

Research Article

From hiking through farmland to farming in a leisure landscape: changing social perceptions of the European landscape

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Abstract

The idea that landscape has been created by human activities on a biophysical basis allows for clear cause–effect reasoning. However, landscape planning and management practice learns that it is impossible to neglect the social perception of landscape, i.e. the ways people think about nature and landscape. It is the result of social research and human sciences of the last decade that a differentiation in views of nature and landscape can be identified in the different groups of social actors in the landscape. Case studies from France and the Netherlands show a marked change in values attributed to nature and landscape in the end of the last century. Social demand for landscape is growing and a shift from a functional image of nature and landscape to a more hedonistic image like the Arcadian and wilderness images has taken place. Comparing the Netherlands with France and rural with urban inhabitants, the influence of urbanisation is evident in this process. It is further shown that images of nature vary considerably between for example farmers, urban residents, hunters and conservationists. The way people perceive landscape seems determined by their functional ties with the landscape and the social praxis in which they encounter the landscape. It is concluded that the concept of landscape is nearer to the lifeworld of people than the abstract notions of nature and biodiversity. This implies a big challenge both for national and international landscape policies and for local landscape management initiatives to be developed, taking into due consideration both the material and immaterial nature of landscape.

Introduction

European landscapes are facing a considerable crisis. Traditional functions like agriculture are declining as a consequence of globalisation and the associated economical processes. In remote and less accessible areas, land abandonment continues, leaving behind deserted fields, useless infrastructure and overgrown pastures. In the readily

accessible, more urbanised parts of Europe, on the other hand, landscape suffers not less from degradation, especially through fragmentation, standardisation and encroachment.

Meanwhile, new functions are becoming more and more important for the maintenance of the physical as well as the social landscape in rural areas. European landscapes are increasingly appreciated as leisure commodities. The consequence of this can be

far reaching, as the values attributed to natural landscapes are changing substantially. The emergence of leisure landscapes can be seen as a threat as well as a relieve. Especially, the commercial forces accompanying this development might converge these landscapes into market-oriented landscapes, where the natural landscape is merely a décor for superficial experiences and consumption (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Knowledge on the social meaning of landscape and the different meanings attached to landscape is therefor indispensable.

This trend might stimulate the re-emergence of the concept of landscape in discourses about rural development. It is not food production or pure nature, but beautiful, recognisable and accessible landscapes that people look for in their free time (Steg and Buijs 2004). Whereas nature conservation tends to focus on well defined species and ecosystems, which are perceived as part of the world outside of us, landscape management concerns us more directly (Pedroli 2000; Pinto et al. 2006).

As Volk and Steinhardt (2002) claim, various environments of landscape science exist in Europe, where a strong Anglo-Saxon stream emphasises the quantitative aspects of landscape, often based on a bio-ecological background, and a strong Central-European stream builds more upon geographical considerations (Bastian and Steinhardt 2002; Palang and Fry 2003; Bastian et al. 2006). In France, since 1990 many sociologist and anthropologist approaches have been presented analysing the social representations of landscape (Conan 1994; Cadiou and Luginbühl 1995; Luginbühl et al. 1995; Voisenat 1995; Hervieu and Viard 1996; Jollivet and Elzner 1996; Terrasson and Le Floch 2000; Tress et al. 2001). This approach, stressing the sociological dimension of landscape, has received little attention thus far in the more quantitative and geographically oriented landscape ecology of the Anglo-Saxon and German research communities (Potschin 2002).

Objective of this paper is to illustrate this sociological approach with a comparison of the French and Dutch situation, using scientific evidence, thus contributing to a common understanding of the social meaning of landscape. After an introduction to the area of study, the social perceptions of landscape in France and in the Netherlands are described and evaluated.

Dimensions of landscape

The material dimension of landscape

The study of the material dimension of landscape is close to classical geography and landscape ecology. Landscape can indeed be considered as the factual, visible landscape, made up of abiotic and biotic matter, organised spatially by human activities, i.e. landscape as a social construction in natural material (Van Mansvelt and Pedroli 2003; Pedroli 2005). This notion can often be found in landscape studies accompanying landscape management projects. These abiotic and biotic substances form the '*factual*' landscape. This factual landscape as an object can be described and quantified in a cognitive and scientific way. It is the domain of geographers and landscape ecologists, integrating a wide range of natural sciences, and of civil engineers using this objective knowledge to guide their construction and management activities in landscape. It is in this factual – abiotic and biotic – landscape, which is continuously in development, that social activities interfere and produce anthropic forms of landscapes.

The immaterial dimension of landscape

Societies have their own material substance, i.e. human substance, but it is essentially through their activities that they transform their environments. This social substance refers to the inter-subjective landscape on which we have opinions and to which we can attribute values. It is thus important to consider more closely the immaterial dimension of landscape.

Based on phenomenological and constructivist theories the concepts of *landscape* and *nature* have been decomposed and the culturally associated different meanings have been surveyed (Seamon 1987; Wilson 1992; Eder 1996; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Keulartz et al. 2004). These studies have shown that one can not speak of one kind of nature or landscape, as if everybody looks at it in the same way. The way we look at the landscape may differ significantly through time, between cultures and cultural groups and between individuals. Every individual holds a personal meaning related to the concept. Discussions are held on

this meaning and different opinions may arise between individuals and, more important, social groups like farmers or ecologists. Therefore, landscape without the cultural interpretation has no meaning (Toogood 2001), and Löfgren (1994) speaks of 'landscape of the mind' (mindscapes) as opposed to material landscapes.

Images of nature and landscape

The way we react today to landscape is often the result of a long cultural discourse, resulting in internalising of cultural connotations for that landscape (Löfgren 1994). So the images of our natural environment (as well as of everything else in the physical and social world) are *constructed* images. Depending on the material subject, we can call these images rural images (Jones 1995; Frouws 1998), images of nature (Buijs and Volker 1997; Lockwood 1999; Buijs 2000; Rink and Wächter 2004) or landscape images (Löfgren 1994).

An image of nature (or landscape, rurality,...) can be defined as 'a coherent set of generalised meanings of nature, culturally embedded and transformed through discourse and personal experiences with nature, which shape actual nature experiences and nature-related attitudes.' Keulartz et al. (2004) define three different components of images (or concepts) of nature:

- the cognitive component (understanding and definition of landscape and nature),
- the normative component (what is the relationship between man and landscape, and how should man act towards nature), and
- the expressive component (what emotional and intuitive significance has landscape for the individual).

This definition expands the well-known concept of 'views of nature' (Thompson et al. 1990; De Groot et al. 2002). Views of nature mainly reflect the normative component of images of nature, describing views on the relationships between humans and nature. Images of nature also refer to the conceptualisation and definition of nature and to more expressive or emotional meanings nature may hold for people.

Images of nature and landscape influence the way we perceive and value the material landscapes.

They are the mental images to which the material landscapes are confronted and from which these landscapes acquire their meaning. But they not only influence our perceptions and meanings of nature, they are also shaped and transformed by our experiences, as the images are constructed through direct experiences in the life world as well as through popular, scientific and policy discourses (Eder 1996; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Turnhout et al. 2004). Images of nature mediate both the consumption *and* the production of nature practices. As with other aspects of culture, they are relatively stable, but nevertheless transform with every direct and indirect contact with nature. Figure 1 exemplifies the dynamic aspects of images of nature.

Historical shifts in images of landscape and nature

The importance of the social construction of landscape and nature is clear when we consider the dominant images through time. In a historical perspective, urbanisation can be seen as a way of emancipation from the overwhelming forces of wild nature within and around, an emancipation that inevitably was paralleled by people's disconnection and alienation from their local and historical roots (Schama 1995). In the prehistoric society images of nature (as far as we can judge from pictorial evidence left, see e.g. Schama 1995) have a strongly religious connotation. With increasing rationalisation, nature is progressively put under control. This finally results in a counteracting trend in the Romantic period (De Groot 1992), when opposition to rationalisation was conveyed in a different perception of nature. The other side of a nature largely controlled by man is projected in an idealised nature, separate from daily reality, i.e. the Romantic image of nature (Van Koppen 2002). In the Romantic image, the dramatic landscapes become appreciated. It implies a positive appreciation of nature and landscapes, with emphasis on enjoying natural beauty and natural history (Steg and Buijs 2004). These Romantic images of nature and landscape are above all *hedonistic* images. Landscapes primarily functions as a leisure-environment or as an environment for good living. Landscape is often looked upon as a décor for living or recreation (Lockwood 1999).

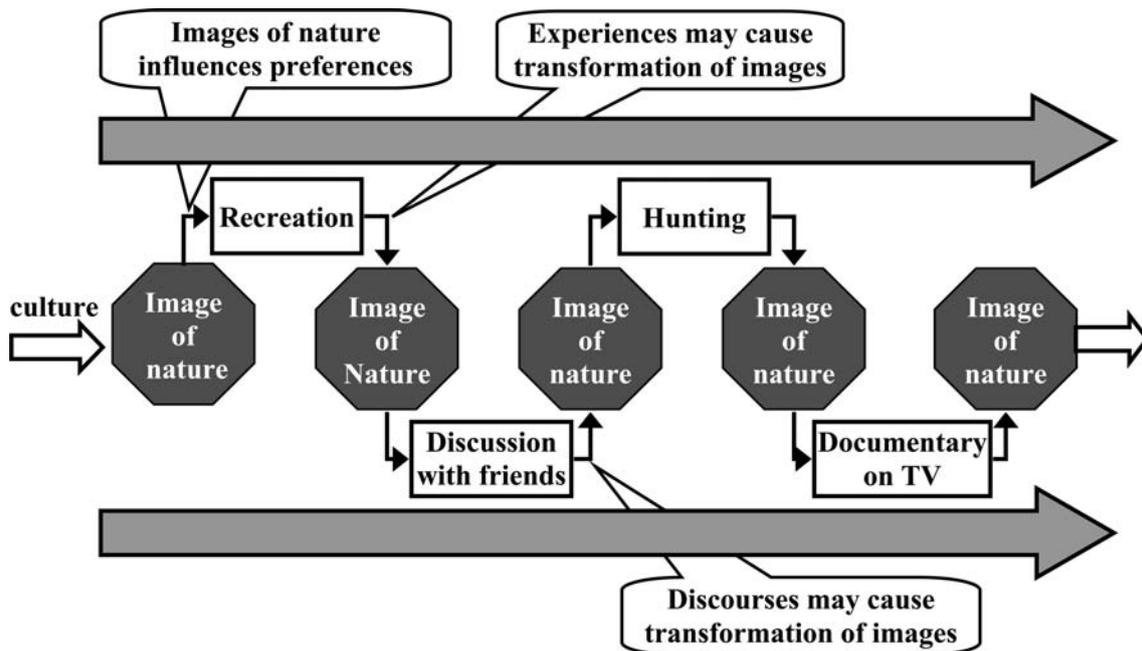


Figure 1. Dynamic transformation of images of nature (and landscape).

Within the Romantic image two diametrically opposed positions occur (Schama 1995; Van Koppen 2002). Typically, the Romantic image is mostly associated with the rural idyll (Mingay 1989): the peaceful countryside, where time has come to a standstill and harmony between man and nature is still present. Landscape is above all a cultural landscape, reflecting a harmonious rural society. It is the picturesque and pastoral landscape (Luginbühl 2001b). Within this image the expressive aspects are dominant. This is called the *Arcadian image of landscape and nature*.

On the other hand, always an other perception of landscape has existed: the natural landscape or even wilderness as attractive landscapes. Here nature is seen as a wild, non-regulated and autonomous appearance, not being subject to human society. Natural landscapes are important for man because nature complements culture, especially modern society with its many rules and the requirement to control emotions. This image is essentially normative and expressive. It is a hands-off vision, where autonomy of the natural landscape is central. The most beautiful landscape is pristine nature, where human influence is absent and the sublime experiences are sought in those landscapes (Buijs 2000). This image is mostly

called the *wilderness image of nature and landscape*.

Contrasting with these two Romantic images, with their emphasis on landscape as décor (cf. Urry 1990), we can also recognise a functional representation in the discourses on landscape and rural use (e.g. represented by Bastian 2006). In the functional image, it is not all about décor, but landscape serves primarily as a life-requirement. Man works with nature in the landscape to produce food and make a living. Many people with this image feel strongly connected to the existing landscape because of the functional ties which may have existed for many generations.

So historically, we can distinguish three different images of nature and landscape:

- (1) The Arcadian image,
- (2) The wilderness image,
- (3) The functional image.

Social perceptions of landscape in Europe

The way the social and cultural meaning of the material landscape has been explored in different

European countries often reflects the dominant meaning attached to landscape. In Great Britain, the dominant image of landscape has been the rural image. Especially, the rural idyll has been a constant factor through time in the appreciation of the British landscape (Mingay 1989). This idyll of the small scale, picturesque landscape, where the farmer works in cooperation with nature can be seen as a cornerstone of British self-identity in the 2nd half of the last century (Jones 1995). In Sweden, images of nature seem more important than images of landscape, as nature is a very important part of the national heritage, more important than the historical heritage, and intense debates were held on the right way of managing forests, lakes and rivers (Löfgren 1994).

In the Netherlands, the rural idyll has also attracted some attention, but the main discussions since the 1980s centred on the concept of 'nature development', between nature conservationists and developers, and landscape architects. Those discussions focused on different images of nature: nature as a wild, autonomous concept (the wilderness image) vs. nature as part of the man-made landscape with all its functional and cultural traditions (the Arcadian image) (Keulartz et al. 2000; Klijn and Vos 2000). During the last decade in the Netherlands several studies into the social perceptions of nature and landscape have emerged, using the concept of images of nature (Buijs and Volker 1997; Buijs and Filius 1998; Van den Berg 1999; Buijs 2000; Van den Born et al. 2001; De Groot and Van den Born 2002; Jacobs et al. 2002). These studies show that under influence of the urbanisation of the rural areas, the importance of the functional image of nature is declining rapidly. This image is being replaced with more Romantic images, like the Arcadian and the wilderness image.

In France, a transition can be observed from functional and Arcadian landscape preferences towards a more nature-oriented one (Luginbühl 2001b). This change in images of landscape is more prominent in young and urban population but less in rural population. For farmers for example, landscape, the rural landscape, is still their work. But for urban population, nature is the remote nature, where reference is made to Discovery-Channel-like images of the Amazon plain or the African landscape with its wildlife.

Results

Social perceptions of landscape in France

Based on the strong sociological tradition in Landscape research in France, extensive research into social perceptions of the landscape was conducted in the 1990's. In 1992, the INED (French National Institute of Demographic Studies) conducted a questionnaire survey with a sample of 5000 persons (INED 1992). In 1995, this was complemented with a more qualitative enquiry involving 250 persons in different regions of France. This enquiry consisted of long interviews, analysed using methods of discourse analysis (analysis of the semantic meaning of the transcriptions of the interviews; Luginbühl et al. 1995). In 1998, CREDOC published the most interesting results of the INED research, and in 2000, IFEN (French Environmental Institute) actualised the research of INED, with new questions. Based on this research, the following picture can be drawn.

Is landscape nature?

Until about 1990, the dominant image of landscape for the French people consisted of the pastoral, Arcadian landscape: the farmer working in and developing the landscape. The agricultural landscapes were the landscapes to which the majority of the French people referred when they were reminded of the term landscape ('paysage'). This privileged place of the agricultural landscape can be explained by the fact that the rural countryside has played an important role in the country's history, and that during several centuries the majority of the French population kept close links with the farmers ('paysans'). Up to present times, rural landscapes occupy an important place in this identity (Luginbühl 2002).

From the 1990s, the dominant images of landscape increasingly and selectively change. Not the agricultural landscapes represent the dominant landscape preference any more, but 'nature' or the 'natural' landscape. The functional image seems becoming replaced by both the Arcadian image as well as a more wilderness orientated image of landscape, as is shown in the in-depth interviews with 250 people chosen from diverse regions and social categories (Luginbühl 2001b). Was

landscape in the 1980s for the majority of the French the rural landscape made by farmers, now landscape is more associated with 'wilderness' or 'great' nature. At the same time the more rural images of landscape do not disappear, they become more nostalgic: most French regret the landscape made by peasants who produce 'nature.' In the minds of the general public, functional images of landscape are thus more and more replaced by the more nostalgic Arcadian images.

This can be illustrated by the analysis of the ranking of spatial vegetation elements as characteristic for nature, as is done in the 1995 enquiry. Results of this enquiry makes it possible to understand to which nature the French refer when they associate landscape with nature (Figure 2).

Items associated with the natural landscape, like the natural vegetation and forests, are seen as the most characteristic features of landscapes. For most lay people items more associated with a cultivated nature, like hedgerows or grain field are much less characteristic for landscape (ranking the 5th and 6th places). So landscape nowadays is for most people associated with the 'natural' nature and less with a more cultivated nature.

It should be noted that these opinions differ between social groups and according to place of living. The more the interviewed people relate to the urban environment, the more 'natural' elements are classified at a dominant place. The more people belong to a rural environment, the more anthropic elements show in the classification. One opinion remains unanimous: urban elements always arrive at the last place (including the trees of a town square). Adults and young people from urbanised areas, see landscape mainly as a natural

landscape. They have a natural image of landscape, or as it is called in most Anglo-American literature, a wilderness image (although wilderness in the French and Dutch situation is on the material scale dimension of landscape no comparison to American wilderness, on the social dimension of landscape it represents the same longing for natural, unspoilt and thus 'wild' landscape and nature areas). In the images of farmers, more anthropic nature is seen as characteristic for landscape. Thus for them more Arcadian or functional landscape images are dominant (Figure 3).

These results coincide with the IFEN opinion surveys and the INED interviews (INED 1992; IFEN 2000). The non-cultivated landscapes generally arrive at the top of the preferences, before the natural grasslands and the cultivated fields. The younger the respondents are, the higher the preference for non-cultivated fields. The farmers place the cultivated landscapes on top of their preferences, at the same level as natural grasslands and cultivated fields. Also interesting is the close resemblance between the farmers and the delegates, whereas the farmers (and thus the delegates) do differ considerably from many other social groups.

Landscape: décor or life requirement

This process of growing preference for natural landscapes above cultural landscapes (especially among young people), has direct influence on the deeper meaning landscape has for people. In the past, landscape was often enclosed in ambiguity

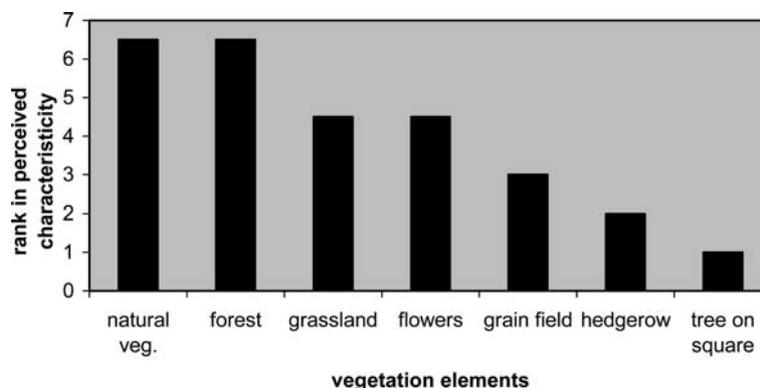


Figure 2. Spatial vegetation elements recognised as characteristic for landscape. Data Source: Luginbühl et al. 1995.

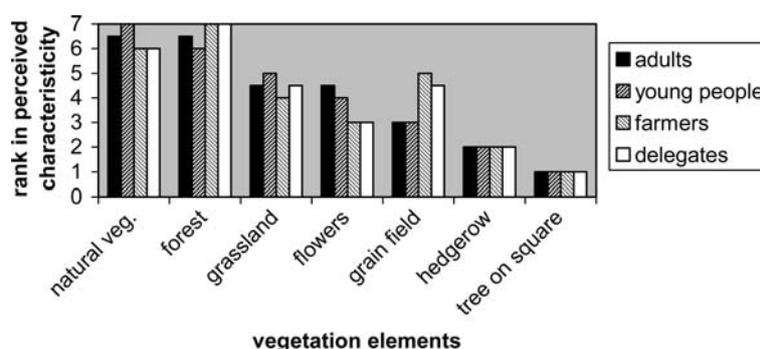


Figure 3. Spatial vegetation elements recognised as characteristic for landscape differentiated between 4 subgroups. Data Source: Luginbühl et al. 1995.

between a beautiful décor (in the more hedonistic sense) and a requirement for life (in a more functional economic sense). Landscape was not only automatically connected with the utopian signification of landscape (the beautiful and peaceful landscape), but landscapes were also connected to life requirement. Farmers worked in and with the landscape, thus forming and transforming it.

When analysing the contents of the semi-directive interviews (INED 1992; IFEN 2000), it is possible to detail the difference between décor and life requirement. With landscape most interviewees associate the terms life, beauty, freedom and harmony, where a clear opposition exists between *harmony and beauty* on the one hand and *life and freedom* on the other. The first couple is primarily an aesthetic concept, and is associated with landscape most often by adults, tourists and especially new residents and sometimes farmers. That farmers also associate landscape with *harmony and beauty* refers either to 'natural' landscapes (coast or mountain) or to the aesthetics of their own work. For them a beautiful landscape of the cultivated countryside is the one they produce by their noble labour, not leaving a trace of neglected work.

The couple *life and freedom* is much more present in the opinion of young people and the majority of the farmers, but with associations differing between the young people and the farmers. Freedom is taken by young people as the symbol of the capacity of the landscape to offer a space of liberation from the social constraints, in the same time presenting a free choice for a way of life. Among farmers, the couple takes another direction: it represents the possibility to plan a

professional life in freedom of entrepreneurship, and to model the landscape accordingly. They would oppose landscape protection which contested the use they make of the landscape.

Shifting balances

So for youngsters and many inhabitants of the cities, landscape is much more about décor than the result of social praxis of farmers and other directly involved actors. But part of this more Romantic image of landscape is also a strong ideological motivation to protect landscape and nature from human induced degradation. Indeed, young people reject more than adults the idea of the degradation of the anthropic nature; for them man, or society, is responsible for the degradation (Cadiou and Luginbühl 1995; Thiebaut 2002).

These shifts in views on landscape seem to be related to the growing urbanisation of European societies and especially the 'mental urbanisation' (Buijs 2000) of culture as a consequence of globalisation and other macro-sociological forces. It is therefore interesting to compare the results of the French studies with insights in the social meaning of landscape in an (even) more urbanised country like the Netherlands.

Social perceptions of landscape in the Netherlands

Is landscape nature?

In the Netherlands, landscape has been an important concept for long times (Schama 1995;

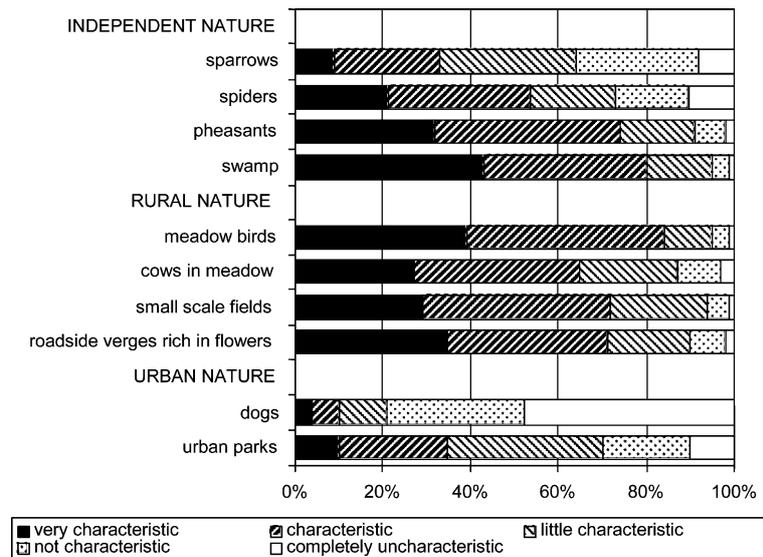


Figure 4. Elements recognised as characteristic for nature. Source: Buijs 2000.

Coeterier 1996). However, since in 1989 a strong policy statement promoting ecological networks was adopted, landscape as a subject of debate was pushed to the background in favour of nature rehabilitation. This government policy was supported through a strong and rich nature conservation movement. They used the media efficiently in promoting their visions of nature and the beauty of 'new nature.' Without doubt these strategies have supported the importance of the hedonistic (and especially wilderness) images of nature and landscape in the Netherlands. This led to strong opposition from philosophers, poets and cultural historians. In recent years, the concern with landscape is increasing again, since the dominating role of agriculture in landscape development is increasingly being criticised. Still, for lay people, the difference between nature and landscape values has always been a theoretical one.

In policy as well as in popular (media) and lay discourses, nature is a much more dominant item than landscape. But when talking about nature, many people also mean beautiful landscapes. Research suggests a rather broad definition of nature. Not only items associated with natural landscapes are important to people (like swamps), also items much more associated with the cultural landscape are seen as characteristic (like cows or meadow birds). Even rather isolated types of vegetation like flowers along road sides are seen by more than

70% as nature. Figure 4 illustrates how characteristic 701 city dwellers in the Netherlands judge certain items for nature (Buijs 2000).

Although these categories do not completely coincide with the categories mentioned for the French situation, a comparable analysis can well be made. Cultural landscapes consists e.g. of small-scale fields and cows. Spiders, pheasants and swamps are considered to be independent nature and thus much more connected to natural landscapes. According to a majority of the Dutch public, the most important feature of nature is its independence of human interference. For most people true nature is autonomous nature and thus much more related to the natural landscape than to the cultural or rural landscape (Buijs and Filius 1998).

But as is the case in France, also in the Netherlands there is no clear consensus on the meaning of nature and landscape. Diverging preferences appear to exist for nature and landscape. Especially on the wildness of nature and its functionality, the opinions differ strongly. About 36% of the respondents are of the opinion that agricultural land used for food production is by definition not nature. However, about 34% hold the opposite opinion and consider crop fields at least partially nature. Consensus is biggest on the absence of human artefacts. A large majority when walking in the nature prefers not to see built-up areas, and

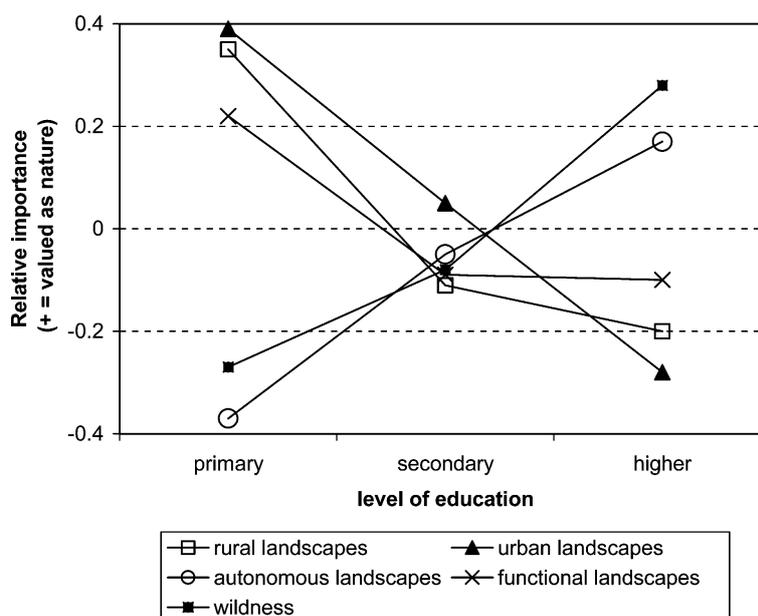


Figure 5. Significant interrelations between level of education and types of landscapes considered 'typical' nature (Source: Buijs and Volker 1997).

finds that power lines and modern wind mills decrease the value of nature. In their ideal representation of nature, there is no place for human artefacts. Nature and culture or two separate entities.

Further analysis shows that these representations interrelate to a large extent with demographic variables like age and education (Buijs 2000). Figure 5 illustrates that different aspects of images of nature significantly ($p < 0.01$) relate to level of education. Higher educated respondents clearly have a narrower definition of nature. They do not regard urban landscapes nor rural landscapes as real nature. Nature is restricted to independent types of landscape, like swamps. More than lower educated people they prefer nature not influenced by man and autonomy is a main feature of nature. Lower educated respondents value more tidiness and managed landscapes, as well as functional use of the landscape for agricultural purposes.

Landscape: décor or life requirement

In the Dutch situation, landscape is already much more connected with décor than with life requirement. The conception that the Dutch landscape is becoming a consumption landscape, rather than a

production landscape is widely supported. The Dutch society is a good example of the dominance the Romantic images of nature and landscape. This is clearly indicated by the fact that only 22% of the Dutch think that 'mankind may rule over nature.' Landscape as (economical) life requirement is supported by only a small minority (14%) of the Dutch (Buijs and Volker 1997).

The most important exception of the dominance of landscape as décor above landscape as life requirement comes of course from farmers and people with an agricultural background (Aarts 1998). But not only farmers have a functional relationship with landscape. Also lay people can develop such a functional relationship. Research by Filius et al. (2000) among 240 anglers, hunters, birdwatchers and landscape management volunteers indicates that the personal relationship with the landscape is very important in forming the specific images of landscape of people (Figure 6). Whereas the vast majority of people regard swamps as real nature, almost half of the anglers have a different opinion. Especially, birdwatchers are very critical on commonplace birds (starlings and pheasants), whereas meadow birds apparently symbolise pure nature for them.

Most interesting is the group of volunteers in landscape management activities. Their functional

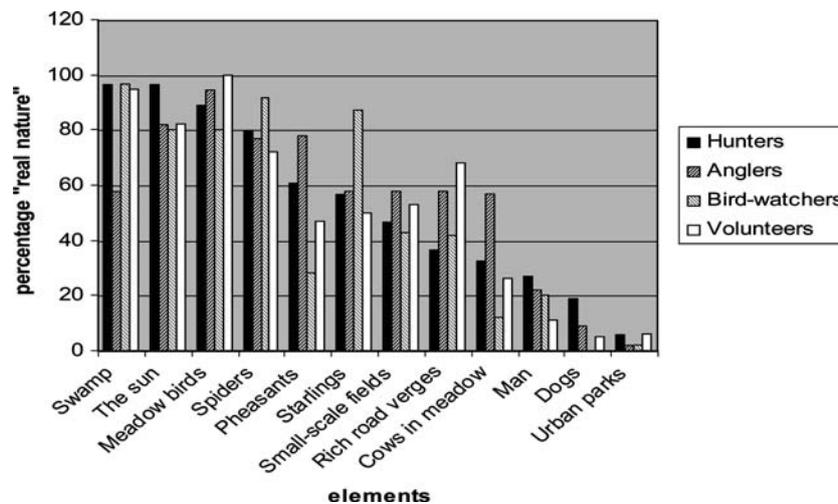


Figure 6. Proportion of respondents considering an item as characteristic for nature (source: Filius et al. 2000).

relationship with the landscape concerns often farmland and farmers. Their top priority are not surprisingly the meadow birds, but also other, more Arcadian features of landscape are greatly appreciated. The relationship of all groups (except for anglers) with agrarian landscapes seem to result in a greater appreciation of small-scale rural areas.

If we look at some normative images of landscape and nature, we also see a clear distinction between the different actors, often closely connected with the specific relation they have with landscape. In general, hunters hold relatively anthropocentric values concerning nature and landscape (see Table 1). They appreciate the functional or life support aspects of the landscape much more than birdwatchers, who especially value the hedonistic and intrinsic values. The latter see landscape mainly as décor, but complemented with normative values on the importance of conserving valuable landscapes. Nature as life requirement for farmers or other economic actors, illustrated by the acceptance of direct interference in nature, is only supported by 5% of the bird-watchers.

Discussion

Based on extensive literature, we have stated in the introduction that different images of nature and landscape may exist among lay people. The

research in France and the Netherlands confirms this statement. Both in France as well as in the Netherlands divergence in meanings of nature and landscape was shown among different actors. Not only farmers, but also other social groups with specific activities in the landscape (like hunters or birdwatchers) have clearly different images of landscape and nature. Functional ties with the landscape seem to be an important explanation of these differences. For farmers in France, landscape is more about the production function, with cereal fields and forest as most characteristic, where for lay adults natural vegetation and flowers are very characteristic. The same tendency has been shown in the Netherlands, where for example hunters see pheasants as much more characteristic for nature than other user groups, and anglers see swamps as uncultivated, not as nature. Also differentiation is shown on the second dimension of images of landscape, the normative appreciation of landscape. Hunters are much more inclined to actively intervene in nature and landscape, whereas most lay people support a more natural development of landscape and nature.

We have shown that the perception of the French seems to be shifting from landscape as a life requirement to landscape as décor. In the Netherlands, this shift is already much stronger. Hunters and farmers are under constant pressure from the urbanised population. The acceptance of hunting is very low in the Netherlands and farmers are mainly seen as an important cause of landscape

Table 1. Proportion of respondents agreeing with certain statements (source: Filius et al. 2000).

Statements	Dutch population (%)	Hunters (%)	Anglers (%)	Birdwatchers (%)	Volunteers (%)
People may change nature for their own needs	54	67	22	5	30
Mankind may rule over nature	22	36	23	3	0
Man-induced change of the environment causes serious difficulties	85	67	64	87	80

degradation and environmental pollution. The landscape as economical life requirement is supported by only a small minority of the Dutch. They seem to embrace the hedonistic images of nature and nature is seen as an important part of landscape. Especially, the functional image has declined rapidly the last decades in the Netherlands (Buijs et al. 2003). The influence of urbanisation, both in a material and a mental sense, seems to be the driving force behind this development. Although the tendency towards landscape as décor is also seen in France, landscape as life requirement is much more recognised by a majority of the French (IFEN 2000, p. 9). And the more people live in a rural environment, the more anthropic elements are recognised as characteristic for landscapes. But the influence of urbanisation on the growing importance of landscape as décor is also noticeable among (more urbanised) young people in France, where youngsters have higher preferences for non-cultivated landscapes than adults.

Although the research methodology was somewhat different between the studies in both countries, we feel that the results can very well be compared. Both studies combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. And both focused on the characterisation of landscape and nature by lay people, differentiating among different groups of users. The specific categories were different, but both studies used spatial vegetation elements as well as specific flora and fauna items. Where Luginbühl measured the response to 'flowers' or 'tree on square,' Buijs measured 'road side verges rich of flowers' and 'urban parks.' The exact names of the features do not coincide, but they *do* refer to roughly the same features.

Different *discourses* can be seen around the meaning of landscape (Pedroli 2000; Van der Ploeg et al. 2002; Turnhout et al. 2004). In this paper, we have mainly described some opinions and meanings within popular discourses on nature and landscape. But in policy practices, much more

attention is paid to scientific discourses. In the Netherlands, discourses from ecological sciences have dominated the political debate (Keulartz et al. 2000). Different writers argue that the windows should be opened and that much more attention should be paid to popular discourses (Jones 1995; Buijs 2000; Keulartz et al. 2004; Van Koppen 2002; Luginbühl and Toublanc 2003). The matter at stake is rather significant: if a landscape market is to be opened, with its different actors, it still remains very much related to nature and it does not completely land at the level of everyday life of the population. The procedures adopted in several countries to designate National Landscapes, for example, maybe could enhance inserting landscape in the field of a spatial planning that currently seems to be lacking attention for landscape (Jongman 2004).

If social values are to be adopted more in rural development policies, the concept of landscape might be an important addition to the dominant discourses. In many discourses, agricultural- and social sustainability are presented as interests opposite to nature, both ignoring the growing importance of leisure as important economic rural driver and as important aspect of well-being for a further urbanising population. Although many people express concern for the global issues on nature conservation and biodiversity-loss, it is nearby nature that stimulates action, both political and recreational (Macnaghten and Urry 1998). And this nearby nature is not about biodiversity, but about beautiful, accessible leisure landscapes. Landscape integrates the material aspects of nature and agriculture, as well as the immaterial and social aspects of this material world. In fact the word landscape in its German (*Landschaft*), Dutch (*landschap*) or Swedish (*landskap*) expression refers to the organisation of a group of inhabitants using the land. Much more than nature, landscape is recognised as a social construct, strongly related to the way it is being perceived.

Insight in the prevailing images of nature can also help bridge differences between parties in the field, especially between farmers on the one hand and ecologists and policy makers on the other (Aarts 1998; Pinto et al. 2006). Farmers have gradually adapted to an economical way of working the natural resources, rather than adopting aesthetical or ethical ways of looking. Since the majority of the people look upon landscape like an urban resident and tourist, this implies fundamentally different views on landscape (cf. Urry 1990). In the 1990s, the images of landscape in the Netherlands and nature were drifting apart between ecological scientists and policymakers, on the one hand and farmers and rural inhabitants on the other. Consequently, nature policy got stuck in local opposition, and the trust of local people in the public authorities damaged considerably in these areas (Keulartz et al. 2004). At the same time this relation between activity and images of landscape also suggests a way out of this opposition. As soon as the practice of actions in the landscape can be more parallel, both parties can approach each other's viewpoints. The tendency towards multifunctional land use is an expression of this development, allowing for new financial incentives in the rural area (Kolkman et al. 2003) and renewed appreciation of ethical and aesthetical aspects of landscape, including the hedonistic preferences of many people. By adopting multifunctional land use, farmers are able to conform with societal demand based on the new images of landscape, and keep farming in the same time.

Conclusions

Based on these research results four main conclusions can be drawn.

Landscape preferences are changing from functional towards hedonistic

Both the French and the Dutch examples show that in the last century a marked change from a dominant functional image into a more hedonistic landscape image has taken place. This coincides with decreasing physical and economic significance of agriculture and increasing importance of leisure industry. In other words: where formerly the hiker

hiked through the farm landscape, nowadays the farmer farms in the leisure landscape. The results of the studies presented in this article illustrate these changes. Although it is doubtful whether it is possible to consciously influence these preferences, it is evident that both nature conservation organisations and governmental policies (especially agricultural policy) have influenced these preferences in a direct or indirect way. This implies that in designing new policies relevant to the development of landscape (e.g. the EU common agricultural policy), the landscape effects should be carefully taken into consideration. Whether or not policy makers want this, opinion leaders and mass media play a significant role here.

Landscape perception varies considerably among people

It is shown that farmers, urban residents, hunters and conservationists vary considerably in their preferences for certain landscape types. This might have been expected, but it also implies that – as a predictable or unforeseen result of certain policy developments – the changing proportions of different categories of people in a region can easily lead to considerable changes in landscape preferences. It is therefore crucial for an open landscape policy that a recurring public debate on landscape preferences is encouraged. The promotion of examples of good landscape practice may enhance the involvement in such debate.

The way people perceive landscape is strongly determined by the way they are involved

Clearly the farmer dependent on the landscape production capacity views the landscape differently than the conservationist active as a volunteer in landscape management. Anyway, involvement either actively or passively, seems to be one of the basic prerequisites for the acknowledgement of landscape as a notion to be taken care of. The Council of Europe (2000) has taken the important initiative to implement this consideration in the European Landscape Convention. It remains to be seen whether the economically far dominant institution of the European Union will be able to follow this up.

Landscape is nearer to the people than the abstract notion of nature

Interestingly, landscape is a notion much more appealing as a whole than the abstract consequences of food web and ecosystems theory underlying the conservationist point of view. Whereas nature and biodiversity are merely normative concepts, without clear and direct relationship with the quality of life, landscapes play an important role in everyday life of ordinary people. Biodiversity is somewhere 'out there', while landscapes are nearby everyone's life world. It is also in the direction of the public and the media that policy action should be oriented in order to enhance a real involvement in landscape development which deserves support and which might go beyond the rhetoric of slogans (Wascher 2000b; Buchecker et al. 2003). It might put to evidence the significance landscape can have for the improvement of everyday life of the people. There is no doubt on the importance of the natural environment for the mental and physical health of people (Van den Berg and Van den Berg 2001), and the widespread biophilia (Ulrich 1993) can well be used to broaden public support for the subject. This implies a big challenge both for national and international landscape policies and for local landscape management initiatives to be developed, taking into due consideration both the material and immaterial nature of landscape.

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