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### **Cultural landscape and a natural landscape – notes with regard to the Wadden Sea region**

A few truisms to start with: it seems as though the idea of 'cultural landscape' is inconceivable without the opposite idea, i.e. without contrasting it with 'natural landscape'. Here the standard opinion is that 'cultural landscape' always refers to a part of the earth's surface that has been worked on by Man and shaped by this work. In contrast to this, 'natural landscape' is deemed to refer to those areas where natural formations – from the basic elements of water, earth and stone to the respective characteristics of flora and fauna – develop 'undisturbed', in line with their own dynamics.

This contrast is always present when mention is made of 'cultural landscape'. This opposition is notionally and conceptually a product of the bourgeois era, which developed over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was finally formulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This can be easily explained: 'natural landscape' as a conceptual opposite of 'cultural landscape' can only be conceived of and appear as a 'mental construct' where 'nature', in its aspect as a landscape, is understood as something for people and having a positive effect on people. It is only when a desert, an inaccessible high-mountain region, a craggy and dangerous cliff line can be regarded as part of a 'good nature' that the familiar term 'natural landscape' makes any sense. This is because it must be set in opposition to cultural landscape, which is also intrinsically valuable and to which standards can be applied – after all, initially the term had basically positive connotations: in terms of the original formation of the mental concept, 'cultural landscape' was based on a doubtlessly positive valuation of human achievement in transforming a natural phenomenon into something that was useful and pleasing for humans.

The initial opposition between these value-laden ideas of natural landscape and cultural landscape can be recognised very clearly on the basis of testimonies and events from the Enlightenment. In a process lasting many decades, a view was formed of 'wild', even threatening nature as something beautiful, or to be more precise, as something sublime. Prior to this, the hostile high-mountain regions, the inhabitable moor, the impenetrable forest, the coast under constant attack from the sea, seemed to be places of danger and admonitions to submit to divine sovereignty. According to the predominant theological interpretation, the natural 'extreme landscapes' were testimonies to divine 'judgments' like the flood, which defined the limits of human 'subjugation' of the earth and which were to be faced with humility and fear. Extracting something pleasurable and uplifting from this existential fear of the threatening aspect of natural landscape formations was the prime achievement of reinterpretation in the age of the Enlightenment. It was not until it became possible to present the hazardous element involved in accessing these landscapes as something desirable that a basis was created for an understanding of 'natural landscape' as we know it today.

This process of awareness, the fundamental reinterpretation of 'wild and untouched nature' has been studied at great depth in the context of the high Alps and a little later of coasts previously considered 'terrifying'. Conceding that inaccessible nature sites with a tendency to appear threatening have an aesthetic charm and value was the beginning of a mental development. This is what then made it possible in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to regard the 'wilderness' as something worth protecting. However, something else was required before 'wild nature' could be excluded from encroaching cultivation and increasingly intensive use by people with the definition of protected areas in the form of laws passed by governments: a concomitant revaluation in the concept of 'cultural landscape'.

After all, a positive assessment of natural formations previously regarded as terrifying and repellent is only one side of the process that led to the contrast of natural and cultural landscapes current today. The other side is likewise part of the 'dialectic of the Enlightenment': a virtually merciless exploitation, a cultivating conquest of landscapes that were still excluded from use for agricultural and forestry purposes. This 'process of cultivation', which was stepped up by governments and private enterprise in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has also been well researched on the basis of examples. Large areas of heath and moor, marshes and flood plains, virtually unused forests and unexploited hillsides were converted into areas used for intensive agriculture and forestry. Not infrequently this was done using coercion and by threatening the rural population with penalties, and was certainly not based entirely on farmers' urge to expand. The cultural landscape already used was also subjected to the imperatives of bourgeois rationality, whilst cultivation was systematised and intensified. These processes are known and I only need to mention them in passing here.

For the landscape of central Europe – and this is all we are talking about here – this immense shift towards an expansion of 'cultural landscape' and the imposition of the dicta of utilisation did not only mean that areas of 'untouched and wild nature' were pushed back to small residues and that the border to the 'wilderness' was more clearly defined than hitherto known. Behind this really new stage in the instrumental 'conquest' of nature stood the idea that in principle the entire surface of the earth, the enormous diversity of natural phenomena, was available for intensive use by Man. For modern bourgeois rationality 'cultivating' development was at best considered a technical and economic problem, not really ruled by ethical or aesthetic, much less religious dicta.

It was inevitable that such an 'imperialistic' view of cultural landscape would clash sharply with the aesthetic and philosophical appreciation of 'grand and wild nature' that had grown up almost simultaneously. As I said, this clash finally had effects that extended to legislation and even to the financial 'battle' for agricultural land. Today we are still in the midst of such battles, which are not only symbolic in character.

The protagonists on 'both sides' forget all too easily that the predominant concepts of natural landscape and cultural landscape are interdependent; you cannot have the one without the other – the appreciation of 'untouched nature' cannot exist without an idea of the aggressive tendency in 'cultivation of the landscape': the idea of protecting nature and landscape is based inescapably on the perception that 'valuable' nature is threatened by the accelerated global use of what exists in nature. And then the longing of tourists for 'beautiful' or even 'wild' nature is fed by the unconscious assumption that the 'natural' inherent in landscape is needed as a cure for the over-civilisation of the world in which we live. Conversely, at least in the classical vision of cultural landscape, it is certainly believed to be a prerequisite that 'cultivation' cannot co-exist with the so-called 'natural' portion of landscape. This concept is based on the assumption that cultural landscape cannot be conceived of or realised without the 'independent activity of the natural'. Incidentally, this can also be observed in the current debates on 'urban landscapes', where, characteristically enough, attention is repeatedly focused on the 'increasing wildness' of wasteland.

If we do not suppress the inner dialectic in the interdependent concepts of natural landscape and cultural landscape, mere opposition makes little sense. This is an argument that must be firmly put to the opposing parties in many of the usual skirmishes, for instance on the subject of nature and landscape protection, or concerning the preservation of the cultural landscape. Let me just briefly cite two random examples before taking a closer look at the Wadden Sea region.

From ethno-botanical and anthropological investigations, for example, we now know that substantial areas of primeval South American forests were not only used by indigenous 'hunter-gatherers', but were partially 'co-shaped' by proper cultivating intervention, e.g. via 'pre-agrarian' plantations and their maintenance. Something that seems to be the epitome of natural landscape, such as the jungle, turns out to be full of 'cultural landscape' in a way that we find disturbing. Realisations such as this make it difficult to resettle forest pygmies in the name of the endangered natural landscape, for instance, from protected areas for mountain gorillas where these people had farmed for millennia. But even the first national parks in the USA were set up subject to the condition that the Indian population, which had cultivated these areas to a considerable degree, would be excluded from the protected areas. And when BUND uses bulk mails to collect money to buy 'wilderness areas' to ensure that the heath lands and moors in Lower Saxony or the new federal states are preserved, merely setting natural landscape against cultural landscape becomes completely absurd. After all, it is not just in central Europe that 'natural landscape' cannot in reality exist without a more or less strong 'cultural portion'.

On the other hand, it is no less counterproductive, or even narrow-minded, to pretend that the use of 'cultural landscape' as it were automatically involves the care of the 'natural'. I have been involved in the debates on the Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park for many years now. As we know, in the mid-nineties the conflicts escalated at the time of the debate on the amendment of the National Park Act based on the so-called Synthesis Report. One of the stereotype arguments used by the opponents of nature conservation was that the 'nature' declared to be worthy of protection was the result of century-long cultivation – not only the marshes, but the mudflat area too had only taken on its 'ecologically valuable' aspect as a result of constant work by the people living there: in other words what we were presented with was not a natural landscape, but a cultural one. In this context, objections to the terms served to justify wide-ranging claims for its use. For example, farmers, shepherds and fishermen claimed that they had always been the real conservationists.

For an outside observer it is easy to have misgivings about such a use of the terms 'cultural landscape' and 'natural landscape' as terminological cudgels in political conflicts. But knowing about the insoluble dialectic in our concepts of natural and cultural landscape does not make it easier to draw conclusions for the actual handling of landscape phenomena. Indeed, even possible terminological conclusions are open to debate as the realisation that almost everywhere the phenomena we designate natural landscape and cultural landscape are in-

terwoven in a complicated manner can hardly be countered by simply doing away with this dynamic pair of concepts. However, such a trend is unmistakable in the ongoing debates. A sidelong look at these scientific, plan-related and political debates is required. At the moment they focus on the concept of 'cultural landscape', but inevitably also affect that of 'natural landscape'.

Experts in geography and landscape planning have at least four different 'fillings' that either compete with each other or are used side-by-side for land-related concepts of what is termed 'cultural landscape'.

I would just like to refer in 'shorthand' to these different concepts, some of which interpenetrate, overlap and complement or exclude each other, depending on the interest involved. The first to mention would be a more traditional idea of cultural landscape which is strongly linked to the home and nature conservation movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with ideas of a pre- and early modern rural landscape, which then seems to be jeopardised by accelerated agricultural-industrial modernisation. The far-reaching effects of this conceptualisation can be felt today in the political and administrative imperatives of landscape management, regional planning and funding schemes for rural areas. Today for this conceptual 'type' the term is generally extended to cover 'historical' or 'traditional' cultural landscape. Opposed to this, in the nineties an idea of cultural landscape arose that generally designates rural areas strongly characterised by the (visible) testimonies to work performed by people, i.e. industrial landscapes or 'commercial landscapes'. The definition then became: "the term cultural landscape is used to designate a landscape the form of which has been profoundly changed in the wake of its respective land use." (Kleyer 1996, 240) This delineation, initially still referring to landscape as a 'historical phenomenon' – testimonies to more or less completed historical phases of development – was increasingly opened up to also include current processes of landscape formation.

This provides a smooth transition to the third variant of conceptualisation of 'cultural landscape': the term is used to be virtually identical to 'landscape' in general. This trend was strongly supported by the Anglo-Saxon 'Cultural Landscape Studies' – "where landscape is defined as the overall human environment covering both built-up [and] non-built-up land as well as the city and the countryside." (Marschall 2006, 5) This makes it seem as if everything that can be recognised and understood as 'landscape' falls under an 'opened' term of 'cultural landscape' – because strictly speaking, the entire surface of the earth is now subject to human influences. Any terminological differentiation would be invalid. This is also hinted at by the European Landscape Convention, which decrees: "landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors."

The impression arises that the classical distinction between cultural landscape as opposed to natural landscape is outdated, not only because the 'landscape' concept is tied to perception by people. Thus, in terms of reception theory as it were (whether seen in constructivist terms or more in traditional aesthetic terms) every landscape is a priori 'cultural landscape' because its constitutive perception is always culturally formed.

The terminological difficulties that I have just touched upon here could therefore make it seem apposite to subsume the term 'cultural landscape' in a general concept of landscape. But this would also make any talk of 'natural landscape' superfluous because, as I have tried to indicate, in its original concept it was tied to the dialectical tension with 'cultural landscape'. I take the view that this tension should not be overlaid as for the landscape phenomenon it is only the efflux of that fundamental and irrevocable dialectic that characterises our concepts of 'nature' versus 'culture'. On the one hand, we understand nature as 'that which exists for itself', which follows laws and a dynamic independent of Man. On the other hand, we comprehend nature as 'that which exists for us', on the appropriation of which reproduction of the human species is based. It is not only epistemologically that we always conceive of nature anthropocentrically while at the same time we literally live from the fact that nature is there and continues to develop without our intervention. The tension that this

involves in our western idea of nature continues, for example, as far as the feminist distinction between *sex* and *gender* or as far as the differentiation between embodiment and body on the basis of natural philosophy. And it also pervades precisely our concept of natural landscape: its concept, its perception and appropriation is not possible without human intervention – be this only in the form of scientific observation or aesthetic delight – and yet it operates with the construct of a natural world that is independent of us.

And the same applies to cultural landscape: the mental concept and social practice mean a transformation of nature via work in the landscape. The accent is on reshaping what is given by nature. Here, landscape seems to be linked so closely with highly developed techniques and types of work that certain types of cultural landscape - for instance modern urban agglomerations - claim to be completely anthropogenic. The impression sometimes arises, also in current debates on cultural landscape, that the 'portion of nature' might disappear from such extremely technologically upgraded 'landscapes'. If we consider for a moment, it is not only present in the phenomenon of urban wastelands or in the organisation of water supply or waste disposal. Before concrete can harden we still have to depend on the 'independent activity' of the natural potential used and in calculating the sway of high-rise buildings we have to allow for the probabilities of the effects of wind, the activity of an independent 'wild' nature. If considered responsibly, ideas of cultural landscape cannot subsist precisely without the idea of a 'nature existing for itself' no matter how much they conceive of a 'nature existing for us'. And the 'For us', if looked at closely, ultimately in turn refers to a natural basis beyond our control, that of our body.

The interlinked concepts of natural and cultural landscape both denominate a human relationship to what we understand as nature. In our modern western understanding this nature always exists as a double one: as an ensemble thought by us and committed to us for appropriation and as a world that exists independently of us and which dependably supports us. So I would argue in favour of not simply trying to define away the opposition of natural and cultural landscape. The tension expressed in this opposition is absolutely essential for our idea of landscape. But merely contrasting natural and cultural landscape as if these were categorically separate or even 'inimical' phenomena is unproductive and at best illustrates an instrumentalisation of the concepts based on certain interests.

Landscape in our 'old European' sense, which still determines the advanced discussions on 'intermediate' landscapes, for example, is always 'landscape with people'. The contrast of natural landscape and cultural landscape therefore describes historically developed distinctions of limited validity which always have to be culturally renegotiated on a sliding scale of human relationships with our natural basis.

This can now best be seen from the history of the Wadden Sea and the present conflicts regarding its protection and use. Finally, I would like to illustrate this on the basis of one of the models used for the analytical observation of landscape formations, that concerning energy.

On the side of natural landscape the corresponding interpretation currently seems quite simple and stringent: 'natural' landscape formations are deemed to be subject to a constant dynamic and their respective manifestation understood as an interim stage in a never-ending process of development. 'Stable' states in landscape (then also in terms of ecosystems) are only assumed for more or less short periods. The idea of 'states of equilibrium' as development maxims is outdated.

What could be a better example of this than the 'natural dynamics' in the Wadden Sea region? It is not only because of the long periods of time and wide-ranging processes involved that the Wadden Sea is characterised by constant change in geomorphological terms and in its ecosystems, however limited. Viewed in terms of energy, the different processes lead to a very high level of 'instability' in this landscape formation. However, according to more recent opinions, this merely constitutes a particularly striking example of the fundamental 'process dynamics' of natural systems.

Conversely, traditional cultural landscapes are interpreted as the human attempt to create and maintain 'stable' ecosystems for a longer period of time even if more or less high yields are exploited from these systems. In order to achieve a relative stability - as this view has it - quite large energy contributions have to be made and not only in the form of direct human work itself.

Here too, the Wadden Sea could be regarded as an ideal example: dike construction, land requisition, shoreline stabilisation and drainage systems can be understood as efforts to dam up (in the truest sense of the phrase) the natural dynamics of change by using substantial resources and in this way to bring about a 'stabilisation' of the cultural landscape in which energy-related investments pay off in terms of high yields in the form of products. The amount of effort required to create a secure, anthropogenic 'balance' with the use of the natural resources in this cultural landscape is extremely large and thus particularly hazardous.

However, an interpretation of cultural landscape formations which understands their creation and preservation as a 'system stabilisation' of natural process dynamics by means of human work really only covers human efforts in pre-modern times. The idealisation of pre-modern rural habitats by bourgeois intellectuals in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries regarded the agrarian cultural landscape in its traditional form as a successful synthesis of a transformed natural state and work regulated by tradition. The price that people had to pay for the relatively long stabilisation of cultural landscapes in terms of their form of livelihood was often ignored by "agrarian romanticism".

Here too, the Wadden Sea region provides an illustrative example: the high price of the 'balancing' of cultural landscape was positively reinterpreted in the 19<sup>th</sup> and more than ever in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the hero worship of the 'Friesians' – and this false stylisation – firstly from the outside and then by those affected themselves - can still be felt today.

For modern cultural landscapes, however, the model of a 'system stabilisation' of natural phenomena by human labour can no longer apply just like that. Here an energy-related view provides useful information: the increasingly accelerated industrialisation of agrarian landscapes requires ever greater amounts of energy to exploit the transformed natural systems. The energy balance of modern agricultural production in terms of resources used has long been a negative one. A type of 'instability' that is different from the natural process dynamics is driving the transformation of cultural landscapes. This also means that the transformation of the 'natural portion' of cultural landscapes is constantly being accelerated.

Today, therefore, we have to assume an extremely high momentum of system change for large areas of cultural landscape. The traditional idea of the relative stability of historically developed cultural landscape must finally be abandoned. For the relationship of tension between natural landscape and cultural landscape this means: two different dynamics must be set in relation to each other.

I would like to close with a hypothesis as a conclusion: political priorities on a sliding scale between the natural conditions in natural landscape and cultural landscape must also create the weighting between the effects of two different dynamics – those of natural processes and those of technological or mechanical transformation. In my view this means: in a conflict none of the sides can base its arguments on the 'stability' of the definitions of natural or cultural landscape. Neither legitimisation based on a long tradition of cultural landscape nor reference to the securing of endangered natural systems can lead to the long-term detailed setting of priorities. These always have to be 'renegotiated'. The frequently difficult tradeoffs, for instance between 'protectors and users' in the Wadden Sea region, are not sellouts, but the inevitable, if problematic practice of balancing the unavoidable tension between the dynamics of natural and cultural landscapes.