

European Landscape Convention



My first picture shows a land use situation. It is obvious that the people are working on fertile clay ground. In the background we see some trees but the whole landscape seems to be wide open. One farmer is using a land machine but hand work still dominates. The people working in the field seem to live in the homestead behind – and there are many of them.

The picture is from the 1920s and it was taken in the German landscape Oderbruch. I chose it because it gives us an idea of the difference in landscape living between that time and now.

People and land were closely connected– the zone where they lived was also the place where they worked.

Natural and cultural elements were interdependent and obvious for everyone.

So it wasn't difficult for people to understand what landscape actually was: in terms of man appropriated nature.

Landscape education in the present sense was not needed during that time.



This situation has since changed radically. Most of the people in Europe live in towns; the population in rural areas is decreasing.

By the way, cities always got their inhabitants from the countryside; they were never able to maintain their population levels by themselves. No one knows how population development should be managed, should the inflow from the rural areas ends.

However, for people in cities the surroundings outside are often just nature, they seldom reflect the immense impact of its usage. Often when I am standing with friends in front of intensively drained corn fields, they would say: "Oh what beautiful nature it is out here!" The same happens with pine forests and so on.

The knowledge of the rural residents is also getting worse because they are no longer connected to their land through usage.

We verified this at schools in the Oderbruch and it was impressive to see, that only a few pupils could name some characteristic elements of their landscape that make it different from other places in the world. Many of them were drawing coca-cola lorries, whales or just streets.

The market rules and European subsidies led to a decline in landscape characters – in reality and in perception. That bothers me and of course it bothers other people.



And this is the answer – in any case for the field of education. It is a speaking tree in the Biosphere reserve station Blumberger Mühle, the information centre for the region.

As far as I know you can buy trees like that in the Toys'R'Us-Shops. You might object and say that the usage of this picture is too polemical, but I 'm convinced that even the lion's share of German environmental education is inspired by the same idea: to make the children love nature, to let them feel that it is alive just like they are, to teach them respect for creatures in nature.

Above all it is education *for nature*. I don't want to challenge the sense of it, but it has little to do with landscape. Cultural features in these exhibitions play only a historical role and land usage is also only shown as a nice and long ago story.

That's why modern contradictions in landscape development are usually excluded. If something of the present is shown, it is a supposed political success.

If you go into German environmental information centers today you will not be informed of the problems with modern land usage, nor of the residents' fears due to rapid changes in their landscape; even the loss of species is often belittled.

To be honest, that bothers me nearly more than the ignorance of the children itself.



You can imagine that from my point of view even the modules for more sensory and sensibility are not the right answers, although I would admit that sensory awareness of nature is a very important subject.

It is a serious alternative to many other man landscape relationships that had become more and more dominated by consumers' expectations. So this touch trail may not be the best example for this domain. I know teachers that do a very good job with children in nature; they show them its richness and give them self confidence to experience it on their own.

But still I think landscape education must deal with the open questions and it should combine knowledge with different kinds of passion. That's why I sympathize with the birders.

First of all it should be outlined by the character of the special area. The education can only be successful, if it presents the different landscapes as worlds worth differentiating. And of course it should include cultural elements and present contradictions in land usage.

Instead of that the German publishing houses make books like "little wood detectives" or "the funny garden kids". If you ask them to publish a landscape related book they would wave it aside – one landscape is much too small a market!



Heimatkalender 1976

für den Kreis Bad Freienwalde (Oder)

A much more interesting work is being done by the local “Heimatkalender” – home almanacs, being released once a year by local publisher groups in Germany since decades. Here they collect articles about landscape history, current activities, groups and associations. They publish poems about the homeland and try to integrate as many authors as possible.

Moreover it is important that these home almanacs are available in libraries later on, so that the material can later be used by people in the coming generations. Sometimes you find irreplaceable information here and research projects often even use them.

The problem with the home almanacs is their quiet old fashioned style. The German publisher groups now are often old and they fail to integrate young people.

Maybe the media itself is also inappropriate, at least if no good online version is available.

I think these almanacs anyhow should be modernized and I suspect a lot of them are going to shut down in the next years.



In this process the Florence European landscape convention from 2000 is an interesting invitation to bring landscape and landscape character back into discourse and public consciousness.

It also has other issues – the most important in my opinion is establishing landscape politics as a political paradigm. In Germany we usually speak about environmental politics, but I think a concept like landscape politics is much better adapted to the demands of the next decades. But here I'd like to concentrate on the field of educational questions.

However, Germany did not ratify the convention until now, even though 38 countries did – Great Britain is one of the countries that did. Only nine states stayed ignorant: Germany, Monaco, Russia, Andorra, Albania, Austria, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Estonia did not ratify. By the way, Germany didn't even underline it. From my point of view it is not only a case of bureaucratic laziness but arrogant attitude from German actors as well.

The landscape concept itself is a barrier against the strong subdivision of land resulting from different purposes or functions. So there are also different interests involved in this argument. It is easier to make an industrial field out of a landscape if nobody realizes what is actually vanishing in this process.

However, Great Britain did ratify the convention and so after this I would like to hear from you what your experiences with it were in the last years!

But I also wanted to show you this cover. A colleague of mine lived on the Shetland Isles two years ago and wrote her diploma thesis on landscape education in cooperation with an RSPB program there.

The British landscape characters were really helpful for the work she had to do. They gave her groundwork for a differentiated environmental education program that was to be adapted to the special schools.

It is based on a puzzle that shows the main elements of the Shetland landscape.

The children are supposed to draw what they know about their landscape into the puzzle, so every program is based on the perception people really have. That work inspired me very much.



We tried to transfer this idea to our situation and started an educational project on the Oderbruch landscape.

It is combined with a children's book we are going to publish next month.

And it is also based on the main cultural and natural elements of this landscape. We chose eight:

the river Oder,

the old riverbed,

the dyke,

the sky,

the hills,

the field,

the meadow

and the draining ditch.

I am convinced that even for adults it is not easy to describe their specific landscape through only eight interdependent elements. It works brilliant and it is a lovely thing to do.

Unfortunately we did not receive any support for this work.

The environmental foundations never understood the point of this and the whole environmental education institution always replied by saying that they already do education for sustainable development as demanded by the UNESCO. At the same time they usually ignore the specific local characteristics and the landscape. So I would say there is still a lot of work to be done.

However, it would be interesting for me to hear from you the experiences you had with the landscape convention and if my perspective from outside corresponds with your situation.

Furthermore I would like to discuss landscape education as an important part of an environmental society.