

(Traditional) landscape identity—globalized, abandoned, sustained?

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Abstract

Traditional landscapes could be considered as one of the most apparent carriers of local identities. They have witnessed previous human activities. On the one hand, local people are keen to keep the existing landscape patterns that indicate their feeling of belonging. On the other hand, there is a desire to introduce new patterns dictated by new technologies and economic conditions. Rapid tourism, sports and recreation development, including big international events in some regions cause conflicts between the environment and human activities that need new approaches and sustainable solutions. The intense development of ecological and rural tourism is also affecting traditional landscapes by challenging environmental capacity, the need for landscape ‘improvement’ (new parking lots, hostels, roads, cellular phone towers *etc*) and agricultural use. Processes of globalization, such as tourism, create standardized landscapes so that regional diversity and identity are wiped away.

This paper focuses on landscape development in the era of globalization – what kind of and at what rate the development of landscape sustains the identity of landscape? Furthermore, we discuss what is the role of tourism in landscape changes; to what rate and how are the meaning systems of landscape changing and how they could be sustained.

1 Introduction

Globalization seems to become one of the most important processes in the present-day world. It also affects landscapes and studies about these. Eaton [1]

describes how an estate in Denmark could not be distinguished from a similar one in Texas – which can be interpreted as a sign of landscapes' appearance becoming uniform. At the same time, Mitchell [2] 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' /.../.*

Estonia is one of the few countries in Europe that have gone through several landscape changes in terms of land reforms and ideological transformations during the 20th century [3]. Therefore, traditional landscapes are rare and vulnerable to too rapid changes. The collective farm landscapes, created by the Soviet system and having existed for almost 50 years, can themselves be seen as an attempt to uniform globally both landscape patterns and images, loosing the local identity and regional variety.

Current paper discusses a number of features related to landscape globalization and is illustrated with case studies that focus on the change of Estonian landscapes. These cases include issues such as loss of traditional landscapes, *Genius loci*, local stakeholders' preferences. We try to find out how globalization affects traditional landscapes, how local people perceive this change, and how the landscapes could cope with these changes. We start with discussing the concepts of traditional and modern landscapes, address the impact of tourism to landscapes and the meaning systems about landscapes. Further, we explore the influence of globalization on those.

2 Background

Even though landscapes tend to change, this change is seldom a planned process. Instead, it is a mixture of autonomous actions and actions planned by man. Consequently, landscape changes in a somewhat chaotic way, while at certain times man strives to steer and redirect the evolution by planned activities, which however, are seldom realized as they were intended [4]. The overall change of landscape is the result of complex and interacting spontaneous natural processes and planned actions by man. Having that in mind, Antrop [5, 6] proposes a chorological distinction between traditional and modern landscapes. Traditional landscapes can be defined as those landscapes having a distinct and recognizable structure, which reflects clear relations between the composing elements and having significance for natural, cultural or aesthetic values. They refer to these landscapes with a long history, which evolved slowly and where it took centuries to form a characteristic structure reflecting a harmonious integration of abiotic, biotic and cultural elements; and therefore possess clear and stable identity [5]. 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. They can be characterized as uniform and rational, often lacking identity and personality.

3 Landscapes in the global context

In scientific literature globalization is addressed in terms of markets, financial systems, competition, and corporate strategies [7]. The variables used to describe changes are production, leisure, and abandonment. How can globalization in landscape be analyzed in these terms? First, globalized markets lead to globalized standards, eliminating differences. The product has to meet certain standards, no matter where it comes from. Accordingly, regional differences caused by different origins of product may disappear. Second, globalizing financial systems in terms of landscape mean growing patch size, simplified patterns, and thereby lower diversity. More uniform landscapes are easier to manage; they tend to create higher income, and therefore are often preferred by the profit-oriented landowners. Consequently, this leads to lower landscape diversity, lesser landscape functions and values, ultimately to landscapes that are emotionally tiring. Also, landscapes become more fractured and anonymous since the transportation flows increase and for that new straight highways are needed.

Competition is perhaps the most important of the features leading to globalization. As agriculture's compatibility is usually low without high subsidies, globalization may support abandonment of rural landscapes. In Estonia, several rural agricultural landscapes face abandonment caused by the disappearance of the Russian market; also by the powerful common market of European Union. The countries of European Union receive agricultural subsidies and the low prices of the products in Estonian market extrude local small-scale food industries. This in turn causes abandonment of fields, meadows, farmsteads, countryside. Some other tendencies for rural change can be the creation of leisure landscapes or the concentration of production into bigger units. All this means that less and less space is left for the multifunctional traditional landscapes. This is currently happening in Holland and Denmark, for example. However, as Bebbington argues: *We must be aware that we cannot be too normative on the demise of rural livelihoods, the destruction of rural environments and the disempowerment of rural communities in the face of global integration and tourism. These may be frequent outcomes but not inevitable ones/.../* [8].

One possible option to ordinate the rural landscape in the era of globalization is shown in figure 1. The common pattern of change of rural landscapes has involved the replacement of old technologies with new ones. The consumption and production of the landscape becomes part of the global market. The outcome of this is a kind of successor of the traditional landscape that retains elements of local character, the identity of that very landscape. It can still be recognized as being part of a bigger system and it can be up to some extent orientated both in time and in space. They are either the modern local landscapes or traditional global landscapes. These are for example wine landscapes where new sorts and new grape collecting technologies are used, nevertheless, still wines distinct to the area are produced. Another option may be the historical city-centers and open-air museums with re-incarnation of traditional forms but global functions of the landscapes. The instances from Estonia could be the remote islands of Ruhnu

and Piirissaar where traditional production is becoming a part of wider markets, as well as the historical Tallinn City Centre or the Open-Air Museum in Rocca-al-Mare – the landscapes attracting global tourist's appetite.

It is becoming more and more frequent to have landscapes with forms and functions totally changed. These landscapes – for example Hi-Tec blocks in the cities or supermarkets along suburban highway circles – can typically be recognized and interpreted by the recent generation. It is equally well understood by the generation representatives from anywhere in the world. Another end of the graph show the tendency of the traditional local landscapes becoming very rare. In Estonia one hardly recognizes any of these. The landscapes of two peripheral areas, the Island of Kihnu and Setumaa area might carry certain local and traditional forms and functions still as radical landscape reforms have not reached these sites throughout the history.

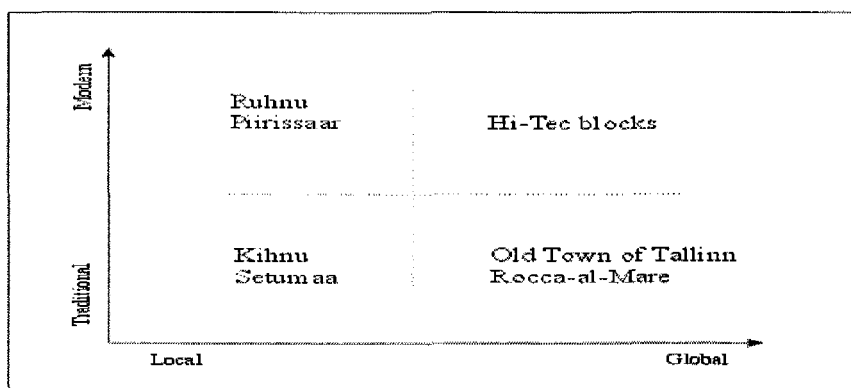


Figure 1: "Traditional-Modern" and "Local-Global" axes as an ordination field for the landscape qualities: the Estonian example.

3.1 *Genius loci*

Landscapes are wholes that are not determined solely by natural processes; instead the natural features together with the human culture create the spirit of landscape – *Genius loci*, a product of social memory containing stories and a special atmosphere created by nature. *Genius loci* is based on natural landscape, on top of which are the layers of cultural landscapes from different times, comprising the cultural heritage created by our ancestors. It contains indeed mythology and nostalgia. Thus, each landscape is assigned a particular "identity" by human perception [9], and in most cases this spirit of the place, the *Genius loci*, strongly affects people's perception and value judgments of a landscape.

But, do all landscapes have *Genius loci*? According to Antrop [5], many 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.

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*. The spirit of the landscape is also perceivable only "there", and nowhere else. It cannot be taken to a museum as old barn houses and hope that it will become alive in the new place.

Genius loci, a well-defined spirit of a place, is mostly attributed to traditional landscapes. Depending on interpretation, it can be argued that *Genius loci* can also be characteristic to modern landscapes; however, in traditional landscapes the sense of place tends to be stronger and more perceivable. See textbox 1.

Textbox 1 Globalization sustaining local identity

Otepää is known as tourism and recreation area, a winter sport training centre situated in South Estonia on the Otepää Upland. The area is clearly different from other rural areas of Estonia with economic change and high construction activity (the number of living houses in the region has increased by 9.6% within the last 5 years) [10]. Attitudes of visitors and local people towards different values of the landscape elements have been studied in the area. Otepää has definitely its identity, *Genius loci*, acknowledged by local people and, even more, by visitors. Four aspects of identity can be brought out for Otepää. Firstly, the endmorainic upland forms diverse landscape with many lakes between the hills. The physical landscape favours recreational use and nature conservation — shaping natural scenery for other aspects what the region is famous for. Secondly, it is a recreation area since the 1920s when poets and painters chose lake Pühajärv, the centre of the region, for their summer resort. By now the beach has been assigned a Blue Flag, is known for a music festival, and the whole area is densely packed with pensions and farms providing tourism accommodation. Active vacation has transformed from a privilege of the selected into everyone's right and has brought along mass tourism. Thirdly, Otepää is an international cross-country skiing centre since the 1950s when the place with long-lasting snow cover became recognized as perfect for training. The Olympic Centre of Tehvandi also offers a perfect roller track for summer. By now, Otepää hosts World Cup events. This in turn has increased the number of so-called Sunday skiers. Downhill skiing became popular in Estonia in the 1990s and ski lifts were established on several hills in the area. Fourthly, most of the area is protected as a Nature Park and is actively exploited as tourism attraction. Traditional agricultural land use is present at a diminishing level and not seen as part of local identity. Altogether, *Genius loci* of Otepää is developing and being updated as a mixture of recreation, skiing and nature conservation all making use of the scenery once dropped there by the melting glacier edge. The main source of the local identity is the physical landscape.

Textbox 1 Globalization sustaining local identity (continued)

Tourism, sports, and recreation have been the priority of local government for developing the area [11]. Recreation can be considered traditional in the area. However, development brings more and more elements replicating 'what is everywhere' such as downhill skiing centres, GSM stations, new international hotels. Reconstruction of the houses brings in new internationally unified and different from traditional building materials and, thus, new (global?) look of the houses. However, much of it can be seen as a normal development trimming the landscape from its laxity. All these changes may decompose the identity of the region. The maintenance of the identity depends to a great extent on how fast is the change.

In turn, how much of addition of new elements into the landscape is tolerable depends much on the landscape. In Otepää the hilly natural scenery absorbs the changes, locating their visibility to smaller area. The 'change-tolerance' is higher than in open and flat scenery where any addition is seen much earlier and further. Maintaining traditional landscape with cultural and historical heritage is important prerequisite for sustainable tourism development in the region, and strengthens the landscape identity values.

3.2 Tourist landscapes

Tourism constitutes one of these major contemporary forces of change in landscapes by providing the most significant means of direct large-scale physical contact and cultural exchange [12]. Travel and tourism is nowadays the largest industry in the world, accounting for 11.7 % of world GDP [13]. Peripheral areas in the Nordic countries see one of the challenges in stopping immigration from distant regions by promoting tourism [14]. This might result with reorganizing the meaning systems of the landscapes (see textbox 2). It is clear that tourism industry changes landscapes in ways where it would be easier to transport tourists, goods; also to have easier access to tourism accommodation and tourist sites both in the countryside and in the city. Roads are built for the convenience of driving not for the patterns of human life that might be engendered. This has further impact in the whole infrastructure: new roads, larger accommodations are needed (see textbox 3). The road landscapes have become monofunctional and become more uniform in appearance with the big corporations such as Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Shell, Texaco standardized establishments [15].

There is a threat that the places, which thousands of tourists visit every day, may lose their identity, authenticity, *Genius loci* and become a consumable Disneyland, or ready-made packages to be consumed quickly [16].

Economist Mishan has pointed out that geographical space is a limited resource [15]. So, allowing the market to develop without regulation effects in destroying the very places, which are the objects of the tourist gaze. This kind of self-destruction has happened in St. Tropez, Greece, Turkey etc [15]. Similar tendencies can be recorded in the Swedish island Öland, named to World Heritage List in 2001.

Textbox 2: Transforming meanings in religious sites

The reverence for places cherished by native people (e.g. religious sites) replaced by more pragmatic purposes, for instance by tourism practices, may be critical to the loss of traditionality of a place. In order to demonstrate the possible adverse effect of such turn we used the example of churches of Saaremaa Island, Estonia. Churches function as physical objects in the landscape, centres of local communes and as tourist attractions. A survey involving 11 Lutheran and 6 Orthodox congregations was carried out among pastors and priests of Saaremaa to detect the role of churches in local community and to find out whether and how tourism affects places associated with Christian tradition. The results show unity of opinions among congregation leaders. Only 50–100 years ago the main role of churches was to be in the service of local community as shrines and centres for cultural, social and welfare activities. At the present most churches have lost this meaning, moreover, many have become the incentives to magnetise tourists. The decrease of the number of religious people and the concurrent descent of reverence for church is to some extent a universal development accompanied by modern power relations between different interests. The role of church as a mere shrine, a room of spiritual experience, a shaper of the identity of local community has been replaced by contemporary, often pragmatic meaning of religious buildings. In summertime many of the churches of Saaremaa entertain much more visitors per week than there are congregation members going to the church on Sundays. Some churches receive hordes of people every day, while some that are distant from main tourist routes are closed to visitors. The latter are subject to deterioration.

Congregations encourage tourism, as this provides them with extra earnings. In fact, quite a number of congregations in Saaremaa would not keep going without tourists' donations. Some churches do some commercial practices (e.g. taking money for entrance and visiting the tower, selling souvenirs) since it is the only option for the church to carry on. What may be also problematic sometimes is the disregard of some basic traditions and undignified behaviour by ignorant tourists during sacred ceremonies.

To sum up, the importance of countryside churches today is primarily in historical and architectural values. Estonian churches in the countryside, often abandoned, belong to the landscape rather than to people's lives.

The landscapes themselves and the meanings of landscapes are now being reconstructed in order to sell the landscapes in the way local authorities understand what world heritage is. World Heritage List has become an economic resource for local entrepreneurs [18]. To conclude, the outcome of the tourist landscape is no longer landscape as nature, not even landscape as identity or cultural image. It is landscape as product, produced for the purpose of wholesale consumption in all of its dimensions: visual/ aesthetic, experiential/ functional and symbolic [12].

Textbox 3: Attractive landscapes and conflicting interests

The island of Saaremaa, Estonia is one of the largest islands in the Baltic Sea with the population of 37,000 and area of 2,673 sq km. With its distinct nature it is a favourite tourist attraction. Many Estonians consider Saaremaa the best place to spend their holidays. Also, foreign tourists have discovered the charm of the island. Estonians themselves have created a myth around Saaremaa – it is considered the best place to spend summer days with friends and family. Answers to questions such as what to preserve in the landscape and why, whose landscapes they are, are very much influenced by economical and political considerations in Saaremaa. The media study and a questionnaire survey as a reflection of different stakeholders' views were carried out and the results were rather conflicting.

The questionnaire survey showed that the image of Saaremaa is constructed of the nature-culture interface. Historical settlement pattern, stone walls and old windmills are valued for their aesthetic worth and for the association they create between present landscape and history. A clear opinion prevails that for the maintenance of peculiarity and harmony in landscape, Saaremaa should host so-called small-scale components. Large constructions, extensive patches of agricultural land, new industries or any other major establishments that could derange the peace and quiet as an indivisible part of the island's lifestyle receive disrespect from respondents. Furthermore, it can be deduced that any proposed large-scale development project in Saaremaa that would bring about the loss of values such as local identity, traditions, wildlife and peculiar ecosystems is objected. What local people also object is mass tourism enhancement, as it impairs landscape values such as intactness, simplicity and traditionality.

Constructing the deepwater harbour to Saaremaa and a bridge between mainland and island are hot issues discussed in the local and national media [17]. Those for the deepwater harbour see it as a savor out from a periphery situation and possibility to create jobs; those against it see it as a threat to vulnerable historical landscapes since new and larger infrastructures are needed for the harbour. The media study shows that constructing it is a political issue, therefore considered as a priority of the state. Also, questions like carrying capacity, how to develop tourism in a sustainable way are the issues still unsolved in the island. The study showed that the future of the landscapes was perceived differently by different actors.

4 Discussion

Too rapid changes are one of the major threats all stakeholders perceive in the landscape. Therefore, landscapes have appeared in policy. Consequently, different kinds of management strategies are applied to avoid or slow down the further drastic changes. Making uniform production landscapes is one of the dominating global trends. Another is creating museum landscapes, which can

happen both by nature restoration (e.g. Dutch and Danish bogs) and open-air museums. Globalized rural landscapes are for instance golf courses, equestrian landscapes (elitarian rural landscapes) that are attractive to tourists. 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.

Traditional landscapes will be fading away, but this process takes long. They will be replaced either by global landscapes oriented to the whole world, following the global rules and representing the global values, or by modern landscapes, that try to avoid the global fashions, instead develop their own innovations and technologies.

5 Conclusion

Globalization of the landscapes is spreading everywhere. As change is definitely 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. These changes may bring along loss of landscape identity. Case studies indicate that people are aware of these threats; they prefer the traditional landscape to the modern one. However, when it comes to creating income, these considerations, go to background.

Sustainability of the traditional image of landscape depends much on the natural composition of the landscape forming the scenery for human activities. The more dominating in the visual side of a landscape is the natural component the better it tolerates faster changes. To sustain the identity of landscape visual side of the scenery must be considered for planning.

In terms of local development, tourism may help to reorganize the values the tourists hold for a region so that people living in the region could present the values the way the tourists would like them to see. The precondition for that transformation is that tourism would not impose problems and costs of its own on local resources and people.

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