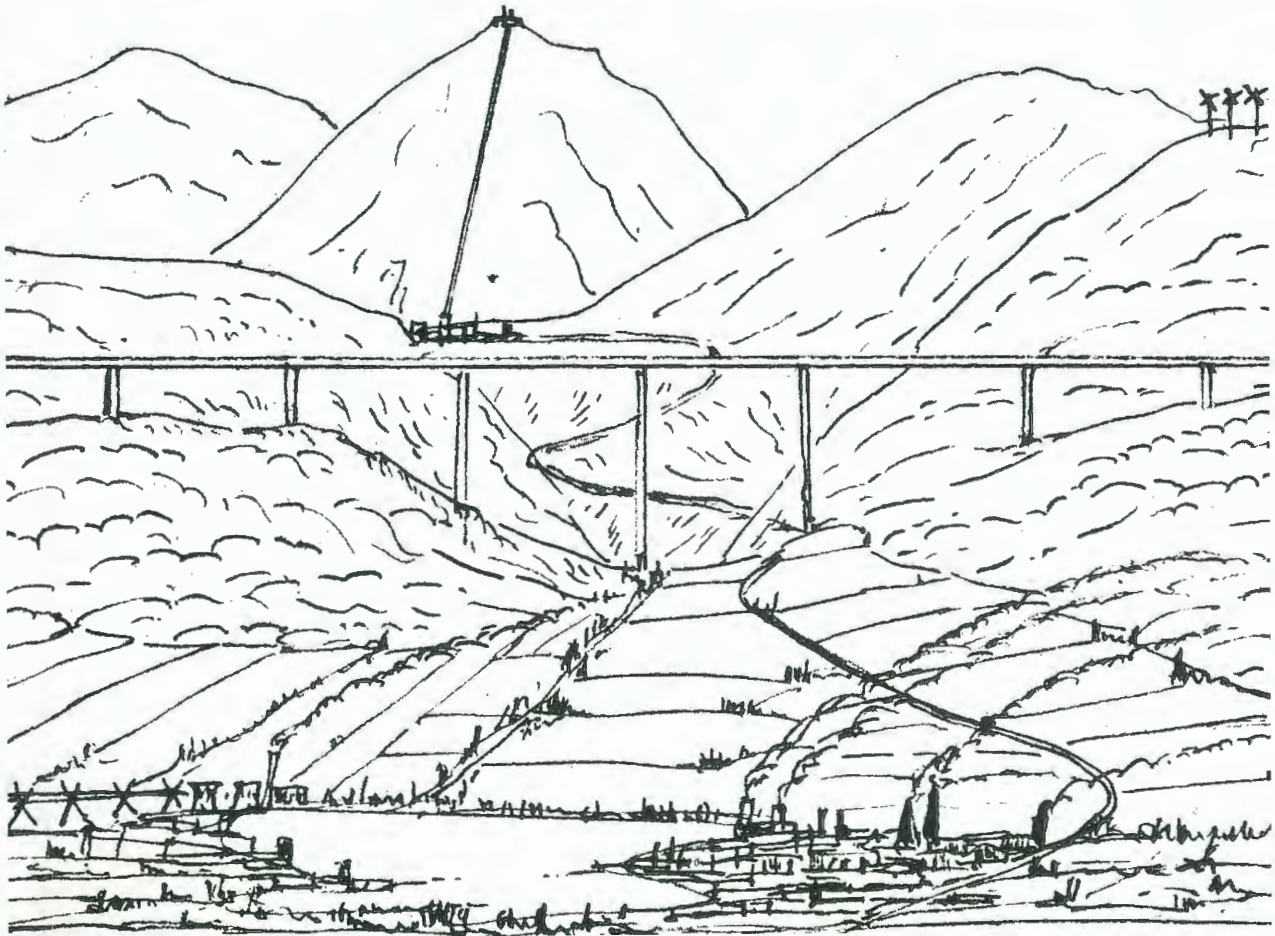




25 years
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25 Years of Landscape Ecology: Scientific Principles in Practice

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Society, culture and people in landscape research

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Introduction

Landscape is a concept which straddles the natural and social sciences, bringing together a variety of physical and cultural elements. This study aims to assess the relative level of importance that physical and cultural landscape elements are attributed in academic landscape research. It is argued that if science is providing data for decision-making, then the research agenda should be relevant to policy and management concerns, and that, specifically, the important role of people in landscapes should be addressed.

Methods

Articles published in *Landscape Ecology*, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, and *Landscape Research* over two three-year periods (1995-97 and 2004-06) were reviewed with a view to deriving data to examine three different dimensions of focus on people in landscape research. The first dimension assesses the disciplinary basis of research and topics of study, the second considers elements of participation and research methods used, whilst the third considers the nature of the research community and its activities.

Results

What do researchers study?

The majority of studies emerge from disciplines rooted in the physical/biological/mathematical sciences (82.1% of studies in 1995-97 and 78.9% of studies in 2004-06). The predominant social science interest was in the planning and management discipline (50.3% in 1995-97; 37.8% in 2004-06). The latter year group also saw the inclusion of new disciplines, namely philosophy and law. There is also a trend towards a decrease in cross-disciplinary studies (57.1% in 1995-97; 43.7% in 2004-06). The dominance of the physical sciences is again clear with regard to topics of study, with 81.5% of studies in 1995-97, and 76.2% of studies in 2004-06, addressing physical attributes of the landscape.

To what extent does data collected reflect participatory concerns and how is it collected?

The percentage of studies involving stakeholders has increased from 13.6% in 1995-97 to 17.4% in 2004-06, although it is still limited. The majority of studies involve stakeholders in order to elicit views and opinions. Facilitative elements are very limited. The dominant research methods used to involve stakeholders are interviews and questionnaires, with some use of more novel methods in more recent years.

To what extent is the research community inclusive and participatory?

There is evident geographical bias in the distribution of both researchers and research, with the dominance of North America and North Western Europe in both year groups. There is also a clear correlation between income status of countries and extent of research carried out within those countries. Some degree of 'appropriation' of research is also evident in low income countries, with poor involvement of local authors.

Conclusions

Although this study indicates that there are mixed trends in research in the field, the role of social and cultural concerns is clearly somewhat limited at present, and there is an urgent need for more integration at different levels, for more practical concerns to be addressed by research, for more stakeholder involvement, and for capacity building in many parts of the world.