

4 THE LANDSCAPE: PLACES AND CULTURES

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A TURNAROUND PHASE

The landscape has entered a turnaround phase, the importance of which is due not only to the expanding conceptual discussions and empirical investigations, *i.e.* to science, but also to the circumstance that praxis has become increasingly sensitive to considerations of the protection of landscape as an essential subject. Hence, for the first time in history, science and policy have converged on this subject, thus giving unprecedented impetus to the search for conceptual approaches that may help implement and optimise praxis.

The rise of landscape in the scientific interests has been due to an unexpected increase of this subject in the geographical discourse, and to its inclusion in the menu of an ample spectrum of disciplines, from architecture to cultural anthropology and sociology, from geology to philosophy, from ecology to agriculture science. As a consequence, an ample range of disciplinary interests have solidified, which have given rise to various approaches, playing different, and sometimes diverging, roles, which need to be critically considered, with the aim of exploring whether and how they may be integrated. Nevertheless, it has become self-evident that there is not a mere question of combining disciplinary pathways, but that a more demanding question has arisen, namely that of clarifying and discussing the conflicting epistemological and hermeneutical backgrounds, which the individual disciplines have moved from. This is the scientific problematique of the landscape.

The relevance of the landscape to praxis has been due, first, to the expanding attention that national and local decision-making centres have attributed to this subject, including it in regulations, planning and management designs with the double aim of protecting it and of using it as a tool for sustainable development. More important, and more relevant to the discussion of praxis, are the approaches from inter-governmental organisations. In this respect, the course initiated in the 1992 is relevant, when UNESCO decided to attribute an extended interpretation of the 1972 Convention on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage by incorporating the landscape in the conceptual category of cultural heritage. Therefore the roster of the cultural heritage became a part of the World Heritage List (WHL), and an increasing number of landscapes were proclaimed as “cultural”. Sensitive to the need to include the consideration of the landscape in any planning approach, in 2000 the European Landscape Convention, conceived by the Council of Europe, was adopted. This legal tool, which entered into force in 2003, plays an unprecedented role because, for the first time in history, a vast number of countries,

covering almost a continent, are moving towards the adoption of homogeneous approaches to landscape. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that, in 1999, the Council of Europe adopted the European Code of Conduct for Coastal Zones (ECCCZ) where the cultural heritage, together with the landscape and seascape, were assumed as cardinal subjects of coastal management. This emerging range of inputs has triggered the need to harmonise the approaches from international (UNESCO) and regional (Council of Europe, and *lato sensu*, the European Union) inter-governmental organisations, and to design how to make them effectively, therefore influencing the approaches on the national and local scales. This is the operational problematic of the landscape.

This double, scientific and operational framework, so rich in inputs, and in unavoidable relevant issues, have converged to give shape and solidify the need to optimise the co-operation between science and policy, between the conceptual and operational arenas. This is the background problematic of the landscape.

To contribute to the discussion of these problematiques, attention will be concentrated on how science may help praxis. First, the role of the concept of space in designing both theoretical and operational approaches will be explored. This exploration will lead to a discussion of how the role of culture may be framed in the scientific representations of the landscape, in order to better design praxis sensitive to the values harboured in individual landscapes. Moving from this duo of *mises au point*, namely the concepts of place and culture, the cultural landscape will be focused on attributing it the role of a cardinal conceptual category for optimising praxis. This discussion may lead to considering how science may help praxis protect and value the individual landscapes in the era of local-global dialectics.

THE CONCEPTUAL ROLE OF PLACE

During the 20th century, the geographical representation of the world has been characterised by the conflict between two approaches, which focus on space and place, respectively. During the initial part of the century, essentially as a result of Vidal de la Blache's contribution (1913), attention was concentrated on place, and geography was designed as the "science of places". At mid-century, the geographical representations shifted to space and remained stuck to this spatial reality (Hartshorne, 1939, 1952). In the late 1970s, some milieus refreshed the consideration of place as the key concept on which to base geographical representations. As a result, at the present time two streams coexist, which give shape to diverging approaches. One stream is marked by an increasing consideration of the role of places in evolving spatial realities, therefore exalting the role of landscape in geographical representations. By way of contrast, the other stream relegates place to the background and assumes space as the conceptual fulcrum of geographical representations, thus under-evaluating the landscape.

This option is endowed with remarkable geographical sense, essentially because it leads to question which spatial scale may characterise the approach to spatial realities.

Although wide discussions of what should be the magnitude of reference have not yet been carried out, there is no doubt that the geographer, when he speaks of space, keeps some ample surfaces in his mind, such as a region, a country, a continent of the Earth's surface in general. By way of contrast, when he speaks of place, he keeps in mind the individual site, such as an urban quarter, an individual city, an individual, almost strict, rural area, a maritime waterfront, and so on. Moving from the former perspective, the representation may lead to discover some homogeneous features which connote the Earth's surface and the human presence, and therefore it may induce to represent the order, more exactly the hidden order, of the geographical reality. By way of contrast, moving from the latter perspective, the order cannot be discovered, the general principles of the spatial assets and organisation cannot be enunciated, but the individual features and their sense in human existence may be highlighted.

Focusing on the concept of place, which is closely concerned with the representation of landscapes, the option of two alternative approaches and their conceptual backgrounds arise. Place may be considered a reality which is external to the subject, and it exists independently from the subject, and which may be conceived in an objectivist way. This representation assimilates the representation of place to that of space in the sense that the same background concepts are shared. Where place is considered as something existing outside the subject, it is postulated that this geographical reality may be represented as a structure, namely as something which consists of elements and relationships among elements. Since it is assumed as a structure, it may be represented using rationalist criteria, namely the Cartesian precepts, essentially the precepts of reduction and causalism. Along this pathway, objectivist knowledge is presumed to be achievable.

The opposite occurs when place is assumed as something lodged in the subject, thus rejecting the prospect of representing it in an objectivist way. In this case, the representation, which is the core of knowledge building, is the result of the role of place in the existential conditions of the subject. This approach assumes emotion, instead of reason, as the source of representation, and postulates that objectivist representation cannot be achieved. As a result, the design of place as a spatial structure is abandoned; the Cartesian precepts are rejected because they reduce the role of place by representing only those features that may be explained, namely those that may be represented as a web of elements connected by cause-effect relationships.

As a result, landscape has become the arena where two concepts of place may be adopted. The structuralist approach assumes place as a *topos*, namely as a geographical reality which may be represented using reason. The humanistic approach assumes that place is the result of the integration of an external reality to the subject and the emotion and spirituality of the subject. To set up this approach against the rationalism-based one, Yu Fu-Tuan (1976, 1978) proposed the concept of *topophilía*, where place is assumed as something integrating physical reality (*topos*) with human sentiments (*philía*). Because of the emergence of this option, landscape has become an arena of a

philosophical *vexata quaestio*, whether and how emotion may converge with reason in building up knowledge.

THE CONCEPTUAL ROLE OF CULTURE

At the present state of speculation and praxis there is no doubt that landscape is a reality that, independently from how it is conceived, combines culture and nature. Also approaches from the physical sciences, such as geology, have recently shared that landscape is something that, in spite of existing outside the subject, is essentially the product of cultures. This stream leads to the consideration of how culture may be intended in approaching landscape, and therefore attention shifts from the consideration of landscape to that of culture and, in so doing, the knowledge building of culture comes to the fore, and assumes relevance. To some extent, this discussion arena, which has marked the recent developments of cultural geography, mirrors the speculative conflict that has just come to the fore with respect to the concept of place. As a matter of fact, two conceptual backgrounds enliven discussions, namely the structuralist approach and a group of alternative approaches that may conventionally be called “humanistic”, or “post-structuralist”.

According to the structuralist vision of reality, which had deeply influenced cultural geography and cultural anthropology up to the mid-20th century, culture consists essentially of human tangible behaviour *vis-à-vis* nature, the social organisation, and of intellectual and spiritual manifestations. As a result, anthropology is inclined to identify and to describe the so-called “models of cultures” (Benedict, 1934), and geography is inclined to represent the spatial manifestations of individual models in terms of land use patterns, human settlements, the various levels of the social organisation, writing systems, languages and religions. As can be seen, a double proclivity emerges: first, attention essentially focuses on the tangible elements and features of the individual cultures; secondly, only those components of cultures that may be represented as elements linked by cause-effect relationships are taken into account. This representation reduces the extent of culture, but it gives the chance to provide simple representations, which the simpler they are, the more useful for planning and, *lato sensu*, for geographical praxis. In this epistemological context, it is self-evident that the concept of place as a structure, which exists outside the subject, is very close to the structuralist approach to culture.

By way of contrast, the antipodal approach, which has solidified in the anthropological sciences during the second half of the 20th century, moves from placing the subject at the centre of speculations. Culture is assumed as an uninterrupted attribution of symbols to those elements of reality with which the communities and the individuals interact, or to those elements that live in their visions and imaginations. Moving from this concept, two consequences have come to the fore. First, attention has shifted from the tangible to the intangible features of culture, and therefore an increasing importance has been attributed to the intellectual and spiritual manifestations. Secondly, it has become self-

evident that symbol-building cannot be represented according to rationalist criteria, and that the search for alternative, or at least complementary, criteria has to be operated.

This option could be a mere speculative question if two inputs coming from the institutional arenas would not have led to consider it as closely pertinent to the praxis of landscape. The first input came to the fore in the framework of UNESCO during the early 1990s, and it has solidified afterwards. It has consisted of the inclusion of intangible culture in programmes and projects aimed at protecting culture as a whole. As a consequence, the approach designed by the 1972 Convention on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage (<http://www.org/culture>), which during the first two decades was operated with reference to tangible culture, has fruited from an ample, intriguing widening of its operational horizons. The inclusion of intangible culture in the operational arena implies focusing attention on intellectual and spiritual manifestations, which cannot be represented according to structuralist concepts and Cartesian precepts. The second input has been brought about by the European Landscape Convention, according to which “‘Landscape’ means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (Article 1). This concept implies the perception of people being assumed as a basis for representation, for knowledge building, and for the subsequent praxis building. Perception is a broad concept, which refers not only to psychological, ephemeral conditions, but is also concerned with the spiritual endowment, and the existential conditions, of individuals and human communities.

As a conclusion, a feedback has arisen involving a trio of elements, namely the concepts of culture and place, and the design of praxis. The more culture is assumed as a symbol-building permanent activity of the human species, the more place is regarded as a part of individual existential conditions, therefore giving increasing importance to the spiritual endowment of human communities; the more culture and places are represented according to the symbol-based approaches, the more the praxis of landscape becomes sensitive to the intangible features and symbolic endowment of places.

THE ROLE OF REPRESENTATION

The joint consideration of science and praxis highlights how profound the change in perspective and interest that has characterised the approach to landscape is. Since the 1970s, the changing scientific perspective has increasingly influenced the representation of individual landscapes, and since the early 1990s, praxis has been bringing about inputs increasingly involving science and encouraging the search for new conceptual endowments. Moving from this framework, the need to represent landscape by focusing on the role of place, and by assuming culture as its leading characteristics, arises. The subsequent need to represent landscape in terms of symbolic endowment of the individual places, therefore placing the existential conditions at the centre, arises too. The question is what representation may be operated to respond to these needs. Since the symbol is a type of sign, it may be useful to explore if the application of semiotic

background concepts may lead to acceptable results. From this perspective, a semiotic “representation triangle”, inspired by the Charles Sanders Peirce’s thought (1931-1935) concerned with landscape may be designed (Vallega, 2003: Ch. 3). The signifier, the sign intended in terms of symbols, and the signified are placed at the vertices of the triangle, while their sides stand for i) the relationships between the sign/symbol and the signifier, ii) the relationship between the sign/symbol to the signified, and iii) the relationship between the signified and praxis (Fig. 1).

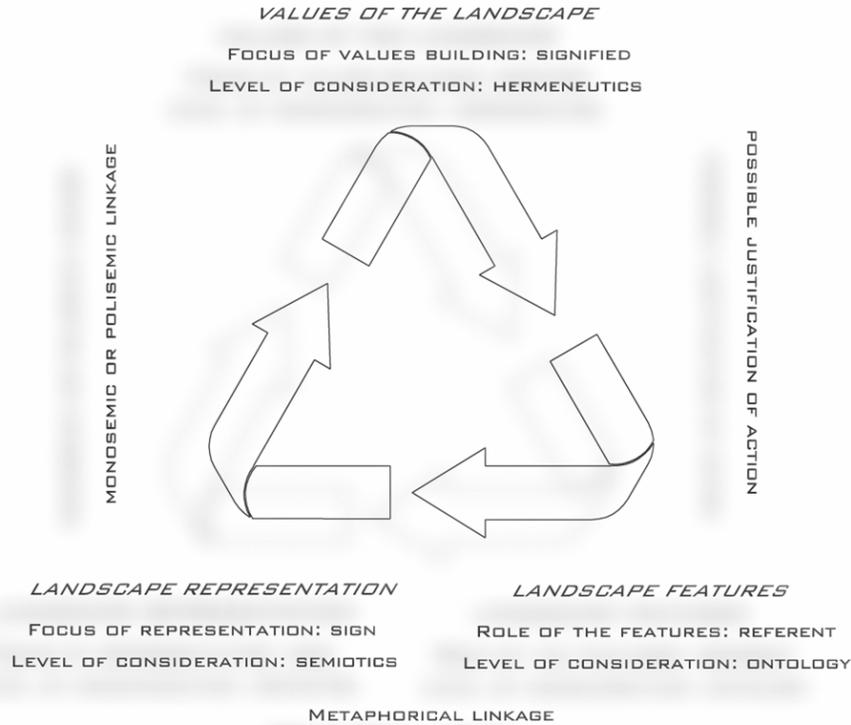


Figure 1: The background semiotic representation of the landscape, based on Peirce’s conceptual approach.

First vertex: the signifier

Individual places are identified as the reference points of the local landscape. This step is concerned with the ontological dimension of reality, to some extent with the physicality of the object, what is called “tangible” according to the UNESCO literature. Although the tangible features of places are considered, this is not the starting basis for an objectivist knowledge building because the representation arises in the mind of the subject as he interacts with reality. The representation, which follows this contact, is the mere translation of something that was harboured in the mind of the subject. According to Le Moigne’s theory of complexity (1977, 1990), it mirrors a general vision of reality, which leads to representing the object/signifier in a given way. The partisan character of

representation, and of knowledge building, is rooted in this initial phase, and marks the unavoidable subjectivism connatural to the representation of culture and landscape, particularly the representation from a geographical perspective.

Moving from the first to the second step

We would like to share Olsson's assumption (1994) that the passage from the object/referent to the symbols harboured in places consists of constructing metaphors. It is the result of the background that determines the sign to be attributed to the signifier. It is influenced by beliefs, narratives, and the metanarratives that more or less influence the construction of the sign, and attribute a huge subjectivist character to the representation. This circumstance justifies designing the passage from the signifier to the sign as a long, sometimes unclear, itinerary, which have been underestimated by literature on landscape, and which challenges the critical spirit of scientists, particularly geographers.

Towards the second vertex: the sign, and its symbolic nature

The second step of the representation pathway has chief relevance to the knowledge building of landscape and subsequent praxis, because it is concerned with symbols attributed to places, and the relationships between the symbol and the signifier. Hence, the semiotic dimension of the landscape discourse comes to the fore. As a matter of fact, landscape is designed as a web of symbols that the individual places are marked by. Tangible reality, giving shape to the ontological dimension of knowledge-building of the landscape is replaced with something which is harboured in the spirit of individuals and human communities. This replacement, which is the result of metaphor building, leads to symbols. According to Peirce's approach (1931-1935: 2.244-46), in this respect the symbol, which is a type of sign, plays the role of representamen. Let me give an example concerned with the Mecca landscape. The representation of Mecca, which may be found in the Islamic maps, figurative arts, literature, and so forth, may be regarded as a symbolic endowment, marked by pre-determined meanings, therefore as a set of symbols able to lead to particular signifieds; an endowment which supposes the symbols are linked with the sign by a determinist relationship. It is there that, according to the Islamic narrative of history, Abraham and Ishmael built the Ka'ba as the house of God, where Muhammad was born (around 570), from where he was forced to flee in 622, but where he came back eight years later to purge the city from idols, and to declare it the centre of Muslim pilgrimage. Up to that time, Mecca was a mere oasis and a crossroads on the old caravan trade routes linking the Mediterranean region with South Asia. By way of contrast, since that time it has been a central place for pilgrimage routes and an oasis to restore, strengthen and expand the Islamic faith. Because these representations have changed during time according to the perspective from which they have been considered, representation may be designed as a metaphorical history.

Moving from the second to the third vertex

All that characterises the representation of the landscape embodies the signifieds. As a result, another intellectual transfer occurs, that from the symbols making the landscape to the relevant signifieds. There is a deterministic relationship between these two actors of the representation performance, since the signified is in the symbol. The signified may be regarded as an interpretant, namely as the sign which is interpreted.

Third vertex: the signified

In principle, the network of symbols may lead to the discovery and the design of narratives and metanarratives. In our case, they lead to discover the set of values that individual landscapes have acquired as components of the human existence. This discovery is concerned with the hermeneutic level of the knowledge landscape building because it berths some knowledge of the geographical manifestations of culture connatural to places. To come back to the example of Mecca, this step may consist in the design of a metanarrative, because the symbolic endowment of this landscape is so abundant and rich with meanings as to call to the fore an impressive set of values marking the Islamic representation of the world. The symbolic landscape of the city converges to design the world as the result of a single creation, which was operated by a single God, in a condition existing beyond time and outside space; a God who, as is asserted by Arab philosophy, is the expression of the principle of singleness. This is confirmed by the language itself, because Allah derives from *al-ilah*, namely a pre-eminently Divinity, which designates the Supreme Being. This signified is hosted in the Ka'ba and it is represented by the Black Stone, a sign handed down through thousands generations up to Muhammad and serving as the terminal of communication between Divinity and Man. Being the creation of a single divinity, the Earth and the World are placed at the centre of the Universe. The Mosque in Mecca is placed at the centre of the Earth and World, and the Ka'ba, namely the House of God, is placed at the centre of the Mosque. A communication line emerges leading from the House of God to the Universe passing through Mecca and the Earth/World, and *vice versa*.

The signified-praxis liaison

The semiotic pathway exalts the spiritual features of individual landscapes, and it assumes the landscape as the chief arena of our existential conditions and values, which have solidified through generations, and the interaction between local and external cultures. It also includes some narratives, sometimes also some metanarratives, regarded as a representation of human existence in the world, and their hermeneutical linkage with the transcendental. This is the result of a conceptual pathway, which starts with the ontological dimension (signifier/referent), moves to the semiotic dimension (symbol, in its role of representamen), and berths the hermeneutical dimension (signified, in its role of interpretant). The hermeneutical dimension is marked by values and narratives that, by their characters, influence the landscape-concerned praxis. To come back to the Mecca example, there is no doubt that the symbolic endowment features lead to a metanarrative of the worlds, and that this leads to plan the urban space, together with

the surrounding places, in a way which is very different from the landscape planning which could be adopted if Mecca were characterised by other symbols. As the “representation triangle” is shared as a possible tool to deal with the cultural nature of the landscape, it may also be shared that the assignment of symbols to places is the source of praxis.

MOVING TO PRAXIS: THE UNESCO APPROACH

At this point, attention may shift to the cardinal approaches to the landscape from the inter-governmental organisations, namely UNESCO and the Council of Europe, in order to explore whether and how they could be implemented by adopting semiotics-based criteria. In this respect, the UNESCO approach is meaningful to explore how the interest of inter-governmental organisations has moved towards the intangible manifestations of culture and, along this pathway, increasing relevance has been attributed to landscape. As has been mentioned, the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was sensitive to the tangible features of cultural heritage, but it was far from considering the landscape. According to Article 1 of this Convention, cultural heritage consists of three sets of objects:

- “monuments”: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- “groups of buildings”: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- “sites”: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and *areas* including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.

A conceptual discussion was indirectly encouraged during the 1980s, when it became self-evident that a chief issue of the UN policy would have been the protection of cultural identity - particularly that of small communities which were going to be increasingly endangered by impacts from climate change, and by some emerging economic processes, such as mass tourism. Hence the need to consider also the intangible aspects of culture started being perceived as relevant to the UNESCO policy. Twenty years after the 1972 UNESCO Convention, a turnaround phase initiated as a result of the inputs from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), and on the basis of the intense discussions that, during the 1980s, were convened in the scientific and political arenas. It is meaningful that, at the end of 1992, just a few months after the UNCED, UNESCO decided to include “cultural landscape” in the operational fields defined by the 1972 Convention. From the

juridical point of view, this inclusion was justified by stating that the cultural landscape may be regarded as embracing the broad concept of “combined works of nature and man”, to which Article 1 of the Convention refers in designing the thematic extent of the world heritage.

In UNESCO’s view - as it was presented by an UNESCO Expert Group in 1992 (<http://whc.unesco.org/archive/93-2-f04.htm>) - cultural landscapes “are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal. They should be selected on the basis both of their outstanding universal value and of their representative attitudes in terms of a clearly defined geo-cultural region and also for their capacity to illustrate the essential and distinct cultural elements of such regions”. This conceptual approach fails to regard cultural landscape as “a landscape considered with special attention [only] to its cultural features”, thus referring to the epistemological dimension of knowledge building. It also fails to regard cultural landscape as “consisting of the cultural features of whatever landscape”, in that referring to the ontological dimension of knowledge building. The cultural landscapes, which UNESCO focused on, are identified on the basis of two background principles, both concerned with ontology. First, landscape is regarded as “cultural” where it consists of culture-relevant objects pertaining to tangible culture. Secondly, the conceptual design of “cultural landscape” does not include all kinds of cultural landscapes but only those landscapes that may be claimed as “excellent” because they have such particular characteristics as to be included in that part of the world heritage which is worth being transmitted to future generations. This background definition criterion is parallel to, and closely consistent with, that through which the world cultural sites have been identified. As a matter of fact, the reason why an individual site is included in the World Heritage List (WHL) is its exceptional cultural value.

Moving from this speculative approach, in 1992 the Expert Group stated that the concept of cultural landscape “embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment” (Ib.). In this framework, three cardinal categories were defined by UNESCO (Fig. 2).

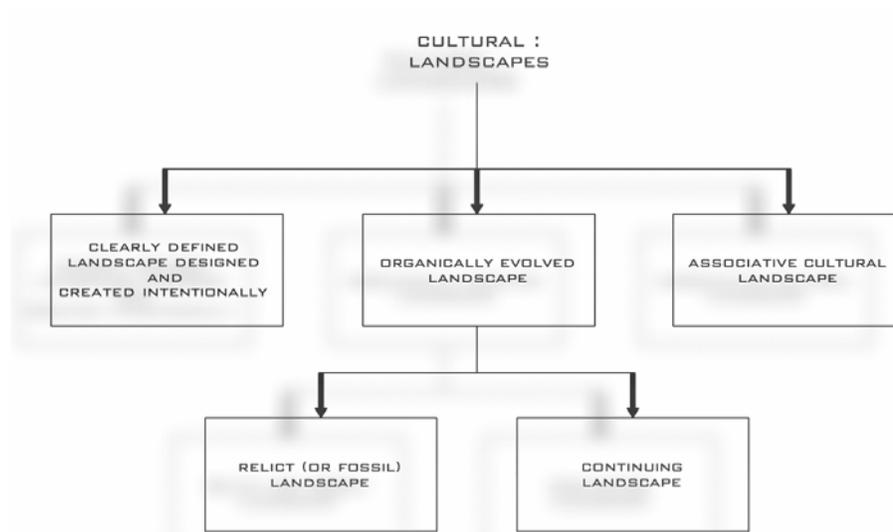


Figure 2: Categories of cultural landscapes according to the UNESCO approach.

The “clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man” is the first category. It “embraces garden and parkland landscapes constructed for aesthetic reasons which are often (but not always) associated with religious or other monumental buildings and ensembles” (Ib.).

The second category is the “organically evolved landscape”. As can be seen, it is conceptually broader than the previous one because, in principle, it embraces landscapes that “result from an initial social, economic, administrative, and/or religious imperative and has developed its present form by association with and in response to its natural environment. Such landscapes reflect that process of evolution in their form and component features” (Ib.). According to the UNESCO approach, this category comprehends two subcategories. On the one hand, it includes the “relict (or fossil) landscape”, meant as a landscape “in which an evolutionary process came to an end at some time in the past, either abruptly or over a period. Its significant distinguishing features are, however, still visible in material form”. On the other hand, it comprehends the “continuing landscape”, which retains an active role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in “which the evolutionary process is still in progress. At the same time it exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time” (whc.unesco.org/exhibits/culturland/categories).

Conceptually diverging from the above mentioned designs is the third category, which the UNESCO landscape-relevant strategy is concerned with. It relates to the “associative cultural landscape”, meant as consisting of landscapes worth being safeguarded “by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the

natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent” (Expert Group, 1992).

Moving from the “clearly defined” landscapes to the “organically evolved” ones, to come to the “associative cultural” ones, increasing consideration of intangible culture may be found. This consideration is conceptually rather absent in the first category, weak in the second one, and self-evident in the third one. Whatever category it belongs to, an individual cultural landscape is included in the World Heritage List only when its functionality, intended as the organic linkage marking its elements, and its intelligibility, meant as its perception from the social context, are self-evident.

MOVING TO PRAXIS: THE APPROACH FROM COUNCIL OF EUROPE

As has been mentioned, the European Landscape Convention, adopted in 2000 and entered into force in 2003, is the second arena that is expected to give strong impetus to the praxis of landscape. This approach moves from considering landscape as the geographical features of spaces and places as they are perceived by the local communities, and aims at presenting how the landscape may be regarded as a fulcrum for planning and management, in the framework of co-operation between European states (Article 2). In this respect, the Convention designs landscape protection as consisting of actions aimed at conserving and maintaining the “significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity”. Landscape management is regarded as embracing those actions that, from a perspective of sustainable development, are able “to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes”. Finally, landscape planning refers to any “action to enhance, restore or create landscapes” (Article 1). This triptych of arenas is expected to host strategies and actions tailored to: “recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people’s surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity; establish and implement landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning through the adoption of the specific measures (...); establish procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other parties with an interest in the definition and implementation of the landscape policies mentioned in paragraph b above; and integrate landscape into its regional and town planning policies and in its cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies, as well as in any other policies with possible direct or indirect impact on landscape” (Article 5).

POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES COMPARED

At this point, the three perspectives — namely, the scientific perspective designed by geographers, and the political perspectives that have arisen from UNESCO and the

Council of Europe (European Landscape Convention) — may be compared with reference to a range of leading conceptual elements (Fig. 3).

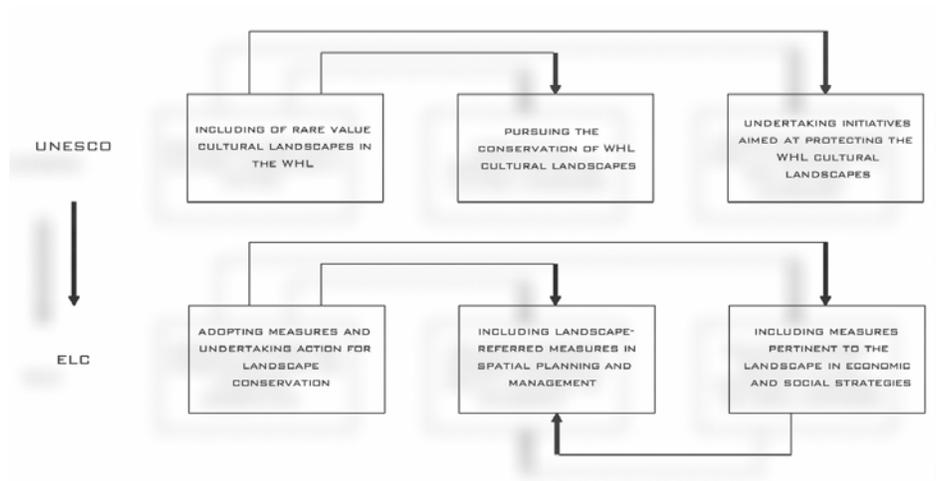


Figure 3: The approaches from UNESCO and the European Landscape Convention compared.

The definition of landscape provided by UNESCO and the European Landscape Convention may serve as a useful basis to explore how the international political milieus that have shown specific interest in landscape are inclined to address inputs to science. In this respect, it should be noted that the definition of landscape (“an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”) provided by the Convention in 2000 is quite similar to 1992’s UNESCO definition (landscapes represent manifestations of “combined works of nature and man”). To sum up, it may be stated that these two concepts are almost coincident. As a result, as far as the starting ideas are concerned, there is a self-evident theoretical proximity of the European Landscape Convention and the UNESCO approaches: the concept of “landscape” from the former may be assimilated to the concept of “cultural landscape” from the latter.

When one speaks of “cultural landscapes”, as UNESCO does, the existence of “natural landscapes” is presupposed, namely the existence of landscapes that consist only of physical and ecological features, and that have been kept untouched by human communities. This duality cannot be found in the approach from the European Landscape Convention; therefore it is supposed that, according to this legal tool, the natural landscape is a “non existence”. This statement could be marked by two meanings. As a matter of fact, natural landscape may be a “non existence” because the human influence is presumed to be practised in any part of the Earth surface; differently, it may be conceived as a “non existence” because any part of the world is embodied in the human visions and representations, being therefore marked by symbols and subsequent signifieds. The former approach relates to the ontological level of the landscape discourse, while the latter relates to the semiotic level. As a preliminary

approach, it may be thought that the European Landscape Convention is concerned with the former discussion. Nevertheless, looking at this legal tool in more depth, it may be perceived that, to some extent, it is sensitive to the speculation that has recently arisen among geographers, according to which whatever speculative background-ontology-or-semiotics-based-is shared, the landscape is something where the human and natural components are intimately connected, and where culture plays a leading role.

As regards the spirit with which the landscape concept was designed in the international and European settings, it may be noted that the UNESCO approach resulted from the convergence of a multitude of cultural backgrounds, potentially covering all the world, and, therefore, it was sensitive also to speculations arisen not only from Western settings. By way of contrast, the Council of Europe's approach resulted only from the visions from the European cultural contexts. It may be supposed that the latter approach mirrors the way to conceive and represent realities congenial to the Western civilisation, while the former approach is much more sensitive to the whole cultural texture of the world. This difference in cultural stimuli is associated with the different geographical coverage of the legal tools. While the UNESCO criteria are applied in any part of the world, therefore reflecting some universal properties of the concept which it was inspired by, the European Landscape Convention is operational only in a continental space, being therefore concerned with the "regional" configuration of the concept which it is based on.

INPUTS TO SCIENCE

How much these two approaches diverge may be more clearly perceived when attention shifts to the objective of the approach. The UNESCO approach aims at identifying a strict number of landscapes, which are endowed with such particular cultural and natural features as to be worthy of protection and conservation in a perspective of serving as fulcra for the local sustainable development. The key words are i) excellence in landscape quality and value, ii) conservation, and iii) protection. By way of contrast, the European Landscape Convention aims at dealing with any kind of landscape in a continental space, because the background objective consists of complementing and optimising the conventional protection, planning and management tools. The key words are i) protection, ii) management, and iii) planning. Where these differences are jointly considered it may be noted that these legal tools have only a few elements in common, essentially the conceptual starting basis.

This discussion leads to the consideration of the relationship between these political approaches and science. In this respect, it may be stated beforehand that, in general, science is required to provide two outputs: i) critical analyses of the political designs with the final objective of offering ground for improving them, and ii) empirical research for operational purposes. In accordance with this conceptual approach and goal, the subjects which are worth being critically discussed have been tentatively presented in the previous sections, where the approaches from UNESCO and the

Council of Europe have been considered from a geographical perspective. Therefore, here attention may shift to the latter role of science - *i.e.*, that of providing research for operational purposes. In this respect, it may be considered that, by its nature, UNESCO's approach calls for collaboration in exploring the world landscape texture in such a way as to identify which landscapes are worthy of being included in the World Heritage List, and of being preserved for future generations. This task calls for interdisciplinary investigations, where the peculiar role of geography consists in representing the spatial manifestations of the nature-man interplay. Collaboration is essentially required at the cognitive level, because the assessment of the individual landscapes, as well as the subsequent consideration for recognition purposes, prevail over the need for management and planning purposes. As regards the epistemological background, it may be stated that the best scientific approach should consist in associating structuralist backgrounds, which are useful for investigating the relationship between tangible culture and nature, and non-structuralist backgrounds, including the semiotics- and spiritualism-inspired ones, in order to focus on the relationships between the intangible culture and nature.

By way of contrast, the European Landscape Convention's approach calls for scientific and technical collaboration at a double level. First, at the cognitive level, collaboration is needed in order to assess the local conditions that are relevant to protect, manage and plan the landscape, hopefully in the framework of planning-oriented approaches to the geographical setting as a whole. Secondly, collaboration is needed at the normative level, in order to design the specific ways according to which the landscape is framed in management and planning-serving designs. Hence two consequences arise. First, scientists are involved in a wider inter-disciplinary context than that which is implicitly prefigured in UNESCO's approach because it embraces much more planning-concerned disciplines. Secondly, due to the role of the required investigations, scientists are encouraged to consider the structuralism-inspired approaches as the fulcrum of geographical investigations, therefore relegating the semiotics-supported ones to the background.

This articulated demand for scientific approach shows how different the approaches to landscape may be, both in terms of conceptual background and in terms of goals to pursue at the operational level. Therefore, it is self-evident how demanding the role of science is, and how socially-relevant their approaches have become. Choosing between structuralist and post-structuralist epistemological backgrounds, integrating ecological and social perspectives, concepts and languages, building up effective inter-disciplinary approaches, and designing useful planning and management patterns may be regarded as a scientific arena endowed by unprecedented difficulty. Namely, it is an avoidable arena through which scientific pathways are to be traced in a spirit of protection of our cultural heritage.

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