



Awareness-raising of landscape in practice. An analysis of Landscape Character Assessments in England



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ABSTRACT

Awareness-raising is one of the measures which signatories to the European Landscape Convention are expected to realise, yet it is unclear what awareness-raising entails when related to an ambiguous subject such as landscape. Our study builds a conceptual understanding of awareness-raising of landscape, recognising that it cannot be a purely top-down process but needs to be seen as a “multi-directional transfer of knowledge” or “co-creation of meaning”. We have used this conceptual understanding as a lens for analysing practices which in some form help raise awareness of landscape. Document studies of Landscape Character Assessments undertaken in England since 2007 and interviews with key actors involved in Landscape Character Assessments were carried out in order to understand how awareness-raising is addressed. The findings suggest that while often overlooked or recognised as a top down endeavour landscape assessments have potential to develop co-creation of meaning.

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Introduction

The objective of a landscape assessment is to create a representation of landscape for others to argue for its values, providing insight and understanding of place (Stahlschmidt and Nellemann, 2009). As such, a landscape assessment signifies an assemblage and subsequent dissemination of knowledge, perceptions and values. The resulting assessment document represents an artefact for promoting an officially recognised expression of the landscape. As a representation of landscape an assessment is integrated into and informs on-going discourse on landscape. The assessment and subsequent development of discourse on landscape is dependent on the knowledge, perceptions and values that are included or excluded, which is subsequently informed by existing discourses.

The assessment document becomes a tool for raising awareness of landscape, expressing officially recognised values and moulding future discourses on the landscape. However, if a democratised view of landscape as enshrined in the European Landscape Convention (ELC) (Council of Europe, 2000a) is considered, then awareness-raising can also be seen as an essential part of the assessment process. Rhetoric from the ELC suggests that all individuals have equally valued knowledge of landscape and hence an equal claim to express that knowledge (Jones, 2007). Consequently, awareness-raising shifts from being a top down activity

to a multidirectional transfer of knowledge potentially leading to a co-creation of meaning (Lewis et al., 2010). Awareness-raising becomes intrinsic to landscape assessment both through the assessment process and as the produced artefact.

To raise awareness requires conscious recognition of the subject matter we are raising awareness of - in this case landscape. This may sound obvious, but landscape is a widely contested and frequently misunderstood concept. Even within disciplines directly engaging with landscape there is an array of theoretical approaches and methodologies for exploring and explaining landscape (Olwig, 2007a; Bell et al., 2012).

This paper addresses the tensions and contradictions which arise when awareness-raising of landscape is taken into account. The phenomenon is studied by examining Landscape Character Assessments (LCA) (Swanwick, 2002a) undertaken in England between 2007 and 2012. LCA is a comprehensive approach for analysing landscape used across much of the UK and recognised as an instrument which contributes to the implementation of the ELC (Natural England, 2009). The LCA approach has been utilised as a case study for developing an understanding of what raising awareness of landscape and landscape values means in practice.

This paper begins with a consideration of the definition of landscape laid down in the ELC and then addresses how awareness-raising can be considered in light of the multiple facets that this concept of landscape represents. The LCA approach is then introduced and through both document analysis and semi-structured interviews an understanding of how these issues are addressed in practice is presented. Implications of this are critically discussed and conclusions are drawn, reflecting on the use of

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awareness-raising for understanding the multiple values of landscape.

Landscape: what are we raising awareness of?

The European Landscape Convention, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2000, is the first international regional convention to focus on Landscape as an entity in itself (Council of Europe, 2000a; Prieur, 2006). As a legislative instrument, the ELC needs an accepted definition of its central subject, landscape. The resulting definition necessitates acceptance across the multitude of disciplines which impinge upon landscape and which already operate within their own legal, policy and theoretical frameworks. The acceptance of the convention as an international legislative tool requires that this definition is also acknowledged across the diverse cultures of the member states of the Council of Europe. To gain such wide acceptance and to be appealing to all, the definition needs a high degree of ambiguity (Matland, 1995). The resulting definition, recognising landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors;” (Art 1a) (Council of Europe, 2000a), is consequently open for wide interpretation. This openness, founded upon “a compromise between concepts and perceptions of landscape” (Olwig, 2007b p. 586) allows a broad if somewhat disparate European understanding of landscape to develop and help further the European agenda of “Unity in Diversity” (Pedroli et al., 2007; Sassatelli, 2010; E.U., 2011). The vagueness of the definition also helps to cross disciplinary boundaries as its openness to interpretation allows all to attach their individual understanding to it. The diversity of disciplines and cultures with their own conceptual/theoretical frames and beliefs means landscape cannot fit within a fixed theoretical definition, but must be allowed to develop and morph.

Ambiguity of language may be appealing at a European policy level where the elasticity imbibed in the concept allows a perceived cross cultural understanding, however ambiguity creates the risk of contention when the subject is operationalised (Matland, 1995). This contention is compounded by the fact that the ELC definition differs from and may conflict with others understanding of landscape (Antrop, 2001; Council of Europe, 2008; ESF/COST, 2010; Déjeant-Pons, 2011). Diversity of concepts and the ambiguity of the ELC are seen as leading to landscape being considered “a fuzzy subject” (Scott, 2011 p2758) which lacks a real advocate for its cause (Jones and Daugstad, 1997). The lack of an advocate for a new and positively laden policy subject, such as landscape, can generate greed as disciplines attempt to attain ownership of it (Jones and Daugstad, 1997; Sassatelli, 2010). This creates space for conflict between the different actors as well as between the ELC definition and the definition operationalised by bodies in member states, working within pre-existing sectoral based legal and policy frameworks.

Academics generally interpret the text of the ELC as a post-modern interpretation of landscape, socially constructed; relating to meanings, symbols and processes rather than to absolute values (Gailing and Leibenath, 2013). These are meanings founded on mental and social constructs (Howard, 2007; Jones, 2007). Such an understanding moves landscape away from being purely an asset and part of physical space, to being linked to people's perceptions (Howard, 2004; Planchat-Héry, 2011). As the focus moves to landscape as experienced by people, it becomes dependent on the actions and interactions of individuals and society, placing increased emphasis on the inhabitants of landscape and diminishing the dominance of experts (Sarlöv Herlin, 2007). As such landscape embodies human relations to the physical environment; it represents the site where routines are lived out and places which are often taken for granted (Sack, 1997). Consequently landscape

becomes an entity through which the environment can be communicated to the public and an arena through which the public can communicate their relationship to their surroundings. Although the public are crucial to an understanding of landscape based on perceptions, the intangible knowledge on which this understanding is based makes the concept ambiguous and not always relevant to people's everyday way of thinking (Soini, 2004; Sevenant and Antrop, 2010).

From this discussion it becomes clear that when landscape is considered there needs to be acknowledgement of what is actually being addressed. At a European level the idea of landscape develops a concept which all can agree on and helps further the objectives and aims of the Council of Europe; at national and regional level landscape needs to function as a practical tool and an instrument for understanding the phenomena which represents the surroundings to life; while for the public, landscape becomes an arena for discussing and understanding life and an entity on which identity is built (Proshansky et al., 1983). None of these meanings of landscape are static, nor do they sit in isolation, each is interdependent with the others as they influence and inform each other.

Awareness-raising

The concept of landscape ingrained in the ELC means that an understanding of landscape moves from being a more or less visible and tangible entity to being inclusive of the subjective matter of the mind. In such light the importance of the perceptions of those who experience the landscape is drawn into focus. Comprehending the perceptions, meanings and values of a landscape is based on the knowledge and its articulations by those who encounter the landscape. This is recognised within the ELC through its emphasis on the need for participation (Council of Europe, 2000a, Art 5c), a topic which has been addressed by numerous researchers (Scott, 2002; Selman, 2004; Jones, 2007; Stenseke, 2009; Clemetsen et al., 2011; Conrad et al., 2011b; Jones, 2011; Planchat-Héry, 2011). In contrast awareness-raising (Art 6a, Council of Europe, 2000a), which is also central to an understanding of landscape, is a relatively untouched topic. The convention expresses awareness-raising as one of three specific measures, expecting signatories to the convention to “increase awareness among the civil society, private organisations, and public authorities of the value of landscapes, their role and changes to them” (Council of Europe, 2000a, Art 6a). This echoes the Council of Europe objective to “promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity” (Council of Europe, 2011). However there is minimal recognition of what this entails.

Existing literature tends to see awareness-raising as a top down approach for promoting the credibility of entities to a community in order to influence both attitudes and behaviours, giving voice to the author of information (UNECE, 1998; Carr, 2004; Sayers, 2006; Burningham et al., 2008). Literature addressing awareness-raising tends not to probe the theoretical or conceptual understanding of the activity, instead focusing on normative (Johnson et al., 2007; Burningham et al., 2008) or procedural issues (Read, 1999; Carr, 2004; Primmer and Kyllönen, 2006) and often expressing raising public awareness as a positive outcome when participation fails (Primmer and Kyllönen, 2006; Nilsson et al., 2007).

There is only limited landscape literature relating to awareness-raising. This tends to be ambiguous generally not questioning what values of landscape are being raised or by whom. Many of these studies tend to recognise a top down perspective on awareness-raising, viewing it as; an unintentional positive side effect of participation, where the public is informed what landscape is (Sevenant and Antrop, 2010); as an important outcome of participation, for informing on policy (Spencer, 2011); or as a prerequisite for successful participation in landscape

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