Resilience and the challenge of social resistance to landscape transformation

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Abstract

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This paper looks at resilience through the lens of landscape change and landscape preference. Landscape is a socially constructed concept (Phillips and Clarke 2004) and one that is easily understood by most people. While the concept of landscape often implies stability and security (Lowenthal 2007), the reality is that all landscapes are in continual flux (Antrop 1998) as the surface of the planet responds to natural and cultural forces. Society has a deeply emotional response to landscape, both local and national. The Council of Europe’s Landscape Convention (ELC) emphasises the significance of all landscapes, both prestigious and vernacular and recognises the importance of landscape to people’s quality of life (COE 2002). It has been noted that, for the general public, "it is at the landscape level that changes in terms of land-use, naturalness, culture or character become meaningful and recognisable" (European Environment Agency 2005:36). The notion of change is also implicit within resilience theory (Walker and Salt 2006) with its account of the way that socio-ecological systems behave and how they move from one system state to another. Both landscape change and resilience theory meet in the spatial arena. Selman (2012, p44) states that "landscape is the spatial and neighbourhood expression of ecosystems services" while Cumming (2011) makes reference to spatial resilience, describing the similarities between socio-ecological systems and "real-world landscapes" (Selman 2012).

This paper explores our attitudes towards our surroundings. It examines factors that underpin our reactions, showing that some landscape preferences appeared biologically influenced, while others are culturally determined. The paper identifies the changes in landscape appreciation that have occurred over time, and the processes by which some new landscape types have become accepted. The transformations associated with modifications in social-ecological systems will result in a changed physical appearance of our surroundings. Selman (2010) notes that the inevitable landscape change associated with our quest for more sustainable development will generate public resistance. Techniques in bottom-up citizen participation can help reduce barriers to change. Such involvement is seen as core to future landscape planning and management and is explicitly asked for under the ELC.

COE (Council of Europe), 2002, European Landscape Convention, Florence.


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