

Changes in rural heritage

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to stand before such an outstanding audience.

My recent research has focused on the history and heritage of European cultural landscapes and that is also the theme I want to discuss with you today. In this presentation, I will first pose the question whether there exist European landscapes. That brings me to the theme of landscape and heritage and I will conclude with the future of European landscapes.

The first question is: can we speak of a European landscape? At first glance, this is not the case. The landscapes we can see around us, are the result of interactions between people and their environments on different scales, but these regions usually do not conform with the accidental boundaries that politicians have drawn between nations or that geographers have drawn between continents.

But there is also another way to look at this question, as landscape and heritage are both concepts that are grounded in European culture.

To start with landscape. Landscape is a complex concept. Originally it meant 'land', including the management of the land and the organization of that management.

From the 16th century onwards, the word landscape came into use for paintings of the environment. Shortly later, it became also a word for what was depicted on those paintings. As such, landscape received a stronger visual meaning.

Much of the present complexity of the term 'landscape' comes from the fact that the present meanings of the word include all the different meanings I just mentioned.¹ It is a region, as well as a painting as well as our visible environment. As such, it comprises the French words 'pays' as well as 'paysage'.

But to return to my earlier point, the original meaning of landscape as 'land' has counterparts in many parts of the world. However, the concept of landscape as the visual component of the environment is a European invention. It was developed in the core regions of late medieval Europe:

¹ See for example the definition that is used in the European Landscape Convention: "Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

the Low Countries, Northern Italy and the connecting zones in Central Europe.



The oldest landscape paintings come from these regions; the south-German painters Albrecht Dürer and Albrecht Altdorfer were among the first who painted real landscapes as such, not as part of a religious picture.



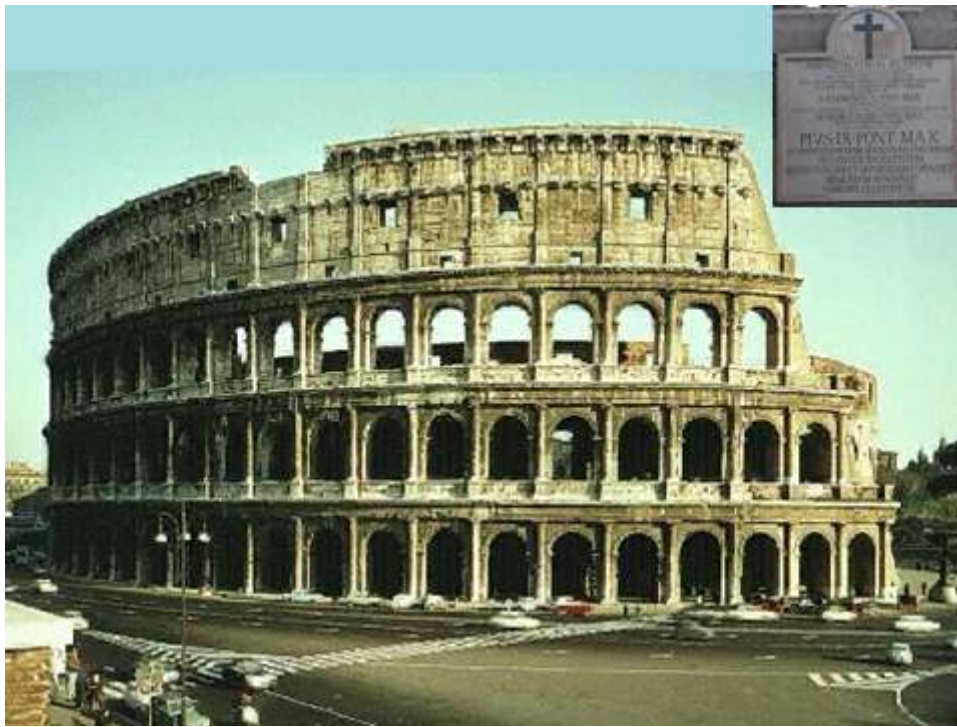
The 'Lane of Middelharnis' by Hobbema (1689) and nowadays

In the way these landscapes were visualised, certain conventions developed. The geographer Denis Cosgrove spoke of a 'landscape way of

seeing' and he sees that as typical European. This way of seeing cannot be understood without the linear perspective, that was developed in Renaissance Italy.

But not only landscape, but also the concept of heritage developed within a European cultural context. Heritage can be defined as 'those traces from the past that are seen as relevant for the present', whereby 'traces' must be defined broadly, including buildings and other concrete objects as well as immaterial traces such as stories, traditions and place names.

In our part of the world, the interest in remains from the past developed already some centuries ago. This interest was partly aesthetical, but usually also to make a connection with historical persons and events. Interest in heritage objects did not necessarily imply that efforts were made to preserve these objects, and certainly not always in situ. In the course of time, museums and country houses in North-Western Europe were stocked with objects removed from other parts of the world. They still cause difficult discussions about the ownership of these objects: do objects belong to the descendants of those who made them, or to the people who happen to live now at the places where these objects were made, or to the world community?



The Colosseum in Rome is an example of an antique building that has been highly valued for centuries already, mainly for two connections: [1] with the Roman Empire, [2] with early Christianity, particularly as a number of Christians were martyred in these premises. Therefore the Colosseum has a long history of heritage management. A number of popes since the 16th century undertook restorations. Other popes, as well as 20th century politicians such as Benito Mussolini, took urbanist measures to connect the Colosseum with other symbols of power (such as

the National Monument and the Piazza Venezia) to shows their claims to legitimacy.

The care for historic monuments still shows differences between different parts of the world. In Europe, and particularly in Western and Southern Europe, the emphasis has been on preservation of authentic materials. This idea can already be found in the works of the 19th century art historian Ruskin. Restoration ethics prescribe, for example, that future visitors must be able to distinguish between the additions that were made by modern restorers and the older, 'original' parts of a building. In other parts of the world, the concept is seen as much more important.

In general, European heritage management focuses strongly on material objects, such as buildings, archaeological traces, landscapes and archives. That also extends to landscapes, where the emphasis is strongly on objects and structures.

In my opinion, the emphasis on material authenticity is mainly a problem for scientists. For scientific research, an original object offers, of course, much more possibilities. Only an original archaeological object can be dated by radiocarbon methods and scrutinised for traces of past use. But the differences probably become smaller now, as we, in Europe, start to realise that many of our protected monuments have in fact a smaller degree of material authenticity than we realised in the past. Wooden ships may still function after a century or more, but almost without a single original piece of wood. Also, the growing influence of the larger population changes the emphasis. In landscape preservation, we are slowly moving from the physical and often abstract structures towards visual elements and the stories people tell about them.



Is there a European landscape? Landscapes are often described within national perspectives. In many countries, landscapes had a role in defining national identities during the 19th and 20th centuries. They were described in literature and appeared in popular music. And in orchestral music: many countries had their 'national' composers and many of them used landscapes as one of their themes.

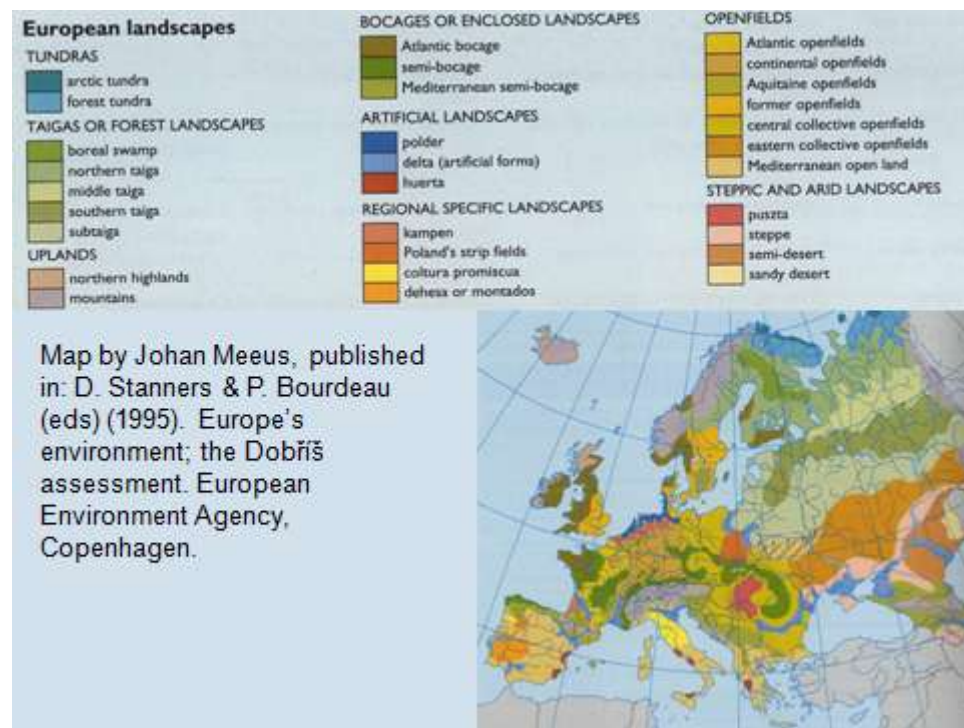


This nationalism was not always innocent, as especially the rural, agricultural or natural, landscapes were presented as core values and as worth fighting for.



In some cases, the reclamation of natural landscapes were seen as national efforts. Especially the wetlands, difficult and (because of malaria) even dangerous to reclaim, became showpieces for national governments. The picture shows the village of Anita in the Po Delta in Italy. Reclaimed during the 1930s and named after Anita Garibaldi, the wife of the unification of Italy and therefore very popular with the Mussolini administration.

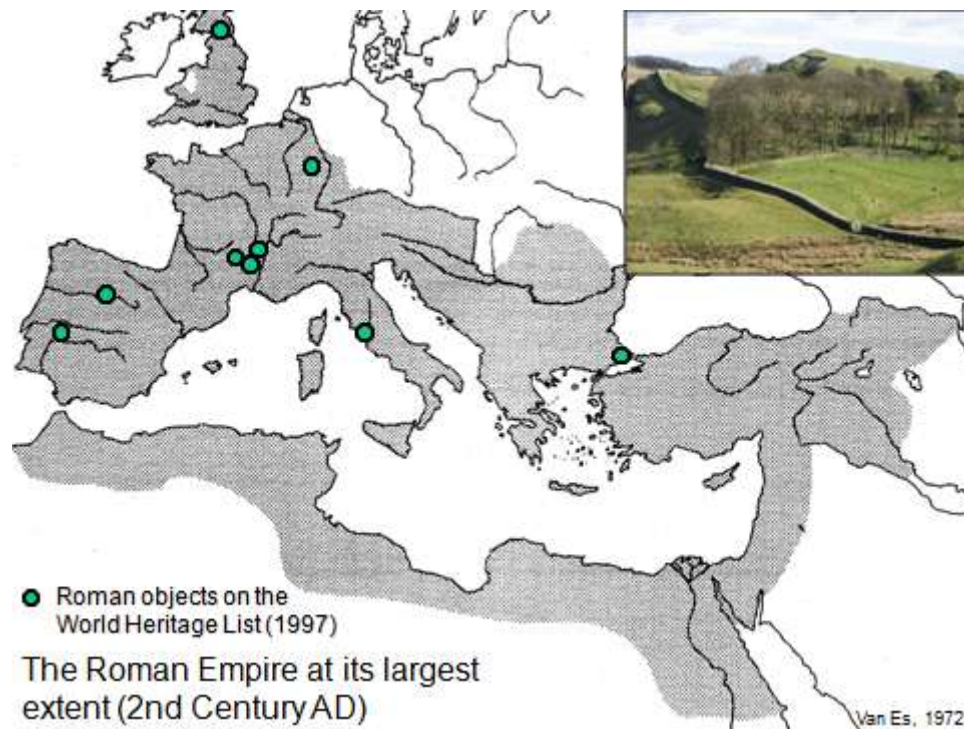
Other typical national efforts were national defense systems (in the Netherlands, the efforts to protect fortresses and bunkers are out of proportion as compared to other types of heritage, perhaps related to the present Dutch self-centered approach to international politics) and the capital cities. Especially during the 19th century, many of the new nation states rebuilt their capitals as showpieces. The Hausmannian boulevards in Paris, the Ring of Vienna are cases in point, as are Athens (built almost from scratch but at the site of the ancient capital), Brussels, Berlin, Rome and many others.



But most landscapes developed already during periods before the emergence of the present nation states. In fact this map of European landscape types is completely unrelated to national borders. So, historic landscapes should be viewed within an European perspective.

In fact, the European unification process is, just like the nation states were doing during the 19th and 20th centuries, searching for its own symbols. Again, some of these symbols are found in heritage objects.

Such symbols can be found in past efforts to unify Europe by force, but of these, Nazi Germany and even Napoleon are still too much contested and are also too strongly connected with states that are influential nowadays.



This is different for the Roman Empire, although imperialist and often brutal in its expansion and also, in fact, more a Mediterranean than a European power. Nonetheless, the old border defences are extremely popular in heritage circles and are slowly developing into a Europe-wide World Heritage Site.



Another Pan-European World Heritage Site is the Struve Arc, that refers to a scientific project. The Struve Arc is a chain of survey triangulations,

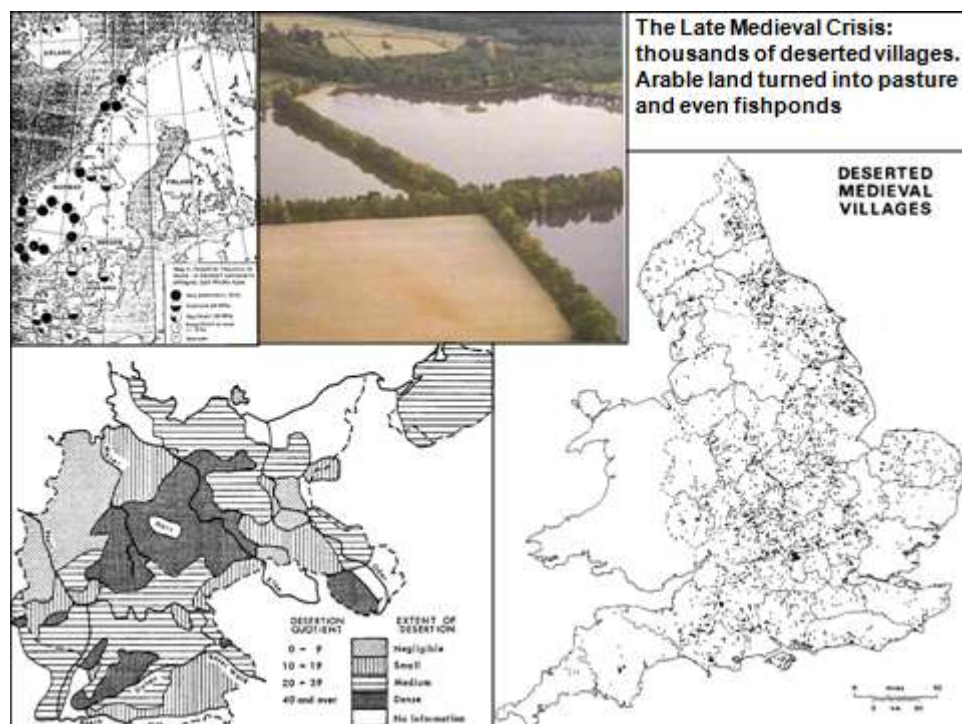
done by Friedrich Struve between 1816 and 1855 and stretching from Hammerfest in Norway to the Black Sea.

Much more interesting in my opinion are some economic and geographic developments that influenced large parts of Europe. I will give four examples.



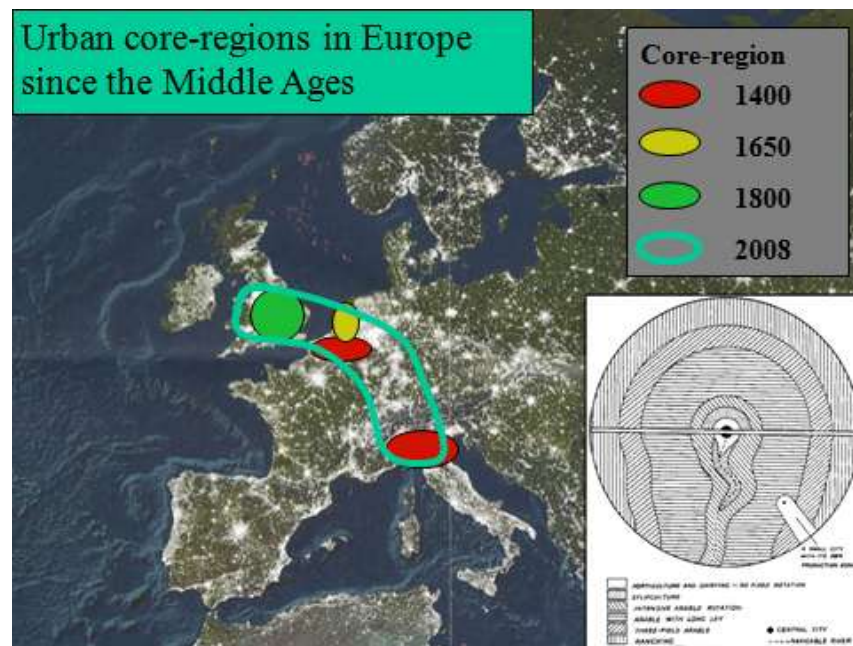
Landscapes of the High Medieval colonisation period: similar settlement types in different parts of Europe. Left: strip farms in a very much individualised landscape in the Black Forest (Germany) and in the Netherland; right: planned villages with rectangular greens in Northern England and in Eastern Germany.

The first development is the economic and demographic expansion of the High Middle Ages. Substantial parts of landscapes in Europe can be traced back to this expansion period.



This was also the period in which towns again became a familiar sight in the European landscape. The large majority of present towns developed or was founded during this period.

Also the successive backlash, the Late Medieval Crisis period, was a European phenomenon. All over Europe, thousands of villages and farms were deserted. We can speak of a reorganisation of the European landscape on a massive scale, that laid the basis for the next phase of expansion.

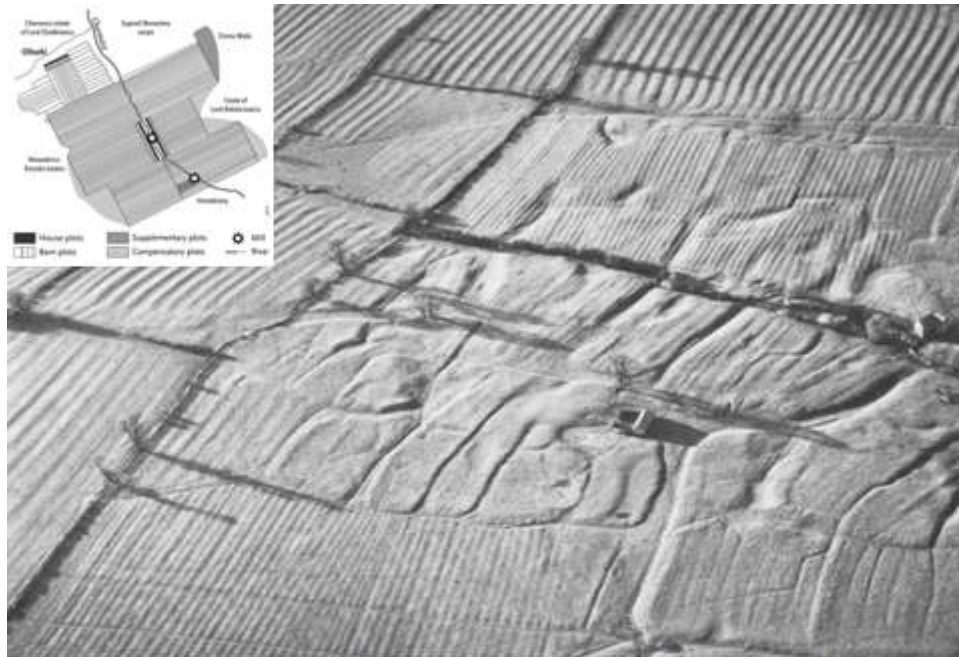


During the next phase, much of European agriculture centred around the one surviving core region, in North-Western Europe.



Land use around the North Sea and the Baltic during the 17th century. From: Nitz, H.-J. (1993). The European world-system: a Von Thünen interpretation of its eastern continental sector. In: H.-J. Nitz (ed.). The early-modern world-system in geographical perspective. Steiner, Stuttgart (Erdkundliches Wissen 110), pp. 62-83.

Grain-growing oriented towards the core region. In grain, for example, the earlier regional production regions around the main cities grew together into a European grain market, when the Baltic grain producers were connected to the Mediterranean basin.



The deserted medieval village of Otley (England): land turned from open-field arable to sheep farming. Inset: new planned open fields in sixteenth-century Lithuania.

In this new European system, another series of spatial reorganisations took place, in which grain production moved eastward: England and a few other regions turned to animal husbandry, parts of the Mediterranean showed a further development of complex market oriented agrarian systems such as the 'coltura promiscua' and new, often planned, open field landscapes developed in the Eastern Baltic.

The last two centuries brought further transformations. During the end of the 19th century the European market for grain developed into a global market when Europe was flooded with cheap grain from Russia and North America. Agriculture adapted to this new situation with a combination of new technology, changes from arable to animal husbandry and by protective measures. In the first half of the 20th century a last phase of large scale reclamations for agricultural land took place.



Two landscapes that developed in different directions during the second half of the twentieth century. Upper part: landscape of collective farms in the Czech Republic; lower part: small-scale family farms in Austria.

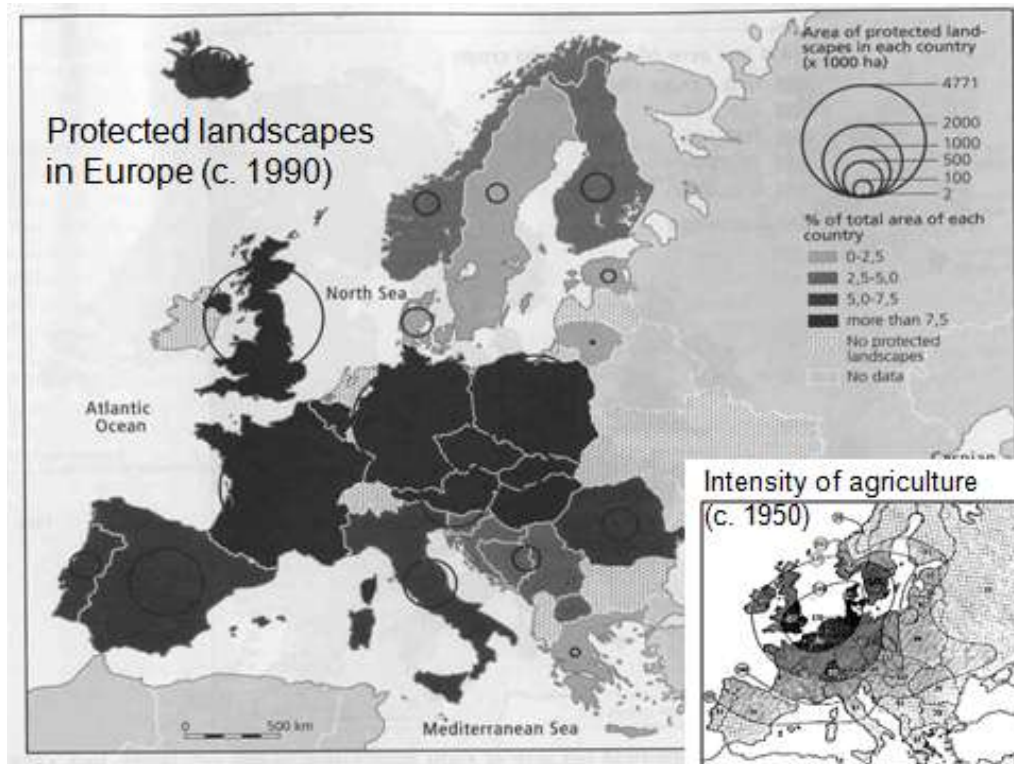
During the second half of the 20th century, the amount of agricultural land started to diminish, when ever more land was used for urban purposes. The remaining agricultural land was in many cases reconstructed, in parts of Eastern Europe by collectivisation and in the rest of Europe by a gradual process of land consolidation

So, what have we learned thus far. Firstly, landscape is a European concept, that is often seen as a marker of identity. Secondly, landscapes are not stable, but have undergone series of transformations, often on a continental scale.

This has consequences for the European landscape heritage. Often a simple division is made between traditional and modernised landscapes. 'Traditional' are those landscapes that have more or less survived the twentieth century transformations and that should be protected. Modernised landscapes have been transformed and are no longer interesting for heritage management. The English landscape historian Chris Taylor uses the terms 'Zones of Survival' and 'Zones of Destruction'.² For the best preserved traditional landscapes, a recent article used the term 'cultural landscape hotspots'.³

² Taylor, C. (1972). The study of settlement patterns in Pre-Saxon England. In: P.J. Ucko, R. Tringham & G.W. Dimbleby (eds). *Man, settlement and urbanism*. Duckworth, London, pp. 109-113.

³ Solymosi, 2011. Mrs Solymosi formulated three preconditions for traditional cultural landscape hotspots: [1] isolation (in geographic, economic, infrastructural, political, cultural terms), [2] a geographical setting difficult for agriculture, [3] inhabitants (made) ethnically and/or socially different from the national mainstream. This is in fact not really new, as these hotspots are comparable to another term that was already proposed exactly fifty years earlier by the German geographer Georg Niemeier, who spoke of 'agrarian landscape relict regions' (*Agrarlandschaftliche Reliktgebiete*; Niemeier, 1961).



There are a few problems with these ideas. The first is that there is an unexpectedly strong relation between agricultural intensity and landscape protection. On a European scale, most protected landscapes are situated in the urbanised regions, that are also the regions with the most intensive agriculture. Landscape protection is stronger related to urban interests than to landscape values.

Preserved	Past activity	
	Much	Little
Much		
Little		

Heritage 'hotspot regions'

Secondly, it is not enough to search for isolated regions that were less influenced by the recent transformations of the landscape. Earlier transformations have added information and stories to landscapes and made them richer. The most interesting landscapes are those where a phase of intensive use was followed by a phase of stagnation.

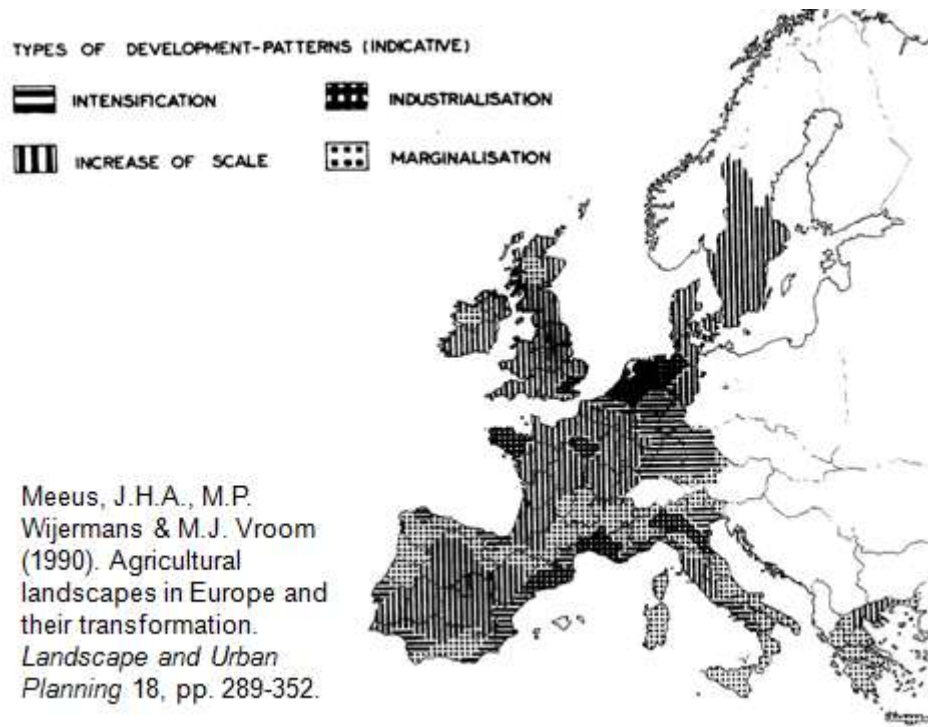


An example are the Orkney Islands, that are now the periphery of the periphery, but that had a much more central position during the Early Middle Ages (when it was part of a dynamic economic system in the Northern North Sea) and must have also been rich and dynamic during parts of the Neolithic. Hence the very rich heritage.



Thirdly, even in the most dynamic regions, many landscapes have shown great resilience, not to say stubbornness. This slide shows a number of interesting landscapes of agricultural specialisation in different parts of Europe. Such landscapes are vulnerable for changing economic circumstances, but yet they still survive.

Will such landscapes survive in the future? Therefore I have to say a few words about the future trends in European landscapes. Now, as the Danish Physician and Nobel Prize winner Niels Bohr once said: 'Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future.'



However, it is clear that the picture will be varied. Population tendencies show differences between parts of Europe. It is probable that agriculture will have to find its place again in an open world economy. In the farther future, climate change will affect nature and landscape as well as agriculture.

This map, already quite old but still illustrative, shows different tendencies in European landscapes, with enlargement of scale in some regions, intensification particularly in urbanized regions and marginalization (with disappearing agriculture) in a third group of regions.

But following my earlier remarks, I think we cannot limit our activities to the well-preserved peripheral landscapes, but we should instead see the whole landscape as our field of study.

Heritage values	Development		
	Scale enlargement, Intensification	Post-productivist	
		Intensive	Marginalisation
High	Preserving relics	Agriculture in an urban environment	Supporting agriculture
Low	Laissez faire; landscape design		Nature



This last schedule shows a simplified first attempt towards strategies to combine heritage values with trends in the landscape. To the types on the earlier map, I add another category, that is increasingly important for urbanized as well as for protected landscapes. This is the combination of agricultural activities with rural tourism, nature conservation and other activities.

Agriculture itself also develops new directions, such as organic farming, local products and direct sale to customers. Whereas some regions in Europe will further develop in the direction of large-scale commercial agriculture, we will probably see an increasing diversity.

The heritage sector will have to move from protection of sites and small areas to what is called 'management of change', which means that we will have to participate in spatial processes on different scales, to safeguard a diverse and interesting landscape in the future.

I thank you for your attention