



Landscape identity: Implications for policy making



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Keywords:

Landscape character
Cohesion
Perception
Landscape change
Landscape policy

ABSTRACT

Landscape is recognised to be an important asset for people's quality of life and people and the landscape interact in multiple and complex ways. Both in science and policy, this interaction has been dealt with in a fragmented way, depending on the objectives, the disciplinary perspective, as well as the used conceptual backdrop. In this wider framework, landscape identity emerges in policy discourses as a powerful argument to value landscape but it lacks an operationalised framework for policymaking. This paper has two major goals. One is to review the conceptual dialogue between landscape's and people's identity. The other is to identify contents of identity in the landscape (i.e. attributes used to define landscape identity) and the complexity of the identity (i.e. dimensions used to define landscape identity) as a way to increase efficiency in more spatially targeted policies. Above all, this paper discusses how landscape identity has been approached, in order to get an improved understanding of its potential for introducing the landscape concept at multiple levels of governance and how an increased knowledge base might be useful to inform policy making.

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Introduction

Landscape identity is mentioned throughout literature and policy documents as an important asset. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention describes that “Cultural landscapes – cultivated terraces on lofty mountains, gardens, sacred places . . . – testify to the creative genius, social development and the imaginative and spiritual vitality of humanity. They are part of our collective identity” (UNESCO, 1992). They also state, that “over half the World Heritage cultural landscapes embody the less tangible characteristic of expressing a group identity” (Fowler, 2006, p. 6). The European Landscape Convention includes already in its preamble that “the landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity”. Furthermore the ELC states in the general measures that each country ratifying the convention should “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” (CoE, 2000, article 1a). These are only two examples of policy documents at the European level referring to landscape as part or as the foundation of people's (collective) identity, which is complementary to the idea that landscape can provide perspectives to understand Europe's geography and European environmental meanings and relations (Cosgrove, 1997).

Nevertheless, landscape identity has been used through scientific literature and policy documents in multiple ways. It can either refer to the landscape itself and the features that render its differences, or on how people use the landscape to construct their individual or collective identity, but it can always be understood as the mutual relation between landscape and people. The first perspective has been more systematically used in supporting the assessment of landscape character as a baseline to map landscape types and units and to identify landscape values; whereas the second perspective, even though made explicit in policy discourses, has a more disperse use in research building on the concepts of social representation and place identity as a mean to explore place attachment and sense of belonging. For the purpose of this paper, it is hypothesised that this duality in referring to landscape identity is not random, meaning that there is an interdependency between the two perspectives that needs to be further explored

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and conceptualised in order to understand how the identity of the landscape relates to and interacts with the individual and collective identity of the people and vice versa.

There seems to be no consensual definition of the concept of landscape identity. The word “identity” is derived from the Latin *identitas*, meaning “sameness”. Stobbelaar and Pedroli (2011, p. 322), defined landscape identity as the “perceived uniqueness of a place”, based on a literature review from different disciplinary contexts. By framing the concept in this way, the authors choose to strengthen the people’s perspective rather than the physical, factual landscape. Egoz (2013) described “landscape and identity” as the “relation between landscape and the identity of humans engaged with the landscape, represents the formative role of landscape in building identity, both collective and individual, in response to the basic human need to belong” (Egoz, 2013, p. 272). For the purpose of this paper, a transactional model to landscape identity is presented (Fig. 1). This approach considers a dynamic relationship between people and their landscape, no longer considering it as independent but as interdependent aspects. In this model, landscape identity is formed through the mutual interaction of people and the landscape at two distinct levels – a sphere of perceptions and a sphere of action. The first builds on the assumption that landscape identity is not only based on the perceived landscape character but also on the character of the landscape as a constructed entity (Altman and Rogoff, 1987; Werner et al., 2002). The second sphere relates to the way society and landscape interact on a physical level by taking action on the landscape (e.g. policies, planning, management), driving the change of the landscape and altering its character, and on how the resulting landscape shapes the bonds between people and place (Antrop, 2005; Selman, 2012). Furthermore, these two spheres are considered as being dynamic and interdependent, based on the understanding that perception and action are two sides of the same coin that cannot be dissociated when approaching landscape identity in an integrated way.

Thus, it is argued that an improved understanding of the processes shaping landscape identity will set a cornerstone for policy action, in the sense that it may provide insights on the acceptable threshold of landscape change and thereby support policy and planning options, notably for those policies that strongly benefit from a territorial approach. This argument is supported by Wylie (2007, p. 191), who raises a series of critical questions connecting the physical aspects of the cultural landscapes with memorial and heritage politics.

In this context, this paper has two major goals. First, reviewing the conceptual dialogue between landscape’s and people’s identity and, second, exploring ways to progress in methodological developments to define contents of identity in the landscape (i.e. attributes used to define landscape identity) and the complexity of the identity (i.e. dimensions used to define landscape identity) as a way to increase efficiency in more spatially targeted policies. Contributing to the latter, an expert panel was involved in an exploratory workshop in order to gain insights on how to ground geographically the conceptual basis of landscape identity.

The construction of individual and collective identity

The first question to answer is why people and groups need to form an identity. In fact, people’s identity is related with the people’s need to understand who “we” are. It includes personal characteristics and characteristics shared with others (e.g. nationality) on the one hand and characteristics from the surroundings (e.g. landscape qualities) on the other. The individual identity has as a main motivational principle of valuing “me” and what is “mine”, i.e. the desire to see “myself”, the “others” and things connected to “myself” in a positive way (Smith and Mackie, 2007).

In this sense, this positive self-esteem is achieved by association to socially valued things, as for instance, living in a prestigious neighbourhood or by a process of a positive bias, that emphasises the positive aspects of “our” surroundings and depreciates the negative ones (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

By using the concept of identity, people define themselves as an individual, but also as a member of a group that shares some common characteristics. But identity is also a way to distinguish “myself” from others or other groups that do not share these characteristics and that are thereby different. This process both strengthens the identity, but can also exacerbate into a source of discrimination and social conflict.

A central aspect of this issue is the multiplicity of the collective identity. Each individual integrates multiple concepts of itself, or identities (e.g. Italian, Roman, urban, European, female) that can be organised into a hierarchical system of classification. Some are more inclusive than others, and some are included in others (Turner, 1985). This multiplicity of identities is not active at the same time. Each identity is activated or “switched on”, in specific contexts, i.e. as a function of the interaction between the person and the environment. Thus, the identity is activated (or becomes cognitively operative) by “metacontrast” from the person and the situation, meaning that people have the ability to choose the identity that best responds to a specific situation. Sometimes more than one identity can be activated simultaneously, for example a person can be “European” and “male” at same time. Another aspect is that multiple identities are activated to achieve a more positive identity. When people have a negative identity activated in a specific context, they can switch to another identity that can contribute to a more positive self-perception. For instance, residents of a neighbourhood with a low prestige can define themselves as belonging to a part of the neighbourhood without negative stereotype (lower scale or level of abstraction) or to define themselves as belonging to the city (upper scale or level of abstraction) (Bernardo and Palma-Oliveira, 2012). This shift in scales of identity can be seen as a way to escape from a negative identity. Thus, the construction of identity is a dynamic process, which allows people to make adjustments in order to achieve a more positive identity. The multiplicity of identities at different scales can be used to reduce the differences between the groups and promotes cooperation and social cohesion.

Based on the proposed transitional approach for landscape identity put forward in this article, it that cannot be ignored that there is a temporal component to the construction of landscape identity. This process of familiarisation and attachment is achieved through personal and community processes of appropriation over time. As expressed in Fig. 1 this process is circular: people are influenced by the landscape; they change or interact with the landscape; which again creates conditions for new relations and thereby influencing people’s perceptions of it. This familiarity gives a sense of autobiographic and “social insideness” (Rowles, 1983), which is expressed by the emotional preference to a specific place (Proshansky, 1978).

The process of identifying (or self-categorization) uses elements that are perceptually salient and elements that facilitate the process of distinctiveness from other places. This means that landscape qualities influence the people’s relationship through social practices and, simultaneously, are used as symbols of the identity of the community.

Thus, identity is a complex phenomenon that has been assessed and analysed from different perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds, depending of the research objective. Dealing with this complexity means to address systematically multiple dimensions of identity (Barney et al., 1998), such as “Intensity” – the strength of belief and degree of positive affect towards the object of identity; “Homogeneity” – the way people share a common perception of the landscape; “Contents” – the attributes used by people to define their identity; “Antecedents” – the aspects of the landscape-people

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