

Lecture 2 - 16.11.2020

Prof. Regine Keller

Department for landscape architecture and public space

WHO OWNS THE LANDSCAPE?

Who owns the landscape? The answers to this question are as diverse as the various interests involved and claims on the landscape. Of course, these interests are affected by the applicable property rights, the prevailing conception of nature, and the conceptions of 'landscape'. Let us therefore begin by considering what landscape actually means.

In Germany?, 'Landscape' is a concept with no uniform definition. It may denote both a part of the geographical surface of the earth and a territorial unit. The word landscape, in German 'Landschaft', is composed of the old Germanic Lant, meaning a cleared area, and the suffix schaff, which derives from Indo-European and means 'create'. In 830 AD, the term Lantschaft appeared for the first time in its designation as a political and territorial unit.

In terms of the image of a landscape, this is influenced by individual perception, the observer's cultural context, and their particular understanding of nature. Historically, in most cultures the understanding of nature as the basis for natural landscape has been associated with the notion of a 'life-giving Mother Earth', terra mater, or with a particular deity – as in Latin America the earth goddess Pachamama. This belief in the nourishing power of nature, the primal mother, has always been accompanied by a warning not to destroy the source of this power, on pain of divine retribution.

What we today call 'sustainability' was already present in these archetypal images. Cultivation of the land which tests the limits of nature's bounty has given rise to an awareness of the exhaustibility of natural resources. From early cultures to the present day, unbridled exploitation of raw materials has always led to unforeseen consequences for the natural world and the landscape, and to the depletion of natural resources.

Landscape and raw materials

An example from the late Middle Ages shows the simultaneously growing knowledge about the complex interrelationships to be found in nature. In his book *Ludicium Lovis* (1492), the humanist and educator Paul Schneevoegel, using his Latinized name, Paul Niavis, described the mining industry in the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) and its consequences for the environment. The story had the gods descending from Mount Olympus to pass judgement. The plaintiff was a personified, battered Mother Earth, who appeared as a physically injured terra mater. Niavis used the terms *sustentare* (sustainable) and *conservare* (preserve). His are the first known comments on the topic of sustainability in literature.

A picture of the mountain altar in Annaberg dated 1521 gives us an inkling of what the Erzgebirge landscape looked like: the forests had been cleared for intensive ore mining on a dramatic scale. The late Middle Ages were thus witness to completely devastated landscapes, with massive deforestation resulting in a timber shortage that led to the collapse of the timber industry. The first prohibitions on felling trees in 1499, and other forestry regulations (for instance in 1526 in the Fichtelgebirge), are documented sanctions designed to limit ruthless business practices / on the ruthless business practices affecting nature.

Under the title 'Who owns the earth?' the journalist Ulrich Grober described this story very affectingly in 2010 in an article in *Die Zeit*. The point of view seemed clear: property rights and the exploitation of natural resources were the main stakes in connection with the landscape. Niavis' story makes him an early proponent of sustainability.

Ownership and sustainability

Who may lay claim to the landscape? What interests are involved in the landscape and how do these alter our conception of it? Our primary vital resources are water, earth, air, and sun. These provide for our basic needs: habitat, food





and goods, power generation and regeneration. This fact has led to the acquisition of land and its cultivation has significantly changed landscapes. It is only because resources are limited that humankind has been led to take seriously the conservation of nature and its possible regeneration. In 1713, Hannß von Carlowitz, the chief mining officer at the service of Augustus the Strong, advocated the implementation of sustainable forestry in his *Silvicultura Oeconomica*. Owing to this treatise, the development of the concept of sustainability is widely attributed to him (e.g. Sustainable Forest Management, Carlowitz 1713).

Landscape architecture and ecology

What is the role of landscape architecture against this background? Landscape architecture always interacts with, and transforms, individual interests in the realm of public space. It mirrors the relationship between humankind and nature that prevails in a given society, as well as its particular conception of landscape.

Historically, cultivation of the land and the subjugation of nature paved the way for garden culture. Technological progress in farming (engineering), architecture and the formal design of public spaces is apparent in Garden Art (Baroque). Then during the Enlightenment, landscape architecture in Europe took a different path, no longer simply aiming to tame nature. As a consequence of technological maturity, a Romantic, nature-led design language was developed (Romanticism, English Garden). This style was followed by mannered design ideas (classicism, modernism, postmodernism). Contemporary approaches attempt to produce a perfect copy of natural areas (nature restoration projects).

Today's landscape architecture can apply any of the styles mentioned above. In addition to landscape architecture developing from garden art, the profession of landscape planning has evolved. Connected to research in geography and biology, ecological planning was formally established in the 1970s in Western Europe and has developed further since then.

The limits to growth – the environmental movement

In 1972, Meadows et al. published *The Limits to Growth*, a book examining the consequences flowing from an aggressive consumption of natural resources. The growing understanding of the complex relationships within ecosystems led to the realisation that our consumption of large amounts of natural resources and our impact on the landscape had led to dramatic damage to the associated ecosystems. In the 1970s, the nature conservation movements in Europe brought about progressive

nature conservation legislation, which also changed the political situation.

Landscape protection, for its part, has existed for far longer. Even the landscape architect Peter Joseph Lenne, working with his 'Schmuck und Grenzzüge' in Berlin in the early 19th century sought to limit the unregulated growth of cities.

Thus the professions of landscape architect, ecologist and landscape planner, who primarily deal with the natural balance of landscape areas, started practicing and researching. Legally, these professions are underpinned by nature conservation laws, and politically supported by the Green Movement, backed by a new civic engagement that also had its beginnings in the 1970s. Of concern here is not only the environment, but also the uses of open space.

The role of the citizen

In his exhibition 'The seizure of the lawn' in 1972, Günter Grzimek put forward seven theses focusing on the reclamation of public space by the citizen. He called for a shift away from centrally-planned public parks towards involvement in the design of public space by the citizenry. His central ideas were that it would be better to go green for less expenditure, and to extend participation in planning processes to the wider population. His ideas are now more relevant than ever.

So, who owns the landscape?

The landowner, the raw material extraction company, the energy producer, the conservationist, the citizen? Or who else... ?

