

LANDAWARD and IFLA APR

IFLA APR reaching out for contributing to establish novel international disciplinary standards

"LANDAWARD is an international landscape award born to reward excellence in the field and recognize the value of international projects that contribute significantly to the dialogue between nature and artifice, developing awareness of the transformation of cities, territories, and places of living. The objective is to reward projects that contribute positively to people's quality of life and integrate art, architecture, and landscape.

[..] Indeed, private, public, or collective landscape spaces naturally constitute the connective tissue of cities and the privileged site of public art, to which the citizens pay attention, driven by the desire to regain areas of encounter between nature and culture [...] and regenerate the systems of open spaces that structure the cities of ours.

[..] Also, the promoters share that landscape represents an essential element for interpreting contemporary territorial dynamics. Indeed, policies of territorial conservation, enhancement, and use -increasingly experienced and participated by the citizens worldwide- are increasingly placed at the center of the actions by the institutions governing the territory." from the LANDAWARD website.

Bergamo is a peculiar city. It boasts a majestic system of defensive walls that date back to the time when the Venetian Republic extended over North-East Italy. These walls surround the historical nuclei and are inscribed into the UNESCO world heritage list. Most interesting, their ballistic purpose and topographic specificity -which makes the center a bit disconnected from the rest of the urban space- has made them into a unique public space, sort of linear park characterized by never-ending panoramic views. That said, the modern expansion of the city boasts a unique system of public spaces, too. This is the juvenile but well-round work of an architect, i.e., Marcello Piacentini, that has come to define the Italian fascist style, i.e., a special spatiality where abstract monumentality, urban scale, and respect for historical context coexist.

In recent years, elaborating on such heritage and the current need to promote, update, and amend it, the architectural scene of Bergamo has been characterized by new professional happenings at the level of both professional associations and governmental bodies. New ties between profession and politics brought the nature park complementing the city walls into the position of internationally acknowledged heritage, too, and a program of redevelopment for the modern core was established, now offering evidence about the local quality of planning and design.

With these initiatives, new local awareness about the importance of 'landscape culture' has sprung. That is, despite the longstanding tradition of Italian public space based on built features, such as hard-paved areas, a new understanding of the contribution of nature developed. This happening has been marked by the formation of a new association that has begun organizing an annual event promoting the local development of landscape and the global progress of related knowledge. Characterized by conferences and installations in the urban space, this event has quickly grown into a vibrant happening, capable of attracting tourists and providing further improvements -even though temporary- to the city.

Driven by the same objectives, in 2021, the association launched the LANDAWARD program, the ceremony of which is expected to take place during the event. Thanks to the ties developed by the organizers, this award has quickly received national acknowledgment by the local, regional, and central institutions of Italy, including universities like Milan Polytechnic University. That said, the social ties have been vital in reaching out at international level, too. Indeed, after a first mediation provided by me -Bergamo is my origin place and, although I left it in the early 2000s and live in Taipei since the mid-2010s, I still have a socio-professional network in the place- the President of IFLA APR, Mrs. Monica Kuo, has found interest in the award and its objectives. After a preliminary review of the activity and organizers, she brought the initiative to the attention of IFLA EXCO, which finally helped LANDAWARD reach out to IFLA Europe and receive patronage at both the international and regional levels. In the context of today's global world, where organizational-geographical hierarchies do not correspond to or facilitate the structuring of any social network, the reach and mediatory attention of IFLA APR was crucial to developing global recognition of a bottom-up initiative like LANDAWARD.

The works of the award are now progressing. Nevertheless, we already know that more than 100 projects were submitted during the call time. Currently, a diverse group of international jurors is

working out three rounds of subsequent evaluation that will end with a debate about the final choice and statement of the jury. Noteworthy, this jury includes a large number of renowned researchers, photographers, architects, landscape architects, critics, and the IFLA APR President has joined, too, accompanied by a representative of IFLA Europe and IFLA Italy.

Information about the award can be found at the dedicated website, i.e., www.landaward.it. Anyway, here, it is meaningful to spend a few lines of text extra to clarify the perspective of this, that is relatively uncommon. Indeed, LANDAWARD is not for landscape architects only. Instead, it is for international projects of architecture, landscape, urban design, lighting, etc. that contribute to the landscape, thus advancing and disseminating landscape culture. That is, the focus is the real quality of the places of living, more than the landscape profession and the codified apparatus of standards that accompany it.

Due to this, within the current panorama of international awards -divided between initiatives that distribute awards in large numbers as recognition of professional proficiency and others that need affiliation to professional associations- LANDAWARD is a different deal. It will give few mentions and one prize. Most importantly, the recipient will not necessarily be the product of landscape architecture practice. Nevertheless, it will be relevant in terms of contemporary landscape and the associated culture.

So, if it is now clear that the initiative aims at sparking debate for the sake of disciplinary development, the Asia Pacific region's participation will hopefully increase with the next iteration of the award. Indeed, the perspective of LANDAWARD enables proposing alternatives to international standards, that is what IFLA APR also supports for triggering regional identity and more sustainable professional developments.

While I can ensure you that juror positions will always be reserved for IFLA representatives, IFLA APR included, I really hope that IFLA APR will participate and strengthen its reach through the award outside IFLA itself. Indeed, today, professional associations are not meaningful per se. They are if they help professionals respond to the 'glocal' challenges of contemporary world, inside and outside the profession. The same is for the awards, and LANDAWARD seems to be well aware of it, especially if we look at the effort that the organizers make to let the panel of jurors interact and debate for the sake of assessing new landscape perspectives. If we consider this, the reason behind submitting projects to LANDAWARD is not only to receive recognition. It is also to feed meaningful debate and be sure that this can prepare ground to new landscape developments.

Alessandro Martinelli

Associate professor, Landscape architecture department, Chinese Culture University, Taipei