

Landscaping of avalanche dams in Fjarðabyggð and Vestfirðir

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ABSTRACT

The landscape design of avalanche protection dams often involves the reshaping of the backyard of the entire community. This means that the nature closest to the village, and sometimes part of the village itself, must be excavated during the construction phase. Wildflower slopes, creeks, small waterfalls and blueberry plots disappear forever.

The landscape architect's role and her main challenge is to work out how to reduce the impact of these drastic changes and how the new and different landscape with the avalanche defence structures can benefit the community.

In Iceland, landscape architects are usually involved in the entire preparation and design process of avalanche projects, often the only design team members to do so. Starting with the appraisal team and the local authorities on initial ideas for the mitigating measures and preparing the Environmental Impact Assessment, making plans and ideas for possible use of the new landscape and creating presentation material for meetings and other introduction of the project to the community. And finally, working with the technical design team on tender documents and making plans for revegetation and planting. This secures continuity of the landscape design all the way from the Environmental Impact Assessment to the finished project.



The local authorities are ambitious about the final touches and understand that good design is important for the acceptance of the modified environment by the inhabitants.

The landscape design of large avalanche dams and waterways close to populated areas is both challenging and exciting, the finishing must be of good quality, safe and beautiful. The changed landscape creates possibilities for new use, the dams make good viewpoints and the tracks laid during construction can be future hiking trails, if this is thought out from the beginning.



Landscape architecture of avalanche protection dams may involve the design of hiking trails, resting places, viewpoints, small parking places and outdoor educational areas. We have also redesigned parts of privet gardens, made room for camping sides, community gardens and a memorial plot.



The inhabitants have started to view “the dams” as part of the environment of the community, using them as recreation areas, showing them to visitors, and even giving them special names based on local history or language traditions.

The presentation will outline the experience encountered in the landscaping at several construction sites of avalanche dams in Iceland over the last 20 years.