

Language, Culture, Landscape

IMLA Module 308 033 International Seminar

Nürtingen-Geislingen University & Weihenstephan-Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences
Part of OLA - the Open Landscape Academy: www.openlandscapeacademy.org

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5 credit hours / Fall-winter term 2026/ [Online via Zoom](#)

Register here: <https://landscape.limequery.com/389335?newtest=Y&lang=en>

Course introduction

How we describe and understand landscape is embedded in identity and culture. Knowing how different cultures understand landscape and everything related to it will only become more important in the increasingly borderless future of our global profession. This course has, by its nature, a global context. But our working definition of “landscape” comes from the European Landscape Convention: it’s any environment that evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings. Let’s start by exploring that one word -- landscape – and its complex web of cultural, physical, geographic and political meanings across borders and time. Here’s a great example:

The word landscape was first recorded in English in 1598. It is a loan from Dutch where it is a term used by painters who were around that time becoming famous for their skills in the landscape genre. The Dutch word landschap means ‘region’ or ‘tract of land’ but in the 16th century obtained artistic significance as ‘a picture depicting a scenery on land’, which meaning then was brought over into English. It took 34 years after the first recorded use of landscape in English until the word was used for natural scenery, the description of the direct landscape as we see it before us. The word for landscape is similar in the Germanic languages: Landschaft in German, landskab in Danish, landskap in Norwegian and Swedish and lânskip in Frisian. The root of the word landscape (land) was translated into the Romance languages as pays. The word was borrowed from the Northern countries to transfer the same double meaning of tract of land and a picture thereof. Thus the words paysage (French), paesaggio (Italian), paisaje (Spanish), paisagem (Portuguese), paisatge (Catalan) and peizaj (Romanian). Basque uses the loan from Spanish paisaia. Also the Finno-ugric languages Finnish (maisema) and Hungarian (tájkép) use the root ‘land’. In Latvian it is ainava and in Lithuanian it is krastovaizdis. In Greek the word is topío referring to locus or site. In Slavic languages such as Polish (krajobraz) and Czech, Slovak and Slovene (krajina) the root for region or territory is used (kraj-). Serbian uses krajolik and the very similar Croatian nowadays prefers krajobraz. An exception is Russian which has both peyzazh and landschaft -- which are loans from French and German...the first word peyzazh refers to the subjective aspect of landscape where the poetical, pictorial and emotional values are emphasised. The second meaning landschaft refers to an objective, technical approach, which makes it possible to change the landscape.

--Durk Gorter, *Linguistic landscape: A new approach to multilingualism*, 2006

Learning mission:

- Perceive differences in understanding of landscape across cultures
- Develop a deeper objective awareness of the concept of landscape in your own culture and how it differs from others
- Create tools for yourself for more effective communication in landscape planning and design in the international context

Expectations, assignments, and schedule:

- We will explore the crossroads of language, culture and landscape using visual tools and essays. This includes building concept maps, which are graphical tools for organizing and representing knowledge.
- The course consists of a single introductory meeting and three presentation meetings. There won't be lectures or a final exam.
- There are three assignments to be submitted by upload to ILIAS and presented during meetings. Please have the assignment ready during the class meetings and share your screen when it's your turn.
- Times shown are in CET. Always be on time for the start of the meeting.
- Presenting your work to the group is part of your grade. If you're unable to attend, contact me to make arrangements or your grade will be incomplete.
- Listening to the contributions of your classmates is essential for the cross-cultural reflection. We expect that you are always actively listening to all presentations of your session.
- Submit assignments on time or give a reason you need extra time.
- Practice your presentation talk including the timing.
- Please communicate with me either through e-mail or ILIAS. Always feel free to contact me with any questions or problems.

Meeting 1: Friday, October 30, 15:00-17:00. Introductory meeting. We'll review the syllabus and answer your questions. We will post the working pairs for Assignment 1 on Moodle and via e-mail later that day. Here's what you'll be doing:

Assignment 1: Landscapes of childhood. What did the landscape of your childhood look like? Where was it? Rural or urban? What do you remember most? What were the built or natural features you remember? Other sensory input, like sounds and smells? Do you remember just one street? Just your backyard? An entire cityscape? A major natural element like a mountain or water? You can choose the scale and scope of what you depict freely, but remember to visualize it as you would have as a child. Creative and fun media are most welcome.

Required output for Assignment 1:

- An original graphic depicting the childhood landscape (can be a single one done together or two separate ones)
- A one-page essay, done collaboratively, explaining the graphics

Due date and submission instructions for assignment 1: Upload graphics and essay to ILIAS as separate files by **Wednesday, November 11.**

Meeting 2, Friday, November 13, 15:00-17:00. Students present Assignment 1. Time limit: 10 minutes for pairs, 15 minutes for trios. We will then have an introduction to assignment 2. Pair assignments are posted later in the day.

Assignment 2: Concept maps and essay. Working in assigned pairs, choose one key landscape-related term in English. It can be the built or the natural environment. Examples: park, street, mountain, agriculture, etc. Create separate concept maps around this term for each of your native languages, providing English translations for both. If you compare the two maps to each other, what are their similarities? Differences? Gaps? What does this word mean to you? What are its linguistic, natural, cultural, historic, mythological, spiritual, social roots? How do they relate to one another? Which are foreign, which are indigenous? What are important related topics, like food, ritual, art, or something else?

Important: Please always include both English and your native language on the concept maps so that everyone can read and understand them easily. Make the maps visually interesting with images -- don't just use words, and I encourage you to do them by hand rather than digital. Keep format and proportions suitable and readable for the Zoom screen. For the essay, consider the differences and offer explanations for them. I advise that you do the essay after you have done the map, as the essay is to be a reflection on it.

Required output for assignment 2:

- Two separate concept maps
- One analytical essay (1-2 pages) done together

Due date and submission instructions for assignment 2: Upload to ILIAS as three files: one PDF for the essay, two JPGs for the two maps by **Wednesday, December 2.**

Meeting 3, Friday, December 4, 15:00-17:00: Students present assignment 2. Time limit: 10 minutes for pairs, 15 for trios. Then we will explain assignment 3.

Assignment 3: The literary landscape. This is an individual assignment. Choose a piece of content with words. It can be fiction or non-fiction, an essay, a book, a poem, song lyrics, a film script -- *anything that you believe defines in words your culture's unique understanding of landscape*. Provide your own translation of it along with your own commentary about why you chose it, and then create a visual that is inspired by it. Depending on how long it is, this can either be a summary translation or a full translation.

Required output for assignment 3:

- The piece of content you have chosen, along with your translation.
- One original visual of your own – a map, sketch, graphic novel, painting, etc. – inspired by the words.

Due date and submission instructions for assignment 3: Upload to ILIAS as two separate files, PDF for the essay and JPG for the graphic, **by Wednesday, Dec. 16.**

Meeting 4, Friday Dec. 18, 15:00-17:00: Students present assignment 3. Time limit: 5 minutes, followed by discussion and closing remarks.

Helpful but not required resources (PDFs on ILIAS unless link is below):

On cross-cultural understandings of landscape:

Basso, Keith. “‘Speaking with names’: Language and landscape among the western Apache.” *Cultural Anthropology*; Vol. 3, Issue 2, pp. 99-130, May 1988.

Bujis, Arjen E., Birgit H.M. Elands, Fransje Langers. “No wilderness for immigrants: Cultural differences in images of nature and landscape preferences.” *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 2009.

Francis, Mark. “Childhood’s Garden: Memory and Meaning of Gardens.” *Children’s Environments*, June 1995.

National Public Radio broadcast about the BBC Shipping Forecast – great example of how sound can form cultural perception of landscape:

<http://www.npr.org/2013/12/16/249722733/the-shipping-forecast-from-britains-seas-into-its-soul>.

On making maps:

You may want to use the software to build out the concept structure, but I hope you’ll do the final maps by hand.

<https://www.mindmapart.com/buildings-and-nature-mind-map-paul-foreman>

<https://resourceartss.blogspot.com/2021/07/art-mind-map-example-2021.html>

Open-source concept mapping software <http://vue.tufts.edu/>

Cmaps tool: <http://cmap.ihmc.us>

Video of presentation about concept mapping:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ROg4mQkvZo>