MANAGING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: A CASE STUDY OF STIRLING , ALBERTA

Buckle Robert / Canada
AACIP, MCIP, MEDes. (Planning)

An Approach to Cultural Landscape Management

We know what they are, we know what they have, we know they are important, what do we do with them, how do we plan for them and how do we manage them?

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Character Planning for Cultural Landscapes

In observing the reactions of people to ordinary landscapes, cultural geographer D.W. Meing noted the description of "10 different versions of the same scene." Geographers, planners, landscape architects, biologists, ecologists, archaeologists, cultural geographers, psychologists, ethnologists, and others have written about landscapes from the perspective of their respective disciplines and professional interests. This paper considers cultural landscapes from a holistic perspective using the idea of cultural landscape character areas as the starting point to develop a cultural landscape plan for a small town.

The proposed approach for planning cultural landscapes is called character planning. It includes an analysis of the parts of the landscape so that there is an understanding as to what makes up the cultural landscape. It also includes an approach to bring these elements together, not merely as a collection of parts to be managed, but as part of the holistic approach that provides a sense of direction. The main components of this planning approach are Melnick's characteristics for rural landscapes, categories for cultural landscape assessment (natural, cultural, visual and meaning), a cultural landscape character statement, and a cultural landscape plan. (see Table 1)

Research

There are a variety of methods to collect information on cultural landscapes: interviews, surveys, participatory design workshops, landscape-recording, questionnaires, and visual analysis surveys. Appropriate methods are chosen based on time and available resources, the intent of the study, available information formats, and the focus of the study. (Carter 1983)

Information about the cultural landscape is derived from two main sources: the historical record and the existing landscape. Actual sources within these categories are described in Table 1.

Inventory

Melnick's characteristics are the starting point for understanding and mapping cultural landscapes. They provide an overview of the cultural landscape and include a sufficient range of factors for an initial investigation. (see Figure 1) One of the most important contributions of the publication of Melnick's Rural Historic Districts was the description of the characteristics of the rural landscape and how these could be used for research and inventory of sites. (Gilbert 1988)

Robert Melnick's work for the US Park Services identifies twelve characteristics that are useful in landscape inventory. Melnick's characteristics were designed for ordinary landscapes, especially for rural settings. These characteristics provide a list of elements to be considered in inventorying landscapes. (see Table 2) (Melnick 1984) The National Park Service and others have used this inventory approach in a number of studies, including that of Ebey Landing.

Melnick's characteristics for studying rural historic districts are useful to conduct cultural landscape inventories, ensuring that a broad base of information is collected. The inventory method proposed for this case study is similar to that used by the National Park Service to document the landscape at Ebey Landing. (Gilbert 1985)

Landscape Character

Cultural landscape inventories may be used as a reference for cultural landscape planning but they do not provide an holistic perspective. Paine and Taylor describe inventories based on Melnick's characteristics as follows: "These inventories provide information about features but do not identify the character, quality, meaning or significance of the landscapes area in which they are located" (Paine and Taylor 1995)

The proposed character planning approach describes the four main elements of a cultural landscape as natural, cultural, visual, and meaning.

Four Features of Landscape Character

In order to manage the character of the cultural landscape it is necessary to understand the primary influences or contributors to landscape character. Four broad categories that the literature has shown to be significant in the understanding of cultural landscapes are discussed. They are natural, cultural, aesthetic and/or visual, and meaning. These four elements are meant to provide planners with the elements to manage a landscape from an holistic perspective.

Most recently, Paine and Taylor reviewed various methodologies and attempted to synthesise a clear approach to cultural landscape management. (Paine and Taylor 1995) This review included consideration of the four elements mentioned above as well as others. The four elements chosen seem to be the most comprehensive and to reflect ways of describing landscape and synthesising the elements into an holistic perspective. These four elements still encompass large areas of thought and information but may represent the beginnings of a comprehensive approach to cultural landscapes for the planner.

Natural

Nature interacts with culture to form the cultural landscape. Studies of cultural landscape must include an understanding of the natural elements that have formed the environment and that continue to influence its development. (see Figure 2) (Sauer 1925)

Understanding of the natural environment may include the examination of such factors as climate, soil, vegetation, geomorphology, and drainage. These natural elements are important components to understanding the backdrop of the cultural landscape. (see Figure 3) The natural environment provides the biological and ecological framework for the cultural landscape. "The natural landscape is of course of fundamental importance for it supplies the materials out of which the cultural landscape is formed. The shaping force lies in the culture itself." (Sauer 1925)

Cultural

Cultural influences are the tangible results of changes that have affected the landscape due to such things as human habitation, transportation, land development, roads, and fences. Jackson discusses landscape as a combination of social, political, economic, and public landscapes. (see Figure 4) The cultural aspects also include those that may be less tangible, such as the process used to bring about landscape changes, how the town is organised, the impact of how the land may be divided, and the architectural defining features. The cultural landscape is the culmination of these effects on landscape. (Jackson 1984)

How the landscape satisfied the needs of everyday living and working is an important consideration for Jackson. (see Figure 5) The landscape must be considered in terms of how well it achieves its function for human productivity. It is more than an artefact or a record for understanding history. This functional view of the landscape means that when the function changes then the characteristics of the landscape must be allowed to change and progress. (Jackson 1984) Everyday ordinary landscapes of farming communities and suburban strips are of equal importance. Both types of vernacular landscapes help our understanding and appreciation of landscape. (Jackson 1984)

Hoskins's value for our understanding of cultural components lies in his multi-faceted approach to studying the history of an area, describing the landscape evolution, seeking confirmation by studying the evidence of physical change in the landscape and identifying its original motivations. (Meinig 1979) Starting with the existing landscape and relating it to historical knowledge, he was able to discern the historical significance of various elements in the existing landscape. He describes the scene in the English Midlands, referring to the lasting effects of the parliamentary enclosure law:

The new fields were hedged around with quickset, whitethorn, or hawthorn, to give its alternative names, with a shallow ditch on one side or both sides of the fence ... but after twenty years the thorns had grown high enough to be cut and laid, a practice which William Marshall describes … in his Rural Economy of the Midland Counties in 1790. (Hoskins 1988)

Hoskins and Jackson refined and broadened our thinking of the cultural component of landscapes.

Visual

The visual refers to what we perceive in the landscape and our reaction to it. Early definitions of landscape were identified with an aesthetic experience of rural scenery or a landscape painting. (Penning-Rowsell and Lowenthal 1986) But not all views are aesthetically pleasing. We see, interpret, and react depending on the nature of the circumstances. This chain of perception is directly linked to our educational training and cultural background.

Jay Appleton, in The Experience of Landscape, attempts to answer the question, "What is it we like about landscapes and why do we like it?" Appleton considers landscape from the perspective of the viewer and the aesthetic considerations of landscape. Why do we prefer certain landscapes over others? How have artists through the ages reflected these preferences and what are their origins? Are they natural to all humans or are they environmentally learned behaviours? He theorised that our attraction to landscape is innately based on three basic factors: prospect, refuge, and hazard. (Appleton 1975)

Appreciation of landscapes for Hoskins and Jackson may be an acquired taste. It may be learned and developed through identity with the landscape, and familiarity, interpretation, and education about the authenticity of the landscape. (see Figure 6 and 7)

The visual aspects of landscape are often a component of environmental evaluation, which attempts to determine ways of measuring landscapes based on the behaviour of those who experience them. (Zube 1984) It looks at landscape through the eye of the beholder and asks what it is that is good or bad, positive or negative, and then attempts to define measurements for those responses. In participatory research viewers are asked to choose between preferred landscape alternatives. The usual methods for determining responses are interviews and questionnaires. Subjective evaluations obtained from experts are often matched with evaluations of lay observers to provide a balanced perspective. The intent is to increase understanding about a particular landscape and to provide some insight into how that landscape may be better designed.

Meaning

The character of landscape is our overall impression formed through our current perceptions and past experience. Layered with time, additional experience, and feeling, character is connected with meaning. (see Figure 8)

Meaning is what a landscape means to us. What does it represent? Is it a symbol or source of identity for a particular group? Meaning is never omitted from the landscape when discussing other categories, but it is important to contemplate its significance when planning for cultural landscapes. UNESCO defines the associative landscape as a landscape that has meaning. It may have had little or no direct cultural impact; it may not meet aesthetic criteria, but may be significant as a result of its meaning for a cultural group. (UNESCO 1997) When planning for cultural landscapes meaning helps us determine our planning approach and to consider its consequences.

One of the most important characteristics of landscape for Jackson is its role in helping to create identity. The landscape we know is a familiar place in which we can experience a sense of place and be aware of shared experiences with others. (see Figure 9) A sense of community is created by landscape. People often feel an identity with the place in which they live; it is not a place to be studied but to be lived in. (Jackson 1984)

Character Areas

A character area results when the contributing characteristics are sufficiently similar to warrant them being considered as an area. Character areas provide a physical planning area in which some interventions may be chosen over others because of their appropriateness and suitability for that area. The choice of intervention, if any, is a combination of technical, professional and community considerations.

Landscape is a physical medium and the results of analysis are best reflected in a graphic way. Pathways and buildings are easily mapped, but it is also possible to map the intangibles. The meanings and visual qualities of spaces may be represented on maps and through photography.

There are two steps to describing the character areas.

First, the information collected through the research, inventory, and recording of the landscape is analysed and mapped. Table 3 shows a matrix used to describe the relationship between Melnick's twelve characteristics and the categories of natural, cultural, visual, and meaning. Second, once the four categories are mapped, the information is analysed using overlay-mapping techniques. Using this information in conjunction with the other aspects of landscape research, cultural landscape character areas are described.

Developing Character Statements

The cultural landscape character statement is adapted from a parallel process used by the Canadian Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office (FHBRO) for heritage buildings. The FHBRO character statement is employed by FHBRO to ensure that the character of heritage structures is retained, while allowing for flexibility in the adaptation of the building to new uses. The character statement is a source of discussion and discovery of customized solutions to address the building context. It describes items of the building or site critical to maintaining its character. It also describes how the heritage building or site may be changed

in the future. Proponents review potential interventions with the FHBRO office. The proposed intervention is considered in the context of the heritage character statement, which acts as a reference point for decision making. (Environment Canada 1990) The cultural landscape character statement, adapted from FHBRO, provides a degree of flexibility, a mechanism for discussing planning and management interventions, and a reference point from which to consider future interventions.

A cultural landscape character statement is developed for each character area. The character statements focus on the essential characteristics of the area and the significance of the area in the context of the cultural landscape. The character statement may also provide information on existing conditions and integrity. For example, the condition of an area of original prairie grass may be very poor and may require a management intervention. Similarly, the condition of an original settlement house may be very good but changes through time may mean its contribution to an area's character is compromised. Proposed changes may be influenced to reflect interventions that are more sympathetic to the cultural landscape character area.

Cultural Landscape Plan

The idea proposed by Kevin Lynch of a "time place", as outlined in What Time is This Place?, provides a context for the planning approach to cultural landscapes. He proposes that our image of the environment being planned be both temporal and spatial. Conservation efforts should be directed at ensuring a humane environment that considers present and future needs. (Lynch 1972) Conservation planning with this idea in mind differs from traditional preservation philosophy. Traditional conservation of heritage or cultural resources is focused on minimizing, if not eliminating, their rate of change. Cathy Gilbert notes that "the preservation philosophy that freezes a resource at a single time and place is not realistic for a cultural landscape." (Gilbert 1988) Cultural landscape resources must allow for an acceptable rate of change in the context of the desires, needs, and concerns of the people who live there.

Lynch's ideas make the possibility of living historical towns more viable. These ideas also encourage reflection on the past that is more open and less constrained than is possible within the traditional heritage conservation framework. While the traditional approach tends to rely on the opinions of experts, the "time place" approach invites the possibility of greater involvement by the community, increased educational opportunities, and participatory decision making.

The cultural landscape plan uses the cultural landscape character statement as a reference point for evaluation of possible alternative interventions. The plan is conceptual and provides a description of possible desired future outcomes from the perspective of conservation of the cultural landscape. It may consist of both policy and design initiatives. Education and participation are important aspects of the plan development and implementation.

Summary

Cultural landscapes are continuously changing. A cultural landscape plan needs to strike an effective balance between planning for those changes and conserving the cultural landscape relative to the context of the resource. Character planning has been adopted for the purpose of this study in an attempt to develop a holistic approach to planning for cultural landscapes. The approach includes research, inventory, and analysis of the four categories of cultural landscape: natural, cultural, visual and meaning. These categories are used to identify cultural landscape character areas and to prepare cultural landscape character statements.

Abstract

The Village of Stirling, Alberta, is the subject of a case study to develop an approach to planning for cultural landscapes. The cultural landscape planning approach is an adaptation of character planning and has the following components: Melnick characteristics for inventorying cultural landscapes, an analysis of the cultural landscape natural, cultural, visual, and meaning categories to define geographic cultural landscape character areas, and an adaptation of Canada Federal Heritage Review Office heritage building character statement concept to the development of a cultural landscape character statement. The cultural landscape character statement serves as a reference point for planning and acts as a catalyst for developing planning concepts. Cultural landscape character planning provides a holistic perspective from which to provide planning strategies for the conservation and interpretation of Stirling cultural landscape.

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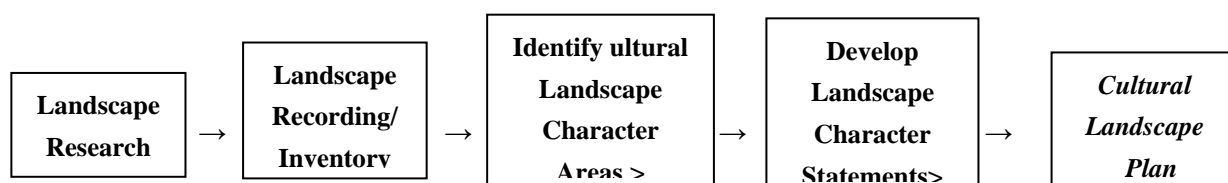AACIP, MCIP, MEDes. (Planning)

Landscape Research	→	Landscape Recording/ Inventory	→	Identify ultural Landscape Character Areas >	→	Develop Landscape Character Statements>	→	*Cultural Landscape Plan*

Table 1: Model of character planning for cultural landscape developed for case study of Stirling, Alberta. (Buckle)

> **I   Historical Sources**
>
> Historical Reports
> Archival Research
> Local Records
> Local Officials and Townspeople
> Aerial Photographs
> Historical Photos and Maps
>
> **II   Field Sources**
> Windshield Survey/Field Surveys
> Current Aerial Photos
> Maps
> On-Site Interviews

Table 2: Sources of cultural landscape information

Melnick's	Characteristics	
	Characteristics	**Examples**
Process		
	1. Patterns of Spatial Organization	Grid Plan
	2. Landuse and Activities	Cropland/Irrigation
	3. Response to Natural Features	Shelterbelts
	4. Cultural Traditions	Gambrel Roof Barns
Features		
	5. Circulation Networks	Pathways
	6. Boundaries	Political/Visual
	7. Vegetation Related to Land Use	Trees in Orchards
	8. Structural Types	Barns
	9. Cluster Arrangement	Homestead
	10. Archaeological sites	Abandoned Farmsteads
	11. Small Scale Elements	Fencing
	12. Perceptual Qualities	Views

Table 3: Melnick's characteristics for describing rural historic districts showing examples of the type of information to be collected. (Melnick 1984, pp. 19-28)

Landscape Character Categories Analysis

Melnick' s Characteristics	Natural	Cultural	Visual	Meaning
1. Patterns of Spatial Organization		XX	XX	XX
2. Land Use and Activities		XX	XX	
3. Response to Natural Features	XX			XX
4. Cultural Traditions				
5. Circulation Networks				XX
6. Boundaries	XX			
7. Vegetation Related to Land Use	XX	XX	XX	
8. Structural Types		XX		
9. Cluster Arrangement			XX	
10. Archaeological Sites		XX		
11. Small Scale Elements	XX			XX
12. Perceptual Qualities		XX		XX

Table 4: Demonstrates the possible relationship between Melnick's characteristics and the cultural landscape planning components of cultural, natural, visual, and meaning.

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Fig 1: Melnick's characteristics of cultural landscapes assist in preparing landscape inventories and describing cultural landscapes. Small-scale elements such as fencing and farm equipment, transportation and communication routes, and structures are considered as part of the inventory.

Fig 2: Natural: The dry grass prairie is a significant component of the Stirling cultural landscape.

Fig 3: Natural: Stirling Lake is a local landmark seen from Highway 4 and the town.

Fig 4: Cultural: Granaries and barns built on the homestead were typically constructed of stacked square-edged timber to ensure support and were usually left unpainted.

Fig 5: Cultural: This is one of the early settlement houses near Stirling. Typical building patterns for the Mormons included steep pyramid roofs.

Fig 6: Visual: Views along the streets are defined by remaining large trees in some blocks.

Fig 7: Visual: The relatively flat dry grass prairie enhances the distant views.

Fig 8: Meaning: The working agricultural landscape has attached to it the values of hard work rewarded by tangible products.

Fig 9: Meaning: The "Milk Shed," a small shed at the back of a lot which was the source of food and clothing for those in need during the Depression, is now part of the village's local history.