Landscape character: enhancing understanding and governance of cultural landscapes

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Structure of this talk

• Briefly review development of characterisation in England
• Consider examples at national, sub-regional and local scales
  • England
  • Peak District National Park
  • Wilmslow
• Reflect on community involvement and landscape governance
What is landscape?

"Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

European Landscape Convention, 2000
making a reality of the European Landscape Convention

**ACTION BY GOVERNMENTS**
- Individually
  - Recognise Landscape in Law
  - Integrate Landscape in Policy
- Collectively
  - Co-operate Across Europe

**ACTION BY ALL, FOR ALL LANDSCAPES**
- Identify Landscapes
- Assess Landscapes
- Set Landscape Objectives
- Protect
- Manage
- Plan
- Monitor Change

**THE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTIVE CONTEXT**
- Raise Awareness, Understanding & Involvement
- Promote Education & Training

landscapecharacter.org.uk
Historical background of characterisation in UK

1970s: Focus on evaluation - what makes certain landscapes more valued, based on ‘objective’ formulae

1990s – now: Focus on character - what makes one landscape different from another
Landscape character

A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse


• Jointly published by: The Countryside Agency & Scottish Natural Heritage
• Not prescriptive guidance – intended to be interpreted to suit local circumstances
• Clearly written, widely used document
• Recently partially updated but not improved!

tinyurl.com/hzetdo8
Two key stages to Landscape Character Assessment

• Characterisation
  • Relatively value free process - understanding what makes one area different from another

• Making judgements
  • Building on the results of the characterisation to make informed decisions for the future
Stages of characterisation

- Defining the scope
- Desk study
- Field survey
- Classification and description

Possible stakeholder input
LCA defines Landscape Character Types and Areas

Landscape Character Types
• generic
• allow different landscapes to be compared
• have similar characteristics in different areas
• called by a descriptive name e.g. ‘Mosslands’

Landscape Character Areas
• unique
• geographically/space specific
• have individual identity but share generic character with other areas of same type
• called by a specific place name e.g. ‘North Fylde Mosses’
Lancashire Landscape Character Types and Areas

Mosslands

16a North Fylde Mosses
16b South Fylde Mosses
16e Tarlton Mosses
Landscape Character Assessment operates as a spatial hierarchy.
National scale: England

- 159 National Character Areas in England
- First defined in 1996
- Profiles updated in 2014

tinyurl.com/jhpzv3s
National Character Area 52: White Peak

- Defined by Carboniferous Limestone geology
- Strong cultural pattern of villages and walls
- Pastoral plateau and deeply incised dales (valleys)
- 52,860 hectares
Profiles include nature and culture

- Key characteristics
- Natural features
- Characteristic habitats
- Built environment
- Landscape history
- Ecosystem services

Natural England, 2014
Statements of environmental opportunity

1. Protect and enhance the area’s clear limestone rivers, streams and springs, limestone aquifer and dramatic karst geology
2. Safeguard the unique character and tranquillity of the limestone dales, and enhance their limestone grasslands, woodlands and scrub
3. Maintain and enhance the limestone plateau’s pastoral landscape with its distinctive pattern
4. Maintain and enhance opportunities for enjoyment and understanding

Natural England, 2014
Did it involve the community?

• Profiles written by staff from Natural England (agency of DEFRA - environment department)
• Significant input from Historic England (agency of DCMS - culture department)
• Some consultation with local experts e.g. National Park staff
• No local community consultation
How is it influencing landscape governance?

- Guides Natural England’s approach to conservation and enhancement of biodiversity
- Used for targeting agri-environment scheme under Common Agricultural Policy
- Framework for monitoring landscapes and heritage assets
- Provides broad context to local landscape plans and assessments
Many local Landscape Character Assessments
...and Historic Landscape Characterisations
Sub-regional example: Peak District National Park

- UK’s first national park, designated in 1951
- Upland landscape underlain by sandstone and limestone
- Perceived by many as wild but a cultural, post-industrial landscape
Two clear stages to project

• Landscape Character Assessment
  • Relatively value free process - understanding what makes one area different from another
  (Published March 2008)

• Landscape Strategy
  • Building on the results of the characterisation to make informed decisions for the future
  (Published July 2009)
Landscape Character Assessment

- Published March 2008
- Carried out in close collaboration with technical officers
- Many PDNPA officers and management team participated in field survey
- Consultation with communities of interest and communities of place
Landscape Character Areas

- Dark Peak
- Dark Peak Western Fringe
- Dark Peak Yorkshire Fringe
- South West Peak
- White Peak
- Derwent Valley
- Eastern Moors
- Derbyshire Peak Fringe

Adjoining Regional Character Areas (no detailed assessment)

- South Pennines
- Manchester Pennine Fringe
- Cheshire & Staffordshire Plain
Landscape Strategy and Action Plan

- Published July 2009
- Sets out landscape objectives for the period 2009-2019
- Defines a vision for each landscape character area
- More detailed guidelines for each landscape character type
- Action plan sets out how the strategy will be achieved
Did it involve the community?

- Shared community workshops with territorial plan consultation
- Internal workshops involved a wide range of staff including park rangers
- Authority members invited to community workshops and involved at dedicated event
- Public consultation on draft document, including detailed feedback from authority members
How is it influencing landscape governance?

The landscape strategy and action plan is being widely used:

- Local development plan
- Development control
- Recreation strategy
- Biodiversity opportunity mapping
- Landscape Partnership Scheme
Local Example: Wilmslow

- Small town just south of Manchester on the Cheshire Plain
- Strong housing development pressure
- Active community group: Transition Wilmslow
Transition Town Wilmslow

Delivering change through:
• Raising awareness of environment and community through practical activities, films, speakers, discussions and workshops
• Connect with existing local groups and local government
• Develop practical projects within Wilmslow

transitionwilmslow.co.uk
Objectives for Wilmslow Landscape Character Assessment

- To survey the local area and document its landscape character
- To encourage greater awareness of the local landscape
- To help recognise current pressures and opportunities
- To influence debates about the future and promote new initiatives e.g. A new vision for Lindow Moss
Local landscape character area

Mosslands: Lindow Moss (M2)
Lindow Moss: Landscape opportunities

• Potential still exists for restoring peat extraction sites to a self-sustaining mossland and carbon sink
• Proposed housing development on peat processing site provides a possible exit strategy for peat extraction
• More effective bio-remediation would reduce pollution of water courses from former landfills
• Improving quality of footpaths and bridleways will increase recreational use especially for the less able
• Landscape interpretation to celebrate Lindow Man and the historic mossland landscape
Is it involving the community?

- Landscape Character Assessment carried out by local community members
- Field survey data and photo database collected by community
- Public exhibition of initial findings
- Field visits and walks organised
- Plans to develop website to engage community in ongoing landscape dialogue
How is it influencing landscape governance?

- Provided Transition Wilmslow with robust information to influence Cheshire East Local Plan
- Underpinning new Neighbourhood Plan for Wilmslow
- Inspiring new projects such as Lindow Moss restoration
- Raising awareness of value of local landscape
Conclusions

• Landscape characterisation helps natural and cultural specialists work together
• Characterisation provides an important tool to guide governance of cultural landscapes
• Scale matters: people find it easier to discuss their local landscape than regional or national landscape
Where next?

• Online maps are now making characterisation freely available to all
• More integration of different views of landscape, including literature and art
• Social media is enabling new open discussion of cultural landscape
• Cultural landscapes continue to be created – on the ground and in people’s minds...