

Workshop Report: Images and Interpretations of Landscape in Policy and Practice, University of Hamburg, 19th-21st September 2018.

The sixth annual workshop of the German branch of the Landscape Research Group took place at Hamburg University in September. The chosen topic for this year's workshop was "Images and Interpretations of Landscape in Policy and Practice". With this topic we sought to reflect on the fact that landscape plays an important, but often hidden, role in policy and practice. Indeed, the governance of space and place, nature and environment, is informed by different and often contrasting images and interpretations of landscape. Landscape architects, planners and nature conservationists each have their disciplinary specific and highly diverse ideas of landscape: of, for example, natural or cultural landscapes, organic or designed landscapes, landscape as private or public good. Furthermore, we understood that the diversity of interpretations of landscape reflects a plurality of rationalities, norms, values and ways of reading the landscape. The workshop thus provided a platform for interdisciplinary critical reflection on existing landscape imaginaries and their workings within specific institutional and societal settings.

Following an open call, twelve papers were selected for presentation at the workshop. The broad spectrum of landscape research was represented with researchers coming from the fields of human geography, landscape planning, landscape architecture, landscape ecology and philosophy. In addition, one paper was given by practising planners responsible for regional and landscape planning for the city-region of Frankfurt am Main. We were very happy to welcome many new faces to the landscape research community, coming from all parts of Germany as well as Austria, Switzerland and France¹.

The workshop kicked off on the Wednesday afternoon with two presentations offering contrasting perspectives on similar issues. Antje Kosan and Reinhard Henke from the regional planning association of Frankfurt/Rhein-Main provided key insights into their efforts to work with formal planning instruments to protect the open landscape of the city-region in the context of multiple competing development pressures. Following this, Markus Leibenath (Dresden) argued for a consideration of landscape planning as theatre, focusing on the performance dimension of planning practices. This led to a lively discussion on the capacity for planning practitioners to creatively respond to contemporary challenges within the context of existing institutional constraints. Following the coffee break, there was time for two papers focussed on everyday landscapes and lay perspectives. Jana Kühl (Kiel) presented her research on the different meanings attached to green space by city residents whereas Lukas Kaußen (Ostwestfalen-Lippe) explored the potential of the user-generated content on social media in the analysis of landscape perceptions.

¹ Laurence Le Du of LRG



Participants at the Hamburg Workshop (from l-r: Markus Leibenath, Michaela Loch, Andreas Röhring, Cormac Walsh).

The Thursday morning began with a paper from philosopher Karsten Berr (Tübingen), tracing the historical relationship between landscape and different ways of understanding the world. He succeeded in demonstrating the relevance of abstract theoretical discussions for how we understand and work with landscape today, particularly in terms of the relationships between scientific and aesthetic approaches to landscape. Following this, we had three papers focussed on conflicted landscapes and infrastructure developments. The first paper (Mara Ort, Bremen) examined issues of contestation at coastal sites in New Zealand where indigenous Maori perspectives on landscape stewardship must be reconciled with interventions focussed on resource extraction and development. Subsequently Andreas Röhring (Erkner) reported and reflected on the emergence of energy landscapes in the context of the German energy transition. The final paper in the session (Silvio Hildebrandt, Nürtingen-Geislingen) reported on an evaluation of a set of landscape images, taken across Germany as part of the process of establishing a basis for decision-making concerning the construction of long-distance electricity networks. This paper, in particular, sparked lively and critical discussion concerning the methodology of landscape evaluation, whereby participants were asked to evaluate landscape images without knowledge of their local and regional contexts.

In the afternoon session the focus shifted to landscape as wilderness, with Brenda Zoderer (Innsbruck) exploring perceptions of wilderness in the Italian Alps and Gisela Kangler (Bavarian Environment Agency) presenting results from her recently completed PhD thesis on discourses of wilderness in the management of river landscapes. Guest speaker Marco Brodde from the Danish Wadden Sea island of Fänö joined the workshop for the remainder of the afternoon and evening. In discussion with Martin Döring (Hamburg), Marco provided insights into his personal attachment to the local landscapes and nature of Fänö through his work as a landscape painter and nature interpreter on the board of the Wadden Sea National Park. Over the course of a number of years he transitioned from being an ornithologist, who brought a pencil and sketchpad with him to document the birdlife, to approaching the landscape and birds as an artist seeking to capture particular aspects of atmosphere, movement and light.

Markus Schaffert (Hannover) presented his research on a participatory approach to place branding on the final day of the workshop. His research demonstrated how landscape narratives could be incorporated within a place branding approach for semi-rural regions. The workshop closed with a strategic discussion on future activities of the branch and a final round of discussion. Overall the workshop was characterised by a high level of constructive, interdisciplinary discussion, made possible

by building sufficient time for discussion into the programme from the outset. An edited book publication based on the papers presented at the workshop is currently under preparation and will hopefully be published in Autumn 2019 (in German).

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