Social Permaculture Design

Luiza Oliveira builds upon P. A. Yeomans' Scale of Permanence to include social aspects that also need to be considered within permaculture designing

The Scale of Permanence (SoP) is one of my favorite tools to develop a permaculture design. It is a great checklist to see if the main layers of the design are covered. For me, this scale really puts in practice what it means to design from Patterns to Details.

The Scale of Permanence, first named as the Keyline Scale of Permanence (KSOP), was originally created in the 1950s by P.A. Yeomans in Australia. It is a system of water management over a site, which incorporates many other aspects of the site and its uses, helping to create a checklist of how to observe one space and start developing a cohesive design within it.[1,2,3]

The list starts from a macro overview with the more rigid structures, to a more specific analysis of the site. Towards the end of the scale are the most flexible structures that are relatively easier to modify.

After Yeomans, this scale was then modified by Bill Mollison,[3] and then Dave Jacke,[4] whose version is the most used nowadays.

Over time, using this scale in various contexts, I realise that the social layers of the design were underestimated in it. Within my practice, I understood that if we don't learn how to name these social layers and better understand the relationships between them and physical layers of the design, we don't see how to work with, tweak or change them.

I decided to add the social layers in parallel to the physical layers, to make them more visible,[5] to encourage people to reclaim these layers when doing their own design too.

FROM MACRO TO MICRO, UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Macro Climates

Geophysical climate is divided in climate zones, where each area is going to present its own specificities, while showing common aspects. Continental Political Climate is a common political background shared by the countries in the same continent that might be experienced in many forms – each country and region presenting its peculiarities, while at the same time they share common threads and elements.

Both geophysical and Continental Political Climate take a lot of energy to be changed and they both need to be considered at a certain stage in the design process.

Site- and Group Specific Aspects

Landform will help to understand the specific resources and limits of the design, its slopes or lack thereof, just as Local Political and Historical Issues will help to understand resources and limits in the design area.

The Element that Connects Everything

Water is an element that comes and goes beyond any design limits. Water carries microorganisms, minerals, and polluters when contaminated. Water when absent or in excess can present many challenges, like Communication Channels in a design.

Properly maintaining the communication channels will support the smooth exchange of information, nurturing the system and its community, within and around the system. Clear and authentic communication systems support the community-building process within the system besides building more support and resilience around the design too.

Set of Rules

Legal issues and Community Governance both share the common set of rules that the system design is going to be ruled by, defining many of its resources and limitations, and the dynamic within it. Having them clear and accessible will support everybody in the system to feel empowered about how to find creative solutions within it.

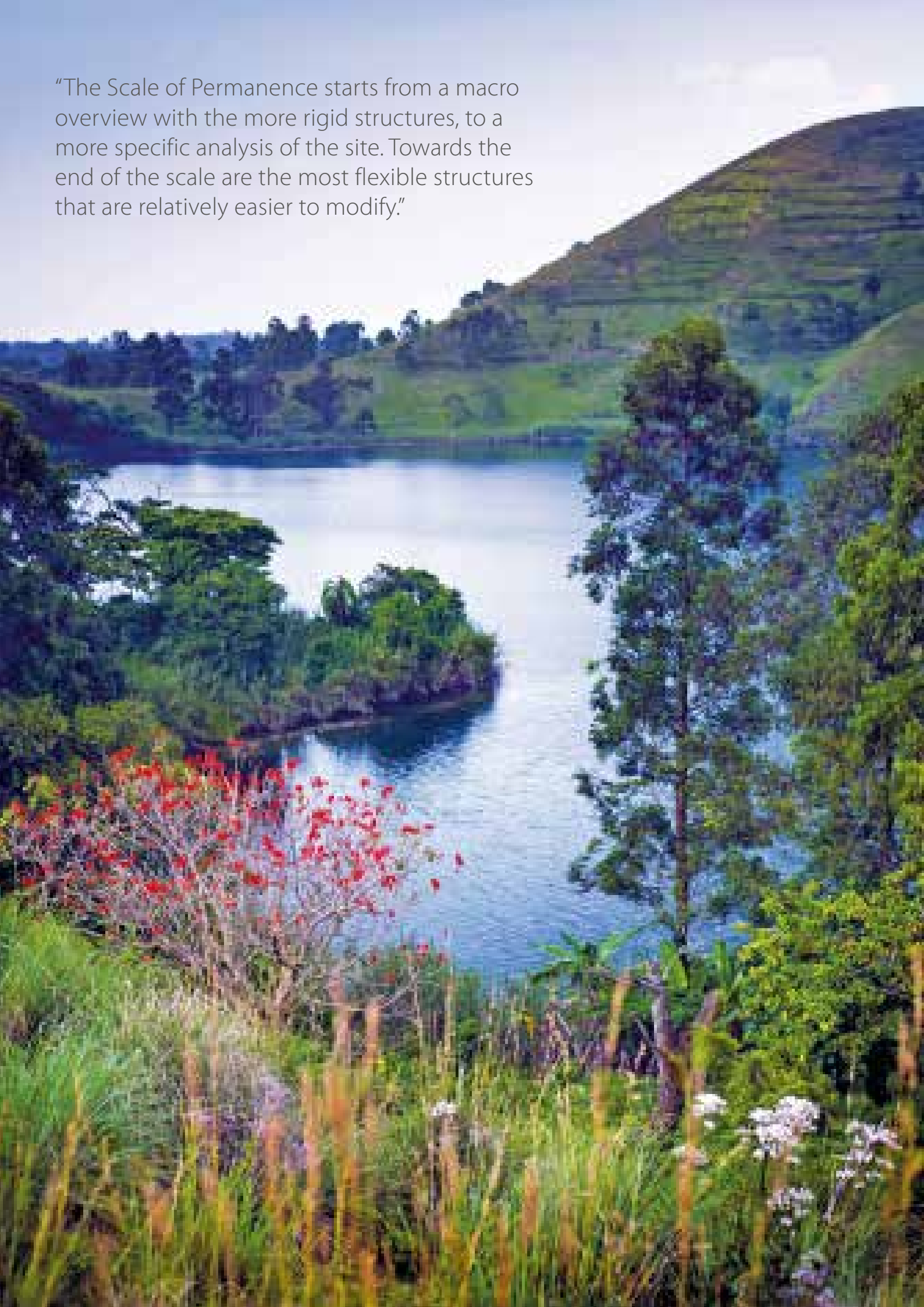
From Access and Circulation to Accessibility, Inclusion and Distribution

Another way of looking at access, beyond its physical aspects, is to think about who has access to this design/system/community, and who is represented by it. How inclusive is it and how does it integrate the social diversity of the area? Thinking about gender issues, anti-racism, anti-LGBT phobias, multi-generational and disability inclusion elements

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SCALE OF PERMANENCE

ADDING SOCIAL LAYERS TO THE SCALE OF PERMANENCE
by Luiza Oliveira

by P. A. Yeomans	*by Bill Mollison*	*by Dave Jacke*	*Looking at its Matrix*	*Social Scale*
Climate	Climate	Climate	The most macro aspect, which takes a lot of energy to change	Continental Political Climate
Land shape	Landform	Landform	Local boundaries, site/group specific	Local Political and Historical Issues
Water	Water supply	Water (in general)	Element that connects the entire system together. Aspect that comes and goes beyond the limits of the design, affecting other systems	Communication Channels
Roads	Farm roads	Legal Issues	Local set of rules, regulations and practices, design/system-specific	Community Governance
Trees	Plant systems	Access and Circulation	Understand who has access to the design and how the resources are distributed throughout the system and beyond it	Accessibility, Inclusion and Distribution
Buildings	Permanent buildings	Vegetations and Wildlife	Acknowledge, support and celebrate the local knowledge and culture	Indigenous Peoples, Culture and Inclusion
Subdivisions	Sub divisional fences	Microclimates	The specific characteristics and needs of the design	Social Microclimates
		Buildings and Infrastructures	Identify and understand how the infrastructures are connected within and beyond the design system	Social Infrastructures
		Zones of use	Identify and understand how the various zones of the design are used and how they interact	Social Activity Zones
		Soil (fertility and management)	Element that nourishes the entire system and is the main indicator of the design's health	Social Compost
		Aesthetics and Experience of the place	How people perceive the design system as an experience	Social Aspects of the Aesthetics and Experience of the Place



"The Scale of Permanence starts from a macro overview with the more rigid structures, to a more specific analysis of the site. Towards the end of the scale are the most flexible structures that are relatively easier to modify."

and policies, to start with. So here, we correlate Access to Accessibility and Inclusivity.

Circulation within a system can also be seen as how energy moves and is distributed within the design and around it. So, we can also imagine that circulation is how energy and resources are distributed around the system and beyond, creating a more regenerative design beyond its limits.

Indigenous People, Culture and Inclusion

The permaculture design process is based and inspired by various indigenous knowledge and practices around the world, but how many permaculture designs name their indigenous inspirations or help to support local indigenous communities as partners and collaborators?

Indigenous people and cultures all around the world face discrimination and challenges, including a denial of their right to control their own development based on their own values, needs and priorities, a lack of political representation and a lack of access to social services. Besides being under-represented or excluded from decision making processes that affect them directly, and too often violently displaced from ancestral land as a result of exploitation of natural resources.[6,7]

As permaculture designers it is our responsibility to identify and not reproduce cultural appropriation, and create a more resilient network around the designs we create to support and collaborate with the people who never stopped caring for the regeneration and biodiversity of the Earth.

Microclimates

Looking at the specific microclimates of a project allows us to take better care of the physical and social needs of the design. Looking at the specifics of the social microclimates of the design, it is possible to be more clear about its missions, its visions and its needs.

Infrastructures

Infrastructures are the facilities that support the framework and function of the system designed. Physical infrastructures are easy to identify, like transportation infrastructure or electric infrastructure, for example. Social infrastructures are equally important to keep the design working in a more regenerative way, like educational infrastructure, conflict transformation infrastructure (or peace infrastructure), for example.

Zones Analysis

To understand the zones of your design is to understand how the activities in it are related, its priorities, how the energy is distributed around them and how to create more synergies between them, physically and socially.

Soil Management – and Social Compost

Social Compost is the capacity to manage and care for the social aspects that emerge in the system design that exceeds its capacity to integrate them at a specific moment.

To use Social Compost means to name tensions and challenges that emerge in the system, giving them time and space to be transformed. Individually it can feel a bit overwhelming, but collectively we can decide to use it as a potential space for learning, transforming and re-designing the system.

To learn how to use Social Compost is to create no social/emotional waste within the system, and learn how to use it for a collective shift, to better integrate it in the learning process of the design. As a rich compost, this element can be used to nurture the transformation of the design to a more regenerative system.

Social Aspects of the Aesthetics and Experience of the Place

To look at the social aspects of the aesthetics and experience of the place is to observe and understand how the social dynamics within the design affect its experience. Does the system reproduce dynamics of oppression or does it support cultural emergence?

The Importance of Adding Parallel Social Layers to the Scale of Permanence

Making these social layers more visible within the Scale of Permanence allows people to understand how to better design their projects and name aspects that are too often forgotten or underestimated. Including these layers in your permaculture design makes your design more dynamic, resilient and regenerative, physically and socially.

Learning how to name, identify and map these social aspects of the permaculture design is to learn how to better integrate complexity into all levels of the design, supporting the community within and around it to benefit from it and be inspired by it.

References

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