



CHANGING THE GAME: THE CASE OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

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The views expressed herein are personal and not necessarily the approved views of the International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes (ISCCL) as a whole. We are working on them.

There are a number of thoughtful analyses on how the World Heritage Convention has progressed, notably by Jukka Jokelhito, and by Christina Cameron and Mechtild Rössler. They explain the principles on which the World Heritage Convention was based. It concerns the common heritage of the world's most significant places – we would all be poorer if we lost them.

This paper concerns the ideas we adopt in our dealings on landscape. The subject of cultural landscapes has been a latecomer in World Heritage terms. It is not a closely defined subject like, say, ecclesiastical architecture, and it has connections to many other subjects. Adjacent to many, it is defined by none. It still occupies a slightly detached column at the edge of the world heritage spreadsheet.

It is not this paper's intention to claim that the cultural landscapes community has been the initiator of fundamental ideas, but it has been touched by many from within and outside the World Heritage system, and in some cases has been instrumental in bringing about fresh thinking and change.

1. Where do values reside?

The idea that values are objective qualities of objects themselves was once generally believed. Value was intrinsic in them – and we humans merely observed it.

This thought was accompanied by somewhat fixed ideas on the nature of value. There was the Monuments culture of ICOMOS, and the wilderness fixation within IUCN. World Heritage was either cultural or natural, and the nomination process effectively led to polarisation along these lines. Aesthetics and other values were not dealt with adequately. Habits die hard. One has seen unfortunate refusals by one lobby to see or appreciate the values of others – so, for example, divisions arose over the English Lake District, and the natural granite columns under the monasteries at Meteora, in Greece, were dismissed as unexceptional.

However philosophers, including Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* of 1979, were beginning to express scepticism of the grand narratives (Progress, Enlightenment, Marxism) that had been associated with modernity with their assertions of some greater and universal truths. As these grand narratives unravelled, thinkers had to find new bases for their theories, and in the 1980s the answer was generally to start again from human cultures. Afterwards this reassessment was called ‘the cultural turn’.

As part of the new mindset it was proposed that values are not intrinsic to objects: they are determined by us humans. That means that each generation debates and decides for itself on values and the rules of conservation appropriate to its time. It is a fiction that we conserve for future generations: we do it for our own reasons, and future generations will decide for themselves.

Another implication is that values are not the preserve of experts, and can be as diverse as the interest groups that have a concern for the object of appreciation. The sustained debate within World Heritage circles on Cultural Landscapes from 1981 to 1992 was a clear symptom of the desire to be more open to other kinds of value. That was followed by work on a Global Strategy, 1994-2000, which brought in a thematic approach, and the broadening of the kinds of properties that could be eligible for inscription.

New types of eligible property could emerge at any time. In the field of cultural landscapes the recognition of public parks has arisen fairly suddenly and strongly. They are not simply patches of green in our cities suitable for recreation, but they were an important response to the inhumane living conditions created during the industrial revolution, being associated with the birth of modern public health and adding much to the social cohesion of our cities. Paseo del Prado and Buen Retiro (Madrid) were inscribed last year, Central Park (New York City) is on the US tentative list, and Birkenhead Park (near Liverpool) is being considered for the UK list.

2. How to enshrine dogma

Perhaps some remember the time when conservation rules were fixed, supposedly for all time, by charters. They were certainly principled, but this mindset made them inflexible when change may have been desirable.

Historic gardens come within the scope of cultural landscapes, and in fact the original name for the International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes was the 'International Committee on Historic Gardens and Sites'. The chairman during the 1970s thought it a great achievement to have devised a charter, ratified in 1981 as the 'Florence Charter'.

At that time, cultural landscapes, whether created through economic activity or designed for spiritual or aesthetic reasons, could not be recognised through the World Heritage Criteria. A palace landscape could be included as an adjunct to its associated monument, but could not be inscribed in its own right.

A meeting at La Petite Pierre, in the French Vosges, in 1992 was to look into this question. Mechthild Rössler helped organise it, and this author was one of those present as an invited expert. The outcome was significant changes to the criteria to permit gardens and landscapes to be inscribed in their own right. Afterwards a senior member of ICOMOS phoned me to congratulate the group for its charter-busting work. Indeed cultural landscapes required no charter, and has relied successfully on successive versions of the Operational Guidelines now for 30 years. Meanwhile the Florence Charter is considered merely an historic document.

So the day of the charter, solidified for eternity, is gone, allowing for a slightly more flexible approach, characterised by guidelines, that can be modified if ideas change or if the wording needs improvement.

3. The natural

Cultural landscapes are neither wilderness nor monuments, but it was recognised that the interaction between nature and humans, and the resulting productions, could produce something awe-inspiring and of world-wide value.

Land becomes landscape when human culture modifies the natural. The landscape may then be modified again and maybe again and again by human agency. A term sometimes used was 'the humanized landscape', another term was 'the historic landscape', but in the end the German and North American term 'cultural landscape' was adopted. It has also been argued that since 'landscape' is always a human perception, the term 'cultural landscape' is an oxymoron, and all one needs to say is 'landscape'.

Note that it is all too easy to enter into debate on definitions. But we must ask: what are the most helpful terms to describe this interaction between natural and cultural? Is nature comparable to culture? The opposite? Complementary? A symbiosis?

Perhaps much of the confusion arises through what philosophers of mind call a 'category mistake'. This occurs when people attempt to compare basically dissimilar entities, attributing qualities belonging to one ontological category to a different category.

'Nature' consists of naturally occurring systems, or ecosystems. It holds no values, beliefs or ethics. 'Culture' refers to certain values and appreciations that humans and their groups hold. We have developed consciousness, morality and the ability to think in abstract concepts. These might well, of course, include values, beliefs and ethics respecting 'nature', including the Australian aboriginal associations with land, European aesthetics and the ideology of Ecocentrism. But culture is in a different category of being from nature.

Nature and culture are entangled, certainly, but they are different even if not separable. They are philosophically but not practically distinguishable. This understanding allows the respective definitions of nature and culture to co-exist but avoids the perils of dualism of which more hereafter.

ICOMOS and IUCN are seen as equal contributors to the world heritage system, and it is presumed by many that the number of cultural sites and natural sites should roughly balance. This is treating the politics of the matter, but not addressing the philosophy or the values themselves. There is always a mix of values. Deleting the distinction between natural and cultural criteria in 1998 helped to make this point. But nature and culture are not equivalent, and it is not a competition. Vis-a-vis recognition and protection they should be treated appropriately, not the same.

4. Change and management

The ICOMOS approach to cultural landscapes from the 1980s was not to 'fix' them but to conserve their essential qualities within a dynamic evolving framework. This theme of protection through attending to the dynamics that brought about a landscape, and not just its structures and materials, has always been central to the conservation of cultural landscapes.

In 1994 two documents said much the same. The more famous one was the Nara document on authenticity. It softened the understanding of authenticity as concerning materials only, and pointed out that authenticity could be seen in several ways. A much-quoted example was the replacement of timbers in Japanese temples. Over time much of the original structure would have been replaced, but the temple, seen as a structure, remained authentic. This is very relevant to gardens and landscapes, in which designs may be perpetuated with accuracy through repairs, but the original materials (trees, hedges, gravel) cannot be kept indefinitely.

The other document was an ISCCL one from a meeting hosted by the Polish government at its manor of Czerniejewo. The guidelines that emerged acknowledged the inevitability of replacement and change. In landscapes of all kinds, it was the dynamical system of culture, organisation and technology operating on natural materials that created the design or layout, and it would maintain it indefinitely unless disrupted. A much later ISCCL document, 'Principles Concerning Rural Landscapes as Heritage' adopted in Delhi in 2017, came to the same conclusion and placed great emphasis on sustainable management.

The Operational Guidelines in 1992 encouraged the recognition of the input of local people. It was the development of the cultural landscapes category that brought into focus the involvement of communities and traditional management systems. An example would be rice terraces, which require considerable organisation and effort to keep them operating. Transhumance systems, with spring and autumn migrations, have been a traditional way of life for hundreds if not thousands of years. In New Zealand, Tongariro's traditional management had been formalised into Maori songs.

This recognition of customary law and management opened the Convention to regions and traditional cultures particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

5. More-than-human, or NatureCulture

From the seventeenth century European theorists debated the respective roles of Nature and Art, those two great creative forces. A distinction was therefore implied, and the dualism was formalised by René Descartes with his 'ghost in the machine' argument, but hopefully we can agree that creating an artificial divide one from the other is perverse. There are not two separate worlds – that inside the head and that outside – but one joined-up world, even if there are difficulties and confusions in how humans, with their unique evolved set of skills, interact with the much older systems that we call ecological.

One way of thinking that is distinctly twenty-first century has been 'enactivism', which argues that cognition arises through a dynamic interaction between an organism and its environment. There are various understandings of this concept, the differences being how broadly the organism is defined – clearly it is wider than the brain, but is it useful to think in terms of the human body, the immediate biological environment, or those mechanisms that humans use to store knowledge about the world such as the recital of sagas, books and computers?

The term 'more-than-human' is sometimes used to express much the same idea – that the human depends not just on a magnificent brain, but has a variety of support systems which include fellow humans and other species including farm animals and microorganisms with which it co-produces to meet all its needs. This 'post-anthropocentric' perspective shares common features with those of many 'first peoples' whose down-to-earth traditions are given new respect by others.

In a similar vein, the word 'NatureCulture', interchangeable with 'CultureNature', has been adopted amongst some who seek a closer embrace between the two. It represents the complexity of our heritage, which includes biological resources, genes, landscapes, geological diversity, cultural places and practices, and traditional knowledge systems. It acknowledges both that humans shape their surroundings and that nature acts on humans in many different ways to produce the world's diverse landscapes.

Indeed cultural landscapes specialists are prominent in this recent movement, starting at the ICOMOS General Assembly in Delhi in 2017 with the document called the 'Guide to the Culture Nature Journey'.

6. First peoples

The adjectives 'native', 'Aborigine' or 'indigenous' imply that the people in question are part of the original fauna of a newly 'discovered' region, which of course is only the view of the discoverer. Hence 'first peoples' is preferable, a term that would include the Maoris of New Zealand, the tribes of North America, the tribes and clans that have inhabited Australia for 60,000 years, and other long-established peoples.

In general, the feeling amongst such people for their landscapes is characterised by respect and collaboration, whilst their cultures embody the lived experience of many nomadic generations, such as how to reconnect with its resources. Their lifestyles are in sharp contrast to most Western ones that are settled and exploit resources to the full, often to destruction.

A more anthropological concept of cultural heritage emerged in the 1990s, exemplified by the recognition of a range of cultural landscapes forming the connecting tissue between culture and nature. In several regions the opportunity was taken to designate 'associative' landscapes. These represented significant ideas, giving rise to a rich tradition of creation myth, fable, song, and customs, even though the physical footprint on the ground would be slight to an outsider's eyes. It was accepted that they would have traditional forms of management.

The first 'associative' landscape to join the World Heritage List was Tongariro in 1994. Although that mountain reached this important accolade, there are innumerable other landscapes around the world which attract feelings of ownership and identity - or at any rate would give rise to a sense of loss if desecrated. Sometimes this takes the form of a religious precinct, sometimes a nation defines its 'national' landscape, sometimes they have strong aesthetic appeal.

It should be added that the traditional landscape question is overlain by contentious issues around colonial settlement. The first peoples regard themselves as the dispossessed and ask who rightfully owns the land. They point to past injustices and governments respond with talk of reconciliation.

The anthropologists take an interest in the customs and physical manifestations of ways of life, and this gave rise to UNESCO'S 'Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage' (2003). It specifically recognizes 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith'. As yet there is not much interchange with the cultural landscapes specialists, though the overlap is obvious.

7. Climate change

The cultural landscapes approach may have much to contribute to the question of climate change. The study of cultural landscapes has to date overwhelmingly been concerned with historic examples, and not the conceptualisation of the landscapes of the future. However the discipline teaches an understanding of the dynamics of landscapes, and the lessons of the past could be applied to the landscapes of the future.

The background is that with reforestation, re-wilding, renewable power generation, carbon capture, different forms of farming, and other changes already being proposed, we face a period of rapid landscape change. However these initiatives are not well coordinated. Who is going to ensure that we create landscapes that we will actually enjoy living in? That, surely, is a role for the landscape specialist.

8. Networking

A most valuable aspect of the World Heritage Convention, many would say, is not the resolution of all these philosophical and practical issues, but that by existing at all it provides a forum for experts from many disciplines and many countries to meet, get to know each other, and understand different approaches. This is very clear from the recent history of the ISCCL. In the 2000s the committee was adjusting to taking on all types of cultural landscape, not just gardens, and activity was much curtailed. Around 2010, though, activity picked up, and there are now over 300 members of the committee, and the various activities provides the opportunity for experts from around the world to meet in person or (more recently) online. Members have enjoyed many fruitful discussions over the years; may they long continue.

To summarise the above: some ideas arise, some need alteration, and some need to be discarded. We move on. What implications does this have for the general case? Cultural landscapes cannot speak for all interests involved in the World Heritage system, of course, but fifty years on, and two generations later, maybe it is time to re-evaluate the foundational ideas behind the World Heritage Convention. Perhaps it is time to be as bold as our predecessors fifty years ago.