Evaluating terminology resources for landscape architecture

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Abstract

Abstract: The present paper approaches problems of exploring the availability of terminology resources for landscape architecture, strategies of improving access to these resources and possibilities of evaluating them. Mainly English resources are envisaged, with focus on Internet resources.

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1. Introduction

In order to analyze and validate terminological resources available in the field of landscape architecture it is necessary, first of all, to deal with the state-of-the-art.

Our starting point refers to the field of landscape architecture itself. It is a domain with a rich tradition especially in the English and French speaking world, as well as Asia throughout the centuries. Traditionally, landscape architecture has always been associated both with gardening and with architectural entities and their surrounding environment. In modern terms, this intermingling, referred to as interdisciplinarity, has become the hallmark of landscape architecture. This feature is reflected in the:

a) education and training of landscape architects;

b) the literature in the field;

c) the expertise of landscape architecture users.

   a) Basic education in landscape architecture – as it results from various curricula – includes subjects such as history of landscape architecture, town planning, civil engineering, and horticulture.

   Recent ‘newcomers’ are, for instance, sustainable landscape management, environmental restoration, international policies and landscapes, visual resource management, digital drawing, human factors in landscape architecture, critical thinking in design, and green roofs.

   b) Literature in the field is of major concern for this paper, as it contains the specific domain terminology; access to terminology, respectively, the resources storing it, as well as use of correct, unambiguous and precise terms, are the key factors of facilitating communication in the professional settings of landscape architecture.

   c) The users of these terminology resources include, among others: specialists in the field, students and teachers in landscape architecture, translators and interpreters, consultants, etc.
Terminology, as well as the production of modern terminology resources boasts of a rather long tradition in the English and French speaking world over the last six-seven decades.

As far as Romania is concerned, after a lower interest in landscape architecture and architecture in general for the last two-three decades, at present there is a growing interest in the revival of landscape architecture. Education and training in the field is done either specifically as studies in landscape architecture, e.g. in Bucharest, Landscape Planning and Management, Faculty of Urban Planning, University of Architecture and Urban Planning, or as part of general training, e.g. in Timișoara, Landscape Planning, Faculty of Horticulture and Forestry, University of Agricultural Sciences, and in Cluj, Elements of Landscape Architecture within Urban Planning, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Technical University.

During the times of lower interest in landscape architecture (especially before 1989), the socio-economic factors were not favourable for publications in the field, and, therefore, Romanian books dedicated to landscape architecture are quite scarce.

At the same time, terminology as a scientific field on its own has been implemented in Romania relatively recently. Therefore, modern terminographic products are still scarce; the same holds true for landscape architecture. The issues of evaluating, validating and assessing terminology quality are also quite new in Romanian terminology and rather unknown for landscape architects.

2. Availability and evaluation of terminological resources for landscape architecture

In order to make best use of terminology resources it is necessary to examine their availability, find out optimal ways to access appropriate resources and establish means of evaluation.

2.1. Availability and classification of terminological resources

The issue of availability is strongly dependent on the above mentioned interdisciplinary character of landscape architecture. At first sight, terminological information is recorded mainly in resources dedicated to landscape architecture (e.g. Curl, 2006); at the same time, one can expect to identify precious terms in terminological resources related to environmental issues, town planning, etc. (e.g. Shoemaker, 2001). Moreover, nowadays there is a tendency to focus on online resources and underestimate the contribution of hardcopy (printed) resources.

At least these two above mentioned reasons justify the need to resort to clearly classified terminological resources ideally based on the key concepts of the domain in question. Knowing the specialism concepts, the landscape architect can become familiar with basic information and documentation principles that he/she can apply to approach any subject field.

For years, there has been a common belief among specialists of various domains that whenever there is a need to discover the meaning of a term or its equivalent in another language, one should resort to dictionaries of the respective domain. Preferably, the dictionary should cover that specific subject field and include the field name in its title.

The science of terminology has developed a wide range of facilities – products and services – to support domain specialists to better access information, respectively, terms. Awareness raising among domain specialists (landscape architects included) of the support terminological resources can bring is decisive in accessing professional knowledge.

Terminology literature contains quite a number of criteria used in classifying resources of terminological documentation. For example, according to Galinski (1999) terminology products comprise different kinds of terminological information for different purposes and different users. Terminological information, in its turn, consists of the following types of data:
- terminological data proper (information on concepts specific to a domain and their representation);
- bibliographic data on different kinds of publications in terminology;
- factual data on institutions, experts, programs, events, activities.
Terminological data proper, representing specialized knowledge at the level of concepts expressed by terms, are available in conventionally published form (hardcopy), as electronic publications or through online information services. It is always important to remember that different users need terminological data of different degrees of complexity for various purposes. If a landscape architect wants to search for terms of his subject field in hardcopy resources, such resources include: books, proceedings of conferences, symposia, seminars, articles, studies, dissertations, theses, dictionaries, glossaries, vocabularies, lexicons, thesauri, encyclopaedias, guidelines, standards, graphic standards, building codes, land use plans, maps, images, indexes and abstracts.

Bibliographic data are not to be underestimated either, as precious information on terms is provided by means of library catalogues and resources, thematic issues of publications, directories, bibliographies of bibliographies, etc.

Factual data lead landscape architects to associations, institutions, experts who can provide information on programs, events, activities linked to their professional interests.

Nowadays, the Internet is considered the major information resource for professionals. The amount and complexity of present-day information requires more than a simple search on the World Wide Web; there is a clear need for systematic search for monolingual, and, most often, bi- or multilingual terminology resources, as well as their evaluation from the relevance viewpoint to meet specific needs, quality, consistency and reliability (cf. Budin & Wright, 2001). The stages of this term mining involve:

- identifying available terminology resources;
- evaluating them for accuracy and credibility;
- selecting accurate and relevant resources;
- checking the accessibility and applicability of such resources.

It is not in our intention to turn the present paper into an exhaustive list of Internet resources; our main aim is to provide know-how in benefiting from terminological means of optimal access and evaluation of landscape architecture resources.

It is, first of all, necessary to mention the existence of a wide variety of search engines (cf. Budin & Wright, 2001):

- generic search engines, aimed at covering the whole WWW, e.g. Google, Raging Search, Altavista, HotBot.
- domain-specific search engines, focusing search on subject fields, e.g. PlantsInBuildings, Garden-visit;
- web-site-specific search engines, allowing the visitor to a site to search within that Web site;
- directories (listing sites by category), e.g. American Society of Landscape Architects, Association of Professional Landscape Designers, European Foundation for Landscape Architects, indexes, meta indexes, e.g. Meta Crawler, meta search engines, e.g. Vivisimo, Dogpile;
- virtual libraries, e.g. Virtuallib;
- portals, acting as gateways to certain areas of the WWW, e.g. BuildingGreen, Google Scholar, CYBERLANDSCAPE. Some of the portals act as gateways to certain areas, providing lookup in a huge number of dictionaries (e.g. OneLook), or including a long list of dictionaries (e.g. YourDictionary).

On the other hand, the presence of portals for terminology activities and practical support should not be underestimated either; we could mention in this respect the Terminology Forum of the University of Vaasa, Finland, and the University of Innsbruck Terminology theory and terminology work Web page.

Any landscape architect may have free access to millions of terms stored in the so-called ‘terminology collections’ – huge term banks, e.g. Wikipedia, Interactive Terminology for Europe (IATE), the EU inter-institutional terminology database containing about 1.5 millions entries, EuroTermBank, with over 1.5 million terms, and TERMIUM, the Government of Canada’s terminology and linguistic data bank.

Any terminologist would advise a landscape architect who needs definitions, explanations, equivalents for terms, etc. to access online resources but also reconfirm information occurring in parallel resources, online or hardcopy.

2.2. Evaluation of terminology resources for landscape architecture

At present, the use of proper terms is no longer seen as merely a matter of language usage, it is always placed in the context of proper communication in various professional settings. Also, special attention is paid to the effects of
incorrect use of terminology such as: negative effects in terms of economic performance, harm and injury in situations involving safety regulations or instructions for use, reduced efficiency at the educational level, increased costs in unsuccessful interlingual transfer of technical documentation, reduced legal protection in contracts and legal documents.

Considering anybody’s possibility of creating a Web site, it is easy to understand the lack of control upon the content quality. Therefore, evaluation is crucial in assessing terminological resources by considering the following elements:

- the correct meaning;
- the correct assignments of terms to concepts;
- the correctness of definitions;
- the coherence and consistency of entries;
- the formal evaluation;
- the syntactical, morphological, orthographical validation.

It is useless to say that a combination of all forms of evaluation bring about quality assurance.

Various attempts have been made to check the value of Web information. For example, for Harris (2000) four factors are decisive in this respect:

- credibility;
- accuracy;
- reasonableness;
- support.

Thus, credibility refers to, first of all, the reputation of a certain author; also, higher credibility is attributed to information provided by organizations and institutions that usually benefit from team work. Similarly, governmental agencies and public entities are considered more reliable as a rule. Trustworthiness of the owner of information is among the first elements to consider. Like in the case of searching in multiple parallel sources, it is highly advisable to confirm items of information in multiple sites. With all due caution, formal aspects may be considered in support of judging Web site information, such as: anonymity, bad linguistic quality, bad translation of web pages, misspellings, timeliness, political, ideological, religious, scientific, cultural, institutional biases or controversies are also a clear warning. Confirmation of results by confronting more sites is quite desirable.

3. Recommendations

As an answer to the above mentioned needs, there are some possible solutions in support of accessing, evaluating and validating terminological resources available for landscape architects:

- short-term terminological training modules;
- collaboration of terminologists, landscape architects, documentalists for the compilation of specific terminological products;
- creation of a national terminological database for Romanian landscape architecture terminology;
- provision of consultancy from professional entities and terminologists;
- collaboration with standardization bodies for the standardization of landscape architecture terms in Romanian.

4. Conclusion

The above lines result in the following:

- there is a clear need to increase awareness of the facilities provided by terminology sources;
- there are several strategies to approach and evaluate these resources;
- there exist various solutions that terminologists can provide, meant to access and evaluate documentation resources properly.
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