Climate change, globalisation, water dynamics and multicultural living are only some of the complex phenomena shaping urban landscape performances today. What does design mean for acting and gaining knowledge in this context? How can innovative design strategies be formulated? What part is played by creativity and understanding?

Starting out from design processes at the STUDIO URBANE LANDSCHAFTEN experts from philosophy, neurobiology, psychology, art and landscape architecture unfold their perspectives of how creativity and understanding are connected. Examples of internationally renowned landscape architecture indicate how closely the production of ideas, design practice and aesthetic expression are bound up with an understanding and investigation of landscape. CREATING KNOWLEDGE thus formulates a contemporary, interdisciplinary approach of design.
5-minute-sketches: Greetings from German urban landscapes.
STUDIO-lecture 2006. Collage: Sabine Rabe
CREATING KNOWLEDGE
Innovation Strategies for Designing Urban Landscapes
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Six years have passed since *Creating Knowledge* was first published. The integrative approach to design that we outline in the book is the product of many years’ experience in practice and research, and of exploratory teaching methods and reflection on design. To mark the occasion of the book launch, we elected to apply our approach to designing for large-scale areas in an open experiment among professionals. This was the starting point for an event funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and conceived and implemented by STUDIO URBANE LANDSCHAFTEN as an experimental setting. In July 2008 we presented the book to international colleagues, invited guests and students as part of a symposium on “Research by Design – the case of urban landscapes” at the Leibniz University in Hanover.

Imagine some 100 people coming and going between a series of light-filled neutral spaces. Hanging plants with blue blossoms hang from the ceiling of the main room, which one reaches through a notional “cinematic sluice gate” comprised of two screens on which the banks of the Elbe between Hamburg and the North Sea (filmed from the deck of a ship) slide gently by on each side. Various people stand talking in groups while others sit on a sofa, reading and browsing through handbooks, project work and research reports. At certain times, most of them listen attentively to the “discussion carousel,” a panel discussion between international professionals in which, at intervals, one person leaves the panel and another takes his or her place. Ever more experts – researchers, practitioners, teachers and students from different disciplines – take a seat at a long table and start to draw, glue, write or create collages. In the next room, two people are working on a dance choreography inspired by the Elbe. Others simply watch and observe. By the end of the day, some 50 pieces of paper are hanging on the wall: a colourful bouquet of pictorial visions for the landscape of the Elbe, covered with a plethora of interesting handwritten questions. (p. 22-24)

The context for this setting was a one-day symposium that was simultaneously a discussion forum, experimental concept and workshop. In addition to an exhibition, a library and a perpetually running film of the River Elbe, the symposium featured a periodically recurring discussion carousel and a parallel design workshop in the same room. The participants were able to move around freely between the workshop area, the lecture area, the entrance and the space outside.

The rules were simple: participants could read, listen, take part in discussions and work as and when they wished.

In this open experiment, the participants and organizers worked together to explore relevant research questions and development possibilities for a chosen urban landscape. Every region and every kind of urban landscape was in principle available as a potential subject of planning. After consideration, STUDIO URBANE LANDSCHAFTEN elected to focus on a section of the Elbe estuary that borders the federal states of Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony in which a range of current and complex issues coincide. The region is exposed to an increased risk of flooding as a result of rising sea levels, heavy rainfall, increasingly intensive shipping use and the presence of a power station in the flooding zone. The region has contaminated industrial wasteland that needs transforming and is subject to the competing interests of urban settlement, recreation and nature protection – all within a section of the lower Elbe in the midst of a wonderful estuary landscape.
The objective of the design workshop was to find a pictorial expression of the *landschaftsgesehe* – of the multitude of processes and activities that give shape to the project area – in the form of drawings, collages, mappings, models or texts, and from these to elaborate initial design ideas for the development of the landscape and derive relevant research questions based on the “dialogue with the pictures.” The basis for the pictorial representation of the project area was an aerial photograph at a scale of 1:5,000 measuring 60 × 24 cm, and further design materials were also provided. The intention was that by the end of the day, participants would have overlaid their map with a vision for the Elbe area and formulated research questions for the area for presenting at a pop-up exhibition in the evening.

On the day, more than 50 works were produced, each of them a visual interpretation of the project area. More than half of the participants (some of whom worked in pairs) were able to find an initial pictorial representation to capture the complexity of the Elbe area. The subsequent evaluation of the works revealed a range of promising ideas and potential questions for further exploration (p. 22-24).

**Creating knowledge in practice, research and teaching**

Creating Knowledge is a research through design process for urban landscapes and is the primary design approach used by the members of the STUDIO. As a consequence of the symposium in 2008 and this design approach, we have since had the chance to lend our voice to the often controversial global debate on how to deal with what is obviously a highly complex spatial constellation: that of tidal river estuaries, which are becoming increasingly threatened by flooding as a result of climate change and rising sea levels. In the six years since the book was published, and as a product of the symposium, members of the STUDIO have continued to work on this topic in both national and international contexts. A series of research and practice projects followed such as the *Wasseratlas* (Water Atlas, p. 27-28), the *Tideelbebuch* (Tidal Elbe Book), the “Deichpark Elbinsel” (Elbe Island Dyke Park, p. 30), the “Deichbude” (Dyke Hut, p. 30), “Pilotprojekt Kreetsand” (Kreetsand Pilot Project, p. 32) and the “Deichpark Bereich Spreehafen” (Spreehafen section of the Dyke Park, p. 31). These are just some examples from a series of projects, prize-winning competition entries, publications, exhibitions and lectures.
undertaken by or in conjunction with members of the STUDIO team. At the same time, the design approach was also being applied and developed in teaching, and subjected to theoretical, empirical and design research in doctoral projects, essays and lectures. The field of designing integrative approaches to developing flood-threatened regions is a good example for illustrating the power of the Creating Knowledge approach (see the project examples on p. 25-33) and in turn for demonstrating how it works (cf. von Seggern, 2014). The design projects and proposals aim to identify approaches that have the potential to be a transformative force for bringing about long-term change and that simultaneously offer a basis for entering into a global discourse on practice and research. Parallel to the field of working with water, members of the STUDIO extended the approach to other fields, applying its methods through collaborative interdisciplinary processes to other socially relevant fields of research, including regional and urban development, regional trials of alternative energy concepts, nature protection and landscape design, or the exploration of links between education and space, looking from the perspective of education as part of raumgeschehen (p. 36) (www.studiourbanelandschaften.de). But what are the central themes of the Creating Knowledge approach? What does the book tell us and what new findings have contributed to its development since it was first published in 2008? Last but not least, which issues and discussions do we need to consider further? In this publication, we focus, using practice, research and teaching processes, on the search for design methods that are suitable for finding – and creating – (own) answers and design expressions (both aesthetic and functional) for the major issues of spatial development within the canon of public planning processes, incentive programmes, governance and market forces. For this reason, our approach requires that we take a closer look at large-scale spatial design and how we define space as well as the related themes of creativity, understanding and ideas, practice and action, direct involvement, and inter- and transdisciplinarity which today are increasingly relevant topics, all of which lie at the intersection of different disciplines. We will therefore examine each of these in turn, illustrating them with example projects.

Designing – a transformative process
Designing is a working knowledge (see Nowotny, p. 42). It requires brains, heart and hands (see Krull, p. 40) and it involves cognition, intuition, emotions and feelings (see Seggern & Werner, p. 59). Designing is a practice, a knowledge that works and with which one works – a process that is simultaneously about creation and comprehension. Designing is a forward-looking activity with its respective theoretical conceptual basis and also a specific understanding of the specialist field in which it is being practiced. In our case it is concerned with wider social issues, how they transform space and how they manifest themselves in a holistic manner (gestalt). Over the past few years the members of the STUDIO, like many other professionals and groups around the world, have been searching for a term that adequately encapsulates a contemporary understanding of design. We ourselves began with systemic planning and design, then with sitative design (von Seggern 1997) and explorative design (e.g. von Seggern & Werner 2005) and we investigated approaches such as reflexive design (e.g. Margitta Buchert), ecosystemic design (e.g. Antje Stokman), topological design (e.g. Christophe Girot), process-oriented design (e.g. Lucia Grosse-Bächle, Marc Angelil), relational design (e.g. Stefan Kurath) and more. The search for an adequate term goes hand in hand with the debate on designing as an independent scientific process of cognition. And this in turn links the debate on design as research with the discourse on a contemporary understanding of science in general – a link that is more important than ever!
In *Creating Knowledge* we describe designing as an integrative process of creating knowledge (p. 59) that brings forth something new out of the simultaneity of a process of understanding and the emergence of ideas. We have deliberately avoided using descriptive adjectives so that the term design can be used to express a contemporary notion of design that can encompass a whole series of characteristics – such as systemic, situative, performative, relational, transformative, topological, experimental – none of which are adequate on their own. Particularly interesting in this context is the current discourse on the notion of transformation (cf. for example Bement 2007/2014 and Schneidewind & Singer-Brodowski 2013). “How transformation happens” is a central, if not the central, aspect of our approach. Our fundamental premise is that to successfully effect a transformation towards a good, liveable future environment – one that is “fit for our grandchildren” as Welzer (2013) calls it – it is necessary that we embrace the careful process of understanding, and the creative simultaneity of understanding and the emergence of ideas it embodies.

In recent years, and therefore also since this book was first published, there has been a surge of interest in the study of the theory and practice of designing in many fields of research and practice (cf. for example Grand & Jonas, 2012; Mareis et al., 2010). As an act of envisioning the future, design plays a role in all disciplines, even if in many disciplines it does not go by that name. Even in the natural sciences – disciplines that epitomise the quest for objective truth – design often informs the questions that determine the direction of research. How can we use what we find out to shape the future? This is therefore no longer primarily about eternally correct and irrefutable knowledge.

This renewed interest must, however, be seen against a somewhat ambivalent background: in essence there are three hard-to-reconcile aspects to consider. We know that as humans we have enhanced our evolution through our actions, cultural and otherwise. This fuels the conceit that we believe we can make or design anything we turn our hand to. At the same time, we are aware that things have a tendency to repeat themselves, which can lead to problems that become remarkably persistent and compounded. Then again repetition is safe and comforting. And finally we know that developments in large-scale *raumgeschehen* (see below) and the effects they have behave more like complex, open systems that we can neither fully predict nor plan – but that we can at least influence. Every definition and description of the initial conditions
is therefore subject to chance, but is by no means arbitrary because we know that the respective initial conditions can be decisive for what will come about in future. That we have learned from the science of complexity. Helga Nowotny’s remark: "That is how it is. But it could also be otherwise." (Es ist so, es könnte auch anders sein, 1999) is therefore as applicable as ever – and also as maddening.

Given this situation, contemporary approaches to design and to research in the spatial design disciplines are faced with a balancing act: we cannot ignore the initial conditions but at the same time we can only try and understand them as best possible in the knowledge that their complexity is such that they can never be fully understood, and that in order to unravel their complexity we must draw on creative ideas. Similarly design and research must continue pushing forward this transformative process of understanding and the emergence of ideas for that which we cannot totally understand in a succession of iterative steps until a (preliminary) result is reached.

If the spatial design disciplines are therefore to be able to produce design responses to the incalculable, unclear, complex and contingent conditions of large-scale development areas, and wish through them to bring about social, institutional and individual transformation, they will naturally need corresponding knowledge and methods for applying their design skills, for understanding what they see and for finding solutions.

We believe that the above has potentially radical implications for how we perceive the design research process in five areas in particular:

A postcard from Glenorchy

Everyday practices such as walking, drawing, and writing, and their combination in a relaxed way makes it possible to fuse the process of exploration with that of idea-creation. “Write or draw a postcard to your class mates telling them about your experiences” was the lunch-break assignment for students while out in the field undertaking individual, all-day walks through the City of Glenorchy, a local government area of Tasmania near Hobart. These often rather naïve drawings represent an initial intuitive “on the spot” response, a personal, sometimes clichéd appreciation that can serve as an important starting point: each postcard drawing is an initial description, interpretation and idea of the study area. For example, the real Mt. Wellington was re-dubbed “Mt. Direction Tasmania”. Only by obtaining a better understanding of the landscape and its relationships can one shape Tasmania’s future, a premise that can still be seen in the finished design proposals. For example, the abandoned railway line, which was identified as a “hidden resource” during the initial exploration, became the starting point for a couple of design proposals. Graduating Double Degree Design Studio (Bachelors in Landscape Architecture and in Urban Planning); RMIT University Melbourne, 2014; Course leaders: Judy Rogers, Julia Werner (SUL)
1. Design is a product of humankind’s creative ability to initiate cultural and evolutionary developments. In this context, design must be understood as the interplay of rational thought with intuition, body and spirit, incorporating the emotions and emotional creativity of all participating in the design process. We all possess a capacity to design, and while this is something that needs training and cultivation, it is by no means solely the reserve of geniuses.

2. Any attempt to define an initial situation, and any consideration and analysis of the existing state of things is necessarily an interpretation; it is an invention – and therefore involves design. Designing always begins with an “invention,” namely the design of the way we choose to look at the initial conditions and the project brief. The beginning of the design process is therefore especially important and for this we need to discover new methods of recording and presenting the existing situation (Werner 2009; 2013). Cartography, for example, as one of the most essential methods for considering large-scape project areas, is not merely an objective recording of the truth but a method that interprets, gives shape and designs, and is consequently now often known as mapping (Langer 2013). Everyday activities, not to mention professional practices from other disciplines, such as walking, playing, recounting, dancing, drawing and producing images, when seen against this background need to be reconceived in order to acquire methodical relevance as means of understanding and cognition. An example of how this kind of design works in the decisive/formative phase at the beginning of a project can be seen in the experimental “Dragnet investigation” undertaken by the STUDIO (Denkwerkstatt der Montag Stiftungen gAG, Studio Urbane Landschaften, 2012. See p. 38).

3. If spatial design is to contribute to solving pressing issues, it must immerse itself in different disciplines and integrate their respective knowledge into the design process and the result-
Designing for large-scale areas is an iterative process, a succession of (almost) identical repeating steps that progress from one level of knowledge to the next level of knowledge in a spiralling, searching pattern (see p. 174). This process depends more than anything on the systemic connections between the individual measures and the large-scale whole, the thematic layers and the narrative visions (stories, lines of argumentation, scenarios). At the same time, the entire design process is directed towards the aim of devising possible courses of action.

5. A good design requires a specific creative point of entry (Werner 2013), an open development idea that determines the task at hand, an idea of a process or pathway to the solution, a framework or form, or alternatively rules that, much like a choreography, give rise to form or that set in motion the dynamics of a design process. Every design proposal is both part of a transformation process and an impulse that shapes it.

In recent years, many aspects of this creative, inventive, solution-focussed way of designing described in the five points above have been recognised in their cognitive approach and scientific dimension, and the *Creating Knowledge process* has been discussed around the world in the context of design research – often drawing additional distinctions between *research by/through design, research for design* and *research about design*. In most cases, a design project will employ all three of these forms. This distinction is not useful in an either/or sense, but is instructive in differentiating between ways of designing as a means of creating knowledge with specific approaches and means of representation. One such differentiation is the adaptive appropriation of scientific methods and traditions for design purposes, rather than their wholesale adoption. This can be seen in some of the STUDIO’s projects, such as “Stadtsurfer, Quartierfans und Co” [*Urban Surfers, Neighbourhood Fans & Co*] (2009), the “Wasseratlas” [*Water Atlas*] (2008, p. 27-28) or the recently completed research project “Unterwegs in deutschen Bildungslandschaften” [*Explorations in German Educational Landscapes*] (2015, p. 36). In this second edition of *Creating Knowledge* we are especially interested in the contribution of *design research* to the debate on a contemporary understanding of science. In this context, a further aspect of importance, which has arisen as part of the current discourse on “Mode 3” methods (Schneidewind & Singer-Brodowski 2013) is the direct social and practical relevance of these methods, and the transformative effect they have on institutions and people. This is something that in our view is such a self-evident part of design processes in the spatial disciplines that we rarely reflect on it.

*Creating Knowledge* is namely also practice-oriented design approach that involves active immersion in the space itself. The planning of large-scale landscapes is often overly focussed on analysing the existing situation and its history. We instead place stronger emphasis on direct (creative) action. The approach we take draws on the interaction between conceptual ideas and the concrete situation, between the large scale and the small scale, between the part and the whole, and between reflective consideration and direct action in a specific context. The process of design is therefore fundamentally experimental in nature and is often explored through the vehicle of an experiment.

That means that much of our creative explorations involve stimulating situative impulses and creating interventions that have a temporary or permanent effect. From practical experience, we develop a hypothesis, which we in turn test in practice, examining and reflecting on the effect of a design idea directly in the respective context.

As yet, this pragmatic, experimental, transformative and also scientific-reflexive aspect of the *Creating Knowledge* design approach and the spatial interventions that follow from it have not
been widely discussed in professional circles. Since this book was first published, we have gained further experience and collected evidence in a variety of projects which we have reflected on from a theoretical standpoint (Seggern 2012, Grosse-Bächle 2012, Werner 2013, see projects p. 22-39).

Creativity, understanding and the idea
In addition to the topic of designing, we also take an equally comprehensive and interdisciplinary look at the second main topic of this book: creativity. What is creativity, how do we create conducive conditions for Kairos, and how can it be put to use? How do ideas arise? And, is creativity something that we can practice?
In this book, the authors Poser, Marlock, Emrich, von Seggern and Werner explore how intuition informs creative processes, the role that feelings and emotions play in creativity, the contribution of the body and bodily knowledge as well as how the initial line of enquiry affects the later design process (see also Werner 2013).
In recent years, the subject of creativity has experienced something of a renaissance. Richard Florida’s hypothesis (2002) on the creative class and its relevance for economic growth has given rise to a flood of creative quarters in many cities around the world. Creativity is posited as a magic pathway to greater knowledge.
In Creating Knowledge, creativity is seen as an evolutionary motivator that, in accordance with

Open-air living room – Temporary interventions for urban gardens
Nine different temporary installations designed by students aim to encourage local inhabitants to voluntarily participate in the planning, construction and development of an international neighbourhood garden initiated by the City of Laatzen. The simulated atmosphere of an open-air living room created a platform for exchanging ideas about the future urban gardens. The students erected the installations themselves. The way it was constructed and the materials used reflect the philosophy of low-budget design and recycling. Each installation could be used interactively and flowers and seeds were given away as symbolic gifts.
Student project at the Institute of Open Space Planning and Design of the Leibniz University of Hanover, 2012. Tutors: Elisa Serra (SUL), Susanne Zeller (SUL), Imke Rathert, Malte Maaß (SUL)

a new hermeneutical notion of understanding, simultaneously generates ideas: i.e. that understanding and creative re-interpretation are part of one and the same process (see in particular Emrich p. 125; von Seggern p. 164; Werner p. 212). In this context, creativity as a way of understanding (p. 75) describes the stimulating process of arriving at an idea. By accepting that I will neither know nor understand everything, I alternate between observing and taking in and becoming an inseparable part of what is going on to allow ideas to “emerge”. The formation of an idea and the act of understanding are part of the same simultaneous transformative process. It is through this that we understand what (lasting) transformation means, as opposed to arbitrary or imposed change. The spatial design disciplines are as yet not well versed in such cre-
atively interwoven approaches and the resulting methodological approaches to simultaneously observing the existing situation and finding ideas. Creative transformative knowledge can only be acquired through experience: it requires one to be mindful, attentive, watchful, to be alert to one's senses, to linger, traverse, to nose around (as the Chicago School of empirical social research have called it), to drift – all things that are not currently common practice (Han 2005).

**Defining space: Raumgeschehen and situation, landscape and the landscape perspective**

The third topic of this book has also been discussed extensively in professional circles: how do we adequately define what space is today? *Creating Knowledge* takes the view that it is now fundamentally necessary to consider space and landscape in two different ways: both as a multi-dimensional, near-endless, nameless and conceptless, open constellation of activities (Geschehen) – a constantly changing space of possibilities – unfolding from moment to moment, as well as in layers, situations or aspects. The material aspect – the built, planned or evolved environment in its different degrees of physical permanence – is just one viewpoint.

To properly see this, one has to switch back and forth between the role of an observer and an active participant immersed in the context, between distancing oneself and joining in (Foxley, 2010), between the world view and the local view and between the scales.

Only by considering these multiple perspectives can we develop designs that are both visionary as well as pragmatic. Creativity requires physical and sensory oneness – a sense of being, flow, of being present that is often called the *Kairos* moment – while taking action requires that we are able to differentiate and separate.

In the field of the spatial design disciplines and beyond, spatial discourse has elaborated space as a complex topological constellation of developments with a performative character and contingency.

In *Creating Knowledge* we understand space as what we call *Raumgeschehen*, a viewpoint that emphasizes the performative, topological aspects of spatial and social development. In German, the word *Raumgeschehen* expresses the multi-dimensional, manifold character of space – occurrences that arise from one moment to the next and manifest themselves in situations. Layers, themes, places, aspects, situations, nets, sections and statistics are all ways of describing different dimensions of this from a specific viewpoint but are not able to describe the situation as a whole.

This for the most part neutral consideration of a spatial constellation (*Raumgeschehen*) is followed by a creative response that attempts to capture the entirety of the *urban landscape* and its performative aspects from a *landscape perspective*. In this context, the term “urban” emphasizes the influence of humans on the respective developments while the term “landscape” focuses primarily on the topological relationships and their expression, including a contemporary notion of nature.

Professional discourse has been searching for a while now for new ways to describe the coupling of *urban* and *landscape* that the use of these terms implies, namely the way that urban and cultural characteristics are permeating the development of regions and large-scale areas. Charles Waldheim put forward the concept of “Landscape Urbanism” (2006) in the USA, and Kelly Shannon has called it “Water Urbanism” (2013). In 2013, the international landscape architecture journal “Topos” devoted their annual conference to the topic of “Strategic Urbanism”. “Green infrastructure” is likewise an increasingly popular recent term that attempts to encapsulate a conceptual idea that links space, landscape and urban life.

The search for suitable terminology is often encumbered by the competing claims of architecture, landscape architecture and urban design, or is – consciously or unconsciously – given an ideological slant through the appending of “-ism” to the word.
In the context of *Creating Knowledge*, our view is that the old, culturally elaborated notion of landscape is in itself perfectly adequate for perceiving spatial constellations (*Raumgeschehen*) from a contemporary perspective. This act of perception must, however, be accompanied by ever new design ideas of what landscape can be, if it is not to remain stuck in preconceived notions. In our view, the term landscape still adequately expresses a concept that aligns with a contemporary understanding of designing space as *Raumgeschehen*: landscape always refers to relationships, it is dynamic, systemic, built but also natural, encompasses people, climate, sky and ground and can also be used in an immaterial sense. It typically has positive connotations that we consciously draw on when we want to mobilise a desire to give shape to something. When we perceive something positively, as being beautiful, inviting and accessible, it mobilises an intrinsic motivation within us, providing an important creative impulse. A ‘neutral’ basis on the other hand can inhibit our creative faculties due to its lack of initial impetus. Landscape is multi-dimensional and at once boundless and concrete. When designing spatial transformative processes, this landscape perspective is therefore helpful in finding new ways of describing and inventing spatial constellations (*Raumgeschehen*), and consequently to bring about movement and change. The development of this landscape perspective is the topic of this book. How can one change one’s own perspective of space in order to creatively perceive – i.e. to look ahead and envision – and take action? In our experience, the act of considering a region from a landscape perspective, in a mindful, immersive but also impartial way (as far as is possible) and from this to acquire an idea of it as an urban landscape is already a radical and deeply-creative step in itself!

**EMILA Summer School 2014: Initial Ammerland ideas built from earth.**

After exploring the region by bike, bus and on foot, students built their first insights and ideas on 5 × 5 m squares of earth in the earth hall of the DEULA.

By the end of the exercise, five different visions for the development of the Ammerland region were presented at a scale of 1:20,000, with strips at 1:5,000 showing a section in greater detail. Aligned next to one another, the strips provided a basis for discussing potential future development scenarios for the region.

**EMiLA (European Master in Landscape Architecture) Summer School: Running out of land. Designing strategies for Ammerland’s competing land use demands. 28 August–6 September 2014**

During the EMiLA summer school, 50 students from seven countries explored the Ammerland, a region in northern Germany where agriculture, tourism, tree nurseries and peat extraction compete for land use. Guided by the international teaching team and stakeholders from the region, students designed visions for the development of the Ammerland region. The one-week workshop took place at the DEULA, an institute for training people in agricultural occupations.

Workshop hosts: Leibniz Universität Hannover, Faculty of Architecture and Landscape Sciences, Institute of Open Space Planning and Design, Verena Butt (EMiLA-Coordinator; SUL), Prof. Dr. Martin Prominski (SUL). Students from Germany, France, Spain, Netherlands, USA, Japan, China. Teaching team: Associate Professor Karin Helms, École National de Versailles, Lisa Mackenzie, University of Edinburgh, Prof. Dr. Anja Kucan, University of Ljubljana, Associate Professor Jorg Sieweke, University of Virginia, Professor Li Dihua, Peking University, Professor Luis Maldonado Rius, UPC/ESAB Barcelona, Associate Professor Nobutaka Nagahama, Kobe University, Japan. Visiting critic: Professor Dr. Hille von Seggern (SUL)
A practice of practising

Every call for more creativity also implies the need to find a way to cultivate its development. Our credo in Creating Knowledge is to develop a practice of practising. This stems from many years’ professional and personal experience of practising and the realisation that while evolution shows us that people possess an innate creativity, this can only thrive when constantly practised. In his book You Must Change Your Life, Sloterdijk (2013) portrays humans as practising beings who are “self-forming and self-enhancing” and goes on to elaborate a new definition of anthropology.

In an age characterised by uncertainty, complexity and unpredictability in which the search for creative forward-looking ideas is ever-present, the notion of people as practising beings (Sloterdijk speaks of practising as a mode of existence) seems appealing, even if it is not always called “practising”. Connected with this is, perhaps, a hope that we may be able to alleviate our sense of insecurity and ignorance through the practice of practising. In many disciplines, such as in the arts or sports, the role that practice plays in acquiring a particular skill is well known: genius and talent is good but practice makes perfect. In such contexts, practising has a dual character – it is about training both technical proficiencies and ‘mental’ abilities. This is no different in the context of design, although of course technical design skills such as drawing are especially important for perfecting one’s design skills.

A practice of practising therefore means the continual focused and organised practising of relevant skills and capabilities that go beyond mere technical proficiency. In the design of urban landscapes, for example, this can include how to engage with a space, how to linger phenomenologically without passing judgement. And because this practice requires experience, it is usually helpful to begin with the help of a trainer of sorts.

In Creating Knowledge we postulate a practice, or a culture, of practising that is permanently anchored in our everyday activities. Only by practising on a regular basis will we be able to respond to constantly changing situations and shifting boundary conditions and to engage with the manifold complexity of space. To pursue an integrative approach to designing, we need abilities that lie outside those of our profession and that are not part of our traditional repertoire of professional skills. As such, we focus on practices that help us to be creative, to have the right idea at the right moment in time. To work with intuition, to tap into our emotions, to coordinate our senses, to immerse ourselves bodily in a spatial constellation (Raumgeschehen), to become aware of and work consciously with preconceptions necessitates a practice of practising in which such skills are continually developed, honed and transformed. Through constant practice, a process of understanding is made possible. Sloterdijk (2013) calls this “the making explicit of what was implicit.” In order to design, we must engage with what we are designing, we must learn to love it, to almost lose ourselves in it, to all but immerse ourselves without becoming engulfed by it. That means we need to practise skills that are in essence about cultivating humanity and consequently transcend the traditional boundaries of our own field.

Engaging directly with space

Creating Knowledge subscribes to the premise that designing always entails some form of direct action in the actual context. In a general sense, designing is a form of taking action, but what we mean here is something more real: to immerse oneself in a space, to engage with it, experiment, discover a topic for investigation before actively taking action. The freedom to work so openly and in such diverse ways is made possible by our understanding of space as Raumgeschehen. At the same time, this presents the challenge of choice: which paths, which topics, which constellations shall we choose. Our choices must be guided by the intention to promote good living conditions – by which we mean living conditions that will also be good for our grandchildren (Welzer 2013).
Our design approach aims to result in some form of direct action. The process of deciding which aspect to concentrate on, of formulating a question, outlining the task, looking with a team and local stakeholders for effective and feasible projects and so on is both a pragmatic and a strategic affair. To use the words of the philosopher Cornel West (Manemann et al. 2012), the Creating Knowledge approach can be seen as a form of prophetic pragmatism.

Putting the approach into effect

To encourage broader adoption of this approach, one needs a group. For STUDIO URBANE LANDSCHAFTEN and its members, Creating Knowledge has become a common theoretical framework and basis for working in teaching, research and practice. The Water Atlas and Urban Surfer research projects were published immediately after the symposium in 2008. The STUDIO began to develop rapidly and its members started taking part in new projects, workshops, laboratories, exhibitions, lectures and publications (www.studiourbanelandschaften.de). Specific aspects of the research and design approach were examined and discussed in doctoral theses as part of the STUDIO’s annual international PhD conference. There followed a period of intensive development in which various STUDIO members founded offices or entered into new collaborations while others took up new positions or were appointed to professorships. As a consequence, the members of the STUDIO now work throughout Germany and there is even a new “offshoot” of the STUDIO in Australia. Projects, lectures, workshops, exhibitions and summer schools followed in various countries. To hold the STUDIO group together, it became necessary to find a suitable structure for the group that could be both a think tank and a project platform. The STUDIO is more than a traditional design office but also more coherent than an informal network. After a period of flux and upheaval, a concrete joint project in 2012 – in this case the experimental “Dragnet investigation” (Denkwerkstatt der Montag Stiftungen gAG, Studio Urbane Landschaften 2012) – brought together the various STUDIO members. Once again, the principle of experiencing directly on site formed the basis of the project (p. 38). In retrospect, we have realised that our experience of the STUDIO echoes the typical development pattern of other successful groups.
Interdisciplinarity as a basis for transdisciplinarity

Landscape is much more than simply the focus of a select handful of disciplines. Because the notion of landscape that we describe in Creating Knowledge is so comprehensive and multidisciplinary, it was important to us from the outset to establish connections to and incorporate knowledge from other disciplines in the concept of the book. In the process, landscape has proven itself as a suitable catalyst for discussing large-scale spatial design.

To adequately address contemporary design problems, landscape architecture needs input and knowledge from other disciplines and an open dialogue between the professions. At the same time, landscape architecture has a long tradition in understanding how to deal with complexity, dynamic processes and open systems. The conventional notion of landscape as a natural counterpart – or complement – to the city and the built environment, means that landscape architecture has traditionally been classed as following the “building” disciplines of architecture or urban design. More recently, however, landscape architecture has begun to play an integral part – and sometimes a leading role – in the development of large-scale regional development projects. This would not be possible without interdisciplinary skills. Landscape architecture has extensive experience in working across disciplines, which other spatial design disciplines do not as yet seem fully aware of.

Although Creating Knowledge was conceived as an interdisciplinary book – a third of the essays are by authors from fields that are not typically associated with landscape architecture such as neuroscience, psychology, literature studies or philosophy – it has achieved most widespread recognition in the field of landscape architecture. Could it be that despite widespread calls for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work, the disciplines (would) still prefer to keep themselves to themselves? Our original intention with this book to promote interdisciplinary discourse on the pressing questions of regional development, and on creativity and design, has only been partially successful, although several disciplines are conducting similar debates within their own professions. We need, it seems, to find ways of building bridges between the discourses conducted within the individual disciplines. We have therefore come to the conclusion that a publication with an interdisciplinary approach is not enough.

We can only speculate on the reasons for the reluctance to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue on the central issues of Creating Knowledge but a key reason would seem to be that the book discusses design, creativity and our definition of space in the context of landscape design. This focus is likewise the primary reason why the book has been most well received in the field of landscape architecture. It is almost as if the presence of the word landscape in the title of the book leads readers to believe that the book only concerns the “green” interests of professional landscape architects. We have chosen to focus on landscape not because we wish to address a particular discipline but because we think that landscape is perfectly suited for addressing the dynamic, performative character of (urban) areas from an interdisciplinary perspective and for observing and describing ongoing transformation processes.

The terms landscape and especially urban landscape also explicitly include the built environment (see the Spreehafen and Kirchdorfer Wiesen, p. 31 and 32) as well as a contemporary notion of nature.

Hopes for the new edition

Five years on, continuing demand for Creating Knowledge is such that the first edition is now sold out. The publisher and the authors have therefore decided to bring out a new edition of the book as an e-book. The book was reviewed widely in publications, and conferences, design workshops, and many universities courses have made reference to the approaches featured in the book. Nevertheless, the book is something of a “silent seller” that has spread without making much noise, and we are curious to hear how and where the book has been received,
which aspects of it left an impression and which new directions it has perhaps inspired. We hope that the new edition will succeed in generating an inspiring (and also more vocal) discourse among the spatial design disciplines as well as among sociologists, economists, philosophers, artists, natural scientists, educators and cultural scholars – especially given the plethora of useful material now available in the form of project examples and research studies and their underlying theoretical concepts. We will continue to develop our approach, to initiate transdisciplinary design projects and to create opportunities for stimulating, furthering and intensifying dialogue that transcends typical (disciplinary) boundaries. And because at present so many disciplines in many parts of the world are pursuing similar lines of enquiry, we think the chance of such dialogue looks promising!

Hamburg, Melbourne, Hanover, February 2015,
Hille von Seggern, Julia Werner, Lucia Grosse-Bächle
Note


To seed – After assuming ownership of a site, a self-organised concert was held that set off a powerful spatial choreography. To maintain – Choreographed interventions with local residents: multi-purpose stage, urban gardens, and open-air kitchens. To harvest – Events and movements choreograph the landscape through the reciprocal relationship between space and its inhabitants.

LANDSCAPE CHOREOGRAPHY is an interdisciplinary research project financed by the European Culture Programme. It involves partners from three European cities: Taranto in Italy, Cottbus in Germany and Cluj-Napoca in Romania. Starting from an observation of the spontaneous activities of local residents and the need to re-appropriate wasteland sites, it aims to stimulate a new European culture of public spaces that encompasses socio-anthropological analyses, landscape architecture, and performing and public arts. Citizens are encouraged to create new urban spaces through participatory constructions and art performances with the aim of bringing about long-term change. The project’s five phases – to dig up, to seed, to maintain, to harvest and to continue – correspond to the agricultural cycle. www.landscapechoreography.eu
Reference literature

The symposium was conceived as an exemplary case study application of the Creating Knowledge approach that examined the highly complex urban landscape of the tidal region of the Elbe between the City of Hamburg and the Elbe River Estuary at Cuxhaven on the North Sea coast. Within the space of a few hours, each of the symposium participants developed a pictorial impression of the region as a whole – from the perspective of the landscape – that is both a momentary understanding of the region and a first creative interpretation. Through their dialogue with these pictorial representations, the workshop participants developed initial interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research questions along with ideas for their development.

Organising team: STUDIO URBANE LANDSCHAFTEN – Antje Stokman, Martin Prominski, Börries von Detten, Lucia Grosse-Bächle, Sigrun Langner, Sabine Rabe, Hille von Seggern, Anke Schmidt, Julia Werner

Funding: VolkswagenStiftung
Parallel activities: discussion carousel and design workshop

Parallel activities: conversations, investigations and designs

Presentation of images and research questions at the end of the day

Presentation of the publication *Creating Knowledge*
A selection of the results from the design workshop at the International Symposium “Research by Design. The Case of Urban Landscapes.” at the Leibniz University Hannover, July 2008.

These and 45 other pieces of work explored the enormous complexity of the study area. Many of the works explored ways in which to grasp its complexity, both in its individual constituent parts and as a whole — as an integrative, multi-layered ongoing landscape constellation. The participants tried to capture the overall dynamics of the landscape as a space for nature, for settlement, as an economic region and a productive environment, as a space for transport and as a leisure space for recreation. Some themes arose that had not initially been considered and were elaborated in sketch-form, for example sediment and silt management in the tidal region, connections to the banks and river crossings as well as (large-scale) uses of the shoreline areas. Together, the different contributions led to the development, clarification and qualification of subsequent cooperative STUDIO projects which all contribute to the long-term objective of developing the Elbe River Estuary region into a dynamic, productive and balanced tidal landscape in the context of climate change.

Top left: Disruption as a means of researching the area and its structures
Top second from left: The ferryman.
Product, consumption, transport: How far does the ferryman need to travel from the fruit tree to the table?
Top second from right: Energy flows & river farmers.
Disappearing and re-appearing landscapes.
How do new landscapes develop this way?
Top right: How much sediment is good for us?
How can we utilise the process of sedimentation as a means of effecting new process-driven urban landscapes?
Below: What makes a landscape different?
After a storm tide?
EVOLUTION OF A SPATIAL “CREATING KNOWLEDGE PROCESS”
THE PRINCIPLE OF INVENTION AND LANDING IN THE TIDAL LANDSCAPE OF THE ELBE RIVER ESTUARY

The images illustrate the stages of a Creating Knowledge process:

1) A complex, confusing, multidimensional performative space (Raumgeschehen), whose issues are yet to be revealed and elaborated.
2) A casual, personal interest in sustainable water projects leads to …
3) A better understanding and a variety of practice-teaching-research projects.
4) The projects – strategically chosen – “land” in the Elbe River Estuary region and address questions concerning large-scale development in the area as a whole and in specific sub-regions. Landscape is understood as a process that can integrate climate change, flooding and use of the river areas, simultaneously making wider reference to projects around the world.
5) The process spawns a series of concrete, practical realisable projects …
6) and simultaneously makes reference to and gives rise to renewed consideration of wider issues such as education, energy, regional development, and megacity development. (all images: Hille von Seggern)

Concrete projects within the tidal landscape of the Elbe, as well as in other landscapes, can be seen on the following pages..
The power of the integrative Creating Knowledge process and the specific approach of designing from a landscape perspective lies in its ability to facilitate designing for a region as a whole — respecting its complexity and its overall gestalt — to discern layers, themes, structures or patterns and to uncover and elaborate relevant sub-projects.

Selected members of the STUDIO URBANE LANDSCHAFTEN have worked for several years in various internal and external design teams on the large-scale development of the tidal landscape region between Hamburg and the Elbe River Estuary at Cuxhaven on the North Sea.

The diagram shows an overview of all the design projects involving members of the STUDIO URBANE LANDSCHAFTEN that relate to the development of the tidal landscape region of the Elbe, its spatial and other relationships, different levels of scale and temporal dimensions as well as how they overlap. Some of the projects are explained in more detail on the following pages. The involved STUDIO members are identified with (SUL).
The topological overview of the Water-Land region is both a description of the current situation and a productive (pictorial) point of departure and tool for future developments. The central idea of the Water Atlas is to describe how the island is, was and still is being shaped by the dynamics of the water along with possible ways of dealing with it. The island is therefore examined and described in terms of three shifting hypsometric horizontal layers that show the dynamics of the site above and below the water level. This provides a basis for identifying the creative potential of future development possibilities. Potential directions and ideas are found using a 3×3 scenario approach in the Water Atlas. The projects that arose out of the Water Atlas have developed these ideas in detail as specific designs for concrete situations.

**3x3 SCENARIOS FOR THE WATER–LAND REGION**

From the topographical analysis, three types of spaces along with their respective Water-Land dynamics are identified: the Harbour Land, Regulation Land and Protection Land. For each of these types of space, three scenarios were explored and designed: one by optimizing the existing water-land dynamics, two more by applying the respective dominant dynamics of the two other types of spaces. This produces 3x3 scenarios that are named after the respective dominant water-land dynamic in each case.

The scenario **Reclaimed Land** and the principal of landbuilding in **Harbour Land**: Obsolete harbour docks are selectively filled.

The scenario of **Floodland** and the principle of dynamic change in **Regulation Land**: Instead of building higher dykes, lowering them and making the dyke line higher than the river level is an innovative method. The controlled return flow into the river Elbe when flood subsides is managed together with decentralised rain and sewage water management.

The scenario **Marsh Land** and the principle of dynamic change in the **Protection Land**: The landscape is created by fluctuations between low and high tide. The newly gained marshland serves as a recreational area from which one can observe the specific natural processes of the floodplain and alluvial meadows.