

NATURAL LANDSCAPE

A spatially isolated fragment of the material world reality, constituting a complex system including terrain forms, soil, water, rocks and vegetation. Atmosphere is also considered to be an element of the landscape.

Although humans, especially during the anthropogenic period, may be a factor significantly influencing the character of the natural landscape, the action of natural factors is considered decisive for the latter. Due to the degree of human intervention, one can identify primeval, semi-natural and quasi-cultural landscapes (Myga Piątek). Abiotic, biotic and social factors can be distinguished in the natural landscape (Rychling and Solon).

The term "natural landscape" is sometimes treated as synonymous with the term "natural environment". Other terms used in the literature include epigeosphere, geosphere, geosystem, earth cover, landscape cover. In the 19th century, when the term "landscape" began to be used in geography and related sciences, the following terms were also used: earthly nature, Earth, earth surface (Lonc and Kantowicz).

The natural landscape is dealt with by various scientific disciplines, e.g. geography (physical), geology, which take a specific point of view, focusing on particular aspects of the landscape. However, there are holistic approaches that consider natural landscapes in all their complexity and inevitable links with human activity, e.g. landscape ecology, which is the resultant of geographical and biological disciplines and is "a holistic approach to the subject of research, which is the landscape including humans and the effects of their activities, treated in structural, functional and visual terms. Landscape ecology includes analysis of landscape components and the relations occurring between them, identification of natural spatial units, their hierarchical classification and valorisation of natural environment systems for various forms of human activity". (Rychling and Solon).

Although, in simplified terms, the natural landscape can be identified with nature (wild or subjected to human influence) and is therefore primarily a subject of life sciences research, it also occupies an important place in culture and reflection on it. It is not only that the natural landscape is at the heart of the cultural landscape and in this sense is a material condition for the existence of culture, but also that ways of conceptualising the natural landscape are an important component of it. Similarly, the ways in which it is represented are important.

The natural landscape is a part of human lifestyle: the field and rural buildings form an agricultural landscape, industrialisation – an industrial landscape, urbanisation – an urban landscape. The natural landscape sometimes becomes a part of mythology or religious system when, for example, a set of images is linked to a sacred tree or mountain, and with the introduction of sacral architecture and roadside shrines, it forms a religious landscape. It can also take on iconic features (e.g. Mount Fuji in Japan, rice terraces in China, Mount Giewont in the Tatra Mountains), national landscape features (when combined with national values, e.g. fields with weeping willows in Poland) and be considered a part not only of the natural heritage, but also of the national one. The natural landscape, like any cultural landscape, can become a component of identity, both collectively and individually (e.g.

home landscape or childhood landscape). The natural landscape of the country of origin often functions as an archetypal landscape, ideal for melancholy. The natural landscape can also be an element of politics: on the one hand, it can be identified as a "natural" place for a given community, and on the other hand, it can be managed in such a way as to eliminate the values traditionally associated with it (e.g. colonial policy).

The natural landscape is one of the most important themes of art. European art as well as the art of China showed natural landscapes already in ancient times. In the West, paintings of this kind (landscapes) flourished in the modern era, in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was then that the very term for a view from a given place became commonplace, and until the 19th century, the landscape shown in art was identical to the natural landscape. The popularity of landscape painting contributed to the creation of the category of picturesqueness, which was extremely important for the culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which referred not only to the painted landscapes, but above all to the real natural landscapes. This artistic tradition was evident in the 19th century, when the term began to be used in geography, understood as landscape recreation. The connection of landscape with painting and picturesqueness also contributed to the emergence of such term as "landscape architecture" – initially, it was believed that an architect should be like a painter and create picturesque landscapes. In this sense, the natural landscape can also be associated with the art of establishing landscape parks created in the 18th century in England, differing in style and form from previously shaped gardens in the French style, in which symmetry, geometric patterns, proportions, harmony, being an expression of human domination over natural phenomena, prevailed. Landscape parks are a manifestation of interest in wild nature (natural landscape, primeval landscape), which grew out of the conviction that the beauty of nature stands above the beauty of art, and on the other hand, a specific way of understanding the natural landscape, different from the way in which it was perceived in earlier epochs.

The fascination with nature found its expression in the 19th century idea of *wilderness*, i.e. nature of North America untouched by the human hand, an idea which was the basis for, among others, the creation of a system of national parks aimed at the protection of primeval natural landscapes.

Both eighteenth-century landscape parks and the idea of *wilderness* show to what extent the natural landscape and its key category of naturalness are cultural products. Landscape parks are human products (cultural landscapes) and only imitate natural landscapes, showing at the same time how nature was once understood and how "naturalness" was understood. On the other hand, huge stretches of North America seemed to European colonisers natural areas to be settled, because they did not recognise the presence of the original inhabitants – native Americans. *Wilderness* areas may seem natural when compared to urban landscapes, but the influence of culture can be seen in them when compared to tertiary forests.

While from the standpoint of natural sciences with their reality-focused attitude, the category of natural landscape does not cause major problems, from the point of view of

cultural sciences, especially those with a constructivist profile, the idea of natural landscape is questionable. Firstly, the idea of the landscape is unclear. Landscape is a phenomenon created with the participation of humans who either look at and evaluate the landscape through the prism of aesthetic notions (e.g. beauty, sublimity or picturesqueness), or live in it, transforming it (in which case the landscape becomes an inhabited place and the familiar surroundings). Secondly, the notion of nature is not unambiguous, because its understanding is historically variable and saddled with ideological meanings. We also call "natural" something that is not "artificial" and has a connection with nature. In this sense, a living Christmas tree at home on Christmas Eve is natural, unlike the plastic one, although its dimension (e.g. the fact that it comes from a plantation, that it appears during Christmas celebration and for its purpose) remains cultural. A village that differs from an industrial city is "natural", and the longing for "nature" is satisfied by a trip away from the city, although the creation of the rural landscape is the result of the impact of culture.

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