sciendo
10.2478/jlecol-2022-0003 Journal of Landscape Ecology (2022), **Vol: 15 / No. 1.**

AN ENGLISH LIFE IN LANDSCAPE: WATCHING LANDSCAPE RESEARCH OVER HALF A CENTURY

PETER HOWARD

Visiting Professor of Cultural Landscape, Bournemouth University, Orchard House, Exeter Road, Winkleigh, EX19 8HW, UK
Corresponding author email: peterjhoward27@gmail.com

Received: 20th January 2022, **Accepted:** 25th February 2022

ABSTRACT

From a largely autobiographical perspective, the development of the European concept of landscape is considered through the last fifty years, focussed on the gap between the environmental idea which has progressively become more ecological, so the landscape idea has become much more cultural. When they work together, there can be outstanding results, as demonstrated in the European Landscape Award. However, what seemed to be an unsteady progress towards a common understanding of cultural landscape can still receive dramatic shocks. The Pandemic is one such shock which has just begun to be absorbed into landscape thinking, and now the cosy concept of national and regional landscape identities is shattered yet again, by invasion, immigration and displacement.

Keyword: Landscape Ecology, UK, History, Landscape Research Group

INTRODUCTION

My life in landscape began in 1965, as an undergraduate geographer at the University of Newcastle, in a seminar on Applied Geography led by Professor John House, and a discussion about whether 'environment' included humans. We concluded that 'environment plus humans equals landscape'. The main understanding of landscape then came from the historian W.G. Hoskins's *The Making of the English Landscape*, very much supported by lectures by and fieldwork with Gunther Conzen looking at urban morphology. This gave me a firm basis that you could use place as a text to read and interpret, and also that landscape was not merely rural but included townscape, and also coastal places. Landscape was routinely conceived as a palimpsest with the traces of its history influencing its appearance today.

Landscape issues and Environmental issues are sufficiently dissimilar to create considerable debates about policy as was shown me by Mario Agnoletti in the Apennines in Tuscany. The abandonment of the mountain slopes as the population headed down to the coastal towns and hospitality trade, has largely been welcomed by the ecological community as the forest cover extends ever more widely. But the increase in biodiversity is balanced by a decrease in landscape diversity as the patches become corridors become full cover, and landscape units, fields, vineyards, farmsteads, are lost.

That historical theme of landscape studies is represented most clearly, in the UK, by the journal *Landscape History*. It tends to be divided between those whose interest is in reconstructing the landscapes of the past, sometimes including literal reconstruction, and dominated by archaeologists, and those whose primary interest is explaining the landscape of the present by reference to its history, often reading it as did Hoskins, and dominated by Historical Geographers. This historical interest in the built environment was joined by similar studies within the more natural environment with Oliver Rackham as its champion.

Fig. 1: River Exe, Devon. A river through a bridge is an artistic favourite

THE 'OTHER LANDSCAPE'

My close academic connection with landscape really dates from my appointment in 1974 to a post at Exeter College of Art, where a far-sighted principal decided that, as most art students came to Exeter to paint, photograph or otherwise get involved with the landscape, then they should appoint a geographer. Here I bumped into a totally different stream of landscape thinking, where the key book was not Hoskins (who actually lived almost beside the college) but Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art*. In this mode 'landscape' was a picture, of a rural scene, largely devoid of people except as staffage, though the need for staffage to give life to a landscape is itself interesting. Understanding the history of the landscape was less important for those whose interest was its depiction, or those developing the landscape with sculpture. The sculptor overlapped more and more closely with the landscape architects, concerned with the making of tomorrow's places. The long extent of landscape study, which

began for me then, has been underlain by the constant drumbeat, accelerating over time, of the to the planet, first with concerns of overpopulation, then to the wildlife and climate change.

Fig 2: Nove Hrady, Czechia. A Nature Reserve fencing out people and wildlife.

The bridge between these two traditions was given to me by Jay Appleton with his work on *The Experience of Landscape*, 1975. Art students immediately engaged with his basic question, 'What kinds of landscape do I like and why?', and his theoretical discussion of the area stood alongside the empirical experiments coming from the environmental psychologists, such as Stephen and Rachel Kaplan. Appleton also was the Chair of Landscape Research Group which he had founded in 1967, and the history of which has been written by Steven Shuttleworth, and also occurs in Mark Antrop's brief history of landscape research. LRG was designed for people like me. I was one of many lonely voices, in many institutions, different subject areas, specifically interested in landscape, and aware that others, in other disciplines, were doing work we should know about. Jay would draw five or six circles, each representing a different discipline of study; where they overlapped was landscape.

LRG provided a round table for discussions on landscape, not only publishing a journal (*Landscape Research*) but organising conferences. We were certainly not the only round table, but we did accept that landscape was future as well as past, planner as well as conservationist, and that the new ideas might come from any direction, any discipline, any country. No one discipline had a monopoly of the chair. My discovery of the LRG led directly to the conference on Landscape and Painting in Exeter in 1983, one of a long series of conferences bringing in different disciplines, listening, for example, to an art historian, an agronomist and a sociologist discussing one of Constable's landscape paintings.

APPLETON EXPANDED

Appleton's Prospect Refuge theory, and the work of the Kaplans, not only influenced my work with art students but was a mainspring of research in the 1980s and 1990s, very largely by way of refutation. Appleton's comparatively theoretical ideas hinted at a universal basis to the perception of landscape by all humans, a universal wish to see without being seen. A very large part of landscape research then flowed designed to demonstrate that landscape perception was much more complicated.

This direction of work was clear in 1984 at a Landscape Research Group meeting at Downes in Essex resulting in a book edited by Edmund Penning Rowsell and David Lowenthal with major essays by Jay Appleton, and J.B. Jackson which now reads like an agenda for the end of the century's research, notably in the debate to what extent Appleton's and Kaplan's proposed universal values of landscape appreciation were largely overwhelmed by other factors and especially on the distinction between popular / vernacular landscapes and those from an approved political aesthetic position. As so much landscape research became fixated on landscape viewed as Heritage, the concept of Authorised Heritage Discourse, coined by Laurajane Smith, and frequently shortened to AHD, was certainly accompanied by a like Authorised Landscape Discourse, based primarily on aesthetics, and most recent research has nibbled away at this edifice and thoroughly undermined it.

Fig. 3: Chulmleigh, Devon. Many landscapes make no sense without the activity

The key concept of the end of the century was the 'stakeholder' as we learned to understand the wide gamut of people (and sometimes of fauna as well) with an interest and

a feeling of ownership over a particular place, An early work which recognised that landscape meant different things to different people was that by Don Meinig, who listed ten versions of the same scene. Those distinctions were dominated by professional views, stressing that the farmer and the painter were in effect perceiving quite different places while standing shoulder to shoulder, and the various professional attitudes to landscape have certainly formed one vital thread in the research from the 1980s. While I edited *Landscape Research* most submitted papers in some way underlined these differences.

Insideness

One major thread which has remained of critical significance was the different perceptions of place by insider and outsider, following Ted Relph's categorisations of these attitudes as early as 1976. At a basic level this distinction is immediately recognised by anyone who has moved into a new district and spoken to locals, whose view of place is based on people and events rather than architecture and form. It has taken many years, however, for the assumption that Kantian detachment is the 'correct' way of evaluating landscape quality, to which other views should be subordinate to be seriously dented. The management of protected landscapes does now widely accept that the local view is different and of significance, but it has been a long battle. There are still major debates about balancing the local perception with the wider, often the academic view, as when people discover that the word 'national' in National Park or 'universal' in a World Heritage Site, can result in locals feeling dispossessed.

Power

Another major difference was that ascribed to class, education, and power politics. Here perhaps the central figure was Denis Cosgrove, showing how huge areas of rural landscape (and even more urban places) are designed for the display of power and wealth. While this may be abundantly clear in major landscape making of the past, such as Venice townscapes, or Versailles, the development of the English landscape was largely designed to veil the display of wealth behind a code which could easily be read by the cognoscenti. Roderick Floud's recent work makes it clear that garden design has always been primarily to display wealth. Not only were most landscapes designed by the powerful, it is those landscapes most clearly associated with wealth and power which are now protected as heritage. The UK does not set out to protect for the future the semi-detached estates of the 1930s however nationalistically idiosyncratic they may be, but the palaces of privilege. Many of the Protected Landscapes were also those of the wealthy, and remain so. There has been some work describing the landscape preferences of the 'other' populations, whether the poor, the immigrant, most obviously by J.B. Jackson and the work on actor-network theory by Burgess and this has come much more clearly to the fore in the current century.

National Identity

Another major area of work focussed on national differences in landscape perception. In England landscape has been a very powerful vehicle of national identity and quite distinct to Scottishness. David Matless drew detailed attention to this, especially in the 1930s, but other countries also have powerful national landscape preferences, many of which found their voice in art and music, leading to studies of landscape in music (not least national anthems), in photography and even in postage stamps. Nationalist movements were often supported by landscape icons, such as Ma Vlast in Czechia or Vestlandet in Norway. Landscape thus becomes a political issue, in a world dominated by media, film, advertising. Wartime recruitment posters used landscape imagery to attract a national unity. This use of landscape

to support the identity of an area is not limited to nation states, of course, and there have been many pieces of research, and many more tourism-based projects, concerned with bolstering, perhaps even inventing, landscape identities in most other countries.

Fig. 4: Landscape is often political. Londonderry, Northern Ireland, a street within the Protestant Unionist quarter

Other factors

The flood of work looking at Nation and Power and Insideness and their influence on perception perhaps underscores the comparative lack of work on other factors shaping landscape perception. There has certainly been work on religion (Sinha) but surprisingly little on gender differences, although in the field of landscape architecture this is a regular subject of debate. People's perceptions obviously alter also with age, and there was a steady flow of articles looking at children's relationship with landscape, not least from those engaged in the design of play parks. There were rather fewer research projects geared to the needs of the elderly, but this has developed more strongly in the new century, not least in Scandinavia.

Time

Another major scholar, also a chair of LRG, was David Lowenthal, a historical geographer whose major work *The Past is a Foreign Country* clearly put much landscape research alongside the development of ideas of heritage more broadly. The *International Journal of Heritage Studies* was founded in 1991. In a sense this work also fits into a similar category of expanding Appleton's universalist ideas by examining different attitudes to landscape

throughout history. Putting the concept of landscape into a wider historical context has also been at the heart of work by Kenneth Olwig, and also, within the specific context of the landscapes preferred by painters, by my own work. With a geographer's love of maps and statistics, I was able to show that artists' choice of places, and of landscape subjects has changed dramatically over time. We have to abandon any idea that landscape attractiveness is common to all people and all times. Dismal swamps have become precious wetlands. Ecologists seeking to analyse the popularity of landscapes could do worse than visit the local art galleries.

Fig. 5: Moscheto Ridge, Tuscany. Forest spreading to obliterate landscape parcels

ABSENCES

Through the 1980s, as I scanned all the articles submitted to the journal, there were some notable absences from the research agenda. The urban landscape was largely ignored, except for some major city park developments. There were scarcely any papers on the suburban landscape (where most people lived) although the concept of edge cities and edge landscapes began to attract some attention. The new commercial surrounds to our cities were often regarded not as new landscapes to be studied, and improved but as land lost to the countryside, and only to be bewailed and ignored.

Future Landscape

With the focus being firmly rural, most landscape papers became concerned with the problem of conserving the past rather than designing the future. With the drumbeat of climate

change still largely ignored by the media and the population, there is no surprise that the emphasis was to save what we can. The study of the actuality of past landscapes such as that by Hoskins, was replaced by considerations of how best to conserve the landscape for a wide variety of purposes, including the conservation of great gardens. The threats imposed by the changes in agricultural practice took centre stage. The balance was firmly on the past rather than the future, and this was true with attitudes to natural landscape as well as cultural, where rewilding is a similar attempt to go into the future by returning to the past.

Fig. 6: Craster, Northumberland. Landscape is not only visual. The smell of smoking herrings covers a wide area

Ecological Landscape

As the disciplines involved in 'landscape' grew, there was one notable absentee at the desk of the editor, from ecologists. While artists' concept of landscape (as a picture) was easily combined with the view of actual physical landscape as a perceived scene, the same word deployed by ecologists, where it tended to have a scalar form, landscape being larger than a habitat, did not fit so comfortably. The ecologist, like the aesthetician, was tempted to imagine that there was an objectively demonstrable measure of landscape quality. Only in this century has it become obvious that the intellectual colonisation of different pieces of land by different disciplines (some places in the intellectual ambit of archaeologists, others of ecologists, others of sociologists) has not been helpful. The result of ecology and aesthetics binding together has been particularly significant, as people accept that a rich habitat is to be seen as attractive, not a mess. Modern garden design favours wildlife; our wetlands have

become popular with visitors. Even the agonised debate over wind turbines in the 2000s already seems to have lost its sting. Ecological need has trumped aesthetic tradition.

Perceptual media

One feature of the primacy of aesthetics, was that landscape was regarded as an almost exclusively visual phenomenon, but the definition of landscape in the European Landscape Convention mentions 'perception' more broadly, and the development of an experiential understanding of landscape meaning has inevitably led to studies in the feel, the sound, the smell, and the taste of landscape. The latter emerges very clearly from the French inclusion of '*terroir'* within their concern for '*paysage'*. Even at the meeting at Downes, participants were expected to go out on their own and report on their experience of the place. One of the most exciting elements was the different reports of the same place based partly but far from solely on the perceiver's discipline. For those who study landscape pictures, the difference between media is the subject of much research. Different landscapes suit black and white or colour; oil painters, engravers and watercolourists depict different scenes. In a commercial world of television, film and colour magazine, as John and Margaret Gold have shown, landscapes change meaning. Harry Potter has created new perceptions even more than William Wordsworth.

LRG GOES INTERNATIONAL

There had been members of LRG from other countries since the beginning, mainly from the USA and other Anglophone countries, although the American and British concepts of landscape were very different. However, in 1992 LRG held a joint conference on Landscapes in a New Europe at Blois, jointly with the French publication *Paysage + Aménagement*. This conference proposed a convention for landscape in Europe, and much time was spent in the construction of what became the European Landscape Convention or Florence Convention. The definition decided for that convention raised many issues but also offered an agreed basis for understanding across the many disciplines and countries involved. Even the words for 'landscape' carried different connotations; *paysage* is more rural, *landschaft* is more an action, *landskap* is more pictorial, *krajina* has implications of ownership. Nevertheless the Convention agreed a definition of 'an area, natural or cultural, as perceived by people.' So a landscape is a real place, not merely a picture, although that might represent a real place. A landscape may be urban or rural, terrestrial or maritime. A landscape has to be perceived by people, so perhaps places never visited have no landscape. As people are critical so participation of all the stakeholders in landscape changes is a requirement with its own problems. The perception may not be merely visual but all the other senses may be involved. Landscapes might be very small, or enormous, and landscapes fit within landscapes like Russian dolls.

The amount of international discovery and collaboration within Europe expanded dramatically. As the International Officer for LRG I was closely involved with the French ministry programme led by Yves Luginbūhl with his concept of landscape as the *mise-en-scene* of life, and with Bas Pedroli from the Netherlands and the organisation of UNISCAPE, academics supporting the Convention. LRG also made close links with the new Nordic Landscape Research Network, and advised on the formation of a German network, Arbeitskreis Landschaftsforschung. My personal interests led to a close connection with the Czech Republic and the landscape and ecology work at Břeclav and at České Budějovice. Ideas and policy strategies were indeed rapidly transferred across the continent to academics and to policy makers.

LANDSCAPE AFTER THE MILLENNIUM

Landscape Research in this century has taken the European Landscape Convention as its basis and most articles now submitted are connected with areas thrown up from the questions that it raises.

Landscape Quality

The dominance of aesthetics as the critical issue in making judgement of landscape qualities has been not only challenged but toppled. This is less true in the field of designed landscapes, although that distinction itself no longer holds with any certainty. Other values of landscape, most obviously the ecological, are no longer considered inferior even in such settings as the private garden. Indeed aesthetics has adapted to incorporate those values, with gardens being judged on their wildlife value, and painters, filmmakers and tourists taking to flat wetlands, once the province of the birdwatcher. Tidiness, once a sure mark of human control, has largely been abandoned. One major arena of debate has been the development of the wind farm and solar array landscapes; increasing demands for sustainable power generation have led to a degree of public tolerance of these structures which would have been surprising twenty years ago. A particular issue is ephemerality, which has long been accepted as often a determinant feature in landscape quality, whether of day/night, of season, of weather or tide, but little studied, and frequently does not fit with a programme of landscape designation, which has been the primary tool of landscape management.

Protected Landscapes

The number and type of protected landscapes has grown prodigiously, at many levels from the World Heritage Site to the Local Nature Reserve, and with many purposes each protected by a guardian academic discipline, from ecology via archaeology to town planning. These purposes have tended to coalesce as Nature Reserves develop concerns for public health and exercise, National Parks develop social policies, or archaeological sites produce strategies for butterfly conservation.

While national governments are still busy spreading the concept of protected landscapes, often looking to specific proportions of the land to be protected in a variety of ways, the whole concept is under serious threat from two directions. One of these is ecological. Although it has long been understood that separate patches of wildlife refuge need to be protected by corridors, only fairly recently has it become obvious that such policies are still not working. Goulson reports how wildlife has continued to decline in German nature reserves carefully protected (and recorded) for more than fifty years. Ecologically it is clear that protecting specific areas as ‘jewels’ while ignoring the remainder, will not work; protected areas need to be exemplars not isolated. Some UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, such as Northern Devon, are following this policy drawing their limits by very large catchment areas, often ignoring administrative boundaries.

The second threat to protected areas is social. Perhaps the first law of Heritage might be ‘If you give something value, then the wealthy will buy it’. Protected areas designated to support local farming systems end up being purchased by incomers, either as second homes or for retirement. As it becomes easier to work from home, the problem gets clearer, whether in Dartmoor National Park or at Holašovice in South Bohemia. British banks produce lists of the price premium for each national park in England. So nowadays protection intended to cover small-scale farming now covers the landscapes of the wealthy. Landscape specialists, with the social purposes of the ELC in mind, are likely to come to different judgements from ecologists. Indeed there is a danger of dividing countries into a smaller part, owned by the

wealthy and protected by the ecological conservator, and the larger part left for the poor and for development.

Fig. 7: Topsham Devon. A bird-watchers' landscape

Phenomenology

Another shift of emphasis running firmly across the millennium has been phenomenological and experiential. Landscape was to be experienced, and was largely a qualitative and personal experience. In a school of art, this was manifested by a major rise in Land Art, less the placing of an object in the landscape, as a manipulation of the landscape itself. The artist was to be part of the landscape, not merely a detached observer. Even where the painter still depicted a scene it would now probably be a landscape being worked, not merely observed. Landscape now became the place where life was lived, activities took place, perhaps best articulated by John Wylie. The aesthetic was not to be regarded as a particularly privileged way of perceiving landscape. Such a view of landscape, now well-entrenched, questions the detachment of much academic writing; even the conventional use of the third person becomes a barrier to understanding different experiences. This emphasis on the landscape as a place to be occupied, and in which activities take place, also brings very clearly into focus that perception is not only visual, but that sound, smell, touch and even taste are critical to the landscape experience.

Participation

The Convention threw up another challenge which has absorbed a great deal of attention, as it demands that landscape decisions should be participatory. All those disciplines which have been the intellectual colonising powers, deciding the policies, designations and protections, have been challenged to include the views not only of local people (where the

social class may have changed dramatically) but of all those who feel an attachment to a particular place, though that may be vicarious, acquired through literature or art. The use of citizen science projects by ecologists, or communal digs by archaeologists, is certainly one of the responses to this need for participation but there is much work to be done, well started by Michael Jones. The World Heritage Convention, for example, now frequently has to modify its plans to adapt to the needs of local people whose interest may conflict with those of experts, and the criteria for the European Landscape Award include public participation as a requirement. The involvement of anthropologists with their techniques of participant observation has been very positive, but as with developing experiential techniques often defy the regular criteria of scientists.

AND THEN CAME COVID

Intellectual research, largely academic, on Landscape, suddenly took on dramatic importance during the Pandemic. During the first, sharpest, UK lockdown, even many city parks were closed, the National Parks were swamped, but stoutly defended by the new wealthy inhabitants. Houses with gardens saw a rapid growth in prices. In the UK there had been a precursor in 2001 when a major outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease had closed the countryside, and the economic shock was drastic. Most landscape scholars were personally well aware how important was access to nature for people's health and well-being, but now the social and medical sciences came to the rescue and began to show the benefits of landscape in unequivocal terms.

The Pandemic has therefore been a major factor in a very significant shift in landscape thinking. If the reaction to climate change had been to cause landscape thinking to discover what of the past cultural or natural landscape should be saved, the pandemic acting as an echo to the ever greater drumbeat of climate, has turned to look at the future. The need for adaptation and for public health drives landscape research to design all future places for all people and all nature.

One example of the significance of landscape for health purposes has been very clear in deciding the current European Landscape Award, which has been given to the Astino Valley project at Bergamo, among a very strong field. The criteria for the award remain the same, but two arms are much strengthened. The demand for participation is now heavily underscored by health issues, while the demand for sustainability now looks even more closely at carbon emissions, energy sources and transport. Projects producing beautiful landscapes to be admired by a few tourists flying in score less highly than previously. Some projects do still straddle across between the European Landscape Award and the Natura 2000 award but the absolute requirement for the involvement of, and benefit to, local people is the defining feature of the ELC award.

Landscape has therefore become the sum of everybody's experiences of place, as perhaps Appleton had recognised back in 1975 with *The Experience of Landscape*. For me it takes me back to that seminar in 1965 where we insisted that landscape was about people as much as place.

Fig. 8: Holašovice, Czechia. A World Heritage Site. Designation is a process of new facilities and new ownership

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

Antrop, M. (2019). A Brief History of Landscape Research in Howard, In: P., Thompson, I., Waterton E. and Atha, M. (2019) *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies,* Second Edition, London, Routledge, pp. 1 – 15.

Appleton, J. (1975). *The Experience of Landscape*, London, John Wiley.

Clark, K., (1949). *Landscape into Art,* London, John Murray.

Conzen, M.R.G., (1969). *Alnwick, Northumberland; a study in town-plan analysis*, London, Institute of British Geographers.

Cosgrove, D. (1984). *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, London, Croom Helm.

Floud, R. (2019). *An Economic History of the English Garden*, London, Penguin.

Goulson, D. (2021). *Silent Earth: averting the insect apocalypse*, London, Penguin.

Howard, P. (1991). *Landscapes; the artists' vision*, London, Routledge.

Howard, P., Thompson, I., Waterton E. and Atha, M. (2019). *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies,* Second Edition, London, Routledge.

Hoskins, W.G., (1955). *The Making of the English Landscape*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Jackson, J.B. (1986). *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, New Haven Yale UP.

Jones, M. (2007). The European Landscape Convention and the Question of Public

Participation' *Landscape Research*, Vol.32 (5).

Kaplan, S. and Kaplan, R., (eds) (1978). *Humanscape: environments for people*, Belmont CA, Duxbury.

Lowenthal, D. (1985). *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP.

Luginbühl, Y. (2012). *La Mise en Scène du Monde*, Paris, CNRS.

Luginbühl, Y., Howard P. and Terrasson D. (eds) (2015). *Landscape and Sustainable Development: the French perspective*, Farnham, Ashgate

Matless, D. (1998). *Landscape and Englishness*, London, Reaktion

Meinig, D.W. (ed) (1979). *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes; geographical essays*, oxford Oxford UP.

Olwig, K.R., (2002). *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic*, Madison, Uni of Wisconsin Press.

Penning-Rowsell, E.C. and Lowenthal, D., (1986). *Landscape Meanings and Values*, London, Allen & Unwin.

Rackham, Oliver, (1986). *The History of the Countryside*, London, J.M.Dent.

Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*, London, Pion.

Shuttleworth, S. (2017). Fifty years of Landscape Research Group, *Landscape Research*, Vol 42, pp.S5-S64.

Wylie, J. (2007). *Landscape*, London, Routledge.

Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*, London, Routledge.