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The Research-Practice Ecotone: Models for Authentic Inquiry and Discovery



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Learning Objectives:

- Explore how the pursuit of research can support authentic modes of practice using the ecotone as a metaphor for the boundary zone between research and practice.
- Understand the challenges and opportunities related to pursuing research in professional practice.
- Explore, through the lens of at least two real-world projects and research initiatives, how authentic inquiry can both make real-world impacts and contribute to furthering knowledge.
- Identify several reasons for the landscape architecture discipline's complex relationship between academia and practice.

Outline:

- 1) Introduction (Megan Barnes)
 - Definition of terms and context about research and practice
 - Definition of terms for ecotone metaphor
 - Ecotones are areas where ecological communities, ecosystems, or biotic regions coincide

- Diversity: Species richness, diversity, and abundance tend to peak in ecotones compared to habitat core, which has more homogeneity. Firms and practitioners in this space pursue diverse threads of inquiry that combat sameness.
 - Scale. Ecotones occur at multiple spatial scales. Research and practice overlap at many scales across design practices of different sizes.
 - Innovation + adaptation. Evidence suggests that ecotones may be speciation hotspots where new forms evolve. Populations in ecotones are potentially pre-adapted to changing environments e.g. more resistant to climate change, invasive species etc. Landscape architecture practitioners who brave the “ecotone” are more nimble and adaptable to respond to current problems and concerns and advances in knowledge
 - Authenticity. Grounding in real world; a world without ecotones would be a world of sameness/homogeneous landscapes. Research and practice continuum as supporting authentic practice.
- 2) Research-Practice Ecotone in Practice: Example 1 – Practice/Research (Mikyong Kim)
- Framed by ecotonal concepts outlined above
 - Project-specific presentation focused on examples including Ford’s Michigan Central and research-based design for neurodiversity
 - Reflections on opportunities and challenges of working in this space
- 3) Research-Practice Ecotone in Practice: Example 2 – Research/Practice (Rebecca Popowsky)
- Framed by ecotonal concepts outlined above
 - Research-driven practice: a presentation of OLIN Lab’s work
 - Reflections on opportunities and challenges of working in this space

Resources and Reading List

Mikyong Kim Design: Design Process (Research): <https://myk-d.com/process/>

OLIN Labs: www.olinlabs.com

Landscape Architecture Foundation: www.lafoundation.org

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