

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION AND FUTURE CONCERNS

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The Dumbarton Oaks roundtable series seeks to facilitate searching discussions of topics of contemporary intellectual and practical concern. Discussion of the arid landscape design case studies was wide-ranging and lively. This chapter briefly summarises the main themes under four broad headings:

1. Landscape technologies and knowledge
2. Community, privacy, and political institutions
3. Cultural dimensions of sustainable landscape design
4. Varieties of “naturalism” in arid regions

At the end of the programme, participants were asked to identify a key theme or concern that they would choose to focus upon in future discussions. Those future concerns are also summarised below.

COMMON DISCUSSION THEMES

Landscape Technologies and Knowledge

Technological aspects of sustainable landscape design figured prominently throughout the discussion. Participants shared ideas about pond systems for wastewater treatment, constructed wetlands, water conservation, plant propagation, and planting technologies. Provocative proposals for artificial turf and plastic trees from 20 years ago were briefly revisited. Some lines of environmental research (e.g., on sand dune stabilisation) were deemed overly technical and insufficiently concerned with social and cultural aspects of design. Some discussants advanced ideas about the roles of modern and high-tech building

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technologies, which led to questions about the continuing influence of modernism and internationalism in environmental design. Others raised questions about the roles of traditional and local knowledge in landscape design, which led to broader questions about the relations between technologies and different systems of knowledge.

Concern about the types of knowledge needed for sustainable landscape design dovetailed closely with discussions of the role of education in sustainable landscape design - both in academic settings like the Center for Regenerative Studies and in public settings. Some lamented the lack of public education about design while others stressed the need for greater education of designers by public groups (e.g., children and communities).

Perhaps the most common view of the group envisioned multiple combinations of landscape technologies and types of knowledge, depending upon the problems and situations involved.

Community, Privacy, and Political Institutions

The debate about public education was paralleled by discussions of community, privacy, and political institutions. The case studies in Iran raised questions about the nature of “community”, “the public”, and “private” life. Although most agreed that different patterns of community sustained different types of landscape design, the nature of those patterns and sustaining relations was not resolved. The children’s park project in Cairo offered a dynamic approach to community involvement and influence in design, and it also raised questions about the role of ritual in community building activities.

Discussion of sand stabilisation projects in Sudan, by contrast, stressed the importance of individual as well as collective responsibility and of individual land tenure security - themes that seem to have increasing salience in international development planning and policy. A re-