

Editorial

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The collected papers presented here are a snapshot of some of the wide-ranging issues discussed at the international conference *Cultural Landscapes in the 21st Century* held at the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS), Newcastle University, UK, 10–16 April 2005. The meeting was the 10th International Seminar of Forum UNESCO–University and Heritage, and an Inter-Congress of the World Archaeological Congress.

The long and intimate interaction between humans and their environment has created a tremendous diversity of cultural landscapes. We relate and ascribe values to such landscapes for aesthetic and spiritual reasons, as well as their practical value in sustaining cultures and biodiversity. Ascribing value to landscapes is not a new phenomenon. One might argue that the 19th century Romantic movement was inspired by remote, dramatic and ‘wild’ landscapes, for example, as was the National Park movement in the United States and subsequently elsewhere in the world.

However, in 1992 the World Heritage Convention became the first international legal instrument to recognise and protect outstanding cultural landscapes that are regarded as ‘part of our collective identity’. The Convention recognises three main categories of cultural landscapes, namely, those designed and created intentionally, such as parks, gardens or cityscapes, associative cultural landscapes which have strong cultural, artistic or spiritual meaning, and evolved landscapes, those that have been modified by people over time. Mechtild Rössler describes the introduction of ‘cultural landscapes’ into the World Heritage Convention, an innovation in conserving landscapes that could help to break down perceived barriers between nature and culture; cultural landscapes are regarded as a fundamental link between humankind and the natural environment. She describes the implementation of this new model in various regions of the world, and makes special reference to the development of new processes of management that enable interaction with indigenous peoples and other key stakeholders. She points to the need to further develop concepts of stewardship to ensure that the management of cultural landscapes identified as World Heritage (in 2006 there are 53 such sites) is effective. Chris Blandford’s article describes how efforts have been made to provide effective management plans for all the designated World Heritage Sites within the UK.

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The situation is complicated by the fact that such management plans are not a statutory instrument within the UK planning system; despite this, planning for World Heritage Sites has evolved dramatically, the use of standard approaches and conventions leading to the establishment of good practice and better informed consultation procedures.

The last decade has seen a significant change in the ways in which we think about cultural landscapes, and in particular how we value and engage with landscapes on a small scale, those landscapes and the heritage elements within them that are pertinent to local communities. In other words, the recognition of outstanding cultural landscapes as part of ‘world heritage’—and how they were designated and subsequently managed—is just one facet of the wide-ranging issues that were discussed during the course of the Newcastle conference. It is becoming increasingly evident that there is real concern for local distinctiveness; the widespread emergence of community-based local heritage projects is symptomatic of this concern. As a result the designation and operational management of cultural landscapes in relation, for example, to changing agricultural practices, local economies or the development of tourism is equally contentious, with potential conflict between more extensive formal legal protection and local community interaction with, and control over, their own environments. Many of these issues, in particular the need to recognise landscapes of significance at a national level, are discussed in Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons’ article on the Council of Europe’s European Landscape Convention (2000). She describes the origins and the key concepts of protection, management and planning co-operation that are the essence of the first international treaty to promote sustainable development. This Convention applies to all aspects of European landscapes, and consequently complements the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972), which has different purposes. The paper provides some useful definitions and a comprehensive summary of the legislation, its implementation and management systems.

As well as engaging with very practical strategic and operational management issues, cultural landscapes are also at the interface of several theoretical areas. These include memory, identity, belonging, place, representation, diaspora, migration, exclusion, sustainability and ethics, and it is therefore unsurprising that cultural landscapes are attractive to researchers from several disciplines. It is evident that new terminologies have evolved as museologists, sociologists, cultural geographers and critical theorists have begun to investigate the diversity of cultural landscapes. They have sought to go beyond the practicalities of designation and management to explore the meanings that lie within cultural landscapes. New taxonomies are being developed as theorists discuss notions of (for example) indigenous landscapes, religious landscapes, and virtual landscapes as alternative conceptions of place emerge. Key elements within cultural landscapes are also changing, with a shift from the tangible ideas of cityscapes and coastal scenery, to include the more intangible elements within our cultural landscapes that are associated with memory, crafts, working practices, belief systems, music, or folklore.

This complexity suggests that we cannot see cultural landscapes as static phenomena. They are dynamic entities, changing through time, and are constantly re-negotiated, re-evaluated and culturally constructed—cultural landscapes can be seen as ‘contested spaces’. Sam Turner explores these ideas further in his description

of the origins and use of Historic Landscape Characterisation, a technique to assess cultural landscapes and inform management decisions. Although the technique has been developed in England, it is widely practised in Europe thanks to the impact of the European Landscape Convention. It provides an holistic view of heritage resources, a feature that is also attributed to ecomuseums. Gerard Corsane's review of the ways in which ecomuseological principles informed the creation of the Robben Island World Heritage Site and its museum provides an excellent example of the ways in which places acquire symbolic meaning, and how the past is negotiated and represented. His descriptions of the long history of Robben Island as a prison and the origins of the site that represent resistance to political injustice are vivid and enlightening.

These five papers are an indication of the range of ideas that were presented at the Cultural Landscapes' conference. The organisers are now in the process of ensuring that full versions of all papers are made available on the reconfigured conference web-site at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/unescolandscapes/>; abstracts of all the papers are already available.