

LANDSCAPE GEOGRAPHY

A branch of science investigating the structure and functioning of the external sphere of the Earth, understood as specific sets of landscapes.

Landscape geography is sometimes referred to as physical geography, geoecology, landscape ecology or landscape science. It focuses on the study of connections and the recognition of relations between the components of nature. This brings it closer to ecology and landscape ecology. Ostaszewska points to three philosophical inspirations of landscape studies: dialectical materialism, systems theory and eco-philosophy. From a geographical point of view, a landscape is "a system of interlinked components of nature, formed on and near the ground". (Ostaszewska). It can be seen as a geo-complex (co-existence of components) or as a geo-system (functional dependence of components).

Among the methods of landscape study are regionalisation (an approach that individualises a given object, hence the physico-geographical region), typology (looking for similarities of the examined object with others, hence the landscape type), induction and deduction, and catena (a term originally meaning a "series of distinct but co-evolving soils" in a given region, but nowadays understood more broadly as a typical neighbourhood of natural types; e.g. ecological catena may show the distribution of vegetation due to the lay of the land).

Classification of landscapes according to the time factor and its impact on the shape of the environment allows to rank landscape typologies in the following systems: 1) natural, emphasising the natural quality of the terrain and omitting human activity; 2) historical, developed on the basis of natural and cultural heritage features of a given historical epoch or their sequences; 3) up-to-date, created on the basis of contemporary features of the natural environment, land use and landscape physiognomy; 4) potential, indicating hypothetical changes resulting from the cessation of anthropogenic factors; 5) predicted, created with the assumption of a specific vision of civilisation development.

Nowadays, geographers pay attention to anthropogenic factors shaping landscape complexes, and consequently take into account these transformations in their typologies. For this reason, a landscape geographer exploring the sphere of the earth thinks not only about the epigeosphere (lithosphere, atmosphere and hydrosphere), but is forced to take into account all landscape-forming factors – physical, biological and cultural. The basic geological layer consists of rocks, sediments (sedimentation) and soils and related processes. The second layer, biological, includes the fauna and flora, their habitats and the ecosystems they create. Finally, the third, cultural layer, concerns land use and the infrastructure being built. The last layer dominates in the cities, as well as in some rural areas. The biological layer dominates in distant places like rainforests, in the Amazon or Congo. Landscapes carry symbolic meanings, affect social practices and people living there and vice versa, therefore the separation of the layers of landscape discussed plays an analytical role, because in practice they constitute each other. Landscape geography systematises the subject of its

research more and more often on the basis of the scale of anthropogenic transformation of the terrain, and not only the dominant forms of its coverage or use.

Polish scientists suggested that the subject of landscape geography research should be divided into three analysis units: a) groups, b) types and c) subtypes. Landscape groups are the broadest category and include: 1) a group of natural and culturally exploited landscapes (there is human activity but natural processes dominate), 2) a group of natural and cultural landscapes created as a consequence of human activity and natural forces, and 3) a group of cultural landscapes where the structure and function have been fully created by human activity. The second level of classification already distinguishes 15 types of landscapes, and the third one 49. For example, in the first group we find the type of surface water and two subtypes: lakes and flowing water systems. In the second group, a rural (agricultural) or suburban and residential type have been distinguished, and the latter includes forest and settlement subtypes of villa character and hotel and sports complexes. The last, third group includes transport, metropolitan or industrial types, with subtypes, such as industrial complexes and alternative energy farms.

Due to the growing importance of anthropogenic factors in landscape creation, geographers are paying increasing attention to the cultural dimension and critical studies, which are a particularly useful tool for understanding the landscape. The two main currents that reconceptualise thinking about landscape draw inspiration from Marxist and feminist research. The former is materialistically oriented, emphasizing the fetishisation of the level of representation (metaphor of reading) at the expense of production processes, reorienting thinking from "what we see" to "who creates" and how the establishment of material conditions and the creation of the relations of power proceeds. Feminist studies, on the other hand, draw attention not only to human domination of the landscape, but also to the fact that they become similar to the values attributed to women or men and their mutual relations. These relations are perfectly captured in the painting *Mr and Mrs Robert Andrews* (ca. 1750) by Thomas Gainborough, who shows a man with a weapon, a lord and a landowner, as well as his farmstead – a woman and a landscape. In turn, the rural context, created not as idyllic, but as "wild", dangerous and harsh, serves to create the image of a man-soldier, hegemon and conqueror.

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