

Concepts of Landscape, Emergence and Perspectives

Outline

1. Aims and objectives
2. Introduction to landscape theory
3. Areas that people perceive as landscape
4. Value that people give to areas in their surroundings
5. Landscape and Democracy Perspectives
6. Conclusions: Landscape as process

1 Aims and Objectives

By asking the following three questions

1. WHAT are human-centred landscape concepts?
2. WHAT areas do people perceive as landscape?
3. WHAT do people give value to in areas of their surroundings?

this lecture aims to discuss

- nuanced understandings of landscape,
- that are based on **people-centred landscape concepts**,
- developed in relation to **pluralistic societies**,
- in order to appreciate people's **diverse landscape values**

Since different cultures use a great number of different words and concepts to express meanings that are within or linked to the semantic field of 'landscape' (Ingold, 2000; Faurest & Fetzer, 2015), particular attention is paid to cultural diversity, because

- Cultures where no 'landscape' word exist must, particularly from a democratic point of view, not be "colonized" by Western thoughts of and about landscape;
- "Times-Before-Landscape" must be considered, in order to understand and continue developing landscape concepts in culturally sensitive ways, particular when and where the term 'landscape' is newly introduced or adopted (Landscapes exist everywhere, of course, even before the term 'landscape' was or is being introduced).

2 Introduction to landscape theory

Landscape is generally described or defined by (a) the interaction of the human and non-human, and (b) the human perception of the resulting material phenomena, i.e. features and processes (Roe 2013: 401). Human centred landscape theory is based on people's landscape knowledge about both the phenomena and our perception of them (Wylie 2007: 7). Rather than being mere assemblages of physical objects, landscapes are thought of as being "constructed" in people's minds (Kühne, 2013; Gailing & Leibenath, 2015). People's mental landscape constructs relate to (i) general knowledge and (ii) special knowledge, such as (ii.a) group knowledge and (ii.b) expert knowledge. Using a theoretical model all landscape knowledge can be thought of as being contained in a simple triangle. Knowledge about physical and material things are arranged at the base, with natural things at the left and anthropogenic things at the right corners, represented by the letters N and A. At the top corner of the triangle the letter S stands for knowledge about social things (Ipsen, 2012).

A little story might help illustrating this theoretical model. It is the story of the short-tongued bumblebee. A news headline provides the title: "Warming world has shrunk bee tongues"¹. At three mountain peaks in Colorado, USA, evolution ecologists had measured tongue lengths of 170 bumblebees between 1966 and 1980 and again between 2012 and 2014 (Miller-Struttmann et al., 2015). The fascinating finding is that tongues of two bee species have shrunk by almost 25% in their average length and natural selection occurred in a period of just 40 years. The cause is human made. Global warming has spurred these changes. Plant surveys from the 1970s and from just a few years ago revealed that flower density on the mountain slopes has dropped more than 70%. As the total number of flowers declined bees with shorter tongue are better able to suck nectar from more kinds of flowers than long tongued bees. More than 85% of flowering plants — including cultivated plants — require pollinators to reproduce. Declines in bee pollination can threaten the existence of fruit and vegetable growers, and also of other agricultural business.

In the triangular landscape model the wild bees and plants represent N, the natural factors. Global warming and farming represent A, the anthropogenic (i.e. human) factors. In the triangular landscape model small circles placed close to N represent expert knowledge such as ecologists knowing about bee tongues and how to measure them, e.g. by using tiny callipers capable of capturing the roughly three-millimetre difference between short- and long-tongued pollinators. A larger circle represents group knowledge such as knowledge shared by members of Rocky Mountain farming communities where the bee study had been conducted. SOCIAL knowledge includes knowing about farming and other economics, about property rights, about standards applied to conducting scientific studies, etc.

¹ <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2015/09/warming-world-has-shrunk-bee-tongues> (06.03.2016)

3 Areas that people perceive as landscape

According to the European Landscape Convention (ECL) landscape “means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (Council of Europe, 2000). Since perception is the constituting factor and perception is culturally contextualized landscape is a “cultural phenomenon” (Ipsen, 2012). Perception concerns (a) sensual responses to landscape and (b) the way that people attach meaning and value to it. Both are culturally specific (Ingold, 2000).

In Europe, since medieval times, relations between area and people’s perception of it may be described as “polity and the land it governs” (Polity: a politically organized unit). Usually a town forms the core of a ‘Land’ (or ‘Pays’ in French). “Scape” (in landscape) and “age” (in paysage) mean „something like character, constitution, state or shape“ (Olwig, 2002). Interestingly, this early European area-perception relationship has interferences with Thai conceptions of space. No landscape word exists in Thai language. In Thai, a “Baan”, literally village, also a cluster of houses located in the same area refers to a community that includes physical and social surroundings. It also refers to the district of a group of people who have something in common and thus portrays a concept of unity within the community. The example of “Baan” illustrates a uniqueness that constitutes a specific character of place, a sense of belonging and bonding to place (baan rao – our home). “Muang”, by comparison, comprises several Baans. Baan contribute a fundamental concept in the constitution of Muang, both in structure and in character. Muang denotes personal relationships as much as spatial relationships (Jiraprasertkun, 2015).

Similarly, in antiquity, we may find many words used to describe landscape quality while not landscape word as such existed. For example the Latin language has words to describe a pleasant or nice natural environment. Among them we can find references to what constitutes an aesthetical contemplation of people’s surroundings. Examples are “loci amoeni” described by Ovid and Virgil, meaning places full of “amoenitas”, that is pleasantness, agreeableness. Many beautiful and even moving descriptions of landscape qualities may be found in the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and other writings. But in no case we find something that might be similar to the contemporary concepts of landscape. The descriptions of ancient authors concern the environment itself and not its perception. Their description is an objective and not a subjective one. All literature from Antiquity presumes the possibility to describe an environment as it is, in a universal and objective perspective, describing a world where nature and human kind were part and involved in the same history. No distinctions are made between environment and human beings in all historical sources: nature is considered to be the natural ambiente of human kind.

Relations between area and perception changed during Modernity in Europe, but the changes were not the same in all regions. Since Renaissance times artists were concerned, for example through “Landscape Painting” ante-litteram, to capture the state or shape of the land they took in at a glance. A “Landscape” now means also a portrait of a “Land” (or a „Pays“); even though the term, that is ‘landscape’ cannot be found in most of renaissance culture. The portrait was initially painted and later also constructed as idealized landscape by gardeners. All forms of idealized representation were meant to be viewed and admired. At the same time the former territorial connotation was lost in some and maintained in other regions (Antrop, 2013; Drexler, 2013).

Today, when using the notion of landscape, we do not speak about a 'natural' environment of human kind as people would have in Antiquity and the Renaissance. Today we mean people's surroundings as it would be perceived by at least one person. The landscape is therefore not the physical ambient, but people's perception of their surroundings. This distinction between the human being who contemplates surroundings and the environment which is being contemplated is fundamental to modern times; as a concept it did not exist before the late Renaissance. Examples of this distinction can be seen in C. D. Friedrich's paintings: a human being is able to contemplate its environment. He is part of it, but he is somehow separated from it at the same time (through contemplation). Today, the fundamental shift that gave rise to the concept of landscape can be appreciated not only when looking into historic sources, but also when looking at tourism, photography and moving images: all are about people's surroundings and many make landscape their subject. It is not by chance that the epoch when the concept of landscape emerges is the same when systems of work and production also change. 'Landscape' appears when processes of control and domains focusing on nature are undergoing radical changes: in its most flourishing periods the rise of landscape appears coeval with the one of Industrialization.

The contemporary western concepts of landscape have much to do with memory and with nostalgia. A kind of nostalgia can be detected, for example of a close relationship between people and soil and nature, a relationship that some contemporaries understand to be forever disturbed by a plethora of driving forces including urbanization and globalization. Urban and industrial life arrived, in the view of some people, to change drastically the relationship between humankind and the earth. It is because of the feeling of loss that the aesthetic connotation of the word landscape is marked with nostalgia.

For the many reason discussed above the concept of landscape that appeared and developed in Europe is difficult to be translated into languages and understandings of other countries and cultures, and it is also difficult to referred to centuries even in Europe before the late Renaissance.

Substantial cultural differences become apparent, regarding landscape appreciation, when comparing modern European area-perception relationship with, for example, Chinese perception of state or shape of the land. In Chinese landscape painting and garden designing, since about the 10th century (possibly earlier), artists are concerned to convey the inner landscape of the perceiver's heart and mind. Rather than creating something that is to be regarded from a distance, artists strive to invite viewers to participate in the experience of a spiritual journey, to immerse one self, to become one with nature (Bruns & van den Brink, 2012). To this day, Chinese landscape paintings are not descriptions of the visible but immersions into an inner world and, as in Chinese gardens, artists do not apply the central perspective.

The above are only a few examples that help appreciating people's diverse landscape perceptions and values. Looking at these and other examples might help understanding what people perceive and cherish as landscape in increasingly pluralistic and culturally hybrid societies (Bruns et al., 2015).

4 Value that people give to areas in their surroundings

“Areas” are perceived as “Surroundings”. As people, we are the „Self“, centred in our „Surroundings“. An archaic symbol found in many different cultures, the “Circum Point”, symbolizes centrality, such as sun and solar system, city center, etc., and the “Self” in the world. The quintessential technology implementing centrality of the “Self” is the “Selfie”, a photograph of one self in the world, taken with a (hand held) photographic device. Taking a Selfie signifies “appropriation” of things in the area that surrounds us. We are taking ownership of things in our surrounding, for example of roads, fields and public parks, as we are engaging in activities such as walking, farming, constructing buildings, etc.). We appreciate parts of our surroundings for certain qualities, such as the “naturalness” or some “heritage value”. We develop, over time, senses of “familiarity” and “identity” which are linked to memory and social meaning (Schama, 1995).

It is important to appreciate how each landscape is at its origin a sort of “mirror” in which human being and human community can recognize itself. The construction of a landscape corresponds also to a motion of self-representation that is an attempt in self-comprehension. In this context it is interesting to observe how the progress in landscape-construction of children and findings made through paleo-anthropological studies are showing corresponding tendencies. Landscape-construction and self-construction appear to be two faces of a same coin.

According to constructivist theory people giving value to their surroundings is conceived of as a four tier (layer) model (after Kühne, 2013). Starting at bottom of this model and working up towards the top, the complexity of the physical world around us is reduced in perception processes. At the same time, landscape meaning is generated and value attached to material and immaterial phenomena.

- Physical features and processes of nature and human made artefacts are arranged at the bottom of the model. These are the “material things” and phenomena that can be measured, such as soil particles, temperature, plants and (remembering the story above) bee tongues.
- One rung up, on the second tier, all things and phenomena are placed in the model that people take note of in areas that surrounds them. People might, for example, notice a meadow and get impressions of how it is filled with flowers, but will usually not look at every single plant or petal. People might be aware of insects buzzing about, but will usually not appreciate the different lengths of tongues that particular bees use for collecting nectar.
- On the next rung up we arrange everything that people learn from so called “significant others”, such as parents, friends, teachers, etc. Hence, on the third tier, we find social meaning and values that are shared among members of groups, communities, etc. Imparted meaning and values have influence on what people notice in their surroundings. If we think of, for example, children strolling along a flowering meadow, one child might, while pointing at the pretty colors of flowers, ask why they are there. The inquisitive child might get an explanation about flowers appearing during early spring time and about spring flowers signifying seasonal change. Another child might, while pointing at insects flying from one flower to the next, ask why they are doing this. An anxious parent might pull the child back and issue a warning about bees stinging and hurting. Another person might tell the metaphorical story of “the birds and the bees” (when parents explain what sexual relationships are).

- At the top layer, the fourth tier of the model, is where individual landscape experience, values and emotions are placed. As adults we might, for example, have forgotten how we picked flowers once, as a child in a meadow, but we may continue feeling good when spring arrives. We might simply feel good hearing the sounds of a meadow buzzing with bees and not even know why. Strong emotions of feeling at home might be welling up inside when a certain mix of sounds and smells of spring arrives that are reminiscent of our childhood and when we hear, for example, the simple song of a particular bird at a particular place in a way that it brings lumps in our throat each time we hear it.

In summary, people are, in the noticing and interpretation of their surroundings, subject to cultural influences (Mitchell, 2000, 2005; Winchester et al. 2003). Our perceptions are socially and culturally contextualized, including memory (Schama, 1996). While natural sciences are studying landscape generally as phenomena of physical materiality (positivist approach), social sciences conceive of landscapes as social concepts and, for the purpose of describing them, refer to human agency (Giddens, 1986), symbolic representation (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Crang, 1998), and to all kinds of cultural and social practice (Mitchell, 1994; Winchester et al. 2003).

5 Landscape and Democracy Perspectives

Since the coming into force of the ELC we are seeing “a paradigmatic shift in the general conception of landscape, from being a sectorial interest in amenity, to constituting a common arena, in which all activities takes place” (Jørgensen et al. 2015: 1). The landscape we perceive may, like the air we breathe and the water we drink, be considered a common good, something that we all should have equal access to and equal rights to make decisions about. Concepts of landscape and democracy have in common that both are people centred. Democracy is defined as “the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves” (Cambridge Dictionary)².

As explained above, a particular area may be one and the same physical thing, but it carries multiple meanings “that emanate from the values by which people define themselves” (Greider & Garkovich, 1994: 1, 10). For implementing representative or direct democracy participatory and deliberative forms of consensus finding and decision making are practiced. Both empower citizens, such as in referendums, public workshops, etc. Where direct voting on issues such as landscape changing plans and projects is practiced, for example in Switzerland and in citizen engaging in initiatives, usually not all people get involved who are affected by landscape changes, such as children, young adults, people who are not used or able to engage publically, people who are not aware of being affected, and many more. What is needed then, for more inclusive forms of consensus finding and decision making, are approaches that help learning about people’s landscape knowledge and values. A combination and mix of methods is recommended, such as, to name just a few, field interviews, collaborative design experiments, virtual reality, and Social Media Analysis. For example, the “Walking Interview” has been successfully applied even in socially and culturally diverse and hybrid urban landscapes (Evans & Jones, 2011). Visualizations and images of landscape, such as the Selfie example above, can also be used to generate transcultural knowledge that serves as basis for

² <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/democracy> (2016-03-17)

decision and policy making. Pictures can empower people and enable them to voice their observations and opinions despite of language barriers or social marginalization. They can help to elucidate local knowledge and understand individual perceptions. Pictures carry emotional and personal values that easily translate into political power.

The ultimate question is: who is in control? Would giving people the chance to represent their views by, say producing images, and sufficiently help shifting the power of representation and interpretation from politicians and landscape professionals to local citizens (Hou, 2005: 2; Wang & Burris, 1997)? How new pathways for democratic forms of planning and policy making on landscape might be established is the subject of the “Landscape and Democracy” lecture.

6 Conclusions: Landscape as process

According to the European Landscape Convention landscapes are areas “as perceived by people”. Inferences exist between this definition and constructivist landscape theory where landscapes are conceptualized as products of people’s minds. People perceive and “make” landscapes as a result of shared systems of beliefs and ideologies (Biger, 2006). Landscape is thus encoded with meanings which can be interpreted by our minds. Landscapes are, for that very reason, perceived and appreciated differently by insiders and outsiders, for example by locals and tourists, and by people with different cultural backgrounds. Hence, we should “...think of landscape, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process ...” (Mitchell 1994, 1) of people continuously comparing memories of the past and perceptions of the present to their aspirations for a future. Assisting people to be and to become actively involved in the process of “making a landscape” might then be our most prominent professional calling as landscape architects, as urban designers, as spatial planners, and as any other group that claims to have special landscape knowledge.

Sources

- Antrop, M. (2013) A brief history of landscape research. In P. Howard, I. Thompson and E. Waterton (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 12-22
- Bartolomei, L. (2009) 'Pilgrimages and Tourisms Differences and intersections between different ways of land use'. In A. Trono (ed), *Tourism, Religion and Culture: Regional Development through Meaningful Tourism Experiences*, Proceedings of the international conference Lecce, 27 - 30 Ottobre 2009, ATLAS; Sphera spin of University of Salento, Italy
- Biger, G. (2006) 'Introduction: ideology and landscape', in Baker A.R.H. & Biger, G. (eds), *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective; essays on the meanings of some places in the past*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bruns, D, van den Brink, A. (2012). 'Pays' -'Land'-'Yuan Lin'. The power of landscape (architecture) terms. ECLAS 2012 Conference, 19-22 September 2012, Warsaw, Poland. - Warsaw: Warsaw University of Life Sciences-SSGW - p. 447 - 449.
- Bruns, D., Kühne, O., Schönwald, A., Theile, S. (Eds.) (2015). *Landscape Culture - Culturing Landscapes. The Differentiated Construction of Landscapes*. Wiesbaden, Springer VS.
- Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- COE, Council of Europe (2000) *European Landscape Convention, European Treaty Series, no.176*, (Florence Convention). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Crang, M. (1998) The symbolic landscape, *Cultural Geography*, London, Routledge, pp. 27-42
- Drexler, D. (2013). Landscape, Paysage, Landschaft, Táj: The cultural background of landscape perceptions in England, France, Germany and Hungary. *Journal of Ecological Anthropology* 16(1), pages 85-96.
- Evans, J., Jones, P. (2011). The walking interview: Methodology, mobility and place. *Applied Geography*, Volume 31, Issue 2, Pages 849–858
- Faurest, K., Fetzer, E. (2015) A Condition of the Spirit: Mapping Landscape, Language and Culture. In: Bruns, D., Kühne, O., Schönwald, A., Theile, S. (Eds.). *Landscape Culture - Culturing Landscapes. The Differentiated Construction of Landscapes*. Wiesbaden, Springer VS. 237-246
- Gailing, L., Leibenath, M. (2015). The Social Construction of Landscapes: Two Theoretical Lenses and Their Empirical Applications. *Landscape Research*, Volume 40, Issue 2, pages 123-138. DOI: 10.1080/01426397.2013.775233
- Giddens, A. (1986) *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.

- Greider, T., Garkovich, L. (1994) Landscapes: The social construction of nature and the environment. In: *Rural Sociology*, 59(1), 1–24
- Hou, J. (2005) Speaking Images: A Case Study of Photovoice Application in Community Design. Conference Paper
- Ingold, T. (2000) *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London, Routledge
- Jiraprasertkun, C. (2015) Thai Conceptualizations of Space, Place and Landscape. In: Bruns, D., Kühne, O., Schönwald, A., Theile, S. (Eds.). *Landscape Culture - Culturing Landscapes. The Differentiated Construction of Landscapes*. Wiesbaden, Springer VS. 95-110
- Jørgensen, K., Clemetsen, M., Halvorsen Thoren, K., Richardson, T. (2015) *Mainstreaming Landscape through the European Landscape Convention*. London and New York: Routledge
- Kühne, O. (2013) *Landschaftstheorie und Landschaftspraxis*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS
- Miller-Struttman, N. E., Jennifer C. Geib, James D. Franklin, Peter G. Kevan, Ricardo M. Holdo, Diane Ebert-May, Austin M. Lynn, Jessica A. Kettenbach, Elizabeth Hedrick, Candace Galen (2015) Functional mismatch in a bumble bee pollination mutualism under climate change. *Science* 25 Sep 2015: Vol. 349, Issue 6255, pp. 1541-1544. DOI: 10.1126/science.aab0868
- Mitchell, D. (2005) Landscape, in Atkinson, D., Jackson, P., Sibley, D. and Washbourne, N. (eds) *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, London, I.B. Tauris, pp. 49-56.
- Mitchell, D. (2000) *Metaphors to live by: landscapes as systems of social reproduction*, Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction, Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 145-170.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (ed) (1994) *Landscape and Power*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Olwig, K. R. (2002) *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Olwig, K. R. (2013) The law of landscape and the landscape of law: the things that matter. In P. Howard, I. Thompson and E. Waterton (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 253-71
- Raffestin, C. (1984) 'Territoriality. A reflection of the Discrepancies Between the Organization of Space and Individual Liberty', in *International Political Science Review*, Vol 5, n. 2, pp. 139-146
- Raffestin, C. (2005) *Dalla nostalgia del territorio al desiderio di paesaggio*, Firenze: Alinea ed.
- Roe, M. (2013) Animals and Landscape, *Landscape Research*, 38:4, 401-403, DOI: 10.1080/01426397.2013.829971
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2013.829971>

7 April 2016

- Schama, S. (1995) *Landscape and Memory*, London: Fontana Press.
- Wang, C., Burris, M.A. (1997) Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education and Behavior*, 24(3): 369-387.
- Winchester, H., Kong, L., Dunn, K. (2003) *Landscapes. Ways of imagining the world*. Harlow: Prentice Hall. 216 pp.
- Wylie, J. (2007) *Landscape (Key Ideas in Geography)*. London: Routledge.