

Summary Report on the EUCALAND Special Session at the 30th PECSRL 2024

In 2024, the 30th Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscapes (PECSRL) took place from 9–15 September in Lublin and Zamość in Poland with the overall conference topic “Borderscapes – Past and Future”. The Institute for Research on European Agricultural Landscapes e.V. (EUCALAND) offered its 9th special session with the title “Heritage of European cross-border landscapes: issues of their identification, management and interpretation”, organised by Alexandra Kruse, Zdeněk Kučera and Pierre-François Toulze.

Landscapes are cross-border phenomena and within Europe often unique landscapes are located along the major political borders. Despite past changes in political and cultural realities within many European areas, it is the unique character of cross-border landscapes that often provides potential for the development of cross-border contacts, communities and shared place identities within Europe’s emerging regions. However, in the context of past and present political, societal and cultural developments, there are also many challenges connected with the identification, interpretation, management and protection of cross-border landscapes and their heritages. Although landscapes located along the major borders may have shared in the past some of the driving forces resulting in its present common unique character, differing political conditions existing and management approaches applied especially along the national borders may have led to various resulting transformations with different impact on the original local landscape character. Last but not least, cross-border landscapes also often represent unique ecosystems, such as big river or mountain landscapes that pose specific challenges for parties involved in their (transboundary) management. Thus, the special session focussed on the discussion of various aspects of identification, management, interpretation and presentation of heritage of cross-border landscapes in Europe.

The session was organised in two parts with three presentations in both. Asja Gollo (University of Innsbruck, Austria) with Andreas Haller and Oliver Bender (both from the Austrian Academy of Science, Austria) presented research on “Expanding heritage and landscape beyond borders. Reflections on challenges and potentialities of linguistic minorities’ cross-borderness” about minorities in the Italian Alps. She draws attention to the fact that facing global change, the erosion of cultural diversity is a particularly relevant issue for small culturally defined groups. Besides facing environmental and economic challenges, they must also navigate through culturally assimilating dynamics that threaten their identity. After this exciting Italian adventure, Jos Cuijpers (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands) shared his approach to “Retrospective research in historical geography”. He explained that a retrospective

study is based on the latter, the known, for example, a recent map of an area. Subsequently, we work step by step back to earlier phases of the landscape based on historical research. By 'subtracting' new developments and 'adding' dilapidated objects, the situation at earlier times can be reconstructed. Alexandra Kruse (EUCALAND e.V., Germany) closed the first session part with her speech about the "Green Belt of Europe – From Death Zone to Lifeline. Different consideration and different meanings on both sides of the former border." She stressed that even more than 35 years later, the effects of the so-called Iron Curtain can still be experienced and felt in the cross-border landscapes, not only from a physical landscape point of view but also within society and even families.

This context was continued in the session's second part by Zdeněk Kučera (Charles University, Faculty of Science, Prague, Czechia) who talked about "Landscape as adopted heritage: remembering deserted settlements along the western border of Czechia". During the period following the end of World War II, the Czech borderland witnessed almost total population exchange connected with significant cultural change – even stronger than along the inner-German border. With the transfer of the Czech Germans, the continuity of settlement, cultivation and interpretation of local landscapes was broken. Consequently, two major characteristics that define the contemporary borderland landscape may be recognized: absences of continuity in cultivation, identity and tradition as well as ongoing attempts at revitalization and growing interest in the history of local places and communities. Andrzej Jakubowski (Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland), Tomasz Studzieniecki (Gdynia Maritime University, Poland) and Joanna Kurowska-Pysz (WSB University, Poland) continued with an insight about "Lithuanian-Polish tourist cross-border functional area: From shared landscape to a single tourist destination". They explored the case of the mysterious land of the Yotvingian tribe and its development as a green retreat – from slow tourism to a healthy life. The session was closed by Theo van der Sluis (Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands) with Veerle Van Eetvelde, Ziggy Sabbe (both Gent University, Belgium) and Irene Bouwma (Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands) who explored the issue of "Restoring ecosystems in cross-border landscapes – the case of the Nature Restoration Law (NRL)". After the agreement on the EU-Nature Restoration Law text by the European Parliament, followed by its adoption through the European Environment Council in June 2024, the NRL has come into force. The law is legally binding and has large implications for all EU member states and conservation organisations. The law requires that the Member States take measures for at least 20 % of degraded ecosystems by 2030 and 90 % by 2050. This later presentation underlined the vast topic and reminded all of us how important it is and always will be to think and act transboundary.

Photos from the conference field trip are representatives of agricultural landscapes (Figure 1) and cultural heritage (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Long stripe fields have their special origin since the whole property was divided equally among all inhabitants after a political change several centuries ago (Photo: Alexandra Kruse)



Figure 2. St. Paraskevi Church, UNESCO World Heritage Site (Photo: Alexandra Kruse)

The recent EUCALAND special session brought together scientists with presentations, representing diverse topics, related to research and management of rural landsca-

pes across Europe. Similarly to previous such occasions, publishing the session proceedings in the Hungarian Journal of Landscape Ecology is envisaged. We are also looking forward to continuing the tradition of the EUCALAND special sessions at the next PECSRL conferences in Gent, Belgium in 2026, and Prague, Czechia in 2028.

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