Perceiving the past in landscape….

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Landscape is:
“an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action & interaction of natural and/or human factors” (ELC, article 1)
A. Introduction

• Characterisation or assessment is a widely-accepted way of looking at / working with landscape. It is encouraged by the ELC which speaks of ‘the character of landscape’ resulting from human/nature action/interaction.

• It is sometimes thought to be a straightforward, descriptive, easy, scientific, objective and repeatable process, but all of these assumptions can be challenged - and why must it be any of those things?

• The first contribution of historical (indeed of any disciplinary) approaches is to challenge the other approaches.

• Landscape Character Assessment seeks to integrate historic and ‘natural’ aspects of landscape, but nevertheless it has been necessary in the UK to have a separate complementary method of historically and archaeologically-informed characterisation, Historic Landscape Characterisation. A similar separation exists in other countries (eg The Netherlands, or Catalonia). Why?

• Does the reason lie in the very wide disciplinary spread of landscape research, or in institutional divisions, or in the emphasis in landscape policy on the natural environment, or in the separatist tendencies of archaeologists and historians, or in the greater complexity and inaccessibility of the landscape's historic dimension? Is it a scale issue? Or is multidisciplinarity not enough, but inter-disciplinarity simply too difficult?
• The British LCA method has spread to other parts of Europe, but it does not always have a supporting historic method. Yet history is a major contribution to public perceptions and appreciation of landscape.

• Seeing the past in landscape also requires us to revisit the word 'perception' in the ELC definition.
  – The traces of the past in landscape are often invisible, even to experts, and legible not to the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) but through cognition, memory, transmission and knowledge transfer.
  – The past can be read in the landscape, but often it needs to be read into landscape, by experts, before becoming part of public perception.

‘Landscape’, of course, is not interpreted as only ‘scenery’, the natural environment, or even ‘cultural landscapes’, but:
  • the ideas and concepts in the ELC,
  • everywhere and everyday as well as special areas,
  • the frame of people’s daily lives,
  • ‘an area, as perceived by people …’
  • dynamic, socially- and culturally-embedded,
  • transcending nature v. Culture
  • sense of place, identity
History in landscape is not only ‘things’ (e.g. sites, buildings, field-walls and hedges walls and terraces, mining sites) or even previous ‘layers’ (landscape is not a gateau). It also - and arguably predominantly – concerned with other concepts, for example:

- Processes (constructive of today’s landscape, even if very long past)
- Actions (our predecessors embodied physically in landscape)
- Stories (and memories)
- The legacy of past lives lived in landscapes long gone;
- Understanding

B. Framing devices - *trois cadres conceptuels*

**Landscape, social challenges and inter-disciplinarity**

European Landscape Convention C of E, 2000

The Faro Convention: The Value of Cultural Heritage for Society C of E, 2005

ESF/COST - SPB41

Landscape in a Changing World: Bridging Divides, Integrating Disciplines, Serving Society

- Inter-disciplinarity; to combat separation of science and humanities
- Research integrated with practice – supporting the ELC
- Real world challenges - landscape as tool

- Landscape provides a common frame
- Complexity & connections; Change
- Human perspectives; Mentality & materiality
- Past and future entwined
Themes for research and action

1. Landscape as **universal commons**: a common good
2. **Roots and routes**: mobility & evolving lifestyles
3. **Reactions and resilience**: long-term transformations
4. **Road-maps**: context for future change

In effect, these are all about past or future history

An example of landscape projects which are framed by the conventions and the SPB and which (in this case) integrates landscape with heritage with [www.cheriscape.eu](http://www.cheriscape.eu)
C. Historic Landscape Characterisation

"... **urban** and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas" *ELC art 2*

GREATER LONDON, a map full of time, change and agency

- The 'Green Belt'
- Heathrow airport
- 'The City'

Produced September 2006 by EH Characterisation Team and GLAHOR
"... urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and **marine areas**" 

*ELC art 2*
Examples of levels of detail from the polygon attributes

- **Broad classes**
- **Types**
- **Types X previous types**
- etc
Differing perspectives on current HL character –

a) emphasising post 1950 modern agricultural change,
b) emphasising survival of older field patterns

D. *Trop? Un excès de méthodes?*
Landscape Character Assessment et Historic Landscape Characterisation

• Some parts of Europe have little or no tradition of LCA/HLC or use different methods. But in the UK, England alone has had **two government-supported methods** (not to mention the ‘Living Landscapes’ approach).

• Why? Does the question need asking?
Comparing HLC and LCA at county scale
Shropshire

HLC
Landscape Character Assessment
mainly topographical-visual, based on areas

LCA

And at national level - HLC Types and LCA Areas

Historic Landscape Characterisation
highly simplified, mainly historical,
based on types

Landscape Character Assessment
mainly topographical-visual, based on areas
Comparing LCA, HLC in England

SIMILARITIES

• LCA and HLC share many aspects, their principles are mutually transferable, and both owe their commonest forms (and commonest scale) to institutional requirements (English Heritage and the Countryside Agency/English Nature)

LCA and HLC both:
• seek comprehensive coverage: everywhere is landscape
• use maps and spatial depictions;
• started out and largely remain expert-led techniques;
• Are synthesis and interpretation, not ‘data’
• therefore, stand on a basically subjective foundation, as is appropriate for landscape, although it is mitigated by transparency of method and (hopefully) repeatability.
• are first and foremost designed to be practical tools for us in planning, environmental policy, heritage etc.
Comparing LCA, HLC in England

Differences

- LCA - invented from the late 1980s, present form in mid 90s; an early stimulus for its development was to justify the designation of special areas AONBs.; originally rooted in visual appreciation.

- HLC - from about 1994-95, but following a longer tradition of landscape archaeology and history (Hoskins, 1950s and further back), which had not much influenced policy. HLC was designed to bring landscape into cultural heritage management and to inject heritage into LCA.

The relationship and meaning of words

LCA

assessment
of
Landscape Character

Character Assessment of landscape

These two words do not mean the same thing

HLC

characterisation of Historic Landscape

characterisation of landscape from a historic perspective

Nor necessarily do these

Transparency

One of these methods, therefore, assesses (i.e. ‘values’, identifies the significance of) an apparently holistic construct called ‘landscape character,’ the other characterises (describes, interprets etc) one key aspect of landscape termed for convenience ‘historic’.
Why two methods?

- Specific operational reasons in 1990s
- Disciplinary perspectives and separation (some benefits, e.g. focus, clarity, unambiguity ...)
- Ideology - why do ‘we’ seek to understand landscape – landscape protection? Nature / environmental protection? To enable participation?
- Pragmatics - we all work in different university departments or government agencies, it is a dispersed landscape ......

Why did we invent HLC instead of broadening LCA

- Landscape is not an object of study, but a way/ways of seeing.
- An LCA inclusive of history/archaeology (if that were possible) would have been merely multi-disciplinary, not interdisciplinary
- As with landscape, the key word is ‘inter-’ . Interaction requires a dialogue between two or more discrete and well developed approaches, not an internalised discourse.
- ‘Landscape’ opens itself to different perspectives. Geologists, for example, cultural geographers, ecologists, economists or sociologists have all been known to say that LCA and HLC both understated the importance of their subject).
So, when should we be inter-disciplinary in landscape characterisation?

1. **At Scoping stage** – deciding objectives, purpose, overlaps and differences

2. **NOT** at data collection or even analysis stage where disciplinary differences are strong and unavoidable (approaches to quantification/qualitative methods, for example, tension between humanities and sciences)

3. **At Interpretative stages (when LCAs and HLCs are created)**

4. **At the conflicting / challenging stages**, comparing results, deciding action; here most can be learnt, through tension and cooperation, from exchange and compromise.

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**D. C’est compliquée?**

Integration? A single method?

- If LCA and HLC methods were ‘fully’ integrated it would create a misleading impression of completeness, and risk closing the door on other unexplored approaches.

- ‘Being [or becoming] interdisciplinary’ in landscape might ‘simply’ mean being aware of other approaches, and intending future integration and co-ordinated uses.

- Landscape (as we heard yesterday) is a complicated concept, perhaps too complicated for us. Einstein was right – but we simply do not understand enough yet to explain it in simple ways. But is over-simplification now the answer?
Our problem is not that two separate disciplinary-defined methods (perspectives) is too many, but that we do not have enough perspectives. We need more diversity and more plurality in our approaches order to do justice landscape’s own diversity and disciplinary range.