

Landscape as a research problem

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Landscape is a most versatile and complex topic as is shown in comprehensive studies by the German geographer Gerhard Hard (Hard 1970). He has pinpointed that as follows: "By making use of the word landscape we actually integrate an aggregate of extremely varied phenomena" (Hard 1978, 17). This has nothing to do with the physical nature of the landscape. The key issue here is in that the understanding of what landscape is supposed to be, largely depends on the variety of premises set up as a point of departure by various scientific, technical or art disciplines. Actually, the differences in notions manifest themselves as early as at the beginning of an attempt to define the subject of the discipline or to formulate the problem in the research process.

In terms of the physicality, geography has a very broad and simple understanding of landscape. According to various authors, the landscape is a fragment of Earth's surface as the totality of the natural and man-made phenomena contained in it. In a contemporary encyclopaedic definition, landscape is described as a part of Earth's surface with an image in which biotic and abiotic nature as well as human activity are imprinted with specific features (Brockhaus V, 325). Obviously, such a comprehensive notion offers possibilities for many interpretations as provided, e.g. by the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Equally, a recent American publication, edited by G. F. Thompson, recognises that this topic encompasses a wide range of fundamentally different meanings and approaches (Thompson). Numerous semantic and other studies have shown that such a wide field of notions is due to the fact that we regard the landscape as a real material world on the one hand. On the other, the landscape is also what we see, perceive in it or ascribe to it and in this way it can acquire numerous, considerably differing connotations.

Basically, the conceptual phenomenology of landscape appears at two levels:

1

The landscape as an objectively existing physical reality which is studied for various purposes through inventory, description, analysis, comparisons aiming at identification, measurement, evaluation and classification. These cognitive efforts consistently end up in a better knowledge about the physical properties (static structure) of the landscape or in an enhanced knowledge about ongoing processes in the landscape (dynamic structure of the landscape). This kind of research, mainly at the morphological level, is a primary occupation of geography as a land science.

However, some more disciplines belong in this group, such as ecology (especially landscape ecology), archaeology (including a recent new field - landscape

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archaeology), plant geography etc. Landscape as a spatial entity is an object for research also to applied natural sciences, eminently to agriculture and forestry. Their research interest is oriented toward finding an optimal (or - sustainable - as is often put recently) land-use system in a given landscape.

2.

The areas of research listed above have a common denominator in that they deal exclusively with the physicality of the landscape. On the other hand, ever since early civilisations began to look beyond the sheer physicality of their environment, attempts were constantly made to interpret certain, especially outstanding landscape phenomena as a dwelling place or embodiment of supernatural beings. Many other ideas and images of metaphysical landscapes have originated that had nothing in common with the geography of the terrestrial space. So, in the course of time, more and more spiritual meanings were attributed to landscape, as has been scholarly illuminated by research of Mircea Eliade (Eliade). With the growing typology of associative ideas - all the way down to our own time - the landscape evolved into a conceptual construct, capable of carrying many layers of very different meanings.

The notion of landscape has varied through historical evolution with variations in individual cultures of the Western World. So, for instance, in the Middle Age Germany *Landschaft* would denote a social unit, later a territory including its population. As early as around 1500 in Germany pictorial representations of the land were called *Landschaft*. In the Low Countries, *landschap* becomes a terminus technicus for landscape pictures as produced by Brueghel, Ruisdael and other renaissance painters. This idea has produced a strong impact on the imaging of the physical environment and was transferred to other parts of, also beyond the realm of fine arts. An outstanding example is The Landscape Movement in the 18th Century England which brought forth a new usage for the real world - a landscape as an aesthetic artefact with implanted symbolic meanings.

Thus, the idea of landscape is not used only in referring to the spatial aspects of our environment. More and more there appears a usage of this term for abstract connotations, such as landscape of ideas, political landscape and even landscape of planning. It seems appropriate to mention this just as an illustration to the complexity and even ambiguity of the concept of landscape. In this associative context a number of different notions can be identified. These are represented by topics like Landscape as a symbol (Cosgrove, Kučan, Ogrin), Landscape as a materialised spirit (Schwind), Landscape as a token (Lobsien), Landscape as an aesthetic subject, Landscape as nature, Landscape as heritage, Landscape as a substitute religion, Landscape as a point of view and others. A similar typology of meanings was amply elaborated by Meinig who has presented 10 different notions of landscape, the majority of which do not refer to physical properties (Meinig).

Several planning disciplines are also interested in landscape properties. At the broadest level, the regional planning requires information about possibilities for the development of cities, communal, traffic and energy infrastructures, for agriculture and forestry as well as for land and natural conservation. Town planning needs information about feasibility for further urban growth and also for the protection of the city heritage, as well in the sphere of the built environment as in the natural/landscape environment.

Landscape architecture, as an activity dealing with planning and design of landscapes, is not only interested in, but it even depends on many information from social, socio-psychological, terrestrial, natural and other areas. These information, primarily relevant for planning, are often not available or are not compatible with planning objectives. In addition, there is a constant need to improve the existing or develop new methodological approaches and techniques

in analysis and planning. All this urges the profession to carry out relevant, specifically oriented research. On the other hand, landscape design is based on an intuitive, heuristic approach. Nevertheless, also here a substantial amount of scientific knowledge is required for ecologically and functionally more adequate design achievements which is a precondition for their positive social reception.

The papers published in this issue are actually reports on research carried out along this line. The majority of the papers are dealing with issues pertinent to landscape planning which is an area of landscape architecture where the rational approach with quantitative methods is very common. Explorations in landscape typology, research in landscape symbolism and above all issues in planning methodology prevail. Of particular currency is a paper that deals with the societal perception of transformation processes in the countryside as a basis for the search of new models for future cultural landscapes. In the area of design there is a relevant paper about residential qualities of the house and garden, understood as a living entity; the research has been implemented with methods from environmental psychology and is one of the few in this field, so far.

With this thematic issue, devoted to landscape architecture, the Scientific Survey opens a new field of publishing in the important area of environmental research.

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