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Why landscapes of the past are important for the future

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Abstract

Landscapes change because they are the expression of the dynamic interaction between natural and cultural forces in the environment. Cultural landscapes are the result of consecutive reorganization of the land in order to adapt its use and spatial structure better to the changing societal demands. Particularly in Europe, history has recorded many successive and even devastating landscape changes, which have left barely any relics today. Today, the changes are seen as a menace, as a negative evolution because they cause a loss of diversity, coherence and identity, which were characteristic for the traditional cultural landscapes that are rapidly vanishing. This growing concern is also expressed in the European Landscape Convention, which will be used as a start for the analysis in this article. Three periods of landscape dynamics are considered: the traditional landscapes before the important changes that started in the 18th century, the landscapes of the revolutions age of the 19th to 20th century, and the post-modern new landscapes. The combined effect of the driving forces such as accessibility, urbanization, globalization and the impact of calamities have been different in each of the

urbanization, globalization and the impact of calamities have been different in each of the periods and affected the nature and pace of the changes as well as the perception people have had about the landscape. Values change accordingly and so does the way of using and shaping the landscape. It is argued that this changing perception also influences what kind and aspects of landscapes are studied, protected and managed. Diversity and identity of cultural landscapes are central in the discussion. It is shown that coherence between small composing elements in a broader spatial context is important for the legibility of the landscape and that the ability to tell the (his)story of a place strongly enhances the identity and the overall value. This offers criteria for inventorying and assessing landscapes, which is needed to define future management and development. Although the general trends of future development of the European landscapes are rather well known, planning and managing future landscape remains difficult and extremely uncertain. The processes and management in past traditional landscapes and the manifold relations people have towards the perceivable environment and the symbolic meaning it generates, offer valuable knowledge for more sustainable planning and management for future landscapes.



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Keywords

Landscape change; Europe; Cultural landscape; Rural landscape; European landscape convention

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