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Globalisation - a threat to traditional landscapes and local identity?

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Globalization – a threat to traditional landscape and local identity

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Abstract

Traditional landscapes could be considered as one of the most apparent carriers of local identities. They act as memory of previous human activities. During the 1990s the economic changes have had a drastic influence on the appearance of these landscapes. On one hand, local people are keen to keep the existing patterns that indicate their feeling of belonging. On the other hand, there is a desire to introduce new patterns dictated by new technologies, economic conditions, enlarged knowledge. This might lead to a kind of standardized landscape so that one cannot distinguish between, e.g., Denmark and western Estonia.

The presentation will focus on the local identities in three Estonian counties. We deal with locals' preferences and ideas concerning their landscapes. Based on some 400 interviews we try to investigate which is the role of traditional landscape in local life, what kind of landscape changes are seen by locals as acceptable, what trade-offs are possible on landscape development, how could local people be involved in landscape planning, do current economic policies support or harm the maintenance of the traditional landscape.

Introduction

Globalization seems to be one of the most intriguing processes happening in the present-day world. And it also has affected landscape studies. In her presentation on the landscape ecology conference in Roskilde, Denmark, Marcia Eaton (2000) described how an estate in Denmark cannot be distinguished from a similar one in Texas – that is sign of landscapes appearance becoming uniform. At the same time, Don Mitchell (2001) raises the question of whose landscape we are talking about? He claims: *Whatever lure the local may hold for landscape geographers it must become one of understanding how particular places, particular landscapes fit into a larger, scalarly complex mosaic of landscapes that themselves are never 'naively given' ...* (Mitchell 2001: 270). Also, there have been arguments that socio-economic processes in the East of Europe are somewhat different from those of the rest, and therefore they move in a different way.

Estonia, together with Latvia, is perhaps one of the countries in Europe having gone through the biggest amount of landscape changes during the 20th century (see Palang *et al* 2000). This means that traditional landscapes are rarer and perhaps more vulnerable to too rapid changes. The collective landscapes we had for almost 50 years have put a pressure on those, and collectivization itself can be handled as an attempt to unify both landscape patterns and images, i.e. loose the identity of a landscape.

The current paper discusses a number of features related to landscapes globalization and is illustrated with a series of case studies that focus on the change of Estonian landscapes. These cases include loss of traditional landscapes, *genius loci*, local preferences, and management issues. We try to find out how globalization affects traditional landscapes, how locals perceive this change, and how the landscapes could cope with these changes.

Background

Landscape can be understood in different ways, starting from defining it as a purely natural complex and ending with a statement that landscape is a solely social construct that has nothing to do with the visual reality around us. In this paper we take a holistic perspective handling landscape as a whole consisting of the visual around us, the mental cognition of that reality and the underlying forces shaping those two (see Keisteri 1990; Palang *et al* 2000 for more). These three combine into a set of phenomena that are associated with the landscape. In this concept landscape is thus divided into an experiential, more subjective part and a more easily measurable, more objective part, each with its own underlying factors. Thus, subjectivity and objectivity complement each other in the evaluation of landscapes rather than being opposite poles.

Landscapes tend to change. This change is seldom a planned process. Instead, it is a mixture of autonomous actions and actions planned by man. Accordingly, the landscape changes in a somewhat chaotic way, while at certain times man tries to steer and redirect the evolution by planned actions (Antrop 1998).

Landscapes are usually defined as territorial units. In addition, they could also be limited in time. Although change is a part of landscape development, at certain moments some landscapes may cease to exist and get replaced by another landscape. Mostly these transformations are connected with large-scale societal changes, *e.g.* change of social formations (*cf.* Cosgrove 1984).

Landscape is a very complex concept used in many different ways. Antrop (2000a) finds that landscapes should be considered as holistic, relativistic and dynamic systems. Holism expresses the concept that the whole is more than the sum of its composing parts. Holism also means that each element receives its significance only because of its position and relationship with the surrounding elements. Therefore, changing one element always means changing the whole in some way. Perception also works according to the Gestalt or holistic principles. When looking at a landscape, the human perception links the results with our knowledge and past experience. Thus, landscape observation is primarily subjective and can be understood only relative to the characteristics of the observer. This makes different people really 'see' different landscapes at the same spot and their evaluation and appreciation of the landscape may also vary greatly.

The overall change of landscape is the result of complex and interacting spontaneous natural processes and planned actions by man. Numerous activities by a large number of individuals are not, however, concerted and contribute to the autonomous evolution of the landscape in a similar way as natural processes do. Consequently, landscape changes in a somewhat chaotic way and man tries to control this evolution regularly by planned actions, which however, are seldom realized as they were intended (Antrop 1998).

Traditional and modern landscapes

As Cosgrove (1984) put it, each socio-economic formation tends to create its own landscape. A new formation establishes its own symbols, land use and power structures, *etc.* Landscape ecologists (*e.g.* Antrop 2000a) distinguish between traditional and modern landscapes. Traditional landscape in most of the Western Europe lasted from the Renaissance till the beginning of the industrial revolution, but patches of it are somewhere preserved till today. These are landscapes where evolution has been slow; several human generations have been inhabiting the same landscape. On the contrary, modern landscapes are those where changes happen more quickly and more radically, so that one single human generation may have lived in two or three landscapes.

Antrop (1997) defines traditional landscapes as those landscapes having a distinct and recognizable structure that reflects clear relations between the composing elements and having significance for natural, cultural or aesthetical values. Traditional landscapes are not synonymous with the concept of cultural landscapes. Traditional landscapes are those which have evolved slowly and where it took centuries to form a characteristic structure reflecting a harmonious integration of biotic, abiotic and cultural elements. Consequently, a large variety of regional characteristic landscapes were created as the result of slow development process with few periods of change and long periods of consolidation. Norderhaug *et al* (1996) also stress that traditional cultural landscapes are unstable ecosystems that are entirely dependent on active use and management. The best examples of such traditional landscapes in Estonia are the wooded meadows.

In that sense landscape could be compared with an old parchment that was used for writing in medieval times: every generation, every social formation has tried to wipe off the previous text from it and replace it with its own. In some places this erasure has succeeded, in other places it has not; and so a traditional landscape is a mixture of several previous layers of landscapes. In a modern landscape, this mixture is once more erased and something totally new is created instead.

Both modern and traditional landscapes consist of multiple assets of landscape elements or characteristics. Most of them carry the quality, which characterizes the scope of commonness either at chorological or temporal scales. As the context of this paper regards, those elements can be ordinated on the continuous scale of *locality* and *globality* of their origin. These assemblages of elements fall into four principal classes (Fig. 1). As example cases we can visualize as a) specific haystacks at traditionally managed meadows (in Triglav region, Alpine Slovenia) – *traditional landscape, local characteristics*; b) intensive winery installments and infrastructures in "vinescapes" (Prahova Valley, Bulgaria) – *modern landscape, local characteristics*; c) golf courses anywhere around the Globe – *modern landscape, global characteristics*; d) Fishing ports with function-dependent outlay of specific landscape elements relatively similar at any world freshwater or marine locality – *traditional landscape, global characteristics*.

The identity within this ordination is able to give additional information or even a value when applied as a component of *The Valuable Landscapes Assessment Scheme*. Whereas a rough quantification is easy to proceed and of assessment value, when statistically enough elements per landscapes are available. If we are able to determine and agree on the common measures of *locality* and *globality*, all the landscapes of relevant interest can be assessed and compared, even independently of geographical locality or of an assessor.

Valuing landscapes

Although individuals perceive landscapes in a different way, some general conclusions may be made on the valuation of landscapes by humans. Different landscapes are evaluated differently in different times; people have had different ideals that have been dependent on the mentality and reign of the area, as well as on the dominant valuations in the society. Values and activities of people change together with the constantly developing cultural systems. This is important to landscape change because there is a feedback loop between culture and the physical landscape that manifests itself through time (Marcucci 2000). This holistic view of

The Vormsi case: influence of cultural change (Palang et al 1999).

Vormsi is a small island off the west coast of Estonia. With its area of 93 km² it is the fourth biggest island in the country. Typically to the small islands off the west coast, Vormsi had been inhabited by the Swedes till 1944, when they fled to Sweden in order to avoid the approaching Soviet troops. Of more than 2500 people who lived on the island in 1934, only some families remained on the island. This was followed by an influx of people from the mainland, so that in 1945 the population of Vormsi counted 912, mostly Estonian-speaking newcomers who had no relation to the former landscape on the island. This change in population coincided with a change in land use policy, when all land was nationalized and agriculture and fishing collectivized in 1949. These two factors together provide a unique possibility in Estonia to follow a creation of a totally new cultural landscape that includes both establishment of a new land use structure and re-evaluation of the surroundings.

The changes in land use are drastic. The area of fields has dropped by 19.7% between 1939 and 1993. Before the war, the fields were narrow long strips separated from each other by narrow deep ditches. This was done in order to divide the more fertile areas more evenly between the households. After the collectivization, these ditches were removed and neighboring fields united to support the more intensive land use. Hay-meadows and pastures got gradually abandoned and now most of the island is covered by forest and brushwood. The same was the fate of fields that could not be united into bigger units.

Together with land use the appearance of the island has changed. In 1939 the island was described as a silent and shy place with lonely houses amidst fields separated by a labyrinth of fences. A dark wall of old pine forest stopped the view from the coast towards inland. In 1997, Vormsi is described as an island that has a plenty of forests, wooded meadows, juniper stands and erratic boulders, with Swedish place names and lots of abandoned houses, with population of 340 people. The former culture has left its fingerprints in form of old church and a number of wheel-shaped crosses scattered beneath a wood. But despite the restoration of old place names (the Estonian transcription of the old Swedish names had been used in 1977-97, e.g. Sviibi - Sviby, Borbi - Borrby, etc.) the island remains an alien monument even for those now living on it.

landscape describes an environment that is a legacy not only of ecological conditions but also successive values. Today's landscape is in part the result of historical cultural values.

Landscape and identity

Genii loci

Traditional landscapes tend to have a *genius loci*, a well-defined spirit of the place. Landscapes are wholes where the natural features together with the human culture create that spirit, making one feel that very Genius.

Landscapes are not determined solely by natural processes; each landscape is also assigned a particular "identity" by human perception (Vos, Meekes 1999). Hanssen (1998) sees the concept of 'identity' as problematic, interpreting it as "the sense of place", but stresses that there are a number of ways to interpret the concept. The sense of place has been named as *genius loci*. In addition to the ecological aspects, the concept of *genius loci* or landscape identity involves also historical, geomorphological, cultural and other aspects. The history of human activity and its visible and invisible traces in the landscape give the landscape its *genius loci* (see also Antrop 2000b), the special feeling of landscape. *Genius loci* is based on natural landscape, on top of which are the layers of cultural landscapes from different time periods, comprising the cultural heritage created by our ancestors. The historical heritage in the landscape is usually valued highly both by the local people as well as the visitors (Alumäe *et al* 2001).

Most of heritage is intrinsically linked to specific physical locations. So is *genius loci*. Historical events, physical relics and surviving structures are located somewhere and that somewhere is, or can be made, a part of heritage derived from these resources (Graham *et al* 2000). *Genius loci* is also perceivable only "there", and nowhere else. *Genius loci* cannot be taken to a museum as old barn houses and hope that it will become alive in the new place.

Genius loci is linked to specific landscape and the identity it generates in people who live in the area, as well as to the concept of holism. If we change one of the elements, then the landscape, previously perceived as a whole, loses its identity and the *genius loci*.

Antrop (1997) pays attention to the fact that the modern landscapes that are mainly characterized by uniform and rational solutions, which seldom fit harmoniously into the existing structure. It would be more meaningful to refer to them as rational land use patterns. Many of these new landscapes lack identity and personality, not to mention *genius loci*, which means that the people living in the landscape feel less connected to the place and this in turn affects their preferences and decisions.

In addition, people's perception of the landscape is multimodal and selective: What is valued in a landscape is a function of what is known and stressed in a specific culture or society (Linehan, Gross 1998). At the same time, valuation of certain elements or features by a certain group may cause conflict with another group and then the question arises whose opinion has the greater weight when it comes to making a decision concerning the landscape (O'Neill, Walsh 2000). This different attitude, driven of subjectivity and emotion, influences also their relations to each other.

Locals versus visitors

According to their different interests towards landscape, people judge the landscape changes differently. Positive and negative evaluations made by different people and interest groups may be conflicting for the same type of change (Antrop 1998).

Locals are those who dwell at a certain location continuously. Most of the locals are usually farmers. The farmers, of course, do pay attention to the visual aspects of their fields and field patterns, but usually they do not call it 'landscape'. The problem is further complicated by the fact that land is privately owned, but the

What do locals prefer? (After Alumäe et al 2001; Palang et al 2001 a, b)

The results of numerous studies reveal that the evaluation of landscapes is very subjective and depends on several factors, both visible and invisible, as well as on personal knowledge and experiences. The traces of human activity in the landscape are highly valued by the locals, since these contribute to the construction of *genius loci*, which gives a special value to the landscape.

The most preferred landscape is a live and diverse rural landscape. The respondents of the Obinitsa area in South-Estonia felt that they generally prefer diverse over monotonous agricultural landscape. In general, the people of Obinitsa favor the current state of their surrounding landscape, but they would like to see increased development and life, and tidier households in the area to pretty and enliven the landscape. So, man in landscape seems to be an important prerequisite to landscape preferences. However, marginalization process as a result of the diminishing role of agriculture is seen as a major threat to the survival of traditional rural landscapes of Estonian countryside. Agricultural land has always been held in high regard as the result of labor of previous generations.

Also, the landscape's potential to change can affect people's preferences. People tend to like landscapes where changes are short-term, small-scale and predictable. In Estonia, the recent changes have been rapid and drastic.

Normally, local people value small details that are important for their everyday life. As in Obinitsa, also the people of other case study areas, such as the Viljandi, Jõgeva, Valga and Põlva counties, like the landscapes that surround them: for them landscape is an arena of everyday activities. One of the most important values put on the local landscape is the identity value. Identity value is strongly related to the traditionalist land use of the area. There are, however, strong variations in the nature and scale of identity. For some, identity is attributed to a single locality, while for others it can mean a whole parish or even county.

It was interesting to see, on the basis of case studies carried out in three Estonian counties, if and how the opinions of locals and experts differ regionally. The opinions of people of Jõgevamaa and these of the experts were quite comparable. The drumlin field, a unique and outstanding landscape area, was valued highly both by the locals and the experts. The situation was rather different in Valga county, which is a very marginal area largely dominated by the abandonment of agriculture. The public preference was given mostly to the recreational or aesthetic values of landscape. Experts also appreciated locals' initiative in valuing and maintaining the landscape. The Viljandi case revealed that local people tend to see landscapes as places, and values are attributed to certain objects or features rather than landscape patterns. The latter were, however, highly evaluated by experts.

The *a priori* opposition of locals and non-locals and emphasizing the profit-oriented value statements of the former are quite common in landscape planning and preference studies. Several studies, however, reveal that value statements and landscape preferences of the locals compared to the non-locals are not necessarily opposing. The amenity values of landscape are highly appreciated by the locals as well as by the outsiders. It is clear that the locals do not feel indifferent towards the surrounding landscapes and therefore their preferences should be considered in the course of planning process.

In most case studies the farmers are seen as a single group whose actions are based on the consumer perspective. However, we can find a growing significance of the phenomenon of the non-economic intrinsic goals, values, attitudes and behavior of farmers in contemporary studies of rural sociology (Cudlínová *et al* 1999). Vos & Meekes (1999) state that apart from an 'external market', all people with any kind of means of production also have an 'internal market' that may guide their decisions.

Therefore one can conclude that the hypothetical conflict between the landscape preferences of locals and

Who rules Saaremaa? (Sooväli et al 2001)

The landscapes of the largest island of Saaremaa can be labelled as symbolically significant for Estonians, both for locals as well as for visitors. The particular landscape with wooded meadows, untouched coastlines and traditional farmsteads conveys the image typical to Estonian isles.

At present, more and more coastal land of the island Saaremaa is being sold to foreigners that is strongly objected by local people. The most abundant group of "strangers" come from Finland. Regrettably often the sale of coastal plots is accompanied by the violation of law. Despite the ban on building new constructions in the coastal zone up to 200 meters from the shoreline, as established in the *Act on Protection of Coasts and Shorelines*, new houses are built on the shore by both Estonians and foreigners.

Year by year, the number of visiting tourists increases on the island. In 2000 the number of tourists in Saaremaa reached 40 000 according to official statistics. It is however known that the actual number is three times higher, amounting approximately at 120 000. At the same time, what local people object is mass tourism enhancement, as it impairs landscape values such as intactness, simplicity and traditionality. This discord should be addressed by authorities in taking decisions and actions influencing landscapes. The detection of categories such as nature, culture, affection and nature-culture interface shows the validity of holistic approach in landscape assessment, as attributes of the landscape interact and are not independent in their influence on the perception.

non-locals is not as huge as usually assumed. This statement is confirmed by several results (Palang *et al* 2001a; Palang *et al* 2001b), especially by the results of a case study in Obinitsa, South-East Estonia, where the locals put the highest value on diverse, recreationally valuable landscape rather than on intensively used agricultural land (Palang *et al* 2000).

The same is pointed out by Oreszczyn (2000), who found that unlike media portrayals of differences between groups, people tend to have quite common views. The case study carried out in England concerning people's views of hedgerows indicates that farmers, experts as well as the general public have quite the same views of hedgerows, demonstrating pride in the English hedged landscape. The hedgerows were perceived to contribute greatly to the local landscapes.

In conclusion it may be said that the gap between the locals and non-locals decreases because of the gradual perishing of the influential role of agriculture and the resulting increase of landscape multifunctionality. At

the same time, our society transfers into a new, information society, where the main criteria of landscape appreciation is no more based on its economic potential, as during industrial, but rather the holistic value formed in the interaction of several values, such as identity value, aesthetical value and cultural-historical value.

The threat of globalization

It seems that too rapid changes are one of the major threats all stakeholders perceive in the landscape. Therefore landscapes have appeared in policy. Therefore all kinds of management strategies are applied.

Making uniform production landscapes is one global trend. Another is the creation of museum landscapes, which can happen both by nature restoration (e.g., Dutch and Danish bogs) and open-air museums. The latter are a kind of islands of history that people are proud of, where they take their guests to show where they originate from, that have a particular *genius loci*. Globalized rural landscapes are for instance golf courses, equestrian landscapes (elitarian rural landscapes) that are attractive to tourists. In fact they are similar to supermarkets – the action is familiar, goods are the same. In that sense, landscapes become homogenized; people feel secure, as the landscape provides no surprises, places are familiar through action in any part of the world. But even these landscapes have their *genii loci*. They are the modern global rural landscapes...

Globalization is also the common past of the civilization, like the memorial landscapes of the war. We all know the background, the history of the battlefield. We visit these to meet our memory. This collective memory might consist of several personal stories (e.g. my grandfather was wounded here) and one general ("heroic" British army beat the "nasty" Napoleon here). Everyone knows the landscape and everybody can read it in the same way.

Conclusion.

Globalization of the landscapes is happening everywhere. AS change is definitely a part of the landscape, this should be handled as a normal process. However, it is still largely to the local people to make decisions concerning the future of the landscape. Landscapes that formerly lasted for long time periods, now appear and disappear at a much quicker rate. Case studies show that people are aware of these threats, they prefer the traditional landscape to the new, modern one, but when it comes to creating income, these considerations, as everywhere, go to background.

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Figure 1. The modern as well as traditional landscapes consist of assets of landscape elements, both of local and of global origin.

