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DESIGN FOR CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Joan Iverson Nassauer



Cultural sustainability refers to the degree to which cultural norms and values sustain environmental health (Nassauer 1997). While cultural norms often undermine environmental health, social scientists have recognized that strategies that work within cultural norms are essential to preventing the collapse of socio-ecological systems around the world (Ostrom 2007). However, landscapes as activating elements within socio-ecological systems, and even more, design as landscape intervention, have not yet been fully understood as a part of such strategies. I will argue that designers' understanding and respectful appropriation of cultural norms for the experience of landscapes can be a powerful tool for protecting and enhancing ecosystem services by ensuring their cultural sustainability, and that cultural sustainability is a useful criterion for ecological design for human-dominated landscapes, including urban, peri-urban, and rural settings.

Ensuring the cultural sustainability of socio-ecological systems should include familiarity with vernacular landscape aesthetics, which, by definition, are recognized and valued by people in their everyday lives. Vernacular landscapes, which J. B. Jackson (1984)

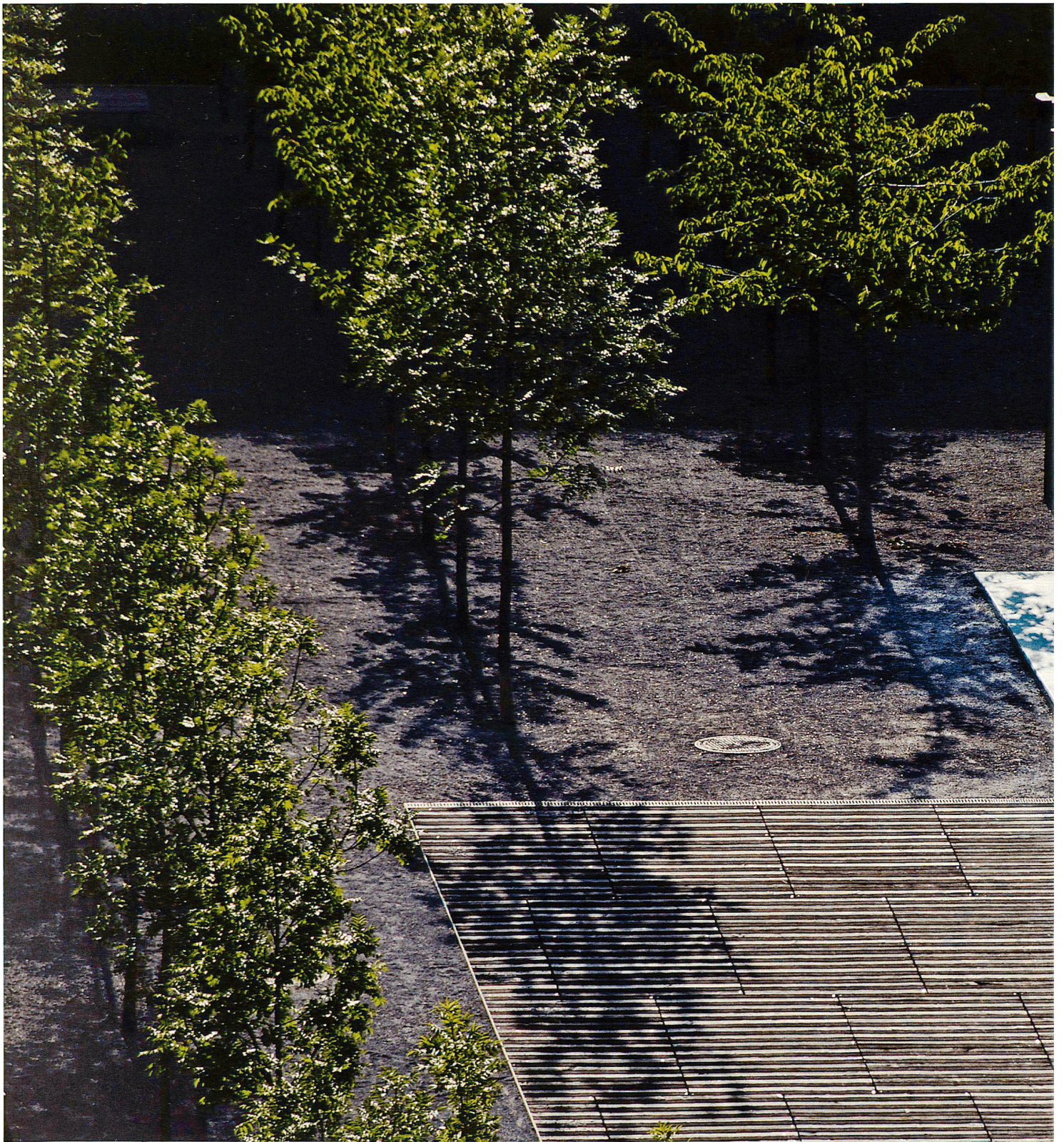
defined as the product of "local custom, pragmatic adaptation to circumstances, and unpredictable mobility", dominate terrestrial ecosystems and have global effects. Decisions about how to change or maintain these landscapes are driven in part by vernacular aesthetics that embody cultural norms. However, vernacular aesthetics sometimes are understood to be antithetical to design innovation. Drawing on examples from design and social science research in rural, peri-urban and urban landscapes, I will describe some vernacular landscape aesthetics that may be useful in ecological design and planning, and I will discuss the relevance of these examples for the evolution of agricultural policy, exurban sprawl, and post-industrial cities. Certain principles for interdisciplinary design intervention may apply across the urban/rural transect. I hope to demonstrate that if design innovation is attentive to cultural sustainability, it can be more relevant for meeting global environmental challenges.

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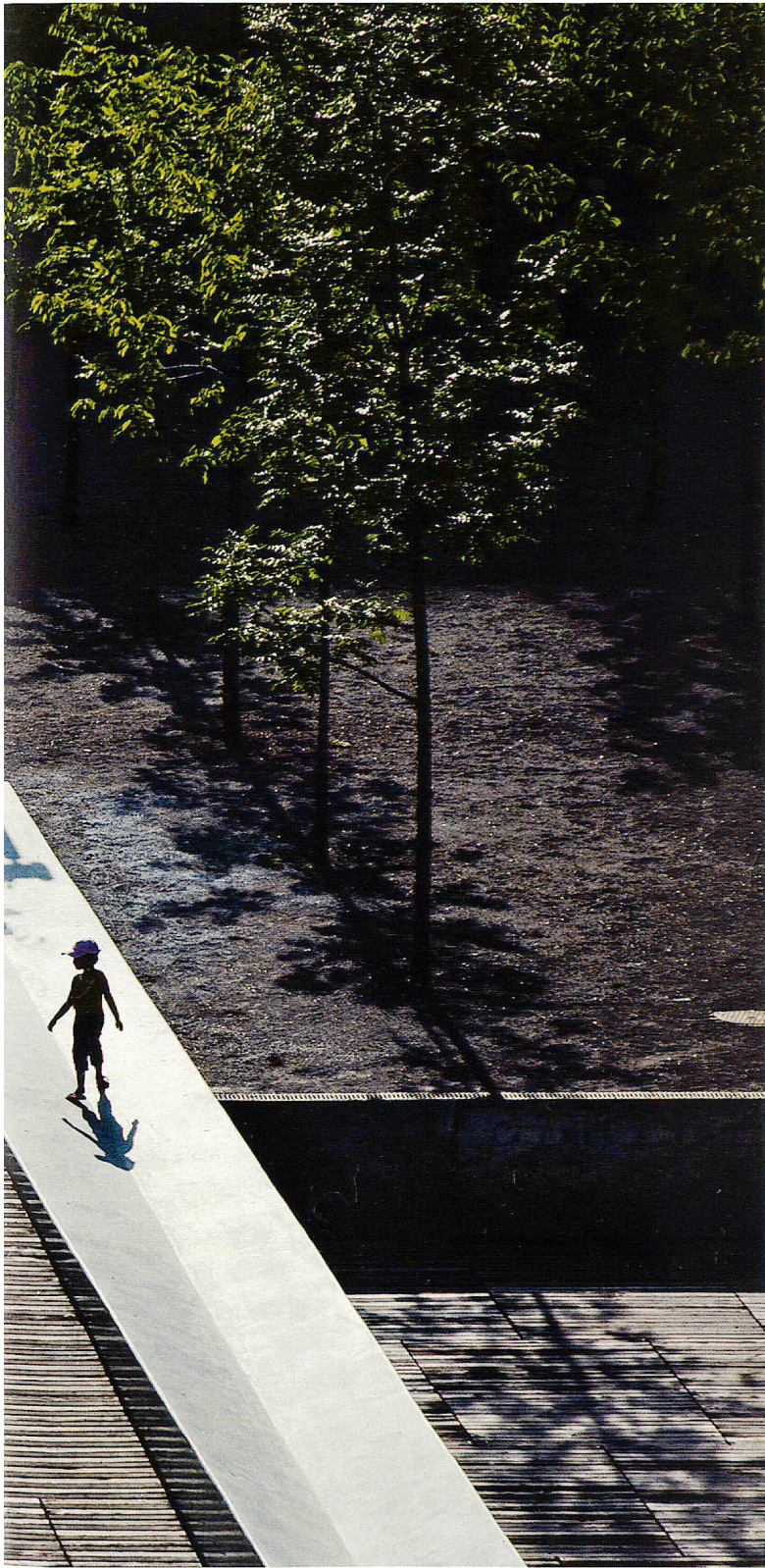
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Phalen Wetland Park, St. Paul, MN, USA, 2000

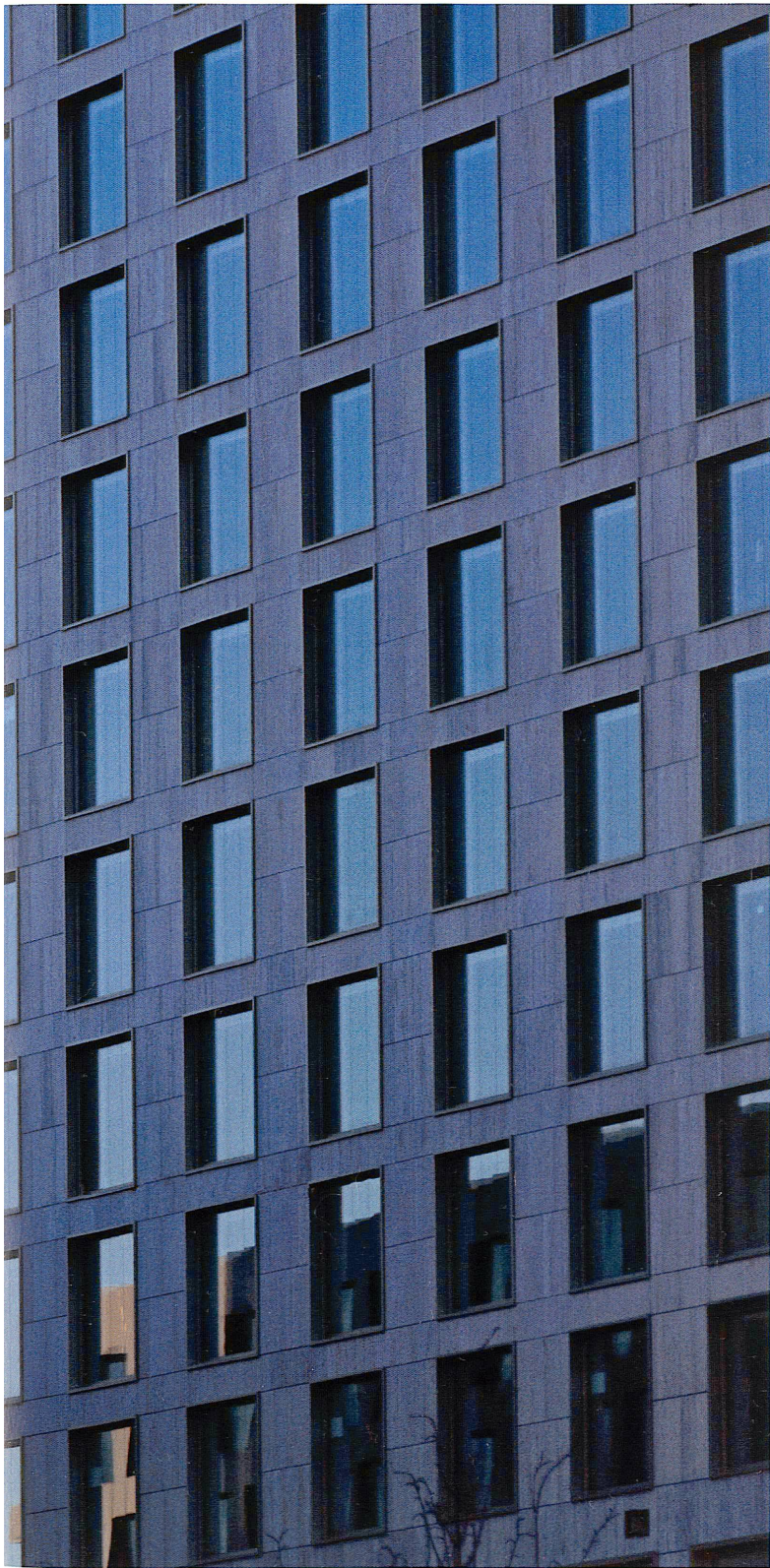


Eke Miedander, Oerliker Park Zurich





Eke Miedander, Zurich West





Eke Miedander, Quaibrücke Zurich





Eke Miedaner, Letzigrund Stadium

