

# Cultural Landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Geographical Consideration between Theory and Practice

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The simplest definition of landscape describes it as the physiognomy of the geographical environment. The notion *cultural landscape* refers to landscape that has been transformed by Man as the result of civilizational development. Cultural landscapes are extremely dynamic and ephemeral systems. Currently, we are witnessing dramatic transformation of the landscape. The processes of *consumption* and *globalization* of the landscape are happening on a mass scale in the 21st century. Many of the factors that cause these rapid changes are within the scope of interest of geography; these include analyses of the impact on the environment of mass tourism, transport, fragmentation of the space resulting from growing areas of settlements and service sites, restructuring of industry, etc. The issues discussed in the paper include: factors of landscape transformation, diversification of European landscapes in selected regions and assessment of their condition, analysis of contemporary threats to the quality of European landscapes and directions of their transformation.

**Key words:** cultural landscape, European landscapes, factors of landscape transformation, 21<sup>st</sup> century

## Kulturni pejzaž 21. stoljeća: geografska razmatranja između teorije i prakse

Najjednostavnija definicija opisuje pejzaž kao fizionomiju geografskog okoliša. Pojam kulturni pejzaž odnosi se na pejzaž koji je izmijenio čovjek slijedom civilizacijskog razvoja. Kulturni pejzaži iznimno su dinamični i prolazni sustavi – trenutačno svjedočimo dramatičnim promjenama pejzaža. Procesi *konzumacije* i *globalizacije* pejzaža vrlo su značajni u 21. stoljeću. Mnogi faktori koji uzrokuju te velike promjene predmet su proučavanja u geografiji; uključuju analizu utjecaja masovnog turizma na okoliš, analizu prometa, fragmentaciju prostora kao posljedicu jačanja prostora obitavanja i usluga, restrukturiranje industrije itd. Teme kojima se ovaj rad bavi uključuju faktore transformacije pejzaža, diverzifikaciju europskih pejzaža u odabranim regijama i procjenu njihova stanja, analizu suvremenih prijetnji kvaliteti europskih pejzaža i smjernice njihove transformacije.

**Ključne riječi:** kulturni pejzaž, europski pejzaži, faktori transformacije pejzaža, 21. stoljeće

## INTRODUCTION

We are currently both witnesses and co-authors of revolutionary transformation of the landscape. Never before in history has human activity caused such dynamic and spatially gigantic changes. Along with quantitative changes, the landscape is also affected by qualitative changes resulting from globalization and cultural unification. Shaped throughout the centuries, evolutionary cultural landscapes are currently subject to rapid transformation resulting, among other factors, from:

- urban sprawl and dispersion of housing onto open areas;
- increased mass commercial tourism and so-called tourist colonization in coastal zones and upland and mountain areas, which were free from tourism until recently;
- decreased importance of legal protection of areas of environmental value and making such areas accessible for commercial use (sports, tourism, construction, hunting, forestry);
- building large-area commercial complexes;
- setting up large-area mining plants of mineral resources;
- development of trans-national transport routes;
- creation of "artificial landscapes" like man-made islands, fantasy worlds, funfairs, theme parks etc;
- expansion of deteriorated areas (post-mining or post-industrial areas) and so-called excluded space (especially in poorer countries);
- change of traditional forms of land management into industrialized agriculture (high technology agriculture).

In the 21st century, the process of "consumption" is becoming a mass-scale phenomenon; what is worse, it is not controlled or regulated, so it will be difficult to stop it or predict precisely its effects.

The aim of the article is to present the causes and the process of transformation of cultural landscapes in the 21st century in relation to the universal factors than determine these changes. Particular attention has been paid to contemporary transformation and threats to landscapes. The present text provides an outlook to the landscape from the point of view of humanist geography and landscape architecture. It is a theoretical consideration based on observations from many European countries.

The article also refers to the latest guidelines of the contemporary spatial policy, constituted by the European Landscape Convention. The subject matter is considered with regards to the policy (and ideology) of sustainable development (Meadows, Meadows, Behrens, 1973; Pawłowski, 2006; 2009).

## CULTURAL LANDSCAPE – THE SCOPE OF NOTIONS

The simplest definition of a landscape describes it as a physiognomy of the geographical environment. In the geographic approach, the landscape is a typological notion and has definite spatial borders that refer to components of the vicinity and its changes.

Depending on the origins of landscapes, geographers classify them as natural landscapes (tectonic, volcanic, karst, periglacial, steppe, etc – depending on the predominant creative natural factor) or anthropogenic (cultural) landscapes – agricultural, settlement, urban, industrial, protected, etc – depending on the main type of human economic activities. Physiognomic features – properties of the landscape vicinity – can be emphasized by distinguishing landscapes of mountains, lowlands, forests, seaside, river valleys, etc. (Andreychouk, 2010).

Man sees a certain spatial order in the landscape, which is usually the determinant of his identity. In geographic terms, Man does not stand out from the landscape, but rather perceives it as a genetically ordered reality in which the man himself is the inseparable element.

The contents of this paper mainly concern the anthropogenic (cultural) landscape, which is referred to as landscape transformed by Man as a result of the civilizational development. In reference books on geography, as well as geography-related sciences, and also in landscape architecture, there are dozens of definitions of landscape (including cultural landscape). The author discussed their multiple meanings, as well as their typology, in several scientific papers (Myga-Piątek, 2001, 2005 a, b; 2008 a). Leaving aside the review of definitions and various research aspects, we will presume here that: *“the cultural landscape is a historically shaped section of the geographical space, created as a result of combined environmental and cultural influences, making up a specific structure, with regional individuality perceived as peculiar physiognomy”* (Myga-Piątek, 2001). According to this definition, the landscape is an image of a region, and analyzing its components makes it possible to read its history and predict the course of its future development, as well as interpret the contents and symbols included within it.

Cultural landscape is the evolutionary subsequence of primary landscapes (natural landscapes – in different ecological zones and altitudinal zonation) that have existed since Neolithic times. Cultural landscapes developed along with the spread of the ecumene. Starting with the first Neolithic revolution, which spurred the beginning of a productive farming-breeding economy (approximate dates: Middle East – around 10 000 BC, Europe – around 4 500 BC, Asia – 2500 BC), primary landscapes were accompanied by areas that were affected by human interaction in cultural activities. The spreading ecumene periodically stabilized and people who inhabited it tamed the newly-explored space as the *place*<sup>1</sup>, which was accompanied by physiognomic changes. Each subsequent revolution in the history of the Western civilization – scientific, industrial or that of sustainable development (Pawłowski, 2009) – brought a new approach to the matters related to space management. Thus, cultural landscape can be regarded, to some extent, as the evolutionary reflection of growing human skills and abilities to use and transform the environment – agrogenesis, technogenesis and infogenesis, respectively (Andreychouk, 2008). That is the reason why currently, various types of cultural landscapes coexist in different parts of the world, differing in their origins, extent of transformation, dynamics of changes and leading shaping factors. Many centuries of adaptation and transformation of the natural environment created a diversified mosaic of landscapes varying in structure and physiognomy. These landscapes are a challenge for geographic studies and have been subject to a number of attempts of scientific classifications (Degórski, 2005; Myga-Piątek, 2005 a, b; Pietrzak, 2005).

Cultural landscape can be analysed as the result of long-term historical processes taking place in the matrix of the natural landscape "coded" by Nature. The processes of spatial transformation are analyzed in the historical aspect, thus it is necessary to take into consideration the factor of time – both geological time, when the evolution of the natural landscape took place, and historical time, when the evolution of the cultural landscape took place. With this presumption, particular stages can be distinguished in the processes of spatial transformation (Myga-Piatek, 2010) and the structure and quality of cultural landscape can be discussed in terms of a product – the creation of societies of past times in history (Wagner, Miksell, 1962; Zonneveld, 1990). The meaning of the landscape can also be interpreted as the cultural assets (compare Norberg-Schulz, 2000; Plit F., 2008).

The factors (Fig.1) that fundamentally influence the evolution of landscapes include (considering the historical paper by M. Dobrowolska, 1948, and the current paper by U. Myga-Piątek, 2010, as an inspiration):

- **Natural factors** – which should be regarded as input conditions, the environmental matrix that determines the type of human activities in a given area. They consist of: geological structure (lithostratigraphy and tectonics of the region), surface

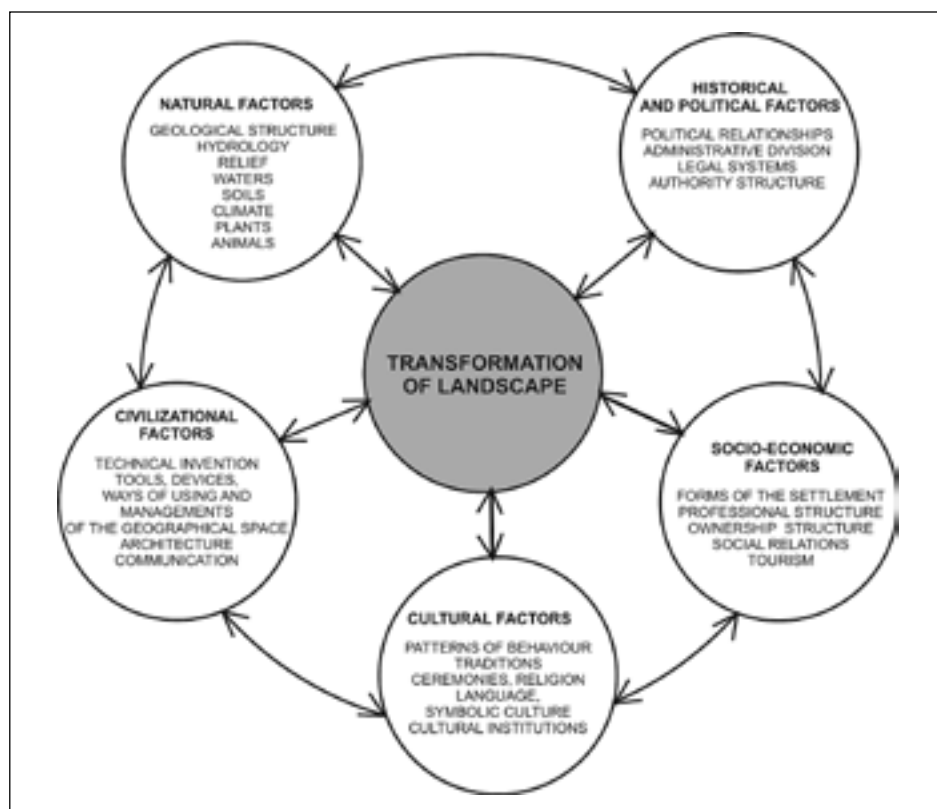


Fig. 1 The factors that influence the evolution of landscapes

Sl. 1. Faktori promjene pejzaža

features, hydrological relations (surface and ground water), climatic conditions, soil cover, vegetation and the animal world. What should be kept in mind is the high changeability of these factors, which, except for the geological structure and surface features, have changed many times in history (e.g. climatic periods in the Holocene, changes in water circulation in catchments, changes in the vegetation coverage and species composition, etc). According to the presumptions of geographic determinism (Ratzel, 1891)<sup>2</sup>, these factors determine the conditions of settlement in the ecumene and civilizational progress. They make economic growth in given areas easier, harder or simply impossible, and breaking the natural laws results in disturbed balance in the geosystem or, in extreme cases, in ecological disasters.

- **Historical and political factors** – consisting of events resulting from changes in borders, wars, administrative divisions; systems of authority and management of people and places (political systems and doctrines), legal and administrative systems, which have changed many times over the history, influencing heavily (in the case of Europe) the features of the spatial layout.
- **Socio-economic factors** – including settlement systems, forms of property of land and material goods, structure of professions, property and the society of residents in given territories. The skills related to the use of the resources in a given environment set the pace of transformations, while socio-economic preferences determine their direction.
- **Cultural factors** – being the evidence of gradual cultural maturation of societies, building patterns developed over time, architectonic styles, scientific discoveries and technological inventions, tradition, a growing feeling of territorial identity, spiritual culture: language (regional dialect), customs, habits, beliefs and religion, which are regularly reflected in the landscape.
- **Civilizational factors** – defined by the intellectual and biological potential of societies, accessibility to technological achievements and material goods. These factors have created Man's growing feeling of safety, gradual loosening of relations with the natural environment, and eventually, absolute dependence on technology, which found its expression in the form of the philosophical-scientific approach – geographic nihilism.

Co-existence of these factors creates a combination of multiple variables, which are difficult to interpret on the global scale. These issues are interpreted by cultural geography, most often in relation to selected regions of the world. The influence of these factors on the life of societies is undoubtedly variable, and attempts to explain it based on the opposing concepts of environmental determinism or nihilism have ignited serious scientific disputes. The concepts of possibilism, introduced by Paul Vidal de la Blache (1922), opened the path for their holistic and complementary roles in the life of societies and processes of landscape transformations. Thus, the Vidalian concepts opened up the way for sustainable development in its full meaning as it is perceived nowadays, as harmonious growth of societies with respect for the laws of Nature and accomplishments of culture.

The landscape is the source of vast amounts of information related to both its form and meaning, but also to its contents, and often its function, by influencing our intellect,

raising various associations and emotions (Dąbrowska-Budziło, 2008). The landscape is the carrier of information and meaning, it is a palimpsest, which can be freely interpreted as a peculiar image (text) of multiple meaning and multi-layered semantics (Casgrove, Daniels, 2004; Hall, 2002). This requires Man to be able to "read the landscape" – perceived as the natural- cultural heritage as well as the background and the result of history. This very skill makes it possible to understand the *genius loci* of landscapes. Reading the landscape is also an elementary skill in contemporary landscape architecture (Black, 2003). Undoubtedly, the landscape is a testament to our activities in the natural and cultural space, as well as an expression of human responsibility for space, as was noticed by Ortega y Gasset, who wrote the famous phrase: "Show me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are." The landscape overview presented in this way depicts the fundamental thesis of this article: the responsibility for the cultural landscape is one of the basic duties of contemporary societies and a prerequisite for the success of so-called sustainable development.

### CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AT THE TURN TO THE 21ST CENTURY

The 21st century began with communities commonly opening up for the processes of globalization and the widespread adoption of the rules of sustainable development. It was preceded by historical democratic and political transformations in central and Eastern Europe and development of common European structures and space – the European Union. Simultaneously, it was a time of great economic transformations in highly developed countries, resulting from implementation of high-tech industries. Contemporary landscape is shaped by processes that stem from technogenesis and infogenesis (Andreychouk, 2008). Thought (knowledge, science), or *noos*, is becoming the main driving force for the "new world"<sup>3</sup>. Most European countries feel the need for functional changes and economic restructuring. These changes, although economically justified, often show up in space in a spontaneous and chaotic manner. Processes of democratization also concern liberalization and release of formerly centrally-controlled decisions regarding space management. Currently, they are often made *ad hoc*<sup>4</sup>, frequently threaten the quality of the landscape and requiring urgent implementation of clearly defined regulations that would comply with the superior concept of sustainable development. The gravity of the situation can be seen in the fact that landscape policy has become really important in the declarations of the European Union. A proof of this is the already famous European Landscape Convention, worked out as an international document in Florence on October 20, 2000 (entering into force in 2004).

The Convention is a set of guidelines and legal standards existing in landscape policies of the countries that adopted it. Poland signed the agreement in 2001 and ratified it on June 24, 2004<sup>5</sup>. The Convention constitutes a new instrument dedicated solely to landscape protection, management and planning in Europe. A very important element in these activities is international co-operation, because the quality and diversity of European landscapes have been recognized as a common heritage and common resource (Gerlee, 2008).

For the needs of the Convention, the notion of the landscape was defined as: "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of

*natural and/or human factors.*” Landscape policy was regarded as *”an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes.”* In addition, the notion of landscape protection was defined as *”actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity.”* The notion of landscape management was specified as *”action, from a perspective of **sustainable development** (highlighted by UMP), 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.”* The convention also specifies another practical aspect of human actions in the landscape, by stating that *”landscape planning” means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.*

The Landscape Convention sets a special role of the landscape in the social field. The document regards the landscape as a key element of individual and social well-being by emphasizing its functional value. In the light of the Convention, the landscape constitutes a **resource** (highlighted by UMP) which favours economic activity, and its protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation. The provisions of the Convention also point out the role of the landscape in public interest in culture, ecology and social issues, as well as in contribution to fostering local cultures. Moreover, the Convention determines that the landscape is the basic component of European natural and cultural heritage, which contributes to human well-being and consolidation of European identity, and also claims that it is an important part of a quality of life for people everywhere: in degraded areas as well as in those of high quality of the environment, both in cities and in the countryside (Gerlee, 2008).

As has been mentioned above, the political factor is a major element that influences landscape transformation. Landscapes are always the expression of influence of particular policy, system of authority, etc. (Górka, 2008). It should be noted that the previous policy, including spatial policy, assumed that development resulted from consequent effort. At present, the policy and politicians’ power to control the space give way to the rules of the market. Landscape management has been dominated by principles of profit and consumption. The vision of future permanent and harmonious development is shadowed by episodic events, which always bring only temporary profits and satisfaction (Baudillard, 2006). The fact that we live in the “turboworld”, whose main characteristics are quick changeability, uncertainty and unpredictability (Sztumski, 2006), causes everything to be regarded in terms of a product for sale. Time and space have become such goods, and so has the landscape. The landscape, especially if it is cared for and “aesthetically correct”, is subject to trade. “Landscapes for sale” are increasingly managed by developers or by so-called tourist colonization. Its particular form is the concept of building “second houses” in coastal zones or in the mountains (Böhm, 2008 a, Myga-Piątek, 2008). As the result of these changes, landscapes lose their regional identity and become a brand product, whose “clones” can be more and more often found in various places of the world, regardless of the ecological zone or altitudinal zonation. Numerous examples could be provided, both from Poland – like “implants” of Podhale building style, torn out from their scenic and environmental context, which appear in the lowlands of Masovia and Great Poland – and

other European regions. Currently, these issues are being researched not only by land planners and architects, but also by geographers; in Austria, for example, the subject matter was discussed by W. Zsilincsar (2009); P. Urde et al. (2009) discussed the impact of Man on the landscape of the southern Romanian Carpathians, while V. T. Opačić (2009) described changes in the landscape of the Dalmatian coast caused by building second houses.

At present, spatial management has been reduced to controlling individual projects – events. Plans of housing estates or single objects do not result from any landscape arrangement vision (concept) as a coherent whole, but rather express the fever of mobility – the urge to search for new areas of activity at any price (Górka, 2008). As a result, spatial chaos grows – proved by huge ostentation. The mistakes resulting from hasty decisions (including those resulting from grey areas in legal regulations)<sup>6</sup> will require costly land reclamation. The case of Poland is special in that regard – it is necessary to mention the different spatial and economic policies of the three partitioning powers (Austria, Russia, Prussia), then Polish efforts of the inter-war period for reconstruction of the former cultural and economic potential, interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, which resulted in huge losses of both cultural heritage and the natural environment; then, the 50 years of socialism, which made the Polish space vague (Czeczczynski, 2005), and the development of democracy after 1989 that made the landscape subject to the market laws. Similarly, the contemporary state of the landscape of other countries can be interpreted based on the historical and political events of the past century. Interesting examples can be provided by Croatia, whose history and politics of recent decades are also reflected in the contemporary landscape.

Rare in Europe are specific spatial relics, typical of the historical-geographical regions that preserved their harmonious landscapes. They are often the result of extreme events – either perfectly run spatial policy aimed at protection of indigenous (which does not have to mean outdated) patterns of spatial organization, as in Alsace, Tuscany or Brittany, or poverty and backwardness of civilization, as in Lonjsko Polje, Polesia, Podlachia or Bukovina.

## SUMMARY

There are signs that show that, like the natural environment, the landscape should be treated as a strategic resource (Redclift, 1996, 2009). The landscape is not an item of consumption, like many others, and must not be treated as one (Górka, 2008). We must learn to "save" it in the way we learn to save water or energy. This requires us to reevaluate our ways of thinking about the landscape, the same way we did about the natural environment. There are a lot of tasks facing education; it is necessary to enhance the school curriculum with contents that would teach aesthetics and care of the beauty of landscapes, and also teach observing the principles of rational use of "free space". Popularization of so-called sustainable tourism will also hopefully bring about positive results.

Cultural landscape combines together the condition of the natural environmental and the condition (including moral condition) of the society. Landscape values are the common good and belong to all citizens. We should widely promote the idea that the landscape is a component of public welfare and is the absolute basis for the further existence of societies (Pietras, Myga-Piątek, 2005). The key to success may be the right proportions between "growth" and "development." In the 21st century, therefore, the landscape calls



for sustainable development primarily by means of widespread landscape education<sup>7</sup> and social participation, the latter understood as participation in both profits and costs. Beauty of the landscape will be achieved mainly at the cost of limited freedom and restricted extravagance of space use. This requires a change of the point of view on the environment, and reevaluation of the hierarchy of needs and expectations on a global scale. This also poses unprecedented challenges to local politicians and parliaments of the United Europe and all other countries; these challenges will be based on the need for specific restrictions, which will probably be difficult to accept, especially in countries where democracy was not regained or introduced until recently. Otherwise, however, the provisions of the European Landscape Convention and guidelines of sustainable development will remain worthless.

## CONCLUSION

Increased concern for the landscape has been observed in recent years. This is largely the result of the existing educational campaign for landscape and opening up of European borders. Increased interest in public space has been observed among professionals (landscape architects, geographers, sociologists), as well as increased awareness, efficient actions of local authorities and favourable social attitudes. Care for the landscape (especially in cities and smaller locations) is manifestation of identity and the emphasized specificity of places. The share of local communities and the public-state sector in improvement of the space quality is essential for the increased comfort and quality of life of residents, as well as for the need to enhance tourist attractiveness. Countries of central-eastern Europe have higher opportunities to use European funds for targeted projects concerning reclamation of historical city centres, post-industrial areas and degraded regions. The process of education on and social participation in the landscape, although progressing successfully, is still far from sufficient. On the other hand, there are still a number of cases where social conflicts and lacking communication between the scientific field (professionals) and the practical field (local authorities and communities) hinder satisfactory success in spatial planning and landscape management, meant as the way of a well-considered, organized and efficient system of actions aimed at preserving (protection) and multiplication of landscape values.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The relations between the *place* and the *space* were largely discussed by Yi-Fu Tuan (1987). Here, we can adopt the simplest meaning of the notion "*place*" as the "domesticated" form of space.
- <sup>2</sup> By way of these considerations, geographic determinism influenced the progress of geopolitics, for which it created the philosophical foundations.
- <sup>3</sup> That was emphasized as early as in the late 1960s by Vernadsky (1967), among others; These are also the foundations of the philosophy of evolutionism by Teilhard de Chardin
- <sup>4</sup> Wider discussion on these issues can be found in Volume 10 of Proceedings of The Cultural Landscape Committee, entitled *Cultural Landscape Management* (Ed. U. Myga-Piątek, K. Pawłowska, 2008).
- <sup>5</sup> The full text of the Convention was published in the Official Journal of Laws of 2006, No 14, Item 98 (Dziennik Ustaw 2006, Nr 14 poz. 98).

- <sup>6</sup> For example, *Act on planning and spatial management of 27 March 2003* (Journal of Laws of 10 May 2003); *Act on competitive rendering of 29 January 2004* (Journal of Laws of 2007 No.223, item 1655); *Polish space. Report about space management of country*. Warsaw 2007.
- <sup>7</sup> Since recently, Poland has had its own graduates in landscape architecture. Pro-landscape education (courses, training, vocational studies, post-graduate studies) is necessary for the whole community, though, including mainly self-territorial authorities and members of municipality councils.

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