

**IFLA APR
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2025**

**NOVEMBER 14TH-15TH
JIO CONVENTION CENTER
MUMBAI, INDIA**

The Landscape Architect Manifesto

ADOPTED AT IFLA APR REGIONAL CONGRESS 2025, MUMBAI (INDIA)

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About this Manifesto

This manifesto is to be read as an artistic / creative manifesto, written through the lens of critical self-reflection of the landscape architecture discipline targeted primarily at landscape architects operating in the Asia Pacific Region. This manifesto is not merely a standalone declaration; it serves as a statement of identity and purpose, a road map for the discipline and a tool to challenge existing paradigms in which it operates. Only when the landscape architects – both academic and professional - act upon the intent of manifesto will it translate into a public declaration that would collectively communicate the rigour, vision and the aptitude of the discipline of landscape architecture for the coming years.

Landscape Architects have been traditionally mandated with the conception, design and curation of the outdoors for defined aesthetic and functional outcomes. Middle to late 20th century foregrounded environmental frameworks, marking a key transition in the profession's trajectory. The current times are witness to a marked shift in the profession's engagement with society, heritage and culture. To a certain extent, Landscape Architecture has transcended its traditional identity tied closely to the architectural object and experience to one that proactively engages with environmental, urban, social, and cultural frameworks on its own merits.

The relevance of landscape Architecture as a discipline, in the APR Region, has never been more important to environmental and human well-being. Previously perceived as one limited to the opulent and the ceremonial, the expected impact of the profession is now understood as one critical in addressing challenges of a rapidly transforming landscape. The pace and type of development, degrees of urbanisation and Climate Change together offer a great challenge in the coming decades; challenges that will indubitably shape the profession as well as enhance and expand its scopes of engagement. With the growing fragility of the

Introduction

environment compounding social and economic risks and vulnerabilities, the landscape architects of today find themselves coerced to address complex issues - climate change, urban heat islands, biodiversity loss, air quality, urban floods - in a rather accelerated pace, resulting in structured and impulsive responses to design externalities in the fluid and often blurred professional milieu. The landscape professional often works with, among and at times against a slew of allied built and natural environment disciplines - architects, planners, urban designers, ecologists, and public health engineers, hydrologists, naturalists – leading to both synergies and conflicts. The challenges and opportunities

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for furthering the discipline of Landscape Architecture is perhaps nowhere as immense as in the the Asia-Pacific region. Given the region's long and rich history with deep relationships with nature, culture, and society, the embedded indigenous knowledge is waiting to be unravelled and leveraged as a sustainable path to the future. Overlaid on this rich and diverse landscape are the current day challenges of increasing urbanisation and vulnerabilities due to climate change. Together, this complex milieu offers an exciting canvas for exploring the limits of the discipline of landscape architecture.

This broad manifesto is rooted

in this framework of practice and development paradigms and tailored specifically to address the operative lens and malleability in the context of the APR Region. A document to direct vision, guide intentions and project values for the landscape architect, to inform and creatively challenge the discipline of Landscape Architecture.

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Preamble

Landscape architects, equipped with knowledge of environment and sense of aesthetics, now need to take forward the mandate to creatively steward and address current and emerging issues, born out of the imbalances of environment necessities and unbridled urbanization. By adopting new methodologies, tools and technologies, the landscape architect should strive to create liveable cities and spaces rooted in a resilient environment. Equally, to consciously adapt and acknowledge indigenous knowledge systems embedded in the region of practice and positioning the design discourse in the socio-cultural apparatus of the working context.

01. IDENTITY

The conception of a landscape architect was not with the intent of creating an independent entity to helm a given project or initiative, but one that is ably positioned to navigate between disciplines towards a state of equitable development; one that effectively balances the demands of the natural and built environments as well as people and cultures. Given the overlapping interests and diffused boundaries of in contemporary engagement, Landscape Architects need to redefine themselves as effective stewards of multiple disciplines in fostering a holistic and sustainable outcome.

02. MANDATE

In recent decades, the mandate imposed by Society on a Landscape Architect and one that is self-imposed by the professional are fast evolving and has undergone sea change. Given the imbalances between environment risks, cultural homogeneity and the current development paradigm, it is incumbent upon the Landscape Architect to define their mandate; one that is more responsive to context of their engagement and to further the multidisciplinary nature of the discipline. Going beyond the defined limits of a given project, such a responsible mandate is critical in shaping the profession and its pedagogy in the coming decades.

03. EXPERTISE

Landscape architecture operates as a multidisciplinary field ranging from environmental history, natural sciences, geography, cultural studies, fine arts and even wildlife. However, landscape architects are not expected to and by training are not field experts in any of the fields. The expertise of the Landscape Architect lies to simultaneously straddle and balance these lenses through scales of design and planning towards creating effective outcome to ensure a responsive and inclusive perspective.

04. INCLUSIVE

As a Landscape Architect, one is confronted by complex and often conflicting demands, with the need to balance environmental, spatial and user needs. It should be the profession's self-defined goal to go beyond the stated program in curating a safe and healthy environment not only for its immediate users but also for the land and the biodiversity that are integral to the larger landscape.

05. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change and its implications for the planet and society is no longer in the realm of speculative sciences; its impact is both immediate and every day, especially in the more sensitive and vulnerable geographies of the APR. Given the intrinsically multidisciplinary nature of the profession, Landscape Architects are well positioned to foreground Climate Change as a critical and creative challenge rather than a problem that needs to be solved in the short term. As Landscape Architects, several aspects of adaptation and mitigation may well be beyond our mandate; building in resilient methodologies and tools through design thinking remains well within our expertise. The profession should respond to this crisis as an embedded design language in fostering a more positive and transformative process of engagement with environment at society across scales.

06. ECONOMICS AND MARKETS

Market pressures that dictate the growth and quality of built environment have never been as rapid and demanding as in present times. Global market forces continue to shape built fabric that are increasingly anonymous and homogenous across geographies, with the idea of a landscape subsumed within generic solutions. For the landscape architect, this flux is an opportune moment, to be a differentiator not by responding to the market, but through wilful engagement of critical disciplinary tools; one that translates in creation of meaningful, safe and healthy spaces balancing immediate needs with long-term resilience. Each engagement across scales is a valuable opportunity in co-creation of systems and spaces anchored in the lived experiences of the end user.

07. SCALES OF ENGAGEMENT

The inherent nature of the profession allows a landscape architect to traverse different scales of engagement - from design to planning to strategic thinking. Popular misconceptions lead one to believe that the true potential of the profession is best leveraged only at larger scales, thereby undervaluing the professional's engagement across scales and contexts. The fact remains that irrespective of scale, the landscape architect's values rooted in nature, culture and society can contribute significantly towards long-term impact; impacts that may not be immediate but evolve and grow with time. Landscape architects should leverage this inherent value and strive to act as stewards to lead ,any and every process of engagement, towards achieving a more holistic outcome - that lies in the inherently - in the capacity of a landscape architect.

08. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Landscape architects, from the APR, must recognize that every land and context they engage with already has embedded patterns and systems evolved over centuries if not millennia; patterns deeply rooted in the ecological, social and spiritual milieu. Responses to environmental and resource challenges evolved and been honed by traditional societies effectively addressing frameworks of sufficiency and not merely for purposes of ceremonial design. At this juncture in human history where environmental challenges are being addressed through technological interventions, perspectives from the global south offer an enormous repository of indigenous practices of managing the land and its systems towards environmental and social sustenance. Landscape Architects operating in the global south marked by vulnerabilities that impact the environment and livelihoods should extend their mandate to acknowledge and recognise this practice as learnings to inform and make their engagement richer. Richer by layering it with knowledge that one can essay to adapt for newer creative opportunities and simultaneously extending depth of the discipline where elements nature is not seen in isolation of its larger practices

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09. PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The role of a landscape architect has evolved substantially over time and gained traction to impact spaces through nature and design. In the growth however, sub consciously landscape architects have unburdened themselves to discuss culture and people, often leaving them to other disciplinary professionals operating in the same realm – thereby devaluing the role of nature with culture, social practices and people. Landscape architects in the stress of a demanding market, unpredictability, risks and vulnerabilities due to Climate Change, must endeavour to root themselves in the cultural expressions, social practices and people's needs – from the marginalized to the powerful – ensuring commissioned spaces are not just 'used' by people to foster new relationships but a becomes spaces for cultural continuity that 'reflect' the necessities , impressions and materiality of the context to which caters to.

10. DISCIPLINE AND ADVOCACY

The idea of designed landscapes has held a connotation of luxury and exclusivity in the past. At this critical juncture in our environmental and social transformation, the profession's focus should be a wilful shift away from this imagery to actively integrate concepts of equity, justice and resilience. While the visible outcome will continue to be dominated by large-scale private developments, it is imperative that active advocacy pushes the profession's concerns and contributions in public conversations. Active engagement with contemporary challenges fostered by partnerships with institutional actors, reaching out non-traditional geographies and through forging collaborations to engage with the marginalized are some strategies critical in foregrounding the relevance of the landscape Architect in contemporary society.

Purpose behind crafting the Manifesto

The manifesto is not a prescription; ideally, it should be engaged with as a directive and guiding document across two scales.

The first is at the disciplinary scale of Landscape Architecture; a guidance and critical reading of the discipline to position and leverage it both academically and professionally with reference to changing contexts as well as in its relational position to allied disciplines.

The second is at the individual level of a Landscape Architect; it is intended to provide direction, motivation and a critical outlook to the evolving times. A guidance to help maintain focus and serve as a reminder of one's professional values during periods of self-doubt, challenges and disquietude.