

Social-Ecological Resilience of Cultural Landscapes

International Workshop

– Call for Papers –

Berlin, Germany

15-16 June 2010

Background

With the adoption of the European Landscape Convention, the protection, management, and planning of cultural landscapes has attracted broad interest from scientists, policy makers, and the general public. But as a consequence of wide-spread land abandonment, agricultural intensification, and urbanization, many cultural landscapes have fallen into a state of crisis: Traditional practices characterized by small spatial scales, mixed cultures, low-input practices, and multiple ecosystem services are being abandoned and replaced by standardized and simplified land uses. All over Europe, efforts are being made to preserve cultural landscapes, for example extensively used mountain grasslands in the Alps, the central Italian *coltura promiscua* mixed cropping system, and the *dehesa/montado* agroforestry landscapes on the Iberian Peninsula. Though some of these efforts have proven successful, large-scale land use and subsequent landscape changes seem inevitable, which often results in a loss of ecosystem services and human well-being.

From the point of view of systems theory, this phenomenon can be brought into line with the concept of *resilience*, according to which systems are able to cope with disturbances (e.g. in the case of cultural landscapes demographic or economic changes) without changing their structure or functions until they cross certain thresholds. Beyond these thresholds, however, disturbances cannot be cushioned any more and the system shifts to another state. This may include negative effects, meaning in this case degradation of ecosystem services from cultural landscapes.

The transitions between different system states (regime shifts) can also be described in terms of systems theory. The concept of the adaptive cycle distinguishes complex systems into growth, conservation (“fore loop“), release, and reorganization (“back loop”) phases. The usually slow fore loop is characterized by growth and accumulation, of biomass for instance, but also in human and social capital. In contrast, the back loop is typically a rapid process marked by uncertainty, novelty and experimentation, leading to either destructive or creative change of the system. From this perspective, many of the traditional cultural landscapes today seem to be in the realm of a late conservation phase, on the turning point of transitioning into a back loop of reorganisation and renewal. But, so far the suitability of the resilience concept for understanding cultural landscape dynamics remains vague.

The workshop

Drawing on case studies provided by participants, the workshops aims at creating, respectively enhancing, theoretical insights into the social-ecological resilience of cultural landscapes through coming to terms with – and challenging – existing concepts of “driving forces”, “thresholds”, “adaptive cycles” and “adaptive management”. We expect that an improved understanding of these issues will facilitate the fostering and advancement of future research on the resilience and sustainable management of cultural landscapes.

The basis of the workshop, and starting point for extensive discussion sessions, will be empirical studies focusing on cultural landscapes as social-ecological systems. We are especially looking

forward to contributions linking ecological analysis with insights into the social processes tied to changing cultural landscapes.

Specifically, we call for papers that:

- analyze drivers at different temporal and spatial scales for determining the state of cultural landscapes;
- identify thresholds and regime shifts that result from crossing these thresholds;
- examine ways to enhance the resilience of cultural landscapes so as to avoid shifts towards undesired structural or functional states;
- discuss the contributions that the adaptive cycle provides for the understanding of cultural landscape dynamics;
- specify adaptive management strategies for the restoration of natural and social capital in traditional or “novel“ cultural landscapes;
- contrast the “social-ecological systems” perspective with the “cultural landscape” concept.

The outcome of the workshop is to be published either in an edited book or in a special issue of a relevant journal. The geographic focus of the workshop will be on Europe, but reference to other cultural landscapes of the world is also welcome.

The workshop will include keynote presentations by:

- Mauro Agnoletti, University of Florence (Italy)
- Carole Crumley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA) / Stockholm Resilience Centre (Sweden)
- Lesley Head, University of Wollongong (Australia)
- Ann Kinzig, Arizona State University (USA)
- Carlos Montes, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain / to be confirmed)
- Mats Widgren, Stockholm University (Sweden)

Participants

The workshop aims to provide an interdisciplinary forum for about 20 PhD students, post-docs, and senior researchers from all fields of landscape research, including geography, landscape ecology, institutional economics, rural sociology, agricultural and forest sciences, and land change science.

Please send an abstract (ca. 300 words) to Claudia Bieling or Tobias Plieninger by 28 February 2010. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by 14 March 2010. Final papers are due by 30 May 2010.

Costs of participation in the seminar will be covered. Participants are expected to bear expenses for transportation and accommodation themselves. To a limited extent, we can additionally provide travel support to people who would be unable to attend the workshop otherwise. If applicable, send your request for financial assistance together with your abstract.

Contact

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