

LIVING IN LANDSCAPES: KNOWLEDGE, PRACTICE, IMAGINATION

Foreword

For countless centuries we as *Homo sapiens* lived and sustained ourselves in semi-wild and wild landscapes. So did the ancestral lines preceding us, all the way back to the first creatures emerging from oceans and seas. They certainly did not conceive of their surroundings as landscapes. That concept came into being during the last tiny fraction of time in our evolution. Life in landscapes was dangerous, but it must have felt like home, for it was well known to the inhabitants. Today's Inuits who still live in the traditional way feel at home in one of the most inhospitable landscapes on earth. It is their home and they know it well.

When organizing the 2010 Permanent European Conference for the Study of Rural Landscapes (PECSRL), to be held in Latvia, one of the first tasks was to establish a theme that would address a major contemporary issue. As in previous conferences the idea was to have themes that would be of current interest and thus lead to ideas and methods for guiding the care of valuable rural landscapes of the past and rural landscapes of the future.

Identified was the major contemporary issue of ever more rapid urbanization, which puts pressure on rural landscapes for mass recreation, mass housing, transportation systems, and other uses. In short, the expansion of urbanization and urban lifestyles into rural landscapes as a major issue. Many urbanites, while attracted to rural landscapes, hardly recognize them as home. Their values and perceptions are urban not rural and often conflict with those of local inhabitants.

Therefore "Living in landscapes" was established as the overarching theme for the conference. "Landscape as home" became one of the principal sub-themes.

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The papers for this issue were selected on the basis of peer reviews of scholarly qualities. They were also selected for how well they fit into the major thematic issues debated at the conference. They are divided into four broad categories:

Living in landscapes. In this segment the papers address humanistic issues as well as practical ones. The formative aspects of Latvian rural landscapes are included.

Historic landscapes. Addressed are past formative processes, the incursion of new, transformative processes, and questions of how to harmonize past, present, and future landscapes. Also included are discussions of how to make people aware and sensitive to these historic and contemporary realities.

Contemporary landscapes. This segment contains current processes of landscape creation as public sector planning issues. Also included is identification of particular landscape characteristics as values for their own sake.

Subjective landscape values. As held to be important by people in the past and today.

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