



# Genesis of the cultural landscape of Urals and Siberia

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents the author's approach to the study of cultural landscape genesis. Historical and geographical reconstruction of Urals and Siberia served as the empirical basis of the study. A hypothesis that highlights some of the basic morphological components of the cultural landscape on the scale of a given region is set forth based on that reconstruction. Communications and cultural values have been classified as the primary morphological components. The article compares the cultural landscape's communicative structure and two main forms of communication. The first form includes land communication routes and regional settlement patterns, which establish a kind of communicative framework for the cultural landscape of the region. The second form is the circle of social and cultural interactions that directly or indirectly affect the economic development and life activities of regional communities. Each of these forms of communication reflects a certain pattern of cultural values that is specific to a given form of economic development in a geographical region or to a particular historical era. Using this approach, the article studies the spatial organization of the cultural landscape of the Urals and Siberia in an attempt to explain the cultural diversity of various parts of present-day Russia.

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## 1. Introduction

It was characteristic of the Soviet era to attempt to homogenize the cultural life of the nation's regions in accordance with prevailing ideological doctrine. However, over a long period of time many of Russia's historical, cultural, and ethnic characteristics have been subject to suppression or deprivation of opportunities for development. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of regeneration of

many long-standing cultural, ethnic and religious traditions started. This has caused massive transformations in the social and cultural life of society, and it has greatly transformed the architectural and environmental appearance of many cities. These processes continue to unfold rapidly at the present time.

The cultural heritage and contemporary social and cultural life of the Asian part of Russia, which includes all of the nation that lies east of Urals, are quite complex and varied. This is a consequence of the fact that in this area, at different periods of Russian colonization and development, a number of different, sometimes fundamentally different, economic systems predominated. Each of these evolved from a particular pattern of settlement that was unique in both its economic and cultural features. Therefore, most regions of Urals and Siberia are currently full of economic and cultural contrasts. Large, fast-growing cities and industrial settlements that serve the mechanical engineering and oil and gas industries are located next door to small

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historic towns, to vast agricultural zones, and to areas where Northern native minorities use the land for traditional purposes (reindeer herding, hunting and gathering, etc.). This diversity often precludes the application of just one discipline (be it history, ethnography, sociology, or cultural studies) to conduct integrated research into the cultural heritage and contemporary social and cultural life of these regions. In an attempt to solve this problem, over the past ten years we have developed a multi-disciplinary methodology to perform a spatial analysis of a number of cultural processes that took place in the regions. The concept of cultural landscape plays an integral role in this multi-disciplinary approach because it allows a comprehensive review of the spatial organization of the material and spiritual culture of various local communities to be carried out.

## 2. Communications and values in the morphology of the cultural landscape of Urals and Siberia

The increasing attention of today's society to the concept of "cultural landscape" attests to the relevancy and urgency of conducting comprehensive research into the inextricable links between the various aspects of human existence and their contexts. This research must take great care to avoid the extremes of atomistic, "one-dimensional" interpretations of culture – for example, by regarding a given culture simply as a collection of material artifacts or as a strictly linear unfolding of defined social and demographic processes (Birks, 1988; Nassauer, 1995; Rubinshtein, 2010; Salter, 1971; Sauer, 1925, pp. 36–48; Sauer, 1927, pp. 154–214; Wallach, 2004).

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the cultural landscape concept has always been open to including the methodologies of private research efforts across a range of different subjects (historical, geographical, philosophical, cultural, ethnographic, etc.).

The first task of our study was to develop a morphological classification of the spatial organization of the region's cultural landscape that would best fit the socio-cultural and geographical features of Urals and Siberia.

The structure of the cultural landscape of a separate area or region is defined first in the methodology under development as a system of communication and shared values.

The structure by which values are communicated across a cultural landscape can be compared with two main forms of communication. The physical form includes land communication routes (river routes, roads, and railways). This form is central to the geographical spread of information and values. The second form derives from the wide range of social and cultural interactions that directly or indirectly accompany the economic development of an area and the daily life of its communities. This second form of communication reflects and reinforces relationships among specific ethnic or socio-cultural groups, provides a means for the transmission of cultural heritage, and preserves cultural archetypes.

The manner in which each of these forms of communication unfolds mirrors a particular system of cultural values that is characteristic either of the regional economic structure or of a historical era. In this way, we can speak

generally about the values of pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial development as addressed in the conceptual schema of periodic societal development proposed by Alvin Toffler and Daniel Bell (Bell, 1973; Toffler, 1980).

One can highlight the dominance of specific value systems particular to any given historical era of a country. In our case, examples of these systems include a radical transformation of the nature of cultural values which have predominated at different times in Russia. This kind of transformation occurred as a result of the reforms of the Russian Tsar Peter the Great, the revolution of 1917, and during a number of industrialization periods in the twentieth century.

On a lesser scale, the "small values" of local communities can be considered from a similar point of view. These "small values" define the socio-cultural identity of a locality.

It should be noted that each type of society has its own characteristic forms of communications that are related to the economic development of its territory. Thus, communication in pre-industrial society developed mainly along routes of natural dispersion (seas, rivers, steppes). In industrial society, this changed to dispersion via man-made routes (roads and railways, the laying down of telegraph and telephone lines). In post-industrial society, communication via networks (e.g., the telecommunications and broadcasting industries, regionalized service agencies, corporate and industrial conglomerates, production and distribution hubs, etc.) has become the dominant modality.

It should be emphasized immediately that in this context, the term "network" does not exactly mean a form, but rather a structural principle of communications that nurtures and disseminates social and cultural innovations in a post-industrial environment. By their nature, the post-industrial forms of development, unlike earlier forms, can be largely correlated with the process of "internal colonization" – that is, progressive settlement within a given area. This means that it is not development of that area "from scratch," but rather the cultural and economic identity that evolves from an earlier period – in this case, the area's industrialization phase. But along with this, there is now a tendency to "virtualize" the development process – today's information technology is bypassing land-based communications and can drastically alter specific features of an area's cultural landscape. This can be illustrated by comparison to the globalization process: prototypes of mass culture and consumption patterns, which change the attitudes, values, and lifestyle of local populations, are easily transmitted by mass media, commercial, and service networks to locations otherwise remote from modern civilization.

For Urals and Siberia, the communication modality predominating at any given point in time has always served as the essential "skeleton" of the spatial organization of their cultural landscapes. In addition to serving as the distribution means of certain forms of economic development, these modalities have always been critical conveyors of cultural examples and values.

Referring to the history of Urals and Siberia, we can give several examples showing that although certain forms of economic development lost their relevance and

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