

## Landscapes Architecture Practice in a Time of Physical Distancing

Live webinar 03/27/20 at 1pm ET

Question and Answer Session

**Attendee Question:** What other advice do you have for people who are about to graduate with a BLA or MLA amidst this pandemic and recession? What are ways that we can adapt to these changes while our careers are just starting out?

**Rebecca Bradley:** Settle in and accept that being a life learner is a strong skill to get you through disruptions. Create opportunity, do not wait for opportunity. Look for areas of need and fill that void with the skills you have. While you may not immediately have the ability to jump into a traditional landscape architect designer role in an office, there are countless industries and organizations that can use your skill set or that will help you strengthen skills you will need to be a better-rounded landscape architect. You can adapt by not falling into a pessimistic or worrisome state of mind. Study history, study industries outside of landscape architecture. Then apply that to how you want to eventually practice. These are great ways to adapt to the new situation we find ourselves in.

**Attendee Question:** Creating quality of living environment in cultural landscapes in general, how we can provide answers and solutions towards the social perspective?

**Signe Nielsen:** It is conceivable that the "new normal" post-pandemic will focus on wellness, which I equate equally with wellness of nature as well as wellness of people.

**Attendee Question:** How are you addressing equity in the digital world?

**Rebecca Bradley:** We haven't had the ability to fully experiment with this as of yet, but have talked about the dual concern for inequity of access to the digital world and the loss of in-person conversation and reading a room that occurs when we are in the same space with one another. This is definitely a new challenge for the next 3-6 months to monitor and ensure that all the strides made with addressing access and public input don't see a setback because of this current isolated state.

**Attendee Question:** I teach a graduate level studio, I am wondering whether you imagine future landscapes as spaces that facilitate social distancing but allow us to be together?

**Signe Nielsen:** Even before we have been required to "social distance" we found that there are many younger people, in particular, who because of their reliance on smart phones, feel uncomfortable socializing face to face. On the other hand, these folks like to be in the presence of other people, so offering them places to be alone together has been, and will be important moving forward.

**Attendee Question:** Is there any silver lining in terms of engaging stakeholders for those public projects that are continuing? Reach audiences that we haven't before? I'm afraid more people will feel disenfranchised due to social distancing. Are there tools we should consider in a community engagement process?

**Signe Nielsen:** Our projects with public engagement have all been put on hold. While some organizations that have regular meetings continue to carry on, it seems easier when the audience is known and with whom you have had meetings in the past. I think it best not to be making planning/design decisions that impact the general public at this time.

**Attendee Question:** While we continue to work, pivot, and innovate in our work in the wake of COVID-19, for those of us already having to make the tough decisions (furloughing or laying off employees, temporarily closing, etc.) do you have recommendations about how principals should talk to our staff and clients about these decisions?

**Rebecca Bradley:** With empathy. No employer wants to make decisions like this. Transparency and kind communication of tough news is the best way to approach employees. If you have never had to lay someone off or haven't experienced what it feels like to be let go when you know it's situational (not performance-based) then this is new territory. Think about if you had to be told something like this. How would you want to hear those words? Then work to deliver them in that way. All employees are different too, so keep in mind what you know about their sensitivities as you communicate to them.

**Attendee Question:** Even if we have to take other employment to pay bills, do you think it would be worthwhile to also offer to volunteer for firms if they don't have the funding to hire in the short term?

**Rebecca Bradley:** This is an interesting scenario to offer - I am not sure offering free work to profitable firms is advisable.

**Signe Nielsen:** I do not support offering free work. Better that you volunteer for a local cause rather than offer to work for free.

**Attendee Question:** What type of marketing adjustments and strategies are you making? In particular, how are you framing CV-19 to your clients and future clients, and how you're conducting business?

**Signe Nielsen:** We are recognizing that city and state economies in hard-hit states will have to reduce their FY budgets and hence funding for many projects not deemed "essential". We are looking to private developers who continue to be able to borrow money, to rebound the fastest. We are helping NFP clients strategize how to phase projects according to their reduced budgets. In the future we will look to marketing our hospital, wellness and medical office portfolio.

**Attendee Question:** Are we investigating the positive impact of public/open spaces within a city in this CV 19 situation? How we can use this info for LA's to fight the good fight for people as a right to public spaces?

**Signe Nielsen:** There is a lot of conversation out there about how this pandemic could be the great equalizer and rebalance many federal, state and local priorities. We need to keep our eye on that ball to see how we can advocate for equity in public spaces.

**Attendee Question:** A couple ideas of how to give back: 1) Donate blood; 2) Consider teaching at a community college; 3) Reach out to middle and high schools to spread the word of LA as a profession. Offer a Zoom meeting that teachers can maybe share with students. Thank you.

**Rebecca Bradley:** The idea of adding curriculum or lesson ideas for online learning regarding landscape architecture through art, natural sciences, and math course work for any age is a wonderful way to contribute or initiate. A good resource for teachers here: <https://www.nepris.com/home/v4>

**Attendee Question:** Can someone speak to the issue of climate change, biodiversity, and the public's deeper focus and attention to these issues? I see this as opportunity for landscape architects to be educators of the public and to implement change.

**Signe Nielsen:** I read an interesting article that discussed that if we applied the same urgency to climate change as we are to this pandemic, we could make a difference. Maybe there is a lesson in there somewhere. But we need to phrase it in a way that is not, "the sky is falling". People, once we get out of this disaster, may be exhausted from crises rhetoric.

**Attendee Question:** Could this be a good time for Landscape Architects to conduct much needed research?

**Signe Nielsen:** Always a good idea—just need to figure out what the right questions are that are appropriate to what we can do as LA's.

**Attendee Question:** Which type of projects do you anticipate losing due to this slowdown, and how do you anticipate it affecting certain vectors of project leads (e.g., City infrastructure vs. commercial, residential, etc.)?

**Signe Nielsen:** We already have had many public design projects that are infrastructure-related, put on hold as the City re-evaluates its financial situation for the next FY. Some agencies are finishing design projects but not starting new ones. NYC has stopped all "non-essential" construction as well which includes public open space projects.

**Attendee Question:** None of our presenters' workload has slowed?

**Rebecca Bradley:** As of this moment our work pace has slowed but no projects have been called off.

**Attendee Question:** Do firms expect a hiring freeze? Canceled internships?

**Rebecca Bradley:** Certainly there will be implications of hiring freezes - and this will most likely be most impacted by how the firm's city is currently tracking in number of cases and social isolation vs. shelter in place orders and expiration dates on those orders.

**Attendee Question:** Has anyone be able to work with their insurance carrier on Work Disturbance claim?

**Rebecca Bradley:** No, but this article was shared with me on this topic and how some chefs in San Francisco and New Orleans are addressing it. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/food/article/Chef-sues-for-coronavirus-insurance-coverage-over-15159880.php>

**Attendee Question:** A few of my good friends are being let go from firms. I find this to be incredibly callous. My firm is working to figure out how to outsource project tasks to help folks out. I think this is totally against the idea that caring for people are important and critical for a sustainable future. How do we encourage our community to get creative and do better to support people?

**Rebecca Bradley:** I think sharing forums like this for employers and firm owners to have access to others to learn from, find resources, and think about how to make tough decisions is a start. Every business is structured and managed differently. These are times when we all have to be open-minded and empathetic to how the virus and crisis are impacting people, business owners, and families. This is also a time that we will learn lessons of how NOT to do things. My personal goal is to not cast judgement, but instead initiate ways to provide, perform, and encourage for good. We encourage by setting a better example than sharing those stories. Hopefully, they can find their way to people looking for a different way to approach a specific challenge.

**Attendee Question:** I'm an LA professor. Any words of wisdom that I can impart to my students? They are worried about online education this semester, future work, etc.

**Rebecca Bradley:** Share the importance of grasping lifelong learning and how to fully develop their human skills, not just technological skills. The webinar's "Key Takeaways and Additional Resources" document contains links to books, blog posts, and podcasts that may be inspirational for them.

**Attendee Question:** Is there a silver lining in regard to decarbonization - being able to see significant visible impacts of reduced traffic, industry, etc.

**Rebecca Bradley:** Absolutely. It's as if this moment says, "See the human impact on the planet." This is the standstill proof of how much each of us contributes to the overall problem of carbon emissions. Will there be a call to action to uphold some limits on ourselves? Our businesses to be less impactful on the earth? That's a big stretch but it seems like if there was a time to have a response in that way, it would be after an event like this. The term 'global citizen' gets used a lot but this blog post is great for considering what our role as a global citizen really means in the field of Landscape Architecture - <https://seths.blog/2020/01/choosing-to-be-a-citizen/> There are additional links in the "Key Takeaways and Additional Resources" document.

**Attendee Question:** What advice might you have for a younger designer who has just been furloughed or laid off having been through various disruptions in the past?

**Rebecca Bradley:** Each day, drip by drip, do something. Make something. Initiate something. This blog post by Seth Godin as been a good bit of advice to think in my mind as I have to approach the new reality one day at a time. <https://seths.blog/2020/03/today/>

**Attendee Question:** I am an architect, and I feel like they do not seem to have a discourse like this. What do you think are the code implications of COVID? When we consider that occupancy is determinative of almost everything we do in design. Also, how will material choices be affected given how the virus behaves on different materials?

**Rebecca Bradley:** This is an incredible question. Our team was talking about this earlier. In the outdoor settings we create, would we be able to dimension and create spaces for "safe isolation settings" in the future? Or will parks have color coding, sensors and/or find ways to fund park attendants to allow certain

occupancy levels, or areas laid out for safe distance seating so that parks can be remain open as places of respite if this were to become a recurring event? If our classrooms in schools were designed for more outdoor classroom settings, would we be able to keep them open during times like this, with children and teachers meeting in reduced numbers? For architects, absolutely, in some settings materiality may be a big consideration.

**Attendee Question:** Travel is essential for developing projects globally. How do you see travel changing in response to COVID?

**Rebecca Bradley:** I think a moment like this may redirect the calling some LA's have for setting roots in their immediate communities, not just big cities and big firms, but serving the land in a more direct way bio-region by bio-region instead of choosing the model of "I live here but I do all my travel to other places to work." This may be something in our field and others that this virus flips on its head.

**Attendee Question:** Can you speak about the relationship between Covid-19 and the climate crisis? Airplane travel, ecosystem destruction, and overpopulation are important parts of this crisis, and they are not new. So what is new about what we are going through and how does it change our mission?

**Signe Nielsen:** It should be interesting to see whether people who live in highly degraded/polluted environments, that have, at least temporarily, been eased of pollution, traffic congestion, and even seen animal populations return to cities, change their behavior or commitment to combatting climate change in the future.