

Landscape School of Thought

Paper: GGY-2066/GGY-HC-2016

Concept of Landscape

The term ‘Landscape’ refers to a common perceivable part of the earth’s surface, land has to do with soil, ground, and territory. The concept of ‘Landscape’ came from the hand of Soviet geographers however, it was popularized in Germany. The concept of ‘*Landshaft Kunde*’ (Landscape Science) gained popularity in Germany in the beginning of the 20th century. In Geography, the landscape concept was matter of study since the beginning of 20th century. Following the tradition of Humboldt and other romantic naturalists, the word landscape was associated to relatively wide portions of space visually characterized by physical and cultural features sufficiently homogeneous to assume individuality (Holzer, 1999).

Carl Sauer, an American geographer, incorporated the word used in German geography, defining landscape as an area constituted of a distinct association of shapes, physical and cultural in same time (Sauer, 1998). The Sauer approach favored a morphological analysis of landscape, considering only the material aspects of culture. Nowadays, the cultural landscape considers subjective aspects of landscape, i.e., a meaning analysis or the value of landscape (Melo, 2001; Santos, 2002). Carl O’ Sauer was specialized in landscape studies as evidenced from his landmark book, “*The Morphology of Landscape*” (1925). He introduced the concept of ‘landscape’ in American Geography. In his book, he wrote: “Geography is concerned with the study of things associated in area on the earth’s surface and with the differences from place to place, both physical and cultural. Man is an agent in fashioning the landscape. He subscribed to the chronological approach for the study of the transformation of landscape. On the other hand, he introduced a phenomenological basis of interpreting human influence on natural landscapes. Borrowing from sociology, he wanted the science of cultural geography to be associated with studying the phenomenological aspects of human interaction with the natural environment as a separate embodiment of human geography.

Troll (1997) considered landscape as a sector of earth’s surface defined by a certain spatial configuration that results of an exterior aspect, of cluster of its elements and its external and internal relationships, limited by natural thresholds of other distinct landscapes. This definition is

characterized by the functional approach, emphasizing the relationship between landscape elements that constitute an harmonious and interdependent cluster.

Tuan (1979; 1980) considered landscape as an image, being a construction of mind and feelings. The Tuan approach is a fusion of functional and moral-aesthetic perspectives. To Corrêa & Rosendahl (1998), cultural or geographic landscape results of action, along the time, of the culture on the natural landscape presenting simultaneously, many dimensions that each epistemologic matrix favors. So, landscape has a morphological dimension, being a cluster of shapes created by nature and by human action; a functional dimension, presenting a spatial dimension; and a symbolic dimension, owner of meanings, expressing values, beliefs, myths and utopies. Thus, a multiplicity of meanings and values of landscape makes it difficult to understand this concept in its totality (Penning-Rowsell & Lowenthal, 1986).

'Landscape' in Geography

In regards to the semantic plurality of the word 'landscape' along history, it is important to note that it always is associated to spatial sense (land, province, country, region, territory), as well as to notion of collection and group (Gomes, 2001). After all, landscape has been considered a hybrid conception, impregnated of nature and culture, natural and social processes (Luchiari, 2001). Depending on the approach, landscape can be linked to social and cultural matters or to natural processes. The meanings and values given to 'landscape' concept will favor one dimension more than others. However, it is possible define a concept of 'landscape' that fulfill all morphologic, functional and symbolic dimensions, without losing its identity. Jackson (1984) defines 'landscape' as a composition of spaces created or modified by men to be used as foundation or background to our collective existence. Then, 'landscape' is a space created to accelerate or restrain natural processes. Luchiari (2001) supports this idea saying that 'landscape' always represents a material expression of sense given to environment by society. When Jackson (1984) and Luchiari (2001) considered the interaction of men and nature, they approached a fundamental landscape property of relationship between cultural and natural elements. The relationship between elements is the basis of landscape definition used by Troll (1997).

One use of 'landscape' concept in geography is to consider it as a dynamic system with spatial structure formed by natural and cultural elements (Bobek & Schmithüsen, 1998). In this sense, landscape is an imprint made by civilization, and at the same time, a matrix because it

participates in perception, conception and action schemes, i.e. of culture, that canalize the relation between society, space and nature (Berque, 1998). As Berque (1998) said, landscape as an imprint must be described through methodological instruments, if the subject which landscape relates to is abstracted. An example of these instruments is statistical quantification of landscape forms and the analysis of their relationships. To consider the direct relation of landscape with a collective subject, it is necessary to understand landscape in two ways. Landscape can be seen by an observer, caught by a conscience, evaluated by an experience, judged (and maybe reproduced) by an ethics and a moral, managed by a politics. On the other hand, landscape is a matrix, i.e., which determines this sight, this conscience, this experience, this esthetics and moral, this politics. So, landscape receives symbolic value, for instance, the cultural meaning of the polar landscape arises from its apparent invincibility by men (Cosgrove, 1998). This value given to landscape, which depends on its direct relation to subject, is called landscape perception (Brunet, 1982). The analysis of landscape perception uses methods from social sciences because it depends on the subject (Palmer, 1997).

The study of the landscape spread from a core topic in geography to many other disciplines. Landscape is a dynamic synthesis between the natural and cultural environment of a region and has strong holistic properties. Consequently, many approaches are possible and needed. Important ones are the typological and chronological classification of landscape as also used in land evaluation. Historical geography and geo-archeology emphasizes the unique history of landscapes as a fundamental aspect their identity. In the beginning, landscape ecology brought the ecologists to a higher scale of observation. Gradually, landscape ecology became a multidisciplinary and is still widening towards transdisciplinarity. This was important to keep the scientific interest upon the landscape as an important aspect of our environment. Also, this shift clearly shows a growing interest for practical applications, especially in different forms of planning.
