments of this approach were known under the acronym SAD (Survey Analysis Design).

Pope and McHarg's focus on basing design decisions on what is found within the existing site would, at first glance, appear to have extinguished the type of blank-canvas transformation typified by Le Nôtre at Versailles. However, on closer inspection, today's landscape designers recognise that each shares a common concern – that of *identity* (see Butina-Watson & Bentley 2007, Dixon-Hunt 2014, Thompson 2000 et al.). The former approach seeks to maintain an existing identity through the appropriation of a site's existing character, whilst the latter seeks to create a new identity in contrast to the found conditions. Whilst it is rare to find examples at the extreme ends of either side of this dichotomy, most contemporary landscape design projects pursue a balance between respecting the existing site's context and creating a new (or improved) identity.

In the UK, the Landscape Institute broadly acknowledges this by proposing that landscape designers "reflect the identity and quality of place while meeting the current and future needs of stakeholders in a sustainable and aesthetically coherent way" (Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered). This desire to find a balance between the existing and the new is evident in many of the UK's landscape practices, who promote their design approach as, for example:

"Our ethos is to achieve our client's aspirations by using the inherent qualities of each site to maximise opportunities for positive and imaginative solutions."

(http://www.allenscott.co.uk/practice_profile.html)

[viewed 23/6/14]

“We seek to reveal the essence of the place, interpret and manifest this in the physical design of the environment.”

(<http://iteriad.com/cumbria-landscape-architects-leading-the-creative-thinking-process>)

[viewed 23/6/14]

Even those practitioners who Richardson identifies as “revel[ling] in the heretical notion that their designs might erase or overlay all traces of what has gone before” (2008: 35), such as Martha Schwartz or Tony Heywood (ibid), are actively and carefully assessing the existing site in order to look for and create identity. Martha Schwartz describes her own ideas about how a site’s conditions influence design decisions:

“to decipher what the image should be for an individual project, a community or even a city – one that is unique to that particular place, that is strong enough to create an identity, and most importantly, will be embraced by the public.”

(<http://www.marthaschwartz.com/about/philosophy.php>) [viewed 23/6/14].

Some projects exist in a context which already has a strong, positive and sustainable identity and so an approach of ‘fitting in’ is deemed appropriate; whereas other projects may exist in a context where the identity is deemed to be somehow lacking. For example in places that have “become more homogenised” Schwartz suggests that “there is an increasing need to create a new or enhanced identity that differentiates neighbourhoods or cities” (ibid). The built-form of a project is the interpretation of a designer’s response to the context of a site and the needs of the client and end-users.

Those engaged in landscape design might also undertake other activities relating to a site in a specific context, such as:

- Feasibility studies, site appraisals and written reports and recommendations.
- Coordinating and conducting community and stakeholder consultation.

- Developing design solutions and proposals with illustrations and models as appropriate.
- Participating in the tendering process, contract administration, site inspections, specifying materials.
- Managing contracts and projects.
- Contributing to public inquiries and acting as an expert witness.

(Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered)

Landscape Planning

“Landscape planning is concerned with the development of policies, strategies and practical interventions in landscape at the large-scale and is a form of spatial environmental planning where there is a major emphasis on sustainability. It is an integrating activity that deals with the many interacting factors – physical, natural and social/cultural – that together shape landscapes over time.”

(Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) 2007:2-3)

In essence, landscape planning is the strategic arm of landscape architecture, assessing and resolving “environmental, economic and social opportunities and constraints relevant to areas of landscape interest and take these into account in addressing a landscape’s potential and capacity to accommodate change”

(Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered). To some degree, all design projects undertaken by a landscape architect will adopt this approach, which influences how landscape architects understand and work with sites in other aspects of their work. This is most clearly seen when surveying a site to assess its potential for future development and intervention.

Landscape planning and landscape design overlap when projects are “concerned with master planning at a large-scale” (QAA 2007: 3). Taken as an activity in its own right however, landscape planning is largely concerned with the gathering and application of knowledge; frequently in the form of data. Thompson (2014: 100-101) charts the history of landscape planning, beginning with the Romantic and

Transcendental movements which sought to preserve nature from the ever-encroaching effects of urbanisation. The initial consequences of this movement in landscape planning was “the notion of the designated and protected landscape and, specifically, of the national park” (Thompson 2014: 100). The need to control development meant it was necessary to properly understand the landscape to assess its suitability for different types of activity. Ian McHarg – introduced above – led the way in developing a systematic, data-led procedure for landscape assessment and planning.

“Known as ‘landscape suitability analysis’ or sometimes just as ‘sieve mapping’, the technique he developed involved layering information on acetate sheets. So, for example, in considering the optimal route for a new highway, McHarg would combine layers showing the engineering properties of the substrates with layers showing productive soils, significant wildlife habitats, important cultural sites, and so on. When these were combined, it was the areas which were clearest of symbols that were the better areas in which to construct the road.”

(Thompson 2014: 102)

This approach and its associated tools, along with their later developments, are now pervasive within landscape architecture as a way of gathering information, analysing sites and adding weight to decision-making processes. McHarg’s technique was an early forerunner of GIS (Geographical Information Systems) which rely on the collection and manipulation of data overlaid or combined with computerised map or satellite data. It is rare that the all-encompassing positivistic approach of McHarg’s method is used as the only, or even primary decision-making tool in landscape architecture, but its importance and lasting influence on how we ‘get to know’ a site, is hard to ignore.

Along with this scientific tool, landscape architects also use a number of qualitative assessments as a way of planning for change and development with “particular emphasis on the assessment of the scenic/aesthetic, recreational, environmental and economic values attached to landscape” (QAA 2007: 3). Those most commonly used by landscape architects are the LCA (Landscape Character Assessment), EIA

(Environmental Impact Assessment) and LVIA (Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment).

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

“... a process by which the identification, prediction and evaluation of the key environmental effects of a development are undertaken and by which the information gathered is used to reduce likely negative effects during the design of the project and then to inform the decision-making process.”

(Landscape Institute & Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
2002: 3)

Environmental Impact Assessments form part of the statutory UK and EU planning processes but are only normally required in certain specific cases where development is likely to pose a significant impact on the environment. Such developments might range in scale from transport infrastructure, waste-processing or power-generation, some large-scale leisure or tourism facilities, some of the heavy industries such as metal working or chemical processing and even large premises dealing with food production or manufacture (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/1824/contents/made> and <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/environmental-impact-assessment/>) [viewed 9/7/2014].

The aim of these assessments is “to protect the environment by ensuring that a local planning authority when deciding whether to grant planning permission for a project, which is likely to have significant effects on the environment, does so in the full knowledge of the likely significant effects and takes this into account in the decision making process.”

(<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/environmental-impact-assessment/the-purpose-of-environmental-impact-assessment/>) [viewed 9/7/2014].

This is a clearly-defined example of how landscape architects take responsibility for providing solutions (whether through design, planning, management – or more likely a combination thereof) which meet the often conflicting needs of numerous and diverse stakeholders including clients, the public and the natural world.

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

"The tool that is used to help us to understand, and articulate, the character of the landscape. It helps us identify the features that give a locality its 'sense of place' and pinpoints what makes it different from neighbouring areas."

(<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/englands/character/assessment/>)

[viewed 24/6/2014]

This tool is frequently used to assess large tracts of land such as those administered by county or city councils, in national parks or on large-scale infrastructure projects which pass through many different areas with distinct characters. As has been mentioned above, the character or identity of a landscape is an important element in contemporary landscape architecture and this commonly used assessment tool gives a framework within which these distinctive identities are routinely assessed and highlighted. Whilst not all practising landscape architects will carry out Landscape Character Assessments, the principle of assessing a site to ascertain what gives it its distinctive identity is common to all aspects of contemporary landscape architecture. Indeed, the 'sense of place' referred to above (also called 'spirit of place' or its Latin equivalent 'genius loci') is seen by many within the profession as a cornerstone of landscape architecture (Holden & Liversedge 2014, Thompson 2014 et al.). LCAs provide a body of evidence to ensure development decisions are made which take into account the specific local conditions so that any changes (including those overseen by landscape architects) maintain and/or strengthen local identity and character.

The kinds of assessment set out above necessitate that the landscape is surveyed, comprehended and described in particular ways in order to meet the necessary statutory remits they are designed to fulfil. Along with other ways of seeing the landscape (and individual sites), such techniques give a structure to the ways that landscape architects 'get to know' a site. The various sets of criteria associated with these assessment tools mean that practitioners are directed (and required) to focus their attention onto a limited number of each landscape or site's attributes; and consequently overlook a place's many other aspects or qualities. This has the effect that sites (and whole landscapes) are only seen, valued and understood through a relatively narrow set of norms which reflect very particular socio-political contexts.

Landscape Management

“Landscape management is the care of land to ensure that landscapes can fulfil needs and aspirations in an effective and sustainable manner for present and future communities of users.”

(Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered)

Landscape management has very many overlaps with landscape planning and design, particularly where “management of the landscape is an essential means of achieving design aims and objectives” (QAA 2007: 3). In practice, projects that contain an element of design and construction will almost always contain elements of planning and management, and it would be difficult to separate the different parts of a project and assign them to one or other of these labels. Broadly speaking, landscape management is concerned with the three main phases of project (planning for a project, implementation and post-completion). These phases are frequently fluid and are not always easy to separate in practice, but are useful to explore on paper as a way of showing how different elements of landscape management fit within an overall process. Firstly, landscape management will focus on the phase leading up to any landscape intervention which normally takes the form of some type of site assessment – such as those described above – along with a number of proposals based on the landscape architect's area of expertise. This detailed work, which may include elements such as the preparation of budgets and

costing, and guidance on the adherence of relevant policies, will lay the foundation for decision-making in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders (Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered).

Once the appropriate decisions have been made, landscape management moves into its second phase: to plan for and manage the process of change. This may involve giving advice on restoration schemes or other management-based solutions such as ecological conservation or long-term community involvement. Landscape management at this stage of a project may take the form of written reports or advice produced by a landscape architect for other stakeholders to follow, or may involve the landscape architect themselves taking an active part in the on-going management of the project, depending on the type and scale of the scheme (Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered).

The final phase of a landscape project is to plan for the management of the scheme post-completion. This is especially important in landscape architecture because a landscape will continue to develop and mature and will need careful and continual management in order to assure its continuing success. As part of the development of a project, landscape architects will try to ensure that provision is made for the continuing maintenance of the project once it is handed over to the client. Details of a scheme's future requirements will form part of the documentation prepared at earlier stages of a project. Occasionally, the landscape architect is able to retain a long-term input into the management of a project as part of their contract.

Landscape Science

“Landscape science is the application of environmental and ecological expertise in the assessment, analysis and resolution of practical landscape issues, and in the enhancement of the landscape.”

(Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered)

Landscape science has significant overlaps with the other elements of landscape architectural practice as outlined in the QAA's *Subject Benchmark Statement*:

“Landscape science is a vital element in environmental impact assessment, landscape character assessment, master planning, management and creative elements of habitat creation, mixing science with design.”

(QAA 2007: 3)

The key concerns of landscape science are also shared by professionals such as ecologists, conservationists, geologists and foresters who specialise in specific aspects of the landscape. Whilst some of the work categorised as landscape science may not be conducted by a chartered landscape architect, some landscape architects may, in addition to their design or planning work, have the training (and in some cases licences) needed to conduct the more specialist types of surveys, assessments and studies (such as bird, bat or amphibian habitat surveys) as part of a larger scheme. In other cases this type of work is out-sourced to a consultant. Where there is overlap with these other professions, landscape architects’ knowledge, experience and practice are widened, just as their understanding-of and approach-to site is also shaped by exposure to other disciplines’ way of thinking and working.

The Landscape Institute guides debate and policy on areas of concern which affect the landscape, such as climate change, sustainable urban water systems, green infrastructure and public health. Landscape science plays an important role in each of these areas, and landscape architects use their design, planning, management and scientific expertise to find solutions to these contemporary issues.

Urban Design

“Urban design is the process of shaping the physical setting for life in cities, towns and villages. It involves both the art of ‘placemaking’ and the science of creating urban form which is fit for purpose.”

(Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered)

Much of the work undertaken by landscape architects is done in an urban setting and it has, according to Waterman, become “increasingly common for landscape architects to specialise in urban design and to call themselves urban designers”

(2009: 176). Waterman goes on to assert that “urban design is a discipline rather than a profession (2009:176), which is echoed by Thompson who recognises that “to practise as an urban designer one generally needs to be qualified in one of the related professions – perhaps landscape architecture” (2014: 110). These ‘related professions’ might also be either architecture or urban planning (ibid) and thus the perspective brought to urban design will reflect the practitioners’ distinct background as well as any subsequent specialist training in urban design. Reflecting on his own teaching experience, Thompson suggests that “the differences between landscape architecture and urban design are largely a matter of perspective... the urban designers’ inclination was to fill [an existing open space] with buildings, amongst which would be a smattering of small parks and urban squares. The landscape architecture students tended towards the opposite direction, scattering a few buildings amid large tracts of open space” (2014: 111). Whereas landscape architecture tends towards a more holistic outlook which also encompasses the natural world, urban design tends towards a human-centric approach;

“...urban design is for and about people... the significance of ‘place’”
(Carmona and Tiesdell 2007: 1)

Despite these apparent differences in perspective, there is a fundamental principle that underpins both urban design and landscape design; that of place-making (Farrell 2014).

Whilst it is unclear whether place-making (with its focus on creating places for people) first influenced landscape architecture which in turn influenced urban design, or vice versa; it is clear that place, place-making, place-identity, sense of place, spirit of place (genius loci) and local identity are extremely important to both disciplines. It is from this standpoint that practitioners working within these professions understand and work with site.

Each of landscape architecture’s specialisms has specific requirements which shape how sites are understood and worked with. Landscape design looks at aspects of a

site's physicality in order to ensure its designs can be built; urban design might seek to understand the character of a place; and landscape science might investigate the ecology of an area. All of this combined knowledge and expertise impacts practice because it influences how sites are understood, and as a consequence, the decisions we make about their future.

2.3.2 Chartership and Professional Development

The Landscape Institute has a programme of gaining formal recognition in the profession through Royal Chartership, and of keeping abreast of an ever-changing industry through Continual Professional Development.

“Chartered status confirms that an individual has the skills, knowledge, understanding and integrity to practice as a landscape professional in the UK.”

(Landscape Institute 2013: 9)

Building upon an accredited university education, the Pathway to Chartership focuses on the knowledge and skills which are needed to operate as a professional. The Landscape Institute defines four core elements required for chartership:

- **Professional judgement, ethics and values:** understanding what it means to be a professional; the ethical obligations and implications as they relate to the LI's Charter and Code of Conduct; the wider contexts in which landscape decisions are made; recognising and working with best practice and other professionals' expertise.
- **Organisation and management:** Understanding the legal requirements and obligations which impact the profession; understand and observe Health and Safety guidelines; work within the LI's guidelines on appointment and remuneration.
- **Assessment and analysis:** Adhere to the legislative requirements, procedures and policies which affect landscape architects; understand how

to identify client requirements and establish a professional working relationship; identify stakeholder requirements and expectations; use appropriate methods to assess the significance, context and character of a site; document and record findings and proposals.

- **Implementation:** Use and create appropriate plans and budgets; use the appropriate tendering processes and contractual arrangements; monitor and control projects from instigation to completion and handover.

(Landscape Institute 2013b)

The syllabus is followed by all newly-qualified landscape architects on their way to Chartership in accordance with the Landscape Institute's Royal Charter. From this foundation, each landscape architect is then encouraged to develop their own expertise, knowledge and skill throughout the experiences of their working life. Continual Professional Development is a requirement of the Landscape Institute's Code of Conduct, ensuring that practitioners maintain their professional competence. It is down to each individual to tailor their learning based on a combination of industry-wide developments and those which are pertinent to a practitioner's own interests and areas of work.

Implications for the research

From the themes outlined above, the following points form the context within which this research is located:

1. Primarily concerned with landscape design and (to a lesser degree) urban design, this research must acknowledge and address the key importance that place, place-making etc. have on these subjects.
2. That landscape architects use a number of standardised (but flexible) tools to assess the significance, context and character of a site.
3. That formal, accredited landscape architectural education is only the first part of a practitioner's professional education which continues through the Pathway to Chartership and onwards through Continual Professional

Development. A practising landscape architect is therefore able (and encouraged) to build upon a base-line of core elements in order to gather the skills, knowledge and experience needed throughout their career. This continual learning necessarily reflects the unique shape of their own interests, skills, education and practice.

Each of these points influences how site is understood: from a discipline-wide perspective; through the interpretive-tools of professional and legislative assessment; through the lenses of the multi-faceted areas of practice and associated disciplines; and also, always, through the skillset and education of an individual practitioner.

Practitioners are educated and trained within the context of an industry that has certain values, practices and orthodoxies which inform how individuals respond to sites within particular cultural, societal and political environments. Every landscape architect will therefore respond to any given project from a unique set of experiences and expertise whilst operating within an industry-wide framework of practice. Understanding this professional context and the responses of landscape architects to particular sites forms the basis for the research in the subsequent chapters.

3

Theorising Site

This review explores the factors which underpin why ideas about site are frequently portrayed in prosaic, technical terms, the effect this can have on landscape architectural practice and the alternative ways of understanding sites which place their interpretation as part of a complex, creative process. As a key concept in landscape architecture, the point at which design becomes material, *site* appears to have drawn the short straw in terms of its academic attention when compared to the very closely associated concepts of *place* and *landscape*. Although both of these are equally important in landscape architecture, they do not share the same precision as *site* which focuses the designer's response to a specific piece of ground; nor do *place* or *landscape* share *site's* burden of the crucial site-survey upon which key decisions are made and creative insights unlocked. It is imperative therefore, to understand how *site* came to be viewed as little more than a descriptor, despite the fact that it shares as much of the complexity, nuance and creative potential as either *place* or *landscape* claim, and because it lies at the very centre of the discipline.

“To think about landscape is to think about site. This seemingly transparent proposition is anything but – for the potential of site in landscape design is often overlooked ... One reason for this oversight is the convention of equating sites with building lots – available parcels bound by legal demarcation driven by property ownership – as opposed to understanding them as large complex landscapes”

(Czerniak 2006: 107)

Section 3.1 examines the terminology of *site*, *place* and *landscape* – key concepts that are acknowledged as overlapping with one another and whose brief dictionary definitions are at odds with how they are perceived in discourse. Whilst the body of

literature associated with *place* and *landscape* is extensive; that associated with *site* is seen as lacking (Burns and Kahn 2005). With particular reference to landscape architecture, this review therefore sets out to examine *site* as more than “an area of ground” (Christensen 2005) in the same way that *place* has been explored as more than “a point in space” (Collins English Dictionary) or *landscape* is understood to be more than “the landforms of an area” (Christensen 2005).

Recognising the centrality of site in landscape architecture, over time there have been a number of attempts to theorise the concept, as outlined in section 3.2. This historical context provides the basis for the remainder of the review and demonstrates how conceptions of site are dynamic. Section 3.3 examines three key conceptions as they are evident across the literature: a geographic, physical understanding of site; site as *empty*, cleared of meaning; and site as *full*, containing identity and inspiration. The most prevalent conception of site in the literature, this last section focuses on the impact of place, identity, the genius loci, site history and how site is used as a source of inspiration in practice.

The final section explores ways that landscape architects interact with a site in their practice. Focusing on the site survey as the primary means for a landscape architect to ‘get to know’ a site, section 3.4 looks at how practitioners observe and measure physical aspects of a site, before turning to examine ways that they investigate a site’s non-physical aspects. The section then progresses to consider how the site survey is framed by the context of a project and those who are involved in its inception. The last parts of this section look at non-traditional methods of surveying a site and the impact that representing a site has on how it is understood.

3.1 Terminology

Conceptions of *site*, *place* and *landscape* are ambiguous. Examining the similarities and differences between these terms is important because all are key subjects in landscape architecture and all have clear overlaps with each other as descriptors of the ground upon which we work. However, the complexity inherent in each of these terms is such that differences do exist, even though authors disagree on the precise nature of these distinctions. Significantly, in landscape architecture, matters of *place* (such as the spirit of place) and matters of *landscape* (such as landscape character) impact each individual site that we may work with, adding further complexity and ambiguity to the relatedness of these terms. This section presents examples of how each is posited within the literature and sets the scene for more detailed examples in the rest of the chapter.

Site

When thinking about site in landscape architecture, the term is most commonly connected to specifically physical conditions (Burns and Kahn 2005, Butterworth and Vardy 2008, Christensen 2005, Waterman 2009 et al.) because “every work of design focuses on spatially finite places” (Burns and Kahn 2005: x). Typical definitions of site will generally be framed around its physicality, for example:

1. A defined area of ground (with boundaries) where a building, project, park, etc. is located or proposed to be located.
2. Any land area of reference.

Dictionary of Landscape Architecture and Construction (Christensen 2005: 336)

In the subject’s key text *Site Matters*, editors Carol Burns and Andrea Kahn (2005) recognise that ideas about site are complex and have a multitude of meanings, declaring that a “straightforward” understanding of the term is “oversimplified” (2005: x). Other authors also recognise this complexity and incorporate aspects of culture, memory, identity and context into their discourse (Amidon 2001,

Beauregard 2005, Burns and Kahn 2005, Swaffield 2002 et al.). Burns and Kahn offer an alternative explanation of site which stands in contrast to it being simply an “area of ground” (Christensen 2005: 336):

“A site exists out there in the world but acquires design meaning only through its apprehension, intellectually and experientially ... We claim the site as a relational construct that acquires meaning and value through situational interaction and exchange.”

(Burns and Kahn 2005: xv)

Framing their discourse in light of this definition, the authors explain that the exchange between site and designer can be termed “site thinking” (2005: xiv – xxiii). “Thinking” is important because they do not conceive of site outside of this interactive relationship. A purely physical definition falls short for those disciplines “concerned with the design of the physical environment” (2005: viii) precisely because it leaves out the designer, suggesting “that designers have no role to play in determining sites and, conversely, that the determination of a site does not bear on matters of design consideration” (2005: x).

Acknowledging the importance of a relational and interactive understanding of site, Burns and Kahn highlight the “culturally rich construct [of] closely associated terms [that] address different aspects of physical location”; such as “place, property, ground, location, setting, context, situation, landscape” (2005: xiii). Burns and Kahn call for further examination of this territory in order to overcome the “terra incognita” (2005: xix) which they identify as surrounding this area of study. In assessing the literature most closely associated with site as it relates to design in landscape architecture, the two terms which overlap and impact the discourse most significantly are *place* and *landscape*. In common with site, these associated concepts appear to have both “straightforward” (Burns and Kahn 2005: x) and “complex” (ibid: xii) meanings.

Place

Interestingly, given that the Landscape Institute describes the discipline as “creat[ing] places where people can live, work and relax” (www.iwanttobealandscapearchitect.com), the Dictionary of Landscape Architecture and Construction does not have a definition for *place*. Among the forty-seven definitions in the Collins English Dictionary however, the most significant to this study are as follows:

1. A particular point or part of space or of a surface, esp. that occupied by a person or thing.
2. A geographical point, such as a town, city, etc.
8. Any building or area set aside for a specific purpose.

Collins English Dictionary (1987: 1171)

The similarities between site and place can be seen in the physical and geographical nature of each, especially in reference to *location*. In common with some conceptions of site, place also has further layers of meaning, although its discourse is wider-ranging and more established. The subject of considerable academic attention, *place* is understood to be more than “a geographical point”, as Creswell asserts:

“When we look at the world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience.”

(Cresswell 2006: 11)

Landscape

Considering that working with *landscape* is the fundamental basis of the discipline, it is wholly surprising that the Dictionary of Landscape Architecture and Construction contains only prosaic, descriptive definitions for the term:

1. An area planted within urban surroundings, near a building, near pavements, or as a park, etc.

2. The landforms of an area.

Dictionary of Landscape Architecture and Construction (Christensen 2005)

In part, this may be a recognition that the term has its roots in German (*landschaft*), Dutch (*landskip*) and French (*paysage*) terms which signify an “area” or “stretch of land” (Giro 2002, Oakes and Price 2008). However, it is also recognised that *landscape* has meaning beyond that of its dictionary definition or linguistic roots. Cosgrove (1998: 13) argues that landscape is “an imprecise and ambiguous concept”, echoed by Swaffield (2005) who labels it “complex and ... confusing”. These complex and more richly-layered understandings of landscape have parallels with the concept of *place*, where it is taken to mean “the history of human customs with respect to a given piece of land” (Giro: 2002: 86). This aspect of landscape has been given official recognition in the European Landscape Convention.

“Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

(Council of Europe 2000)

In landscape architecture, the discourse surrounding *place* has had the most impact because it has been high on the cultural and political agenda. *Placelessness*, a sense of *place* and *place-making* have readily found their way into practitioners’ vocabulary, giving them a way of persuading their clients that their designs are appropriate and sensitive to a particular place.

The literature confirms a degree of overlap between the terms *site*, *place* and *landscape*, with different authors bestowing on each subtly different meanings depending on their particular standpoint. It is important to be aware of these differences, and as long as this is taken into consideration, it is sometimes possible to apply what an author says about place or landscape in design discourse to a discussion of site. Having acknowledged this ambiguity in terminology, the literature review continues to examine further facets of site (and by association, *place* and *landscape*) as a way of demonstrating assumptions, influences and conceptions held by landscape architects in their professional practice.

3.2 A History of site in landscape architecture

Drawing on the works of Meyer (2005) and Thwaites and Simkiss (2007), this section examines how attitudes to the subject of site in landscape architecture have shifted over time, and how this has resulted in its predominance as a technical term describing an area of land.

Beginnings

As landscape architecture has transformed over time and across the globe, so too has its understanding of and relationship to site. According to Meyer (2005), site theory – which is intimately linked to the way we design landscapes – has “ebbed and flowed” in parallel to shifts in the relationship between humanity and the natural world, varying in significance and meaning as society has changed over time. Writing from an American perspective, Meyer (2005: 93-129) charts the chronology of site theory from the beginnings of landscape practice in nineteenth century North America, asserting that landscape architects differentiated themselves from architects, engineers and horticulturalists with the skill for “visiting a site and interpreting its essential character... a connoisseur who discerns” (2005: 95). Echoes of this approach can be seen decades later in the work of land artists whose work, according to Irwin, should be framed by “an intimate, hands-on reading of the site” (Irwin 1985: 573. c.f. Cooper and Taylor (2002)).

Within the discipline’s early years there was a tangible emphasis on revelation, suggesting that each site:

- i) had something to reveal and
- ii) that it took the skills of a landscape architect to bring about its fullest potential.

This mode of thinking is typified by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s (1844) declaration that landscape design was “the most poetic occupations of real life, the bringing out by

art the native but hidden graces of the landscape”. Furthermore, Meyer (2005), and Thwaites and Simkiss (2007) note that as the nineteenth century progressed, the notion of revelation gained currency so that each site came to be valued for its specificity and uniqueness.

Physical Sciences

According to Meyer, the next significant stage in site-thinking was the development of a public appreciation of natural history, with geology and later, ecology, being of particular fascination (2005: 98). Meyer argues that in nineteenth century America, an intense public interest in physical sciences impacted the role of landscape architecture by positioning it as a discipline concerned with the artistic revelation of site specificities. The scales at which geology influences the landscape can vary from the tectonic plates which undergird continents, down to uniquely localised geomorphology. Moreover, Meyer notes that this diversity in scale affects landscape architecture in a number of ways: by revealing or highlighting the workings and structures of a specific site as a signifier of the wider landscape. The same author also points out that in particular, it was advances in, and appreciation of, the graphical representation of geological form which drove this new phase in site appreciation.

Landscapes had long been graphically represented through cartography and painting, portraying an abstraction of reality in a highly stylised and partial manner. As public interest in cartographic and diagrammatic techniques developed, so too did the intensity with which individual sites came under scrutiny. These new of graphical interrogation established a cultural interest in site-revelation, and through revelation, a deeper appreciation for site specificity in a wider context of cultural identity. Landscape architects were now able to read and interpret specific places in new ways thanks to the “new languages and techniques” produced by “landscape painters, scientists and cartographers” (Meyer 2005: 98).

Meyer suggests that because a site could be captured on paper or photographic plate, identifiably different to its surroundings, with boundaries and specificity, each place could be examined in new and detailed ways. By selecting, editing and presenting a limited set of data, Meyer argues that the influence of an ecological lens on landscape introduced a process of translating scientific fact into design vocabulary in landscape architecture (Meyer 2005: 100). The incorporation of such concerns into the landscape architect's repertoire adds another dimension to a designer's understanding of site. The study of geology and ecology in nineteenth century America, helped establish the site as being the primary source of design inspiration in landscape architecture. In common with Meyer, Treib (1995) and Cooper and Taylor (2002) discuss how the attributes of a site are "taken into account and transformed into inspirational material" (Cooper and Taylor 2002: 9) and how this inspiration is purposefully used as a way to "instruct us about the natural workings or history of a place" (Treib 1995: 120).

Meyer suggests that a distinction arose between site and landscape as a result of focusing on each place's particularities: "The former valued the particular and the unique, while the latter valued the general and repeatable" (Meyer 2005: 100). In nineteenth century America, the focus on a site's specific qualities was used in the battle to preserve regional identity in the face of sustained industrialisation and urban expansion (Meyer 2005: 108). The adoption of site-specificity, especially geological context into landscape design introduces an assumption into the discipline that "plots are not empty canvases, but full spaces, full of nature and history, whose latent forms and meanings can be surfaced, and made palpable" (Meyer 2005: 102). This approach would vary in its popularity and currency over the coming decades.

Site Loses its Voice

A shift in public attitude to landscape design at the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century radically altered society's relationship to the discipline. Meyer describes how landscape design lagged behind other fine arts as the

influence of Modernism increased as “style matters replaced site matters” (Meyer 2005: 114). That which led Emerson to declare landscape design as the highest form of the arts, dependent as it was upon the reciprocity between site and user, denigrated into arguments over style, such as the competing merits of informal and formal responses to site (Meyer 2005: 112).

During the twentieth century, the cultural pendulum swung away from an interest on the uniqueness of each site towards detached contemplation and abstraction, to the extent that landscape architecture was no longer considered to be an art form (for details, see Meyer 2005: 117; Thwaites and Simkiss 2007: 9). Meyer argues that the profession lost its place in the realm of the artistic because “building a conceptual strategy on a found condition weakened the designer’s role as a creative genius, an individual with a unique, idiosyncratic voice” (Meyer 2005: 118). In contrast, modern art was concerned with the new, the fresh: the blank canvas.

Marot (1999) argues that over the course of the early twentieth century, landscape architecture became a quieter voice within site-based practices, and much work that would once have been the domain of the profession became dominated by architecture and urban planning through the Modernist and modernisation agendas. Although landscape architecture did not remain ingrained with the nineteenth century understanding of site, there was a distinct lag which divorced it from its foundations as an artistic practice and increasingly associated it with “the establishment of operational rules and procedures aimed at repetition and reproduction” (Thwaites and Simkiss 2007: 8).

Arguing that Modernist programmes of land development conceptualised individual sites “solely in quantitative terms”, Marot asserts that this had the effect of portraying the landscape as “blank surfaces on which to organise urban functions in efficient and often standardised ways” (1999: 47), and furthermore, Richardson notes that, “pure Modernism is devoid of the concept of site” (Richardson 2008: 103. Quoting Mark Rios). Although these authors criticise the Modernists for treating the land as a blank surface, such readings fail to take into account the

differences between the Modernist *style* in landscape architecture and the way that techno-scientific/ rationalist *methodologies* determined how sites were assessed and designed.

There was indeed a period where a modernist aesthetic impacted landscape architecture, as documented by Walker and Simo (1994), Treib (2000) and others; however, Butterwoth and Vardy (2008), Moore (2010) and Thwaites and Simkiss (2007) counter that the greater legacy was that a distinctly modernist philosophy influenced landscape architects' treatment of sites. Critics of the blank canvas approach to landscape architecture – such as Marot (1999) and Richardson (2008) – suppose that Modernist designers are forcing a style or intervention onto the site regardless of found conditions. This commonly held view appears to overlook those who more convincingly argue that in practice, these 'found conditions' of a site could rarely be ignored because they *always* impact the manner and extent of a designed intervention (see Eckbo 2009, Treib 1994, Redfield 2005 et.al.).

When discussing Modernist-influenced landscape architecture, writers including Corner (1999), Marot (1999) and Sternberg (2000) tend to work with the assumption that viewing a site as a blank canvas automatically leads to the design having a "numbing homogeneity" (Meyer 2005: 119) because the same design could be replicated almost anywhere. The Modernist focus on the blank canvas, resulted in a "landscape of estrangement" (Corner 1991: 116) because it tended to ignore the peculiarities of specific sites or regions (Marot 1999: 47). Corner (1991), Tibbalds (1992) and Marot (1999) suggest that a reflection on the effects of the modernist era's legacy can be summarised as "impoverished and uninspiring" (Corner 1991: 118), producing landscapes which "fall a long way short of current public aspirations" (Tibbalds 1992: 10). One cannot ignore however, the fact that many landscapes from the preceding centuries also consisted of imported style, pattern and precedent which were effectively applied to the site as if it were a blank canvas (e.g. the BeauxArts tradition cited by Redfield 2005: 188).

Corner, in his paper outlining key concepts in landscape architecture, argues that Modernism, scientific rationalism and positivism affected the discipline both in how site was conceptualised in theory, and crucially, how it was examined in practice. The effect of these movements was that design became understood “as a methodology for solving site-based problems through the application of sets of rules and procedures” (Thwaites and Simkiss 2007: 9). This detailed examination of the landscape gave rise to the Survey Analysis Design methodology and Ian McHarg’s Ecological Method (McHarg 1967). Thwaites and Simkiss (2007) assert that landscape architecture was re-framed as a site-based problem-solving activity, where decisions were made only after in-depth analysis.

Meyer (2005) and Thwaites and Simkiss (2007) indicate that in an arena where the sciences had gained cultural significance, landscape architecture wanted to keep abreast of the zeitgeist in a way that it had failed to do when the arts progressed in the early twentieth century and left the discipline floundering. In adopting a positivistic techno-scientific methodology for site survey and design, “designers felt their creativity would assume the sought after solidity, authority and legitimacy of scientific rigour.” (Thwaites and Simkiss 2007: 9). The authors go on to argue that:

“intrinsic to this methodological approach is that the collection and analysis of data by rational procedures appears to be given greater status as part of the process than is the creative insight of the designer.”

(Thwaites and Simkiss 2007: 11)

Landscape architecture of the mid-to-late twentieth century was undoubtedly influenced by Modernist philosophy, although the extent to which landscape architecture neglected its long-held responsibility as the reader and translator of site during the Modernist period is much debated in the literature by authors such as Redfield 2005, Treib 1994, Walker and Simo 1994 et al. Even within the Modernist tradition, Butina Watson & Bentley (2007) and Isenstadt (2005) point out that contrary to popular opinion there were many individuals who displayed distinctly “positive value[s] in place-identity terms” (Butina Watson & Bentley 2007: 14).

Site and the Rise of Placemaking

Marc Treib (1995: 110) suggests that towards the end of the twentieth century, a new pursuit of meaning, to counter the effects of Modernism's universalist ideals set the scene for landscape architects to once again address and respond creatively to "specific built contexts" (Burns 1991: 148 c.f. Sternberg 2000: 38 & Osment 2002: 16). Just as landscape architecture lagged behind the art world in adopting a modernist approach, so the return to site-specific works was led by artists, rather than landscape designers, during the 1960s. Kwon suggests that the art world was fundamentally changed when "the space of art was no longer perceived as blank space, a tabula rasa, but as a real place" (2004: 11). Meyer asserts that whilst landscape architecture was no longer the driving force it once was, the theory and practice of site-generated art can be seen to have impacted how sites are understood in landscape architecture.

Within the field of landscape architecture, Patrick Geddes – a landscape architect with a background in sociology and geography – began to promote the idea that design practice ought to be "based on a thorough understanding of the prevailing social, cultural and geographical circumstances" (Thwaites and Simkiss 2007: 8). Similarly, John Dixon Hunt argues that "a new agenda of meanings should be established, and that locality should be exploited" (quoted in Thwaites and Simkiss 2007: 13). Cooper and Taylor note that "some of the most important gardens and landscapes of the last twenty years have been site generated" (2002: 7), and citing Robert Irwin, suggest that the influence of site-generated landscape architecture came directly from theories and practice of "public/site art" (Irwin 1985: 572). Irwin describes how "the sculptural response draws all of its cues (reasons for being) from its surroundings. This requires the process to *begin* with an intimate, hands-on reading of the site" (Irwin 1985: 573). This artistic approach to site-specificity appears to have been in the background within landscape architectural theory, and the shift away from the tabula rasa of Modernism seems to have been largely driven by scientific rationalism rather than artistic exploration.

Summarising the changes in landscape architecture over the course of the nineteenth, twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Meyer asserts that it is no surprise that “site practices ebb and flow” with the changes in culture and society when landscape architecture is seen as a reflection of how we comprehend “the relationship of humanity to the natural world” (Meyer 2005: 119).

The changes evident in society and culture over time are mirrored in the changing attitudes to the landscape, the role of artistic endeavour, scientific enquiry and the need to regain an apparent loss of connection with particular places. At this point in history, landscape architecture is still feeling the effects of the backlash against a Modernist sense of the ‘blank canvas’ whilst still embracing some of that era’s views in regards to the rationalistic surveying of the land. Overlaying this is the need for landscape architects to counter the supposed placelessness of earlier developments through the assessment, capturing and strengthening of each site’s particular character or spirit. This research asks how this contextual milieu impacts the ways in which practicing landscape designers ‘get to know’ the area with which they’re working, and what effects this has on their subsequent design decisions.

3.3 Academic Dimension: conceptions of site in landscape architecture

This section looks at the key ways that the concept of site is understood in landscape architecture and explores how these largely theoretical standpoints impact practice. Picking up on a number of the themes introduced in the previous section, it begins by linking Cosgrove’s proposal that landscape can be thought of as a “way of seeing” (1998:13) with other authors’ suggestions that ‘site’ might also be understood in a similar way. Next, the commonplace conceptions of site as an area of land with boundaries will be examined, before considering the implications of the seeing the landscape as a blank (empty) canvas. The section concludes by exploring an alternative way of understanding site linked to Burn’s (1991) theory of

a 'full' site which can be posited as a repository of meaning, identity and inspiration.

3.3.1 A way of seeing

The conceptions of *site*, *landscape* and *place* all contain a dichotomy in meaning. Each has connotations relating solely to the physicality of the earth whilst simultaneously having layers of meaning which link physical perception with mental conception. The discourse exploring these dimensions of *place* and *landscape* is well founded and extensive (see, for example Creswell (2004) and Thompson (2009) respectively), which, according to Burns and Kahn (2005) is at odds with that connected to *site*.

Cosgrove observes that whilst *landscape* is frequently defined in purely geographical terms, it is in reality "an imprecise and ambiguous concept" (1998:13). This echoes the attempts of Burns and Kahn (2005) to open up the debate surrounding *site*. Rather than limiting it to "an area of ground with boundaries" (Christensen 2005), they seek to examine its 'imprecision' and 'ambiguity'.

Reflecting Cosgrove's (1998) assertion that landscape is a way of seeing and Cresswell's (2006) that place is a way of understanding, Burns and Kahn suggest that site can also be a way of thinking: a "conceptual construct" (2005: x). In the same way that "landscape denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience" (Cosgrove 1998: 13), Beauregard (2005) and Burns (2005) propose that when understood thoroughly, site is also a construct of the human experience. To label site a 'social construct' suggests that these parcels of land are framed by the cultural conditions through which they are viewed: with the result that that "one cannot divorce site from the way it is known" (Burns 1991: 151).

3.4.2 Geographical, physical site

Almost all examinations of site begin with defining it in geographical terms: “a straightforward entity contained by boundaries that delimit it from the surroundings” (Burns and Kahn 2005: x. c.f. Christensen 2005, Waterman 2009 et al.). Although Burns and Kahn go on to characterise this understanding as “oversimplified” (2005: x), they do recognise that it has an “arguable basis” (ibid). Landscape architecture demands “physical particulars... exact areas where design activity will take place” (Burns and Kahn 2005: xvi) which can be surveyed, mapped and investigated as part of the design process.

“The majority of architectural projects start with a red line on a plan. The client body, having agreed on the extent of the red line, hand over this map to the architect and so identify ‘the site’. In doing so, the site is defined by its physicality, its perceived vacancy and its difference to what is outside the red line.”

(Butterworth and Vardy 2008: 126)

Waterman argues that defining a site – often with a red line – marks it out “with the intention that action will occur there” (Waterman 2009: 52). Similarly, Dripps stresses the importance of defining the land’s physicality because it “possesses a reassuring degree of certainty... A site’s edges are known and a centre can be found” (2005: 61). According to Leatherbarrow, this “ancient idea” (1993:65) reflects humanity’s desire to assert control by dividing large endeavours into smaller parts: “the invention of a defined site is a project that aims at the whole” (ibid: 64).

Jacobs notes that the demarcation of the landscape brings with it legal ownership, that the owner has “a set of legal rights” (2005: 19) which he or she can assert over the site because of the strength and definition of its boundaries. Jackson maintains that it is these boundaries which “transform an amorphous environment into a human landscape, and nothing more clearly shows some of the cherished values of a group than the manner in which they fix those boundaries” (1980: 12).

There are a number of different ways that these boundaries can be conceptualised over and above the red-line on a plan which frequently – although not always – equates to legal ownership. Boundaries are important to the study of site: not only are they typically used to give definition, but – depending on how they are understood – can also impose limits on a designer’s involvement or imagination.

Closed-Boundaries

Boundaries can be variously conceptualised; fixed according to areas of “internal homogeneity” (Hill 2005: 132), “a distinctive identity” (English Heritage 2008: 21), as a mark of difference from its neighbours (Lippard 2005: 1), or simply by its physical context: “none other than the lines at the base of the near sides of adjacent and surrounding material objects” (Leatherbarrow 1993: 18). These conceptions could be termed ‘closed-boundaries’, where the edges are known, enforced and identifiable, and each plot is defined by distinction. Burns and Kahn (2005: x) argue that to take a site as an area of ground with delineating boundaries is an oversimplification of its nature, but one that persists both in practice and pedagogy purely because “designers often receive a site as a delimited given entity” (ibid). They assert that this approach is limiting to the profession because it “suggests that designers have no role to play in determining sites and, conversely, that the determination of a site does not bear on matters of design consideration” (ibid).

The complex jigsaw of boundaries and ownership of the contemporary urban environment, replete with leases, easements and covenants, makes the simple bounded-site, based on ownership alone, something of a rarity. Nevertheless, Burns and Kahn (2005) and Butterworth and Vardy (2008) all suggest that a plan with a clear red line delineating the scope for intervention remains the norm: a powerful, if limiting, construct.

Open Boundaries

In contrast to closed-boundary approaches, Arida (2002), Hill (2005) and Marcuse (2005) propose that while plots may be identified by their boundaries, they are not necessarily defined by them. Marcuse (2005) discusses this from two alternative positions: from the inside out; and from the outside in; arguing that the usual way to address the site is from the inside. Marcuse argues that this site-centred approach is based on an assumption that the client's needs will be met within the site's confines which he terms its "area of effect" (2005: 250). In contrast to this mode of site-thinking, Marcuse suggests that sites could be examined "by looking at the site from the outside, to evaluate the function it performs in the broader community" (ibid: 268). Whilst this approach does not necessarily eliminate the defined boundaries, its stance does suggest a very different way of conceptualising the site from those portrayed above. Marcuse concludes that "not many private clients will take an interest in looking at a site from the outside in" because their concerns tend to lie with "feasibility" or "profitability" (Marcuse 2005: 270).

At the most basic level, working with the conception that boundaries are indeed defined by a physical context, Leatherbarrow notes that "every true boundary is two-sided, a joint or a connection between two *different* things" (1993: 25). This seemingly simple statement transforms the idea of a bounded site standing in oblivious isolation into one which has the possibility of exploiting its boundaries for design purposes: to fade in or stand out. Taking a step beyond a simple acknowledgement, Hill recognises the possibilities afforded at a site's boundary by suggesting that boundaries be treated as dynamic "edge zones" rather than reified artefacts "that deserve permanent memorisation simply because they once existed" (2005: 146). Hill suggests an alternative based on an ecological model; that boundaries be treated as permeable skins which give a degree of containment and describe difference to the surroundings, but which simultaneously allow the passage of numerous flows in and out of the site (ibid: 140, c.f. Gregory: 1994: 72). Both Arida (2002) and Dripps (2005) likewise suggest that mutable peripheries at

the edge of a site are “extremely exciting places” (Arida 2002: 210) which provide a much more fertile ground for design than a rigid inward-looking boundary.

Non-Physical Boundaries

Moving away from the idea of boundaries as purely physical, Arida (2002) proposes that a site can be thought of as an event, and that every event has a “territory [which] can spread to the limits of its event horizon” (2002: 149). This “event-horizon” contrasts with traditional notions of boundaries which “speak of edges and borders, limits and jurisdictions as if these really were impermeable envelopes” (2002: 211). In Arida’s model, physical boundaries appear largely irrelevant, so it is possible to imagine a territory extending over a much larger area and encapsulating many overlapping event horizons which may flow across or terminate within the traditional bounds of the site. This model reflects the three distinct areas which Burns and Kahn set out:

“The first... is the **area of control**, easy to trace in the property lines designating legal metes and bounds. The second, encompassing forces that act upon a plot without being confined to it, can be called the **area of influence**. Third is the **area of effect** – the domain impacted following design action.”

(Burns and Kahn 2005: xii)

This complexity contrasts with the neatly imagined parcels of ground which represent the traditional site, so that landscape architects now theorise in terms of: “nodes of interaction”, “networks” (Hill 2005); “patchworks” (Leach 2002); “milieu”, “mosaics” (Corner 2002); or “matrices” (Pollak 2007). Czerniak enforces these understandings of site with the language of “relational networks” (2006: 107), and Girot; a “moving continuum, a complex flux of interwoven systems and epochs, a syncretism of countless moments compressed into a single pace” (2006: 90). Hill argues that sites ought to be considered as “shape-shifters, and boundaries as tricksters that teach us that what we see in a moment of time is not necessarily what matters most to the river of time” (Hill 2005: 145-6). Despite these alternative

ways of conceptualising site, Hill recognises it would be a struggle to reorientate practice, theory and policy around such conceptions because they have always “relied heavily on geographic dimensions as their primary means of recognising and reproducing important relationships” (Hill 2005: 141).

3.3.3 Emptied site

Introduced in the discussion about Modernism’s influence in landscape architecture, this section explores the idea of an emptied site – or blank canvas – in greater detail. Whilst Thompson (2002) observes that this approach is rarely used in contemporary practice it nevertheless occupies a significant part of the discourse because it is often used as a counterpoint to alternative ways of understanding site (see section 3.3.4 below).

Burns (1991), Kwon (2004), Meyer (2005) et.al observe that at certain times and under certain cultural conditions, the site has been conceived of as an empty, blank canvas onto which designers and artists can make their mark. Burns (1991: 146-167) labels this approach ‘the cleared site’ and argues that it is certain assumptions and conceptions about a site which sets the agenda for its subsequent investigation and development:

“... the cleared site strategy undertakes to isolate architecture from time. The past is denied and the future is deemed powerless to change the situation, much less improve it. Denying any relationship to existing conditions, the architecture of the cleared site presumes a power to initiate and finalise the site in both spatial and temporal terms.”

(Burns 1991: 152)

Asserting that this way of thinking is a strategy rather than an unquestionable truth about the site, Burns argues that a cleared site is one thought to be “unoccupied ... empty of content” (Burns 1991: 149 c.f. Czerniak 2006: 107). In the same vein, Leatherbarrow (1993) and Casey (1993) also discuss this concept in terms of being

“defined as material absence ... a hollow in an otherwise solid stone landscape” (Leatherbarrow 1993: 19) or “sheerly diaphanous ... the mere occasion for the positioning of those obdurate material objects” (Casey 1993: 226). Positions such as these which suggest that some landscape architects treat the landscape as “cleared” are rare in the literature however. More common, is the suggestion that in certain circumstances, a site *could* be considered as a tabula rasa if it is continually “made and remade” (Hargreaves 2007: 171) or, that the landscape architect selectively edits a plot of land, choosing to ‘clear’ certain parts. These approaches suggest that ‘clearing’ is “an ever-present choice: to eradicate or to augment the existing” (Amidon 2005: 156).

Lippard (2005) and Beauregard (2005) argue that emptying and clearing are temporary stages within the overall process of development. Lippard posits that all sites have an inherent narrative which can be “downplayed” by designers, but which cannot be completely destroyed (Lippard 2005: 2). Taking this a stage further, Beauregard asserts that whilst a place is “never emptied”, during the process of design and development those involved employ “a form of discursive displacement” which shifts the site’s existing narrative in favour of a newly created version (Beauregard 2005: 54).

Thinking of the landscape in terms of tabula rasa eliminates the unique qualities of individual places, and so rather than seeing a blank canvas, landscape architects generally consider each site to inform or “limit” (LaGro 2008: 211) the possibilities for a designer’s “singular vision” (Beauregard 2005: 40).

3.3.4 Full site

Carol Burns’ significant text, *On Site*, outlines that in opposition to the ‘cleared site’ (emptied site, blank canvas or tabula rasa) is the idea of the ‘constructed site’ (1991: 153). Authors including Berrizbietia (2007), Dripps (2005), Dixon Hunt (2014), Girot (1999), Marot (1999), and McHarg (1967) who write about site in this way,

describe it as being a repository, container, accumulation, accretion, residue or palimpsest. Contrary to Leatherbarrow's (1993) and Casey's (1993) view of sites as voids, these 'full', repository-like qualities are frequently associated with site in landscape design discourse. For example, Swaffield argues that "embedded within each site are traces [of] natural and cultural processes" which can be read by an attentive landscape architect (2002: 228). Amidon uses the metaphor of layers to describe how "sites tell stories as a result of accretion" and like Swaffield, asserts that landscape architects can "peel back onionlike layers of a site's history" as a way of getting to know a place (Amidon 2001: 157).

A 'constructed' conception of site is comprised of a range of physical and cultural attributes. Burns describes these physical aspects in very general terms as "a unique intersection of land, climate, production and circulation" (1991:163) whereas other writers are much more specific in the natural attributes which contribute to this 'construction': "light, weather, topography, horizon, and earth provide clues for how we might create new landscapes on the basis of what exists in a given location" (Høyer 1999: 74).

Although physicality is clearly vital in landscape architecture, in contrast to this, focus is more commonly directed towards a site's cultural attributes – such as its identity and meaning – and how these might influence a landscape architect's interpretation of each place.

Identity

A 'constructed' understanding of site is commonly associated with being a repository of cultural meaning, identity and significance. This appears to be the flip-side of a 'cleared' approach which is associated with a degradation of "meaning that provides the sense of attachment to place" (Cresswell 2006: 43). Butina Watson & Bentley (2007), Cresswell (2006), Kwon (2004), Relph (1986) et al. indicate that landscape architects frequently work within a culture seeking to satiate "a longing for identity and roots" and satisfy an "inner craving for stability,

predictability and belonging” (Muir 2000: xiii), and that there is a general cultural consensus that every “place should have its own special character – ‘identity’ is the word most commonly used” (Butina-Watson & Bentley 2007).

Creswell (2006), Meyer (2005), Relph (1986) et al. observe that identity, specifically a unique, local identity, became increasingly important as a reaction to the widespread homogeneity of the Modernist period. Farrer (2008), Hough (1990), Hopkins (2007), Thwaites and Simkiss (2007) et .al. suggest that landscape architects have responded to this cultural shift by promoting regional identity and local distinctiveness as key tenets of the profession (as have numerous bodies responsible for policy, guidance and funding (see DCLG 2010b, EH 2008, LI 2011 for example). When sites are understood as “ready reservoirs of unique identity” (Kwon 2004: 55) Meyer argues that landscape architects seek to unlock the apparently missing sense of belonging, meaning and attachment by incorporating this identity into their designs (1997: 168 & 2003: 93-94). Marot (2003) and Richardson (2005) observe that identity and meaning are resonant themes in the relationship between particular places.

According to Millward and Worple (2004), the cultural and social functions of a site are frequently highlighted by governmental and heritage funding bodies (see BCCRD 2005, DTLR 2000, HLF 2004, et al.). English Heritage suggest that people value their historic environment as “part of their cultural and natural heritage” because it endows a place with “distinctiveness, meaning and quality”, which in turn benefits society with “a sense of continuity and a source of identity” (EH 08: 19). Similarly, CABE SPACE argues that “a successful green space will usually promote and reflect the identity and culture of a local community” (CABE 2005: 63).

Place

Place is important in understanding a ‘full’ site because the two concepts share many key concerns and are, in a number of respects, different ways of describing essentially the same thing. The development of place as a concept is strongly

influenced by foundational work carried out under the disciplines of human geography and sociology, as noted by Carmona and Tiesdell (2007). As a construct, place is most commonly described in the academic discourse as, for example, “a site with human vestiges ... sites trod on by humans” (Español 2007: 144 – 145). In general, place is defined by the addition of some form of human mark to an otherwise (apparently) empty and neutral area of land. This relationship is examined by Beauregard (2005) who comes to a definition of site by removing those elements which differentiate it from place:

“A site is a social construct, a representation of space ... In effect, a site is a place that has been denatured, formalised, and colonised, its meanings made compatible with the relations of production, state imperatives, and the order that both imply. Opposed to the site is a representational space – what I have termed *place* – and its complex symbolism grounded in lived experience ... site does not exist prior to the onset of planning and design.”

(Beauregard 2005: 40 – 41)

Defining place in this way necessarily envisions sites as ‘cleared’ or empty, even though, as has been noted above, this is not a universally accepted understanding of site. As a consequence, place appears distinguishable by the inclusion of traces of humanity, some form of repository: a “half-full, half-empty container” as Lucy Lippard (2005: 1) postulates, which has “all physical, biological and cultural history” written thereon (McHarg 1967: 39). Taking the notion further, McHarg argues that landscape architects must be able to “read” and “understand” a site because this is “the prerequisite for all intelligent intervention and adaptation” (1967: 39).

As an academic construct, *place* also contains the important element of identity which *site* frequently appears to be missing. In design discourse, this has been predominantly taken up by urban designers who, according to Butina-Watson & Bentley (2007) and Carmona & Tiesdell (2007), mostly work with *places* rather than *sites*. From an urban design standpoint, place identity is defined as a “set of meanings associated with any particular cultural landscape which any particular person or group of people draws on in the construction of their own personal or social identities” (Butina-Watson and Bentley 2007: 6). This conception is also

commonplace within landscape architecture, as noted by Thompson (2014) and Waterman (2009), particularly where the two disciplines overlap. Although frequently less well examined as conceptions of place, Sherman (2005) states that a site can also be understood as “a simultaneously ecological, infrastructural and cultural construct” (2005: 314), and conversely, Wortham-Galvin argues that a ‘sense of place’ might also incorporate “experiential and associational narratives as well as physical attributes” (2008: 39). Contributing to the overlap between these concepts, Vroom argues that “every place is unique by its physical composition and the way in which it is experienced” (2006: 248) which closely mirrors the way that Sherman (2005) describes site. The discourse surrounding place and its interaction with landscape architecture is complex. Moore (2010), Thompson (2000) and Thwaites and Simkiss (2005) et al. note that terminology can be confusing: place and place-identity are frequently incorporated into discussions about a ‘sense of place’, ‘spirit of place’, ‘genius loci’ or ‘local identity’, and Burns and Kahn (2005) suggest that part of the reason for the denigration of site as a fruitful concept is the rise of overlapping terminology. This is especially prevalent when site is linked with matters of place, identity and character. Site and place *can* mean the same thing, but in the ebbing and flowing of practice place has accrued a greater cultural currency than its apparently more prosaic counterpart.

Thompson (2000) suggests that as a profession, landscape architecture has a strong leaning towards social objectives – to enhance character, meaning and connection between people and place. In order to create or strengthen a community’s sense of connection with a place, Collins and Sheils (2001) suggest that landscape architects focus on the unique identity of a site as a way of making this aspiration tangible. Authors including Amidon (2001), Girot (2002) and McHarg (1967) et al. suggest that discovering a site’s place-identity or local distinctiveness is the first step in careful landscape design, and that a response cannot be comprehended until that identity has been recognised. A plot must be surveyed in order to first identify its identity or character, thereby establishing a link between place-identity and the site survey. Furthermore, such authors also suggest that once a site’s identity has been identified, “every landscape designer [should] enhance and not destroy that unique

quality” (Vroom 2006: 248). So strong is the influence of place-making, that, according to Thompson (2003: 73) to have a different design agenda is guilty of “setting its face against the contemporary consensus.” Relph asserts that the uniqueness and individuality of a place is “naively obvious” (1976: 106), and Berleant argues that a place which does not consider identity or meaning is “obverse... inauthentic... pallid... superficial” (2003: 50).

In addition to the discussion on place-identity within design theory and its role in social cohesion, Kwon, writing from an artistic perspective, argues that an area’s distinct character can bring economic benefits. He uses the artistic term “site specificity” which has strong parallels with ideas of “distinction of place and uniqueness of locational identity” (2004: 54) which are commonly found in landscape architectural discourse. Taking the ideas of those who suggest that a place’s unique identity can have cultural value, Kwon asserts that “site specificity remains inexorably tied to a process that renders the particularity and identity of various cities a matter of product differentiation” (Kwon 2004: 55). In essence, the identity of a particular place can be utilised as its Unique Selling Point, and that landscape architects, urban designers, and others should use their design skills to enhance an area’s sense of place to secure its economic and social viability.

Genius Loci

Brook (2000) and Moore (2010) highlight the notion of a *sense of place* as having some kind of metaphysical aspect or “spiritual significance” (Thwaites and Simkiss 2005: 32) which cannot be satisfactorily replaced with a *sense of site*. Isis Brook suggests that the term *genius loci* (also referred to as sense of place or spirit of place) is ambiguous (2000: 217) and sets out ten possible readings of the term(s). In landscape architectural discourse, the term is generally used to refer to:

- a) ***character*** (*representing place and place-identity*),
- b) ***communing with the spirit*** (as a way of getting to know a site)

This section focuses on genius loci as character: the section on the site survey will explore the genius loci as a method of getting to know a site. Examining these aspects separately avoids the confusions often associated with the terms, a trap that Tate (2005: 61-62) appears to have fallen into when rejecting Moore's assertion that genius loci "mystifies the design process" (Moore 2003:49). Frequently the two do get confused, which is why Tate mistakenly argues that Moore's concerns equate to the rejection of "the importance of context" (2005: 61) when it is matters of 'communing with the spirit' which Moore was addressing. Criticising the genius loci is akin to criticising place-making, and to do so is to be unfairly accused of rejecting the notion of the uniqueness of place and so falling back into the Modernist ideas of tabula rasa and "endemic placelessness" (Treib 1995: 114). The focus on "rooting landscape design in a particular locale" (ibid) means that the spirit of place is a key constituent in the approach to place-making in landscape architecture.

Relph (1976) describes the genius loci as; "character or personality [which] obviously ... involves topography and appearance, economic functions and social activities, and particular significance deriving from past events and present situations" (1976: 106). He concludes his exploration of the genius loci by maintaining that although it encompasses all of these attributes it "differs from the simple summation of these" (Relph 1976: 106). Relating the genius loci – which is literally 'the spirit of *place*' – to conceptions of *site*, Pevsner asserts that "in modern planning terms [it is] the character of the site" and that this is primarily a combination of the "geographical ... historical, social and especially the aesthetic character" (Pevsner/ Aitchison 2010: 183). Noting that place also has "spiritual connotations", Thwaites and Simkiss assert that this "arises pre-given from the place's intrinsic physical characteristics" (2005: 32).

Evidence of how genius loci has been valued in the profession is demonstrated through the 'Award' and 'Review of the Year' issues in the professional journals of the British landscape architecture industry (*Landscape Architecture* (now

Landscape) and *Green Places*). Comments by chairs of the judging panels reflect the profession's focus on design being sensitive to the spirit of place:

“Those illustrated on the following pages were selected by the judges as uplifting examples of landscape work, relying not only on rational thought, but, thankfully, engaging romantic and irrational thought processes as well. Many of the entries give a clear indication that the ‘genius of the place’ is to the fore in design thinking.”

(Ellison 1993: A1)

A judge in the 2007 LI Awards, Hopkins asserts that the mark of a successful landscape architect is someone who can “[get] to grips with the genius loci”. Furthermore, Hopkins argues that a successful designer is one who is able to “express that understanding [of the genius loci] in their design” (Hopkins 2007: 4). Farrer, part of the 2008 judging panel, likens the genius loci to “a little magic ... through design” and that “to conceive, hold on to and deliver” a design capturing the genius loci was “difficult”, but “a pleasure to see” (Farrer 2008: 5).

Arguing that some attitudes surrounding the genius loci are unhelpful, Moore does acknowledge that when it is “used as a kind of shorthand to indicate sensitivity to the nuances of place, a consideration of its unique qualities and its context, there is not a great deal to take issue with” (2010: 57). Beyond this however, and especially when the genius loci is seen as encapsulating the site's universal truth or essence, Moore warns that it becomes easy to “relinquish the responsibility we have as designers to investigate, analyse and interpret the significance of what we see in a critical, grounded, culturally astute way” (2010: 60). Furthermore, Moore argues that an over-reliance on the genius loci as a by-pass to critical, creative thinking can have “a stultifying impact on design practice” (Moore 2010: 60).

History

Closely associated with place, identity and the spirit/ sense of place is the significance of a site's history. The interplay between these concerns is

demonstrated in Marc Treib's comments on the genius loci: "Buried within this approach to shaping the landscape is the belief that reflecting a pre-existing condition created a design more meaningful to the inhabitants" (1995: 116). Towards the end of the twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries, heritage was often given a degree of primacy as design inspiration in the profession which was associated with a renewed interest in overcoming placelessness by reinforcing local identities.

Commentators including Kwon (2004), Mattinson (2006), Moor (2006), Otero-Pailos (2010) and Richardson (2008) who express concern that places are not treated as blank canvases and emptied of meaning, posit history as a source of a site's identity and significance. Beauregard argues that when designers acknowledge the "overlapping histories and intersecting current events, they resist being turned into cleared sites" (Beauregard 2005: 39). Based on the value of the past to contemporary culture (emphasised by English Heritage, 2008), landscape architects frequently look to "pillage" (Dixon Hunt 2014: 11) the history of a site as a way to (re)establish a link between people and place. Commenting on how site-history is valued in the public realm, Richardson observes that "history is consciously used to activate the contemporary meaning in a landscape, garden or park setting" (2008: 104). In a paper exploring the public's view on the value of heritage, Mattinson contends that heritage matters to the public because it "gives us a sense of identity" and "cement[s] the area's character and historical meaning" (2006: 86 & 88-90).

In contrast to the largely positive opinions on how site history can be used in landscape architecture, Treib notes that "history became an image to be dusted off and applied to any current proposal as a means to validate it" (1995: 114). He renders this obsession with the past as "curious", particularly where landscape architects seek to "restore what has previously been destroyed" (1995: 121). In an unreserved comment on this design approach, Wiston Spirn, quoting Jellicoe, asserts that "to copy a historic form of the past is to raise a corpse from the dead and pretend it is alive" (1998: 198).

Although the manner in which site history is used in landscape architecture varies from one practitioner to the next, Thompson (2000) observes that it can be seen as a linchpin in many landscape architects' understanding of, and approach to place-making. In common with ideas of place-making and the *genius loci*, a site-history approach tends to encompass a place's "ecological, social, cultural, topographical and functional characteristics" (Richardson 2008: 98). In short, it is yet another way of describing site as significantly more than 'an area of land'.

Layers

Drawing on a site's history in landscape design frequently relies on "the visible layers of landscape phenomena [and the] natural and human forces [which] have shaped land" (Burns 1991: 154). Amidon (2001) suggests that when sites are understood as being 'full' of history, designers often look at the landscape back in time, or down through the layers of accumulated history. Rosenberg argues that this has "become a dominant metaphor in the theory and design of landscapes" (2002: 15. c.f. Lipard 1997: 7; Girot 1999: 63; O'Connell 2001:98). Amidon (2001: 157) and Betsky (2005: 12-13) both suggest that when the site is conceived of in layers, landscape architects take on the role of detective, uncovering these layers to discover what was there before.

To conceive of the landscape as being composed of layers of history has given the landscape architect a tangible way to explore and reconnect with the distinctive qualities that gave rise to the specificity of a particular site. Girot (1999) and Rosenberg (2002) observe that the metaphor of layers encourages landscape architects to uncover hidden and invisible patterns, stories and events because the metaphor of layers "joins a physical description of land with an historical idea of time" (Rosenberg 2002: 15). This connection with a place's past is made evident through "maps and their related illustrations" (Alpers 1983: 161, c.f. Barson, undated) and can be revealed through "careful research and analysis" (Girot 1999: 63). Although most commentators argue that site history is predominantly revealed

through tangible means, Girot reflects that like the genius loci and place-making, a site-history approach can also rely on “invisible ... intangible” aspects that are “not necessarily what remains visible to the eye” (Girot 1999: 62-63). Here again, the implication is that landscape architects must possess the skills to read and interpret what remains unseen.

Palimpsest

Unlike Amidon’s (2001) layered “onionlike” metaphor, Burns does not hold to the idea that history is laid down in distinct strata spread uniformly across the site; rather they are typified by “interruption, simultaneity, discontinuity, synchronism, fragmentation, coincidence, and disruption; they occur only in abrupt juxtaposition” (1991: 154). Marot likens this fragmented notion to a “palimpsest-like nature”, and suggests that the landscape might be experienced “precisely as a palimpsest” (2003: 66). This conceptualisation of a site’s multitudinous facets, past and present in collision, would seem to work around and across the site rather than simply downwards *into* the land. However one conceives of this repository, Burns suggests that it is done so in order that the landscape architect makes use of what he or she finds in their design work (1991: 154). The role of the landscape architect is seen as crucial in this understanding of site because it depends on there being skilled practitioners who can investigate this rich repository and reveal it to a society eager to listen (McHarg 1967: 39).

A Mapping Impulse

Rosenberg (2002) cites the example of the ‘mapping impulse’ postulated by Alpers (1983) as a departure point between the traditional framed landscapes; “the picture considered as an object in the world”, and Dutch landscape painting which “is seen as a map in the sense in which it is conceived of not as a window, but rather as a richly articulated surface on which both objects and words are described” (2002: 11). Rosenberg asserts that this way of thinking about site is based on the idea that “terrain is not merely a medium” – the form of which

landscape architects alter and manipulate –rather, it is “explicitly expressed and celebrated as a material” (2002: 12) onto which elements, ideas and narratives from a site’s past can be re-written.

A prime example of the Mapping Impulse in practice is Georges Descombes’ project at Lancy. This excerpt illustrates how many intersecting ideas come together within this notion of site as a repository of ideas *and* a surface upon which to record them. It incorporates elements of place-making, identity, site-history and the idea that landscape architects act as interpreters of visible and invisible phenomena:

“Descombes reinvents a sense of place by describing what is there and what is no longer there. What has disappeared is, in fact, as important to evoke as what is present. ... The surface of the land, inscribed with the history of its alteration, becomes the map and the historical record of this place. ... The aesthetic of “revealing imperceptible forces”, as Descombes put it, sustains a tension between what is and what was; between what is present and what has been lost. The mapping impulse, in this work, then, takes on a broader agenda. The intention is to reconstitute site by describing it – and thereby reveal its lost history as traces on the land. “Describing” becomes an act of recovery.”

(Rosenberg 2002: 20)

Site as Source of Inspiration

In Thompson’s (2000) work, *Ecology Community Delight*, the author concluded that practitioners leaned towards treating sites as sources of inspiration. One of his interviewees maintained that as a matter of course “the place should be saying what sort of design you should be coming up with” (Heather Lloyd (interviewed) Thompson 2000: 45). The means of unlocking may be ‘scientific’ or ‘intuitive’, but the assumption appears to be the same; “‘site-based design’ is the only right and proper way to go” (Moore 2010:76-77). The site survey thus becomes an exercise in discovering what makes a place unique, and posits landscape architects as the “psychoanalysts of places” (Richardson 2005: 133).

Inseparable from the concept of a 'full' or 'constructed' site is the notion that it can be thought of as a source of design inspiration (see for example, Heyman 2010, Meyer 2005 et al.). From this standpoint, landscape architects are posed as interpreters who have a responsibility for exploring and revealing "the unique attributes of a site", providing a "rationale and raw material" for their design decisions (Marot 1999: 48-49). Demonstrating that this way of understanding and treating site is the antithesis of an 'emptied' blank-canvas, Beauregard asserts that even when a the land literally cleared in preparation for development "planners and designers" are loath to consider it as such: "Even a cleared site has to have meaning attached to it" (Beauregard 2005: 54). The general consensus is that a site can never be truly empty because "something is always there before he begins" (Hough 1990: 210), whether this be "visible phenomena" (Burns 1991: 154) or "intangible ... forces" (Girod 1999: 63).

The genius loci is seen to be the most prevalent way of understanding and discussing a site's "intangible" qualities – even though Thompson (2000), Thwaites and Simkiss (2007), Treib 1995 et al. acknowledge that it also incorporates a place's physicality. Furthermore, the genius loci is usually – but by no means always – shorthand for landscape architects to "pay attention to the existing qualities of a site" (Thompson 2014:56). The genius loci can be thought of as a process for investigating those aspects of a site we struggle to name – such as its atmosphere, or our own reaction thereto – rather than a spirit that exists 'outside' of us and tells us what to do or think.

When landscape architects "employ site phenomena" such as its tangible physicality, or intangible narratives, as "generative devices" (Corner 1999: 12), authors including Brook (2000), Thompson (2000), Treib (1995) observe that designers bestow a site with a degree of authority, authenticity or meaning. Whilst the majority of such commentators assert that this can be a fruitful and creative way to generate design inspiration, Treib and Moore both caution that this can be taken to an extreme. Moore argues that imbuing the genius loci with the capacity to dictate our design decisions can allow landscape architects to "abdicate our

responsibility” (2010: 59). Coming at the same issue by criticising the techno-scientific ‘SAD’ methodology proposed by Ian McHarg (1967), Treib similarly warns that surrendering the creative skills to a formalised process allows landscape architects “sufficient moral grounds to avoid almost completely decisions of form and design” (Treib 1999: 31).

In landscape architecture discourse, it is not uncommon to find designers taking inspiration from the site itself as a way to reinforce identity and re-connect people with place and nature (as identified by Corner 1990, Hawkhead 2004, Milward and Worple 2004, Scazzosi 2004 et al.). The interconnectedness of place, identity and history with the conception of site as a source of inspiration is not only seen in academic discourse. This approach appears to have been absorbed into planning authorities’ design guidelines which frequently refer to history (or heritage) as a way to enhance a sense of place. In Belfast for example, the City Centre Regeneration Directorate assert that when thinking about design, “the history of the people and culture remain untapped sources of information” (BCCRD 2005: 12-13). Quoting Tilden ((1957) *Interpreting our Heritage*), the Heritage Lottery Fund asserts that interpretation is the first stage in a process that leads to protection; “Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.” (HLF 2008:5). To offer an interpretation of some aspect(s) of a site through design is therefore seen as a way of reconnecting it back to culture after the apparent divorce of people and place in the twentieth century: Design as a “hyperlink” as Marot (2003: 78) terms it.

In a challenge to the assumption that meaningfulness, identity or significance necessarily has to come from ‘site-based design’, Relph (1986), Richardson (2005) and Waterman (2009) argue that meaning and value is a product of how a place is used and lived-in by people. In a BBC interview, Martha Schwartz suggested that a sense of place can be created by a designer and doesn’t have to be the reflection of the existing site conditions. She argues that creating a sense of place is a vital part of creating sustainable places, but that sustainability is “a cultural notion”, cultivated and maintained through “careful and inspired design ... that attracts

people, creates vitality, and is cherished by its inhabitants” (Schwartz 2008: BBC News). The value of connecting people with place outside the confines of a ‘site-based’ response is also recognised by the Landscape Institute which gives designers complete freedom to choose the most appropriate way of working towards the benefits of social sustainability.

“Creating spaces that users can connect with both physically and emotionally – leading to benefits for local businesses such as increased foot fall and time spent... A key feature of landscape architecture is its ability to deliver a range of social, environmental and economic benefits at the same time. This represents an approach to development and placemaking which makes the most of our landscape.”

(Landscape Institute 2011: 1)

Lippard reminds us that rather than the site ‘telling’ a designer what to do, it is the professional’s responsibility to “choose the lenses and the frames” through which we view a site (2005: 1), and similarly it is the author/designer who will “make out of this raw material *their* ways of reading and talking about it: discoursing” (Jenkins 2003: 11 *italics added*). Likewise, Corner (1991: 129) asserts that the landscape is a text which is “open to interpretation”. Amidon (2001), Burns (1991) and Rosenberg (2002) suggest that revealing certain aspects of the site entails a process of discovery and survey; the results of which may be used to inform subsequent design decisions and a “literal basis of construction” (Burns 1991: 154).

Implications for the research

The academic context of this research suggests a tension between those who posit site in “geographic” (Cosgrove 1998) terms; preferring to write about *place* or *landscape* when discussing anything other than the demarcation of an area of land: and those for whom the implications of such a narrow understanding of the term has negative consequences. The discourse also sheds further light onto the reaction against ‘clearing’ or ‘emptying’ the landscape, and shows how landscape architectural theories have been greatly influenced by ideas that practitioners have a responsibility to search for meaning and identity in every site, and to draw on

these findings for design inspiration. This research therefore seeks to understand the extent to which these ways of understanding site impact how landscape architects 'get to know' a site, and on their resulting design decisions.

3.4 Professional Dimension: Site survey and practice

Butterworth and Vardy (2008) propose that the site survey is the most significant agent through which landscape architects comprehend individual places, and Tate describes the action of "appreciating the forces ... roots ... character ... essence" of a site as "the most fundamental and enduring value underpinning landscape architecture" (Tate 2005: 66). At its most basic level, the site survey is seen by Seex (2001) and Stiles (1992) as a framework for analysis which looks for "problems and opportunities" in order that a subsequent design solution can find a comfortable fit. In contemporary landscape architecture, the survey is seen as essential to understanding the whole scope of "social, economic, geological, ecological and climatic forces" of a site (Tate 2005: 62), or as discovering the essence or "*je ne sais quoi*" of a place (Girod 1999: 63).

Measuring and Observing the Physical Site

According to Lootsma (1999), the site survey directly influences design through a rigorous, apparently scientific process of survey and design (c.f. Russ 2002). Standardised techniques emphasise the survey's position in a process, the most common of which is known by its acronym 'SAD' *Survey, Analyse, Design*, which, when followed according to agreed principles would "almost automatically seem to generate the plan" (Lootsma 1999: 266). This approach was seen as a "rational way of solving design problems... modelled on scientific method" (Stiles 1992: 30, c.f. Lootsma 1999: 266) and has close associations with Positivist methodologies. Although this rigid systemisation has since been questioned by, amongst others Moore (2010) and Stiles (1992) et.al, it is *still* promoted as "an orderly sequence of

techniques” by Holden and Liversedge in which “the site as revealed by the analysis of the survey should in turn determine the design” (2014: 83).

A reliance on quantification and measurement typified by this approach has led to a situation which focuses our conceptualisation of site on that which can be *measured* – so much so that Butterworth and Vardy point out that “the list of inclusions for a site survey, as defined by The Architect’s Job Book, comprises of only physical characteristics” (2008: 126). According to Moore (2010: 74 – 78) this apparently neutrally objective way of thinking emphasises the rigor of a scientific process. Thwaites and Simkiss similarly note that by utilising “quantifiable and objective” survey methods, designers could assume the “authority and legitimacy of scientific rigour” (2007: 9). Apart from the different and presumed sources of inspiration, both this scientific approach, and a reliance on the genius loci, look beyond the designer’s skills of interpretation to assume a degree of legitimacy for subsequent design decisions.

Sensing and Absorbing the Site

“Perhaps the most challenging and important part of design is learning how to listen to the memories shared between a place and its people. Partly this will involve talking to those who live there and partly researching the history in archaeology, maps, writing and illustrations. But there is no substitute for simply spending time in a place and allowing its character to seep into one’s consciousness.”

(Kim Wilkie, undated)

Meyer argues that the techno-scientific methodology has now “given way to site readings and interpretations drawn from first-hand experience and from a specific site’s social and ecological histories” (2005: 93). This way of understanding and surveying the site could be termed an intuitive approach, as it deals with those aspects which, at first glance, appear not to be quantifiable. It relies on the landscape architect being sensitive to a site’s character; “where one feels before one thinks”, being able to “tap the hidden energy of a place” and look at the site “with wonderment and curiosity, with subjective and interpretive eyes” (Girot

1999: 61). This approach emphasises the landscape as something which must be read or interpreted in order to inform various stages of the design process. Whereas the techno-scientific survey methods focused on measuring quantifiable data, the intuitive approach relies on 'sensing' 'intuiting', 'feeling' and 'picking up vibes'. Lynch (1984 and Richardson (2005)) suggest that significant aspects of this approach fall within the idea of the genius loci or sense of place. Brook (2000) distinguishes between the genius loci as "character" and as "communing with the spirit": in landscape architecture, "communing" is also rendered as "consulting" (Thompson 2000: 25) or "feel[ing] the essence" (Moore 2010: 57). Picking up, feeling, sensing or consulting the genius loci usually refers to a process of getting to know a site "that is unquantifiable and difficult to describe" (Richardson 2008: 305) and which does not necessarily rely on measurement. With so much weight given to the genius loci Lynch notes that "the skilled site planner suffers a constant anxiety about the 'spirit of place'" (1984: 5) and Moore argues that it has assumed a "greater significance as some kind of spirit in here, out there, somewhere, waiting to be communed with" (2010: 57).

Moore also argues that, whilst such methods of survey are not inherently bad – far from it – their prevalence is unhelpful for two important reasons. Firstly, the language used in association with such modes of discovery suggest that there is "something other to see if you look sensitively enough" (2010: 58); and secondly, that "too many students have been told simply to go out and feel the essence of the place, to see what it has to say" and that to "'consult the genius of the place' is often the only guidance students get as to how to approach the designing of a landscape" (Moore 2010: 57).

Directed Survey

Burns (1991), Stiles (1992) and Thomson (2000) et al. suggest that the criteria for conducting a site survey are framed by the programme of the project. Moreover, Butterworth and Vardy argue that "this codified, abstracted and fixed version of the site carries enormous weight in the determination of the parameters of the

architecture that follows” (2008: 127). The lens through which a site is examined is not neutral or “value-free”, according to Burns and Kahn (2005: xiv), and neither is the site itself according to Burns, because “one cannot divorce site from the way it is known” (1991: 151). Furthermore, the “tools” we use to conduct a site survey “models, photos, sketches, diagrams, maps” influence any subsequent interpretations and translations (Vogt 2010: 22). Reflecting Burns’ (1991) and Lippard’s (2005) notions that our understanding of site is dependent on our cultural context or professional objectives, Isenstadt indicates that the site survey both frames and reinforces this partiality:

“As often as not, an architect’s description of an existing context will soon underpin a subsequent series of decisions to intervene in that context. A characterisation of context smuggles into the design process a set of confirming values camouflaged as a description of existing conditions and observed facts; the details of any description of context will usually indicate whether the speaker aims to show respect or reject it. Dressed as an inventory of what is here now, the architect’s analysis of context is often a preliminary step in the struggle for what will come next.”

(Isenstadt 2005: 158)

In landscape architecture, site surveys tend to be a combination of techno-scientific data gathering *and* intuitive or phenomenological approaches; where techno-scientific surveys are seen as objective, and the more intuitive or phenomenological techniques are acknowledged as subjective. Lootsma argues that we favour one over the other depending on the cultural currency of the time. For example, there are efforts to quantify and legitimise “instinctive or emotional arguments” for those who value scientific rigour by using “a poll or vote for example” (Lootsma 1999: 267). Commenting on techno-scientific and objective methodologies, Stiles argues that survey data and analysis in itself cannot “directly produce a design” because “designs are the product of the human mind ... the design solution does not lie hidden somewhere in the design problem waiting to be discovered” (Stiles 1992: 32).

Non-Traditional Survey

Much of the literature outlined above focuses on analysing a site through measurements (objective data-gathering) or experience (intuitive, 'spiritual' approaches). Looking for a middle path between the attachment of a theoretical scientist and the detachment of an experiential or cognitive description, Burns and Kahn suggest that when examining an area, it ought to be done from "situated knowledge or as narrative-like synthesis" (2005: xxiii). When narrowly defined as an area of ground with boundaries, it frequently follows that the site is surveyed within these similarly narrow terms. However, when conceived as a 'way of seeing' or as a "relational", "social" or "cultural" construct (Burns and Kahn 2005, Beauregard 2005, Burns 2005) it opens the door to allow designers to break free from these limiting boundaries. Meyer (2005) proposes that the discipline needs to investigate alternative ways of imagining sites, drawn from other disciplines and be unafraid to experiment, because, as Moore suggests, "no one approach to the survey is inherently superior to another, more realistic or authentic" (2010: 98). Rather than the site survey attempting to unlock a secret held within the land, it is "what the designer brings to the project ... the calibre of the investigation" that counts (ibid). From this standpoint of "situated knowledge" (Burns and Kahn 2005: xxiii), the emphasis is on the designer using their professional skill in order to "fulfil their potential possibilities" (Butterworth and Vardy 2008: 131).

This theme is developed by Butterworth and Vardy, who examine an approach to surveying which provides landscape architects opportunities to interpret the site in less familiar ways. In summing up this approach, they set out the following characteristics of a "creative survey" which differentiate it from a traditional, normative survey:

"While the 'creative survey' does not follow a predetermined pattern it usually exhibits the following characteristics:

It is not limited by a red line around a site

It is not only carried out by the architect, but by other users too

It is active, experimental and open-ended
It makes proposals rather than just recording what is
It can occur at any time through the design process
It allows proposals to emerge rather than be imposed
It employs language and codes that are accessible
It can create processes through which people can together, cope with change.

In essence, the 'creative survey' expands the focus of the normative site survey to encompass users, time, programme and physical location, and it forges a relationship between all these dimensions."

(Butterworth and Vardy 2008: 137)

In common with Butterworth and Vardy, other author-practitioners suggest ways that the site survey can be creatively developed alongside or instead of more traditional methods. Berleant submits that landscape architects need to develop their observational and interpretive skills. Using language that is not always helpful in ascertaining how this might be achieved, he advocates that designers "develop their perceptual capacities ... kinaesthetic consciousness... semantic spatial awareness... sensory recognition of volumes and textures, auditory acuteness, and the richly complex sensibility of synaesthetic perception" (2003: 52). Taking a more linguistically accessible approach, Vogt similarly suggests that by walking through a landscape, designers are able to closely observe and interpret their surroundings: "walking is as much a subject of interest as it is a means of getting about". In common with other methods for getting to know a site, Vogt argues that it is the interpretation of what is found that informs the design process: "We assess our walks, and if we can find out why they are interesting or not, we have a good basis for design" (Vogt 2010: 26).

Representing Site

Just as the process of surveying influences how landscape architects comprehend the site, some authors contend that the way it is represented impacts how it is known. This is particularly evident in the "figure-ground drawings" where "buildings

are black and all else is white” (Dripps 2005: 73-4). Dripps argues that representing site as an “empty white space” can render it “devoid of character” which is in effect emptying it; clearing it by transposing its physical reality onto a sheet of paper (2005: 73-74). Attempting to capture and transfer the rich, textured materiality of a site with camera, pencil or word inevitably involves alteration, interpretation and change. Dripps’ argument is that the ubiquitous black and white plan can itself have the effect of rendering the site as a blank canvas. According to Corner, maps in particular abstract the site and reinforce conceptions of neutrality because “their surfaces are directly *analogous* to the actual ground conditions” which “record the surface of the earth as direct impressions”. Furthermore, “because of this directness, maps are taken to be ‘true’ and ‘objective’ measures of the world, and are accorded a kind of benign neutrality” (Corner 2002: 215). Corner continues his argument by noting that maps have a second side to their agency:

“the inevitable *abstractness* of maps, the result of selection, omission, isolation, distance and codification... Maps present only one version of the earth’s surface, an eidetic fiction constructed from factual observation.”

(Corner 2002: 215)

A reliance on normative survey techniques to provide a true picture of the site is an attempt to capture a part of the landscape so that subsequent design decisions can be legitimised as being either “from the site” or “objectively neutral” (Moore 2010), depending on the cultural setting or designer’s preference. Corner argues that in effect, the criteria on which the survey is undertaken has a direct relationship with the resultant programme of works, “helping to legitimise and enact future plans and decisions” (2002: 215). In short, the data and graphical information we show in our landscape representations reveals what we think about site. For example, revealing an objective bias, Gazvoda asserts that the “creative part of the drawing is less important than the analytical one” because “there are many scientific facts we want to carry over from preliminary drawings to new design” (2002: 119). The site survey also aims to capture a particular representation of the site which can be taken back to the studio. Gregory terms this process “the cartography of objectivism” (1994: 71) because there is an attempt to portray that which can be

measured and observed from reality onto a plan. This process can also apply to those aspects of the site more usually associated with the intuitive (the genius loci for example) when any attempt is made to record that which is 'found'.

In all cases, the aim of the survey is to get to know the site, as Butterworth and Vardy note:

"The site survey's ambition to be comprehensive is perhaps its essential limiting characteristic. The process does not acknowledge the abstracted nature of the information that it produces nor does it recognise the absence of other information it has not gathered. Such limitations are not considered in the adoption of the site survey as signifier of the site. This adoption goes so far, in fact, as to obliterate the site so that we reach the paradoxical situation where the map is indeed the territory; the site survey has become the site."

(Butterworth and Vardy 2008: 127)

The authors go on to argue that there is a real danger that this process of abstraction can be so strong that the actual site can be forgotten so that all design decisions are made and located on representative maps and plan (ibid: 128). Girot worries that there is a trend which is seeing "landscape as place" being replaced with "landscape as a piece of paper or computer screen" which will inevitably lead to an "inherent absence of site" (2006: 95). Jonathon Hill (2003, quoted by Butterworth and Vardy 2008: 127) argues that the site survey and associated data and images are "tools of abstraction" which, it is argued, are employed to exclude that which does not serve to further the programme of development (c.f. Gregory 1994: 71 on Cartesian Exclusion). Lootsma asserts that "mapping becomes instrumental in constructing arguments, presenting a case, and getting projects built. It is a rhetorical art form." (1999: 267 c.f. Corner 2002: 213).

The use of maps, and in particular historical maps, can be particularly significant in the notion that the landscape is made up of layers, creating an abstracted form of the site which the landscape architect can delve into as a repository of a place's history. Maps also emphasise boundaries in the landscape; the most commonly

used maps in the UK (based on Ordnance Survey data) are a graphical representation of physical objects, each with a distinct, observable boundary. It is perhaps unsurprising that sites are seen as areas of ground with boundaries when they are represented as such on nearly all the documentation that passes between client and designer.

Most authors agree that the results of any survey are not equal to the site itself, merely a description of a “limited set of characteristics of the site ... that are deemed useful” (Butterworth and Vardy 2008: 127) or perhaps a record of characteristics which are “essentially arbitrary... the artist’s conception of that site at a particular time” (Berrizbeitia 2007: 176); a representation of reality which, according to Butterworth and Vardy (2008), stands in place of the site itself:

“A plan represents a view that never exists in reality. It is a convenient fiction.”

(Treib 2008: 115)

Or to put it a great deal more whimsically:

“Granny Weatherwax didn’t like maps. She felt instinctively that they sold the landscape short.”

(Pratchett 1992: 28)

Corner discusses whether the ‘real’ site is being replaced by a virtual version by calling on Baudrillard’s assertion that technology has blurred the boundaries of “what is real and what is representation” and concluding that the “act of differentiating between the real and the representation is no longer meaningful” (2002: 222). The argument presented by Butterworth and Vardy et al. suggests however, that there is a very real danger in unconsciously, perhaps insidiously, confusing reality with artifice. Dripps (2005: 77) asserts that to unthinkingly abstract the site will result in ignoring the evident subtleties of a place, while Leatherbarrow argues that the process of abstraction “prevents the designer from grasping any particular site’s concrete qualities” (1993: 17). The use of maps in abstracting the site *can* result in a situation where a ‘blank’, two-dimensional representation is

given absolute authority as a legitimate version of the site, but to do so ignores the creative possibilities of the mapping process.

Implications for the research

The process of surveying a site is one undertaken by all landscape architects and forms the primary way in which they 'get to know' a site. As such, the techniques, methods, processes and approaches we use to look at a site will govern how we understand a place. In addition to these ways of comprehending a site, the ways in which we subsequently represent our findings shape how we see the landscape. The criteria we use to survey a place necessarily limits those aspects of a site that we might otherwise consider. Likewise, in selecting certain elements of these findings, we are constructing a particular narrative which meets the needs of its audience. This research seeks to more fully explore how practicing landscape architects get to know a site, to ascertain the extent to which it conforms to those approaches described above, and to investigate how these ways of 'getting to know' a site impact design decisions.

4

Operationalising the study:

Journeys, Questions and Methods.

This chapter begins with a narrative of the research journey associated with this thesis. It is included here to show how the project has developed over time, and through a process of continual reflection and refinement, has evolved into that which is set out herein. Part of the reason for describing this process is to demonstrate how the research questions which guide the study went through a number of iterations before settling on their final form. As a reflection of the project in its entirety, it necessarily includes details of the on-going observations and conclusions which shaped the direction of the study as a whole. The research questions are set out in more detail in section 4.2 and form a bridge to the remainder of the chapter (4.3) which sets out the methodology used to address these questions.

4.1 Research Journey

Beginnings

The impetus for this research was born out of the experience of being a landscape architecture student: learning how to ‘read’ a site, generate design ideas and translate this inspiration into space and form for a specific area. Studying what practitioners wrote about their design processes, it became apparent that many designers cited ‘the site’, and in particular its history, as a key source of inspiration. This raised a number of questions: if design-inspiration were taken from the history, or some other aspect of the site, would there be a danger of chaining that place to

its past? Would doing so limit the opportunities to bring new ideas and creative solutions to a project? Comparing this experience with other artistic endeavours, would an artist paint a picture about the canvas or where it was bought? Would a sculptor make a work denoting the quarry or the extraction tools? Perhaps there was something different about inspiration in landscape architecture and the nature of the medium with which we work.

These themes were initially explored through the major design project of a postgraduate diploma in landscape architecture, whereby a site with a distinctive and locally-important history was purposefully selected in order to work with the balance between historical significance, non-literal design inspiration and ensuring a project meets the needs of a complex brief. As part of the research for this design project, a number of precedents were studied as an opportunity to understand the professional context within which site-history was used as inspiration for design. Examining these precedents and the literature associated with them indicated that landscape architects used site-history in a range of different ways in their designs. Within the context of historically-influenced design, one particular interpretation was especially interesting: some practitioners were re-interpreting the outline, form or pattern of long-buried features within a site into their new schemes so that something which had been previously lost to history was resurrected and given a completely new form and/or function. Having studied historical geography as part of a bachelor's degree, and being aware that the selection, recording and interpretation of history is always significant, it was surprising that the information published about these landscape projects gave no indication as to why a particular era or feature from a site's past was selected over the myriad of other possible options.

By resurrecting very particular and selected elements of a site's history, further questions were raised which, whilst not possible to investigate as part of the aforementioned design project, might be investigated as part of a further research project. How were designers choosing what to reveal, and what was the reasoning behind their decisions? Furthermore, if a site is being 'cleared' for redevelopment,

why take inspiration from the past rather than a site's present or its imagined future?

Following the successful completion of the postgraduate diploma, the opportunity to design a research project to investigate this design phenomenon arose, and a term was coined to describe the type of landscape feature to be studied.

'*Resurrected Footprints*' are new landscape features which trace the outline of a lost landscape feature which have been previously destroyed.

Testing the waters: a pilot study

The very earliest iteration of this research project sought to uncover when and why this design approach arose, categorise the different ways in which landscape architects used this method and attempt to critically assess the quality and effectiveness of these designs. Three research questions led this pilot study:

1. To what extent do landscape architects use *Resurrected Footprints* in contemporary landscape architecture?
2. How do examples of Resurrecting Footprints refer or respond to the feature to which they are alluding?
3. Why do landscape architects use *Resurrecting Footprints* as a design approach and how do they decide which element(s) of history to refer to?

As this proposal began to take shape, a survey of the examples of *Resurrected Footprints* within contemporary British landscape architecture was designed to establish its prevalence within the industry and provide a set of case studies for further examination. Recognising that there are hundreds of new landscape schemes designed or completed every year in the UK, the survey took those which had been selected by industry experts for inclusion in the two main industry journals as part of their Review of the Year or Awards issues over a set period of time. For each project, the primary generator(s) were noted and recorded, revealing that within the sample from an eleven year period, approximately half cited 'history' as being a primary generator for their scheme, and just over 10%

contained at least one example of *Resurrected Footprints* in the project. In addition to this sample, further published examples were noted as case studies.

A desk study of each case study established what the original (historically lost) feature was and how the landscape architect re-interpreted it into their design scheme. Two main types of feature were identified: rivers or other water-ways which had either dried-up or been culverted, and buildings or other built-structures such as walls or monuments. Most of the projects which sought to reveal a former water course did so using some kind of water feature such as a line of fountains, but in at least one case the culverted river was depicted by a line of blue-bricks within the paving of a city square. Former buildings or other structures were re-interpreted variously as hedges, changes in level, new structures and patterns in the pavement. Eleven illustrated case-studies were prepared at this stage of the project.

Exploring Resurrected Footprints

In order to explore how and why designers look to a site's past for design inspiration, four high-profile landscape architects who had used this approach were selected for in-depth interview. The interviews focused on the design process behind a specific case-study and the factors which influenced their design decisions. As this was an approach which focused on a site's history, interviewees who either offered professional guidance or funding to historical projects were also invited to take part in the research.

In parallel with the collection of primary data, the literature review looked at the various ways in which authors have charted or categorised different approaches to landscape architecture and the factors influencing design inspiration. This widened the scope of the research quite significantly so that the study was less focused solely on one particular way of interpreting history, and more on understanding how this approach fitted into the bigger picture of landscape architectural design

theory. In response, the research proposal shifted slightly to address the following research questions:

1. How does the *Resurrecting Footprints* phenomenon relate to existing design theory in landscape architecture and to the policies and guidance applicable to the industry?
2. How do practitioners identify and utilise former (historical) landscape features as part of their design process?
3. Why do landscape architects use site history as a determining factor in their designs?

As the research progressed, a number of common themes began to emerge: the importance of historic maps; the role of local identity; and theories relating to the nature of the site itself.

The early phases of the research established that the history of a place was used as a way of making a connection between the past and the present in order to re-connecting people with a place. This was echoed in the literature which indicated that *site specificity* and *sense (or spirit) of place* were of key importance in the industry. Furthermore, *localism* and *uniqueness* were integral to (then) governmental policy and guidance. The interviewees sought to identify and utilise something specific to a site, strengthen its local identity, engage people's curiosity about its unique qualities and give a new design a sense of place grounded in the continuation of its history.

Interviews showed that in all cases, specific features were identified by examining historical maps, and designers chose elements that were either spatially or culturally interesting or significant to them, their client or the end-user of a scheme. Both the interviews and literature indicated that designers used old maps as a way of understanding the history of a site and that designers saw the history recorded in these maps as being significant for re-connecting people with place.

As this phase of the research neared its end, it was necessary to review the evidence of the study thus far:

- There is a socio-political impetus to make places distinctive, engendering them with meaning and identity in order to connect people to places.
- Some landscape architects conceive of the site as being a significant or legitimate source of design inspiration.
- Site can be understood as a repository of self-evident and inherently meaningful information which landscape architects can unlock in order to fulfil the socio-political requirements set out above.

From this point, a further set of literature was examined in order to test whether there was any mileage in deepening the scope of the research, and if so, in what direction.

This reading explored different ways that site can be understood and worked-with, both theoretically and practically. These texts demonstrated various approaches to understanding the nature of a site and the impact this had on the design process. It became apparent that the *Resurrected Footprints* approach, in common with all other approaches to landscape design identified in the on-going literature review, had a direct link with how landscape architects understood and worked with a site.

The significance of a site

Discovering that there were different ways of understanding site was incredibly significant. The research to date had identified a number of factors which contributed to each individual design project, but this new discovery appeared to suggest that there was something more fundamental underpinning the relationship between site and design. As a site-based discipline, the way that a landscape architect thinks about and approaches each place appears to be fundamental to their professional practice (Burns and Kahn 2005, Thompson 2000 et al.).

From this point onwards the research focused moved on examining different approaches to site in landscape architecture. This raised a number of issues which were used to drive the initial impetus for this renewed phase of the project:

Firstly, questions about the inherent value of the site as a design-determining factor prompted an investigation into how different authors saw the relationship between the site and design decisions. Several lines of enquiry were pursued in an attempt to discover why the site was seen as inherently valuable, and why designs based on history were viewed as more legitimate or significant by some commentators and practitioners. It appears that two seemingly opposing factors were at play: on the one hand the landscape can be rigorously and scientifically analysed, and the resulting data, which is thought to be a provable techno-scientific process (McHarg 1967) can be used to inform design decisions; and on the other, that some designers can tap into an unknowable and unteachable creative process brought about through exposure to the unique spirit said to reside in every place (Moore 2010). The processes used to glean information and derive design inspiration from the site appeared to be the mechanisms by which the site itself is given legitimacy and authority as a source of inspiration. The aim of the study at this stage was driven by the desire to demonstrate that, rather than site being inherently authoritative, it was the designer who held the authority because they were making the choice to select, ignore or edit which parts of a site ultimately influenced their design decisions.

Secondly, it was noted that site was frequently discussed as being constructed of layers, and that these layers could be peeled back and investigated as a way of generating design ideas (Amidon 2001 et al.). This theory appears to have some basis when considering how successive editions of maps can be placed on top of one another to illustrate the changes to the land's physicality over time. Each map contains a snapshot of the area as a layer in time which can be readily interrogated by landscape architects as they research its development. It would also appear that mapping and publishing this data lends it further credence as an authoritative and legitimate source of design inspiration because design ideas taken from a map can

be fully evidenced, and the design process therefore demystified. This part of the research was driven by the observation that in practice every area is less ordered and neat than a series of overlaid maps might suggest.

Thirdly, in landscape design discourse, site was usually defined along the lines of “an area of ground” (Christensen 2005). This limited approach appeared to miss out on many of the insights gleaned from the literature review, such as Burns and Kahn’s (2005) concept of ‘site-thinking’. Furthermore, there seemed to be little attention paid to how landscape architects went about ‘getting to know’ and understand a particular site and how their conceptions influenced a design project. The following research questions were proposed as a way of addressing this:

1. What are the key factors contributing to site-thinking in landscape architecture?
2. How does site-thinking manifest itself in practice?
3. How might this research revitalise site-thinking and its implications for practice?

The first question sought to identify and examine the different factors relating to what we mean by ‘site’, how they are conceptualised and surveyed, and what part a site plays in the different processes within landscape architectural practice. In the same way that the earlier research sought to understand those factors which led to and supported the use of *Resurrected Footprints*, this part of the research would take data from a combination of literature, case study and in-depth interview.

An initial proposal sought to examine a number of land-based subjects and interview a range of practitioners who dealt with different aspects of the land, but this was later refined to focus solely on practising landscape architects. A number of key factors had been identified in the literature which became the basis for a set of interview questions and case-studies. For each of these key factors, participants were asked to discuss a project where this factor had been purposefully used as part of their design process, and then to discuss a project where they had, for whatever reason, purposefully *not* used that same factor. Initial analysis of the data

from these interviews concentrated on mapping the extent to which practice and theory differed and converged, and attempted to account for this. As the project progressed however, it became apparent that the factors influencing ideas about site were far more diverse than those identified in the literature.

The second research question initially aimed to discover what practitioners thought about site, and how this influenced their design process. The interviews began by asking each designer to map out the process by which they 'get to know' a site with the aim of understanding what influences this process and how this was then carried through into their design work. Analysis of this data began to build up a picture of the spectrum of different approaches to site given by the various interviewees, and the different ways that these approaches were expressed in built form. As the project progressed however, the understanding of 'site-thinking' shifted away from the relatively narrow focus on defining the key factors which make up our ideas about site, and towards a larger set of inter-related factors which impact how we understand sites.

The third aim of this phase of the research was based on assumptions taken from the literature and the first phase of interviews. From the inception of this research project, certain notions about the relatively narrow set of presumptions about site in practice (compared to those found in some of the literature) drove a desire to find ways of approaching and thinking about the site in theory and practice which were creative, innovative and fruitful. On reflection this appears to have arisen out of frustrations and difficulties with site-survey techniques and habits learnt as a landscape architect student. The perhaps unconscious aim of this research question was to therefore take what had been learned about the most fertile ways practitioners get to know a site, combine this with the more fecund theories and understandings from practice and literature, and propose new and exciting ways to engage with site. As the project progressed, and through a process of self-reflection, it became apparent what lay behind the aim of this particular research question, and in turn what was therefore driving the rest of the project. This could be seen in early drafts of the research which focused too closely on comparing the

results of the interviews with the situation found in the literature and attempting to construct a framework to account for the results.

The first draft of these results settled on four broad observations:

1. Site is essential: Landscape architecture is fundamentally about designing places which are located in and tailored to a specific site. This highlighted a difference between ideas of a 'general site' and those relating to a 'specific site'. To understand the general site is to look at those factors and ideas which can apply to any area of land, and tends to be associated with theoretical discourse. A specific site is one which is located in time and space and which forms the basis for a defined project in practice. The process of getting to know a site is one of transforming general ideas into specific details. Within the design process there exists a difference between design *for* a site, which is to say that every design is tailored for the unique qualities of a specific site; and design *from* a site which, like *Resurrected Footprints*, is an approach which takes design inspiration directly from a place. There is not always a clear distinction between the two in practice.
2. Site is a piece of land(scape): Site is frequently seen solely as the location for various other concerns or activities such as the place where a battle was once fought, or the place to locate a new park. In literature and practice, site frequently plays second fiddle to landscape even though landscape architects largely deal with individual sites as a matter of course. To many, landscape appears more significant than site despite the fact that the point at which a landscape architect interacts with the larger landscape is through a specific plot of land. In some cases, a site is considered separate from the landscape during a project, even if this is just at the conceptual or intellectual level. It would be beneficial to reconnect site-thinking to the larger field of landscape-thinking and remember that a site cannot be disconnected from the landscape as a whole.

3. Site is a cultural construct: Landscape has been defined as a cultural construct, “an area perceived by people” (Council of Europe 2000), and in the same way, the research indicated that a site is likewise dependent on the cultural lenses through which it is comprehended. Site, both general and specific, has meaning which is built on the values, knowledge and thinking of those individuals and groups who are involved in any given project. It is the values, knowledge and thinking which shape a site and give it meaning.

4. Site is a meeting place of ideas: The research demonstrated that there is a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations, each of which is unique to every site and to every designer whilst also holding industry-wide or culturally-wide ideas which might affect all sites or all practice. There is no escaping that site has physicality even though its meaning might be culturally dependent. This physicality enables landscape architects to translate their values, knowledge and thinking from idea into form. Site is (partly) constructed by the knowledge, experience, culture and language of a designer who must make judgements about what is most appropriate for a specific site within the realm of their professional expertise.

Reflecting on these initial conclusions, it became apparent that the project was focused too heavily on attempting to draw together existing models of site-thinking and propose an alternative framework based on the data gathered from the interviews. The attempt to re-frame site-thinking as a source of creative inspiration within landscape architecture was driving the formation of these conclusions, whilst overlooking some of the more interesting findings contained within the collected data.

Digging Deeper

This realisation prompted a change in how the data was analysed, which had previously relied on attempting to fit the data into a pre-conceived framework

based on a particular reading of the associated literature. Reading the interview transcripts with fresh eyes, and without the restriction of a pre-existing framework, the data began to show a more complex and richer picture of how landscape architects get to know, work with and articulate the site with which they are dealing. Whereas before, the data was slavishly pigeonholed into one or other category of site-thinking, it was now able to reveal the fact that site-thinking was itself part of a much greater web of inter-related factors which influence landscape architects. Many such factors influence how an individual designer might work with a specific site, and the comprehension or conceptualisation behind the question 'what is a site?' (i.e. site-thinking) is just one small part of this. This accompanied the realisation that site-thinking is not a separate endeavour whereby a practitioner has a conception of site which is held aloft and informs all other decisions isolated from the rest of their practice; rather that site-thinking, like site itself, is complex and unique to every designer.

In response, the research aims were revised, but more important was the shift in approach behind these aims:

1. Propose a working model for an "*articulate comprehension of site*" (Burns and Kahn 2005) in landscape architecture.

This was based on Burns and Kahn's call to investigate what site means and how this thinking impacts practice. Whilst not an explicit aim in earlier iterations of the study, this was always one of motivations behind the research. Previously, this manifested as an attempt to define what site means in theory and practice as demonstrated in the set of four conclusions taken from the first draft (above). A fresh reading of the literature and the data began to indicate that it was not so much a definition of site that was important, but rather a recognition that an "*articulate comprehension of site*" is one which can begin to account for the spectrum of factors which influence each individual's understanding of and approach to each individual site. It is less about cataloguing these different factors and more about stepping back and recognising that there *are* influencing factors; that site is not a neutral entity.

2. Establish the key factors contributing to site-thinking in landscape architecture.

From this fresh reading of the data, the study turned once more to mapping the key factors contributing to site-thinking in landscape architecture, but without the encumbrance of a closed-loop of pre-defined categories. The data identified five distinct but inter-related contexts which impact site-thinking and the design process in landscape architecture. They are: The *site context* – these are the factors affecting the specific area of land with which a given project is concerned such as topography, climate or demography; The *project context* – These are the factors which affect the specific project such as the client, brief or end-users of a design; The *personal context* – These are the factors which affect each individual designer such as their education, experience or values; The *professional context* – These are factors affecting all landscape architects such as professional guidelines, governmental policy or law; and The *cultural context* – These are the factors affecting the society within which the designer works such as a particular zeitgeist, science, philosophy or religion.

3. Show how site-thinking is manifest in landscape architecture.

The multitude of factors outlined above provides the lenses through which each project is undertaken. These factors influence every decision a designer makes, and in the context of this research therefore influence how landscape architects understand and approach each site, how they survey that site and how they interpret their findings and use their skill, knowledge and judgement to create a design. Each designer interviewed, and each case-study examined illustrates how a different set of lenses influences the decisions made and the resultant designed output. These lenses can be mapped-out and illustrated through case studies.

4. Recommend ways to revitalise site-thinking in theory, practice and pedagogy.

The research indicated that many landscape architects are not given the opportunity to reflect on the spectrum of influences which impact their day-to-day

work. In the context of this research and in order to make the most of their professional judgements, practitioners demonstrated the need for: freedom to carry out their work to the best of their ability; experience built up over time; the ability to persuade and convince; a high level of creative interpretation; and a concern which was greater than the scope of their own (individual) work.

The study up to this point had revealed many insights into how 'site' was understood and worked-with in academia and practice alike. In order to complete the research, it was time to reflect once more: to refine the methodology and gather a final set of data to complete the emerging picture.

4.2 Research Questions

Reflecting on the journey thus far, it was judged that there would be benefit in incorporating the perspectives of stakeholders who participated in the kinds of landscape project the research had already examined.

In the first instance, the data gathered thus far did not represent the insights that might be gained from looking at how other players understood and interpreted a site, and the possible effects this might have on a landscape architect's ideas and responses to sites. Furthermore, the way that the data had been organised and analysed did not seem to reflect the complexity and variety that was clearly evident within the interview transcripts. As a way of pushing the final phase of this project forward, the research questions were modified so as to better reflect the holistic emphasis of the study.

Settling on the Research Questions

- *How does site shape a landscape architect's design decisions?*

The first research question was formulated in response to the observation that landscape architects attribute various aspects of a site with inspiring their design decisions. At the beginning of the research journey, answering this question was expected to reveal a set of site attributes and conditions which landscape architects used as design inspiration. The literature gave most weight to a site's physicality, its character and its history as well-established inspirational sources in contemporary landscape architecture. When comparing this to the situation in practice, it was largely anticipated that landscape designers would be able to add to this list with detailed and nuanced examples taken from projects with which they had been involved. In reality however, whilst the factors described in the literature were evidently part of the picture, practitioners placed very much less importance on them compared to the prominence they were given in the short, pithy articles and essays describing these projects to a professional audience.

This question is therefore intended to explore the different ways that 'site' might influence a landscape architect's design decisions. By studying how sites are investigated, surveyed and comprehended, the study aims to open up a deeper understanding of what practitioners and stakeholders mean when they talk about 'site'. It seeks to investigate and understand the different ideas of – and approaches to – 'site' that exist in the professional and academic literature, and examine how these might be evident in practice. It will also look at the ways that landscape architects 'get to know' particular places in their everyday practice, and will compare this to those procedures set out in the literature. Furthermore, in seeking the views of other stakeholders, the research will explore how these 'outside' responses to sites impact the decisions landscape architects make.

- ***What factors affect how landscape architects interpret site?***

The second research question was initially expected to flow directly from the initial findings of the first. The literature review and the first set of interviews confirmed that the site survey was the primary way that landscape architects interpret site and that history and character (spirit of place) were highly importance in terms of design inspiration. As the research was refined to look at these subjects more closely through the second set of interviews, it was surprising therefore to discover that there were many more factors which affect how landscape architects interpret site. Although some of these factors – such as the designer’s experience or stakeholders’ ambition – were discussed in the literature, they were not directly linked to ideas about site, nor was it suggested that their implementation or effects might affect how landscape architects interpret sites.

This second research question focuses attention on outlining what these further factors entail and the extent to which they are evident across the interviews and within the professional and academic literature. Those factors which are seen to be of particular significance to the scope of this study will be given the most attention with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of their relevance to how sites are understood. Of particular relevance to this research journey, the final thrust of the project carries out a set of interviewees specifically designed to explore how different stakeholders in landscape projects impact a designer’s interpretations of a site.

- ***How do these factors impact design decisions and outcomes?***

The final research question was initially expected to be a survey of case studies demonstrating the spectrum of ways that factors such as site history and spirit of place were given form in the landscape. The first two data sets gave some interesting examples which illustrated this approach and added to the body of knowledge which describes and accounts for the design inspiration underlying built landscapes. However, as the research progressed and it became apparent that the

factors influencing how a site is interpreted were more complex than expected, this approach no longer seemed suitable. Having discovered that the commercial and professional contexts of a practising landscape architect had a far greater role to play in how site was interpreted than had been assumed, it was deemed more important to explore how this new knowledge impacted design decisions and outcomes.

Bringing together the first two questions, this element of the research seeks to investigate and understand the implications of how site is comprehended and interpreted in practice. It looks at the different ways that site is described by practitioners and theorised in the professional and academic literature, and asks how these ways of seeing are manifest in specific projects, procedures, policies and attitudes. Building on the previous question which outlined the various factors impacting landscape architects' design decisions, this research will demonstrate the effects that such factors have in practice. Looking at the design process holistically, this exploration will seek to make sense of theoretical, professional, personal and project-specific factors which shape the context within which a landscape architect works. It will aim to examine how understandings of, and responses to, 'site' are also part of a larger context which encompasses working relationships with other stakeholders.

4.3 Research Methods

4.3.1 Research Approach

The preceding two chapters have established the academic and professional discourse surrounding the concept of site. In seeking to explore and make sense of the connections between theory and practice, this research takes a broadly

inductive approach which aims for a holistic picture of how sites are interpreted by landscape architects.

The research uses two significant works as research-strategy precedents (Lawson's (1997) *Design in Mind* and Thompson's (2000) *Ecology Community and Delight*) which both take a reflective, interpretive approach to examine the links between theory and practice through in-depth interviews with architects (Lawson) and landscape architects (Thompson). Deming and Swaffield – authors of *Landscape Architecture Research*, the discipline's "first and only book on this topic" (2011: back cover) – categorise Thompson's research strategy as *interpretive* based on its reflective approach to the interaction between theory and practice. They sum up this approach as one which "moves reflexively between the observed data and the theoretical concepts that are brought to the investigation and used to make sense of what is found" (2011: 152). In such approaches, the practitioners interviewed by the likes of Lawson and Thompson are termed "key-informants" (2011: 154).

An interpretive, relational research methodology sits with established methodological precedents outlined by Deming and Swaffield (2011), Lawson (1997) and Thompson (2000) utilising a broadly Pragmatic framework as explored and used by Moore (2010). This approach also sits well with the working-model of site as a relational construct as put forward in the subject's key text (Burns and Kahn 2005).

Adopting an interpretive strategy, this research frames it differently to Deming and Swaffield who place it in a constructivist framework as a way of seeking a middle-ground between the traditional objective-subjective dichotomy. In contrast to the strategies outlined by Deming and Swaffield, the Pragmatic approach described by Moore (2010) deliberately side-steps the positional-philosophical arguments surrounding the existence of absolute (or external) truth (Moore 2010: 1), and by implication, the strategies employed to establish this truth (be they objective, constructive or subjective). A Pragmatic framework sees an interpretive approach differently. Rather than seeking to find hidden meaning in language, its "main

purpose is to delve into the particularities, appropriateness and expression of certain ideas” (Moore 2010: 160). A Pragmatic approach to research necessitates “a move from philosophical legitimisation of knowledge to the practical effects of knowledge” (Kvale 2007: 149). This strategy is an appropriate fit for this research because its focus is “not on whether a proposition fits a particular ontology” (Gray 2014: 28) but instead seeks what works in practice, or as Gray notes, “generates practical consequences for society” (ibid). Written from the perspective of a number of years’ experience teaching students in the design studio, a Pragmatic approach is fitting as it seeks to explore how the embedded knowledge and experience of skilled practitioners might be applied and/ or made available to both under- and post-graduate students. A Pragmatic stance does not seek to legitimise this knowledge through either subjective or objective methods; rather it asks *what are the practical effects of this knowledge? how does a landscape architect’s comprehension of site impact their design? and how does knowledge and practice inform landscape architects’ conceptions of site?*

Traditionally, the type of research undertaken by Lawson and Thompson for example, has been labelled qualitative research, embedded in social science as a way of interpreting and analysing subjective data. Deming and Swaffield categorised the analytical method used by Thompson, *Discourse Analysis* (2011:161), a qualitative research strategy which attempts to identify the “dominant narratives they [the interview transcripts] contain” (2011: 163). This analytical method comes from a body of linguistic tools of analysis (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 219-230) which makes sense of qualitative data by searching for meaning within the language used. Thompson used this strategy to analyse and interpret the language of his interviews to “examine their motivations and their satisfactions and dissatisfactions” (Thompson 2000: 9) as a way of articulating the *sources* of values in landscape architecture.

The knowledge-base of this research is two-fold:

- Firstly, the literature forms a body of knowledge about site in landscape architecture which establishes a framework, scope and language for the investigation. Chapter 2 examines literature governing professional practice; chapter 3 explores the subject from an academic and theoretical standpoint.
- Secondly, landscape architects hold a body of knowledge about site as it is used and articulated in practice, providing a range of experienced insights into how this knowledge is worked-out in practice.

This research takes a sample of practising landscape architects and key stakeholders in order to access the sense-making information that these interviewees bring to their everyday work. The research does not aim for generalisations which might be applied across the whole discipline, but instead seeks indicative findings which, from a “perspective-seeking” (Gray 2004: 89) stance is primarily aimed at opening up the field of enquiry. In-depth interviews with “key informants” enable this study to drill down and give a deep and rich look at the behaviour and practices employed by professionals as they interpret sites in landscape architecture.

Following the model for PhD study in design disciplines outlined by Durling (2002: 84), the research was undertaken in the following stages (section numbers in bold):

- **4.3.2** Pilot study
- **4.3.3** Evaluation of literature
- **4.3.4** In-depth interviews with key informants
- **4.3.5** Interpretive analysis and evaluation of the relationship between literature and interviews

4.3.2 Pilot study

Forming the initial enquiry into the subject, this study was undertaken prior to the main thrust of the research. Its methodology is set out in order to explain how the

results (located in Appendix 1), were obtained. The purpose of the pilot study was to examine the extent to which 'site' was identified as a design-inspiration by identifying the primary generators from a sample of published reviews of award-winning landscape schemes. In design-terms, a primary generator can be thought of as the "guiding principles" (Lawson 1997: 5) which drive the design process forward, or as Banathy terms it, a "set of initiating concepts" or the "contemplation of what should be" (1996: 55). The sample consisted of 109 landscape schemes taken from the 'Award' and 'Review of the Year' issues in the professional journals of the British landscape architecture industry (*Landscape Architecture* [now renamed *Landscape*] and *Green Places*) from between 1993 and 2005. Each journal article contains details about what the landscape project hoped to achieve, both in its completed form and throughout the design process.

In addition to identifying the primary generators in these 109 schemes, the pilot study also sought to examine the prevalence of a particular approach to interpreting a site's history. This design-approach had been noted whilst studying precedents for a design project as part of a postgraduate diploma in landscape architecture and provided the spark of interest which led to this research project. To help identify examples of the design-approach in question, a definition of their characteristics was established, alongside which the term *Resurrected Footprints* was coined for the purposes of this research. *Resurrected Footprints* are new features within a landscape scheme which trace the outline, path or structure of a previously buried or destroyed part of the landscape. An example might be a culverted river which is re-interpreted in a new scheme as a line of water-jets; or the outline of a once-standing castle highlighted through a change in a landscape's surface material.

Data Collection

The relevant articles from these journals contain an outline of the design brief, concept or approach and information regarding the funding, consultation and construction behind these award-winning or note-worthy landscape schemes. The

text contained therein was written by the landscape architect(s) responsible for the design and, occasionally, with comment from the judging panel. Each article was read and any text relating to the design-inspiration, aim or aspiration for the scheme (indicators of the primary generator) was highlighted. The following data was then compiled in a matrix for analysis and comparison:

- Project Name
- Journal Reference
- Primary generator(s) influencing the project
- Category (see below)
- *Resurrected Footprint* details

Although the majority of projects had multiple primary generators in line with Lawson (1997) and Banathy (1996), a judgement was made, based on how each project was presented in the journal, as to the *overall* philosophy or guiding aim of the project: its 'desired outcome'. Looking at how these 'desired outcomes' were described in the text, it was possible to group them into the following broad categories:

- Site Sensitive
- Socio-Economic
- Restoration
- Ecological
- Well-Being
- Landmark
- Other

It is possible to define these categories in different ways, and to have many permutations and sub-divisions corresponding to the range of industry niches and specialisms. However, for the purpose of this initial pilot study, this set of categories was judged to adequately represent the key areas in which landscape architects tend to practise.

Grouping projects in this way gave an indication of how different primary generators were represented across a sample of landscape projects, showing a broad view of the profession's concerns and priorities. Secondly, the data was used to provide indicative information on the proportion of projects which cited site-history as a design influence, and for those which specifically used the *Resurrected Footprints* design approach. Whilst it was possible to use the data for straightforward numerically illustrative purposes, neither its collection nor analysis was designed to deliver statistical significance. See figure 4.1 below for an example:

Figure 4.1 Primary Generator example

This example is included in order to clarify the distinction made between primary generators:

A new park is built on a heavily contaminated site which requires significant ecological amelioration within a historic area. The brief is to create a park with a range of uses including public amenities, business opportunities and to stimulate investment in the area.

The primary generators may be recorded as: *ecological site amelioration; historic area; public amenities; stimulate investment.*

Clearly there are many factors influencing this scheme which inform the primary generators for the project. However, the text is explicit that the overall philosophy of the project is *'to create a park with a range of uses including public amenities, business opportunities and to stimulate investment in the area.'* Therefore, the primary generator is judged to be a socio-economic one (rather than ecological or historically-sensitive) even though the project requires significant ecological amelioration and historical sensitivity to get to the desired outcome of a multi-use park. The ecological amelioration and historical sensitivity are contextual factors that must be taken into account on the journey to the destination of delivering a multi-use park.

As explained in section 4.1, the pilot study was an important part of the research journey because it showed that more investigation was required in order to explore

the relationship between what designers think about sites, and how this might impact their subsequent design decisions.

The remainder of this chapter relates to the main part of the research, i.e. that which followed the pilot study.

4.3.3 Literature review

The review of texts initially focused on landscape design theory and the history of landscape architectural practice. The purpose of this reading was to become familiar with the range of approaches to the discipline and how these have shifted over time. The vast majority of these works are written from British, Continental European and North American perspectives, corresponding to the regions where landscape architecture was established and has traditionally flourished.

This reading was extended to incorporate more specialist literature which focused on the following areas:

- Works relating to 'site' and how it is theorised and conceptualised
- A broad grouping of literature relating to Spirit of Place, Sense of Place, Genius Loci, Place-Identity and Local Distinctiveness
- Methods of surveying site
- Professional policy and guidance pertinent to all of the above

Some of this wider reading was drawn directly from works specifically relating to landscape architecture, whilst others were to be found amongst related subjects such as urban design, architecture and geography.

Literature was obtained from a combination of sources: academic books; project-profile books; peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed professional journals (including open-access journals); websites of professional bodies, practices,

governmental or quasi-governmental bodies and other literature from these latter two sources. The libraries of BCU, Warwick and Coventry Universities were used (as part of the SCONUL scheme), as was the inter-library loan facility at BCU. A number of search engines were employed, including ZETOC, the British Humanities Index, Design and Applied Arts Index, Ingenta Journals and the RIBA online library for example. Key-word alerts, RSS feeds and LISTSERV digests were also employed.

4.3.4 In-depth interviews

This research adopts an interpretive strategy, described by Demming and Swaffield as one in which the investigator “actively engage[s] in ‘making sense’ of the phenomena they encounter”, where “the researcher moves reflexively between the observed data and the theoretical concepts that are brought to the investigation” (2011: 152). In common with an interpretive strategy, the Pragmatic approach described by Moore (2010) maintains that the researcher can only make judgements and draw conclusions from a position of knowledge. In this research, the position of knowledge is established through a detailed familiarity of the interview transcripts and contextual literature through reflective and iterative reading. Furthermore, Deming and Swaffield also note that an interpretive strategy is one where “the investigator becomes a social actor within the research, and understanding is actively constructed through mediation between researcher and the data” (Deming and Swaffield 2011: 152). Moore describes this as a position from which one can be objective, but not ‘neutrally objective’ as long as “we are informed, if we make judgements from a position of knowledge, aware of our prejudices, preconceptions and desires” (Moore 2010: 90).

The purpose of the interviews was to discover how conceptions of site shapes the design decisions landscape architects make in practice and to look at the factors that affect how landscape architects interpret site. Participants were selected on a “purposive” basis which “seeks out data expected to be most helpful in addressing the research question” (Demming and Swaffield 2011: 131). A small number of the

interviewees were recommended on the basis of their reputation within the industry in line with Lawson's methodology which states that "it is more useful to know how a few outstanding designers work and think than to conduct experiments on large numbers of less able ones" (Lawson 1997: 3). Further interviewees were selected on the basis that they were directly involved in landscape design (rather than landscape ecology, planning, science or public art for example) in line with the aims of the research. Constraints of time and finance meant that interviews were drawn from the UK, focusing on the Midlands where this research is based, with a cluster around London and further individuals in the North of England and Mid-Wales.

For those interviewees not drawn from recommendations, it was necessary to select candidates from the Landscape Institute's directory of practices. This meant that a number of sampling methods outlined by Demming and Swaffield (2011: 130-131) were unsuitable. The nature of the study ruled out the *opportunistic* method because candidates needed to be chosen and interviews arranged in advance. A *random* method was also considered unsuitable because the Landscape Institute doesn't directly publish the type of work each member is involved in (e.g. design, planning, science etc.). Finally, a representative method which allowed statistical conclusions to be drawn was judged to be unnecessary for the Pragmatic approach of this research.

Each set of interviews was designed so as to drill-down on specific elements of the investigation in order to obtain a deeper and richer sense of the behaviour and practices of the professionals interviewed therein. The results are presented in separate chapters (5 to 7) in order to demonstrate the distinct insights gained from each research phase and to show how each stage built on the previous one. In chapter 8 all of the interview data outlined in section 2 is brought together and viewed as a complete entity in order to address the overarching research questions. Procedurally, because all of the data in the main body of the research is in the form of interview transcripts, there were no difficulties bringing the three phases together for discussion.

Research Development

Set 1 (See chapter 5)

These interviews were designed to examine how site-history was used as a design-determining factor. The five “Key Informants” (Demming and Swaffield 2011) in Set 1 were known, either personally or by reputation, through industry contacts. They were all selected based on their reputation, professional recognition or specific area of expertise. Four of the interviewees are practising landscape architects working in private practice, all of whom hold Directorship positions within their respective companies. The fifth – working as a landscape architect for a national advisory body – was selected for their expertise in how site-history is used in the landscape. Each interviewee was coded to provide anonymity in accordance with their wishes. The tables below outline the interviewees’ details:

Figure 4.2 Set 1 interviewee details

	Interviewee code	Career length*	Position in practice	No. in practice	Type of practice	Background and education
Set 1	1A	Late career	Managing Director	~20	Urban Design	Architecture
	1B	Late career	Owner/ Principal	~20	Landscape Design International Education	Art
	1C	Mid-career	Associate Director	~16	Landscape Design	Landscape architecture
	1D	Late career	Landscape Advisor	100+	Landscape Design	Landscape architecture
	1E	Late career	Owner/ Principal	~4	Landscape Design International Education	History Landscape architecture

*Early career = <10yrs

Mid-career = 10-25yrs

Late career = >25yrs

Set2 (See chapter 6)

For the second set of interviews, nine further candidates were selected in order to examine the range of factors influencing site-thinking on practitioners working in different circumstances from those in Set 1 (for example, junior staff, sole-practitioners, recent graduates and those working in large teams). Six of these interviewees were known either personally or by reputation through industry contacts. One of this six is an academic in the field of enquiry and was invited for interview based on their knowledge and experience in teaching landscape architecture together with their expertise in the concept of the genius loci – one of this study's key areas of enquiry.

The remaining candidates were not directly known and were invited to partake in the research based on their range of skills, knowledge, areas of expertise and the length of time they had been practising. These further three candidates were selected using the Landscape Institute's Directory of Practices as a starting point. Contextual information on the interviewees (such as experience and length of time in practice) was obtained from practice websites which publish profiles of their employees. The alternative would have been to contact each company individually and ask a member of staff to divulge the names and details of their employees which was deemed impractical and ethically problematic. As only a minority of practices publish this information on their websites (and hence in the public domain), this narrowed the field of potential candidates considerably.

Of the fifty six practices registered with the Landscape Institute in the Midlands and East Midlands, forty three had websites at the time of viewing. Of these forty three practices, ten had personnel profiles which published details of their employees. This resulted in a long-list of thirty two individuals, which was narrowed down to six people who were judged to represent a spread of experience, background, education and length of career which complemented those already selected by reputation and recommendation. All six were invited for interview, three of whom accepted. This resulted in a total of nine individuals for the Set 2 interviews.

Figure 4.3 Set 2 interviewee details

	Interviewee code	Career length*	Position in practice	No. in practice	Type of practice	Background and education
Set 2	2A	Late career	Director	~12	Landscape Design International Education	Landscape architecture
	2B	Late career	Director	Sole	Landscape Design	Landscape architecture
	2C	Early career	Landscape architect	~4	Landscape Design	Engineering Architecture
	2D	Mid-career	Director	~85	Landscape Design Infrastructure International	Marketing Finance
	2E	Mid-career	Senior Landscape architect	100+	Landscape Design Public sector LVIA/EIA	Environmental science
	2F	Early career	Director	Sole	Landscape Design LVIA/EIA	Geography Archaeology
	2G	Mid-career	Director	~12	Landscape Design LVIA/EIA	Landscape architecture
	2H	Early career	Landscape architect	~4	Landscape Design	Chartered Surveyor Marketing
	2I	Late career	Lecturer	-	Landscape Design Public sector Education	Philosophy History

Set 3 (See chapter 7)

The final set of interviews was designed to examine how stakeholders in a landscape design project influence landscape architects' design decisions and their interpretation of a site. Three of the interviewees from Set 2 were asked whether they had a project (current or completed) in which the stakeholders with whom they worked might be amenable to partaking in this research project. Two of the

candidates responded with one suggestion each, and the third suggested two, each very different in scope and scale.

Coded according to the set (3) and listed A-D, the four projects were as follows:

- 3A A completed, inner-city public realm scheme funded by devolved governmental monies. The project is led by a landscape architectural practice.
- 3B A yet-to-be-completed visitor education centre and associated landscape setting for a charitable foundation. Funded through donations and grants. Architect-led.
- 3C A yet-to-be-completed courtyard within a newly-built part of a university campus. Funded by the university. Architect-led.
- 3D A completed residential garden for a private property. Funded by the property owners. Landscape architect-led.

Each landscape architect was interviewed in turn, and as part of the interview, they were asked to name the stakeholders with whom they had formed working relations. These stakeholders were then contacted separately and invited to be involved in the research. Out of the four projects studied, a total of 11 stakeholders were invited, 7 of whom accepted and were subsequently interviewed.

Figure 4.4 Set 3 interviewee details

	Project code	Interviewee code	Stakeholder involvement
Set 3	3A	3Aa	Landscape architect
		3Ab	Client representative
	3B	3Ba	Landscape architect
		3Bb	Architect
		3Bc	Charity Trust Director
	3C	3Ca	Landscape architect
		3Cb	Architect
		3Cc	Project Manager
	3D	3Da	Landscape Architect
		3Db	Client
		3Dc	Client

Arranging Interviews – for all three sets

Each prospective candidate was initially approached by email and/or letter, outlining the purpose of the project and inviting them to participate in the research. An example of this letter is found in Appendix 2. Thereafter, contact was made by email or telephone as appropriate. Each interview candidate was sent a copy of an ethical statement based upon BCU/BIAD’s ethical procedures for research. A copy of this can be found in Appendix 3. Each candidate was asked to give their permission for the interview to be recorded and for a full transcription to be made. Interviewees were given the opportunity to choose the date, time and location of the interview, with most choosing their place of work or a neutral location such as a meeting room or café. Two of the interviews were conducted by telephone.

Interview procedures – for all three sets

Of the various face-to-face interview techniques, a semi-structured approach was selected. This relied on a set of questions which had been worked out in advance, but that could respond to the course of the conversation by refining existing

questions, adding new ones or leaving others out as appropriate (Robson 2000: 231). Each interview lasted between forty five and ninety minutes, and all were recorded using a digital voice recorder.

On completion of each interview, the audio-file was uploaded onto a PC hard-drive, with back-ups made on an external hard-drive and on-line data-storage facility. Each interview recording was fully transcribed and a copy sent to the interviewee according to their wishes.

Question design and selection

Lists of the questions corresponding to each set of interviews can be found in Appendix 4. In short, Set 1 explored the factors influencing a particular case-study's use of site-history as a design approach; Set 2 sought to understand the factors which influence landscape architects' design decisions and their interpretation of site; and Set 3 examined the impact that working relationships with key stakeholders had on how landscape architects work with and interpret site.

Continual Improvement

Reflexively examining the interview process to include new areas of enquiry as they arose and to improve the quality and appropriateness of the research tools, the first set of interview transcriptions were reviewed, and based on Robson's (2000: 232) guidance for interviewers, the following issues were identified as needing attention in the remaining interviews:

1. To ensure that the questions were worded more carefully to avoid confusion. It was noted that the nature of a semi-structured interview necessitated a degree of re-wording 'on the spot' to respond to particular lines of questioning. Occasionally, this meant that certain questions needed clarification or further explanation.

*Action: To take notes or write new/amended questions out (if there is time).
To take time to re-think the question, indicating as such to the interviewee.*

2. To eliminate cues (verbal or non-verbal) which lead the interviewee to respond in a particular way. It was noted that on occasion, if a question was not answered promptly (i.e. if the respondent took time to think), the interviewer cut in with a subsequent question with the presumption that the original question had not been understood and the interviewee was waiting for clarification.

Action: *To allow the interviewee time to think, and only give clarification if requested.*

3. To aim for open (as opposed to closed or fixed-alternative) questions. It was noted that a few of the questions could only reasonably be answered 'yes' or 'no'.

Action: *To avoid closed questions where possible and/or to follow up with an open question.*

4. To eliminate multi-part questions. It was noted that on occasion several questions were grouped together as one, resulting in confusion for the interviewee.

Action: *To avoid multi-part questions unless the first part is a simple yes/no answer which might be followed by why/how etc.*

5. The literature against which the interviews are compared is largely written from a European and North American perspective but the research proposal is based upon interviewing UK based practitioners.

Action: *Acknowledge that although the majority of theory is not written from a UK perspective, the nature of the discipline is such that most practitioners will be familiar with internationally-based theory and accept that the research will not consider the impact of nationality in its findings. The majority of interviewees routinely work on projects internationally and a number have either trained or taught overseas.*

6. There is a possibility that interviewees will give an 'ideal' answer when questioned about their response to a theoretical standpoint.

Action: *Couch the questions in terms of interviewees own experience; projects that they are/ have been involved with.*

4.3.5 Interview analysis

Interpretive Analysis

“By moving back and forth between data and concepts, an interactive and iterative process helps define an emerging set of categories that become the project’s explanatory foci.”

(Gerson and Horowitz 2002: 218-219)

The processes of analysis outlined above helped to “identify the phenomenon to be explained” so that a more detailed interpretive analysis could “identify the range of factors and processes that may or may not contribute to its explanations” (Gerson and Horowitz 2002: 218). The framework for this interpretive analysis was originally influenced by the literature review which established that there is a spectrum of understandings surrounding the concept of site. The analysis aimed to discover whether the spectrum of site-thinking evident in theory, was also evident in practice by drawing together the threads of “an emerging set of categories” (ibid) from different interview questions and areas of discussion.

The comprehension of site is articulated through the language used, and this method produced a familiarity with both the transcriptions and literature so that each could be read and re-read in the light of the other. Following the precedents of Lawson (1997) and Thompson (2000), words spoken by the interviewees are quoted verbatim (but anonymised) in the relevant chapters in order to set their opinions and insights in the context of the discussion, giving them voice alongside citations from published authors.

Analysis Process

Each transcription was manually coded according to the initial areas of investigation (site history, spirit of place, site survey and design inspiration). The interview transcriptions were annotated to indicate where they accorded with, differed from

or added a new perspective to the theoretical understanding – with appropriate references to the literature noted.

For each interview, any text, key words, comment or terms pertinent to each area of investigation was transferred into a matrix; with one matrix for each particular area of enquiry. Within each matrix, any superfluous text was removed, leaving a series of statements and key words/phrases relating to the area of enquiry in order to focus and concentrate on the key terms and explanations used by each candidate. This set of matrices gave an overview of the range of interviewees' responses, so that similarities, differences, anomalies etc. could be noted and summarised. All other references of relevance to the area of enquiry from across each interviewee's transcript were also included in the relevant matrix. This process was repeated for each of the interviewees. All of the focused statements relating to each particular topic were then viewed together so that patterns, comparisons, differences and anomalies could be observed, noted and summarised. The following example shows how pertinent parts of the interview were highlighted in the original text (figure 4.5) and once superfluous parts had been removed, were collected according to subject (figure 4.6).

Figure 4.5 Portion of transcript from interview 2D.

I pick up on it by my **instinct**, my **reactions**, and I don't think that is wrong, in actual fact I think it's quite **appropriate** because when I said about being an **informed process**, I like to think after 20 years, and with **stacks of learning, research, observation** etc. I like to think my senses to a site are **appropriate** because it's **balanced**. I used to go to site, particularly when I was studying, I used to go to site and I would just see what I wanted to see, you know, the spirit of the place was what I needed it to be because that was my own design agenda, whereas actually now, you know, you **perceive** the spirit of the place, because that's as much about **context**, and that is my big message, because without wanting to criticise my architect friends too much, an architect designs a building within the 4 walls, it's as much about how you look at it and the space within it. A site is different because the site has a **context**, it's a **component** part, it's part of the **jigsaw**, so if you just get the **feeling** for the site on its own, it might be a beautifully enclosed, magical place, and outside is surrounded by either greater beauty or it's an appalling nightmare, and the **context** is as much about the site as the site is about the **context**.

Figure 4.6 Interview data pertinent to interviewee 2D's site survey approach

- **instinct**, my **reactions**, and I don't think that is wrong
- quite **appropriate** because when I said about being an **informed process**
- stacks of **learning, research, observation** etc. I like to think my senses to a site are **appropriate** because it's **balanced**
- I would just see what I wanted to see
- the spirit of the place was what I needed it to be because that was my own design agenda
- now, you know, you **perceive** the spirit of the place, because that's as much about **context**, and that is my big message
- site is different because the site has a **context**
- a **component** part, it's part of the **jigsaw**
- **feeling** for the site
- **context** is as much about the site as the site is about the **context**.

From this initial collation of the candidates' responses to the areas of enquiry, a number of additional themes were identified as running through the data. These were not subjects to which specific questions were asked in the interview, but

were identified as being significant to the discussions taken as a whole and in light of the literature review. They are:

- The influence of the client and the brief
- Site context
- Application of skills, experience and knowledge of the practitioner
- Conceptions of 'site'
- The practitioner's approach to design, design-philosophy etc.
- Concerns and frustrations expressed by the candidate

For each of these further areas of investigation, the process of data-collection, organisation, concentration and summarisation outlined above, was undertaken and recorded in their own matrices. The table below shows the full range of subject covered by the matrices.

Figure 4.7 Subjects for study matrices

Matrix	Subject	Matrix	Subject
A	Desk Study	M	Comment on Tom Turner's dictum
B	Always visit site?	N	How sense of place informs design
C	Site survey approach	O	Site boundaries
D	Most important aspect of site	P	Inspiration from the site
E	Sufficient information on site	Q	Other sources of inspiration
F	Challenges to site survey	R	Justifying sources of inspiration
G	Importance of history	S	Influence of client and brief
H	Researching site history	T	Site context
I	Important elements of site history	U	Experience, skill and expertise
J	How history informs design	V	Comprehension of <i>site</i>
K	Defining spirit of place	W	Design approach and philosophy
L	Picking up spirit of place	X	Frustration and concerns

Patterns and Spread

Each of the matrices was summarised to show the range of responses and highlight patterns and themes of those elements that were important together with notable anomalies or exceptions. Each interviewee had their own way of explaining the

topic being discussed. This meant that each answer was subtly different, nuanced and contextualised compared to the next, so all analysis was done with reference to the context of the full transcripts where necessary and appropriate. Taking this point into consideration, it was possible to pull out common themes despite the variance in language based on how this subject is discussed in the literature. For example, one aspect of the Spirit of Place is the idea that it is something to be sensed (Brook 2000, Moore 2010, Thompson 2000 and 2009 et al.), so language associated with this might include “using all my senses”, “feeling it evokes”, “personal sense”, “emotional response”, “vibes” and so forth.

Analysis Limitations

It is recognised that the reading of the data is only one of many possible readings, and another researcher using the same data may well prioritise different aspects and uncover insights that were not judged as significant in this study. Furthermore, a different research framework and analytical tools such as the NUD.IST software used by Thompson (2000) might have shown the data in an alternative light.

PART TWO

Part	Chapter	
	1	Does Site Matter?
	2	Professional Practice
1	3	Theorising Site
	4	Operationalising the study: Journey, Questions and Method
	5	Delving Deep into Site
2	6	Results A Landscape Architecture Way of Seeing
	7	Whose Site is it Anyway?
3	8	Site Seeing: Contextualising the Findings
4	9	Interpreting Site: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

5

Delving Deep into Site

5.1 Pilot Study – a report

Since the pilot study was instrumental in setting the direction of this study, a summary of its main findings are presented in this chapter. The complete results are set out in Appendix 1.

Carried out as a precursor to this research project, the pilot study demonstrated that more serious investigative work needed to be undertaken. The pilot study for this research investigated the extent to which site history was cited as influencing landscape design in a sample of projects which had been selected for inclusion in industry journals 'Review of the Year' and 'Awards' issues. It also focused on a specific approach to how practitioners interpret a site's history (which has been termed *Resurrected Footprints*). This data demonstrated how landscape architects portray their work to a panel of judges, giving an insight into what motivates their design decisions and also what particular judges value in their roles as representatives of the industry.

This pilot study also located late twentieth and early twenty-first century 'site-seeing' in landscape architecture within a socio-political context which supported economic growth through the development of public spaces which promoted place-identity and community cohesion. These observations add-to and update the work carried out by Meyer (2005) whose study lacks UK-specific detail.

Contextual milieu

The data from the 109 projects studied proved rich and useful, and whilst each project was categorised according to its overall aim (primary generator), this was done with full acknowledgement that this was just one part of the overall picture. This realisation, along with building a position of knowledge of the reasons behind design decisions, proved to be crucial in later phases of the research.

By grouping the projects into broad categories, it was possible to get a broad sense of the scope of the profession and its context. The way that each site is comprehended, treated and developed is dependent on a specific set of circumstances based on particular cultural, social and political settings. The pilot study showed how these contextual conditions shifted over time, as reflected in the priorities and concerns of each year's judging panel. In addition, the types of projects being built, funded and selected for awards is a reflection of the environment in which they were created. In this sample, a number of these contextual concerns stood out:

- A political arena where policy and guidance place emphasis on taking account of and being sensitive to the specifics of a site.
- The proclivity for site-sensitivity as an overall aim of a project indicates that this concern is shared by the clients who are setting the briefs for such project.
- Being sensitive to, and capitalising on, the history and heritage of a place is seen by some as a way of uniting people and place.
- Socio-economic development and the strengthening of links between people and place are considered important driving factors.

This data also demonstrates that each and every site is unique in terms of its location, topography, character, status etc. Whilst this may be obvious, it indicated that the profession still needs to make this clear as a counterpoint to the effects of placelessness and the treatment of land as a blank canvas. Furthermore, each brief

is unique because it relates to a specific site in a specific situation and is a reflection of the needs of, for example, those writing the brief, the end-user of each project, and those funding the scheme. Much can be learned about the contextual milieu surrounding a project by examining the priorities of those involved.

Site history

As a way of examining these points further, the pilot study sought to look specifically at how site-history is interpreted given the socio-political context of the projects being studied. It became clear that understanding the *significance* of a site's history was perhaps more important than the mere mention of it as a factor in a project because it revealed how theory, policy and cultural influences shaped the design decisions made by landscape architects.

Examining a site's history is a key element which landscape architects regularly factor into their site survey processes. This initial research showed how a routine part of practice corresponded with the (then) socio-political context which valued site history as a social and economic driver.

Resurrected Footprints

This specific design approach demonstrated one way that landscape architects acquire design inspiration. This is important because, apart from these examples, within the articles sampled it was rare to find a designer explain precisely what led them to design a particular element in their scheme. In the cases examined, the designers sought to give their scheme – and its users – a sense of continuity by utilising and referring to archaeological discoveries. These examples show that landscape architects are able to look at the information held by a site and creatively interpret it from one medium (archaeological records, documents, plans etc.) into the medium of landscape architecture (walls, trees, rills, pergolas, surfaces etc.).

Summary

In summary, the two key lessons learned from the pilot study are that:

1. Landscape architecture exists within a particular (and changing) context which is complex; therefore it may not be possible to generalise about how practitioners interpret site.
2. Whilst generalisations may not be possible or desirable, this small sample points to the possibility that the process of interpreting a site in its unique context may in itself contribute to a landscape architect's creativity: in other words, interpreting site in context is a creative act.

Moreover, it established that there was a need to undertake more detailed research into the links between theory and practice. The pilot study showed that it would be necessary to explore the particular socio-economic, cultural and professional contexts within which the discipline operates, as a way of understanding how designers 'get to know' and work-with sites.

From the data gathered in this first stage of the research, two specific areas of questioning formed the basis of the more detailed investigation outlined in the remainder of this chapter:

Context

- What led the designers to refer to a site's history as a design approach?
- What were the designers hoping to achieve by referring to a site's history?
- How was the project shaped by other agencies and collaborations?

Design Process

- How were specific aspects of a site's history selected?
- How might the designer assess the success of a design in meeting the brief?
- What shapes the designer's personal design philosophy?

Examining site history in this pilot study has revealed something much more significant than its use as an influencing factor in design decisions. This initial study has shown that site is not objectively neutral because designers approach and treat sites differently according to the context in which they are working. Site history is just one element within a wider context of how sites are understood. Sites are infinitely complex and ambiguous; the ways that landscape architects respond to them is partly dependent on the context in which they exist, and our comprehension of sites shifts as these contexts change.

5.2 Re-forming a Site's History

This chapter builds on the pilot study by examining specific examples of projects which utilise a site's history, in order to understand the contexts in which each project exists and the factors which lie behind the landscape architects' design decisions. The following sections are organised according to four key themes which emerged as the interview transcripts were compared and interpreted.

Contrasting with literature which posits the site survey as an exercise in data-gathering and/or consulting the genius of place (see chapter 3), section 5.2.1 demonstrates that the interviewees in this sample generally employ a much more in-depth, interpretative and creative process of 'getting to know' a site. Focusing on the practitioners' attempts to fathom a place's character, the section then explores how the story of a site and its history are woven into the design schemes of particular projects. Drawing on Cosgrove's arguments regarding a "landscape way of seeing" (1998: 13), attention turns to examine whether these interviewees display a particular 'landscape *architecture* way of seeing' which relates to the use of site history as a design influence.

Section 5.2.2 builds on observations made in the literature review and in chapter 5 that landscape architecture can be utilised as a way of connecting people with place. Three interrelated concepts are proposed:

- firstly, the idea that landscape architecture might be used as a way of informing people about the place in which they live and work.
- secondly that landscape users can connect to a place through experience.
- thirdly that landscape architecture can be used to ground people in a particular place, anchoring them in the present as part of a larger continuum which stretches both backward and forward in time.

Section 5.2.3 examines how this group of landscape architects routinely employ an informed and critical decision-making process as part of their practice. Building on the work of Thompson (2000) and Moore (2010), this section shows that each practitioner articulates certain guiding principles which can be seen as directing the decisions that they make in relation to the particular and unique opportunities afforded by the medium of landscape architecture. Adding to the literature, which tends to overlook the influence of outside agencies, section 5.2.4 explores the dynamic relationships with stakeholders and how this is manifest within the range of experience and expertise evident in this sample.

The final part of the chapter (5.2.5) outlines the implications these have for the research that follows.

5.2.1 Understanding a site

More than simply seeking to understand a site by collecting data or documenting its appearance, the interviewees expressed that this was a much richer process. Interviewee 1E, with a background in history described it as *“a deep delving into what a place has to offer”*, and 1B likened their interactions with a site to their experience of getting to know certain people better; *“It’s like every person you meet is a different person, so that’s why finding out more about them just makes it richer”*.

Fathoming the character of a site

Fathoming the character of a site is about seeking to properly understand all aspects of a place, what makes it unique, how it evolved and what it means to the people who interact with it. All of the interviewees spoke about this as a formative part of their practice, although there were differences in the rationale they gave for the process and also in how they practically approached the endeavour. The most common reason given for seeking to explore and understand a site’s character was

a variation on what interviewee 1A expressed as the idea that there is a need for *“the design to come from the place”* so that projects don’t appear to be *“parachuted in from the outside”*. The interviewees were demonstrating a recognition that each place possesses its own distinctive character, even whilst recognising that in many places, this has been eroded over time so that *“everywhere looks more or less the same”* (1C).

Through gaining an awareness of how a place’s character has developed, most interviewees suggest that they are able to use this as a way of authentically connecting their design with the site, and that this can, in turn, help to strengthen its distinctive identity. Interviewee 1D, representing a national advisory body, argues that *“one of the keys to good design must always be that it understands its place ... what makes it special and why”* because this gives the experienced designer a solid position of knowledge upon which to make design decisions. In tandem with this, terms such as ‘sense of place’ and ‘genius loci’ were used by some of the interviewees in connection with describing a place’s distinct identity – rather than as a description of its “universal truth” as Moore suggests some do (2010: 57). Interviewee 1A sought to clarify one of these widely used terms by suggesting that *“perhaps we shouldn’t say a sense of place; perhaps we should say a sense of this place, which is, we try to draw out the uniqueness”*.

‘Getting to know a site’ can be thought of as a creative approach to traditional survey procedures in a discipline which seeks to “teach intelligent artistic practice” (Moore 2010: 161). Interviewee 1B understood that their role as a landscape architect was to produce a design that would be meaningful to its users and, rather than viewing the survey as an exercise in simply accounting for the site’s character, for them, it was the beginning of a creative process:

“... an exploration of a site’s history and geography and geology and societal demands and cultural history ... Who are the people living there now? The current users? The past users? Who’s the client? What do they want? How many days does the sun come out? How long does it stay on the site and

when? When you actually drill down on all the information that is out there, often there seems to be nothing there, and it's your job to come up with what it should be. That's my job. People come to me and say 'what should this space be?' as if I'm some sort of soothsayer: Well I don't know yet, I need to think about it." (1B)

As demonstrated in the quote above, the character of a site consists of diverse aspects such as history, geography, economics, culture and ecology; an observation which was shared by all of the interviewees. This combination of factors underlying a place's distinctive character was commonly articulated in terms of a site's history, for example: *"historic interpretation, it's historic referencing. That's what distinctiveness is, it's just another term for it" ... "it's picking out what makes a place different from another. Really it's its physical form or history"* (1C). The process of fathoming the character of a site can furnish landscape architects with design inspiration and, as the pilot study had shown, one way of translating the history and character of a site into built form was through the *Resurrected Footprints* approach. Commenting on why they thought other landscape architects use site history as design inspiration, interviewee 1D suggested that *"they're going back to basics aren't they? They've got intrigued by the site and inspired by the site"*.

Weaving into the story of the site

Closely interlinked with the idea of fathoming the character of a site is the focus on 'weaving into the story of the site'. All of the interviewees expressed that the site has a history which includes the context, conditions and circumstances that have developed and shaped its unique identity. To varying degrees and in different ways, each articulated how their intervention would somehow interweave with this story and shape its future identity. In common with other interviewees, 1A argued, from their experience in urban design, that in order for a design to be meaningful to the people who live there, there is a real need *"to reveal places as they are"*. This stance suggests that the designers use their skills and expertise to explore and

understand the character of a place, and then use this as inspiration to bridge the gap between the site's past and future whilst maintaining, strengthening or developing its distinctive character.

Taking a slightly different approach which highlights the need to critically assess a site's story, 1E – with their background as an historian – states that *“when you're dealing with a place, you're dealing with it on borrowed time and you do need to take responsibility for what you're passing on”*. This emphasis advocates that as well as weaving with the existing threads of a place's story, landscape architects have the ability to rework the weft and warp of a site and begin to weave a new narrative with full knowledge of its past. The same interviewee continues by proposing that:

“I think it's completely right to research the history of a place for environmental reasons and clues as to what'll work there as well as to understand the story. Then, with that full knowledge to look at what its role today is, and what the priorities for it are today, and what its potential – in one's guesswork – for the future might be. I think all three of these need to be weighed up together.” (1E)

For interviewee 1B who sees their responsibility as making *“somebody care about [a] place”*, this approach is taken a step further by arguing that it is their responsibility to weave a story that will engage the users of the site. The existing narrative will certainly help them understand the context of a place, but ultimately theirs is a new take on the site, a new story, as they explain here:

“I like to find out the information about the site because it makes it in some way much easier to start weaving a story that people can actually understand and feel something about... I could say with great confidence that if I went to a site and had a very, very strong take about what needs to happen, what this place needs, I wouldn't necessarily need a lot of rationale

behind it at all. The information just starts me thinking, it's simply a starting point." (1B)

These interviews begin to demonstrate that the way(s) in which landscape architects approach the process of understanding a site is framed by how they might use this knowledge. For all of the interviewees, this will be about seeking to understand the site as a way of ensuring that their designed intervention is woven into the fabric of the landscape, whether or not they choose to use the existing threads – or pattern – as part of this fabric.

Ways of seeing

Are there ways in which landscape architects see a site which impacts how they respond to it in design terms? The sections above certainly suggest that landscape architects are trained to be careful observers of a site and that this observation has purpose: primarily to be able to comprehend and then perpetuate a place's unique character and identity. To quote Cosgrove, for these practitioners site "is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world", it is "the external world mediated through subjective human experience" (Cosgrove 1998: 13). The data indicates that when seeking to understand a site, these landscape architects are 'seeing' each place with identifiable purposes, and that these purposes are twofold:

Firstly, these landscape architects are 'seeing' a site through the experience of seeking to create distinctive, unique places as articulated by interviewee 1B who argues that *"we'd like to think that every space actually called for something different, so I think we go in predisposed to want to explore that"*, and by 1C who stated that *"I'm in the business to create distinctive places for people"*. Within this approach, there are other ways of seeing – some are looking to the site (its history and story) to provide the inspiration to create a distinctive place, whilst others use this as the starting point for their own imaginative leaps. They are united by an

inquisitive, attentive way of seeing because, as 1D notes, *“the landscape architect’s whole training is about looking at the environment around you and its context”*.

Secondly, and closely associated with the first, is the idea that landscape architects use their creative response to the existing site as a way of creating meaning in the re-imagined site. This is demonstrated by 1A who argues that *“to create meaning, we think you have to look back, you certainly have to look forward, and you have to raise expectations”*. Interviewee 1E echoed this idea, linking it to the need to understand a site as best as one is able by *“delving deep into the meaning of a place”*. They go on to advise that *“if one is lazy about that, about the real understanding of a place, then you come up with something trite”*. This last quote raises the possibility that there are perhaps ‘lazy’ ways of seeing. Interviewees 1E (who has a background as a historian) and 1B (a background as an artist) both made a distinction between parochial ways of seeing and interpreting site, and those which are perhaps more sophisticated and creative. When asked why they thought landscape architects refer to a place’s past, 1B suggested that *“maybe they don’t have any better ideas... it’s a lack of imagination”*.

5.2.2 Connecting people and place

The idea that every place, every site, is unique and has a distinct identity is of utmost concern to these interviewees and is a reflection of the wider industry (see chapters 2 and 3). In the course of these interviews, all of the designers spoke about how landscape architecture might be used as a way of connecting people and place. As mentioned in the literature review, landscape architects are often seeking to recreate or strengthen the local identity of places which have succumbed to a sense of “placelessness”. This is aptly summed up by interviewee 1C who, commenting on the centre of Belfast, says *“everywhere looks more or less the same”*.

There is also a concern amongst the interviewees which stands over and above the desire to ensure a place keeps or is given a distinct identity, which is the aspiration that people will connect with the places that the designers are working on. The interviewees approach this from three angles:

- informing people about a place
- facilitating an experiential connection and
- meaningfully grounding them in space and time.

Informing

A specialist in historical landscapes, interviewee 1D said that a landscape architect's role in instructing people about the history of a site *"was the most natural thing to do"*, and that even if this did not express itself in a design, *"when you went to the first public meeting, it was bound to come up at some point. It just shows about the understanding of your brief and what you're trying to do"*. This reaffirms the notion that looking at a site's history is part and parcel of a landscape architect's everyday job, but makes it clearer that there is an audience for what they discover.

Interviewees 1D and 1E, who both have experience in working with historical landscapes, observe that people are *"genuinely interested in the past, and stories of the past, and ways that that can be revealed"* (1D), and that *"one of the things that I have become acutely conscious about is an almost universal fascination with what has been on the site of someone's house or someone's birthplace or something like that. I actually haven't found anyone yet who isn't fascinated by what's gone before"* (1E). Both of these interviewees acknowledge that people are interested in the history of a place and spoke about how this might be approached through the medium of landscape architecture. Coming at the subject from a slightly different angle, interviewees 1A and 1C make similar observations albeit from an apparently theoretical appreciation of how people are connected, or otherwise, with a place:

"I think in bygone times people were much more connected with their past and the rate of change was less. As the rate of change increases, I think

people need to understand why their place is like it is... it's important people understand why their place is as it is." (1A)

In the context of the interviews, most candidates were talking about projects in which *Resurrected Footprints* were used, and so the way in which people were informed about a site was through the introduction of an element of the site which had been lost to history in the intervening years. Before the commencement of this research it was assumed that this approach was primarily based on informing people about history so that they would grasp a connection to the landscape through an appreciation of their place within a site's historical timeframe, as noted by 1A who argues that *"if you can reveal that, then you can make the present that much richer"*. However, the data suggests that connecting people and place is not primarily about a connection with history, although this is an important aspect for some interviewees. It is clear from the interviews that connecting people to a place has to be authentic; design inspiration is taken from the site's physical past (as revealed by archaeology or historical map) rather than being 'invented' by the designer. 1A warns that inventing ways of connecting people and place *"can be a fairly dodgy process"*.

When using landscape architecture to inform people about a site, the interviewees are not necessarily attempting to instruct them about the history of a site per se, rather they are using its history to prompt people's curiosity as a way of facilitating a connection with the place. Interviewee 1D picks up on this by noting that *"things like this are intriguing, and what I love about it is that if it gets people to stop and look and actually engage in their environment or to ask questions or even to voice negative opinions – that's great"*.

It was originally assumed that the reference to a site's history had to be legible in order for it to function as a connection to the site, but the interviewees made it clear that the point of such a reference was less about being an historical lesson, and more about functioning as a landscape element which had multi-layered

meaning. Rather than being a didactic endeavour as outlined by Treib (1995), these designers are offering people an opportunity to learn about a site as one way of helping to connect them with a place. A number of the interviewees spoke about how their designs were more than just historical records that people had to be able to read. 1A argues that their designs have *“to work for people who are not interested per se in this subject”*. This is echoed by interviewee 1C when commenting on an example of an historical reference used in one of their schemes:

“[If you] ask the same question to the person who’s playing in it and running through it [water jets] ‘do you need this historic link?’ and if we were to tell them there’s a historic link there, I think they’d be pleased, or there’d be an acknowledgement I’m sure.”

1E offered a slightly different perspective by claiming that when referring to a site’s history, *“if you’re too literal you don’t allow people’s imaginations to engage”* and that *“music, advertising, writing and landscape are the most powerful when there’s enough to trigger a whole series of thoughts and imaginations, and not so much that you stifle it”*. This point is taken up by 1B who takes the stance that landscape has the power to engage people’s imaginations, but unlike the other interviewees, does not concede that there *has* to be any element of ‘informing’ in order to connect people with place.

“I don’t think you need a narrative. I don’t think it’s even important that people understand the narrative – I really don’t. It’s not important that anybody ‘gets it’. I don’t care. What I do care about is whether they somehow like the space, they intuitively get it – it feels good to them and it looks like it would be fun”.

This point of view represents an *experiential* approach to connecting people to place. The other interviewees also use this approach; the difference being that for 1B, this is their primary way of working, and for the others, connecting people with place *experientially* sits alongside other approaches.

Experiencing

When questioned, all of the practitioners said that the historical associations of an historically-influenced feature were secondary to its function in the contemporary landscape. As landscape architects, these designers might employ elements from a place's history as devices to generate form, but they are principally concerned with creating landscapes which people experience, rather than signposting historical events. This is summed up by 1B who argues that *"in the end, ideas do not make the place. It's a physical art form. A physical design. It's about what people see and touch and smell, and that's what makes the place – not the narrative, not the history"*.

These designers seek to create landscapes which operate on multiple levels so that people might find the site intriguing and be prompted to, for example, *"find out the reason for the alignment of it [a water feature which traces the line of a culverted river]"* (1C). The point of these designs is not primarily to help people to connect to place *through* an historical reference, but to make those connections experientially as people use the site and are intrigued by the design and enjoy the spaces that these designers have created. Interviewee 1C was clear that *"the dynamics of that space are created by the people using it... the events will determine how it's used, and that's the important thing... That's working on a landscape level, not just a historic interpretation"*. For 1A, the most important thing within the case-study being discussed was that the historical landscape had a clear function which was still relevant today, and that to be authentic to this history was to allow people to use this site in ways that it was used in centuries past. Reflecting on one of their schemes, 1A noted that *"maybe they [a group of visitors] were interpreting or absorbing some hidden history, I don't know. It would be nice to think that they were. The point is that they were using that space for the original purpose six-hundred years later, and that was very gratifying"*.

Interviewee 1B made the most detailed case for how people connect with a place experientially. They argue that a design needs to connect with people so that it is accepted, used and well-maintained, and they have found that the best way to ensure this is to ask *“how do you make someone care about this space?”*. Their first tactic is *“to do something new every time out. It’s just boring to repeat oneself”*, but behind this is the commitment to create *“something meaningful to people”* which *“they have to feel something about”*. As with other interviewees, 1B creates designs which speak to the needs of the people they are seeking to engage. For example:

“Even if you [the user] were just thinking ‘it would be great to skateboard on top of those things’ or ‘I’d like to sit down on one of these things one day and sit in the sun’ or ‘I’d like to hang out here and see what the water’s doing’. That’s the level... People want to be amused; they want to feel safe; they like hanging out together in groups. That’s the level it has to be real.”

This interviewee describes their approach as *“social sustainability”* ... *“the thing that is of most interest and maybe most relevant to urban landscapes is that so much of it depends on people and whether people respond to it or don’t respond to it. The upkeep of it, the maintenance of it, the allocation of funding, the will to do it – all depends on whether people respond to the space”* (1B). In this sense, connecting people to place takes on a much wider remit because it impacts every level of a landscape architect’s practice. All of the landscape architects who described their own designs were most animated when talking about seeing how people were experiencing and connecting with their landscapes. Interviewee 1E reflects on a time when they visited one of their schemes and were able to appreciate how people were connecting with a place experientially:

“I remember one evening I was there on a beautiful, I think it was an October evening, but it was an Indian summer and it was still very warm, and there were a dozen different people just sitting around the garden. Some were sitting in the water, some on chairs beside it. All different ages, all different backgrounds, and all completely still. I realised that so much of what we’re

encouraged to value is noise and quantity, and I realised that encouraging people in the middle of a city to feel so relaxed they can be completely still – that was a magic moment. And to see it full of kids in the summer is great too. There is that moment of how people react to it and how they enjoy it.”

Grounding

The final element to connect people with place is the notion that landscapes can somehow ground people in space and time, and that they can help give people the sense that they are part of something much larger. This is akin to the idea that landscape architects can weave into a site’s story, and in doing so, enable people to see that they have a place in this continuum. To the extent that it is easier to grasp the past than the future, the most common way these designers are expressing how we can be grounded in time is by utilising a site’s history. This is summed up by 1D who likens it to an *“anchorage in the past to give gravitas”*. This anchoring to the past is seen by some as helping to ensure that people will continue to connect with the site in the present and on into the future. A good example of this was put forward by 1A who described how *“we developed the ‘Walk of a Hundred Years’ idea, really to reconnect the past with the future, and that was very conscious... We always wanted to connect people with their past”*.

Expressing a different sentiment, 1B suggests that people are grounded to a place, not in a time-bound way, but based on the power of art [in this case landscape architecture] in a way that transcends time. Their experience was expressed as a *“generative belief ... the power of art to transform and communicate: that really powerful art, the things that actually do become timeless – I love the word when people use timeless – but the things that continue to broadcast through the ages are the things that are heartfelt”*.

Bridging these two positions, 1E spoke at length about the nature of time, and how *“the idea of a place which transcends time, and potentially even compresses time,*

becomes enormously reassuring, and that in the architecture, in the stories and the memories of a place is a sense of continuity which is quite reassuring in terms of the ephemeral nature of an individual life". Underpinning this position is the idea that "without this connection to a place, there is this sense of drifting" (1E), and as a consequence this designer seeks to ensure that their designs are drawn from the discovery of what "really binds and excites the local community". In their different ways, each of the interviewees is seeking to 'fathom the character of the site' and 'weave into its story' as a way of connecting people with place and time. Demonstrating one way that landscape architecture can be used to ground people within space and time, 1E suggests that "it is looking forward to how you best use open space within the city as well as looking back at what makes it resonate with people".

5.2.3 Informed and critical decision-making

The need to look carefully at a site is influenced both by the desire to ensure a distinctive identity and also to connect people and place. More than this however, these interviewees made it clear that the process of *"delving deep"* (1E) was about being well-informed so that they were in a position to make well-considered judgements about all aspects of the project. Finding out about the site – especially its history – is not simply about fathoming its character, discovering its story and looking for connections between people and place, even though these are clearly important aspects to that research. For most of this group, researching the site is primarily about giving them a really solid foundation of knowledge upon which they can critically assess and begin to make design decisions, as described by 1C:

"I think you have to amass all the information about what was there previously to make a design decision. Well, that's how I, or we, work here. I think it's important that we do that. There's absolutely no point in picking a scheme out of the air without knowing confidently why you've done it. One way of knowing that is looking at historic maps, your history. As teachers

always said, 'know your history and the rest will make sense, will follow'. It's an important factor I think."

Interviewee 1E linked the process of gaining what they termed "*full knowledge*" to the application of skill and judgment. It's important to note that this "*full knowledge*" is not an attempt to know absolutely everything about a site which might then reveal a correct design solution. Instead, 1E describes targeted knowledge (perhaps about the development of the site over time) which "*gives you a familiarity with the subject*" so that "*you can feel at home with it and take liberties with it*" or as 1B suggests "*because it makes it in some way much easier to start weaving a story*". Being well informed allows designers to make justified and reasoned design decisions. It allows them to determine the best course of action based on their knowledge and experience. For 1B, who asserted that "*I really do think this issue of judgement and appropriateness is really important*", it was a significant insight into their practice.

Landscape architects judge what they find out about a site against a whole range of criteria including "*social or economic validity*" (1A), "*historical value*" (1C) and, for 1E the quality of existing landscape design:

"just because a design is old, and just because it may be by a named designer doesn't necessarily mean it's good; and it's worth taking a judgement on whether it was good design in the first place... it's much easier for archaeologists to run in and say 'it's old, therefore we keep it', than to put a subjective judgement on it. But I think it's important to have that debate as to whether it's worth keeping."

Judgements and decisions are also made against what might work in design terms within the remit of a project's brief. 1B explained that information and ideas which might originate from the site combine with ideas from elsewhere "*in a constant dialogue of ideas*" and that it is the creative investigation of these ideas that "*gets*

us stepping a little bit forward". These landscape architects said that what they found from the site was critically assessed and filtered until they found something that they could use and develop into a design.

There were differences between the designers' abilities to recall how they made their design decisions, with some not able to retrospectively describe all of their thought process: "*How we actually made the decision... I'm not sure*" (1C), and others able to recall it more precisely: "*and so the thought process was...*" (1E). 1B gave the lengthiest description of how their findings combined with the needs of the brief, and how they developed this into ideas and built form. On some points, they appear to be clear about their thought process, but at other times, the design process seems less well-defined. It is worth reproducing this extended extract in order to demonstrate how 1B reflects on the thinking behind some of their design decisions:

"Well it was such a goofy name for god's sakes. English has such weird names for things! As an American, 'Hanging Ditch!' – I was like, 'what did that mean? And what was there? Why is there a hanging ditch? There's no ditch, no-one being hung. Hanging what?' So just the name was provocative, and the more we thought about it, and what we were asked to do – which was to put back a site that had been physically torn apart and put back a city that was kind of run-down and demoralised and deal with a piece of the city that nobody really cared about for a very long time; it really was an ugly, bedraggled cacophonous mess – How so you actually pull it together? So the pulling together was really important. A lot of the stuff is actually random so I can't say. The fact that we discovered that the Cathedral District was on a Pudding Stone promontory and there was a geological shift – it's almost on an island – and that's why the city was coming together from these two, they're almost like tectonic plates: It was like, 'well this is interesting because this reinforced why the Hanging Ditch was curved and it starts embedding the idea into something much older'. Maybe this is kind of voodoo? Maybe it's more intuitive, like 'gee, now I get it'? And that's why

that whole district is made of Pudding Stone, and the cathedral and everything is made of Pudding Stone because they're sitting on a huge piece of Pudding Stone. And that's why it's curved like that: So why don't we just take that and go with it? And it provides enough grist for the mill in terms of ideas".

In the context of a project which includes *Resurrected Footprints* (see pilot study, Appendix 1), these landscape architects are looking at the site for a variety of reasons. One such reason is that the site can be a source of design inspiration because, as 1A explains, *"from a practical point, as a designer, it gives you something to hang ideas on"*. However, these designers are not naively *resurrecting* an element from the past, they are critically judging it as an idea against its value and significance to the project's future.

Guiding Principles

In the course of the interviews, the designers spoke about what was important to them and how this shaped their decision-making processes. This highlights another set of factors which influence how landscape architects make judgements and navigate their way through a project. The diversity evident even within this small sample gives an important insight into the complexity of the profession, and helps explain that our ideas about sites are ambiguous, because we all see through different lenses. Interviewees 1A, 1B and 1C all expressed a variation on the theme of wanting to create places that are *"individual"* (1A), *"distinctive"* (1C) or that *"every space actually called for something different"* (1B) which echoes themes of local identity and uniqueness noted in the literature.

1B was alone in stressing the importance of *"artistic freedom"* to their work, explaining how they might turn down certain projects *"where the constraints are so much that there's no room to do what I want to do"*. For landscape architect 1B it was important that their projects expressed the work of a designer because *"you*

can tell there's somebody behind that. You can feel the individualism. You can feel the passion... the most moving landscapes are made by those people who are absolutely committed to their aesthetic in some kind of transformative way".

In direct contrast, 1E explained that *"as a designer, you're not significant. You are a catalyst, and the best designs are where the place is remembered rather than the designer"*. For this landscape architect, their guiding principle seemed to be the idea of stewardship because *"you need to take responsibility for what you're passing on"* (1E).

1A described how they began work as an architect and how this influenced their landscape practice with a commitment to *"holistic"* design, which in their words represents *"no division between architecture and landscape"* and *"thinking in terms of how the external space and the internal space work together"*. Other interviewees also spoke about their formative experiences: 1B as an artist, 1E as an historian, and 1C whose landscape architecture education majored on the influence of the genius loci which *"was drilled into me at university"*.

All interviewees spoke about the social aspects of their work and how important it is that their designs connect with and serve the site's users; summed up by 1E who suggests that *"for each design that one comes up with it needs to be generated by the needs of the people, by the conditions on the site – but by an element which relates to its particular identity"*.

The unique opportunities afforded by landscape architecture

Interviewees spoke about how their ideas were interpreted in light of their ability to work in the medium of built form, spatial experience and other opportunities afforded by landscape architecture. Demonstrating that landscape architecture is multi-faceted, these designers utilise its diverse possibilities to give character to a place; to help people feel a sense of belonging; as an economic driver; a cultural repository; a spatial experience and an artistic medium, to name but a few.

1A, 1C and 1E all described how they had used *Resurrected Footprints* as a way of interpreting an historical landscape feature into their new design and how it was important to them that these function spatially and experientially as well as having a link to the site's past. For example 1A described how *"we wanted to create a variety of places and spaces which had different qualities. If you go back to the Priory, a priory is like a mini town which has busy market bits and quiet contemplative bits, and we wanted to create a quiet contemplative space slap bang right next to the space that we wanted to become busy with restaurants and bars"*.

A few of the designers pointed out that there were different ways of presenting the information that they found out about a site's history, but that it was absolutely crucial that any design solution work as landscape architecture; even if this meant that their other function – as an historical reference – was illegible to the average site user. For example interviewee 1B reflects:

"It's not a book, it's a landscape and each medium has its own way of making you feel and think, and landscape isn't a written medium, it's an experiential medium."

5.2.4 Stakeholders

One line of questioning in these interviews was designed to ascertain whether the inclusion of an historical landscape reference was influenced by any agency other than the landscape architect themselves. In particular, questions focused on funding bodies, community groups, the client and advisory bodies because these had all been mentioned in the pilot study (see Appendix 1).

Dynamic relationships

To varying degrees, all of the interviewees spoke about the relationship and impact of different stakeholders. Commenting on the influence of the client, 1D suggested that *“the intelligent client is one of the magic ingredients in all this”* because they are in the position of setting the scope and ambition of the project as well as selecting a designer capable of meeting or exceeding those ambitions: *“intelligent clients who say ‘are we really getting the right designers, consultants for whatever it is?’”*.

As part of their narrative of the design process, two interviewees spoke about some of the stakeholders who influenced the development of their brief. Interviewee 1C said that *“my colleague, my partner and a couple of engineers sat down and really developed a brief as to how this whole project would formulate”* and that *“within that research there was an element of interpreting, or at least recognising historic buildings, linkages, the way that certain routes were used”*. In the project outlined by 1E, a group of residents had organised an archaeological dig which revealed the graves of historically significant figures. As such, *“the local community said to the city, ‘you can’t just tarmac over it again, there’s something very special here. We haven’t got a space that we can use and we want to hold our own competition for a garden over what we feel is one of the more sacred and special sites in Britain”*.

In addition to these initial statements of intent, interviewees 1A and 1C also talked about how the brief was modified and developed as the project progressed and new information arose. In the context of these particular projects, these changes tended to arise because of historical and archaeological discoveries that would impact the designs for the sites. It demonstrates that the design process is dynamic, and that changes are made as a result of factors from the physical site as well as from interactions with people – individuals or groups. In the project described by 1A, *“English Heritage has a view. There were certain things which in their view were sacrosanct, and the contract was altered and continually changed at certain times to account for steps and things that we found like that, or to avoid damaging other*

things". 1C explained how expert advice from various bodies helped them understand the significance of the site's history, and that this *"made the project quite exciting because if they had found things we'd have to change the concept to a point to accommodate it"*.

Areas of expertise

Across the interviews it was clear that these projects involved a number of other professionals, each with their own area of expertise which fed into the overall development of the landscape scheme. As mentioned above, 1C said their concept would have to be changed as the site was excavated concurrently with the development of the landscape design proposals, and that the impetus and financing for the project came from a governmental development corporation. With regard to the historical referencing of the landscape, 1C was clear that they *"had a free hand"*, but that they were in dialogue with the city's archaeology and heritage departments to *"explain why and exactly what we wanted to do"* in order to meet the relevant planning policies.

1A listed a whole host of collaborators: the City Council, Millennium Commission, English Heritage, architects, artists and archaeologists as well as *"informal consultees ranging from Coventry University, the University of Warwick and various community groups"*. In addition there were also collaborations with land-owners including the Museum of Motor Transport, Holy Trinity Church and Sainsbury's. In this project, one of the stakeholders had more of an impact on the design approach because *"a very large chunk of the funding was coming from the Millennium Commission, so the idea of time was very important ... The Millennium Commission wanted us to be respectful of the past, and they were supplying £10million and therefore pragmatism dictates that we satisfy them... one condition of the funding was that we had to have a water spout or something similar on the causeway down onto Millennium Place"* (1A).

Out of all the interviews, this is the only example of a funding body which had put conditions on the design of the project. English Heritage and the teams of archaeologists represent certain statutes and procedures which must be adhered to and which might impact design decisions, but they are not directly setting the design agenda for the landscape architects.

As it is common for community groups to be consulted as part of a planning development, the interviewees were asked whether such groups had impacted the schemes being discussed. Three of the four projects were city-centre redevelopment schemes which had very little in the way of local community, and those who were involved did not have any particular influence on the design as 1A explained: *“the community – it was helpful, but I wouldn’t say that it shaped or changed it a great deal”*. The project discussed with 1E was instigated by the local community following the discovery of important archaeological remains on the site. The community outlined what was important to them and set the brief for the site’s function (*“they wanted somewhere to sit and gather, but also to be able to watch people walking through”* (1E)), but they employed a landscape architect to interpret this into a design. With the exception of the Millennium Commission’s influence with 1A, the landscape architects had sole responsibility for translating the requirements of the brief into a design. Discussing the boundaries between each stakeholder’s areas of expertise, interviewee 1B raised some interesting points about collaborating with community groups and professionals:

“I think it’s fair to say that the people who are the end users have a say in terms of influencing what happens there; but how it functions and the spirit of it is different to how it looks, the actual physical language of it. That’s where there’s this kind of line... There is a line in there where you can tell me how it must function and you can tell me the standards it has to meet, and you can tell me how people have to use the space, but my job is a job that has to extend that in order for me to do my job and in order for me to fulfil the expectations that are probably not written down in the programme which is that you want this place to matter to more than just you. It has to

matter to a lot of people and it has to actually leverage you, so you have to let me do my job. By dictating that you don't like the way that bench looks is transgressing my area of expertise."

Within the design and development processes there are some areas where the domain of expertise is clear and obvious, and that at certain points these domains meet or overlap. English Heritage was cited by two of the interviewees as being an important stakeholder in their practice (1C works in Northern Ireland where the equivalent body is the Environmental Heritage Services). In addition to the four landscape architects in practice, interviewee 1D was selected because they work for English Heritage and were able to provide an important, national stakeholder's perspective.

In terms of English Heritage's role, 1D explained that as *"the government's advisor for the historic environment"* they are *"champions of good design"* rather than of 'historical' design because *"contemporary design is often a better solution than building something that 'looks like'"*. All of the projects selected for this phase of the research were to some degree influenced by the site's history, however only two of the projects triggered the involvement of English Heritage based on historical and archaeological significance of their setting.

Commenting on the historical research done by landscape architects, 1D stated that *"if the result of that research was some sort of design inspiration and English Heritage was asked for advice, English Heritage wouldn't be able to influence the design in terms of 'yes' or 'no that shouldn't happen', but their guidance would be that you only reconstruct if you had strong historical evidence to do so"*.

In the project outlined by 1A where English Heritage influenced the direction of a project, the landscape architect described their relationship with English Heritage as *"a collaboration because we both had to be pretty nimble because things were being built and dug up and you had to react: So I would regard that as a kind of*

collaboration as opposed to a sort of master-slave relationship. There was definitely sort of give and take, which was good actually, pretty good”.

Implications for the research

This stage of the research has shown how vital the process of getting to know a site is for landscape architects. More than simply a requisite part of their practice, the site survey gives practitioners an opportunity to gain a thorough understanding of the place with which they are engaged. Contrary to some authors who posit it as a means to directly generate inspiration – from scientific data or by inspiration from the genius loci – these interviewees use their knowledge as part of a process of creative and artistic interpretation of ideas which come from a much larger contextual sphere.

Two areas of enquiry have been identified as being necessary to address in order to more fully explore the ways that landscape architects try to understand sites and how their responses inform subsequent design decisions.

A. Site Survey

One analogy for getting to know a site might be that of getting to know a person: the better you know a person, the better able you are to respond to them as an individual, taking into account their likes and dislikes, their personality and their upbringing.

In order to ascertain the factors which affect how landscape architects respond to sites and how this impacts their design decisions, it will be useful to find out how landscape architects this process and how they interpret their findings. The next phase of the research will need to ask questions including: *What processes, techniques, approaches or methods do landscape architects employ in order to get to know a site? What information are they gathering? What challenges do they*

face, and how do they overcome them? How does the site inspire them at this stage of the design process?

B. Interpretation and decision making

Secondly, this phase of the research has demonstrated that critically assessing information and making informed decisions are important facets of the creative process of design. Landscape architects interpret the information gleaned from a site survey and translate it into built form – taking into account all they know about the site, the brief, the client and so forth. This is also impacted by the designer’s own ‘way of seeing’ which comprises their background, values, interests, education, experience in practice and so forth.

The pilot study and these interviews have indicated three key factors which influence how landscape architects interpret site:

- Site history
- Spirit of place (and its synonyms)
- Sources of design inspiration

With this in mind, the next phase of the research will ask:

- *How do landscape architects find out about site history and how does this inform design?*
- *How do landscape architects fathom the spirit of place and how does this inform design?*
- *Where do landscape architects get their design ideas from and are some sources more valued than others? Why?*
- *What can be learned about a landscape architect’s ‘way of seeing’? Are there similarities and differences between how different designers work with a site? What might account for these variations?*

6

A landscape architecture way of seeing

This chapter relates to the second set of interviews with eminent practitioners. It investigates the factors which influence how practitioners ‘get to know’ a site, and how this shapes their subsequent design decisions. Drawing on Cosgrove’s notion of a “landscape *architecture* way of seeing” (1998: 13) as a way to explore the profession’s diversity, the second round of interviews – combined with the first – demonstrates how this ‘way of seeing’ is complex and “severally layered” (ibid). Among the spectrum of factors which impact how landscape architects see and interpret site, five key themes emerge as being of particular significance. Together, these themes can be seen to shape the unique context within which each individual designer engages with each specific site and responds to each particular brief.

The following sections explore each of the five themes which were found to shape an emerging concept of a “landscape *architecture* way of seeing”. Used primarily as a way of organising the chapter (numbers in bold), these five contexts rest lightly above the inherent complexity of the data and offer a way of framing how this group of practitioners construct their understanding of site:

Personal Context	Professional Context	Site Context	Project Context	Socio-Political Context
Influences for each individual designer	Factors affecting all landscape architects	Factors affecting a specific area of land	Factors unique to a specific project: Primary Generators	Factors affecting the society in which a designer operates
6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5

Beginning with a rarely explored factor, section 6.1 examines how elements of a landscape architect’s personal context influence their practice. The experiences, viewpoints and interests of this group of interviewees not only shapes how they interpret site, but also provides a filter through which they undertake all aspects of their work. The results show a range of different approaches to the profession which echo the diversity of professional backgrounds and personal expertise of the sample. Uniting these individuals is a recognition that to be a landscape architect is to be an interpreter, and this group show a number of ways that they interpret the landscape, all of which are based on expert knowledge and skilled analysis.

Section 6.2 looks at the implications of factors raised in the interviews which can be seen as affecting the profession as a whole. A number of the procedures and guidelines outlined in chapters 2 and 3 not only govern specific aspects of practice (such as LVIA and EIA), but are also seen to impact the ways that sites are surveyed more generally. Confirming the dichotomy noted by Moore (2010), these systematised ways of seeing are interpreted by some of these practitioners as the objective counterpart to more subjective ways of looking at the site. The culture of the particular practice in which an individual works, along with opportunities and frustrations which this can entail, are given very little attention in the literature except for the occasional (and overtly promotional) practice profile in an industry journal. These results shed light on this important factor and show how a landscape

architect's experience in practice can have a significant impact on how they get to know a site and their subsequent design decisions.

6.3 puts subjects such as site history, spirit of place, boundaries and site-users, which attract significant academic attention, in the context of factors affecting how designers interpret specific sites. Early in the research these key ideas we have about sites were thought to be the primary lenses through which landscape architects interpreted site, and although they can still be thought of as pan-discipline concerns, in practice they are usually applied in the context of a specific place associated with a particular project.

The context of each project includes factors such as the client, brief and various stakeholders which can all influence how landscape architects interpret a site and make design decisions. Whereas the literature reviewed in chapter 3 tends to focus on the contractual obligations of such interactions, emerging in section 6.4 is a sense that such working relationships are of much greater significance to a "landscape architecture way of seeing" than might have been expected.

The fifth of the contexts (section 6.5) encompasses the socio-political factors in which all work is undertaken. The subject of more detailed attention in the literature (see Meyer 2005 and Thwaites and Simkiss 2007 for example), the interviewees in this sample raised these factors only in circumstances which diverged from the normal industry context in which they specialised.

6.1 Personal context – Influences for each individual designer

The Landscape Institute rightly needs to ensure that its members are well-rounded, competent professionals who undertake their roles and responsibilities in accordance with the codes of conduct necessary to gain chartership. As such, whilst acknowledging that each member operates within their own specific “area of practice” (LI 2013b: 14), the literature tends to focus on general skills and knowledge rather than on how each individual’s unique context shapes their practice. An exception to this is Thompson’s study of the values which underpin “why landscape architects do what they do” (2000: 1). Adding to Thompson’s work, this research locates an individual’s ‘personal context’ within a wider, complex framework of factors which impacts how sites are interpreted.

Noting that this personal context is hugely significant to how places are interpreted, interviewee 2D declares that:

“We’re all informed by our own background, by our own interest, by what makes us tick. You might look at the cathedral and think it’s ugly; I might think it’s beautiful. There’s a reason for that you know, and all of these things come into play.”

These “reasons” are the accumulation of a person’s education, experience, knowledge and expertise, which together form the basis of Moore’s argument that “however we encounter the site, we will always interpret and reinterpret what we see, armed with a wealth of experience, knowledge and opinions ... every part can be seen as an interpretative and culturally defined investigation” (2010: 103). A number of practitioners described the effects of their personal context on how they design in different ways to Moore however, with 2G suggesting that *“I suppose we all have a secret hidden agenda that we like to try to get onto our sites”*. This is not to say that this particular designer has ulterior motives; it’s just that they don’t

frame it in terms of how their personal, professional and cultural contexts influence the decisions that they make.

Interests and outlook

Adding detail to Moore's broad observations, interviewees in this research were clear that a careful and skilful understanding of – and response to – a site were central to their practice. There was a spectrum of ways in which these landscape architects approach a project which, although multifaceted in their outworking, broadly aligned with one (or more) of the following:

- People-focused:

A number of interviewees focused on ways that a site is currently being used by people, and said that the ability to anticipate the impact of any change to the landscape was a key part of how they looked at a project. Interviewee 2E expressed this in terms of what *"landscape architects are good at ... if they're doing their job"*. Interviewee 2G described how this people focused approach arose from a belief that *"your mind, your body and ... spirituality are interconnected and if one of those is out of sync, then the rest of those are out of sync"*. Using the language of the pilot study's primary generators, this might be defined as a 'well-being' approach which helped them to design *"a place that people want to be in and they respond positively to"* (2G).

- Landscape-focused:

Some interviewees saw their primary concern as *"working for the landscape as a priority"* (2C) which manifest as taking *"responsibility for what you're passing on"* (1E). These designers saw their role as one which seeks to *"create the best for the landscape, which I fundamentally believe is the first point of what we're trying to do"* (2H). Interviewee 2A likened their practice to the process of learning a language and that being fluent in this language *"is hugely important"*:

“Rule number one, learn the language. So once you’ve familiarised yourself with the language of that particular place – the language of that particular landscape – you can decline it, you can parse it, you can do all the grammatical things that you need to do with a language; but you can also express yourself accurately, and ultimately you can write the poetry or the prose.”

- Design-focused:

A number of interviewees’ primary focus was on the design potential of the discipline, with interviewee 2B suggesting that when they visit a site *“I don’t necessarily go to do it as a landscape architect ... I’m a bit more of an artist/landscaper”*. This individual sets themselves apart from other practitioners who are *“very good at writing reports”*, seeing them as *“a very different type of person”* with whom they *“can’t relate”* (2B). This is unusual amongst the sample, with most other interviewees recognising that their job entails a variety of tasks – even if they do enjoy designing more than other elements of their profession. Amongst other interviewees who spoke about their design-focused approach, 2D said that they *“design in a particular way because that is my style”*, whilst 2G elaborated on this by specifying their style as having *“a certain look to them”* with *“morphic shapes”*. In contrast to the idea of having a particular style, 1B said that they *“want to do something new every time out”*.

These loose approaches echo Thompson’s (2000) tri-partite framework of Ecology, Community and Delight, with the definite exception that the landscape-focused interviewees of this study were concerned with the cultural aspects of the landscape as well the ‘environmental ethics’ of Thompson’s model. A landscape-focused approach is one which sees landscape as a cultural construct in the manner of Cosgrove’s “landscape way of seeing” and the European Landscape Convention.

Irrespective of their overall approaches, most of the interviewees expressed the importance of a meticulous and thorough approach which sought to *“understand every aspect of a site”* (1E). This is based on an acknowledgment that all designers

operate from a position of knowledge (as posited by Moore 2010) “*which you can only do by having a really good understanding*” (2F) based on research and investigation. Such an approach recognises that this kind of detailed investigation takes time because “*you can’t just walk in and know everything*” (2F). This latter comment could also be taken to mean that it takes time and experience for a practitioner to gain the skills in order to conduct this kind of thorough and sensitive survey.

Experience

The landscape architects in this study sample represent a spread of ages (early-thirties to mid-sixties) and length of practice (fewer than ten years to more than thirty years). There is also a mixture of practitioners who joined the profession as a second career and those for whom it is their first.

Being a landscape architect is a way of life, not simply a job according to a number of interviewees. They described how landscape architecture is almost an obsession “*it’s what you’re nerdy about isn’t it*” (2G) and that “*you can’t do it Monday to Friday 9 to 5. You can’t just pack your pencils away and go and sit down at the weekend*” (2D). A further common theme running through a number of the interviews was the idea that “*your own experience of the world as a person and ... your experiences in life*” (2E), were just as important as professional experience because learning is a continual process, not confined by ‘personal’ or ‘professional’ labels. This dedication is part of a process of continual learning and development which was evident across the interviewees.

The nature and course of a landscape architect’s experience is unique to each individual; a point which was made clearly by interviewee 2B who commented on the “*diverse range of backgrounds*” across the industry. For a number of individuals, their previous experience was an important part of how they practise as a landscape architect because it equipped them with transferable skills or gives them a view of their role and responsibilities from an ‘outside’ perspective. For example,

interviewee 2D had a background in finance and sales which prepared them for the task of persuading a client to buy into their design proposals, especially when it required additional funding. A clear example of how *“we’re all informed by different things and different experiences”*, the previous career of this landscape designer equipped them with skills which enabled them to excel in *“communicating the idea”*. Commenting on the value of this experience to their current practice, 2D asserted that *“if you don’t communicate well and you don’t communicate convincingly ... how do you expect the client to buy into the idea?”*

A few of the interviewees made a link between the age of a designer and their skill and ability, with 2E saying that *“a good landscape architect has got to be an old landscape architect”*. Interviewees 2A and 2D also made this link, with 2D reflecting that *“my approach to design now is far more mature than it was fifteen years ago”*. Confirming Moore’s observation that *“our knowledge alone frames our perceptions of the opportunities and problems we face”* (2010: 91), 2D indicated that *“I like to think that after twenty years, and with stacks of learning, research, observations et cetera ... my senses to a site are appropriate, because it’s balanced”*. Similarly, 2A used the example of Jellicoe as someone who demonstrated that it takes a good deal of experience and knowledge to become expert in their profession:

“To be able to have assimilated yourself within a place requires a lot of skill and takes a long, long time to learn. I think Jellicoe said he started doing his best work at sixty: it took him that long to learn how to do it”.

This accumulation of experience allows landscape architects to make informed interpretations of what they find during the process of getting to know a site. In common with Moore (2010) who notes that site surveys tend to be split into objective and subjective spheres, a number of these interviewees likewise make a distinction between two sides of a survey. 2I described these two elements as *“objective information – things about which everybody could agree”* and a *“subjective survey... bringing in your own evaluations”*; and 2D suggests this distinction is between *“the rules, if you like”*, and *“a spiritual context... the*

emotional side of it". However, rather than seeing these apparently contrary methods of getting to know a site as pathways to "find the real truth" about the site (Moore 2010: 61), these practitioners readily acknowledge that they are interpreting both 'types' of data based on "*how well informed you are*" and that "*everyone will react to a site differently*" (2D).

The types of site interpretations based on what might be labelled 'subjective' techniques were commonly attributed to "*emotional response*" (2F), "*feelings*" (2H), "*instinct*" or "*reactions*" (2D) by these interviewees. Interviewee 2I suggested that landscape architects use their "*own body as an instrument*" in a site survey, and that this produces subjective results which need to be interpreted in light of the project's context. Although some of the literature associates concepts of the genius loci with a guiding spirit which bypasses the critical capacities of a designer (see Brook 2000 and Moore 2010), this sample of designers give a very different picture of their subjective, emotional responses which have little or nothing to do with the genius loci. This is a group of professionals who critically engage with "*the emotional side of it*" (2D) by interrogating their responses and reactions as an integral part of finding out about a site. For example, in response to their reactions to a site, 2D suggests landscape architects ask "*what is this site telling you?*", "*what do you feel about it?*", "*what do you understand?*", "*what is its potential?*" and understand "*why you love it or why you don't*". Similarly, 2H asserted that "*It's not just good enough to walk on site and say 'oh this feels nice'. I want to understand why it feels really nice*".

Responding to and interpreting a site is key to all the designers in this sample, and although 2I suggested that it is "*subjective information which informs the design process*", this is their way of describing an interpretative process based on a position of knowledge and experience. It is emphatically not a "so-called value judgement" which "are still 'dismissively regarded to the realm of personal and arbitrary likes and dislikes'" (Moore 2010: 131 quoting Whitely 1999: 110). These "subjective", "emotional" or "instinctual" responses represent a shortcoming in the language we have available to describe how we interpret what experience on a site,

but in reality they represent a critical, interpretative and creative process which is “trying to understand ‘what is the site?’” (2D).

Education

Surprisingly few of the interviewees spoke about their education as a factor influencing their practice. This may be because they had all completed their university education some years ago. Two of those who did talk about how it has shaped their practice did so from the perspective of their studies in a different subject (history and architecture) and how this had given them an alternative perspective on landscape architecture. The only other direct mentions of the influence of education were the importance of the genius loci and local distinctiveness for interviewee 1C which was “drilled into me at university that you would use it” and for 2D who described how their approach to design had shifted since leaving university. Each of these cases was little more than a passing mention in the context of a wider discussion.

Where education’s influence was mentioned in greater detail – and with greater strength of feeling – was in its shortcomings, especially by interviewee 1B who called it “appalling”. Talking to the then Mayor of London about the state of the public realm in London, they declared that if “you want to make the public realm better in London – you need to look at education” (1B). For this person, their fundamental complaint was that the education system did not allow the space for students to explore and develop their creativity, and that it actively “tries to pound that out of you”. This was echoed by 2E who decried the lack of design education throughout a child’s education as “a big flaw in the UK” leading to a general lack of aesthetic awareness so that “people don’t always know what’s possible”.

Although much of this criticism is levelled at the general state of education in the UK, its effects are seen as impacting the profession in very specific ways, most notably the lack of rigour and skill in carefully examining and responding appropriately to a site. For example, interviewee 1B identified that there is a lack of

cultural literacy which was echoed by 2A who thought it led to some landscape architects passing off projects with *“a thin veneer or pretence of cultural responsiveness”* and by 1E who had observed a *“lack of rigour”* which is *“intellectually, very lazy”*.

6.2 Professional context – factors affecting all landscape architects

Interviewee 2A describes how knowledge and experience need to be employed in order to demonstrate that landscape architects can undertake *“the skilled transformation of ideas ... founded on craftsmanship, technology and the physical possibilities of the medium”* (Moore 2010: 181):

“It’s your profession, it’s in your job description – it says ‘landscape architect’ – that’s your job description, so understand the land; understand the landscape; what it means to be an architect. You know, you’re supposed to be a master of your craft... I would make no demands on people to be artists or philosophers or something – but be damned good craftsmen or women: skilful.” (2A)

This section examines how this sample of landscape architects approach site in their day-to-day practice, including how they respond to and work with some of the statutory processes outlined in chapter 2.

Procedures and statutory guidelines

The first noticeable factor influencing this group of landscape architects is the diversity in the type of work they undertake. The extent to which practitioners carry out these assessments varies according to the type of work they undertake and their position within a particular practice. The most common of the standardised

procedures mentioned by these interviewees were Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). Interviewee 2F has built a career around specialising in these assessments and so nearly all of their work revolves around the processes and procedures set out by these guidelines. For 2E and 2G, their workload would include a large proportion of assessment work mixed with landscape design. For most of the others, these assessments did not form a significant portion of their workload, although they were familiar with the processes, having been involved in them as part of a larger project.

Although the output of these assessments have a very specific purpose within the planning system, the methodology used to gather information is in effect a specialised site survey, even if, in the case of an LCA, the site might be an entire county. Conducting an LVIA (or similar) has a *“methodology of how you appraise the site”* (2D) which is used by some as a basis for more general surveys because it is a thorough and familiar process. For example, 2E said that *“following GLVIA guidelines in terms of how you’d approach and assess a site”* was *“pretty standard stuff”*, and that as part of this *“you go through a checklist of statutory things that you’d need to take account of”*. Building up experience of site analysis, whether using industry guidelines or a practice’s own *“benchmark checklist”* (2E) or *“cheat-sheet ... of key questions”* (2H) enables practitioners to become skilled readers of a landscape who can *“get into the habit of just being able to look at it straight away and know exactly what you’re going to be up against”* (2G).

In a design project, the information gathered about a site is not normally published because it forms part of the practice’s background research used to inform design decisions. With LVIA, EIA or LCA however, these results may form part of the submission to a client, and as such need to be interpreted in such a way that they can be communicated to their audience. Interviewee 2F, who specialises in these assessments described the process of interpreting what they see on site into something which can be presented to a client as *“how you would describe the*

landscape to a blind person". They also re-iterated the importance of an *"emotional response"* which they use to help interpret what they see:

"You can't assume that everyone will love moorland for example, because some people might get absolutely terrified by it – but you can describe the bleakness of it, or the sense of isolation or the sense of remoteness or tranquillity for example."

Although these procedures and guidelines provide specific types of work for some landscape architects, and are used by others to shape their 'normal' site surveys, a number of interviewees described some of the statutory exercises associated with the planning process as having to *"tick a box when you fill in your application"* (2G). The following designations were also mentioned during the course of these interviews:

- Local Development Frameworks (2D)
- English Natural Areas (2F)
- Landscape Character Assessments (2F)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (2F), (2G)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2G)
- Local Nature Reserves (2G)
- Tree Preservation Orders (2G)
- English Heritage Listed Status (1D), (1E), (2G)

Practice culture

In addition to the various types of work undertaken and the different niches they occupy, the day-to-day work of a landscape architect is also influenced by the specific practice in which they work. This may affect the type of client and project they are likely to encounter, their approach to the site survey, or the professional opportunities they are afforded.

Interview 1C spoke about how the practice for which they worked had a particular house-style which, to some extent, influenced the aesthetics of their design – *“not that I’m towing the party line or anything”* – in a positive way because it accorded with their own design approach. For 1A it was very specific, that their practice promoted designs which *“have some sort of connection with the past. At a general philosophical level we really think that’s terribly important”*.

A couple of interviewees spoke about how their practice encouraged them to explore ideas and develop their knowledge. The practice 2D worked for *“had something called the inspiration fund, which is a sum of money that sits within the practice and people can say ‘I want to go and study something somewhere’”*, whilst in the studio run by 1B there was an enormous bookcase filled with *“art books: this is what we look at all of the time and you can just open up any of those books and see some fabulous stuff that’s so exciting”*.

Obstacles

In contrast to these positive examples, a number of landscape architects spoke about some of the limitations that the circumstances or practice’s culture placed upon them. Firstly, 2E, who works for a multi-national engineering company, said that they were often asked to conduct a *“smart-scoping”* exercise which is a *“desktop trawl... to see what’s in the public domain... assembling your base-line information”*. This appeared to be to the exclusion of design work which they had hoped would make up greater part of their work-load. Secondly, four of the interviewees mentioned the fact that they were not always able to visit a site either because of their junior position in a small practice (interviewees 2C and 2H) and/or because their client doesn’t *“necessarily want you to, or won’t make the resources available”* (2E). 2H signalled that:

“I haven’t always got the advantage of going to see the site because he’s the Principal, so sometimes on a cost and distance basis, he’ll go.”

Seen as a fundamental part of all design projects, other interviewees were not at all happy with this situation: *“that’s appalling”* being 2A’s response. In other situations, where the site was overseas or difficult to access, the interviewees qualified their responses by maintaining that they would eventually get to visit because *“it’s inappropriate to start a design process of any sort... without having been to site, because your perception of the site, your understanding of it... is heavily influenced by the time you go to site”* (2D).

A lack of time and money to focus on the design process was also raised as a factor which impacts the whole industry. Interviewee 2C offers an insight into how these pressures have affected their own practice:

“The way things are set up through architecture and landscape architecture – I don’t think you’re often given enough time within the project at the beginning... often because of the money and time restraint everything’s just confined in such a small space ... The annoying thing is a lot of these projects are time restricted, so there’s only a certain amount of research you can do at the beginning before you just have to say ‘right, there’s the line, we have to draw it under there’ and move on with developing the design.”

On the whole however, the majority of the interviewees were confident that obstacles can be surmounted, with 2D suggesting that if a designer cannot overcome an obstacle when getting to know a place, *“then maybe you’re not the right person to be going to assess the site in the first place”*.

Professional satisfaction versus duty

Following on from some of the obstacles which face a landscape architect in their professional context is the balance that many designers hold between their own sense of professional satisfaction and the requirements of practising in a commercial environment. In some regards this is clearly demonstrated in the fact

that in an ideal world, they would be allowed a great deal more time to visit a site and develop a design (2C, 2E and 2H in particular). In other regards however, is a simple acknowledgement that these designers sometimes compromise their own personal satisfaction in order to meet the expectations and demands of their clients. This was demonstrated when the interviewees were asked how they judged that they had enough information about a site to begin designing. 2A noted that *“you will have enough information to build what you want to build because if you don’t you can’t build it; but in terms of intellectually, emotionally or artistically, there will always be more, always more”*.

For some, the balance lay between the type of project they would like to undertake, and the day-to-day reality of having to earn a living. For 2E who had recently joined the landscape team of a large engineering team, *“the idea was to try and develop the landscape practice here as well; so all the time we’re pushing to get... more traditional design work”*, even though this was an uphill struggle. Expressing similar frustration 2G said that one of their personal passions was *“historic buildings and historic gardens... they’re one of my favourite things to do. I’d love to do them”*, but that this was very difficult because *“it’s a bit of a niche market”*.

For interviewee 1B, the freedom to pursue an artistic, creative process was all-important – *“whenever we do agree to do something...I try to be clear that I want to get something out of it too”* – to the extent that they only got involved with work that would fulfil them personally and professionally. Reflecting on their long and successful career, they suggested that *“it’s not as though we could have accomplished this body of work if we had taken every job on from the beginning. To be sure, it’s not a ‘get rich quick’ scheme. I have the privilege of turning work down – and I did – but a lot of people can’t. But that enabled me just to stick to the high ground and take the projects where the site constraints and this and that and the other still left room”*.

For interviewee 2I, the balance they had to find was in wanting to improve an area bigger than the site that they had been given to work with: *“I think it’s almost universally true that what you’re presented with as the site is not going to satisfy you”*.

Each of these frustrations seemed to spur these designers towards improving their practice; to gain more skills, knowledge and experience which would enable them to respond more skilfully to the opportunities which arose as they sought new and interesting challenges.

Precedents

The landscape architects interviewed here do not practise in isolation and all show a keen awareness of what is happening in their profession. Interviewee 2G reflected that their own design practice is influenced by the wider industry because *“I think you respond to trends”*, and many of those in this sample talked about other designers’ projects which had influenced them.

Precedent projects were a source of inspiration for some of the interviewees who critically analyse them *“not necessarily [to make] a copy of it, but as a seed of an idea that you’ve seen or read about”* (2F). As with many other areas of their practice, these designers creatively assess and interpret what they see because, as 2D noted, *“you learn as much by studying what you don’t like as you do by what you do like”*. This informed criticism of design precedents was echoed by 2B who suggested that *“a bad example of something ... might make you think ‘well actually, if they’d done it this way...’, and that generates an idea”*.

This group of landscape architects also proposed that it was important to be culturally literate and aware of developments in other disciplines such as art (1B) and design (2B). Interviewee 2E also stressed the importance of working with *“non-creative professions... because you understand, or they explain to you how certain things work and you can see that you could take that as a design idea for a site”*

(2E). The cross-fertilisation of ideas within and outside of the profession help to frame how design decisions are made because it all adds to the knowledge and experience which constitutes these professionals' expertise.

6.3 Site context – factors affecting a particular area of land

This section illuminates the key elements of a site (history, spirit of place, context, boundaries, physicality etc.) which designers pay attention to, and which – when combined with all other contexts – represent a particular interpretative lens.

These landscape architects generally accept that a site is the particular area of land over which they take responsibility for the duration of a project. Interviewee 2A pointed out that *“the idea of ‘the site’ in... contract law is crucial, and so that needs to be unambiguous, and the clarity I think – in terms of words – is very important”*, but went on to explain that this did not limit how they interpreted a particular place when it is seen in the context of the wider landscape.

The designers in this sample do not readily think of 'site' as an abstract concept, preferring to talk about specific sites. This is important when examining how landscape architects interpret sites because, like 2H suggests, every case demands a different approach which is *“unique to every particular site”*.

Site history

Following on from the observations made in chapters 5, the interviewees in this sample confirmed that a place's history is *“important in understanding the site”* (2H) and that it *“contributes so much to the sense of place”* (2F). In terms of influencing how design decisions are made, the process begins at the site-survey stage where many of the interviewees seek to understand the historical context of the site in order that they might prepare *“a design work which is culturally*

responsive” because *“the culture of the place and the language of the local landscape emerges out of the previous inhabitants of the place”* (2A). In this sense, a site’s history can be seen as providing a contextual body of knowledge which provides *“a platform as to how you want to develop the design”* (2D).

Other interviewees did not investigate the history of a place as a matter of course, seeing it as an option *“depending on the particular project”* (2E) or *“depending on what sort of site”* it was (2G). Interviewee 2E suggested that historical investigation is a specialist endeavour, and that *“people should be honest enough to know when they’re stepping outside their professional expertise... the stuff that you just couldn’t understand or be able to detect as a landscape architect”*. Furthermore, they argue that in most of their practice, unless *“your remit is to look at the landscape history”*, it would not be something they routinely explore in any detail. Whilst this might appear unwise to some of those who consider a site’s history as an essential part of fully understanding a place, other designers are making judgments based on the relevance of such information in the context of a project’s future usage, or even their client’s budgetary allowances. For 2B, history is *“always important in terms of how the ground has changed... soil and sub-soil and contaminations”*, but in other regards *“often projects are just functional and practical and need to meet cost parameters... as soon as you start to relate something to history, it’s immediately becoming bespoke in some way”* (2B).

When a practitioner is looking at historical information, they use their professional judgement to creatively interpret what they find as a way of exploring *“whether the site has got anything that is a clue, something to latch on to”* (2D). Initially thought to be the origin of what Moore criticises as design which has to *“come from the site”* (2010:77), these ‘clues’ which provide something to *“latch on to”* are simply one of many points of inspiration which make up a complex and multifaceted design project. Demonstrating how these clues and points of inspiration are interpreted as part of the design process, 2E suggests that landscape architects *“need to put it through the landscape filter to say ‘OK, well what part of that*

heritage asset is of relevance to the landscape or the landscape architect and my remit as a designer?”

In terms of specific ways that a site’s history might influence how landscape architects make design decisions, there appear to be two general approaches: the first is to use particular aspects from the past, such as *“colours... materials... direct historical references in terms of inscriptions or image”* or *“a more artistic representation of the influence of that place”* (2B); or secondly (and more commonly), designers use a site’s history to build up an overall understanding of a place so that they can make an informed and appropriate response.

Far from being the holy-grail of landscape architecture, 2H asserts that although site history is *“important in understanding the site”*, it is *“not binding on what we chose to do”*. In a similar vein, 2A asserts that a designer takes on board a whole host of information during the process of getting to know a site, and that using their skill and judgement, they can *“decide to respond to that, or otherwise”*.

Spirit of place

The interviewees in this phase used a range of terminology to describe the spirit of place and/ or the genius loci:

- Cultural marks
- A distillation
- Feeling
- Memory
- Informed emotional response
- What makes a place special
- What makes a place different
- Vibe
- Ancient Wisdoms

'Picking up on the spirit of place' and 'consulting the genius of the place' are common components in landscape architectural site-surveys. Despite the different terminology used, uniting the practitioners in this sample was an awareness that 'picking up on' or 'discovering the spirit of place' is a process of interpretation. Interviewee 2A described this process thus:

"I stand around with my hands in my pockets and have a good look and a feel and a smell... use all the senses to absorb the atmosphere of the place and mentally log all of its stuff... its nuances and effects of your perception of the place".

This information – the 'spirit' or character of a place forms a part of a designer's position of knowledge, from which they are able to make informed and professional decisions.

In terms of how the spirit of place shapes landscape architects' design decisions, there appear to be two broad approaches:

- Firstly, spirit of place is seen as the character of a site. A number of the interviewees spoke about the importance of ensuring that their design input is appropriate given its context. Within this, there are terms which relate to aspects of a site's character (cultural marks, what makes a place special or different etc.)
- Secondly, spirit of place is seen in terms of the *genius loci*. Whilst this is frequently seen as synonymous with 'character', it also carries connotations relating to a landscape architect's response(s) (feeling, memory, informed, emotional response, vibe etc.).

In these interviews, most designers used both *spirit of place* and *genius loci* to refer to a site's character. Their explanations also tended to indicate it was their duty as a landscape architect to ascertain each place's distinct character as part of their 'getting to know' a site. The process by which they did this varied from traditional

site survey procedures through to more esoteric processes such as being able to “sense [the] energy of what’s going on” (2C).

Although, as 2I explained: “to consult the *genius loci* [is] the single agreed law of landscape architecture... our *raison d’être* – we start from that point of view” (2I), most of the interviewees were quite careful in clarifying that it is “a strand” (2D), but not one that is binding on how they design. 2H explains this more fully:

*“I don’t believe the *genius loci* has all the answers. It’s part of our understanding. It’s an important part to respect, but that doesn’t mean ‘slavishly adhere to’, and to respect can just mean to acknowledge that you know it’s there, and the reasons why you’re moving forward.”*

None of the interviewees thought that the *genius loci* was an actual spirit residing in the landscape, although a couple did come close, with 2D suggesting that “every site has a voice of its own of some description” and 2B likening ‘consulting the genius of the place’ to a process of waiting “for the bubbles to start flowing... it’s sort of the beginning of the fermenting process”. Of all the interviewees, only 2A rejected the concept of an embodied spirit outright, declaring “that’s b*****s”. Instead, they proposed that the idea of the *genius loci* is also about interpretation:

*“The genie [sic] is an imaginary thing. The nature of the place, the landscape – you know, we’ve got a perfectly good word to describe it which is ‘landscape’. The fact that ‘landscape’ is being stolen and turned into a verb instead of a noun is what is driving people away from their convictions about landscape and they’re having to invent these concepts like ‘genius of the place’... or ‘spirit of the place’ or ‘*genius loci*’. They even have to do it in Latin because English isn’t good enough which is crazy. So that’s what landscape it, the genius of the spirit of the place, because it’s in your head.”*

Context

Context and character are extremely important in landscape architecture, being key concerns in many of these interviewees' practice, and frequently cited as the most important aspect of the site, as demonstrated by 1D who asserts that *"the landscape architect's whole training is about looking at the environment around you and its context"*. In contrast with the importance of context in landscape architecture, interviewee 2I (who teaches both architects and landscape architects), described how *"there is a tradition in architecture of designing the building as an object ... there was no site context whatsoever ... you didn't feel there was any response to place: whereas clearly in landscape architecture there always is"*.

The issue of judgment and appropriateness is particularly important when these landscape architects spoke about projects which needed to be *"sensitive to [their] environment... partly because of the client and partly because of the location"* (2G). Interviewee 2D suggested that context was important because it *"influences your response to the site – the objectives you want to deliver... or the aspiration"*, whilst 2F echoed this by saying that it was essential that landscape architects *"respond to the environment that it's in, but correctly"*.

It appears that landscape architects are concerned with acting appropriately and with sensitivity, with 1A suggesting that *"the design has to come from the place"*, and 2D similarly believing that *"the site lends itself to a particular response"*. The extent to which something needs to *"sit in its character"* (2F) is a matter of judgement on the part of the landscape architect who has to balance the physical and cultural context of the site with the needs of their client and the impact of residents and site users.

The cautious approach to appropriateness evident above contrasted with some of the interviewees who spoke about situations where *"something which was inappropriate gradually becomes appropriate... I think that there's something about*

suddenness... of change" (2I). In these situations, the interviewees urged caution because *"you have to be careful if you're juxtaposing"* (2F).

Interviewee 2H was more adamant that *"I don't think we always need to be safe because of our context"*, a sentiment which was echoed by 2I who reflected that Tom Turner encouraged the idea of *"Similarity, Identity, Difference"* which, in practice means that *"you don't necessarily have to imitate what's there. You can have this strategy of contrast, of difference: but that isn't ignoring the site, that's the point – it's playing off the site. It's recognising its characteristics and then doing something which is deliberately different."*

Boundaries

"Well for me, the site is the piece of land that you've been asked to consider, and a client may come to us and say "I've got this site" and there's a red line around it on a map, and that's lovely because it's very, very accurate."

(2A)

As 2A describes, the boundaries of a site mark out the area of land associated with a particular project. For many of the interviewees there was an acknowledged disconnect between the red line on a piece of paper and the reality of a physical site in its context; *"a red boundary... defines land ownership, but the site does not stop at land ownership"* (2D). Some recognised that the *"red line is for planning reasons"* (2B) and that as a result the *"red line boundary that keeps a planner happy doesn't always mean that you are going to have explored all the opportunities and constraints of the site"* (2E).

It was widely suggested therefore, that although a project might *"start with a very defined boundary of the site... you never restrict yourself to that boundary"* (2C) when conducting a site survey or seeking to design with an eye on the surrounding context. The boundary of a site is understood as a demarcation rather than physical

barrier because *“site is actually as far as the eye can see”* (2D) and *“what you see doesn’t stop at that red line – it carries on beyond it and is absolutely critical to the character of it”* (2F).

A number of interviewees explained that whilst they may be *“always influenced in some way by the site itself”* (2C) and *“the site should be a consideration [it is sometimes] appropriate to design a thing just because they’re beautiful”* (2G). Interviewee 2G continued by arguing that whilst *“the site should be an influence on your design... I don’t think it should be a determining factor”*. In this sense, the matters of judgement and interpretation surface once more, demonstrating that the process of getting to know a site and making design decisions are complex.

Physicality

Perhaps the most readily identifiable aspect of a site is its physicality which includes elements of:

- Topography
- Vegetation
- Wildlife
- Aspect and elevation
- Views
- Layout of buildings
- Access and connectivity
- Enclosure and boundaries
- Water and hydrology
- Geology

These are the factors which tend to be labelled *“objective”* (2I) in a site survey, and which the interviewees tended to describe in lists of the things that they are observing and measuring as part of their survey. Most of the practitioners described an approach which involved walking around the site with a camera in

order to properly understand the site: *“it’s our responsibility to point out everything, even if it’s not in our remit... things that are going to have an impact – so lots of photos”* (2G). For interviewee 2B, ensuring that they have *“any critical measurements”* is the *“basic kind of survey”*. Echoing Moore’s observations that *“we don’t grasp facts ... without value judgements”* (2010: 72), interviewee 2A spoke at length about how landscape is more than self-evident physicality because it relies on human conception and interpretation:

“Land is the stuff you can stand on... a very, very simple definition, and it’s an irrefutable definition – and that is the land. Landscape is an idea about the land. You can’t actually touch landscape with your finger... you can’t physically fashion it because it’s in your head, and landscape only exists in human brains... human beings have this other thing, which is an emotional or intellectual response to the land, which we call landscape.”

Obstacles

Over and above the obstacles mentioned in the ‘professional context’ section above, the site itself can present the landscape architect with certain impediments. For interviewee 2D who had a *“138 hectare space to design”* the sheer size of the site proved to be *“an awesome task [because] scale can be a hurdle”*. The other common obstacle mentioned by these landscape architects was gaining access to difficult sites which might be *“dangerous or overgrown”* or sites with *“restricted access”* (2G).

In all cases however, the interviewees made it clear that they would make every effort to overcome these obstacles as 2D notes: *“scale and context can be the issue, but you can push past that”*.

6.4 Project context – factors unique to a particular project

This group of factors sets the purpose of a landscape architect's involvement with a site. The different stakeholders in a project help to define the parameters of a brief to which a landscape architect has to work. As such, there may be certain 'client ways of seeing' with distinctly different contexts and considerations to a 'landscape architecture way of seeing'. However, from a landscape architectural perspective, this 'way of seeing' is one which must take into account the influence of client, brief and users. The influence of these factors not only sets the framework for the end-product of a design process, but may also direct how a landscape architect investigates a site from the beginning of a project.

Brief

The brief appeared to be one of the cornerstones in defining how a landscape architect gets to know and interprets a site because, according to 2I *"when you're doing the analysis, you're starting to think of things in terms of the brief"*. 2B stated that receiving a brief was often the first communication from a client and would be read before any further desk-study or site visits were conducted, thus setting the scene for a particular way of seeing the site. Furthermore, 2B acknowledged that they would frequently have to check their own interpretation of a site against the constraints of the brief, saying they *"start to get carried away with it and later think 'oh don't be silly, that's not the brief and there's no way I am going to get that past the client"*. In this way, the brief acts as a metaphorical boundary to a project in much the same way that the boundaries of a site contain the landscape architect's involvement. Despite a number of the interviewees seeing the brief as something which bounds their work, there was some evidence that writing and /or receiving a brief was a fluid programme in which the landscape architect could play an important role as described here by interviewee 2A:

“It starts off with an instruction but then evolves into something that stays the same, gets smaller or gets bigger depending on the circumstances.”

The dynamic process of constructing a brief was further explored by interviewee 1C who explained that *“my partner and a couple of engineers sat down and really developed a brief as to how this whole project would formulate”* and by 2C who suggested that even with a *“tight project brief”*, dialogue with the client would allow them to propose *“a wider masterplan that could be put in place”*. The brief sets the context and purpose for a project which landscape architects creatively interpret as a way of formulating, exploring and testing ideas.

In contrast to written accounts (such as those reviewed for the pilot study) which frequently detailed a project’s brief, this sample of landscape architects rarely mentioned the brief, focusing instead on the personal interactions between themselves and their client or other stakeholders (see below).

Client

“The site itself is not the thing saying ‘do this with me’ – it’s the client who has an opportunity, a reason for it.” (2D)

Confirming Schwartz’s observation that *“a landscape designer needs clients in order to function professionally”* (2005: 81), 2C notes that in most cases a project *“starts with the client”* whose *“requirements”* help to set the parameters of a project. Furthermore, interviewee 2C also acknowledges that clients have *“quite a big impact on the design”* and suggests that their requirements influence *“how we interpreted the site”*.

The Landscape Institute emphasises the need to *“maintain a good relationship with a client throughout the life of a project”* (LI 2013b: 9), and whilst these interviewees reflect this responsibility, they demonstrate a range of approaches to their working

relationships. There is a minority who see it as their duty to deliver *exactly* what their clients are asking of them, with one even criticising practitioners who *“ignore what the client really wants and ... just go off and do their own thing”* (2B).

Much more common however are those practitioners who *“take what they say with a pinch of salt”* (2C), going so far as to suggest that it’s *“important not to just design what the client wants”* (2C). The reason for this is understood to be that as a professional, a landscape architect has a duty to *“think about what’s outside of the initial remit”* (2E) because they are in a position to judge *“between what’s appropriate and what the client wants”* (2G). Corresponding with Moore’s argument that *“design is about raising aspirations”* (2010: 226), these interviewees understand that part of their role is to demonstrate ways in which their client’s project might be enhanced beyond their original ambition or vision because *“lots of clients aren’t necessarily that enlightened”* (2D).

Amongst others from this sample, 2D spoke about the importance of a *“well-informed”* client who is able to grasp the vision set out by a landscape architect. A ‘well-informed’ client is one who is able to strike a good balance between giving clear instructions and allowing the designer the latitude to exercise their professional judgment and artistic flair. 2H describes a specific example of a client who achieved this balance: *“her role – as she saw it – was to encourage and direct if there was something that was really of concern to her, but to be free to let us create what we wanted to create”*.

Stakeholders

The client is just one of the stakeholders who influences the design decisions made by landscape architects. Among the interviewees, the end-users of a site are also seen as extremely important in ensuring that their proposals fulfil a specific purpose, which, for example, might be *“to improve the place for a person, for that individual so they’ll benefit from it”* (2C). Interviewee 2E believes that practitioners should be able to *“step inside... the landscape in people’s minds, of users”*,

suggesting that a ‘landscape architecture way of seeing’ encompasses the ability to comprehend the “implications of [their] actions” (LI 2013b: 3). As a matter of course, landscape architects take account of stakeholders’ specific requirements in order to ensure that their brief is met and their client is satisfied. A specific example of this was given by interviewee 2G who recalled that when designing the setting for a residential care home, *“careful consideration was given to the plant choice in the gardens, providing a mix of colour, form and seasonal diversity for the enjoyment of the residents”*.

6.5 Socio-political context – factors affecting the culture in which a designer works

Acknowledging the impossibility of separating a landscape architect’s ‘way of seeing’ from the culture in which they are embedded, it is nevertheless interesting to note and comment on the few instances where these interviewees’ cultural influences were noticeable.

Cultural differences between nations influence how landscape architects interpret and work with site. Interviewee 2D explained how *“in China... development is everything and nothing stands in its way”* meaning that they were able to treat a site much more like a tabula rasa compared to the UK where they explained that *“I wouldn’t allow any of my team to see it as a blank canvas”*, and even a site which is *“wall to wall brown nothingness ... is still not a blank canvas”*. As well as impacting how designers interpret site, the socio-political context of a project can impact design decisions, such as *“social housing projects where it would be inappropriate to use lots of artistic representations because it’s perhaps seen as a waste of money”*, as described by interviewee 2B. Commenting on the financial consequences of particular socio-political contexts, interviewee 2D reflected that the state of the construction industry and difficult financial environment in the UK

at the time of interview meant that *“there are so few projects where you can just call them an indulgence – in fact there’s zero at the moment”*.

In other cases, judging the appropriateness of a design decision is based on the cultural context of those using the site. In the previous chapter, interviewees 1A, 1D and 1E spoke about how the public’s interest in history led them to refer to a site’s past in their design work. In contrast, on a project for a former mining town, interview 2B described how:

“it wasn’t really appropriate to start putting relics of the mine around the park... the colliery works represented a very dirty industry, in a way you want to create something that was a total contrast to that”

In other ways, the cultural context can best be viewed by observing how it has changed over time. For example, in post-war Britain the attitude to a site aligned with *“Modernism – you just wipe it clean. Clean slate, start again”* (2I), which is very different to how it is generally treated today (see interviewee 2D’s comments on treating a site as a blank canvas, above). Furthermore, the political agenda, financial climate or availability of land for development, frames the types of work that are put out to tender as well as decisions made about specific sites (as demonstrated in the pilot study). Interviewee 2A sums this up when commenting on how design is influenced by factors outside of the direct control of the landscape architect or their client:

“Somebody in Whitehall might be making decisions about a place in Belfast or Abergavenny or somewhere like that. So, there are statutory and legal influences on the site. There are financial influences on the site which could come from anywhere in the world.”

Implications for the research

Together, the first two sets of interviews have demonstrated that the factors influencing a landscape architect's understanding of site comprises many more factors than are accounted for in the professional and academic discourse. The data has begun to show an emerging concept of a diverse and complex 'landscape architecture way of seeing' which is creative and interpretative.

The emphasis of the next section arose from an observed dissonance between what interviewees in phases one and two said about the influence of the client. In phase one, when asked whether their clients influenced these designers' interpretation of site and design inspiration, the majority said that they did not. Consequently, it was surprising to discover that a number of the interviewees in phase two spoke about the importance of the relationship with the client in how they approach a project and interpret a site. The second set of interviews made it clear that in every design project, the landscape architect is only one player, and that their perspective is but one part of a larger whole.

The next phase of the research therefore seeks to examine how other stakeholders impact particular projects with specific reference to the ways that they shape how landscape architects understand sites, and how these other players influence the design process. Having examined this second set of data, a number of questions were raised which form the basis of the final round of interviews:

- *How are projects instigated, and how do the different stakeholders become involved?*
- *Who shapes the ambitions for a project?*
- *What are stakeholders' initial impressions of a site, and how do these change/develop over the course of a project?*
- *How do working relationships develop as a project progresses?*
- *How do different stakeholders influence a project?*

7

Whose site is it anyway?

This chapter focuses on the third set of interviews and develops a more contextual concept of site which includes key stakeholders' views. Concentrating on the interaction between landscape architect, client and other key stakeholders across a number of case studies, it demonstrates how successful working relationships allow all parties to fruitfully interpret a site.

This chapter is set out in three sections. The first section (7.1) considers how clients and other key stakeholders influence the interpretation of site through their working relationships with landscape architects. Using the case studies as examples, the section begins by looking at the range of stakeholders that may be involved in a landscape project and how they can direct a landscape architect's interpretation of a site. An important part of any project is the client's brief, and the way that a landscape architect responds to this is a crucial component of a working relationship. The next part of the discussion therefore examines stakeholders' experience of landscape architects using the brief as a way of opening their client's eyes to the possibilities of the discipline. Finally, this section looks at some of the difficulties and obstacles in working relationships as perceived by stakeholders.

In the second section (7.2), the focus shifts from the stakeholders' perceptions of working relationships to the landscape architects'. Beginning by exploring how different practitioners in this sample understand their relationship with clients, stakeholders and design teams, this section then moves on to look at what landscape architects consider to be their strengths in a project. Attention then turns to the ways in which stakeholders and their briefs influence landscape architects and their interpretation of site. Lastly, this section addresses some of the

difficulties encountered by landscape architects as they negotiate their way through particular projects and deal with challenging issues therein.

The final section of this chapter (7.3) concentrates on the interface between landscape architects and other stakeholders in a project. Beginning with an exploration of the attributes of a successful landscape architect as perceived by different stakeholders, the discussion then unpicks how these attributes contribute to a fruitful working relationship using examples from the interviews. Next, attention turns to certain characteristics of working relationships and collaborations that landscape architects find particularly beneficial to their practice. This section concludes by looking at the importance of communication and listening, which are considered to be essential skills in a landscape architect's armoury, and crucial to the success of working relationships and of a project.

7.1 Stakeholders' views

7.1.1 Diversity in the range of stakeholders

No two landscape projects are ever the same, and as obvious as this seems, it is important to recognise the implications that this has with regard to the range of stakeholders who can influence a project. In contrast to much of the literature which focuses on 'professional' stakeholders such as architects, contractors and engineers (especially Garmory, Tennant & Wunsch 2007, Holden & Liversedge 2014 Rogers 2011, Vernon, Tennant & Garmory 2013, Waterman 2009 et al.) this study demonstrates that projects draw in a vast array of stakeholders, many of whom have little or no experience of working with landscape architects.

Clients

It was expected that the data would shed light on how a client directs the way in which a landscape architect interprets site, but it became clear that 'the client' was in itself a difficult concept to pin down outside of the necessities of contract law and professional duties as outlined by Garmony, Tennant & Winsch (2007).

Across the case studies examined in this research it was clear that the client was chief among the various stakeholders, but that the nature of the client was as diverse as the projects studied. Each of these types of client are represented in the literature (for example, Holden and Liversedge 2014) but in brief paragraphs and without any of the complexity evident in practice. With the exception of the private individuals, all of the other clients are, as interviewee 3Cb – an architect – put it, “*multi-headed*”. In the cases of multi-headed clients, the interviews were conducted with representatives of the relevant organisations who acted in various capacities including charity Trust Director, Client Co-ordinator and Project Manager. Each of these individuals spoke of the difficulties inherent in speaking on behalf of a multi-headed client and trying to represent the often conflicting needs and desires of multiple stakeholders.

Summarised in chapter 4, it is worth elaborating on the four projects' clients for this phase of the research:

- 3A** The first landscape-led case study was a public-sector client which employed a landscape architecture practice to redevelop an inner-city area. The client was an organisation acting on behalf of – amongst others – residents, business owners and developers, and who was responsible for spending public money.
- 3B** The second case study is a visitor/education centre for a charity, with the client being the charity's trustees who are responsible for ensuring that the project represents the aims and principles of the charity and those it serves and seeks to educate.

- 3C** The client in the third case study is a university and the landscape architect formed part of a design team working on a particular part of the campus. In this instance the client is akin to a conglomerate of voices represented by a small number of individuals who are responsible for overseeing the project. The project is being instigated for the client's customers (university students) with the aim of improving the university's offer in a competitive market.
- 3D** The clients for the last case study were joint owners of a property with whom the landscape architect effectively dealt as a single client. These clients did not need to consult with any other stakeholders and the only other party to the project was a contractor who was responsible for construction. Conforming to the model of a "private individual" (Holden & Liversedge 2014) or "owner/landscape architect relationship" (Rogers 2011: 238), the clients in project 3D were spending their own money and would be the principal users of the completed project.

Other stakeholders

The nature of different stakeholders' involvement in a project is diverse, and their relationship to the landscape architect is similarly varied. Each interviewee highlighted different groups of stakeholders, which reflected the significant working relationships that shaped their involvement in the particular project. One landscape architect focused on the various engineers and contractors involved in their project whilst others spoke more about the design team and the eventual users of the project. The other stakeholders interviewed – project co-ordinators and architects – focused on their relationship with clients, landscape architects and a variety of consultants who impacted the direction of the project.

Participants in project 3C's consultation exercises included: the Vice Chancellor, Estates Manager, Students' Union, Campus Operations, Waste Disposal, Facilities, Catering, Sports, Academic Faculties, Health and Safety, Highways, Fire Safety, Environmental Services and Maintenance. In this project, the lead designer was the

architect, who invited the landscape architect to join the design team because they *“need to have the expertise of someone in landscape”* (3Cb).

According to interviewee 3Bc, the charity project’s Trust Director, stakeholders in this project were similarly diverse; *“an orchestra of voices”* who shape the story that the project is facilitating. As a charity, the project received a number of material donations – trees, sculptures, decorative stonework etc. – from supporters whose involvement was fundraising and moral support. Other stakeholders shaped the project in more significant ways, chief among them were the architect with whom the landscape architect joined *“as part of the bid”* (3Ba) and English Heritage who needed to approve the scheme because of its position close to *“one of the most prestigious cultural and heritage cities in the country”* (3Ba). Outside of the landscape element of the scheme, interviewee 3Bc (the Trust Director) explained that they also collaborated with *“a panel of amazing advisors who are all internationally renowned for their expertise”* in the story the charity’s project is seeking to tell.

Unlike the two ongoing projects mentioned above, the public realm scheme (3A) had recently been completed. For this reason, the stakeholders mentioned by the landscape architect also included those involved in its construction, such as Civil Engineers, Quantity Surveyors, Contractors, the Highways Agency and the City Council. Unlike the other projects, this one also counted local residents, business owners and developers amongst its stakeholders, as well as English Heritage and a local Buildings Preservation Trust. According to the landscape architect, an artist was also brought on board and had a very significant impact on the project. This artist was unable to participate in the research.

The network of stakeholders is frequently large and complex, and an interviewee’s position within this network determines which other stakeholders they are connected with. In the case studies highlighted here, the client, other members of a design team (architects and an artist in these instances) and English Heritage (as an

example of a consultant with “a huge weight” (3Ba) of statutory influence) are the stakeholders who have the greatest impact in a project.

7.1.2 How stakeholders influence the interpretation of site

Confirming Schwartz’s observation that it “is the client who usually sets up” a project, and that a landscape architect’s “power is directly proportional to the desire your client has to have you involved” (2005: 81), the projects here are all governed by their clients’ ambition for a site. It does not matter whether the client is a single individual or a multi-headed panel representing an organisation, the client sets the agenda. The results indicate that of all the stakeholders’ involvement, it is the client’s ambition for their project which is of most influence because this sets out the parameters of a landscape architect’s engagement with a site. Two examples of how clients articulated their ambitions come from projects 3A and 3D. The clients of project 3A instigated a landscape scheme which sought to “improve the environment and as a consequence ... drive up the values of the land and building holdings” (3Ab). The owners of the property which was the subject of project 3D wanted “something we were actually proud of” which “adds value to the house”. Both of these examples refer to the economic value of a landscape intervention (noted as a socio-economic factor in the pilot study). In contrast, the Trust Director (3Bc) described project 3B’s driving ambitions in cultural, social and educational terms:

“to tell the story of people, not of politics, not of things, but of people, and to be able to present that in a way that a child can go and come away with an understanding of what it was like – that’s the key” (3Bc).

These ambitions – expressed in informal conversations, or through formal consultations and briefs – define the agenda for a project, and in doing so set the direction for a site’s interpretation. Landscape architects interpret the site in large part through the lens of their client’s wishes, needs and ambitions.

Supporting interviewee 2D's observations that clients appoint designers for a specific purpose which consequently ensures a site "*already has its definition*", landscape architects from this latest round of interviews are also looking at a place with an idea of what their client wants already in their mind. This means that in practice, their encounter with the site is frequently shaped by what the client wants to do with it. However, this group of landscape architects demonstrated that no matter what the agenda for a project, as designers *they* choose how to interpret the site and brief. For example, their interpretation can be both practical: for example, "*how much car parking you need*" (3Ba) and conceptual: as interviewee 3Ca reflected – "*this needs to be the heart-space of the university*".

As the design progresses, the client's influence remains a guiding force – especially in the form of the brief – but many other stakeholder voices also come into play. There are three broad groups of stakeholder involvement which influence how site is interpreted: Planning, Design/construction and Liveability.

Planning

Each design must conform to the various planning requirements affecting that particular project, and a landscape architect must therefore interpret the site with these in mind so as not to fall foul of their restrictions.

This includes stakeholders who influence how landscape architects interpret a site through statutory guidelines, procedures and processes. In this study examples included the Highways Agency who develop practical solutions; English Heritage who ensured that the site's impact did not overshadow its neighbour; and numerous wildlife surveys required by law through which the landscape architect interprets the site according to its environmental needs.

Design/construction

In the projects studied in this research, stakeholders involved in building and construction include: architects, project managers, quantity surveyors, contractors and engineers of various types. These players have clearly defined roles and tend to become involved in a project following initial investigations and once a design has been submitted to the client for approval. Each of these stakeholders 'sees' the site in their own way and according to their own profession lens. Although the working relationships with these players is seen as extremely important, they do not seem to have a particularly strong impact on how landscape architects interpret site. The exception to this rule is the involvement of architects. In the cases where an architect is part of the project, they can be seen to have an extremely significant impact on the landscape architect's interpretation of a site. In two of these cases, the landscape architect was brought on-board after the architect and were therefore interpreting a site already set-out by the architect, such as this instance described by the architect on project 3B (the charity's visitor and education facilities):

"I think we originally sent over our site plan as it was and said 'have a play about with it, get some ideas ... the building is going to go here and the memorial is going to go here'" (3Bb)

When a project is architect-led, it appears that the landscape architect's interpretation of the site is influenced by how the architect has interpreted the area in the first place. In these cases the landscape is in effect working to the architect's prior interpretation, even when the relationship is described as a design team. This is demonstrated by the architect in project 3C who describes how their existing work set the scene for the landscape architect: *"there's a design ethos that we've got for this building and it would be nice to see how that could extend out into the landscape successfully" (3Cb).*

Liveability

Stakeholders who fall into this category include clients who use the site on a day-to-day basis, other residents, and people who occupy and use the area as part of their daily lives. In the university case-study, there are many examples of these stakeholders such as students, academic staff, gym staff and catering staff. The project's brief was described by the project manager (3Cc) as a *"twenty two bullet point brief"* encompassing the numerous stakeholders' requirements for the site. These stakeholders had a significant influence on how the landscape architect understood the site because their requirements and wishes formed the "problem" Lynch & Hack (1984: 37) which needed to be solved. In this instance, these stakeholders' requirements often competed with one another, thus presenting the landscape architect with a further layer of complexity for their design solution to negotiate.

To varying degrees, each of the stakeholders has an influence on a project because their *"aspirations", "drivers", "requirements"* and *"priorities"* (3Cb, 3Cc, 3Db, 3Da) direct the landscape architect's attention, including how it may be used in the future. This is a fluid process of negotiation, communication and dialogue which seems to diverge from how the literature describes it in distinct and separate "stages of work" (Holden & Liversedge 201: 134). Stakeholders also direct landscape architects' interpretation of a site through the day-to-day working relationships of idea-sharing, collaboration, consultation and response.

Sites are interpreted on the one hand by "solving design problems" (Stiles 1992) and on the other through working relationships, which project manager 3Cc summed up as *"understanding ... what our drivers are"*.

7.1.3 Expanding stakeholders' horizons

Every single stakeholder in the study referred to a landscape architect's skill in opening their eyes to the possibilities of the site or in their ability to translate stakeholders' ideas into a design solution. For some, this professionalism was evident in the set of skills which a landscape architect brought to a collaboration, such as their plant knowledge, their thoroughness in site research or their ability to negotiate the planning system. In one sense this observation does not seem to be noteworthy: surely these landscape architects are just doing their job? It does however demonstrate that stakeholders *notice* what landscape architects do, particularly when it relates to getting the most out of their brief and their site. Some stakeholders notice and admire landscape architects for skills that they themselves lack, and take the opportunity of collaborating as a chance to develop their own knowledge and understanding, as architect 3Cb reflects:

"The more I can learn about their discipline, the better of an architect I will be ... If I can learn something from these people and take that away and apply it in the next project, I consider that a success".

Stakeholders also commented on specific instances in which landscape architects were able to look at a site and, in light of the brief, see its potential. Client 3Ab (public realm scheme) who had worked with property developers, architects and landscape architects over many years, highlighted that the landscape architecture practice with whom they were working *"were good at helping us to future-proof the space ... understanding how the buildings around it might make use of the square at the heart ... it's not something that was part of our thought process before"* (3Ab). In another example, the charity Trust Director commented that they were appreciative of the landscape architect's knowledge of how to get the most out of a project within statutory limitations: *"they spent time with the team at English Heritage ... I doubt very much that we would have got our solution as quickly had it not been for their input"* (3Bc).

Within the literature concerning professional practice (see chapters 2 and 3), there is a tendency to focus on the tangible output of landscape architects (the end product: a drawing, a plan, a report, a new town square) and not on the many positive outcomes inherent in the *process* of working with a landscape architect. In contrast, this research demonstrates that a landscape architect's professional impact is evident throughout the design process and is not limited to or measured by the end product. Even when stakeholders are commenting on the product rather than the process, a number did so in terms of *how* it was presented to them. Opening stakeholders' eyes to the possibilities of their site and their brief relies on good communication: being able to "*tailor the conversation to suit the audience*" as Project Manager 3Cc noted; or as Trust Director 3Bc admitted, "*because us lay-people find it very difficult*". When client 3Db said "*that's why we were going to pay someone to come up with some ideas*", they were in effect echoing Moore's assertion that as landscape architects "*we not only read and describe the landscape ... we also have a close knowledge of its potential and the skill to realise that potential*" (2010: 198).

In addition to Moore's observations that landscape architects make their clients aware of the potentiality of a site, they also present their interpretations using the language and terms of other stakeholders' fields. For example, pointing out the economic benefits of a design solution to a property developer, or the heritage assets to a client reliant on Heritage Lottery funding. Stakeholders notice and appreciate these interpretations throughout the process of a project, indicating that collaboration and communication are extremely significant aspects in the interpretation of site.

7.1.4 Negotiating working relationships

The way that a landscape architect responds to a brief appears to be as important to stakeholders as their actual design-response. Stakeholders commented on the manner in which landscape architects consulted with them in order to build up a

position of knowledge that would allow them to respond effectively and appropriately. Much of the literature outlined in chapter 3 focuses on design solutions, but as landscape architect 3Aa noted about his clients, *“the design is meaningless to them, it’s the actual reality of what’s there”*, suggesting that until the project is built, the stakeholders are maintaining a high degree of confidence in the landscape architect to fulfil their expectations. Stakeholders want to know that they – and their project – are in safe hands. Confidence is enhanced when stakeholders feel that the landscape architect is working in harmony with everybody else in the project team and not just pursuing their own agenda. Good working relationships keep a project moving forward and are as important as the design submission to a client’s sense of a successful project. Confidence also comes when stakeholders appreciate the professional expertise which landscape architects bring to their project, whether they complement another stakeholder’s skill-set or bring a different perspective to the project.

Within each of the projects studied, the stakeholders pinpointed aspects of working relationships that proved difficult or challenging. Chief among these were examples of designers (not just landscape architects) who do not listen; such as those who are so *“passionate about the design”* that *“they will just try and push everything out of the way that we’ve said”* (Project Manager 3Cc). This and other similar examples illustrate the frustration felt by stakeholders when their wishes and requirements are side-lined. There is sometimes a tension between the landscape architect who wants to push the possibilities inherent in a site and brief and the client who may have concerns about cost, timescale or complexity. In the charity’s visitor education centre project, the client cited this disparity in priorities as *“the only pressure point”* and that although they had *“beautiful, beautiful ideas ... their original plans cost almost three times the rest of the project”* (3Bc). The Trust Director (3Bc) acknowledged that this was partly due to a difference in understanding of terminology, thus demonstrating the importance of good communication – especially where there are differences between public and professional perceptions of landscape architecture.

Challenges also originate within bodies of stakeholders, especially where there are many individuals or groups with conflicting or competing points of view or requirements. In a number of the projects studied, the client/project co-ordinators commented that they found it difficult to manage the expectations of the stakeholders they represented. The university campus Project Manager described how, in seeking to manage a multi-headed client they needed to *“try and be quite forceful on where we need to steer it”* (3Cc). These behind-the-scene negotiations and struggles are seldom acknowledged in the literature as impacting landscape architects, but it is clear that they play an important role in how a project develops because they shape the environment in which working relationships are formed and developed. Furthermore, this research suggests that competing requirements are sometimes used as the basis for a brief, meaning that the landscape architect’s role becomes that of problem solver and mediator. The process of negotiating these working relationships influences the direction of the project and the interpretation of site. Here again, stakeholders highlighted the importance of communication and listening as being crucial in achieving *“client satisfaction”* (3Ab). For this individual (the client representative on the public realm scheme), *“client satisfaction”* also encompassed *“working on time and to budget”*, the key to which was *“regular meetings, keeping us up to speed”* (3Ab). This observation demonstrates the importance of recognising the inter-relatedness of professions. Whilst it is natural for the landscape architecture profession to consider how its members can achieve professional and personal satisfaction, it is important to also realise that we play a part in fulfilling (or hampering) other stakeholders’ professional and personal satisfaction during the process of a project.

7.2 Landscape architects' views

7.2.1 Landscape architects' relationship to other stakeholders

From these landscape architects' points of view, the client is seen as the key stakeholder whether they be an individual person or a project manager representing a multi-headed client. The landscape architect working on the charity visitor education project was clear that *"your relationship with that client ... is a make-or-break for how well a scheme will work"* (3Ba). Many landscape architects see themselves as providing a service and the designer of the public realm scheme indicated that their practice ought to focus on *"achieving what the client wants to achieve"* (3Aa). Whilst this may appear obvious, it reflects an observation made by Moore that the discipline frowns on apparently "egotistical or 'top down' designers" (2010: 77). It would appear that in landscape architecture, "egotistical" (Moore 2010: 77) design has two distinct elements to it: firstly, when working for a client, it is not a medium for self-expression, and secondly that it is closely associated with careful listening and good communication. Clients and designers alike report that either of these are potentially seen as negatively affecting the client-designer relationship. This is confirmed by landscape architect 3Ba working on the university campus, who asserts that design is *"not about us expressing ourselves"* and that when working with a site for a client, landscape architects ought to be *"taking ego out of it"* because *"it shouldn't be 'you' on a page"*. This point was also picked up by a number of the stakeholders who had worked with designers who were more interested in their own design than meeting the client's requirements. There is a tension between landscape architects wanting to get the most out of a site and brief, and needing to ensure that they do not push too far so as to alienate their client.

Depending on the type and scope of the project, landscape architects may find themselves working as part of a design team, frequently in conjunction with an

architectural practice. Two of the projects studied here were collaborative, and both were architect-led. In the university campus project, the architect noted that *“architect and landscape architect don’t dominate one another, they just genuinely work sympathetically with one another”* (3Cb). Landscape architects and architects spoke highly of one another and were clear that a shared outlook helped cement the working relationship. Indeed, in all significant working relationships, parties identified common ground, *“personal rapport”* (3Ab), and mutual respect and ambition as extremely important. As a result, landscape architects found it challenging when they felt this respect was lacking from another stakeholder.

In all cases, landscape architects spoke about their role amongst stakeholders in terms of bringing people together, getting people *“on board”*(3Da), *“balancing ... managing”* (3Ba), *“engaging [through] teamwork”* (3Ca) and *“giving them a voice”* (3Da). In contrast to literature which oversimplifies the design process and neglects the importance of working relationships (see Waterman 2009, Holden and Liversedge 2014 et al.), the day-to-day practice of a landscape architect cannot be separated from the interrelatedness of working relationships, as this practitioner explains:

“All of those things that you do at college, and all of those text-book ways that a scheme goes forward can just go out of the window when the client gets involved.”

(3Ba, landscape architect for the charity visitor education scheme)

Landscape architect 3Ca proposed that *“the landscape [should be] top of the stakeholder interests”*. For this interviewee, their commitment to the landscape *“as a true stakeholder”* meant that they took on a responsibility to represent the landscape even when it *“may be in contravention to what you’re being told you need to do to it”*. They did this by undertaking what they referred to as a *“deeper”* site survey or *“a landscape consultation”*, which was described as *“listening to the landscape”* (3Ca). A key reason for treating the landscape as a stakeholder was so that the other stakeholders might be given the chance to better understand the landscape, and in doing so *“deliver something that ... can really work properly”* for

all parties. The other landscape architects certainly saw it as their professional duty to ensure that the landscape was understood properly and treated with care and respect, but instead of bringing the landscape to the table as a *“true stakeholder”* (3Ca), they themselves were acting as its agent.

7.2.2 What landscape architects bring to a project

A number of the landscape architects were very clear that one of their prime skills – and responsibilities – was *“looking after the tax-payer”* (3Aa), because when it’s *“public money ... it has to be really transparent”* (3Ba). This forms part of a larger narrative about caring for the client and working for their best interests so that they have *“total confidence that we know what we’re doing”* (3Aa). Literature on professional practice is clear that landscape architects must act with integrity and professionalism at all times (see Landscape Institute 2013b for example), and this is demonstrated by all the interviewees. Another way that landscape architects act in the best interests of their clients is by interpreting the site *“with fresh eyes”* (3Ca), developing briefs and looking for solutions which are *“extremely innovative ... progressive”* (3Aa). A number of the interviewees spoke about the importance of getting to know the site thoroughly, both for their own purposes in preparation for subsequent design decisions, and as a way of helping their client to more fully appreciate their site and its potential. Sites are often represented by numerous reports that form part of the site survey processes, and as an example, landscape architect 3Aa (working on the public realm project) spoke about *“report fatigue”* which they contrasted with *“making a difference in the real world”*.

These landscape architects regard their ability to communicate effectively as one of their key strengths – either as an integral part of the project’s development or in ensuring the client understands the implications of a report or potential in a design drawing. Demonstrating that they were also skilled in bringing people together, all of these landscape architects talked about how they worked with stakeholders to develop the brief, and in particular how they endeavoured to look at the project

from other people's perspective; to *"understand the place he might be coming from"* as landscape architect 3Ca puts it. The designer of the public realm scheme highlighted that within the industry this rallying approach is not always evident, especially when dealing with engineers, and that landscape architects are more likely to say *"bloody engineers, they don't understand ... which is normal, and it's wrong, completely wrong"* (3Aa). The industry is not uniform, and working relationships between stakeholders are dependent on the experiences of collaborating with different individuals and companies, not all of whom they *"got on with on a personal level"* according to landscape architect 3Aa. Every single landscape architect, in common with all of the other stakeholders, specified the ability to relate to people on an individual level as a key to a successful working relationship. A number of the landscape architects specifically mentioned that they made an effort to actively build good working relationships. This might be by *"judging your client ... how to work with them, how to manage them, the different type of person they are"* which for the charity project's landscape architect was seen as *"a skill you have in life"* (3Ba), or by actively developing their own *"communication skills"* and *"management skills"* by attending courses which will enable them to help *"people think for themselves ... to hear what they have to say"* (3Ca). Either way, landscape architects see themselves as needing good communication skills to enable them to form, maintain and develop good working relationships so that they can give their all to – and also to get the most out of – a project.

7.2.3 How stakeholders influence landscape architects' practice

Among the landscape architects interviewed here, stakeholders seem to have the potential to frustrate and sharpen their practice in almost equal measure. In general, the frustrations appear to be associated with the day-to-day difficulties of negotiating a project or those rare individuals who do not respect what landscape architects offer.

Landscape architects discussed how interacting with stakeholders enabled – sometimes forced – them to raise their game in order to meet or exceed expectations. In every project, finding a design solution to fulfil stakeholders’ needs *“forces you to think”* (landscape architect 2Aa), and interviewees cited numerous examples of how they used their knowledge and skills to produce a landscape intervention that would work for the needs of specific groups of people. As expected, part of this problem-solving process sees landscape architects consult stakeholders for their input, but landscape architect 3Ca also saw this as an opportunity to help stakeholders *“think in a more strategic manner”*, showing how the process can be mutually beneficial.

According to landscape architect 3Aa, with the network of working relationships, stakeholders have the potential to *“change the dynamic”* because landscape architects are constantly *“connecting with different people in different ways”*. The multiple stakeholders within most projects often have competing requirements and pressures which landscape architects have to balance. The landscape architects in this study indicated three ways that this impacts their practice. Firstly, landscape architect 3Ba spoke about their professional judgments and how they need to ensure that they are *“really clear as to what we do and don’t think is right, and what we think is important”*. This clarity helps to remove ambiguity and potential confusion about what the different parties might mean so that each understands what the other wants. Following on from this, landscape architects highlighted the need to plan and foresee how other stakeholders might act or react in future stages of a project. This increases the need for landscape architects to remain connected with stakeholders, and from a contractual point of view, ensure that everything is *“fully documented and legally correct”* (landscape architect 3Aa). Finally, a number of landscape architects explained that one of the key ways stakeholders influence their practice is by making them come up with creative interpretations of the site and brief within limited budgets. Landscape architect 3Ba spoke about how their client wanted them to *“maximise the impact on this site for the money that we’ve got available”*. This means that landscape architects need to know their site

thoroughly, be skilled in dealing with the medium of landscape and have the ability to convince their client that what they are doing is appropriate and good value:

“If we want to push something, we explain it, we put it all down, we put a cost associated to it – we say ‘we think this is a really good thing to do on this site’.”

(landscape architect 3Ba)

7.2.4 Negotiating working relationships

A number of the challenges facing landscape architects' working relationships have already been hinted at in this section. To begin with, a number of the interviewees talked about working with people who, according to landscape architect 3Ca are not *“aware of landscape architecture as a profession and a skill”*, or else don't listen to their professional opinion. Landscape architects spoke about such situations as *“really challenging ... because your opinion is not valued”* (3Ca), or *“they don't take you seriously”* (3Aa). It was previously noted that stakeholders expressed their dissatisfaction with designers who do not listen to them or take their wishes seriously, and it perhaps unsurprising that landscape architects also find these mismatched working relationships unsatisfactory. Part of this seems to be associated with clients and stakeholders who, because they are unfamiliar with construction and planning, may understand concepts and terminology differently to landscape architects. In order to overcome these challenges, landscape architects recognise the need to communicate in ways that are appropriate for the intended audience and check other people understand what is being said, because, as landscape architect 3Ca noted *“what I recognise ... and what you're saying is different”*. Stakeholders who are unfamiliar with the different aspects of a landscape project may also, for example, find it *“difficult to understand how ecology surveys could cost three and a half grand or four grand”* as was the case in the charity project undertaken by landscape architect 3Ba. In rare instances, individual stakeholders can be uncommonly stubborn or difficult, such as those who

say *“I don’t care, I’m having that. That is what’s happening”* (3Ba) which require patience and diplomacy on the landscape architect’s part.

Negotiating working relationships requires landscape architects to be able to see others’ points of view and to communicate clearly and appropriately. There was a recognition amongst the interviewees that this is a two way process, and that, as landscape architect 3Aa reflected, whilst *“you do what you possibly can”*, frustration arises when *“they’re not doing what they should be doing”*. Whilst most frustrations appear to be connected with interacting with particular people, one interviewee highlighted a systemic issue which has the potential to affect very many landscape projects nationwide. The problem was identified by landscape architect 3Aa as a complete lack of *“strategic planning”* with regard to enforcing the Street Works Act once a project has been completed and handed back to the client. It appears that in this particular landscape architect’s experience, the Act, which ensures that *“if you dig a trench in the street, you have to replace what was there before”* was not being enforced, resulting in *“a complete mess”*. The problem appears to be exacerbated by the disparity between the landscape architect who was *“trying to protect the public purse”* and service providers whose remit does not have *“any interest in the public ... they will – unless you absolutely force these people – they will lay waste to everything. All the streets everywhere will just be laid to waste because they couldn’t give a s**t, there’s no interest”* (3Aa).

A further obstacle mentioned by interviewee 3Ba related to projects which required unusually large compromises. This is the flip-side to the situation highlighted by certain stakeholders who felt that some landscape architects were over-ambitious in their design proposals. In this instance, the landscape architect recognised their own aim was *“to push it as far as we can”* and that whilst compromise was inevitable, they still found some of the limitations *“really disappointing”* (3Ba).

7.3 Good working relationships

7.3.1 What stakeholders want

This section considers the attributes that stakeholders consider landscape architects need to possess in order to maintain good working relationships. These are drawn from stakeholders' experiences and from their musings about what would make an ideal working relationship with a landscape architect.

Firstly, in accord with literature on professional practice (see chapters 2 and 3), stakeholders are looking for landscape architects who display a duty of care towards their clients and the other individuals and groups involved in a project. These attributes were summed up by client 3Ab as "*client care*" or "*client satisfaction*" and reflect the ways that landscape architects ensure that their clients are fully informed, with "*regular meetings*", for example. For client 3Dc, this included something as simple as the landscape architect being "*quick to respond*" and readily available to talk to about the project, whereas client 3Ab did not appreciate having to deal with designers who are "*working on about two dozen projects at once*" because "*they're never close to the detail of your project*". Other attributes relating to a landscape architect's "*professionalism*" (client 3Db) included their ability to deliver a project "*on time and to budget*" (3Ab) and "*being prepared to take the time to look at what we want and ... the best way of delivering it*" (3Bc). Clients 3Db and 3Dc expressed how they need to feel that a landscape architect is genuinely "*interested in the outcome*" of their project because it gives them the confidence that they are working with their best interests in mind and will seek to ensure the best possible outcome for all concerned.

The projects a landscape architect undertakes form part of their portfolio of work and it is natural for them to want satisfied clients and to produce designs of which they can be proud. Recognising that some designers put their own portfolio of work

before a client's needs, client 3Ab contrasted their experience working with a landscape architect with that of working with *"a lot of architects who try sort of just work to their own agenda rather than working to their client's"*. A landscape architect's ability to communicate well, to learn from other stakeholders and to *"listen and then concede on points that they realise are important to the clients"* was appreciated by Project Manager 3Cc as an essential part of a landscape architect's practice.

Secondly, all the interviewees were clear that working with someone with whom they had *"a lot in common"* (client 3Ab), or found *"shared ground"* or *"shared belief"* (architect 3Cb), meant that the project ran much more smoothly and was more satisfying professionally and *"on a personal level"* (landscape architect 3Aa). This is partly connected with finding other people *"enjoyable to work with"* (landscape architect 3Da) and partly discovering other professionals who share a similar outlook or philosophy. Landscape architect 3Aa mentioned a firm of collaborating *"engineers who have a proper understanding of what cities should be like"* as a good example. Personal relationships seem to be particularly important amongst stakeholders who work together frequently because it allows each profession to gain an understanding of the other's perspective and helps confidence and trust to develop over time. Having said this, stakeholders also need to know that a landscape architect will be able to build up a working relationship with every member of a team no matter what the circumstances are, and as Project Manager 3Cc notes, *"engage at the right level, whether that's with a Vice Chancellor or the Porter pushing a trolley"*.

Finally, a number of the stakeholders outlined particular personality traits that they found to be beneficial or desirable in a landscape architect. Client 3Db remarked that they were won over by their *"charming"* landscape architect who wasn't *"in the least bit pushy"* and that the whole process was *"all done very politely"*. Project Manager 3Cc reported that *"patience"* was a necessary virtue when negotiating what can often be difficult or protracted negotiations or processes. Most of the literature and professional guidance reviewed in chapter 3 focuses on the skills

necessary to comply with the statutory and contractual remits of the industry, whereas many stakeholders seem just as concerned with how they relate to a landscape architect on a personal level. Clearly, landscape architects need to be able to ensure that they are complying with the necessary principles inherent in their duty of care, and here too stakeholders uniformly focus on a landscape architect's ability to communicate effectively as a means to achieve this. A number of stakeholders valued an 'open' working relationship which essentially means that all parties are consulted or informed about decisions, and that channels of dialogue are kept clear and active. Architect 3Bb reflected that in an *"open design team"* the different parties feel that *"they can come up with ideas ... and we discuss them together and figure out what's the best way of working"*.

The two key traits cited by stakeholders as being absolutely fundamental to a good working relationship are the ability to listen well and to communicate effectively.

7.3.2 What landscape architects want

Having explored some of the traits stakeholders saw as beneficial to working relationships, attention now turns to examine those attributes which landscape architects seek when establishing or developing working relationships. Inevitably there is some overlap, but among those only mentioned by landscape architects are things such as *"trust"*, *"honour"* and *"reliability"* which are, according to the interviewees, a reflection of some of things lacking in the less-successful working relationships in their experience. In contrast to some of the challenging working relationships they had experienced, a number of interviewees spoke about the need to build working relationships with people who are in tune with the sort of thing they're trying to achieve. According to landscape architect 3Aa, this is largely based on mutual trust and respect, both personally and professionally:

"It's because they know what they're talking about that we trust them. We know what we're talking about and they trust us".

For landscape architects, especially those who are relatively new to the profession or have less experience working in design teams, being respected and treated as an integral part of a design team is especially pertinent. In contrast to some design-team experiences where one party has acted as if *“we’re better than you”*, landscape architects universally wanted to establish what 3Ba called an *“ease”* in their working relationships, with *“no pretentiousness”* from anyone. Furthermore, this landscape architect sought equality and democracy in working relationships where, for example, all parties were able to say to one another *“let’s work on this together and let’s get to a resolution”*. All of the landscape architects involved in these interviews were quick to recognise and compliment the talent and skills of other stakeholders, and it seems that they are seeking similar recognition in return. As well as wanting to be recognised for their own skill and talent, landscape architects also appear to be seeking recognition on behalf of their profession which has not always been the case according to some. Landscape architect 3Ba summed up this stance by hoping that stakeholders would *“let the people who know what they’re doing do what they can do”*.

As with other stakeholders, landscape architects spoke about how individuals with whom they established good working relationships made their working life more fruitful and satisfying. Landscape architect 3Aa described how they quickly developed a good rapport with a client’s *“day to day”* representative (interviewee 3Bb), and that this particular person helped smooth what was a very time- and budget-sensitive project: *“he’s extremely professional, extremely helpful. I really liked him”*.

The common thread running through the attributes landscape architects seek in a good working relationship is the willingness of other stakeholders to listen – just as stakeholders hope landscape architects will listen to them. Two-way communication allows all parties to discover common ground, build trust and overcome the challenges that inevitably arise within all projects.

7.3.3 Listen and learn

During the course of these interviews, landscape architects and stakeholders alike have explained how *“it all comes down to communication”* (architect 3Cb) and that to *“listen is the biggest thing I’ve got to say”* (project manager 3Cc). This section begins by examining how landscape architects and stakeholders orient their practice around dialogue and collaboration, and includes examples of the methods used to facilitate this aspect of their work. Attention then focuses on how landscape architects and other stakeholders see communicating and listening as part of their creative and problem-solving processes.

Landscape projects are normally instigated with written or verbal instructions, and it is incumbent on all parties to open up a dialogue about how to interpret what the client is looking to achieve. The crucial element here is that the landscape architect *“understands personally”* (3Bc) what the client wants, and they in turn understand what the landscape architect can offer. Landscape architect 3Ca suggests that arriving at a place of understanding requires that all parties *“be very clear”* in what they are saying, and by *“listening to what they have to say”*. A number of the interviewees were able to point to examples where problems occurred because one or other party misunderstood what another meant. This seems to be particularly pertinent where stakeholders are unfamiliar with landscape architecture terminology. Landscape architect 3Ca notes that stakeholders use specific language *“because it’s what’s available to them”*, and that it’s incumbent on a professional to ensure that they properly understand what is being said, despite the variance in terminology. It is crucial that all stakeholders are properly understood because this foundational communication shapes how landscape architects will subsequently interpret the site.

In all of the interviews, landscape architects described the different ways that they enabled an appropriate space for other stakeholders to be heard. Landscape architect 3Ca said that a large part of their role was *“making sure that they all have*

that voice ... as a way of giving me more information”, whilst 3Aa spoke about a “network of good relationships” which was achieved by being “on the ground there, meeting people”.

The site survey is also influenced by stakeholders: in the public realm scheme, landscape architect 3Aa initially saw the site as *“a sort of empty vessel ... because there was nothing much going on there”*, but talking to stakeholders allowed them to *“gradually find out more and more”*, thus helping them to construct a fuller understanding of the site. Landscape architects actively need to engage with other stakeholders because, as 3Aa noted, *“none of this was signposted, it’s just what people tell you”*.

Landscape architect 3Ba was clear that in order to facilitate the dialogue and communication required in all projects they need to *“learn how to approach [a] client”*, or any other stakeholder for that matter. Good, effective communication – in particular listening – is acknowledged as *“life skills”* (3Ba) which as a *“personable soul”* (3Cb) one might already possess, but that can be honed with *“experience”* or by *“actively go[ing] on courses”* (3Ca). In common with others, architect 3Cb pointed out that these kinds of skills were essential because *“you’ll probably spend about 2% of your working year in pure design”* whereas the rest of your time will be spent *“managing other people around you ... you’ll be much more of a diplomat ... the majority of the time”*. Furthermore, it was pointed out by 3Ba that because these skills were not part of the university curricula *“we have to teach them all of those skills; how to talk to a client, how to interact with the Local Authority, how to talk to people”*. Landscape architect 3Ca who actively sought to improve their communication skills did so because *“I want people to think for themselves ... I want to hear what they have to say”*. In their day-to-day practice, this means that they need to create an environment in which all voices can be heard. For example in one meeting *“I made them change the room layout because it was hugely confrontational”* in the way that it forced people to sit in distant corners a long way from one another. *“I made them break it down ... so that they were just close to me and I could engage them, and then you could actually help them understand what*

was needed" (3Ca). Examples such as this demonstrate that in contrast with practitioners' experience at university, and even within some of the literature, the skills needed in practice *"goes beyond just about understanding of design and how you design"* (3Ca). This is not to say that being fluent in *"how you design"* is unimportant, rather that in practice, interviewees spoke about how effective listening and communicating were integral to how they design.

According to architect 3Cb, the integration of listening and communicating into a design process involves, amongst other skills, *"information gathering"* and *"presenting back"* so that designers *"really understand all the different parameters"* that they will need to work with as they interpret the brief and site. Clients and other stakeholders who were responsible for running projects were very clear that designers *"take the steer from the clients"* (3Ab) and use *"their skill-sets to interpret our vision"* (3Bc). This puts the onus on landscape architects to listen to what other stakeholders are saying, and where other designers are involved, to try and ensure that parties *"don't dominate one another"* but instead aim for *"a symbiotic relationship"* where *"they just work genuinely sympathetically with one another"* (3Cb). Where these open collaborations are in evidence, all the interviewees were able to cite examples of how this informed the design process, nurtured ideas and developed their own practice. When communication within working relationships is open and honest, designers spoke about a *"freedom"* (3Ca) to be able to test ideas out amongst different disciplines and that *"if it's not very good or it needs to go in a different direction, that's fine"* (3Bb) because of the trust and respect already established between individuals. Architect 3Cb developed the notion of ideas growing and developing through communication by observing that an initial idea will *"probably trigger something else going on in the landscape architect"* and that through sharing their thoughts there is *"Discussion! Excitement! Design!"*

Listening to other stakeholders also meant that landscape architect 3Ca expressed a tension between confidence in their expertise and not *"profess[ing] to have all the answers"*. Balancing confidence with humility enabled this landscape architect to

pursue a more collaborative approach to their practice: *"I want to help them talk to each other about how we can resolve this"*.

Clients were able to pinpoint examples of when landscape architects brought new ideas to the table which were developed around *"informal discussions"* (3Ab), and that in a number of instances, negotiating the challenges of particular projects would have been more challenging *"had it not been for their input"* (3Bc). Clients 3Db and 3Dc went further by saying that because their landscape architect physically talked them through their plans in person (rather than emailing a pdf file), it *"made it compelling"* and gave them confidence to then enter a dialogue where *"we discussed and we talked about changes"*.

Possessing communication skills was cited by a number of interviewees as being key to overcoming the inevitable obstacles that face all landscape projects. Where one or more stakeholder had an issue *"which could have potentially been a real deal-breaker"*, landscape architect 3Ba was able to show how they worked closely with other parties to work towards a solution. Listening in order to understand the other's point of view meant that in this project *"none of these problems have been insurmountable"* (3Bc).

Implications for the research

This chapter asked 'whose site is it anyway?', and in summary, these interviews have demonstrated that although one party can claim legal ownership, in the life of a project, a site is a shared entity. Its interpretation relies on collaboration, and in turn collaboration relies on communication. From a landscape architect's perspective, design decisions are sometimes made in formal collaborations (with architects for example), but are always made as a result of having collaboratively explored and developed a brief. This might be recognised in different ways; from meetings with a single client, through to design-team conferences, community consultations or simply bouncing ideas around with a colleague.

Whilst each site is comprehended and interpreted collectively, each profession has their own sphere of responsibility and experience. These interviews have demonstrated that all collaborative endeavours rely on careful listening and good communication, something which the professional and academic literature rarely addresses. Furthermore, these same theoretical perspectives seldom account for the diversity of clients and other stakeholders evident even in this limited sample.

The research questions set out in section 4.2 have brought the three phases of this research together. The first question, *How does site shape landscape architects' design decisions?* has been addressed by exploring the different ways that practitioners understand and work with site, together with observations about how other stakeholders' conceptions of site also influence their work.

Question 2, *What factors affect how landscape architect interpret site?* was key in all three interview sets. Collectively, these have demonstrated a complex and diverse picture, of which landscape architects' interpretations are one component. The last question, *How do these factors impact design decisions and outcomes?* demonstrated that it was the particular contexts and collaborations within which each project is located which provides designers with ideas and inspiration. Moreover, it is the landscape architect's creative interpretations (rather than the factors themselves) which impact design decisions.

These observations, together with others made throughout the thesis thus far, form the basis of a detailed discussion in the next part of the study.

PART THREE

Part	Chapter
	1 Does Site Matter?
	2 Professional Practice
1	3 Theorising Site
	4 Operationalising the study: Journey, Questions and Method
	5 Delving Deep into Site
2	6 Results A Landscape Architecture Way of Seeing
	7 Whose Site is it Anyway?
3	8 Site Seeing: Contextualising the Findings
4	9 Interpreting Site: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

8

Site-seeing:

Contextualising the Findings

Guided by the research questions, this discussion chapter contextualises the findings of chapters 5 to 7 against the theoretical background outlined in chapters 2 and 3.

The ways that we interpret a site are of central importance in landscape architecture because the site is the place where ideas are turned into form. The literature reviewed in chapter 3 contained a number of alternative ways to conceptualise a site, but little detail as to how this might be translated into the materiality of a landscape project. Furthermore, those texts which provide instruction on the technical details of technique or policy rarely reveal how such approaches might impact how we think about or respond to a site. This apparent gulf between theory and practice receives little attention, making it difficult for someone new to the profession to know how to make links between ideas and form. In part 2 of this research, practising landscape architects were interviewed, and it was found that the picture painted of how we understand and interpret a site in the literature was vastly oversimplified in comparison to practice. The literature rarely dealt with the different factors revealed in the interviews as impacting our ideas about site, and where attention was given by certain authors, there was little suggestion as to how this might affect how we interpret a site or make design decisions. By drawing attention to the key areas which have been raised by the study so far, this chapter explores how they might be more fully explained so as to access tacit knowledge and previously unexplained ways of thinking with an emphasis on helping students develop their own practice.

Landscape architecture can be understood as a culture which “provide[s] ways of thinking embedded in a way of acting, while the way of acting is infused by the way of thinking” (Healey 2006: 64). For a student who is new to this culture, these “ways of thinking ... [and] acting” are unfamiliar, and lacking the benefit of experience, it can be difficult to comprehend the connections between ideas and action, or see how theory relates to practice.

Accordingly, this chapter is based around the following observations:

- Section 8.1** There are a number of different ways to understand site, the most prevalent of which renders it as a neutral, objective area of land. A more helpful way of conceptualising and working with a site is to see it as a social, cultural and relational construct, to which we respond.
- 8.2** As a profession, landscape architecture has particular ‘ways of seeing’ which are interpretative in nature. These ‘ways of seeing’ shape the decisions and interpretations practitioners make at every stage of a project.
- 8.3** Landscape architects need to be able to communicate effectively, part of which is to recognise that our professional culture brings with it a particular set of terminologies, meanings and language.

Outside of landscape architecture, in “common parlance” (Burns and Kahn 2005: viii), a site is “a defined area of ground” (Christensen 2005: 336), and so it is hardly surprising that novice students operate with this understanding of a site, especially when their focus is on the process of learning how to design. For a student, the everyday definition of site might seem to serve them well, and allow them to function with one less thing to worry about. However, experienced practitioners demonstrate vastly more complex and creative ideas about sites which need to be explained and made explicit so that students can access this embedded and situated knowledge as a way of developing their own understanding. Within the body of literature which discusses subjects that impact landscape architecture it is

rare to find authors who demonstrate how their ideas might be translated into how we think about or approach a site, even though ultimately this is where their theory will be put into practice. In addition, many of the texts which present more detailed explanations and interpretations of sites do not make this link either, leaving students with little idea of how an experienced designer translates ideas into form.

Drawing on the experience of being a student and from teaching under- and post-graduates in the studio, novice landscape architects rarely have the knowledge and skill to make connections between theory and practice themselves, nor are they able to see the implications that an idea or a way of thinking might have on how they design. When students are instructed to 'survey a site' at the beginning of a project, what precisely are we asking of them? Are we, as educators, probing their ideas about a site, and helping them make links between their ways of thinking and the implications for how they interpret the site, or are we sending them out into the field with nothing more than their habitual ideas and uncritical assumptions?

University courses are designed and regulated in such a way as to cover the core competencies of the discipline which are interpreted according to the particular specialities of different institutions, and in order to ensure that practitioners have the "skills, knowledge, understanding and integrity to practise as a landscape professional in the UK" (Landscape Institute 2013a: 9), the Landscape Institute has in place a successful Pathway to Chartership scheme. Furthermore, the profession is structured in such a way that individuals are mentored and are expected to undertake Continual Professional Development. However, in the process of training as a landscape architect and becoming familiar with its professional culture (Healey 2006), there is much to be gained from stepping back from what Moore (2010: 91) calls "easy assumptions", and observing the ways of thinking and acting demonstrated by those with greater experience and knowledge. Observations from Birmingham City University's landscape architecture programmes suggest that students are relying on an unquestioned understanding of site and that these have an impact on how a student responds to and interprets a site. A student's time at university is a good opportunity to examine their particular 'way of seeing' and to

understand how this in turn affects the way that they understand and approach a site, and how they make design decisions.

Writing about the relationship of culture to landscape architecture, Robert Rotenberg suggests that:

“Culture is not a straightjacket. It is like a set of grooves in our lives. We can easily move within the grooves, or we can chose to step out of the grooves and walk beside them. The greater awareness of where the grooves lie, the broader our range of choice.”

(2012: 245)

Being able to critically recognise the ingrained cultural ‘grooves’ of how and why we interpret information and make judgements and decisions will push students towards the self-reflective practice that is required at later stages of their professional life. It is important to observe the ways of thinking and acting which affect practice so that we can explain to students how experienced practitioners understand sites and how their ideas are used to inform their design responses.

8.1 What is a site?

8.1.1 Materiality of a site

The tendency to understand site as a location and treat it “explicitly as material terrain” (Burns and Kahn 2005: viii) is recognised in the literature and deemed “understandable” by Burns and Kahn (2005: *ibid*). Butterworth and Vardy (2008), acknowledge that this is a direct result of sites being presented to landscape architects as pre-defined areas by their clients. There is more to this seemingly limited understanding of site however, as demonstrated by the ways in which the interviewees in this study respond to and interpret the sites they work with.

According to Moore, in common with other professions, landscape architects have historically measured and observed sites from a detached, neutrally objective perspective (2010: 71-78) which has contributed to our conceiving of sites as objective entities. There are a number of further reasons why site is commonly conceived of as an objective entity by authors, designers and associated bodies such as policy makers, and advisors:

- Firstly, landscape architecture has a long association with the techno-scientific methodologies typified by McHarg's (1967) Ecological Method and later SAD (Survey Analysis Design) and GIS (Geographical Information System) processes which aligned the discipline with "practicalities and scientific fact" (Moore 2010: 71).
- Secondly, sites are frequently presented to landscape architects as pre-defined areas on base-maps which are themselves considered to be "indisputable mirrors of reality" (Corner 1999: 215).
- Thirdly, the process of surveying the site using a base-map abstracts the site so that the real, physical site is replaced by a representation on paper which, according to Butterworth Vardy, "*becomes* the site for the purposes of the design" (2008: 127).
- Fourthly, the site is seen as pre-existing landscape architecture's involvement, and as such is separate and distinct from the actions of the profession which are played out on the site (see for example Beauregard 2005, Swaffield 2002 et al.).

Burns and Kahn warn that such a limited view of site "misses much" (2005: x) and Moore asserts that to presume that a site is a neutrally objective entity "sets up serious problems in the design process" (2010: 76). To understand site solely as a neutrally objective area of land misses out the crucial role that designers and other stakeholders play in interpreting what a site is presently and will become in the future. It separates humans from nature instead of investigating and marking the intrinsic relationship between the two.

The landscape architects who participated in this research displayed a range of conceptions of and relationships to site. All referred to site in its “geographical” (after Cosgrove 1998) sense, either as *any* area of land to which they were referring, or as a *specific* area of land with which they were professionally involved. In this context, looking at the use of the word as a descriptor, it would appear that practitioners’ notions about site conformed to those limited and narrow definitions which the authors above warned of. However, confirming Burns and Kahn’s observations, this study has found that “the philosophy of each person ‘is contained in its entirety in [her] political action’” (2005: ix, quoting Gramsci 1971: 324), meaning that greater insight can be gained from exploring how ideas inform action than by simply asking practitioners to define a word or concept.

In contrast to prosaic ideas about sites which posit them as distinct areas of land with which landscape architects are tasked to work, the practitioners spoke about sites as part of the landscape with a history, context and significance. Rather than taking an area of land at face-value and simply measuring its physicality, this sample of interviewees were seeking to discover how and why a site looks like it does, and to understand the significance it has for the people who interact with it. A site has a particular physicality because of the natural forces which have shaped it together with human actions (and their underlying decisions and values) which have changed it over successive generations. When working with students, this often needs to be made explicit because, as has been observed when teaching, sites are often treated as objects, divorced from their surroundings and represented as distinct entities in the centre of a blank sheet of paper. Furthermore, where sites are more fully surveyed, and their current and historical contexts are accounted for (as instructed by Holden and Liversedge 2014, for example), there is an assumption that this is a “factual” exercise, separate from the “emotional” responses and which must be “collected and organized (sic)” before “the actual design work [can] begin” (ibid: 72).

It is important that students know that the site is the way it is for a reason, and are shown how to undertake the kind of investigative enquiries demonstrated by the

interviewees. Experienced practitioners use their skill and knowledge to judge what aspects of a site are going to be important, useful or fruitful in a project, and students can benefit from having these decisions explained as a way of aiding their learning. In addition, students would also benefit from being made aware that rather than the presumed neutrality of a site survey, a multitude of factors shape the ways that we encounter and interpret a site so that we approach it from a particular position.

8.1.2 Ideas about sites

Theory in landscape architecture helps to explain “the relationship between materiality and ideas, form and content” (Moore 2010: 157) and as a central part of the profession, our ideas about site need to be theorised – in the sense of exploring and explaining – because they “exert a powerful force in design” (Burns and Kahn 2005: xv). Burns and Kahn (2005: viii) observe that there is “scanty literature directly addressing” how site is understood, a position which this research confirms. Although practitioners could readily discuss individual sites, and were equally able to debate subjects which “indirectly” (ibid) affect their ideas about site (such as its history, sense of place or the nature of its boundaries), they were less aware of the academic discourse which focuses solely on conceptualising site as a distinct subject. Burns and Kahn submit that “ideas about site provide a theoretical background against which ... actions are taken” (2005: viii), and even though the practitioners in this study were unaware of this “theoretical background” as a body of academic work, they possessed a wealth of situated knowledge and ideas about site which informed their actions.

Burns and Kahn stress the importance of an “articulate comprehension of site” (2005: viii), and note the on-going absence of a “consistent theory of site” (quoting Rapoport 1969) which might bring together the tacit and situated knowledge into a unified whole. There *is* an abundance of knowledge spread across the discipline’s literature; it’s just that the connections between this knowledge and the

implications for how we understand site and for how we make design decisions have rarely been made explicit. In addition, expertise in working directly with sites also permeates the profession in its entirety; embedded within practice and education, this expertise is seldom explained or made clear. Although Burns and Kahn criticise the lack of literature directly addressing site (which practitioners are generally unaware of anyway), there is plenty of literature, together with practical experience and skill, *indirectly* addressing site, which is no less important to how we understand and interpret a site.

Whilst practitioners may not conceptualise 'site' as an academic subject to study, their knowledge and experience of interpreting sites in practice demonstrates that they are thinking about how sites relate to all manner of subjects which affect their work. These observations align with Moore's assertion that it is futile to try and separate "ideas, theory, expression and technology in practice" (2010: 155) and that what matters is that we are aware of what underpins "the assumptions we make and the decisions we take" (ibid: 162). Although the dichotomy between theory and practice is deemed to be of little help in the discourse, our actual conceptions of site and the way that we interpret them are of immense importance.

In practice, landscape architects' ideas about site were observed to be varied and complex, and many interviewees were able to articulate how these ideas informed their responses to some degree. At every stage of a design project designers select and prioritise certain aspects over others based on their ideas about site which are informed by knowledge and experience. A landscape architect might pay attention to a site's topography, but not its position in relation to the astrological sign of Libra at the Spring Equinox for example. A particular image or understanding of the site is constructed based on those aspects deemed to be important, useful or valuable in some way. This is never seen as complete or authoritative because these interpretations serve to fulfil particular functions, based on the requirements of a specific situation or project. Designers participating in this study were fully aware that their comprehension of site is just one way of looking at a place, as

demonstrated by interviewee 2D who asserted that *“we all go through a very different process about understanding site and what it is”*, and 2I who remarked that for every project we will *“tailor what we look for”*.

As a student coming to landscape architecture for the first time, it was always a struggle to reconcile the creativity and ideas that an individual brings to a project with the need to design in a way that was appropriate for a particular place. Permeating the literature was the sense that it was a landscape architect’s duty to look to the site to guide their design decisions, and to do otherwise is *“setting its face against the contemporary consensus”* (Thompson 2003: 73. c.f. Moore 2010: 77). A key idea about landscape architecture’s relationship with site was posited as one in which the designer must *“draw as much as possible from the potential of any given site”* (Girod 1999: 60); expecting it to provide us with *“generative devices”* (Corner 1999: 12) which we would use to inform our designs. Sites are often understood as repositories of design inspiration from which a careful study and analysis would *“inspire and generate”* (Høyer 1999: 72) an appropriate design response. This way of thinking is manifest through the use of comprehensive positivistic or scientific site surveys which focused on the *“particular visible phenomena”* (Burns 1991: 154); or else on the genius loci which seeks the *“invisible or hidden meaning”* (Moore 2010: 52). In both instances, it is ideas about the site as an authoritative source of inspiration which shapes landscape architects’ design decisions. In practice, a number of landscape architects affirmed this stance, reporting opinions along the lines of *“the first inspiration is from the site”* (2C) or *“the site will inform a design response”* (2D).

In another example of the ideas practitioners work with, interviewee 2A made a distinction between the physical site which they defined as *“the piece of land that you’ve been asked to consider”*, and their ideas about site which they likened to a section of landscape, where the suffix *scape* is *“an idea about the land... a response to the land”*. For this practitioner, the ideas underpinning their practice meant that they interpreted each site as piece of the landscape which has been identified for a specific purpose. Furthermore, by locating their interpretation in specifically

landscape terms, they were relating it to the concept of landscape as defined by the Council of Europe which encourages an exploration of the “action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” that have given rise to the site’s current form and significance (CoE 2000). The manner in which this designer comprehends site cannot be separated from their overall approach to practice, which is to immerse themselves in the peculiarities of the landscape, not as a neutral observer, but as a fully engaged professional who can interpret what they find using their knowledge and experience according to the specific needs and requirements of a brief and the collaborative input of multiple stakeholders.

Based on the interviews conducted for this research, the ideas about site that practitioners work with appear to be more complex and multi-faceted than those which are presented in much of the literature. In contrast to an academic discourse which tends to explore one idea at a time, in practice ideas about site come into contact with many other factors which affect how everything else is interpreted.

For example, the background, interests and experience of each landscape architect were described by interviewee 2D as “*what makes us tick*”, but these important factors are rarely, if ever, taken into account when we conceptualise our ideas about site. This may be because it is much simpler to talk about and describe an area of land than it is to try to fathom the complexity of an individual’s comprehension of a particular place. In practice, landscape architects have their own unique and particular understanding of and approach to a site based on a combination of what interviewee 2E called “*standard industry guidance and emotional intelligence*”. This “*emotional side of it*”, (which was also contrasted with “*the rules*” by interviewee 2D), was used by a number of practitioners to sum-up their reactions, perceptions and responses to the site based on their own knowledge, experience, likes and dislikes. Rather than being misrepresented as a “subjective response” which “must be carefully balanced with the facts” (Waterman 2009: 54), practitioners demonstrate that their interpretation of what they see, measure and sense forms a holistic, integrated response to an idea about a particular site.

8.1.3 Ideas informing materiality

The site will always influence design decisions, but not in the sense that it ‘tells’ the designer what to do – either through rigorous survey or by sensing its spirit – as if it were a neutral entity divorced from human agency; instead, it is a designer’s response to the site which influences their design decisions. Burns and Kahn assert that site is a “relational construct” which is created through the “dialogical exchange” of site and designer (2005: xv), and for students of landscape architecture it is therefore important to understand that there is not one ‘correct’ way of understanding or interpreting a site.

When we design with a particular place in mind we tailor our decisions and ideas to the peculiarities of that specific location. LaGro sums this up by asserting that “physical and cultural features ... limit the number of feasible design configurations” (LaGro 2008: 211). Even if we design with the idea that the land can be treated as “cleared” (Burns 1991) *tabula rasa* or blank canvases, we are still designing for a specific geology, climate and ecology etc. Using the analogy of the blank canvas, an artist may have the freedom to paint whatever they wish, but they are still bound by a surface made of canvas which may suit oils better than watercolour; and it’s highly improbable that the artist will produce hammer and chisel and attempt to sculpt the canvas as if it were stone. In the same way, whatever our ideas about site, it is virtually impossible to utterly ignore its physicality and the impact this will have on a landscape architect’s vision for their design response. What is seen in practice is a situation where the land’s physicality is understood to be an important source of design inspiration rather than a problem to overcome or as a limiting factor. In this way, the idea that site is ‘an area of ground’ is reconceptualised as an area of ground whose physicality is the result of a set of historical circumstances which might be used to inspire a design response.

When landscape architects encounter a place, with its particular attributes and features, they are continually interpreting what they find in terms of their own ‘way

of seeing' which includes the project brief, their interactions with other stakeholders, their own experience and the requirements of their profession. This research confirms that landscape architects' work in line with Moore's assertion that "what we see is neither subjective or objective, but interpretative, based on our experience of the physical, material world around us" and that "any meaning we might glean is dependent on what we know" (2010: 42 & 148). Interviewee 2A summed up this interpretative approach as:

"Be fluent in the place that you're thinking about and express yourself in that language, but tell your own stories, make your own poetry ... In our subject, learning the language of the landscape and all the history, and all the cultural marks as I call them ... they're all evidence and you can read them ... [When] you know about the place you can decide to respond to that, or otherwise."

Practitioners tend not to interpret a site or make design decisions based on one idea alone, rather they bring in all manner of ideas which they judge to be relevant in order to make the decisions necessary to complete a project. Based on their knowledge and skill, experienced landscape architects assess the value of an idea in relation to how it might work for a particular site. Interviewee 1B noted that particular way of thinking can become ingrained into the discipline so that they take on an assumed authority, whether or not it is of use or relevance in every circumstance: *"there are lots of ideas ... people choose a point of departure and then try to make a religion out of it"*. The pilot study of this research was designed to explore one of these 'ways of seeing' which was centred on the idea that people and place could be connected by resurrecting the footprints of a site's historical form. Underpinning this notion is a substantial theoretical background based on ideas about the site as a series of layers, the genius loci and the role of landscape architecture in social sustainability. As an insight into how ideas inform action, *Resurrected Footprints* are useful examples for students and practitioners alike because their material form is distinctive and their designers can give a good account as to how and why they chose to reveal a site's past.

Building on the work of Burns and Kahn (2005) and Moore (2010), this research finds that a landscape architect's design process and response to the site is not limited to, or even necessarily framed by, their understanding of site as *only* "an area of ground". In practice, a designer's actions and ideas are so completely and tightly woven into interrelated contexts that it would be meaningless to draw a distinction between the physical site and our ideas about site: a point which Burns neatly sums up by arguing that "one cannot divorce the site from the way it is known" (1991: 151). The knowledge and experience of a designer, the social, political and cultural contexts in which they practice and the influence of clients and other stakeholders shape how landscape architects work with a site. If and when a landscape architect talks about site as a piece of land, it is not *just* a piece of land; it is a place of action and interaction and has "severally-layered meanings" (Cosgrove 1998: 15) impacted by the host of factors explored in part 2 of this study.

8.2 Interpreting sites

8.2.1 Forming an understanding of site

Most professional discourse tends to focus on how landscape architects work with sites that have *already* been defined for the purpose of a particular project, with Beauregard going so far as to assert that "site does not exist prior to the onset of planning and design" (2005: 40 – 41). In literature and practice alike it is acknowledged that sites are usually handed to landscape architects having already been identified and signified "with a red line on a map" (Butterworth and Vardy 2008: 126). Working with students undertaking design projects in the studio, it has been observed that for many, the red line on a plan is supreme and a site is received as a self-evident entity. Tempting as it may be to consider that a project begins when the client first takes ownership of a plot, or when the landscape

architect is given a brief, it is imperative that we remember that a site pre-exists a project, despite what Beauregard argues and what students presume.

The landscape is continually being shaped and re-shaped, its meaning and significance shifting as ownership changes, development occurs and cultural values shift. Whilst a site might be defined by the boundaries of ownership or arise from a client embracing an opportunity for change resulting from a dissatisfaction with its existing form or function, it must never be forgotten that a site is part of the larger landscape. The process by which a site is formed and defined is fluid and dynamic, with multiple stakeholders working in different ways to define and justify elements such as its size, shape, purpose, its social significance or economic cultural and ecological value. This process of responding to a site in different ways and giving it meaning and significance can be described as 'constructing' (different to building with bricks and mortar), to which Beauregard, Burns and Kahn (all 2005) respond by describing sites as relational, cultural or social constructs.

According to the interviewees in this research, a client plays a crucial role in defining a site: firstly, because it is the client who *"has an opportunity, a reason"* (2D) to select an area for development, we think about and respond to that place based on what we ultimately plan to do in a particular project, as interviewee 2D explained:

"if you've been appointed to go and look at a site because a developer wants to build on it, it already has its definition".

Secondly, clients such as land owners and developers have a certain degree of power over deciding how much of the land is included within the bounds of a plot, and by excluding that which is not.

For a landscape architect, their involvement in the on-going process of interpretation is likely to begin when they receive their client's instructions, and one of the landscape architect's first tasks is to get to know the site in all of its various guises. This is not a process of detached observation, but an active process

of response and interpretation which builds a picture of the site based on the unique requirements and contexts of a specific project. Using a fairly limited set of normative techniques, landscape architects get to know specific aspects of a site based on the information that they need to ensure the project fulfils its brief and is appropriate for its social, physical and cultural setting. The process of gathering, sensing and interpreting this data (used in its widest sense, not limited to measurements and statistics) forms a response which can be worked with. Landscape architects and other stakeholders judge what is important to know about a site and interpret what is found through the complex, multi-layered contexts which make up each project.

Forming a response to a site also takes place through the media we select to represent our impressions, measurements and interpretations. When we visit a site or conduct some form of desk-study, we record our findings, using a variety of means and media which informs our understanding, directs our actions and aids our interpretation. The use and creation of images and plans combined with the action of sketching and drawing are acknowledged as contributing to the process of developing ideas (See for example Corner 2002, Moore 2010, Treib 2008 et al.). These actions are linked to the creative process as Andrea Kahn proposes:

“the descriptions and analyses that designers produce actually generate the knowledge necessary to engage a given condition as a site ... site drawings, models and discourses are never mere second-order redescriptions of some pre-existing conditions as much as they are evidence of thought in formation, a thought about what the urban site might be.”

(Kahn 2005: 289)

8.2.2 Site survey

When a landscape architect undertakes a site survey, they are selecting their survey criteria based on a particular ‘way of seeing’. Described by one interviewee 21 as “*an over-simplification*”, the idea that the site survey is an objective act of

observation followed by a subjective act of evaluation – suggested by Waterman (2009) – is rejected by the majority of practitioners in favour of “*an iterative process*” (2D) which forms part of a singular creative and interpretative endeavour. Design decisions are not simply made as a result of having evaluated an observation about the site, but are instead creative interpretations based on our responses to, and knowledge of, the client, brief, landscape etc.

The site survey is not merely or simply collecting information about the landscape, however comprehensive its scope. This research concurs with those who construe the site survey as contributing to the process of interpretation through “drawings, models and discourse” (Kahn 2005: 289, c.f. Moore 2010, Butterworth and Vardy 2008). Although physicality and character tend to be the aspects that most landscape architects investigate when undertaking a survey – and are therefore the most widely acknowledged in the literature – the generalities of the profession-wide overviews given by Holden and Liversedge (2014), LaGro (2008) or Waterman (2009) soon begin to break down into nuanced variety when considering individual practitioners’ approaches to site.

Broadly speaking, landscape architects are not seeking to find the absolute truth of a site in a way that the deterministic and positivistic methods expounded by McHarg (1967) et al. suggest. Neither are the participants in this research looking to the genius loci to be the neutral or objective mouthpiece of the site as Moore (2010) suggests some do. Certain normative techniques are absolutely necessary to find out specific information about a site, and landscape architects routinely measure elements that are scientifically accurate and verifiable such as its area, topography or species of flora. Practitioners also described how they seek to get a sense of the genius of a place when it is taken to mean ascertaining its character or local distinctiveness (and not a spirit inhabiting the site). In addition, a number of the interviewees spoke about “*emotional intelligence*” which is the ability to “*step inside ... the landscape in peoples’ minds*” (2E) and comprehend it from their imagined perspective. In which ever ways landscape architects get to know a site, they are not doing so as a disinterested observer. In practice landscape architects

rarely, if ever, conduct a site survey 'cold'. They almost always visit a site knowing where the project is heading, tailoring *"what you look for to what you expect to do at the end"* (2I) or with *"some sort of design agenda"* (2D). Their records and descriptions of the site are undertaken in order to help them creatively interpret the site in such a way that it will aid their ability to meet the requirements of a brief. Interpreting site with a wide and complex set of perspectives and contexts is a creative act, and forms part of a landscape architect's design process.

The practitioners in this study were always questioning and interrogating what they find out about a site in light of the particular contexts they work in, guided by their individual experience and knowledge as well as through collaborative experience and knowledge. Moore outlines why relying on the genius loci or a neutrally objective standpoint can be potentially creatively stifling: this research finds that in both cases, practitioners are routinely demonstrating the 'interpretive' perspective put forward by Moore as an alternative; whereby designers *"interpret and reinterpret what [they] see, armed with a wealth of experience, knowledge and opinions"* (2010: 103).

Every landscape architect's interpretation of a site is unique, although there are also many common responses to a site, especially in the widespread use of certain survey procedures and approaches which permeate the profession. In the literature, these normative ways of understanding and interpreting a site are given the most attention at the expense of the variety and complexity which is evident in practice. In contrast to students observed in the studio who stick rigidly to published survey procedures, the interviewees in this study discussed ways that these techniques had become one tool among many in their interpretations of a site. Education is important because it provides an opportunity for novice designers to learn from their more experienced counterparts because, as interviewee 3Ba notes, *"all of those textbook ways that a scheme goes forward can just go out of the window ..."*. As well as the important foundations, a student's university education might benefit from experiencing some of the complexity evident in practice as a means to equipping them for the workplace.

8.2.3 A landscape architecture way of seeing

There are many areas in which the profession, through the Landscape Institute, seeks to present a united voice on subjects such as climate change or green infrastructure (LI 2008, 2009, 2011a). It may be tempting therefore to consider that there is a particular 'landscape architecture way of seeing' the world, to borrow Cosgrove's phraseology (1998: 13-15). However, the landscape architects involved in this research demonstrated that to consider one single uniform "way of seeing" would be to miss much, and that the complexity, creativity, innovation and variety represented across the industry would be better represented by 'landscape architecture ways of seeing'. There *may* be a broad, collective 'landscape architecture way of seeing', but in practice this clarity is supplanted by a more nuanced approach which, although is still recognisable as encompassing a landscape architecture perspective, is strongly influenced by the designer's own experience and knowledge together with the various factors more fully explored in part 2 of this thesis.

The importance of professional judgement is widely recognised in the literature and was frequently mentioned by practitioners as being key to their success as designers. Crucially, based on our knowledge and experience, the interpretation of a site is a creative act which generates and refines ideas. Professional judgement and experience were acknowledged as being built up over the course of a lifetime, with interviewee 2E going so far as suggesting that "*a good landscape architect has got to be an old landscape architect*". Whether or not this is true is debatable – there are plenty of young and extremely talented landscape architects in practice – but the benefit of experience was clearly valued by those interviewees who had been practising for many years and by those who felt that their best years lay ahead of them.

Landscape architects form ideas about a site according to those attributes, priorities and concerns that they construe as valuable and significant in the context

of a particular project. In landscape architecture this is evident in a number of ways. Perhaps the most significant influence on a landscape architect's 'way of seeing', the site survey, is a reflection of the types of factors a landscape architect needs to take into account in order to effectively and competently fulfil their professional duties. Examining elements such as geology, soils, hydrology, vegetation, site use, views, services, planning status etc. are deemed necessary precursors to the production of technical plans and specifications for building. Thus, our conception of site is partly framed by our need for technical information necessary to build what we have designed. It is therefore not surprising that site is frequently conceptualised as a problem to overcome (after LaGro 2008) when we frame our responses to a site on a largely technical basis.

In addition to the technical survey which interviewee 2E described as "*pretty standard stuff*" required to fulfil the technical "*project deliverables*", contemporary landscape architecture also places high value on the context, identity and character of a site. A site survey is therefore geared towards ascertaining "*what makes that place special and what makes that place different from other places*" (2F) whether it be on the scale of a county-wide Landscape Character Assessment or for an individual design project. As a profession we frame our conception of site through the lens of character and identity, seeking to overcome placelessness and ubiquity in the landscape.

To illustrate two different ways of seeing from the spectrum of practitioners who took part in this study, the following example is given. In broad terms, there is a group of practitioners who appear to focus on the landscape via the medium of design, whilst a second group focus on design via the medium of landscape.

For the first group, their particular way of seeing puts the landscape first and foremost, framing their ideas about site and its interpretation through the lens of understanding what interviewee 2H termed as being "*what is right for the landscape*". The way that this group of interviewees approach their practice, interpret sites and make design decisions is typified by a need to "*familiarise*

yourself with the language of [a] particular place" (2A) and *"encourage a deep delving into what a place has to offer"* (1E). For these 'landscape-first' practitioners, design is a tool with which they are able to carefully, skilfully and sensitively bring out the best of the landscape for their clients. Such designers might turn down work if they felt they would not be able to properly serve the landscape within the constraints of a particular brief or client's requirements. In design terms, their output spans the range from subtle, minimally intrusive schemes right through to bold, innovative and striking design. Their insistence that the landscape has primary priority is no indicator that their designs are always "places that fit in, are unobtrusive or invisible, merging in, integrating, blending, being 'absent'" (Moore 2010: 77).

The second group's way of seeing puts design first and foremost, framing their understanding of a site and its interpretation through the lens of being, for example, *"absolutely committed to their aesthetic in some kind of transformative way"* (1B). These interviewees are typically concerned with *"the great artistic possibilities inherent in the landscape"* (1B) or that their creativity should not be *"constrained by the site"* (2G). For interviewee 2B, it would appear that they might be equally at home employing their skills and expertise in areas such as *"a sculptor or an artist or something like that"* and that for a variety of reasons, they chose to express their artistry through the medium of the landscape. Such designers might turn down work if they felt it would not give them sufficient *"latitude for artistic freedom"* (1B). In design terms, their output spans a very similar spectrum of aesthetics to the first; ranging from the bold to the subtle.

To be clear, these are examples of different 'ways of seeing' evident in the interview sample: those who put the landscape first are equally accomplished designers, and those who put design first show no less concern for the landscape. Both groupings (and those who fall somewhere between the two) combine expertise in landscape and design, but approach the discipline from different perspectives. There are many other ways of seeing evident throughout the

discipline, and in practice ‘a landscape architecture way of seeing’ is typified by a complex interaction of distinct and overlapping perspectives.

8.2.4 Stakeholders’ ways of seeing

The multitude of stakeholders involved in any given project, each of whom may bring their own personal, cultural and professional interpretations and responses, means that our ideas about sites are incredibly complex, ambiguous and “severally-layered” (Cosgrove, 1998: 15). This complexity is rarely acknowledged in the literature, which tends to limit stakeholders’ involvement in the comprehension of a site to clients’ instructions or residents’ views (see LVIA guidelines (2013) for example). Formal stakeholder consultation frequently focuses on gathering information about site-related issues such as environmental impact, matters of identity and character, or economics. Such views are important, not only because they impact the lives and livelihoods of people, but also because they are integral to the social, cultural and relational interpretations of site. The examples of consultation put forward by the interviewees in this study were quite different from those in Thompson’s (2000) study, which focused on public consultation rather than the professional stakeholder consultation of this research. Thompson suggests that amongst designers, “many believed that its [public consultation] purpose was to access information that might otherwise be unavailable” but that “no one believed they [the public] should become the designers” (2000: 123). Despite the difference in consultees, this research also finds that landscape architects primarily value stakeholders’ input as a means to find out about the site and tailor their design solutions to the requirements of these stakeholders. In common with Thompson’s findings, it was also observed that landscape architects drew a distinction between consultation and design collaboration. No matter what the circumstances of a stakeholder’s involvement in a project, the landscape architects in this study spoke about the need to judge the extent to which other ways of seeing site may be beneficial, by interpreting it through the lens of their knowledge and experience.

Aside from formal stakeholder consultation – which may, or may not, take place depending on the scope of the project – there are numerous working relationships and other connections with stakeholders which can influence how site is comprehended and impact the design decisions that are made. For example, a chance meeting with a local resident might allow a designer to *“find out more and more about the history”* (3Aa) which had not previously been formally recorded and would otherwise have been unavailable. Insights such as this feed into a designer’s understanding of site and contribute to their ability to *“make judgements from a position of knowledge”* (Moore 2010: 90). This position of knowledge is not posited as a comprehensive understanding of site. Landscape architects are not seeking to discover everything about the site from their interactions with different stakeholders; instead, as interviewee 2A says, there is a balance between having *“enough information to build what you want to build”* and a recognition that *“intellectually, emotionally or artistically, there will always be more”*. In terms of looking to the site for design inspiration, interviewee 1B suggested that it is a matter of ensuring there is *“enough grist for the mill in terms of ideas”*. Students often find the process of judging what will be a fruitful or appropriate idea daunting, which is why it is helpful to talk them through the anatomy of a case study as a way for them to understand how stakeholders impact the ways that sites are interpreted and design decisions made.

When considering the many different points of view amongst stakeholders, it is not uncommon for them to conceive of the site as an area of land upon which their various concerns are projected. Examples include: owners who see their site as an expression of their personality and taste; residents who gain a sense of their identity from the historical associations of a site; developers who are concerned with how the site functions as an income-generator; and conservationists who are concerned with ecological diversity. There is a danger that stakeholders could understand site solely as a material entity which must be protected, mitigated or exploited depending on their particular viewpoint. Whether knowingly or not, each individual or group of stakeholders has their own particular way of seeing a site, meaning that they are not seeing in a neutrally objective way. As with other

instances mentioned throughout this chapter, it is important that students are aware that all stakeholders (including themselves) have a particular understanding of and approach to site, each of which will be different. This research has demonstrated that it is essential for practitioners to be able to account for these varying perspectives and use them to interpret a site and make design decisions; and so it seems wise to ensure that students can also contend with the influence of stakeholders as they learn how to design.

Many of the stakeholders in a landscape project will themselves be professionals with particular areas of knowledge and expertise. As such, it is recognised that their specific ways of seeing the site will be a reflection of their professional judgement combined with their own knowledge, experience and interests. Part of the role of a landscape architect is to ensure that stakeholders are given a voice and that their input is appropriately considered and interpreted through the lens of a project's requirements. Whether the input be expert advice from an engineer or ecologist, the recollections of a resident, or suggestions from a client, landscape architects evaluate all information according to how it contributes to the aims of the particular project, using their own professional judgement.

When undertaking design projects, landscape architects are not engaged in designing sites for their own benefit because, as interviewee 3Aa noted, *“everything flows from the client ... it's not about us, it's about the client ... achieving what the client wants to achieve”*. Although a 'landscape architecture way of seeing' is based on expertise and specialist knowledge, this is not to discount or devalue other stakeholders' ways of seeing, but a recognition that all ways of seeing site are partial. This partiality is a product of each individual's, group's or profession's sphere of knowledge, expertise and interest. In a landscape project, different individuals, groups and professions come together in order to, amongst other things, share their understandings of, and visions for, the site in question. These collaborative ways of seeing a site involve a number of different endeavours: discussing a client's requirements; consulting with residents; undertaking tree surveys or Environmental Impact Assessments; working with engineers and

surveyors; or collaborating with artists and architects. However these working relationships, collaborations or consultations are described, they all form part of a shared way of seeing, made up of the many facets of individual relationships to, and comprehensions of, site. Even if most parties only see the site from their own particular perspective, the landscape architects in this study consistently demonstrate that they are endeavouring to incorporate all other ways of seeing into their own understanding, thereby forming a comprehension of site that is as highly complex and “severally-layered” as authors such as Cosgrove (1998), Burns and Kahn (2005) and Moore (2010) suggest. It is also important to recognise that landscape architects aren’t simply facilitators in a wider conversation, nor is their voice just one amongst many: their expertise gives them a unique position in representing their client’s and the landscape’s best interests. It was encouraging therefore that many of the stakeholders interviewed for this research recognised the expert contributions made by the landscape architects with whom they worked.

8.3 Communicating Site

Landscape architects and other stakeholders alike identified that the process of bringing different ways of seeing together can be a source both of fruitful creativity and of frustration. In projects which affect the landscape – even where it’s not the primary focus – landscape architects fulfil a vital role in enabling stakeholders to fully appreciate the potential of the site and its wider landscape context. In all projects, but particularly in those involving consultation and collaboration, the practitioners in this study were clear that their role extended to managing and facilitating good working relationships between stakeholders. Effective communication, with a particular focus on attentive listening, was singled out as being a highly significant part of a professional’s skillset because it contributes to good working relationships. Landscape architects who can bring people together, get the best from all involved, and manage those who are particularly quiet or vocal, contribute to the overall success of a project and enable a fuller, richer comprehension of a site to emerge. A number of the landscape architects in this

study argued that cultivating an atmosphere in which other stakeholders were able to speak openly enabled them to more fully articulate their point of view and argue for a better outcome for the landscape and/or their client.

Interviewees reported that these vital abilities were gained over time, a product of age and experience in practice, or by undertaking training outside of the industry. Literature which explores working relationships from the perspective of landscape architects is generally limited to the intricacies of contract law or good working practice (for example, Garmony, Tennant & Winsch 2007; Rogers 2011 et al.). Whilst such capabilities are considered to be part of a chartered member's remit, the Landscape Institute offers only sparse guidance on "the key generic skills which underpin professional life and lifelong learning" (2012a:11). Evidence from practitioners and other stakeholders in this research suggests that these competencies need to be given much greater significance over and above the directive to "communicate ideas clearly and effectively" (ibid).

Adeptness in communication is not only necessary in order to make the most of working relationships, it also serves an important role in enabling stakeholders to fully appreciate how the potential of a site might be realised through the medium of landscape architecture. This aspect of a designer's role parallels the Landscape Institute's recent efforts to raise the discipline's profile and status (see LI 2011b for example) and is consistent with many of the interviewees' personal efforts to act as landscape advocates. Practitioners need to listen to and speak for their clients and other stakeholders, represent the landscape, and also take account of their own informed professional standpoint. All of these actions are interpretative because landscape architects have to judge how they inform the particular project they're working on. Evidence from the interviews shows that practitioners are undertaking this role as a matter of course and that they routinely aim to help their clients and other stakeholders to see a site from the perspective of the wider landscape and through the lens of landscape-related concerns such as social sustainability, green infrastructure, public health and liveability. These are crucial skills, and so the techniques and methods need to be properly taught in the same way that we

expect to teach students how to design. Rather than simply tell students to communicate effectively, or to assess them on their ability to verbally convey information, these skills could be explicitly taught as part of their overall preparation for the profession.

Listening

Practitioners described different approaches to listening which could be summed up as 'interpretative listening', and 'listening in order to understand'. The former is a creative process of dialogue and collaboration, where ideas are formed and developed, and parties spark off one-another in an energy-generating, innovative atmosphere. The skill of listening in order to understand aims to ensure that parties properly understand one-another so that misunderstandings which could potentially affect the progress of a project are avoided. In addition to listening in order to understand others' points of view, landscape architects are also enabling others to see the site from a different perspective. Both approaches to listening are very important, but quite different. It is therefore important that students and practitioners are proficient in both techniques and are able to utilise the appropriate skill depending on the situation. Our ideas about sites and the ways that we respond to them are influenced by the various working relationships and encounters with stakeholders. For a project to be successful therefore, practitioners need to be able to explain their professional interpretation of a site to others, and to be able to carefully ascertain how others' points of view might inform the course of a project.

Language

With a 'landscape architecture way of seeing', comes a responsibility to recognise that the industry has its own particular set of terminology, language and meaning. It must not be taken for granted that some terms, concepts or phrases have the same meaning for both landscape architects and their clients or other stakeholders. A number of practitioners noted that these differences in understanding led to

difficulties in their working relationships and any training in this area must therefore address the language we use as well as our ability to listen and explain effectively. Moore (2010) argues that the language we have at our disposal is an indicator of how well we are able to articulate our ambitions for the discipline, noting that it is currently “dismally misrepresented” (2010: 221). Given the centrality of site to the “professions concerned with design of the built environment” (Burns and Kahn 2005: viii), it is vital that landscape architects are aware of how their professional culture interprets and portrays sites in all of their complexity, rather than rendering it simply as an area of land.

As experts in getting to know sites, landscape architects are able to creatively interpret their findings in order to meet a client’s brief and aspirations. It is important that this expertise be communicated well so that these stakeholders might also appreciate the landscape as the vital and holistic cultural, environmental and economic resource that we do. Our knowledge and experience provides an opportunity to talk about the land in ways that “inspire and show us things we hadn’t noticed in the world” (Moore 2010: 226). From this perspective, we might also help clients and other stakeholders understand an individual site’s relationship to the wider landscape, and show how our expertise in envisaging the potential of a place can also fulfil our client’s aspirations, whatever these might be.

PART FOUR

Part	Chapter	
	1	Does Site Matter?
	2	Professional Practice
1	3	Theorising Site
	4	Operationalising the study: Journey, Questions and Method
	5	Delving Deep into Site
2	6	Results A Landscape Architecture Way of Seeing
	7	Whose Site is it Anyway?
3	8	Site Seeing: Contextualising the Findings
4	9	Interpreting Site: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

9

Interpreting Site:

Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

This thesis began with the premise that each “site matters” (Burns and Kahn 2005: viii) because these portions of land are where landscape architects’ ideas are made material. Although constituting relatively small areas of land, added together, the whole earth is comprised of individual sites, and as such, the challenges and opportunities faced by our planet are worked out at a site-by-site scale. The study of sites is at the heart of the discipline: we survey each place in detail in order to ensure our responses are appropriate; we use our informed observations to inspire our creativity; and our plans and visions form the basis for the continued evolution of the landscape. Our ideas, attitudes and ways of working with these parcels of land influence our practice and have consequences for society at large because, after all, we are shaping the landscapes in which we all live.

This research demonstrates that practitioners’ ideas about sites form part of a much larger contextual framework in which they operate, and that it is this previously little-examined framework of contextual factors which shapes how they see and interpret sites, and make design decisions. Moreover, it shows how the wealth of ideas brought to each project and site-investigation is part and parcel of a landscape architect’s artistic and creative work.

Having established that sites are interpreted, rather than scientifically or intuitively 'known', the onus of responsibility is handed back to the designer to carefully, critically and creatively investigate sites. Rather than visiting a site in order to 'be inspired', this research finds that practitioners investigate sites holistically in light of all the factors which constitute a project: the client's wishes and perspective(s); the brief, the reason(s) for the project; the project's aims; the social; historical and cultural context; the area's environmental context and history; the history of a site; the economic and budgetary contexts and so forth. All of this, and more, forms part of how sites are understood.

Acknowledging the centrality of site to the discipline, much of the academic discourse tends to focus on understandings *of* site (examining what site is) in contrast to that which relates to professional practice, which pays more attention to our approaches *to* a site (what we do on site), with little overlap between the two. In bridging the gap, this thesis establishes that practitioners do not operate with a theory/practice dichotomy when it comes to working with sites. This is of particular significance to both academic and professional-practice writers and policy-makers who, from the reading of currently-available works, rarely cross this apparent divide. For students and early-career designers, it is of added import that the two endeavours (theory and practice) are clearly understood as not being distinct; to be aware that practice-led literature is founded upon certain ideas and conceptions; and to remember that theory needs critically engagement in practice, and not left in a textbook on a shelf.

9.1 Research Questions

As a way of drawing the thesis to a close, each of the three research questions are used to guide the reader through the findings of the study and to demonstrate how they contribute to the discourse on site in landscape architecture. Whilst the original wording of the research questions is preserved here, on reflection it was

judged that the complexity of the findings was such that were the study to be conducted afresh, a new or amended set of questions may prove to be more useful.

Throughout the research, it was noted how observations from one part of the investigation overlapped with those from another, and so it is also true for the summary of these research questions:

- ***How does site shape landscape architects' design decisions?***

This question was formulated in response to the observation that designers would often describe their landscape schemes as being 'inspired by the site' – without explaining what they meant. *What was it about the site that inspired them? What form did this inspiration take? What did they do with it? What is so special about a site?* Underpinning these questions was a key, early finding: that it is the ways that we think about and respond to a site which 'shapes' our design decisions.

This research has found that there are typically three ways that landscape architects think about site. Using an analogy from artistic practice, it is suggested here that sites tend to be thought of as; *canvas, clay* or *muse* – or some combination thereof. This analogy is proposed as a way of summarising the UK's current generalised approach to sites in landscape architecture, and in doing so contributes to the wider discourse on site in landscape architecture. In particular, these observations address Meyer's call to continual "interrogation of our contemporary condition" (2005: 121).

Canvas

To think of site as canvas is to think of it as a surface onto which we work: it is the "area of ground" to which most common definitions point. At times in the discipline's history, we have thought of site as a *blank* canvas, freeing designers from past conditions and allowing them to create something new and fresh. This

particular way of thinking about site has all but disappeared in the UK because we have come to value the unique identity of each site. Having said this, the idea of a canvas is still important when considered as a palimpsest-like surface onto which we might completely erase certain parts, reveal other elements partially hidden, or build atop existing features.

This research finds that whether seen as 'empty' or 'full', some designers and stakeholders conceive of sites as *recipients* of a landscape architect's ideas, and that the resultant design is *applied* to that area of land. This finding is significant because it points to a potential separation between a site and the design process, and is particularly pertinent to students in the design studio. The nature of the profession is such that direct contact with the physical site is often limited to the site-survey at the very beginning of the project and then construction at the end. The time in-between, where ideas are processed and designs refined, tends to be carried out in the studio using an abstracted representation of the site. If, as has been noted when teaching students, the site is thought of as a canvas onto which their ideas will be applied, it is all-to-common for novice designers to neglect to consider that they are working with real places as opposed to a detached on-paper exercise. Whilst this is certainly less common with experienced practitioners, a number of interviewees did point to examples where patterns, motifs or features had been applied or imposed to a site unthinkingly or inappropriately.

Clay

To see site as clay is to recognise that, rather than a painter applying paint on a canvas, the sculptor's artistry is demonstrated through the shaping of the material with which they work. This research finds that the majority of landscape architects fully recognise and utilise the physicality of the landscape (its geology, hydrology, ecology, structures etc.) and, unlike the analogy of a canvas, work out their ideas with a detailed and sensitive knowledge of a real physical site. This way of

conceptualising a site is important because it points to the idea that a sculptor must know their medium, and how to work with it, intimately.

Whilst it is true that a painter must also be expert at manipulating their paint, that analogy highlighted the separateness of paint and canvas, whereas sculpting clay speaks of integration and directness. Furthermore, the thorough, first-hand knowledge implied by the working of clay mirrors the significance of experience, expertise and skill which was a common theme running through this research. Particularly applicable to students and early-career designers, the clay analogy highlights the importance of being able to 'get to know' a site in detail; of "delving deep" as interviewee 1E suggested. It was noted that this thorough knowledge of sites is not always evident in those published materials supposedly instructing practitioners in site-survey tools and techniques.

Muse

This way of thinking about site has been of most interest throughout this research because it suggests that the site itself can inspire a designer. Within landscape architecture, there are those who attribute this way of thinking to the *genius loci*, suggesting that each place has a spirit which will tell the designer what it wants or needs. This research found only a very small number of practitioners who hold this particular view. More common was the idea that *genius loci* is a synonym for character, and that a landscape architect's responsibility is to design in such a way that appropriately accounts for this character. This did not mean that a new design had to 'fit in' with the existing form or fabric; there were plenty of examples where designers judged it appropriate to contrast with the existing character.

This study finds that the contemporary popularity of the *genius loci* (spirit of place, sense of place etc.) appears to coincide with the idea of site as a *blank* canvas falling out of favour. A reaction against perceived placelessness gave rise to designers seeking to uncover the unique identity of a site, and it is this way of

thinking which underpins most of present-day landscape architecture theory and practice.

In contrast to ideas which portray the site (or genius loci) as the only legitimate source of design inspiration (see section 3.3.4), this research demonstrates that whilst designers will always take account of the context of a site, inspiration can, and is, taken from all manner of sources. In doing so, this study provides working evidence of Moore's (2010) thesis.

To think of site as *muse* is to acknowledge that the myriad aspects of a site (history, character, ecology, residents, topography, hydrology, buildings, street patterns etc.) can, and do, inspire designers. Whilst these features of a site clearly prompt ideas, these ideas (and their development) are the designer's, and it is *they* who interpret and re-interpret them in light of their expertise, knowledge and experience. This contrasts with traditional understandings of the muse (and traditional understandings of the genius loci) which rely on an external 'spirit' to imbue the artist with inspiration. Echoing Moore's criticism that an understanding of the genius loci as a muse-like spirit is unhelpful, this study nevertheless concedes that designers frequently draw inspiration from sites. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that inspiration (from the site, or just as legitimately, elsewhere) is interpreted and developed by the designer, not delivered by the muse as a fully-formed masterplan which the landscape architect simply reproduces.

The ideas that we have about sites – what we think about them, how we get to know them, what it's appropriate to do with them – are the result of an ever-shifting milieu of contexts and circumstances. This thesis establishes that it is *we* who shape our design decisions, not 'the site' as this first question initially supposed. In hindsight therefore, it may have been more appropriate for this first research question to be: *How do ideas about site shape landscape architects' design decisions?*

When the conditions of a particular site – physical, cultural or environmental for example – are such that certain responses are more appropriate, this is not the site literally ‘telling’ the designer what to do: rather, it is the landscape architect’s knowledge, skill and experience which shapes their responses *in light of* the site’s specific conditions. It is important that novice designers are clear about this distinction. In practice, landscape architects readily acknowledge that it is their responsibility to thoroughly and creatively get to know a site. Unlike elements of academic and technical discourse however, this is not because the accumulation of knowledge will somehow present an ‘obvious’ answer, but instead so that *the designers themselves* are able to make informed and reasoned design decisions.

Many of the participants in this research recognise that their ability to make these decisions improves with age and experience, an insight which is rarely mentioned in either the academic or professional practice literature.

- ***What factors affect how landscape architects interpret sites?***

The overriding finding of this research is that our ideas about and interpretations of sites are complex. No single driver or factor shapes our understanding of a site, nor does it alone dictate how we respond to a particular place; instead, our interpretations are based on a complex and interrelated web of contexts. Rarely considered in the literature, these factors include a designer’s own background and education, the practice in which they work, their professional experience and expertise, the clients’ and stakeholders’ input, the context of each site, and the project’s brief – amongst others. Of these factors, a number stand out as meriting further elaboration because their impact is seen as having particular influence.

Bounded plots

Commonly, the notion of a site rests on it being a precisely defined area of land with legally enforceable boundaries – and nothing more: a simple definition of a

plot of ground. Even though landscape architects routinely consider a site to be a constituent part of a larger landscape, in a multidisciplinary environment, this can be overwhelmed by those whose focus and resources are located firmly within a fixed area of land. This situation is perhaps unsurprising given the fact that in almost all of the documentation associated with a project, a site is portrayed as an abstracted representation on a (often) black and white plan with clearly demarcated boundaries; in effect reinforcing the message that *'you have no jurisdiction beyond this line'*.

This is of particular relevance to those disciplines collaborating with landscape architects and for whom the notion of a site as part of a larger whole is perhaps less familiar. It is also important therefore for landscape architects to be aware that their colleagues from other disciplines may have very different ideas about a site – and consequently all that occurs therein – form their own. A number of interviewees mentioned that this can sometimes be a source of friction in working relationships and that this might be addressed by further cross-discipline training and professional development.

Site Survey

The factors which are selected for survey (either as a desk survey or site visit) reflect the things that we, our clients and society at large value. The literature explaining how to survey a site tends to focus on measuring its physicality and/or understanding its character – these being the aspects which are usually deemed necessary for a landscape architect to undertake their professional duties. Furthermore, such texts posit the site survey solely as an information-gathering process, which can reduce it to a mere technical exercise.

Sometimes disparaged in the literature, this research established that in practice, landscape architects put great weight on their 'emotional' and 'subjective' responses to a site precisely because these reactions represent an accumulation of experience, skill and knowledge in which they can trust. Although some might

attribute these subjective responses to a spirit residing in the landscape, on the evidence of this research, in a site survey context the genius loci is better described as a process of interpreting a site using highly developed professional responses. This study finds that the genius loci is often invoked because practitioners don't necessarily have the vocabulary to fully articulate their subjective, emotional responses in a culturally- or disciplinarily-appropriate manner.

Having established that the abilities to conduct, communicate and interpret the complex results of a site survey are accumulated over time and with experience, this research also notes that a number of practitioners suggested that a greater focus be placed on refining such skills at an early stage in a landscape architect's career. Rather than repeating the standardised approaches to site surveys however, students and early-career practitioners would benefit from exploring creative interpretations of sites such as (but by no means limited to) those referred to by the interviewees and authors within these pages.

Working relationships

Landscape architects do not work in a vacuum, and amongst the wide variety of stakeholders evident in this research, the client is perhaps the most influential in shaping how landscape architects interpret sites. In practice, i.e. outside of the professional and academic literature, 'the client' was a difficult concept to pin down because each is so very different and brings their own contextual circumstances to bear on a project.

Of all the factors considered by this research, the recurring message that communication and listening skills were of paramount importance to every project studied was the most surprising. This issue was barely mentioned in the literature, but according to practitioners was key to ensuring the success of their projects.

The ability to communicate well with clients, design professionals and other stakeholders was considered by some to be an area where newly qualified students

were often lacking. In highlighting this observation, those responsible for the education of landscape architects (as well as students and early-career practitioners themselves) may seek to focus attention on addressing such employers' concerns.

- ***How do these factors impact design decisions and outcomes?***

The combination and interplay of the contextual factors explored in this research can be thought of as a 'landscape architecture way of seeing'. This suggests that as a profession, we have particular outlooks, norms and standpoints which bind us together. Included in this 'way of seeing' are a number of common practices and assumptions made about sites and how we get to know them: ideas such as the need to encourage a place's unique identity, or the use of certain normative survey procedures, for example. The research showed, however, that rather than a uniform 'way' of seeing it would be more accurate to suggest 'ways' of seeing which reflect the complexity and variety of the discipline.

Along with a 'way of seeing' which represents our industry, every other profession with which we are engaged in a project similarly has their own perspective. Our practice, which includes the design decisions we make, is thus impacted by cross-disciplinary ways of seeing – which may be quite different from a landscape architect's. Landscape designers negotiate this complexity – constantly interpreting the contextual factors and multiple perspectives using their knowledge and skill – in order to make well-informed, reasoned and justifiable design decisions. This contextual complexity can be a source of creativity, and when collaborations between parties function well, the process can be a source of personal and professional satisfaction.

The *Resurrected Footprints* approach identified as part of the pilot study is a clear example of how our ideas about sites, together with the contextual factors surrounding a project, had a demonstrable impact on design decisions and outcomes: In order to overcome placelessness and help create a connection

between people and place, designers interpret elements from a site's history as a way of anchoring a new design's identity in its past reality. Furthermore, the availability of historical maps and the profession's routine investigations of a site's past as part of the site survey process meant that details of historical landscape forms were readily available and could be 'traced' back from past into the present.

9.2 Contribution to knowledge

Following on from the specific research questions addressed above, this section outlines the impact of this study with particular reference to the audience(s) who may benefit from its findings.

Reflective practice

Building on work undertaken by Burns (1991), Burns and Kahn (2005) and Moore (2010), this thesis offers an alternative to the common perceptions that site is simply defined as an area of ground which landscape architects are tasked to measure and observe *before* the creative acts of designing can occur. In providing evidence of how practitioners work with Moore's proposal that "our knowledge alone which frames our perception of the opportunities and problems we face" (2010: 91), this research also shows how landscape architects habitually transgress the supposed neutrality associated with site surveys. The research demonstrates that practitioners interpret sites in light of their ideas, knowledge and cultural influences, and consequently highlights a very real need to critically examine all of the ideas we bring to each site, and to scrutinise how these ideas then shape subsequent decisions.

In practice, as this study outlines, a designer's actions and ideas are so completely and tightly woven into interrelated contexts that it would be meaningless to draw a distinction between the physical site and our ideas about the site: a point which

Burns neatly sums up by arguing that “one cannot divorce site from the way it is known” (1991: 151).

Of particular relevance to university students and early-career professionals who frequently lack the experience and expertise of seasoned practitioners, these findings show;

- that a complex web of factors and ideas inform how we interpret sites
- that these ideas impacts built-form
- that we can't survey sites from a *neutrally* objective point of view because we always survey with a particular purpose in mind.

Confirming Moore's observations, each of these points illustrates that we cannot escape the ideas and knowledge we bring to each project. Furthermore, because our profession requires landscape architects to be reflective practitioners (LI 2013b, QAA 2007) it is vital that the assumptions and concepts underlying our design decisions are questioned. Considering sites are where everything happens in landscape architecture – there are no concerns which do not ultimately get worked-out on a particular site – it is surprising that the profession tends to overlook this particular area of practice.

Interpreting and decision-making

It has been demonstrated that landscape architects routinely and consistently interpret contextual information in order to make judgements and take design decisions appropriate for their individual projects. These skills are utilised in every area of practice. Landscape architects interpret what they observe and discover in tasks as diverse as: meeting with clients; site and desk surveys; sketching design ideas; resolving planning applications; meeting with contractors; or specifying materials.

Despite being vital to the profession, the skills of interpretation and decision-making are given negligible attention by the LI or QAA in the documentation

relating to how landscape architecture is taught and how professionals are accredited. Furthermore, in a key text on professional practice, 'making judgements' (arguably synonymous with *interpreting* and *decision-making* based on the interview transcripts from this study) is located separately, and *after* the process of surveying and data-gathering (Garmony et. al. 2007). This is in clear contrast with the findings of this study which show that practitioners make judgments *throughout* the process of all projects. Other key texts (Holden & Liversedge 2014, Rogers 2011, Vernon, Tennant & Garmony 2013 et. al.) also fail to address these issues, or else isolate 'judgment' and 'interpretation' in the technical realms of contract law and policy implementation.

Interpretation and making judgements is, according to the data, less about the ability to make *correct* decisions, and more about such decisions being *appropriate*. Perhaps these skills are largely ignored in the literature because they are so context-dependent; each decision being influenced by the complex web of factors such as those described in these pages. Rather than try to understand and explain the complexity which is evident – and acknowledged – in practice, the literature tends to focus on teaching processes and procedures on the one hand, or embracing the mystique of the genius loci or sense of place on the other.

Moore notes that for students and early career professionals it is especially important to be aware that every decision is a judgement and that every piece of information is interpreted in order to avoid what she labels "easy assumptions" and "familiar ideas" (2010: 91). Recognising that every decision is a judgement, and every piece of information is interpreted puts a certain burden of responsibility on students and practitioners to:

- critically examine assumptions, prejudices, ideas etc.
- be aware that 'the site', 'the genius loci' or 'the survey procedure' cannot make a decision for you – it only provides information which needs to be interpreted

- invest time examining other people’s decision-making / interpretations / judgements in order to understand how contextual factors influenced them and thus learn from their experiences.

Genius loci and site-surveying

This study furthers the discourse and brings clarity to the understanding and role of the genius loci in landscape architecture. In part, it responds to Thompson’s reflections on his own PhD thesis; that to consider of the genius loci an “overblown idea” was in fact “an oversight” because “there was, after all, something important in the notion” (2009: 216). On the evidence of this research, landscape architects consider the genius loci (and its synonyms) to be an important aspect of their practice. They tend to think about and use the genius loci in two specific ways:

1. As a *process* of ‘getting to know’ a site. Brook likens this to ‘Sensing Place’ (2000: 217) which the wider discourse suggests requires certain sensitivities to be able to discern and interpret.
2. As a synonym for character which is used to *describe* the locally distinctive identity of a specific place. This locates the genius loci within Brook’s categories of ‘Authenticity’, ‘Narrative’, ‘Local Distinctiveness’ and ‘Character’ (2000: pp219-222).

This research shows how landscape architects work with the vague notion of ‘sensing’ the genius loci in practice. Rather than tuning in to unseen ‘vibes’ or a mysterious spirit telling them how and what to design, these practitioners apply their professional judgement to interpret and make informed decisions about what they find in each unique site. Whilst Moore (2010) suggests forgetting the term altogether, it is proposed here that due to its significant cultural currency, the genius loci ought to be re-cast as the name for the process of interpretation, judgement and decision-making undertaken by the landscape architect based on their skills, experience and knowledge. This shift in thinking largely removes the

genius loci from the realm of the metaphysical and anchors it into a cultural context which values local distinctiveness, authenticity and connecting people with place.

For students and early-career practitioners, this research also explains that the dictum to “consult the genius” needs to be carefully re-imagined because practicing designers are *not* ‘consulting’ an external agency (the spirit of place) as some authors suggest.

- ‘Consulting’ the genius loci is a process of identifying what makes a particular site unique by spending time getting to know a site through detailed observation and study.
- It is also important for novices to be aware that observation alone is insufficient because all observations and findings must be interpreted and judged in light of the particular project’s context.

In essence, the genius loci is used to describe both the process of ascertaining a site’s character, and as term to sum-up this character.

Site as collaborative arena

In every site-based project, all decisions, ideas, collaborations etc. are undertaken with the express aim of altering the future form and/or function of a site. In contrast to the prosaic understandings of site, this thesis argues that sites are the arena in which cross-disciplinary collaborations play out. They are the points at which landscape architects creatively interpret complex contextual factors using their accumulated knowledge, experience and skills to respond in a way that is appropriate for each unique situation. Consequently, working relationships are crucial to interpreting a site because sites are interpreted collaboratively. This is not the same as collaborative design or community/stakeholder consultation.

Collaborative interpretation is the meeting, sharing and negotiating of how a site is understood and interpreted from multiple points of view and with overlapping, interrelated and competing contexts. Each stakeholder in a project will interpret a site differently according to their own contextual factors.

Working relationships are crucial to the interpretation of sites because they can impact the professional judgements and decisions made by landscape architects (and other stakeholders). Landscape architects are responsible for making design decisions pertinent to their professional remit, and moreover, are interpreting what the various collaborators are saying in light of their own frame of reference.

For all landscape architects for whom collaboration and inter-disciplinary work is a key element in their practice, these findings highlight:

- that decisions and interpretations can be impacted by those with whom work
- that communication, particularly the skill of listening to all stakeholders and members of a design team, is central to effective working
- that all decisions and interpretations have real consequences for the sites with which we are involved.

It is crucial that training providers (practice managers, CPD co-ordinators etc.), educational establishments and the Landscape Institute make sure that landscape architects are fully trained and equipped to work in this particular industry. This means ensuring that skills such as effective communication, listening and negotiating are taught alongside the technical aspects of the profession such as drawing, contract specification or construction detailing.

9.3 Forward Agenda

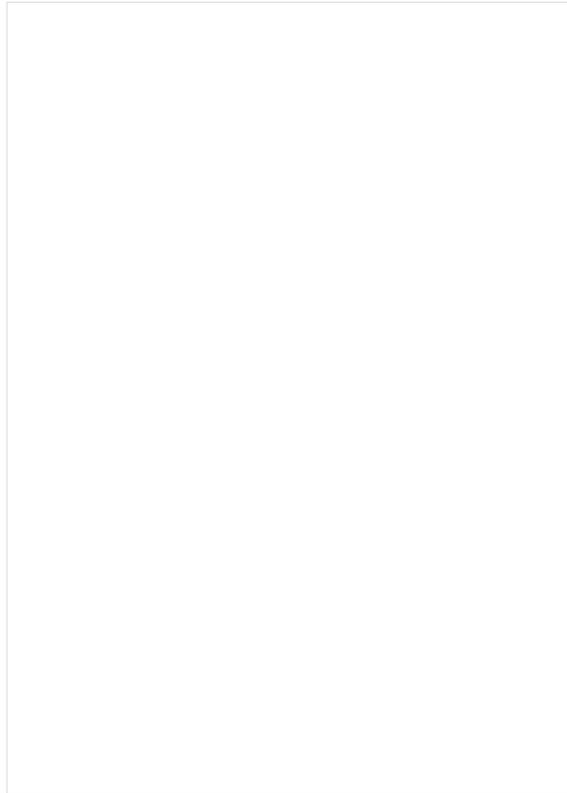
Following on from the discussion above, and in light of a number of interviewees' comments about graduates lacking certain skills, this section outlines a number of key areas for development within the industry. A series of further interviews with practitioners could be designed to establish the gaps in graduates' skills and knowledge; and working in partnership with universities and the Landscape

Institute, supplementary research be conducted to determine how to modify the relevant programs. Initial suggestions based on the observations of this thesis include:

- Listening skills, including the ability to encourage others to speak so that they can be understood, could be taught in workshops and routinely incorporated into design studios, crits and seminars.
- Studio projects organised in such a way as to include stakeholders. These might include those experienced in the industry, or postgraduate students acting as a client or resident. Stakeholders could be encouraged to introduce well-timed changes to a brief or shifting priorities so as to echo the realities of practice. Project assessments could include students' ability to interact with stakeholders as they navigate their way through a project.
- A year-out and/or summer placement to help students gain the fluency in skills necessary to enter the workforce once their formal training has been completed.
- Implications between theory and design decisions can be made clear so that students can see the links for themselves. For example, changing socio-political contexts have shaped how we understand sites and therefore how we treat and design them.
- This research suggests that getting to know a site is a crucial skill to master and that it is a hallmark of landscape architectural practice. Students need to be shown how to get to know a site: equipped with contextual information; given practical demonstrations; allowed to test ideas and principles for themselves; and have the opportunity to reflect on their learning.

Referring to this last point, whilst teaching a particular design module, a pocket-guide was produced by the author to help students relate the aims of the project to the process of understanding and interpreting a site. A copy of this guide is included below. Written in 2011, the guide could be updated to reflect the latest findings of this research.

Figure. 9.1 Pocket guide to site survey for BCU undergraduate module: Conceptual Design Process:



Considering education more generally, the Landscape Institute's education department could widen its influence by adding to those voices already lobbying for the arts to be properly represented in the UK's education system.

The tacit knowledge evident throughout the discipline helps to shape our ideas about sites and the ways we interpret them. Attention might also be given to encouraging healthy culture of landscape design criticism in the UK – such as exists in architecture and other creative industries. This would not only raise the profile and quality of the discipline but would also demonstrate how landscape architects skilfully interpret the landscape, creatively collaborate with a multitude of stakeholders, and produce designs which respond to their settings with inventive and artistic solutions.

Two areas of practice were raised by many of the participants in this study, and whilst they featured as relatively minor aspects of this research, they constitute real areas of concern for landscape architects and their clients. These two areas of study would be relevant to a number of industries involved in design, not just landscape architects and would provide insights which could be used to improve working practices and the teaching of work-based skills.

1. How effective is communication and listening within design teams?
2. How do working practices and commercial pressures impact how landscape architects interpret sites and make design decisions?

9.4 Limitations

The approach of this research was such that it built up in stages, with each phase focusing the area of concern on the findings of the previous stage. Whilst this allowed a reflexive and adaptable tactic, it meant that each set of interviews was limited in size and scope. A larger pool of interviewees may have given a different set of observations, and had time and budgetary constraints allowed, a more purposive selection of practitioners could have ensured a fully representative sample of the profession.

An interpretative approach, which seeks to examine the specific and particular implications of how landscape architects interpret site does not give rise to any statistical generalisations. However, in generating theory which is useful in understanding what influences practitioners getting to know and interpret sites, a degree of generalisation is possible.

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APPENDICES

Pilot Study

These results relate to the pilot study carried out as a precursor to the main research project. The methodology of this study is found in chapter 4, section 4.3.2, and a report showing how these results impacted the main research is found in chapter 5, section 5.1

Introduction

Reflecting the diversity of approaches within the industry, an overview of the primary generators shows the extent to which a range of influences impact landscape design. Tracking the concerns of the consecutive judging panels, it was noted that certain award criteria have shifted and others have remained consistent over the sample period. This review gives an initial insight into how landscape architects work with and understand the range of sites and projects covered by the industry as well as showing how different cultural, social and political contexts influence design decisions and project outcomes.

Attention next turns to the prevalence of site-history as a factor which influences design decisions within this sample. This begins with an outline of the sample as a whole, followed by an examination of site-history's influence for each of the aforementioned categories in turn, all of which helps to demonstrate how a detailed exploration of the site (in this case its history) is an integral part of the design process. Finally, the focus turns to those projects which use *Resurrected Footprints* as a specific way of interpreting a site's history through design.

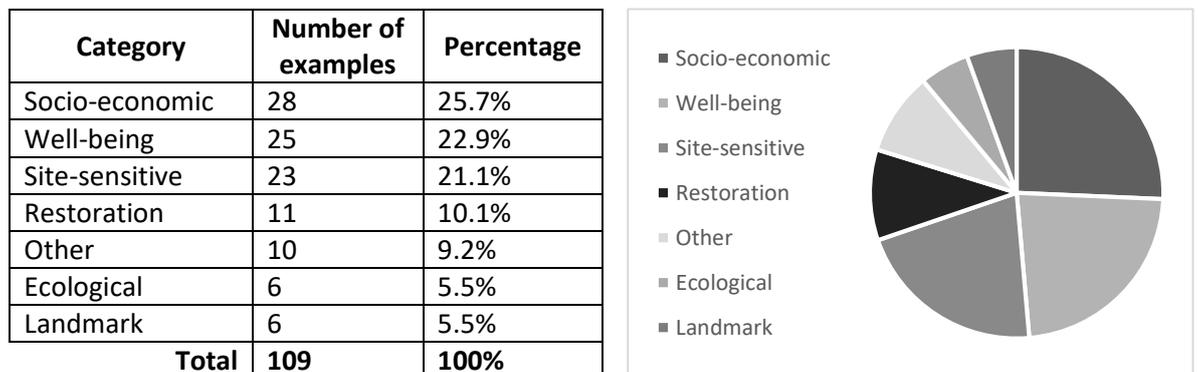
Whilst the initial purpose of this exercise was to examine the influence of site history in landscape design, the data proved to be a far richer source of insight than expected because it provided context to the main thrust of the subsequent research phases.

The following categories cover the range and scope of the majority of projects undertaken by landscape architects.

- **Site-sensitive**
These projects are primarily concerned with fitting in with their context. Historical or cultural context, character and sense of place are of utmost importance.
- **Socio-Economic**
These projects are frequently concerned with regeneration of a particular – usually urban – area. Stimulating economic or social development is important, as is the creation of strong social identity through design.
- **Restoration**
These projects are concerned with restoring a historical landscape or setting. They sometimes also incorporate new elements in the landscape even though the overall emphasis might be on its historical context.
- **Ecological**
These projects are primarily concerned with the restoration, conservation, amelioration or creation of habitat. They may be rural or urban in location and may encompass a variety of uses or functions such as leisure, housing or industry within an ecologically sensitive setting.
- **Well-being**
These projects are created with human health, education, leisure and well-being at their core. Projects may include educational or hospice settings and frequently incorporate some form of sensory landscape element.
- **Landmark**
These projects are created to make a statement. They frequently form part of a regeneration project within a town or city; or as the setting for a high-profile building such as a company headquarters or museum.
- **Other**
This category covers the few remaining examples that do not easily fit within one of the above. They might include strategic plans, street-furniture design and designs for private, domestic gardens.

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge the variety and scope of individual landscape projects within each of the broad categories set out above. For example, amongst the most prevalent group of projects (socio-economic) are projects ranging from a ‘doorstep green’ which was the first step in regenerating a deprived area of a small town, to the multi-million pound development of one of London’s key business centres. This diversity in scale is reflected across all of the groups with the possible exception of those in the well-being category which, on the whole, tend to be smaller in size and scope (gardens in schools, hospitals and community projects etc.).

Figure A1.1 Number and percentage of projects by category (in descending order)



Of the 109 projects examined from journals spanning twelve years (1993 – 2005), more than two-thirds fell into just three groups: *socio-economic* 25.7%; *well-being* 22.9% and *site-sensitive* 21.1%. This is hardly surprising, because between them, these groupings largely cover the remit of a landscape architect’s work of “shaping the natural and built environment to create desirable places for people to live, work and play and environments for plants and animals to thrive” (Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered).

Having said this, it was surprising that ecologically-led projects were the least numerous within this study because it seems such a significant part of the profession’s ethos. This could be accounted for by the criteria used by each year’s judging panel, or by the relative abundance of urban projects, compared to rural

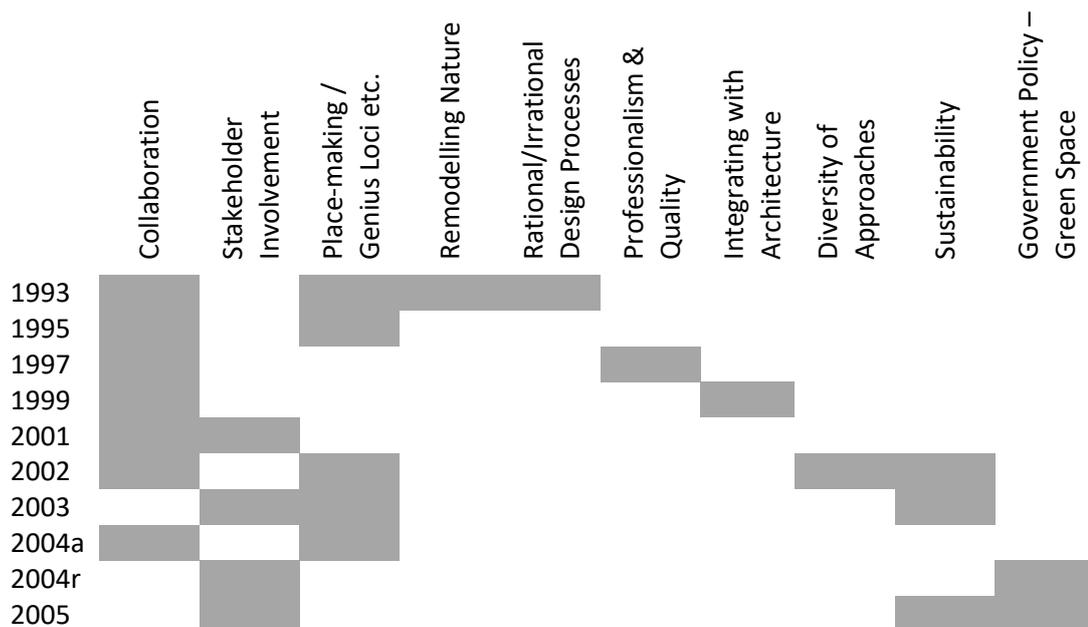
projects undertaken within the years studied. The data used did not include the total number of projects undertaken across the whole profession within any given year, nor on the split between urban and rural schemes. As a body of projects deemed merit-worthy by designers' peer-review, this data set is a reflection of what is considered important within the industry at the time of judging.

Context of judges' concerns

Over the ten journals, spanning twelve years, some of the judges' concerns shift whereas others are consistently mentioned as being important to the profession. In most cases, the *Awards or Review of the Year* issue is prefaced with an article written by the chair of the judging panel (often the presiding President of the Landscape Institute), in which they set out the criteria for making their judgements for that year along with comment on the general state of the profession and its impact and interaction within the wider world. The table below shows the judging panels' concerns which set the context for each year's award or review committee.

Figure A1.2 Main concerns of each judging panel

(2004a Awards; 2004r Review of the year)



From the first year examined, and for about a decade thereafter (1993 -2004), collaborative design is given a prominent place in the judge's criteria: the exception being in 2003. As the prominence of collaborative design diminishes, stakeholder involvement becomes more significant. Both of these concerns represent an important part of the landscape architect's professional context, and the transferal (and overlap 2001 -2004) suggests a subtle shift in this context.

When the Landscape Institute Awards were inaugurated (1993), the profession had yet to be granted its Royal Charter (this was achieved in 1997). The articles written to preface the first few issues were therefore focused on the importance of landscape architects collaborating with other built-environment professionals. This may be reflecting a growing self-confidence within landscape architecture, but could equally be evidence of a still-small industry asserting itself amongst its peers. These articles promote and award projects which have been successful in working with architects, communities, engineers and politicians to show that capability of the profession, and to inspire this potential within the journal's readership as demonstrated by the inaugural judge's rhetoric:

"The entries to this year's awards were an affirmation of good, collaborative design... Surveyors, architects, conservators and engineers need to participate in the landscape architect's work, to give a sensitive, accurate and therefore cost-effective input. Design is not easily evolved, and cannot be regarded as a solo performance."

(Ellison 1993: A1)

The waning of collaborative design as a primary concern can be seen as an increase in confidence in landscape architecture's role and status within its professional context. It also appears to correspond with a growing emphasis in stakeholder involvement which reflects the change in political circumstances concurrent with the then Labour government's emphasis on urban renewal. From 2002 onwards, sustainability also becomes important to the judges, and in 2004 and 2005, governmental policy on green space is specifically mentioned. Sustainability was a

major factor in landscape architecture during this time, echoing the government's push towards building strong communities and social cohesion:

“Community involvement is an essential element in delivering sustainable and safe communities.”

(ODPM 2005: 6)

Stakeholder involvement was a crucial element of the government's approach to community building as it transferred some of the decision-making powers from professionals into the hands of the communities affected by these development initiatives. The emphasis on collaboration with other professionals was thus extended to collaboration with stakeholders as part of a larger shift towards social sustainability and accounts for the vast majority of the judges' concerns in this sample. The bulk of these case-studies fall within the two successive New Labour governments, so it would be interesting (although outside the scope of this study) to track how the more recent landscape awards and reviews manifest their political and social contexts.

The other key concern highlighted in the various judges' forewords is that of place, which is variously described as *place-making*, the, *genius of the place*, *understanding the character of the site or connecting people with place*. Given little attention by Meyer (2005), this has long been a significant component in landscape architecture, which was picked up in New Labour's governmental policy which sought to “rekindle the relationship between people and the spaces and places where they live” (DTLR 2000: 14).

It is within this contextual milieu of professional, political and social concerns that these projects were judged. It is therefore important to note that behind every article describing a project, behind every primary generator and behind every design decision, lies a complex web of influencing factors.

Primary Generators (by category)

Socio-economic projects (25.7%)

By a small margin, projects categorised as having an overall socio-economic objective were the most common within the study group. Looking in detail at the projects within this grouping together with the wider societal and political context described above, it is perhaps not surprising that this is the case. During the period these projects were completed, the regeneration of public space as a catalyst for urban growth and economic prosperity was well-funded and actively encouraged. The Landscape Institute, along with central government bodies such as CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) championed the positive economic benefits of good urban design as having “a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres big or small” (CABE 2004b: un-numbered).

This theme of landscape-led social and economic redevelopment is seen in many of the project descriptions such as the Royal Victoria Square, designed by EDAW. This project is an early example of how a landscape scheme plays a central role in the redevelopment of a previously derelict district. Completed in 2000, this project won a Landscape Institute Design Award in 2004, giving the scheme time to become established, and its impact on the socio-economic development of the area to mature. The judging panel notes that “since completion we have observed how exciting, high-quality and functional public realm can become a driver for successful establishment of new city districts” (Landscape 2004:4). In this example the commissioning client (the London Development Agency) sets the agenda and overall aim of the project and hence determines the primary generator. The influence of the client was not initially given a great deal of prominence because the focus was very much on investigating the use of site history as a design influence and the prevalence of *resurrecting footprints*. This insight would nevertheless take on greater significance as the research progressed, especially in chapter 7.

Well-being projects (22.9%)

This grouping of projects was slightly less numerous than those categorised as socio-economic (22.9% vs. 25.7%). Amongst the other categories' larger-scale and often big-budget projects, this group was typified by small landscape interventions associated with hospitals or schools which generally do not receive the same exposure as the more photogenic urban redevelopment projects that feature in the same journals' regular issues. Their relative abundance within the sample, and the fact that they have been selected as merit-worthy by a panel of their peers, might suggest that they a) make up a larger portion of the profession's workload and/or b) are valued more highly within the profession than was initially expected at the instigation of this research.

The projects categorised as 'well-being' demonstrate a very important part of the ethos of landscape architecture:

“Much of the history of landscape architecture can be traced back to the need to create places that were beneficial for people's health and wellbeing... Landscapes have long been seen as places of delight and relaxation. Today, these associations are becoming more explicit: an increasingly strong evidence base demonstrates the positive effects that access to good-quality landscapes has on our health and wellbeing – and the negative effects when we don't.”

(Landscape Institute 2013c:1)

This is not to say that any of the projects grouped into one of the other categories does not take health and well-being into consideration – far from it; rather that within this sample there are a number of examples whose brief is specifically geared towards addressing the health and well-being of the projects end-users.

Some of the articles included funding sources for each project, and a cluster of these 'well-being' projects were funded from sources such as New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, the Big Lottery Fund and other initiatives specifically set

up to improve the health and well-being of communities through landscape projects. The remaining projects which revealed their funding sources tended to be either funded by the client themselves or through a combination of different sources including those mentioned already. The majority of the projects didn't publish the source of their funding however.

There was also a small cluster of projects designed by the charity Groundwork. Groundwork is the largest single employer of landscape architects in the UK according to Thompson (2014: 86). The charity "work[s] with community groups, housing associations and local authorities to improve all sorts of green spaces for people to use for exercise, to relax, for children to play and for people of all ages to enjoy being outdoors" and whose "landscape architects have the skills to make places cleaner, streets safer and outside areas green and beautiful" (<http://www.groundwork.org.uk/landscape-design>). The majority of 'well-being' projects were designed by private practices however, most of whom have a diverse client base and design a variety of project types.

The issue of how a project is funded is obviously not limited to projects categorised as 'well-being', however it was exploring this group which first gave rise to the possibility that these funding sources may come with certain stipulations which directly impact the design outcomes of a design. There was no substantive evidence from the articles themselves regarding this possibility, but it would prove to be an interesting line of questioning in the first phase of interviews detailed in chapter 6.

Evidence from the articles did suggest that for certain projects there is a link between the overall aim of a project and how it is funded, but this is hardly surprising: A town's regeneration project funded by Government and Regional Development funds is likely to focus on the socio-economic development of the area because that is the aim of those funders; and likewise, the redevelopment of a hospital's garden which is funded by the NHS and charitable donations to a 'friends of...' group is most likely to focus on the health-giving aspects of the landscape because it accords with the ethos of those funders.

Site-sensitive projects (21.1%)

Along with socio-economic and well-being projects, site-sensitive projects make up the bulk of all projects surveyed in this initial research exercise (taken together they account for 69.7% of the schemes). The common theme running through all of these cases was that the conditions of the existing site were such that they led the project. In most cases the site was of local importance and many were associated with significant buildings or in town or city centres. These projects tended to focus on an area or building which sought to retain and strengthen a link with the past rather than some of the 'socio-economic'-led projects which were looking for, if not a break from the past, then certainly a re-imagined future.

The prevalence of site-sensitive projects was not surprising for two main reasons, both of which are connected with the context in which the profession operates. Firstly, landscape architecture is a discipline whose primary material output is grounded in specific physical places and hence whose practitioners are encouraged to "be able to 'read' the landscape and understand the cultural forces that have influenced its formation" (Holden & Liversedge 2014: 15).

Secondly, the data suggests that this sensitivity to site is also held within a context wider than landscape architecture alone. The proclivity for site-sensitivity as an overall aim of a project is an indicator that this concern is shared by the clients who are setting the briefs for such projects, for example:

"Ironsides Farrar was appointed by the Restalrig Urban Village Association and City of Edinburgh Council and landscape architects, to put together a scheme to restore the urban fabric of the historic area. The aim was to invest in the urban environment in order to safeguard its unique qualities and sense of community identity for future generations."

(Landscape Design 2003 No.326: 19)

This is echoed within the political arena where policy and guidance place emphasis on taking account of and being sensitive to the specifics of a site. Whereas

landscape architecture has this approach embedded within its collective psyche, the policies and guidance prevalent at the time of this study suggest that site-sensitivity is a means to an end. In a nutshell, the policy and guidance which framed the context within which these projects were built suggests that:

- a) People need to be reconnected with place and that this can be achieved through creating a sense of place.
- b) That an area with an established sense of place has a stronger identity which can in turn help achieve social, cultural and economic improvement.

This can be seen in some of the judges' context-setting articles as well as formalised policy and guidance from central and local government and their agencies (for example DETR/CABE 2000: 19). Denton-Thomas notes that "sense of place has a profound and stabilising influence on local communities; it is one of the things that binds them together. At a time when there are many influences that lead to the fragmentation of communities, we, the landscape profession, provide a vital service to society by strengthening the link between people and places" (Denton-Thomas 2003: 6).

The second of these aims is also reflected in many of those projects grouped as 'socio-economic'; however there is a difference between the emphases which drive the projects. In schemes grouped under a 'socio-economic' umbrella, the brief focuses the project on social and economic development and *may* seek to achieve this using site-identity as a means: site-sensitive projects all use site-identity as a focus and some *may* do so with the aim of social and economic development. The interplay and overlap of these grouping was an indication that there are links between site, place-identity and social and economic development.

A further theme which ran through a number of the projects in the 'site-sensitive' group was that of site-history and heritage which will be examined in more detail below. Having just remarked on the overlap between some of the site-sensitive and socio-economic projects, it is also worth noting further links between

history/heritage, site-sensitivity/place-identity and social, cultural and economic development. This is demonstrated in the guidance given by English Heritage who propose that “the historic environment lies at the heart of our sense of place... understanding how places change, and recognising the significance of their history, is the key to successful and sustainable regeneration” (English Heritage 2005: un-numbered).

Within the contextual milieu of this study, where socio-economic development and the strengthening of links between people and place are considered important driving factors, being sensitive to, and capitalising on, the history and heritage of a place is seen by some as a way of uniting these diverse aims.

Restoration projects (10.1%)

Of all the groups, this is one of the more straight-forward to categorise because the aims and end-point are so clearly articulated in the relevant articles. These projects are all set within the context of an existing and historically significant landscape such as a public park or stately home which, for whatever reason, is in need of some degree of restoration. The earliest project in this group, J Sainsbury Training Centre (1993), is a landscape associated with a stately home and its redevelopment forms part of a private facility. The second project, the restoration of Kensington Palace Gardens (2001) is part of the Crown Estate and one of the capital’s most prestigious addresses (Gentleman 2014). The remaining nine examples are sites open to the public such as parks and gardens. Of these nine, seven are part-funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the others are funded by local heritage initiatives. Money from the HLF has been available since 1994 to “help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about.” (<http://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us>).

Monies from the HLF (as with other funding sources) come with conditions relating to the funding body’s aims and ethos. It is hardly surprising therefore that the majority of the projects within this group are at least partly funded by the HLF

because they will have stipulated that, amongst other things, “the community values the park as part of their heritage” and that the project will be “conserving and improving the heritage value” (HLF 2006: 3-4). Of the articles which provide any information about the sources of funding, all those which specifically mention the HLF are promoted as being driven by restoration (and are categorised as such). It is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest, at least in part, that in these instances “form follows funding” (Tate 2005: 59).

Examining the articles in this research exercise suggests that there is a distinction made between history/heritage and restoration. By their nature, restoration projects are centred on the form and fabric of the landscape and any other benefits described in the articles, such as those of social or cultural significance, tend to be of secondary significance. In contrast, projects which make use of a site’s history or heritage tend to do so with an explicit reason such as strengthening the area’s sense of place.

Other projects (9.2%)

When examining the articles for this research, there was some debate as to whether to include some of these projects because they do not readily conform to the notion of what might be considered a regular landscape architecture scheme. It was decided however, that although they are not representative of the profession’s day-to-day work, they do demonstrate the variety of projects that occur across the broad spectrum of practice and should be included in this sample.

The most common of these projects (6 out of 10) are designs for street furniture including shelters, performance spaces and signage. Designing bespoke furniture is within the remit of a landscape architect’s work, but generally this would form part of a larger project covering all aspects of a landscape whereas these examples were for furniture alone. Other examples included the design for a private garden which did not fit readily into any other category; a ‘wall of light’; a show garden and a scheme to plant wildflowers around a housing estate.

Ecological projects (5.5%)

It is important to note that environmental sustainability and sensitivity is of key importance in all landscape architectural projects because it forms part of the profession's ethos and duty of care. The Landscape Institute places a great deal of emphasis on aspects such as climate change, urban drainage and green infrastructure (see Landscape Institute 2008, 2009 & 2011a for example) and every single project will contain some degree of appropriate environmental assessment and action where necessary. The integration of environmental consciousness within the profession is one of the multitude of factors which make up the professional context: the cases in this category raise environmental and ecological concerns to the forefront so that they become the driving force for the project.

Although this group makes up a small percentage of the overall total, the projects categorised as ecological stand out as having a very clear identity and definite overall aim. Ecologically-based projects require landscape architects with a different skill-set from most of the other schemes in this study because they are dealing with dynamic landscapes, wildlife and the sensitive balance of natural systems. Within this group, three of the projects were addressing existing watercourses including the restoration of Bedfont Lakes, the River Skerne, and the Llanelli Wetlands. The Dalton Country Park was created from a brownfield site which was redeveloped with habitat amelioration at its core. Similarly, the A470 project was designed to ameliorate the effects of a significant new road which passed through an ecologically sensitive area. Standing out in this group was the building of a new research park near Cambridge because it was a brand new landscape which was designed to attract wildlife rather than as a repair to a previously degraded or damaged area.

Given that a key part of the Landscape Institute's Charter states that we should create "environments for plants and animals to thrive" (Landscape Institute 2012b: un-numbered), the relative rarity of ecologically-led projects might seem surprising. This could be explained either by ecology-led projects being less numerous than

other types of design work, or by the judges' not deeming such projects as praise-worthy as other types of project. Given the author's knowledge of the industry, it is far more likely to be the former because much more work is available within the urban context where ecology is of less significance – compared to other concerns – than it is in, say, a rural or coastal context. The importance of ecology and the environment to landscape architecture has a long history, and although it forms a minority of its work-load, Meyer (2005) and Thompson (2000 & 2014) note that the legacy of an ecologically-based discipline is still a strong force in the profession.

Landmark projects (5.5%)

At the beginning of this phase of the investigation, it was assumed that landmark projects would frequently be associated with the socio-economic development of an area because landscape-led redevelopment is often cited by bodies including CABE (2004b) and the Landscape Institute (2011b, 2012c) as being a key factor in the economic and cultural success of a project. There were indeed many cases where the landscape was seen as being the primary stimulus for development, and as such might have been considered as landmark projects: however, it was judged that those examples were primarily about the socio-economic regeneration of an area, and the landscape was the means to this end. It was also apparent that there was another (albeit smaller) set of projects which served a quite different function. Each of these schemes was associated with a particular building (or buildings) so that landscape architecture and built architecture together make a statement. The type and scale of these projects varied from two company headquarters (one an historical building, one a newly-build campus); two university campuses: The Said Business School (also performing as a gateway to Oxford's rail connections); and the landscape associated with Walsall's iconic art gallery.

All of these projects demonstrate how landscape architects work with other professions (primarily architects in these instances) to produce the type of collaborative projects a number of the award and review panel judges admired.

There are many other projects which aptly demonstrate collaborative work but which have been grouped within the other categories in this particular study.

The Said Business School is the only project in the whole sample that appeared in two separate journal issues (2002 Review of the Year and 2004 Awards). Why this may be so is unclear, but both instances were incorporated into the investigation as an indication that it must have been held in sufficiently high regard by the respective judging panels to warrant its dual inclusion. (NB. there are therefore five *separate* projects in this group, making 108 in total.)

History of the site

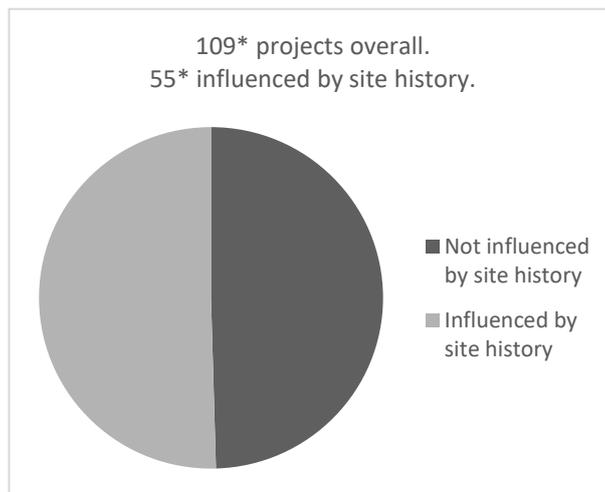
Having taken a broad overview of all the projects from this sample attention now turns to the extent to which site history is an influencing factor in this set of data. This was done because a site's history was regularly cited as a factor which influenced design decisions within case-study articles in journals and books. Examples of primary generators concerning the site's history included (but were not limited to):

- Historical setting
- Historical character
- Site of listed building
- Historical references
- Historical conservation area
- Historical landscape
- Historically important
- Celebrate history
- (Re)interpret history
- Restoration

Summary of data

Of the 109* projects listed in this sample, 55* were described as being influenced by the history of the site. *As described above, the Said Business School was listed twice and has been included twice: there are therefore 108 *separate* projects, 54 of which purport to be influenced by the site's history in some way.

Figure A1.3 Percentage of projects influenced by site history



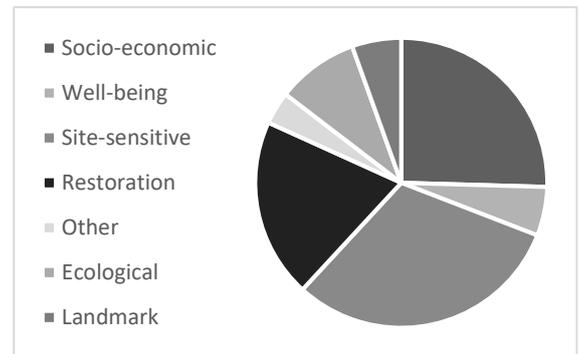
With an almost 50% split between the two categories, it is clear from this very broad-brush investigation that site history is an important influencing factor for almost half of the cases in this sample. From the data available it was not possible to ascertain the extent to which history influences individual

projects, nor what its effect on the designed outcome might be, only that it was cited as *a* factor

When looking only at those projects stated as being influenced by the history of the site, the distribution of projects across the categories is very different to the overall picture. It would appear that the history of the site impacts certain groups of projects more than others and/or that these types of project rely more heavily on the history of the site in their design and in the way that they are described.

Figure A1.4 Number and percentage of projects stated as being influenced by site's history

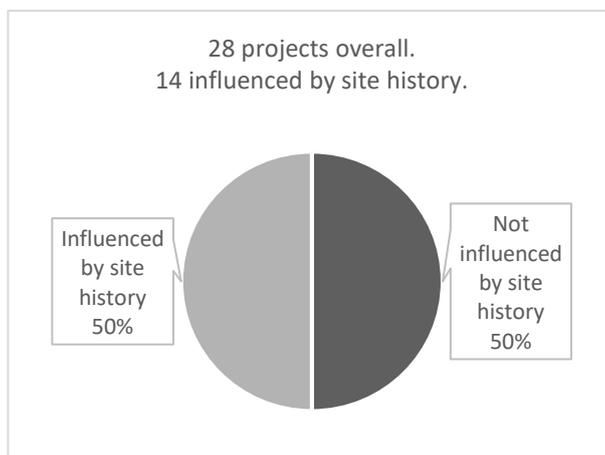
Category	Number of examples	Percentage
Socio-economic	14	25.5%
Well-being	3	5.5%
Site-sensitive	17	31%
Restoration	11	20%
Other	2	3.5%
Ecological	5	9.1
Landmark	3*	5.4%
Total	55*	100%



It is helpful to look at each group in turn so as to begin to understand why site-history influences certain types of project more than others.

Socio-economic projects

Figure A1.5 Percentage of socio-economic projects influenced by site history



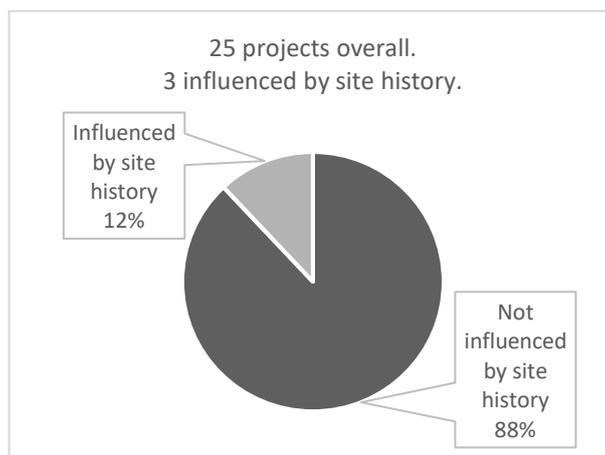
Half of the projects with the major focus on the socio-economic development of an area were influenced by the history of the site; and of all the projects influenced by site history, socio-economic projects made up a little more than a quarter (25.5%).

Although each project must be understood and evaluated on an individual basis, within the socio-economic group, there is a surprisingly high proportion of projects that are influenced by the history of a site. This is surprising because the vast majority of these projects have a forward-thinking plan which seeks to make a change from the site's current conditions. Where these projects are influenced by

the site's history, they tend to take inspiration from an era of the past which predates the site's current (negative) conditions. Bodies such as CABI and English Heritage assert that taking elements from a site's history can positively influence the social and economic development of an area (DETR/CABI 2000, English Heritage 2005 et al.). Landscape architects use these principles to create and establish a strong and positive future: looking back in order to look forward. Site history is just one way of achieving this, and the manner and extent to which this occurs in any individual project will form part of the unique context in which that scheme is undertaken.

Well-being projects

Figure A1.6 Percentage of well-being projects influenced by site history



It would appear that site history is of relatively minor importance for those projects whose primary aim is one of health, education or leisure. Many of these projects cater for groups such as school-children, the elderly and those with physical and/or mental

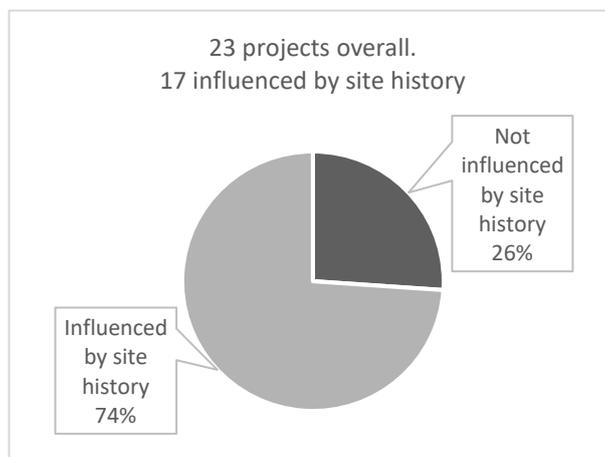
impairment of some form. It would appear that the primary design issues in these schemes are focused on the elements which are specifically designed to meet the needs of the project's users rather than the context or conditions of the site. Taken generally, these projects could be said to be more highly people-sensitive than site-sensitive, although this varies from project-to-project and from designer-to-designer depending on the context and circumstances of the scheme.

Each of the well-being projects that were influenced by the history of the site was located in a historically sensitive area open to the public. This is unusual in this sample because the majority are situated in private or limited-access educational or

healthcare facilities. The fact that the three above-mentioned schemes are open to the public (small-scale parks) suggests that the projects are in some way integrated into a wider public-realm context (rather than separated like a school playground or hospice garden) and therefore subject to some of the same political, cultural and economic influences which influence the other projects across the whole sample.

Site-sensitive projects

Figure A1.7 Percentage of site-sensitive projects influenced by site history

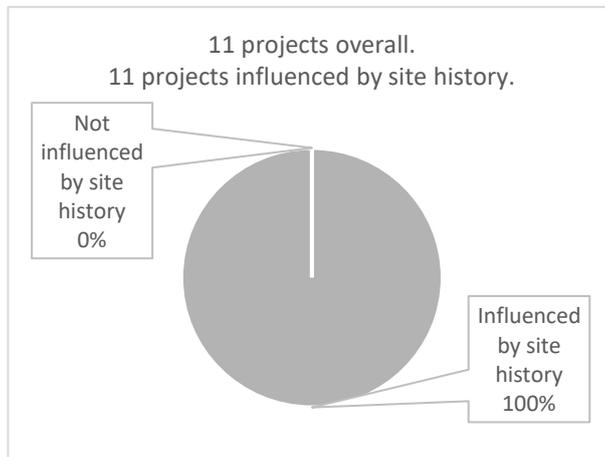


At 31% of the total number of projects influenced by the site's history, those categorised as 'site-sensitive' proved to be the largest single grouping. Of the 23 site-sensitive projects, almost three-quarters were cited as being influenced by the site's history.

Holden & Liversedge (2014: 15) assert that with a site-focused outlook, one of a landscape architect's chief responsibilities is to read and ascertain the forces which have formed a landscape. Projects which have a site-sensitive approach tend to be those which are concerned with the context, character and 'spirit' of a place which are influenced or defined by the contextual factors which have shaped the site over time. That there are so many site-sensitive projects which do not mention site-history is surprising because the history of the site is examined as part of the routine research undertaken by a landscape architect. This does not mean that the designer has not taken the site's-history into consideration in these projects; rather that the projects in question have either taken their inspiration from another source or that the article's author didn't consider site-history to be a significant factor in the design.

Restoration projects

Figure A1.8 Percentage of restoration projects influenced by site history



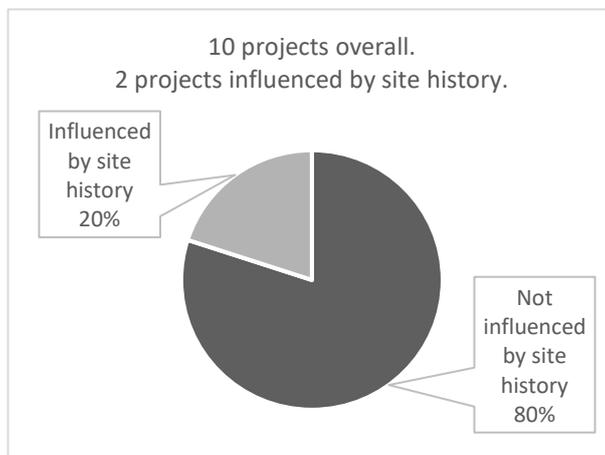
By their very nature, all restoration projects are concerned with a site's history, so it is no surprise that 100% of 'restoration' projects are influenced by site history.

Restoration projects are slightly unusual however because they

utilise site history in a very specific way. Whereas some of the other projects in this sample seek to redevelop a site in a way which is sensitive to its context, these regeneration projects are looking to *return* a site to something which existed previously. Within the remit of a restoration project, there is sometimes room for development which is not a slavish copy of the past, such as a development which incorporates forms, functions and features which are new (but sympathetic) to the historical landscape.

Other projects

Figure A1.9 Percentage of other projects influenced by site history



Of the mixture of projects found in this group, the two which were influenced by site history were located in historically sensitive areas. One project was for street furniture in a historical part of Newcastle, and the other was for

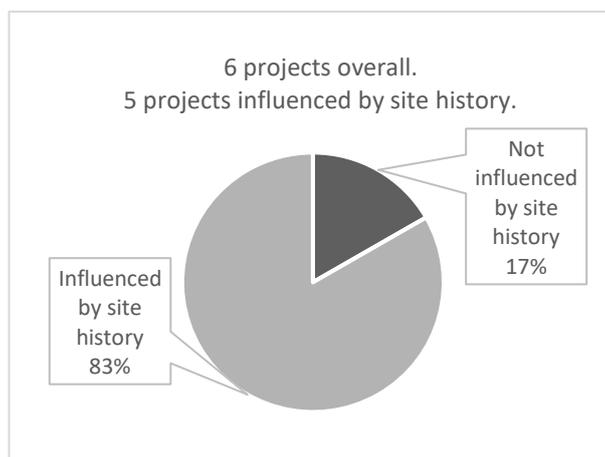
signage and interpretation boards for a heritage trail in Ireland. These projects

might have been categorised as site-sensitive were it not for the fact that their primary generators focused on providing public amenity and interpretation, and were also atypical landscape design projects.

These two projects have much simpler briefs than do most others in the sample – which may, for example, be for a whole area with complex and conflicting needs and functions.

Ecological projects

Figure A1.10 Percentage of ecological projects influenced by site history



All but one of the projects were described as being influenced by the history of the site, but the manner in which site history impacts each project was quite different from those in other categories.

In the majority of projects across other categories, the historical factors affecting a site tend to be human-centric because they are generally urban in nature. They are usually concerned with the form and fabric of the built-environment as well as the intangible senses of identity and significance which are derived from the accumulation of lives lived in these populated areas. The projects categorised as 'ecological' are generally not projects where people live their everyday lives and so the emphasis on a site's history is different. Projects which utilise this type of factor within their design outcomes appear to be linking the history of the built environment with the intangible senses of significance and identity associated with an urban (and therefore people's) history. There is no evidence in this sample that landscape architects are reaching so far back into a site's history to a time before it was populated by people and therefore subject only to the natural ecological

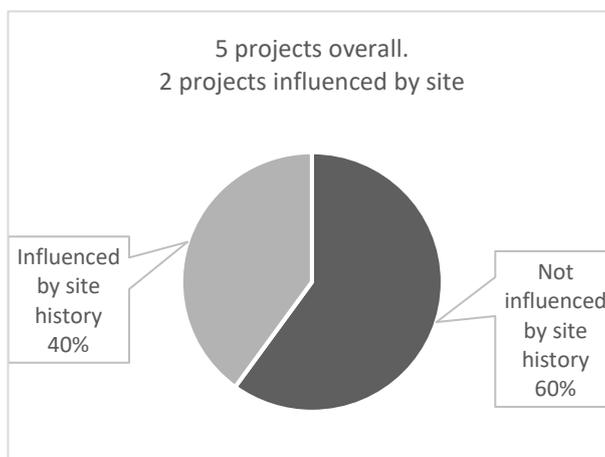
process which defined its pre-human condition. Site-history in urban areas focuses on its urban-history. A site's significance to today's people is drawn from, and strengthened by, its significance to yesterday's people.

The projects grouped as 'ecological' in this sample show a different take on site history. In each of these five cases, the focus is on the natural ecology of the site. What gives it a particularly site-history focus is the fact that the landscape architects are looking back to a time before human activity changed the landscape. In contrast to projects in urban areas where human activity has shaped the site for centuries or millennia, these projects are dealing with sites where human activity has generally been in the region of decades. 'Ecological' projects tend therefore to talk about "restoration" and "amelioration"; *returning* the site to a more ecologically natural state and bypassing the intervening damage done by humans.

In an urban area, we might value the sense of belonging and identity that comes from the long history of human development, whereas in a rural setting we might value natural beauty and habitat conservation. The projects in this sample demonstrate that context is an important factor influencing the way we understand and value site.

Landmark projects

Figure A1.11 Percentage of landmark projects influenced by site history



The two individual projects which utilise site-history in their design outcomes are very different: The landscape associated with the BA headquarters is built within former parkland and the project seeks to utilise this fact by creating a design

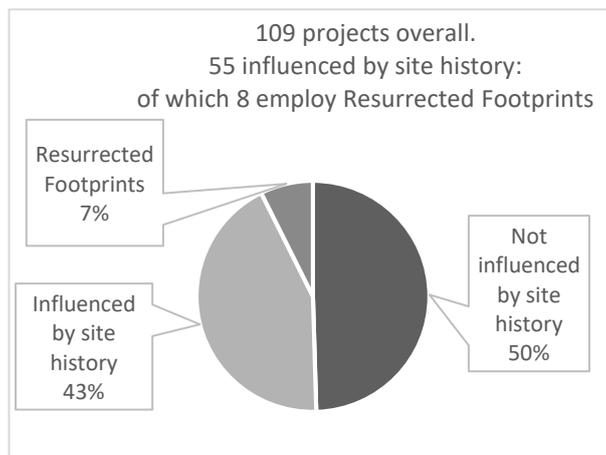
which balances the existing (albeit repaired) parkland with a newly-build global

headquarters. The second project sought to completely renew the existing landscape around and within the Said Business School, but based its design on the features and layout of a previous iteration of the site’s use (a monastery).

Resurrected Footprints

In order to examine how site history directly influences the design-decisions of a project, the research looked at the instances of *Resurrected Footprints* within the sample. These projects are a clearly documented and visible manifestation of one way that site-history impacts the design of a landscape project. They show how landscape architects interpret site in particular ways and set the scene for exploring how site is interpreted through interviews and case-study in chapter 2.2.

Figure A1.12 Percentage of projects with a *Resurrected Footprints* feature



Of the 55 examples which cite site-history as an influencing factor, 17% employ *Resurrecting Footprints* as a way of manifesting the site’s history into the present built form.

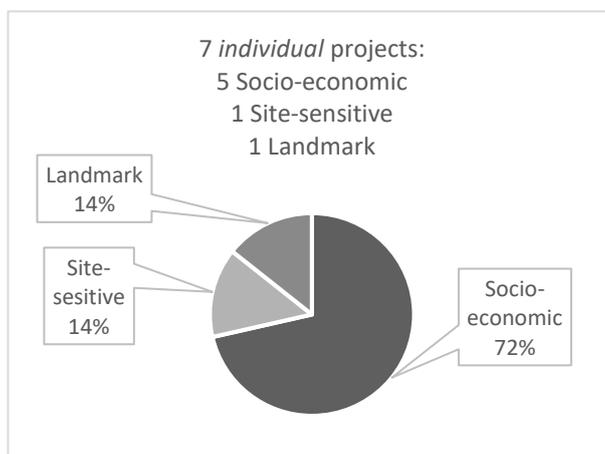
Where landscape architects use *Resurrected Footprints* as a design approach, the articles associated with that scheme sometimes give clues to the significance of its usage. The most common reason given is that the particular feature which is subsequently reinterpreted as a *Resurrected Footprint* has been revealed during archaeological exploration of the site. For example, in the project at Charles Rowan House, London, the designers Farrer Huxley write that “residents organised an archaeological dig” which “unearthed artefacts and the line of a former street, which have all been replicated in the new ground plane” (Landscape Design #316 p37). Similarly, in London’s Mint Street Park, the landscape architects Planet Earth described developing the design

“within its physical and historical context by opening up new roots from the surrounding areas so that ancient street patterns that once existed on the site could be renewed and knitted back into the dense urban fabric of the locality” (Landscape #7, p18).

Some of the descriptions of the projects listed above suggest that the archaeological dig and subsequent usage of *Resurrected Footprints* was a way of engaging with local residents and enabling the new development to somehow link people with place, and the site’s past with their lives in the present and future. Two of the projects do not refer to archaeology; instead, they discuss the history and heritage of the site in terms of “exploration” and “associations”, suggesting that the sites’ histories were perhaps investigated in other ways (such as oral or documented histories). At Arundel Street in Portsmouth, the City Council’s designers created “a representation in the floorscape of the 19th-century canal” which is “lined with square-clipped trees which depict the canal in straight, rectangular lines” (Green Places #11 p31).

In all cases, the information on why *Resurrected Footprints* is used is scant, although it coincides with a socio-political context which values identity and stakeholder involvement.

Figure A1.13 Percentage of *Resurrected Footprints* projects by primary generator category



This design approach is primarily utilised in projects grouped as ‘socio-economic’. It was expected that a project which places so much emphasis on the history of the site – utilising the physicality of this history in its development –

might be more frequently found within the ‘site-sensitive’ category. It would

appear therefore that *Resurrected Footprints* is somehow associated with the forward-looking development of a site rather than being particularly sensitive to the current character and conditions of the site.

The sites which utilise *Resurrected Footprints* are generally ones which are in need of improvement and redevelopment because their current character and conditions are thought to hold back social or economic prosperity. This design approach seems to be a way of making a physical and metaphorical link back to a time in the site's history before it became dilapidated, thereby imbuing it with a sense of continuation whilst equipping it for the prosperous future desired by the client, designer and users.

Appendix 2: Example of letter to potential interviewee

Dear XXX,

I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to take part in a doctoral research project I am undertaking at Birmingham City University under the supervision of Prof. Kathryn Moore PPLI.

Involvement in this study will take the form of an informal interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. In the first part of the interview, I would like you to tell me about how you get to know a site. The research would be greatly enhanced if you were able to illustrate this process in some form of diagram (this will take about 10-15 minutes). Previous interviewees have found it most helpful to reflect on how they get to know a site in advance of the interview and bring their process diagram with them to the interview as the basis for dialogue. The second part of the interview will involve discussing a number of aspects relating to the site which you may, or may not, draw on for design inspiration. For this study, I shall be interviewing approximately 10 UK landscape architects, from different practices, with varying amounts of experience and with different approaches to the discipline. Your perspective, experience and expertise, as revealed through the interview process will be used, along with my other interviewees, to build up a picture of how landscape architects relate to the site and how the site informs their design work.

The purpose of this research is to explore the interrelationship between the site, the site survey and the design process of practising landscape architects. The role of site is rightly acknowledged as fundamental to the work of landscape architects¹, and is conceptualised by practitioners and theorists in numerous ways; amongst others, as a canvas onto which landscape architects paint, the clay with which they work or the muse from which they draw inspiration². In order to understand this interrelationship more fully, I shall be examining how landscape architects get to know the site and how they use particular aspects or approaches to the site as design inspiration. I will be

asking how the history of the site, the context of the site and the spirit of the place can inspire a design, and how practitioners decide which of these factors will influence their work. I will also be questioning whether it is appropriate to take inspiration from outside the site.

In order to ensure that this research is carried out in accordance with the university's research ethical standards, I need to ask that you give informed consent to participate in this project. Please could you read the information set out over the page which explains how data will be collected and used. If you have any questions about this project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Alex Albans BSc(hons) PGDipLA

Appendix 3: Ethical Statement to accompany interview invitation

This PhD research is being undertaken by Alex John Albans at Birmingham Institute for Art and Design (BIAD), Birmingham City University (BCU), faculty of Architecture and Landscape. BIAD Research Office, BCU, Corporation Street, Birmingham B4 7DX

Research supervisory team:

Director of studies: Prof. Kathryn Moore.

Second supervisor: Prof. Richard Coles.

Permissions and data protection:

You may withdraw from this research project at any time.

You do not have to give a reason for your withdrawal.

All information will be kept secure and used solely for the purposes of this study.

In publishing my findings, I (Alex Albans) agree to respect any restrictions you wish to place on the use of material.

In order to make a thorough analysis of the interview, I need to record what is said so that a complete transcript can be written. A copy of the audio-file of the interview and its associated transcript will be made available to you should you wish. The output of this research project will be in the form of a thesis along with published articles and conference papers where applicable.

Quotations from this interview may be used in these published outputs. In agreeing to be interviewed, you will be asked to indicate whether you would prefer to proceed on the basis that:

a) quotations will be attributed; b) that they will be anonymised.

Participation in this study is on a purely voluntary basis: no payment is involved from either party.

Complaints and concerns should be initially raised with the Associate Dean for Research at BIAD, Prof. David Durling.

This study is undertaken in accordance with BIAD's published research standards. A full copy of the faculty's research standards can be viewed at: <http://www.biad.bcu.ac.uk/research/site/pdf/GuidelinesAndProcedures.pdf>
Paper copies are available on request.

Appendix 4: Example interview questions.

Set 1

A. Project

I understand that part of the brief of the project was to reveal or refer to the site's history.

1. With this in mind, was it up to you to decide which aspects of history to reveal, and how to reveal them?
2. How did you decide which aspects of history to reveal?
3. Did you reject any phases in history, and why?
4. What led you to resurrect footprints as opposed to another design approach/interpretation?
5. How did the collaborative approach influence the design process (City Council, Residents, Funding Bodies, Artists etc.)?
6. What were your aims in revealing the site's history?

B. Resurrecting Footprints

1. Have you used the resurrecting footprints approach in any of your other projects?
2. What are your thoughts on revealing history as a design approach?
3. Why do you think designers use resurrecting footprints in landscape architecture?
4. Do you think it works as an approach? Examples?
5. How do you know if it is successful?

C. Personal Design Philosophy

1. Could you describe your own design philosophy?
2. What influences and informs your design philosophy?
3. Are there any key texts / people that informed your design philosophy?

Set 2

The site survey process:

Please could you map out the process you use to get to know a site (list/diagram/flowchart):

- Do you always (personally/your team) visit the site – at what point? enough times?
- Do you gather any information before visiting the site? (what?)
- On site: what do you do? What are you looking for (facts, feelings etc.)? How do you record information? What are you picking up on?
- Do you ever face any challenges or hindrances in the process of getting to know a site? What are the consequences of these obstacles? How do you overcome them?
- What is it about the site that influences your design work the most?
- How do you know when you have enough information about the site?

The history of the site:

- Is the history of the site important? Why/why not?
- How do you find out about it?
- How does the history of the site then inform your work?
- Do you find any particular aspect of the history of the site especially informative? (might be social, environmental or architectural history). Or one particular era?
- Can you give me an example when the history of the site was evident in the physical design?
- Can you give me an example when it was not appropriate to use the history of the site in the physical design?

Spirit of the place (genius loci)

- You're familiar with the concept of the spirit of a place aren't you: How would you define it?
- Is the spirit of the place important? Why/why not?
- How do you pick up on or sense the spirit of the place?
- Tom Turner has called the injunction to "*consult the genius of the place*" the Single Agreed Law of Landscape Architecture. Do you agree? Do you obey it?
- How does the sense of place influence your work?

- Can you give me an example of when the spirit of the place was evident in the physical design?
- Can you give me an example when it was not appropriate to use the spirit of the place in the physical design?

Non-site concepts/ extra-site/ para-site:

- Commissioned to work on a particular site: The site is often defined by a red line on a plan: when is it appropriate to stray over the red line?
- In your work, does design inspiration always come from the site?
- *Should* design inspiration come from the site? Why/ why not?
- Where else might design inspiration come from?
- Are ideas from beyond the site as justifiable or compelling as those from the site itself? Why/ why not?
- Can you give me an example of when the physical design was not inspired by the site?
- Can you give me an example of when it was not appropriate to use ideas from outside of the site?

Set 3

- Briefly tell me about how you became involved in this project.
- What are your ambitions for the project?
- What shaped these ambitions for the project?
- What are the most important considerations for you when developing this project?
- What have been the key moments in this project?

- How did XXX come to be involved in this project?
- What do you look for when working with a landscape architect?
- What makes a good working relationship with a landscape architect?
 - Has XXX lived up to that?

- I'd like to know about how you and XXX work together:
 - Are the architectural and landscape elements being developed as a whole or do you each set your own parameters with the client?
 - How does this work in practice?

- What, if anything, has XXX brought to this project that has helped move the project along?
- Can you think of an instance when a landscape architect has hindered a project?
 - What?
 - How was it resolved?

- In your experience, what would you say has been the key thing you've learned from working with landscape architects?

- If you could influence the next generation of landscape architects, what one message would you like them to hear?

Appendix 5: DVD of pdf interview transcriptions.

