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## Landscape



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# Landscape

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**Landscape is constituted through physical and spatial aspects as well as through perception and identification processes. Accordingly, the term is used at various levels of meaning and abstraction, and a vast variety of approaches can be observed in the scientific and research fields.**

# 1 Clarification of the term

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The term *landscape* spans a wide and diverse range of subjects, perceptions and semantics. It is the subject of direct experience in daily life, whereby (at least in Western cultures) an environment perceived by human beings is understood to be a landscape, as well as the subject of various scientific disciplines. Landscape is the core subject of geographic and ecological landscape research in particular as well as an essential subject of ▷ *Landscape planning*. Different areas of study and different areas of life have very different, heterogeneous perceptions of the scope and use of the term.

# 2 Various roots of the term

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The reasons for this become evident when the two different historical roots from which the term *landscape* has essentially evolved are taken into account:

The term *landscape* refers on the one hand to a space of certain dimensions, which may exist on different scales and which encompasses all of the natural and anthropogenic variants to be found within it. This meaning dates back to the Old High German and Middle High German term *lantschaft* or *lantscaf*, which was first documented in about 830 CE and means an area of land which is firmly demarcated in its physical extent and which is defined politically (Gruenter 1953: 110). In medieval times, the term signified the population of a country, and was later limited to mean the politically endowed inhabitants of an area (the *Landstände* [political representatives of the estates of the realm in the German Empire in the Middle Ages]). It is also debatable whether a correlation exists between the syllable *schaft* and the Old Germanic term *skapjan* (*to create*), which would also add the meaning of ‘shaped land’ (Haber 1995: 597) to the term *landscape*.

On the other hand, *landscape* also refers to the aesthetic or pictorial impression of a section of the environment, initially only in the sense of a painting. This perception was shaped by developments in the history of painting, where *landscape* became a recognised term in the 15th century and referred to the backdrop of a painted scene with motifs from nature. This term later took on an independent meaning as a specific artistic genre, i.e. landscape painting. Artists did not usually depict actual landscapes in their paintings; instead, their landscapes were constructs which they composed to reflect certain aesthetic and formal ideals. From painting, *landscape* found its way into the language of the educated classes as a term for the overall pictorial impression such artworks reflected; in addition, poets imbued landscape with certain moods and emotions, especially during the Romantic period. The term ‘landscape garden’, which was coined in the second half of the 18th century, in turn relied on motifs from literature and landscape painting and defined not only the skill of planning and designing landscapes (which eventually influenced the development of the later discipline of ▷ *Landscape planning*), but also shaped the prevailing ideal of a beautiful and harmonious landscape. In the early 19th century, Alexander von Humboldt turned the term *landscape* into a scientific concept: he defined landscape as a region of the earth ‘in its total character’.

### 3 Dimensions of the term in everyday language

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In everyday language, the term *landscape* is used in different contexts and on different scales (cf. Jessel 1998). It signifies:

- a specific spatial section of the earth's surface that can be delimited on different scales, and which is studied as a network of interacting biotic, abiotic and anthropogenic components, including material and energetic interdependencies.
- the visible figurative shape of a region of the earth, such as is expressed in generalising landscape types, such as *Gäu* landscapes [an open, level landscape mostly for agricultural use], Pleistocene landscapes or similar landscape typologies.
- a pictorial (ideal) condition that is ascribed to the landscape over and beyond the perception of its material characteristics. This includes images of landscapes that are associated with certain archetypes (e.g. pastoral landscapes defined by pastures with 'Arcadian' scenery) and common planning guiding principles, such as the maintenance of the small-scale, patchwork-like cultural landscape often required in spatial development plans.
- an abstract pictorial metaphor (e.g. 'soul landscape', 'political landscape', cf. Guldin 2014).

This spectrum of meanings spans various levels of abstraction from actual spatial entities to abstract ideas. Landscape cannot be conceived without nature and is closely related to it. Fischer (2013), for example, argues that 'landscape' is created by 'working on nature', i.e. through its transformation as a result of being created by humans and of human perception of both outer and inner nature. For this reason, the Federal Nature Conservation Act (*Bundesnaturschutzgesetz, BNatSchG*) uses as its basis the twin terms *nature and landscape*, which are also very common in other contexts. Unlike *landscape*, the term *nature* can also be conceived without humans and is generally used as part of an opposing pair of terms ('nature and technology', 'nature and the city'), while *landscape* is always used in relation to a perceiving human being (Trepl 2012: 12 et seq.). The European Landscape Convention (ELC) defines landscape as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (Article 1 ELC; Council of Europe 2000: 2).

Landscapes, moreover, exist in a continuum of human influence, which ranges from merely indirect impacts, e.g. via the air path, to severe changes to and excessive physical impacts on the earth's surface. The earlier classical and conventional dichotomy of *natural landscape versus cultural landscape* is no longer relevant; in the final instance, any landscape turns into a ▷ *Cultural landscape* when it is the object of human perception (subject to cultural influences).

### 4 Landscape in spatial planning

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The example of ▷ *Landscape planning* illustrates how the various meanings associated with landscape overlap in various ways: landscape planning as a type of sectoral planning of nature conservation refers to a specifically demarcated, physical section of space (municipality, district or federal state). On a methodological level, landscape planning often works with spatial units (landscape units), which are demarcated by their appearance; these units are used as an integrated

spatial basis for assessments and for the categories of objectives and measures based on them. The objectives of landscape planning are often based on diverse (more or less archetypal or idealised) landscape-related guiding principles. In addition, the various stakeholders in landscape planning often have disparate perceptions of landscape, which are systemised, e.g. by Wojtkiewicz and Heiland (2013), based on attributed meanings that focus on ecological, socio-cultural or use-oriented considerations. Wojtkiewicz and Heiland (2013) also note that it is important for planning and decision-making processes to disclose these divergent points of view and to develop a shared understanding of landscape to prevent conflict. At the same time, the term *landscape* has considerable strategic potential for spatially related actions as it can be integrated in various ways into strategic perspectives and assessments, for example (cf. Gailing 2008).

The European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe, adopted in October 2000, establishes a holistic action framework for European landscapes: the signatory member states undertake to identify the landscapes in their own territory with the active participation of the populace and to introduce differentiated quality objectives with which the protection, conservation and shaping of different European cultural landscapes can be taken into account. The European Landscape Convention includes all landscapes in accordance with the above definition – natural, urban and industrial – and emphasises the significance of landscapes in their diversity for the development of spatial identity and quality of life. It has been signed by 40 European countries – but not by Germany.

## 5 Approaches to landscape in landscape-related research

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Alongside the diverse meanings of the term, there are also very different approaches to landscape in various scientific and research fields: Landscape ecology and physical geography focus on a predominantly descriptive identification and outlining of the elements of physical landscapes as well as the processes and influencing factors associated with the changing landscape (cf. for example Leser 1997; Steinhardt/Blumenstein/Barsch 2011; Küster 2013). Sociology, political science, and social and cultural geography, on the other hand, primarily pursue approaches that focus on discourses, institutions and  $\triangleright$  *Governance* (i.e. institutional management), and generally follow constructivist notions of landscape (cf. Kühne 2012; Leibenath/Heiland/Kilper et al. 2013).

## 6 Landscape and the perception of landscape in flux

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The above discussion makes clear that the perception of a certain space as a landscape has had to be learned over the course of history. Accordingly, the perception of landscape changes over time: human perception has increasingly discovered and taken over new spaces as landscapes, e.g. post-mining landscapes and urban landscapes. The current energy transition has breathed new life into the discussion of landscape as an identity and homeland for the populace and has led to ‘energy landscapes’ as a landscape type newly established in public perception (cf. Gailing/Leibenath 2013; Stremke/van den Dobbelsteen 2013).

In addition to other factors such as ▷ *Demographic change*, climate change (▷ *Climate, climate change*) and structural agricultural change, the development and expansion of renewable energy sources (▷ *Renewable energies*) is also responsible for the pressures of rapid change and transformation to which German cultural landscapes are currently exposed. Models show that substantial transformation processes are to be expected in the next 17 years in nearly half of German landscapes in the wake of the implementation of the current energy policy and climate objectives as well as the grid development plan for the expansion of the power grid, including the development of settlement and traffic areas. If the landscape changes of the past 15 years are taken into account as well, about two-thirds of the traditional landscapes in Germany could undergo fundamental change within a single generation (BfN/BBSR [Federal Agency for Nature Conservation/Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development] 2014: 41). This illustrates the significance of spatial ▷ *Planning* and design.

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