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Methods of landscape research

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PREFACE

Not only in Poland are landscape-related issues increasingly popular. We are witnessing the great renaissance of such studies. Cultural landscape is a subject of many scientific disciplines and in each of them a different aspect is in the centre of attention. Landscape is perceived in many different ways in many cultures. Different research methodologies are used in many regions of the world.. Landscape is an object of diverse protection policies and planning approach. It is therefore important to mention the contemporary sciences which deal with the landscape as subject matter for research.

We would like to offer the reader another book concerning methodological aspects of cultural landscape research. Rather than review all most important or most commonly used research procedures in a handbook-like manner, our aim is to present achievements and methodology of research of various sciences dealing with landscape. This book is intended to compare different schools of landscape research in geography and related sciences. The goal was to review the leading research trends and "philosophies" in landscape studies.

The volume includes some articles by representatives of the so-called eastern school, whose many years achievements have been acknowledged internationally, and where landscape is dealt with in a systematic way and treated as a geocomplex. Physical-geographical, geochemical and bio-geographical analyses are predominant in the approach to landscape. Research work within this scope of studies often involves mathematical methods of data processing and generalization of results by modeling.

The book should also give an opportunity to present the methodology of cultural studies of landscape, the aspect which is close to anthropogeography and cultural geography represented by the so-called western school. In this aspect, landscape is treated as a material reflection of centuries-long relation of man (or, more precisely, the culture represented by man) and the geographical environment; therefore, it can be a valid, and frequently univocal identification of particular countries. This trend uses methodology and resources which are closer to human and social sciences. Landscape is characterized in terms of quality rather than quantity (while bonitation assessment prevails in statistical comparisons).

This trend is enhanced with clearly practical examples of application by landscape architects, who will show the methodology of the practical aspect of landscape studies related to the art of use of the landscape as a substance (raw material) in creation and care of beauty in our neighborhood.

The third approach emphasizes the historical aspect in creation and evolution of landscape. This approach treats it as inherited landscape, which broadens the understanding of changes resulting from the man's interaction with the natural environment in the past. It makes it possible to determine the direction and pace of influence of natural and anthropogenic processes which have their external expression in the form of cultural landscape. The main research methods include: cartographic analysis, historical studies (concerning economy, demography, culture, natural disasters, but also climatic changes, hydrography, vegetation, etc.).

Scientists in Central Europe usually apply the mixed approach in landscape studies, making use of methodological achievements of different schools, and adopt research procedures from other sciences while adapting them for their own needs. Traditional methods increasingly include photo-interpretation of aerial and satellite imagery, comparison of vector images and statistical analyses. We hope that the thoughts included in this volume will be an inspiration for experimenting and provide methodological concepts for further research.

Editors