

**Summary:**

# Experiences of Landscape in Everyday Life

## Introduction

### Urbanisation and counter measures

About 80 percent of the population of Norway now live in cities and villages compared to 50 percent only 50 years ago. This urbanisation of Norway together with ample space has resulted in an urban sprawl. From 1960 to 1990 the urbanised areas of Norwegian cities increased by 170 percent, while the population growth in these cities was 27 percent. The increasing use of private transport in order to travel within the cities has claimed 25 percent of the land area for automobiles and trucks. As a result the towns have been reconstructed to serve more as transport networks with the following aesthetics of bridges, motorways and ramp systems. At the same time many green areas have been lost.

The large impact of transport on the production of greenhouse gases and the need to economise with energy recourses has resulted in an increasing awareness that it is necessary to reduce the amount of travel in cities. One means of accomplishing this is to increase the population density by building new housing and commercial buildings in between the existing buildings and houses. New projects utilising space more efficiently replace older solutions.

The planning options are greatly reduced by this planning strategy. It becomes necessary to take into account a whole range of new restrictions and considerations. These considerations include questions about how to avoid the loss of important arenas for local cultural heritage, how to avoid solutions that have adverse effects on people's life quality and people's experience of nature and cultural landscape.

The challenges posed by a densification of the urban space are:

- Which parts of the local urban landscape should be protected?
- How is it possible to preserve valuable local arenas in the cities and in the urban natural and cultural landscape?

To address these challenges it is necessary to understand what constitutes the everyday experience of the urban landscape and to understand what people seek out and appreciate in their daily surroundings.

### Everyday life takes place in cities and urban areas

Within research on landscape experience and man environment interaction, focus has mainly been on the natural landscape and on the importance of the landscape in a

holiday and leisure context. In other words, there has been a focus on life as it takes place outside of the everyday world (Zube *et al.* 1982a, Herzog 1992, Jacobsen and Grue 1997). It is however through the daily experiences of ones surroundings that people have most of their experiences of nature and culture.

In Norway, as much as 74 % of the population today live in cities or urban areas (Norway Statistics 1999). Many of these urban areas have the character of smaller urban structures such as villages or in densely populated areas. Still, most people carry out their daily lives in more or less urbanised surroundings, where they travel to and from work, spend time with friends – and experience landscapes.

### **The object of this paper**

As a part of the Research Council of Norway's programme «Landscape in Change» (Landskap i endring), we initiated a project aimed at giving useful contributions to public planners and administration addressing some of their main challenges in designing future urban landscapes.

The main object of this project is thus to capture people's experience of the everyday landscape in urban or semi-urban areas. This task can conceptually be divided into two subtasks: First, to explore and identify the landscape and arenas that are seen as important and salient for people in their everyday environment. Secondly, to study the way in which people themselves divide their surroundings into different landscape experiences, as a function of time, space, speed (travel mode) and activities.

Within the context of this project the current paper functions as a proposal for an outline of a theoretical framework for the study of the everyday landscape. This might seem as an overly ambitious task. And, as we found in the course of reading through the literature, it is. A more modest, and maybe more honest, goal formulation, is that we want to explore some of the topics found in the literature concerning people's experience of their everyday landscape, to show how incredibly multi-faceted these experiences are.

## **Defining everyday landscape**

### **Landscape**

The word «landscape» has its origins in the arts, and was first used to describe the new style of painting which gained popularity in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This new school of painting introduced the use of nature as an object of art, rather than merely as a background for a portrait, and so on. According to Simmel (1957), who was concerned with the relationship between nature and culture, a landscape is neither nature nor a single entity within nature. To look at a certain terrain as a piece of landscape is to view a section of nature as a separate unit. Nature on the other hand is «the endless connection between all things» says Simmel (1957).

Another definition of landscape is «an area containing distinct physical and cultural forms» (Bourassa 1990). In this respect, the term landscape is also used to denote nature that is cultivated, refined or in other ways processed by man (Viken 1999).

In the scientific literature landscape and environment are some times used interchangeably. Meinig (1979) tries to define landscape as something that is more than *scenery* but less than *environment*. Although it might be difficult to grasp precisely what is meant by «more» and «less» in this context, the definition does make some sort of intuitive meaning. While “scenery” has connotations to a defined perspective, to a painting or a prospect, landscape alludes to something less focused and broader, and includes other experiences than the purely aesthetic. Compared to environment, on the other hand, “landscape” is less inclusive and more distanced.

By using the concept *Landscape* in this project we want to focus on the *physical spatial framework* of people’s experiences and activities when being outdoors. In the study of everyday landscape in urban areas this physical framework consists of parks, gardens, woods, buildings, streets, and so on, i.e., elements of both nature and culture.

### **Daily landscapes**

People’s experiences of their daily landscapes, or the physical spatial framework for their daily life, is closely connected to their daily choices and activities. This means that the understanding of urban landscapes is associated with the environment as a context of action.

Everyday life is an ambiguous concept within social science (Hjorthol 1998a). Heller (1984), for instance, defines the spatial element of everyday life as activities in people’s local environment or their neighbourhood. However, most of people’s daily activities are related to both production and reproduction (Lefebvre 1971, Giddens 1979). Thus, these activities are also related to their workplace and arenas for other activities such as shopping and leisure activities. Data from the Norwegian time-use study show that even though the population spends 15 hours a day in their dwelling or in their immediate local environment, they spend an ever-increasing amount of their time outside of their local environment (Norway Statistics 1992).

Mobility is also an important aspect of modern everyday life. It contributes to both splitting up and connecting together people’s daily activities. Our own travel surveys (Stangeby *et al.* 1998) shows that the Norwegian population above 13 years of age travel on average 38 kilometres pr day, carry out three journeys and spend 1 hour pr day on travel.

This means that people’s daily landscapes includes both the physical setting where they stay for a shorter or a longer period of time, and the surroundings they pass through to get to these settings.

## Place and meaning

Moving through, and being in, a physical setting creates experiences of various sorts. If the surroundings do not make any impressions, or if one is indifferent towards them, it is difficult to talk about any experience at all. In this case, we could say that these surroundings do not have any meaning, in the sense that they do not have any personal or cultural significance. The concept of *place* is often used related to locations that have personal or cultural significance. A landscape can consist of places, but a place can also consist of several landscapes.

The fundamental characteristic of place is that it is imbued with symbolic and cultural meaning (Meinig 1979). Meinig (1979) further divides between 1) publicly or common acknowledged or recognised places, and 2) private, personally experienced places. Places can thus exist on a number of levels, from your local playground to the national state. The small places can be experienced directly and immediately, whereas a place such as the national state are learned through indirect experiences and by the help of symbols and notions

Entrikin (1997) describes place through *functions*. A place can function as a context for action, a source for identity or a focus for environmental meaning.

According to Relph (1976), however, place meaning isn't derived from its locality, function or the people who inhabit it. The meaning of place is something deeper, which is associated with actional intention, something almost immeasurable. This meaning of place has also been described by the use of concepts such as *topophilia* (Tuan 1974b) and *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz 1980).

Canter (1996) describes place as a *system of experiences*, which implies the cultural and personally significant aspects of spatially defined activities. This definition differs from Relph's (1976) by being more neutral and technical, and by not referring to the quality of the locality. This has been done, according to Canter, to establish a unit of study that captures the different processes which creates experiences of the socio-spatial environment.

The everyday landscape can thus consist of both publicly acknowledged places and personally experienced places. This definition extends beyond a mere physical delimitation of surroundings into squares, streets, gardens, parks, and son on, by also including an element of activity, experience, movement and time.

In other words, the everyday landscape is here understood as the parts of the everyday environment (arenas of activity in everyday life) that are seen as meaningful and can be characterised as arenas of experience.

## Experience

It is important to bear in mind that the topic or focusing object in the search for the everyday landscape is not the landscape as such, i.e., its physical characteristics, the number of trees pr square meter, and son on, but peoples' experience of it. But, what

kind of experiences are we looking for? What can we expect to find? Zube (1982) calls what is created in the meeting between man and environment an *interactional product*. Within the literature this product has often been operationalized as *aesthetics* or *preference*.

The concept of aesthetics has its origins in man's apparently never-ending obsession with beauty, be it physical or otherwise. Although the ancient Greeks were concerned with explaining what is beautiful, the term «aesthetics» actually didn't occur until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In environmental psychology interest has mainly been with what people appreciate as a beautiful landscape. The term thus relates to beauty, a beauty that is pure and devoid of other considerations.

In this line of reasoning aesthetics can be seen as one of the properties of a given landscape. A measure, or an operationalisation of this property can be described as people's preference for this landscape, or their like-dislike affection (Zajonc 1980).

So, if we have «model» where the output is preference, what is then the input? Well, to continue this mechanistic view of environmental experience, input are all those aspects of the environment, the landscape, that is thought to influence people's experience, their preference. Examples of such aspects are: spaciousness, prospect, refuge, familiarity, mystery, recognisable, and legibility. All of them thought to be universal qualities of a landscape.

There are several critiques to be made to this line of reasoning. First, experience is more than just preference for visual stimuli. Sources of experience may include both what you hear, smell, feel or sense in any other possible way.

Secondly, such a mechanistic model, where preference is elicited by e.g. a certain degree of mystery combined with a certain sense of refuge and an optimal ratio of trees to water, just will not do. The model would not capture the richness and variation in people's thoughts and feelings when interacting with their surroundings, be they common or spectacular. A different approach is needed.

## **Landscape experience**

### **Approach**

To study landscape experience is not a simple task. Zube *et al.* (1982) distinguishes between with four different approaches: 1) *the expert paradigm*, where professionals evaluates the landscape; 2) *the psychophysical paradigm*, that focuses on the correlation/coherence between the elements in the landscape and people's evaluation and behaviour; 3) *the cognitive paradigm*, that involves a search for human meanings associated with the landscape; 4) *the experiential paradigm*, where the value of the landscape lies in the interaction between people and the landscape. Our approach can be said to operate within the framework of the last two paradigms.

### **Social construction of reality**

Using Bourdieu (1984), Hubbard (1996) points out that whilst each individual potentially attributes a unique meaning to their physical environment, these meanings are generally constructed through codes which are socially transmitted and shared between individuals of similar social background. In this sense landscape evaluations are social representations which are a result of an individual, social and cultural process. The concept *sense of place* indicates that the relationship people have with a place includes emotions and meanings as a result of personal involvement through their everyday life within the given social, cultural and economical conditions in which they live. (Relph 1976; Rose 1995).

Hartig (1993a) describes the relationship between man and the environment as a *transaction*. This indicates that the relationship is an ongoing process where man, both as species, cultural and individual, is in a continuous process of adaptation to, and modification of the environment. Experience of nature may thus be put into a pattern of interrelations between people, places and psychological processes.

This approach may be compared with what in general social sciences is understood as constructivism or phenomenology, based on the sociological theory of social construction of reality introduced by Berger and Luckmann in the 1960s (Berger and Luckmann 1966). According to this theory members of a society constitute and reconstitute the world of every day life. Both individuals and society are mutually constructed, and cannot exist independently.

From a constructivistic point of view it is essential that reality is not something that exists in advance of our recognition/acknowledge of it. It is not something that «lies out there» as an objective reality. Reality is rather a result of the interplay between people and their environment (the external world). The knowledge and the experience that people have of their daily landscapes is in other words not a mirror of this landscape, but a result of the interaction between the characteristics of these landscapes and the meaning people ascribe to them. This experience is, as referred above, *an interactional product* (Zube 1982).

### **Landscape experience as consumption**

The meaning people ascribe to their daily landscape may have many origins and forms. One approach that makes it possible to capture the multiplicity of meanings, is to look upon everyday landscape experiences as *consumption*. This approach is inspired by Uth's analytical framework, which she used in her study of modal choice as consumption. (Uth 2000).

Based on constructivistic theory of identity, newer consumption theory interprets consumption as a special form of symbolic interaction, where we constantly exchange symbols by what we say, what we do, the things we have, and also by our preferences for places and behaviour settings. Based on this theory Uth (2000) distinguishes between consumption as *experience* and consumption as *signal*. Further, she makes a distinction between the consumption's *private* and *common reference of meaning*.

Consumption as signal indicates that a person consider/judge/evaluates what the object of consumption (activity or article) symbolises, e.g. if it signifies something that the consumer may identify with or not. Consumption as experience implies that focus of the evaluation is on the *experience as such*, i.e., the feeling related to the consumption. One can for instance feel good, consider it practical, useful or neat, or one may be indifferent about it.

A common reference of meaning is an evaluation of the consumption that most people agree on. A private reference of meaning is more influenced by the person's individual history and experiences. This last distinction relates to Meinig's (1979), categorisation of places as 1) socially accepted and comprehended/understood places, and 2) personally experienced/private places.

### Four denotations/connotations of consumption

By combining these two dimensions (figure 1) it is possible to differentiate between four separate denotations/connotations of consumption:

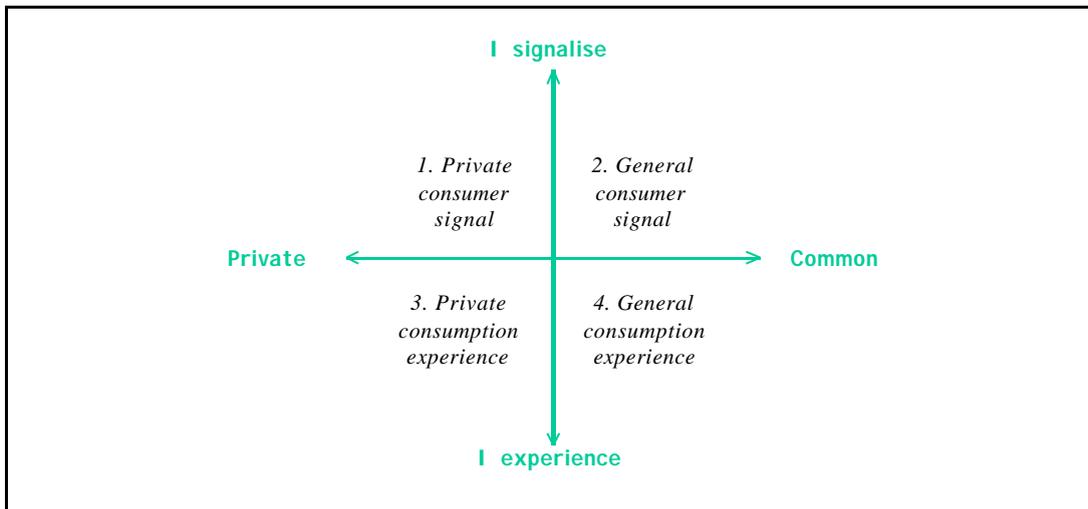


Figure 1: Analytical framework of connotations of consumption

1. Consumption as *private consumer signal* implies that the consumption has a symbolic meaning mainly for the consumer herself/himself. One example in relation to landscape experiences is if sitting on a bench in the park for one individual symbolises boredom and old fashion, because he or she spent a lot of time in parks in their childhood with their grandmother waiting for their parents. Other people might not agree with this interpretation, they are likely to have a completely different history of park bench sitting (maybe the sweet memory of a first romantic encounter a beautiful day in springtime).
2. *General consumer signals* symbolise more or less the same to all consumers. The consumer believes that her or his evaluation or interpretation of the consumption is in accordance with the common reference of meaning. Consequently, the consumption has a stereotypical symbolic value for the consumer, and may be a contributing factor for the communication of a persons lifestyle or identity to others (Holt 1997;

McCracken 1986). A person would signalise an interest in conservation of old cultural environment if she or he shows a special preference for ancient Roman architecture. Or, if the person indicates adoration for the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao and modernistic architecture, he or she would believe to signalise a modern urban identity.

3. A person would have a *private consumption experience* if the value of the experience relates to the consumer's own framework of values, views and patterns of meaning. For some people the enjoyment of driving a car as fast as possible on a motorway is such a private consumption experience. The pleasure of solitude in the woods and the gratification of the sense of community in the neighbourhood, might be other examples of positive private consumption experiences.
4. A *general consumption experience* is based on the consumer's evaluations of experiences with reference to common norms and values, history and convention. In this way, consumption results in an experience that is of a general valid character. A generalised, or common, landscape experience might be to enjoy being on the beach in the summer, travelling along roads with few cars, looking at a waterfall – and believing that most people would share your view on this.

### Individual differences

Using the distinctions above as an analytical framework for studying landscape experience, shows that landscapes and landscape experience may have many meanings or connotations and that a person's meaning structure regarding landscapes has many different sources. However, neither people's understandings of reality or their preference structures are one-dimensional. The individual may choose what parts of everyday life he or she ascribes meaning to and who they consider to be the relevant community for the exchange of these meanings. The origins of a person's meaning structure is multi-levelled, as a function of what social level the transaction between man and society takes place on.

Several studies have shown that there are differences between different groups in experience of the landscape. Lifestyle, previous experiences, membership in organisations, age, sex, cultural background, and profession have all been shown to influence preference. (Dearden 1984; Fyhri 1994; Strumse 1996; Wilson 1996). Different life styles lead to different patterns of activity, which again will lead to exposure to different types of surroundings, which again will represent different landscape experiences and preferences (Hjorthol 1998).

A useful method for analysing, or clarifying, these different meaning structures are by dividing them by level of origin. It is possible to distinguish at least three different levels (Miegel 1990):

1. *The structural level*; indicating a general *way of life*, for instance «Modernity» or national characteristics.
2. *The positional level*; indicating different *life forms* depending on what position one has within society. For instance class, gender, age, ethnic background or religion.

3. *The personal level*; indicating different *lifestyles* based on personal choices and preferences the person has within his or her structural and positional framework, with reference to his or hers personal history.

It is important to bear in mind that the division between these three concepts is not always clear cut. As an example, Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *habitus*, which is central to the understanding of aesthetic preference, can be placed on the borderline between life form and lifestyle. It is assumed that a person's *habitus* has its roots in his or her class background (i.e., life form), but it is also closely associated with the person's personal history (i.e., lifestyle).

Sometimes there may be a discrepancy between the ideal and the actual when it comes to the preference people have and the choices they make. Someone may have strong preferences for lying on a beach or wandering in a park, but may not have the time or money to do so.

By distinguishing between way of life, life form and lifestyle we emphasise that the transaction between individual and society can take place at different levels and that people's reference structures for the experience of the landscape can have various sources.

What exactly that is considered attractive, and how to organise everyday life to reach such attractive places may be characterised as *scripts for everyday life*. Such a script describes all the things you have to do, or ought to do. How and where people travel in their everyday life is mostly dependent on material considerations such as where you live and work, available travel resources, time budget and so on. However, a script for everyday life may influence the way things are organised and the way these activities are evaluated.

### **Summary and conclusion**

The *meaning* and the *significance* of spatial elements in people's physical surroundings are the focus in the study of everyday landscape experience. The meaning and significance is the result of an interplay or *transaction* between people and their environment. In other words, people's landscape experiences can be called *social constructions*. Individual landscape experiences and evaluations, viewed as consumption, are part of a special symbolic interaction and related to the person's identity. The transaction between individual and environment can take place at different levels and people's reference structures for the experience of the environment can have various sources. Consequently, there may be great differences between individuals and between segments of the population about landscape experience and evaluations of their behaviour settings. This is not a surprise.

In our view, the contribution of this paper has been to conceptualise differences in the experience of landscapes and to develop an analytical framework as a basis for the further exploration of the experience of the everyday landscape in urban and semiurban areas.

This analytical framework indicates that:

- ▶ Viewing landscape experience as consumption provides a conceptual framework that gives us the opportunity to determine whether a person's evaluation of elements in their everyday landscape is based on experience of the landscape as such, or if the symbolic value is most important. If it is the symbolic value that is most significant, there is reason to believe that landscape evaluations is an area of influence and easier to change, than if the experience itself is most important.
- ▶ Experiences and evaluations of landscapes may be based either on a common or on a private reference of meaning. Consequently, they are either socially accepted and comprehended by other segments of the society, or only personally experienced.
- ▶ A qualitative approach is most applicable to the study of the experience of everyday landscape

The sample must be based on a hypothesis about differences in landscape experiences (i.e., life forms and lifestyles).

A previous version of this summary was presented as a paper at the workshop on 'Environmental Discourses, Policies and Perceptions in Northern and Southern Europe', Istanbul, 20–24 September 2000. The paper was titled «In search of the everyday landscape», and covered most of the topics presented in this report, except chapter 5 on methods.