

OF LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

THE EVOLUTION OF LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT IN THE UK AND ITS POTENTIAL APPLICATION IN AUSTRIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Landscape, as the European Landscape Convention defines it, is “*an area as perceived by people*”. But it is not just people as individuals who perceive landscape. People also create institutions and organisations and they in turn have their own perceptions, especially of something as complex and multi-dimensional as landscape. This paper will, amongst other things consider the way in which the perceptions embodied in the terms of reference of institutions and organisations influence the way in which they approach landscape.

The landscape definition contained in the European Landscape Convention goes on to state that the character of the landscape “*is the result of the action*

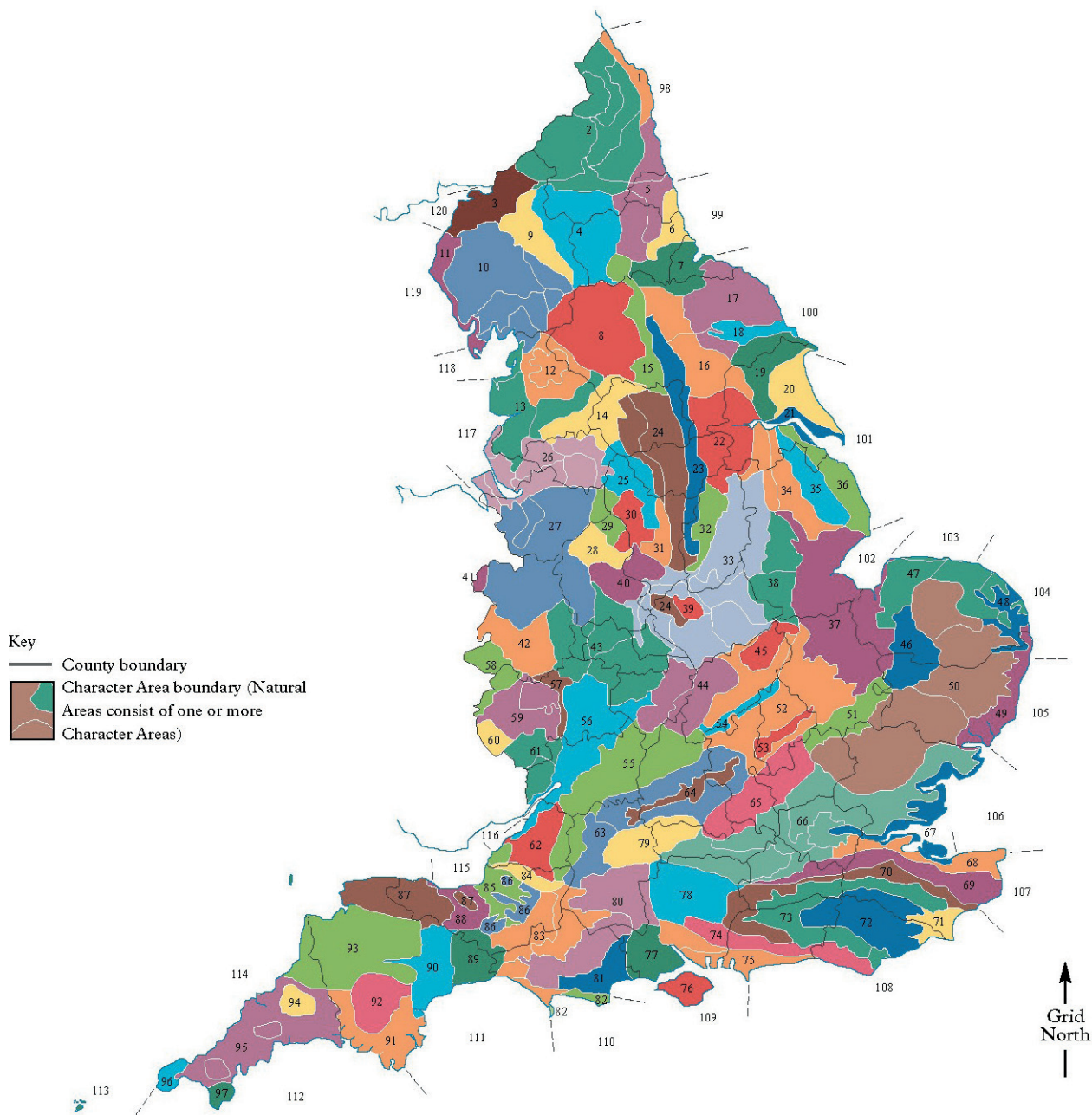
and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. The recent publication of a detailed and sophisticated series of ‘National Character Area Profiles’ by ‘Natural England’, the body charged with providing government advice on the natural environment, marks the culmination of an intense and complex period of evolution of approaches to landscape in the United Kingdom.

Alongside the evolution of the approach to landscape in the UK, and perhaps closely associated with it, there has been a period of change and re-structuring of the organisations responsible for its conservation, resulting in a gradual re-alignment of the landscape perceptions of each of the bodies concerned, even though none of these organisations originally recognised

landscape as a key focus of their terms of reference and responsibilities.

The idea of landscape is perhaps better anchored in Central Europe, where Alexander von Humbolt’s geographical definition of landscape as the ‘total character of a region of the earth’ has a long tradition. But Austria provides an example where the administration and management of landscape is also divided between different authorities, but here ‘horizontally’ according to regional administrations, the provinces of federal states, rather than ‘vertically’ in the sense of different national bodies being responsible for different aspects of landscape as was for a long time the case in the UK.

Because in Austria nature and landscape conservation are the responsibilities of the provinces, there is no



consistent national strategy for the identification and management of rural landscapes with a strong local character. There is currently no comprehensive approach to such landscapes comparable to what has been developed in the United Kingdom, while the definition of such areas for conservation purposes in Austria also takes place very differently in different cases, often without the explicit use of clearly defined criteria. From this point of view, the approach to landscape character assessment developed in the UK could provide a good basis for the identification and management of valuable cultural landscape in Austria. This paper is divided into two parts: the first considers the evolution and the reasons behind the current integrated approach to landscape in the United

Kingdom in both conceptual and institutional terms, while the second looks at the situation regarding the conservation of traditional rural cultural landscapes in Austria, using case studies of *Naturparke* in three different provinces, and considers the extent to which the approach which has developed in the UK is applicable there.

2.1 ORIGINS OF LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Despite the country's long landscape tradition, which can be traced to the aesthetic debates about the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque during the 18th century,¹ at the time of the development of the 'English Landscape Style'

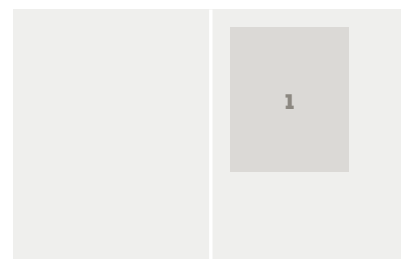


Fig. 1: English Nature's 'Natural Areas' overlaid on the Countryside Commission Character Areas



Fig. 2: National Character Areas and Protected Landscapes ([HTTP://WEBARCHIVE.NATIONALARCHIVES.GOV.UK/20140711133551/HTTP://WWW.NATUREENGLAND.ORG.UK/IMAGES/NCA-NP-AONB_TCM636961.PDF](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturengland.org.uk/images/nca-np-aonb_tcm636961.pdf))

of gardening, the systematic treatment of landscape in the context of land use planning has a much shorter pedigree, one which goes back only to the middle of last century, and the creation of the first 'National Parks' in the immediate post-war period.

The 1949 'National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act' created not only the legal framework for the establishment of a first series of 'National Parks'² starting in the 1950s, but also established a statutory authority, the National Parks Commission, to administer and run them. The designation of the original 10 National Parks in the 1950s can be seen as part of the post-war reconstruction process and was carried out largely on the basis of recommendations made by government committees sitting during the 1930s when the granting of public access to privately owned land for recreation became a hotly debated political issue. At the time, the designation of the parks and the delineation of their boundaries was the result of pragmatic decisions rather than specialist landscape studies. The original National Parks were, without exception, located in 'highland' regions away from the main centres of population on areas of poor agricultural land, as a result of which the process of protecting them from the pressures of post-war development was made less difficult.

By the late 1960s the pace of economic development was accelerating fast and it was felt that the previous zoning-based

planning system was no longer flexible enough to keep pace with the rate of change. In 1968 two new pieces of legislation were passed which in different ways had an important effect on the field of landscape assessment.

The 1968 Countryside Act abolished the National Parks Commission, replacing it with a new organisation the 'Countryside Commission, which had an extended remit to advise on recreation in the 'wider countryside' too, beyond the boundaries of the National Parks. The terms of reference of the new Countryside Commission were not unusual at the time in that they did not make reference to the word 'landscape'.³ The absence of the word 'landscape' from the 1968 Countryside Act, was, it can be argued equally significant. Thus the act referred to the role of the Countryside Commission as being to operate "for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside, and encouraging the provision and improvement, for persons resorting to the countryside, of facilities for the enjoyment of the countryside and of open-air recreation in the countryside."

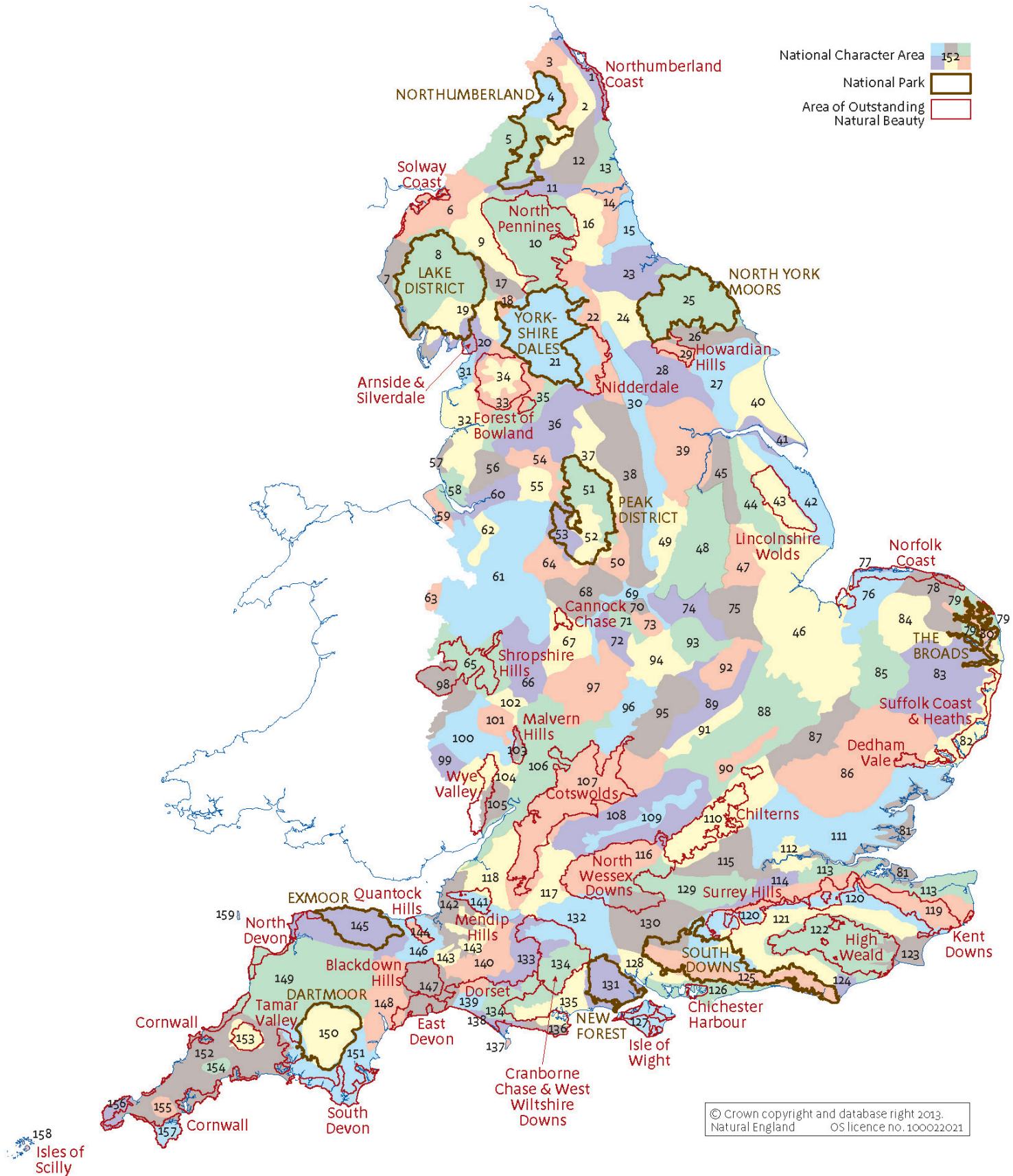
The 1968 Planning Act required the preparation of new strategic of 'structure' plans at the county level, with more detailed local plans being necessary only for those areas where considerable change was to be expected. An important part of the new structure planning process was the identification of areas of 'high quality' landscape which

¹ Burke, 2008

² It should also be noted that British National Parks correspond only to Category 5 of the IUCN's classification of landscape protection areas, and are thus equivalent in their protection category, if not scale, to the Austrian Naturparks.

³ "What's in a name?" asks Shakespeare's Romeo - but he found out to his cost that whether you were called 'Montague' of 'Capulet' was indeed a matter of life and death for 'star-crossed lovers'.

National Character Areas with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty



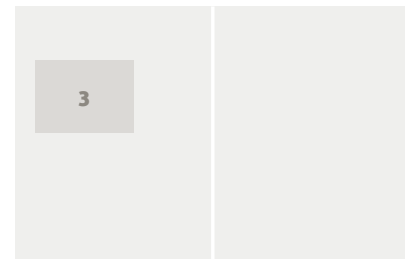


Fig. 3: National Character Area Profile No. 97: Arden - one of 159 area profiles

were to be protected from major development for purposes of recreation. At this time of 'rational' planning, it was clearly important to have clear methods with which to make the necessary decisions as to which areas of landscape were worthy of protection.

A number of studies were undertaken dealing with the landscape of particular areas, including the county of East Sussex⁴ and for Scotland,⁵ who called for "the evaluation of scenic resources⁶ in some objective and quantitative fashion". Following a number of attempts to develop such approaches as part of the preparation of the first round of the new 'structure plans', Countryside Commission, the national body responsible at the time for advising the government on policy relating to recreation and rural conservation, and in particular national parks, decided that a consistent approach was something to be aimed for. As a result the commissioned Manchester University with the preparation of the 'Landscape Evaluation Research Project', which was undertaken between 1970 and 1975.

The resulting, so-called, 'Manchester Method', published as a two volume study,⁷ was intended to provide an objective and repeatable approach to

assigning quantitative values to landscape quality. A complex methodology was developed, using a sample of one kilometre square quadrants, to which a number of 'experts' were sent to assign scores reflecting their landscape quality. At the same time the physical attributes of these grid squares were recorded, and using regression analysis, the subjective expert valuations were related to the objective landscape features to be found within the sample squares in question. Using this information, it was now possible to go on to assign subjective quality values to any other grid squares, without the need for the experts to visit and evaluate them.

With the publication of the research report, however, the matter of landscape evaluation had not been solved - quite the opposite. The method was met by a critical outcry, both in terms of the theoretical approach behind the study as well as its practical applicability on the everyday planning context. The overall 'gut reaction' was to ask how something subtle and subjective such as landscape quality could be reduced to numerical values assigned to grid squares, but the role of the 'experts' in the method also came in for much criticism: who were these experts, and what right had they

to define landscape quality for the population as a whole? One important aspect of landscape was not taken account in the method, due to its focus on the attributes of grid squares: views between squares could not be accommodated - how could one evaluate a landscape without taking the views into account? From a practical point of view, the method was criticised by planning authorities as being far too complex to be undertaken by county planning departments with their limited resources. All in all, the search for the 'definitive method' of landscape assessment resulted in an embarrassing failure, and the study ended up in a drawer at the Countryside Commission and was quickly forgotten.

2.2 LANDSCAPE AND PLANNING - A NEW APPROACH

It took some ten years before the Commission again ventured to publish anything on landscape, and when they did, it was a slim 13 page document with no illustrations and just one simple diagram! Even more than its size, what was most important about it was the change of approach it represented. Because the answer produced by the 'Manchester

Method' was not satisfactory, rather than just continuing to search for a better answer to the same question, instead crucially the question itself was changed.

The Manchester study had been about developing an objective method with which to identify something largely subjective - landscape quality. The method had been developed in order to help planning authorities identify the 'best' of their landscapes, so that they could be protected from the worst effects of development. By contrast the new approach outlined in 'Landscape Assessment - A Countryside Commission Approach, was primarily about landscape character, something which might be thought to be more 'objective' in nature. The methods proposed to identify character areas were, however, largely subjective: "It is a broad, multi-dimensional approach based on aesthetic taste operating within the context of informed opinion, the trained eye and common sense."⁴ The approach set out in this publication was more or less a summary of the methods developed and tested at a public enquiry on the designation of a new area of a new 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' - a protected landscape - in the North Pennines. The document was the first set of national recommendations on landscape assessment published by the Countryside Commission since the demise of the Manchester Method, and it also stressed that the approaches chosen for landscape assessment should be in proportion to the nature of the decisions which the assessment is intended to support.

Following closely on this publication, which could be seen as a 'stop-gap' measure, aimed at ending the Commission's long official silence on the subject of landscape assessment, the next step was seen as being to develop more detailed guidance which could provide practical support to the work of county planning authorities. As the initial work done on developing the new approach was focussed on the sparsely populated upland

area of the North Pennines, it was decided that a study of the more 'everyday' landscapes of a lowland county would be an appropriate way to develop the method further. "The Warwickshire Landscapes Project was therefore initiated jointly by the Countryside Commission and Warwickshire County Council in 1988. Its stated aim was to: "consider the unique and distinctive landscapes of Warwickshire, and to develop a new methodology for landscape assessment, one that would identify specific means for conserving and enhancing landscape character".⁵

The approach started with a desk-study of physical, ecological and cultural aspects of the landscape resulting in the preparation of overlay maps showing relief, land cover and historical features. These were complemented by field surveys as a result of which discrete landscape types each having its own distinctive were identified and classified. As a result, seven broad regional character areas were identified for Warwickshire, which were used as a framework with which to refine the study and to identify more detailed local landscape types.

The results of the study were published by the Commission in the 1991 publication *CCP332-"Assessment and Conservation of Landscape Character - The Warwickshire Landscapes Project Approach"*. This described the method in detail, and although it has subsequently been refined over the following years, essentially it can be seen as the first step on the road to the development of what is more or less the current 'state of the art' on landscape character assessment as reflected most recently in the series of Natural Area profiles recently published by Natural England.

The next step envisaged by the Commission was a further pilot study aimed at applying the approach in a larger region, the south-west peninsula of England including the counties of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. This more extensive study was published

⁴ Fines, 1968

⁵ Linton, 1968

⁶ Note: Here too the term used was 'scenic resources' and not landscape.

⁷ Robinson et al, 1976

⁸ Countryside Commission 1987, CCD 18 p. 3

⁹ See: <http://countryside.org/node/296>

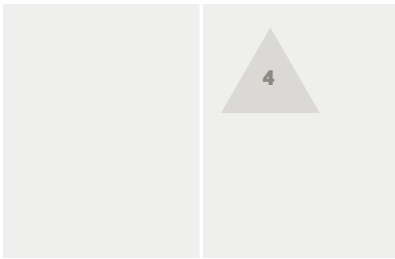


Fig. 4: Dimensions of the rural cultural landscape
(ADAPTED FROM BECKER, 1998, 57)

in 1994 under the title 'The New Map of England' divided the south-west peninsular into 38 separate 'character areas'. In the preface to the publication, the Countryside Commission stated that the project was part of a 'wider more complex project, provisionally called the Landscape Character Programme', which would apparently be extended to cover the whole country.

The further development of the approach was, however, influenced not just by technical considerations, but also by the institutional framework of conservation which underwent significant changes during the 1990s, resulting eventually in the formation of 'Natural England' the organisation today responsible for landscape in England. Coincidentally the 1990s was the same time period during which work on drawing up the European Landscape Convention was taking place.

2.3 THE EVOLVING INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE [OF LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT] IN GREAT BRITAIN

Two contrasting developments took place during the 1990s in the landscape of the responsible conservation

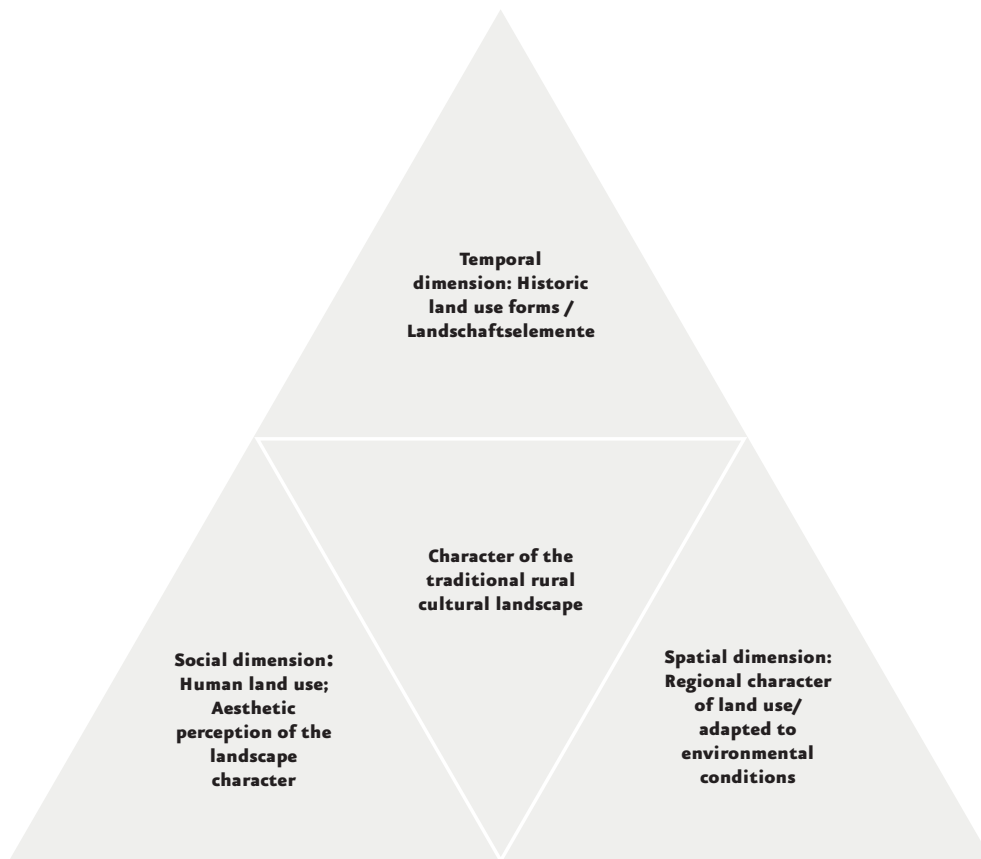
bodies in Great Britain. The political decision to pursue the devolution of power from London was the motor for one of the developments, which saw the break-up of country-wide organisations and the establishment of separate 'national bodies in Scotland, Wales and England. The second trend was towards the amalgamation of what had previously been the separate statutory organisations for 'landscape' and 'nature', but as a result of the pressures of devolution, this did not happen in a consistent way.

At the beginning of the 1990s the Countryside Commission was responsible for advising the government on rural recreation and the conservation of 'natural beauty and amenity' in England and Wales, while there had been a separate Commission for Scotland since 1968. Nature conservation was the responsibility of the Nature Conservancy Council, since 1973, and their remit covered the whole of Great Britain. In 1991 the Nature Conservancy Council was dismantled into three separate national parts. In Wales and Scotland these merged with the respective arms of the former Countryside Commission to form the 'Countryside Council for Wales' and 'Scottish Natural Heritage', while the English part became 'English Nature' but did

not merge with the remaining part of the Countryside Commission, which continued under its former name to be responsible for England only.

The English Countryside Commission continued to exist until the end of the decade, when it was merged with the 'Rural Development Commission' (a body charged with promoting economic development, which did not necessarily sit well together with one whose role was conservation) to form the Countryside Agency. This body, however, did not last long either as in 2006 it was integrated with the equally short-lived 'English Nature' to create the current authority with responsibilities for both nature and landscape conservation: 'Natural England'.

These far-reaching institutional re-organisations were taking place as the background to the development of the approaches to landscape assessment and can be said to have affected it in two important ways. Firstly, the bringing together of the two conservation organisations in each of the three nations of Great Britain was certainly beneficial to creating a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of landscape, and as such could be said to have repaired a fault which resulted in these two closely related issues being separated when the initial



conservation framework was established by the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, following the Second World War. What these developments also mean, however, was that there was no longer a consistent approach to matters of landscape assessment in the three nations of Great Britain, and while England and Scotland continued to work relatively closely together and to use a similar approach, Wales followed its own route as far as landscape mapping was concerned, developing a GIS-based approach with separate layers for different landscape parameters. Thus despite the accession of Great Britain to the European Landscape Convention, the landscape map of England now stops at the Welsh and Scottish borders, in conflict with the common wisdom that landscapes do not correspond with administrative boundaries.

The problems in coming to a consensus on landscape issues has relatively deep roots in the British context, and the institutional separation of rural recreation and conservation from nature conservation at the end of the Second World War was symptomatic of this fact. Indeed, as will have been noticed, even the word 'landscape' was hardly used in the official terms of reference of the organisations concerned: their remits were about

'natural beauty and amenity, nature and wildlife, but never landscape. In continental Europe these two aspects were linked in some way through disciplines such as landscape ecology, but in the English speaking world the concept was long unfamiliar. In continental Europe, the long-standing ability to give ecology a spatial dimension, which provides a natural bridge to landscape, can be traced back to the discipline of plant sociology or vegetation ecology, something which was long viewed with scepticism by the Anglo-American tradition of ecology. Although Braun-Blanquet published his seminal work in 1928, it was not until the mid 1970s that the Nature Conservancy Council commissioned the first work on a National Vegetation Classification for Great Britain.¹⁰

2.4 MOVING TOWARDS A CONSENSUS ON LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

But even before they merged in England, however, the then Countryside Commission and English Nature were already beginning to develop very similar approaches to landscape. In parallel to the work being undertaken by the Countryside Commission, the authority

10 Rodwell et. Al. 1991 p. 3

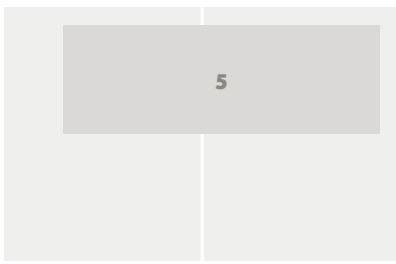
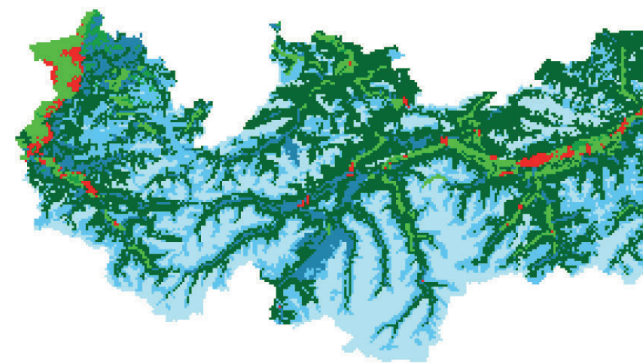
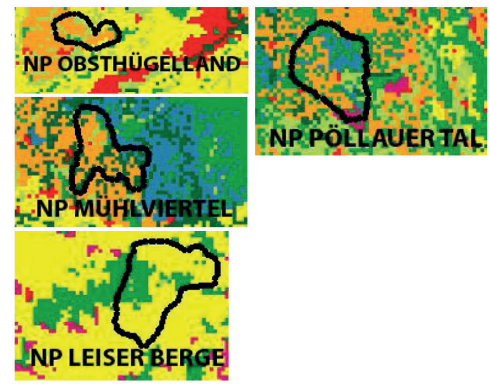


Fig. 5: Location of the four study areas within the overall context of Austrian cultural landscape types (AFTER WRBKA ET AL., 2002)

- A Alpine Fels-und Eisregionen
- B Subalpine und alpine Landschaften mit großräumigem Weideland und Naturgrünland
- C Bandförmig ausgedehnte Waldlandschaften
- D Inselförmige Waldlandschaften
- E Grünlandgeprägte Kulturlandschaften (KL) des Berglandes
- F Grünlanddominierte KL glazial geformter Becken, Talböden und Hügelländer
- G Grünlandgeprägte KL der außeralpinen Hügelländer, Becken und Täler
- H KL mit ausgeprägtem Feldfutterbau oder gemischter Acker-, Grünlandnutzung
- I Kulturlandschaften mit dominantem Getreidebau
- J Weinbaudominierte Kulturlandschaften
- K KL mit kleinteiligen Weinbau- und Obstbaukomplexen
- L Siedlungs- und Industrielandschaften



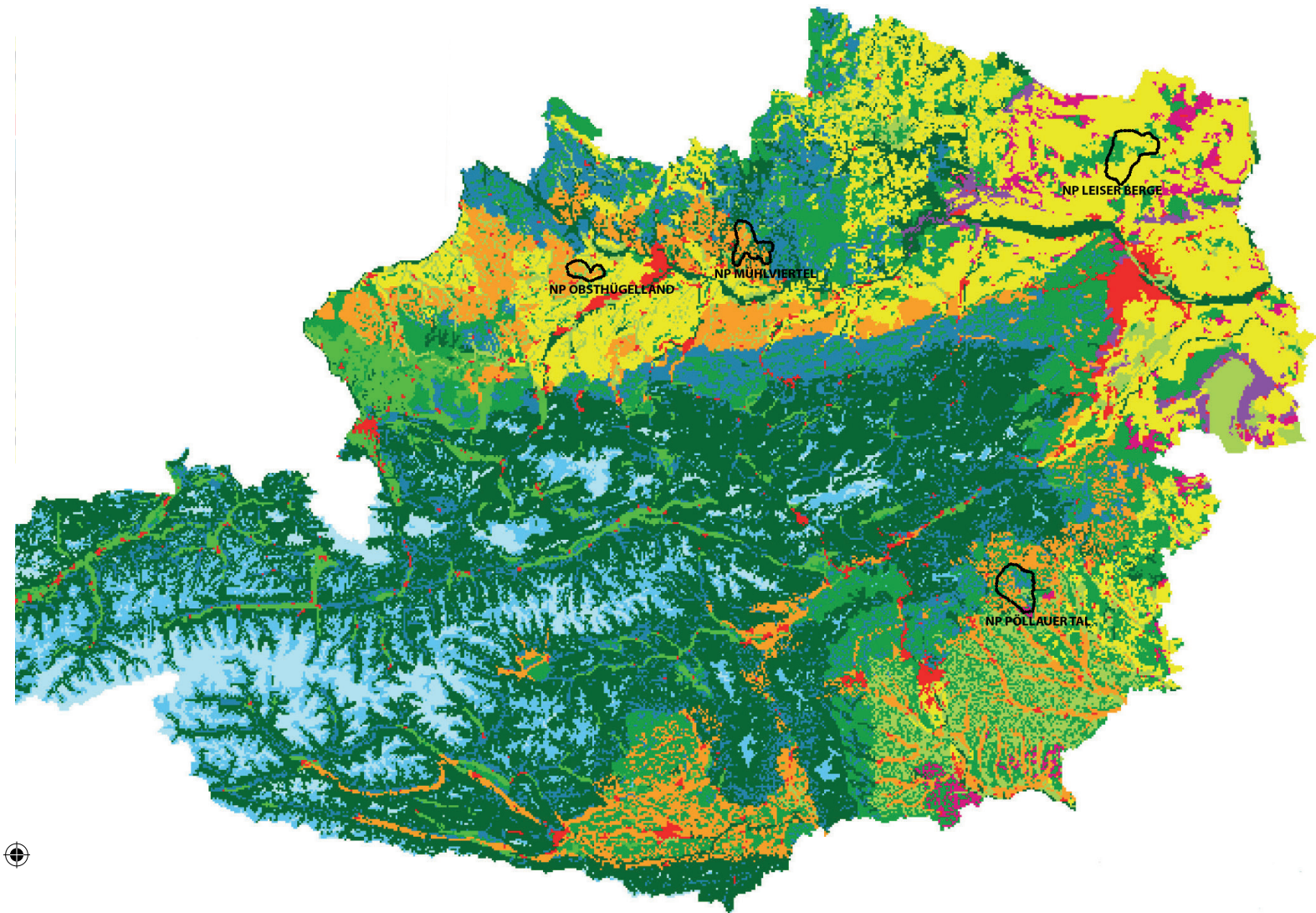
responsible for Nature Conservation in England – since 1990 English Nature and previously the Nature Conservancy Council¹¹ – began in 1992 for the first time to develop what they called a ‘natural areas approach’.¹² This was seen as a means of placing species and habitat conservation objectives into a wider context, an initial structure of 92 natural areas, each with its own characteristic association of wildlife and natural features, was defined. The preliminary map which they produced had different aims, including the development of a more strategic approach to nature conservation in the, so-called, ‘wider countryside’ i.e. outside designated nature reserves. It was, however nevertheless very similar, although not the same as the first results of the Countryside Commission’s work. This meant that there were two different ‘landscape’ maps being prepared by two separate national conservation authorities.

But there was also a third statutory authority with responsible for

conservation in England, namely the – also recently reorganised – English Heritage. Their main role was in the conservation of historic and archaeological monuments, and they too began to look for a wider strategic context within which to coordinate their activities. This was perhaps also linked to the development of ‘landscape archaeology’ as a discipline, which aimed to understand individual archaeological sites in the context of their wider historic environments. Also at the start of the 1990s English Heritage began to investigate approaches to ways of taking the ‘historic depth’ of the landscape into the more general landscape assessment approaches being developed by the other conservation organisations. A research project was commissioned to investigate possible theoretical and methodological approaches to historic landscape characterisation. The results were eventually published in 1999 under the title: ‘Yesterday’s World, Tomorrow’s Landscapes’ and the recommendations

were also to focus on a ‘wider landscape’ approach rather than to identify particular ‘special areas’ on which to concentrate conservation aims.

Unlike the Countryside Commission and English Nature, the approach adopted by English Heritage was not to produce a standardised national landscape assessment map, but rather to work at the county level and to explore many different methodological approaches. As a result a number of county historic landscape assessments were published during the 1990s. As a result of the similar work going on at the strategic level during the early 1990s, the three responsible authorities were persuaded that they should collaborate in the preparation of a combined approach to landscape, and the Countryside Commission published a joint guidance document providing guidance on landscape assessment which aimed to combine the approaches.¹³ This eventually led to a common landscape map, integrating the Countryside Commission’s



'countryside character areas' with English Nature's 'natural areas'. Historic landscape aspects were contributed to this joint study by English Heritage, so that the resulting classification was able to reflect all dimensions of the cultural landscape in its widest sense.

So the 'countryside' and 'nature' approaches of the former two conservation agencies were finally brought together with the inclusion of an historic perspective, even before they were merged into one body in England.

Before completing the narrative of the evolving approaches to landscape assessment in Great Britain, a final small but influential organisation should be mentioned. 'Common Ground' is a charity, which was founded in the mid 1980s and which focuses on promoting the idea of 'local distinctiveness', working closely with local people and other stakeholders.¹⁴ They too have developed mapping projects, but at a very local scale as well as working with artists to celebrate local landscape character.

2.5 THE CURRENT 'STATE OF THE ART' IN LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT IN ENGLAND (AND SCOTLAND)

At the end of this long and, in institutional and theoretical terms, turbulent period of evolution, the approach to landscape assessment in England has now reached a certain level of maturity. The publication of the joint guidance on landscape assessment by the, now defunct, Countryside Agency of England and Scottish Natural Heritage in 2002 is still the definitive document on the subject, indicating that some stability has settled on the subject area since the 1990s.

The accession of the United Kingdom to the European Landscape Convention in 2007 has provided further impetus to the development of the approach which has resulted in the completion of publication in late 2014 of a full series of 159 National Character Areas Profiles for England, each containing a detailed description of both the current and the historic aspects of the landscapes in question as well as

¹¹ Since the beginning of the 1990s conservation organisations in Great Britain had been undergoing considerable reorganisation, to a large extent in relation to efforts towards devolution. The Countryside Commission was originally responsible for England and Wales was split into two, with the Welsh arm merging with the part of the nature conservation body responsible for Wales to form the 'Countryside Council for Wales'. In Scotland a new joint authority 'Scottish Natural Heritage' was also formed. In England the fields of rural conservation, including landscape, and nature conservation initially remained the responsibility of separate authorities, the Countryside Commission and English Nature.

¹² Tilzey, 2000

¹³ Countryside Commission, 1993

¹⁴ King & Clifford, 1985

reference to the ecosystem services they provide. The environmental improvement and enhancement opportunities provided by each of the character areas are also described, as are the processes of landscape change, all of which corresponds well to the expectations of the European Landscape Convention.

In a topic paper accompanying the guidance document on landscape character assessment for England and Scotland, Carys Swanwick, perhaps the leading force behind the development of the current state of the art approach to landscape assessment in England and Scotland, characterises its evolution as having been in three main stages. These stretch from 'landscape evaluation' in the early 1970s (exemplified by the Manchester Model), through 'landscape assessment in the mid 1980s, (following the North Pennines AONB designation enquiry), to 'landscape character assessment' dating from the mid 1990 (and resulting from the integrated approach involving nature conservation and historic aspects).

3.1 A GERMAN SPEAKING VIEW OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND LANDSCAPE PERCEPTION

The discussion of landscape character ('Eigenart') in the German speaking world has influenced the debate and practice in Austria, and in the following we will consider these approaches, first on a theoretical basis and then in the context of the designation and management of four Naturparks where the conservation of the traditional agricultural landscape is the main goal.

According to Jessel and Tobias, the character of the landscape comprises the typical forms of landscape organisation and sequences, the characteristic scales and proportions as well as the environmentally dependant site-related differentiations of land use.¹⁵ The

character of a traditional rural cultural landscape is determined above all by the typical configuration and sequence of certain agricultural uses and landscape elements, as well as a local differentiation of specific forms of land use.

Becker criticises the lack of precision and the failure to operationalise the term 'character' in a practical way.¹⁶ On the basis of an analysis of the content of the German Federal Nature Conservation Act, he identifies three different dimensions of the concept of character – these correspond to social, temporal and spatial aspects. The social dimension includes people as a critical component of the cultural landscape as the 'creators' of its character. The temporal dimension includes the formation of the historical cultural landscapes through the simultaneous absence of simultaneity, which exist in the contemporary landscape as relics and are critical in determining its character. The spatial dimension describes the regional aspects of a landscape's character.

On the basis of Becker's (1998) assumptions the following characteristics are important for traditional rural cultural landscapes: the social dimension includes on the one hand the character as determined by human use and its aesthetic perception. The presence of historic, traditional land use forms and the landscape elements that result from these correspond to the temporal dimension. The typical regional nature of the agricultural use with its adaption to the local environmental conditions represents the spatial dimension (fig.)

As a result of its holistic perception of the landscape, the English approach to landscape character assessment (Swanwick, 2002), does justice to each of the different dimensions of the character of the cultural landscape. The different dimensions of cultural landscape character are taken into account as a result of the perception of its ecological, cultural and aesthetic characteristics.

Currently, the holistic perception of the landscape in the context of the conservation of the character of the traditional rural agricultural landscape is the subject of a dissertation being undertaken at the Department of Landscape Architecture at Vienna University of Technology. Its objective is the development of proposals for measures which can better involve farmers and land managers in activities aimed at the conservation of Austrian Naturparke. The aim is to formulate recommendations for the work of the authorities and the administrative bodies responsible for managing the Naturparke, which are to be based on an understanding of the relationships between the action of selected management instruments and influencing factors such as the natural conditions prevailing in the ecological regions in question, social values and the political-administrative context together with the socio-economic situation of individual farms.

Furthermore, the resulting findings can contribute to the planning and optimisation of measures aimed at land managers in the Naturparke.

This paper will present the study areas being investigated as part of the dissertation which are being analysed largely on the basis of landscape character assessment. On the one hand the focus is on the natural ecological conditions, in particular geology, topography, climate and soils, all of which are critical in terms of defining the agricultural use of the land, while on the other the cultural and aesthetic aspects of the landscapes are being analysed.

3.2 THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER IN AUSTRIA

In order to protect the ecological and aesthetic values of the cultural landscape, area and object-based nature



Naturpark	Aesthetic characteristic of the resulting from agricultural use
 Naturpark Obsthügelland	Scattered fruit trees: Areas planted with standard trees in climatically favourable or marginal areas. Rows of fruit trees along roads and paths or linear agricultural features such as ditches or field boundaries. Individual trees or small groups: field edges or small pieces of land which are difficult to use, open meadows, pastures or arable fields which are often relics of earlier fruit tree areas (DVL, 2007, 19)
 Naturpark Mühlviertel	Small scale arable production /pasture/ woodland Hill tops and slopes: poor quality arable land and pasture on un-productive land Hill tops: primarily in arable use; slopes predominantly permanent pasture; narrow valleys mainly used for forestry.
 Naturpark Pöllauer Tal	Scattered fruit trees in hilly areas with a small-scale structure (as a result of climatically favourable conditions) and partly in intensely used valley floors as relic areas (Schrank, 2012, 6) Rows of fruit trees along roads and paths or linear agricultural features such as ditches or field boundaries. Individual trees or small groups: field edges or small pieces of land which are difficult to use, open meadows, pastures or arable fields which are often relics of earlier fruit tree areas (DVL, 2007, 19)
 Naturpark Leiserberge	Dry grassland, semi-dry grassland, low productivity arable land, orchards and vineyards, woody species on the slopes of the plateau landscape South-facing slopes: Arable land and some vineyards and orchards. North-facing slopes and the associated plateaus: dry grassland on hill tops (Rötzer, 1994, 3)

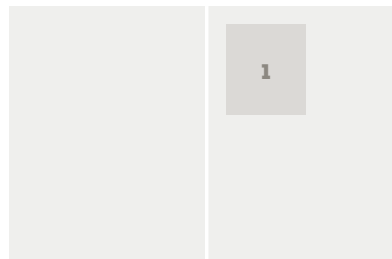


Table 1: Aesthetic characteristics of the Naturparks

conservation can draw on a long tradition and a varied history which stretches back to the beginning of the 20th century. It is above all the spatial dimensions of cultural landscape character¹⁷ which appear to provide an appropriate instrument for conserving the cultural landscape. Within their administrative boundaries and on the basis of their political organisation, different regions are characterised by different landscape features and have different potentials. Cultural landscapes are a matter of interest from a planning perspective when they are particularly well developed, when they have so-called unique features or when they represent important areas with a particular cultural landscape character.¹⁸

3.3 NATURPARKE ('NATURE PARKS')

Naturparke (Nature Parks) which are characterised by a particular rural land use are designated as such with the aim of protecting the traditional land use forms on the one hand, and in order subsequently to make the cultural landscape available for purposes of recreation and regional development on the other. For this reason,

agriculturally dominated Naturparke represent an ideal basis to research conservation measures aimed at land managers. In all four Austrian Naturparke are being studied in the context of the dissertation in question.

According to the IUCN's (International Union of the Conservation of Nature's) classification system for protected areas, which divides conservation areas into different groups on the basis of a consistent set of guidelines, Austria's Naturparke can be placed in Category V: 'Protected Landscapes'. IUCN Category V areas are defined as areas where, as a result of a long term interaction between mankind and nature, have developed and are characterised by ecological, biological and aesthetic values (cf. Dudley 2008, 20). The objectives of designated areas belonging to category V correlate on the one hand very well with the goals of Austrian Naturparke (Brands, 2006, 15)¹⁹ and on the other with aspects of Swanwick's (2002)²⁰ Landscape Character Assessment approach.

The Association of Austrian Naturparke defines a Naturpark as 'an area of protected landscape which has arisen as the result of the interaction between mankind and nature.

¹⁵ Jessel and Tobias, 2002, 218

¹⁶ Becker, 1998, 56ff

¹⁷ Becker, 1998

¹⁸ cf. Wille, 2008, 40

¹⁹ Brands, 2006, 15

²⁰ Swanwick's 2002



These are landscapes which have reached their current form over the course of centuries, and which ought to be conserved by the people who live and work in them as the result of sustainable land use practices and landscape management. In Naturparke, these particularly attractive cultural landscapes are made accessible by means of special facilities for recreational use" (Association of Austrian Naturparke, 2013). Austrian Naturparke are exemplary cultural landscapes which are designated by provincial government by the award of the title 'Naturpark' (cf. Handler, 2005).

The precondition for the award of the title Naturpark is the previous existence of a protective designation. Thus Naturparke in Austria are protected landscapes which have been given an additional award. Depending on the province they may be landscape conservation areas, nature reserves or European conservation areas, or parts of the above.

The legal purpose of Naturparke is the protection or the sustainable development of a landscape in combination with its use (Verband Österreichische Naturparke, 2013; cf. Zollner, Jungmeyer, 2010, p. 33). As part of this, particularly important or characteristic parts of the landscape or landscape elements are to be protected from being destroyed and developed further.

3.4 STUDY AREAS BEING INVESTIGATED FOR THE DISSERTATION

As a result of their locations, the four study areas – Naturpark Obsthügelland, Naturpark Mühlviertel; Naturpark Pöllauer Tal and Naturpark Leisnerberge – which are situated in different Austrian cultural landscape contexts (fig. Xxx) – each demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of landscape character.

The fundamental factors used by Wrbka et al. (2002) to categorise the

Austrian cultural landscape were altitude, aspect, slope, geology, soils, climate, land cover, land use, hemeroby and species diversity. These factors also play an important role in the Landscape Character Assessment approach developed by Swanwick (2002).

The landscapes of the Naturparke being studied are characterised above all by their agricultural use and landscape elements as adapted to the natural ecological conditions as well as by certain land use forms that are adapted to differentiated local site conditions.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

The state of the art in landscape character assessment as now being promoted in England and Scotland, based on the work carried out from the mid 1980s onward, represents a mature and well documented approach, the like of which is not currently used on Austria, where the designation and management of Naturparke by the different provinces has been carried out on a largely 'ad hoc' basis.

When considered in more detail, however the de facto situation in Britain regarding the relationship between landscape conservation and landscape character assessment is not so much different, as the designation of the IUCN category 5 protected landscapes took place in most cases many years before the current landscape character approach had been developed, also from a largely pragmatic point of view, even if the current management of these areas can now profit, in theory at least, from a more carefully rationalised understanding of landscape character.

A comparison of the two national landscape character maps showing the location of the protected landscapes in question, indicates a different level of resolution in terms of the landscape character areas identified and

the degree of landscape homogeneity exhibited by the designated areas.

In the British examples, the changing approach from the identification of areas of high landscape quality to be protected, towards a more comprehensive approach involving determining the landscape character of the country as a whole has provided the basis for a more comprehensive approach to landscape character awareness. Here, the accession to the European Landscape Convention was not central to these developments, as the fundamental landscape character approach had already reach its current level of maturity before the Convention was signed and ratified.

Since the original publication of the guidance on landscape character assessment in 2002, the situation has not stood still, but has continued to be developed, amongst other things under the influence of efforts to implement the European Landscape Convention. The 159 national character areas of England have been further described and characterised and a new guidance paper has recently updated the previous advice, considering the application of the approach at different scales and has introduced new dimensions such as the involvement of local people (Tudor, 2014), something which is also very much in line with spirit of the Convention as well as being in the 'local distinctiveness' tradition developed by organisations such as 'Common Ground.

The application of the 'Natural England' approach to landscape character assessment as an aid to the management of Austrian Naturparke would be an interesting development which could:

- Provide a regional information base about the character of the cultural landscape
- Identify areas worthy of protection and define their boundaries
- Aid the development of measures for the conservation of their character

and the sustainable development of land uses and landscape elements

- Contribute to the management plans of the Naturparke

The question of landscape quality, however, which was effectively rejected in Great Britain and replaced by the landscape character approach in the 1980s, has been put back on the landscape assessment agenda by the European Landscape Convention. This calls for the definition of landscape quality objectives for all landscapes, presenting a new challenge for the British approach, while it is the more fundamental challenge of signature and ratification of the Convention that still awaits the Austrian landscape authorities.

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