

Introduction: A Landscape in Disequilibrium

It is still surprisingly far to the centre of the old harbour town of Edam from the lake IJsselmeer (formerly sea: Zuyderzee). But the walk is worth the effort. The town, capital of the homeland of the famous Dutch cheese, is pretty and small. Modest merchant houses with crow-stepped gables line the narrow streets. Arched stone bridges and wooden drawbridges cross the water that once formed the artery of local commerce, connecting the peat meadow 'polder' landscape with the Zuyderzee. We warm ourselves in a cosy pub by the inner port; they serve delicious smoked eel.

After lunch, we continue our walk into the polder, where there are meadows for as far as the eye can see, and here and there some sheep. The last snow makes the dug-out peaty soil along the just-cleaned ditches seem still darker. A low, winding dike, a ditch with a high water level, and on the other side another polder, slightly deeper. To the left in the distance are some farmsteads; triangles leaning heavily on the earth under the grey winter sky. To the right, the strong dike of the IJsselmeer. Unbelievable how medieval communities started digging out the peatbogs and erected new dikes, and how later, on the wet peat meadows, they kept the cattle that we know from the Edam cheese. The landscape proudly carries the traces of this history.

In the next polder – this time straight dikes and ditches – we discover a few hundred white-fronted geese, quietly grazing. One of them has a neckband and we recognise the code; it was ringed in Russia last spring, on its way to northern Siberia, 5000 km away. For many centuries, wild geese formed a welcome supplement to the scanty diet of the rural population. In winter in the Dutch cultural landscape, in spring in Russia. Many sightings of ringed geese are reported by Russian hunters. They may not know that without cows and Edam cheese, offering rich feeding grounds for wintering birds as well, spring would bring much fewer geese.

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FIGURE 1.1
Polder in Holland near IJsselmeer
(photo: Bas Pedroli)

In the Edam landscape, there is evidence of at least three fundamental transitions of the landscape in the past 1000 years: the exploitation of the peatbog in AD 1000–1200; the draining of the lowland peat to form polders to allow dairy farming around 1300; and land re-allotment to improve accessibility and agricultural production capacity in the 1960s. All these changes occurred at

varying rhythms in different places. In other words, the landscape developed in a highly dynamic way both in space and across time.

The underlying conditions for landscape transition are changing continuously and involve a variety of often conflicting interests, which sometimes favour the large landowners, and sometimes enhance the opportunities for the more flexible, smaller landowners and farmers' communities. Recent mainstream developments, however, have prioritised market-oriented agricultural production over community-based farming. Smallholder and family farming seem to have been neglected by these developments, although interesting new types of community-based initiatives are gaining momentum, extending farmers' communities into social communities.

Today the European landscape is in transition even more strikingly than in the past. It still exhibits the traits of the age-old history of evolving land-use systems and ownership patterns, but current land use is rarely in tune with the inherited landscape. In other words, if current land use had been practised in the past, it would never have created today's landscape. This also means that sooner or later the current land use will lead to a different landscape pattern, which is adapted to the users' demands. The landscape will follow the use, either in a consciously designed way, such as in land reclamation, land re-allotment and wetland restoration, or in spontaneous, unintentional ways such as in abandoned farmland, the gradual removal of treelines or farm paths, slope levelling etc. A stable landscape where change is not occurring does not exist – unless on a very small scale for a limited period. A museum landscape in which the traditional features are conserved can be maintained only when the traditional land use is being practised, something which can be afforded only to a limited extent. However, a well-elaborated, integrated, new management approach for the future of the European landscape is almost entirely missing in academic discourse, policy practices and public debate. In fact, although the majority of European countries have ratified the European Landscape Convention, there is a tendency to leave the landscape to the tourist brochures, and let it be covered as a low-priority dossier by sector policies on culture, environment or even economics.

There is, thus, a compelling need for reflection and debate about current landscape transitions, the value of the European landscape and its potential future and the ways we can create the proper boundary conditions and governance approaches to ensure a sustainable future for this impressive asset of European culture and identity. This is what this book is about.

1.1 The Diversity of Landscapes in Europe

Europe has an astonishing diversity of landscapes, from the extremely sparsely inhabited tundra of Sámiland (northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) to the silvo-agro-pastoral Montados of Portugal, the monoculture-like

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terraced traditional olive groves on Eastern Lesvos, the undulating cereal fields of the Paris basin and the extensive former state farms of Eastern Europe. This diversity is undoubtedly one of Europe's main assets both in terms of local identity, tourism and quality of life and as a development factor, which influences, for example, the location of new headquarters for multinational enterprises (Stanners and Bordeaux 1995).

Why are European landscapes so diverse? Europe is a small continent with a large range of climatic conditions, depending on a mixture of Atlantic, African, Arctic and Central Asian influences. Together with geology and geomorphology, this results in highly variable soil conditions, which is reflected in an equally diverse flora and fauna. People have settled in Europe since prehistoric times and – while adapting to their environment – they have substantially added to the outstanding diversity of landscapes, which represent an intricate expression of natural and cultural heritage. In the course of time, they developed a large variety of communities, traditions and social constructs, which made an imprint on the landscape.

A long history of diverse regions is reflected in the European landscape. Some regions are characterised by an extraordinarily high population density and a dense network of urban centres with well-developed commercial connections across the region and with the outside world. Over short distances, there are impressive contrasts in the way these complex settlement networks are structured and evolve. In previous centuries, areas of agricultural production have also developed into areas for residential use, communication, transportation and leisure. These highly dynamic regions have been in contrast to other more peripheral, much less populated or accessible remote areas until recently. The European landscape has evolved to support a multitude of societal functions, while farming has played its part in the development of what might be called the European multifunctional landscape, which combines societal functions in many different ways depending on the varying population density and urban networks. The high concentration of multiple functions provided by the countryside and the intricate small-scale pattern in the way these functions are combined is definitely a trait of European landscape diversity.

Naturally, this dynamic development of the European life world is mirrored in the landscape. The long natural and cultural history, the large biophysical heterogeneity and the highly fragmented political and cultural territorial development have created the great diversity of European landscapes.

Landscape has never been static, as is well illustrated by the description of the Dutch polder landscape at the start of this chapter. However, the pace of change has increased enormously in recent decades (see e.g. Antrop 2013; Bürgi, Hersperger and Schneeberger 2004; Hoggart, Black, and Buller 1995; Plieninger et al. 2016; Primdahl 2014; Van Vliet et al. 2015), even though there

is generally a considerable time lag before changing landscape functions lead to noticeable changes in the perceivable landscape (Van der Sluis et al. 2015). The highly dynamic landscape in many European regions poses serious challenges to landscape planning and management. The changes are often fragmented and incremental, brought about by societal transformations and market mechanisms. Indeed, landscape – as it is sometimes claimed (Antrop et al. 2013, p. 1644) – can be seen as a mirror of Europe’s identity and diversity, or rather “as mirror and mirage” at the same time (Hansen-Møller 2006; Lefebvre 2000, p. 189). Simultaneously, landscape-planning objectives are becoming increasingly complex and require integrated approaches. This book is about European rural landscapes in transition. The significant diversity of landscapes and their dynamic nature require careful analysis to identify the causes of the changes, and the opportunities for taking an active role in designing pathways for the future and steering landscape developments.

1.2 The Historical Roots of the Landscape Concept

The way people relate to landscape – consciously or unconsciously – is to a large extent determined by cultural attitudes regarding the human–nature relationship which develop over time. The classic reference regarding the birth of the concept of landscape is Francesco Petrarca’s 1336 letter which describes his ascent of Mont Ventoux in southern France, ‘moved by no other purpose than the desire to see what the great height was like’ (Petrarch 1948, p. 45). It marks the point in modern times when reflecting on conscious observation of the landscape – in contrast to the pious introspection of the observer (Schama 1995, p. 450) – became possible (Ritter 1962). Since the Renaissance, ideas inspired by the Enlightenment and rationalism gradually took over the role of self-evidence in the human–nature relationship: rationally developed reclamations of forests and wetlands extended the agricultural land represented by fields farmed for subsistence. The rational attitude, characterised by taking a certain distance from nature and observing it from an anthropocentric point of view, has been at the core of modern society with all its achievements and failures and provides the opportunity (and responsibility) to govern the natural resources of the landscape with ever more drastic consequences. Because we cannot possibly administer all these consequences, at the end of the day, this rational use of the landscape almost inevitably leads to detachment and loss of identity (Latour 2012; Olwig 2008; Pedroli, Pinto-Correia and Cornish 2006; Stobbelaar and Pedroli 2011).

There is, however, another way Europeans have developed a relationship with the surrounding world, with the phenomena that today compose the landscape. All over Europe, but especially on the periphery of the continent, people erected large stones in intriguing patterns, e.g. in Malta,

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Corsica, Portugal, Ireland, England, the Netherlands and Sweden. Even after Christianity had spread across Europe, people continued to worship the natural characteristics of the landscape as a source of truth, beauty and justice. In Ireland, for example, instead of impressive churches, simple high crosses were placed in the open landscape. The Celtic cross (the shape of which is much older than Christianity) includes a ring that symbolises the sun or the moon (Figure 1.2). For those living in the areas where such crosses were erected, it seems that the landscape was a sacred space, where they could worship nature as a divine creation (Pedroli 2012). Mythical stories and sagas describing the adventures of heroes in recognisable landscapes have survived for centuries in many Nordic areas such as the Edda epic in Iceland, the Saga of the dream of Olaf Åsteson in Norway and the Kalewala epic in Finland (Friberg, Landström, and Schoolfield 1998). This illustrates that, in northern Scandinavia, people's connection with the landscape was more self-evident than in Central Europe until recently, as demonstrated by the existence of many sacred localities (e.g. Ukonsaari Island, Figure 1.3).

For example, several authors (Bergman et al. 2008; Gaski 2011; Häkli 1999), especially Ingold and Kurttila (2000) and Roturier and Roué (2009), have demonstrated that the Sámi culture in northern Scandinavia has a fluid notion



FIGURE 1.2
Celtic high cross in the Irish landscape



FIGURE 1.3
The sacred island of Ukonsaari (centre), Inari lake, Lapland, Finland

of specific places in the landscape. In Sámi tradition, one has to be involved in a landscape before one can live in it as ‘the work of memory, and hence people’s sense of continuity with their own past, was intimately tied to their experience of inhabiting particular locales’ (Ingold and Kurttila 2000, p. 187). This is in contrast to the modern perception in Western society where people and the landscape are distant from one another, as discussed earlier (Buijs, Pedroli and Luginbühl 2006; Ritter 1962). Adopting an attitude in line with that of the Sámi peoples makes it possible to learn from the landscape, reconnect to the environment and feel responsible for the actions we undertake. It is at the basis of the appreciation of places highly valued by ecotourists or by people searching for a quiet retreat away from sophisticated technological measures improving the production capacity of the landscape. Perceiving the landscape with all senses, refraining from intellectual labelling of the observed phenomena brings a sense of belonging, of identity (Wattchow 2013).

Place and space may have a different meaning for the Sámi than they do for most European people. And because the Sámi still live in a landscape in which every place may be worth taking care of depending on the season, the year, the climate, the abundance of wildlife and fish and, last but not least, the snow conditions, we can learn from their connectedness with landscape, their inner view instead of the detached consumer’s view of modern society. Of course there is no point in returning to a nomadic lifestyle. Despite the achievements

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of modern technology, science and the dominant economic models, it seems that society has lost the ability to observe the landscape as a whole, and be aware of a sense of belonging and identity (Senge et al. 2004). Sustainable landscapes of the future will evolve only if the two mentioned attitudes towards landscape are applied in combination. This is increasingly reflected in recent developments in the concept of landscape as used in landscape research and planning.

Landscape is a complex concept with multiple meanings, the significance of which varies depending on the history of the land and the society which adopts the concept. Academic and professional disciplines are increasingly studying the meanings of the concept, and have identified ways forward to achieve responsible landscape policy, planning and management (Wylie 2007, 2013). We return to these meanings in Chapter 2.

1.3 Main Traits of European Rural Landscapes

The European landscape is very much shaped not only by the way rural settlements have evolved within their surroundings but also by public policies and state interventions. The following sections are devoted to the characteristics of Europe's rural landscapes.

European Landscape: The Land Organised around the Village

Historically, small towns and villages were central components of the rural landscape in Europe, and thus also of the organisation of the landscape as we find it today (Aalen, Whelan and Stout 2011). A powerful tradition in human culture is nucleation: people tend to gather and organise themselves in groups, and this is particularly apparent in the occupation of the European territory, from hamlets to villages and towns which have been there for centuries (Grove and Rackham 2003). Independent of population density, this agglomeration process has taken place all over the continent – in some regions of the more inland and dry Mediterranean, peasants used to live a few hours away from their fields in order to live and keep their families and social relations in small towns, often just with a small field-house in the field for staying overnight. No understanding of the European landscape can be complete without including rural–urban relationships and the influence of towns and villages on the rhythms, functions and structures of the landscape. This is the core of Chapter 5.

This rural organisation is as old as the prestigious early Christian monasteries, which performed the functions of incipient towns, as early centres with cult, market, educational and political functions (Aalen et al. 2011). Within the territory of the Roman Empire, the countryside was largely organised from

the first century AD into towns, connecting routes between towns, and fields around each town, and the Roman rationalisation of the space remained many centuries later (Pitte 1983). In the south of Europe, particularly in Iberia, the Muslim influence contributed to shape economic and culturally powerful towns, but it also transformed the rural landscape. Fundamental structures were created in the countryside, centred on villages and hamlets, mainly complex and sophisticated irrigation systems, but also field organisation. Through different patterns and rhythms, settlement structure has evolved quite diversely across Europe. Still, the gathering of the population in centres, the organisation around the church, the shop, the school and the public space is at the heart of the community organisation and thus also of the organisation of the land.

Many hybrid settlement forms have also appeared through history. The single hamlet structure has in fact often been the conjunction of two or three hamlets at very short distances from each other and with a shared organisation of the surrounding fields. The form, size and functional relationships with the surroundings vary across the continent and this variation may even be significant within relatively small regions (Antrop 2004a). Traditionally, the village is typically located in the centre of relatively fertile arable land, the infield, which in turn is surrounded by more extensively used outfields (Renes 2010). Another common pattern is the location of the village on the edge between the infield and outfield, wetlands on the outfield side and well-drained arable land on the infield side (Uhlig 1961). In both cases, the outfield historically produced grass and hay for the livestock – sometimes combined with fodder from trees – while the infield produced vegetables and annual and permanent crops. In the parts of Europe where livestock was kept inside during the winter, farmyard manure could easily be transported from the stable to the arable fields (Emanuelsson 2009).

Defence sometimes played a role in the location of the village. The location of many Mediterranean villages on hilltops was for protection, although this may not have been very functional from an agricultural point of view. In Western European regions, villages were very rarely located on the coast. Even in regions where fishing was an important source of subsistence, the village was typically located a few kilometres inland as a location at the seaside was simply considered too dangerous (Aalen et al. 2011). Even when coastal areas became safe in the late Middle Ages, as was the case in the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea including Denmark, the village was moved to the coast in only a few cases (Porsmose 2008).

In general, some villages have grown into towns, while others have been abandoned; currently, some villages have been in decay for some time, while others, despite having been in decline for decades, have recovered in recent years due to the rural renaissance and urban population's quest for a new

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lifestyle (Aalen et al. 2011; Kovách and Kučerová 2006). Rural settlements have thus been quite dynamic through history. Still, except in more recent reclamation areas, existing hamlets, villages and small towns are not new sites as most of them are located on the sites of very ancient settlements (Pitte 1983), which implies that the organisation of the landscape around them has been in place for centuries or even millennia and bears traces of this close urban–rural relationship, which we may not always be aware of.

A Place of a Thousand Agricultures – Europe, the Continent of Cheese

When comparing European landscapes with those on other continents, the cultural history immediately comes to mind as a major factor associated with the European identity reflected in its landscapes. Much more than in the so-called New World (the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), European landscapes represent deep and continuous cultural histories. Already in early prehistory, man substantially changed his environment, e.g. by introducing controlled grazing, arable cropping and iron ore extraction. Especially the Roman culture made large changes to the landscape by introducing standard parcel systems, (straight) military roads, deforestation, new cropping methods and agricultural estates. Many of these changes can be found as layers in the European landscape today.

Notwithstanding the intricate cultural history of Europe, which gives its landscapes a special character, landscape was of course also changed by man on other continents. Native Americans in the Amazon basin define to a large extent the species composition of the tropical forest and this is their landscape (Kaplan et al. 2011). Although there is ample evidence for the impact of prehistoric humans on landscape from various archaeological accounts (Goudie 2013), not much is known about the influence of man on the prehistoric landscapes of Europe as a whole. But what is European in European history is that the diversity, grounded in an extreme biophysical diversity, survived to a large extent, e.g. in languages, local markets, local regulations, local nations. Europe has grown into ‘a place of a thousand agricultures’ (Ventura et al. 2008, p. 149). Indeed, after agriculture started developing in the Middle East and Asia Minor long before our era (see e.g. Grigg 1974), gradually also the entire map of European landscapes was defined by the influence of agricultural civilisations, and by the associated settlement forms.

Subsequent periods in history saw many new influences on the landscape: large landowners (kings, bishops, landlords) and farmers’ communities always interacted (Pounds 1990). From the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century, monks – and the rulers of their communities – have contributed to European landscape developments by reclaiming and working the land in almost every corner of Europe (Duby 1961). Wars, diseases, famines,