

Institution: University of Sheffield

Unit of Assessment: 16 - Architecture, Built Environment and Planning

Title of case study: Developing landscape character assessment as a tool for landscape planning policy and practice

1. Summary of the impact

Research in the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield between 1998 and 2003 has had a significant impact on policy and practice in landscape planning in the UK and internationally. The research led to the publication of guidance on accessible and practical methods of Landscape Character Assessment and its application in policy arenas, notably in sensitivity and capacity studies. This guidance is now the primary reference for landscape character assessment in the UK and is widely used in Europe, aiding responses to the requirements of the European Landscape Convention. It has also been acknowledged as influencing landscape planning approaches in other parts of the world and is cited in recent work on aspects of the World Heritage Convention.

2. Underpinning research

Between 1998 and 2003, research carried out by Professor Carys Swanwick in the Department of Landscape was shaped by the changing policy background in the UK in relation to land use and development decision-making. The introduction by the UK Government, initially in Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 of 1997, of a policy aimed at protecting rural landscape 'for its own sake' gave impetus to a search for a method that could be used by local authorities to implement this approach in their strategic planning.

From 1998 to 2002, Swanwick was funded by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage to look at how landscape can be taken into account in decision making in ways that move beyond the traditional approach of designating protected landscapes to methods that recognise the distinctive character of all landscapes. This required 1) recognition of the need to move beyond the idea of landscape value as the basis for decision making; and 2) development of an acceptable, reliable and repeatable method of assessing the character of the wider landscape and using this information to inform decision making. The research brought together theoretical perspectives with lessons from Swanwick's previous practice experience, and was informed by extensive user consultations and examination of case studies. The research and associated outputs crystallised the concept of landscape as the relationship between people and place and challenged the idea that it is too complex and subjective a concept to be able to influence policy and practice. The researchers developed an accessible and workable practical method known as Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) - a process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape and using this information to assist in managing change. The key output was definitive published guidance on LCA (R1), written by Swanwick, initially to be used in England and Scotland to reflect the remits of the funders. This set out in detail the method to be adopted in assessing the character of the landscape at different scales and using the results (the characterisation) to inform judgements in many different areas of landscape policy. It was illustrated by a number of case studies and examples of the approach in practice.

Between 2002 and 2003, Swanwick carried out further research, funded by the same agencies, focussing on the complex issue of how Landscape Character Assessment could be used to underpin judgements about the sensitivity of different landscapes to change and development and their capacity to accommodate change. This research involved consultation with a reference group of practitioners and examination of practical examples of alternative approaches to identify an acceptable approach. The output was a topic paper (R3) on sensitivity and capacity, published as an addendum to the main guidance. It set out a step-by-step approach to using landscape characterisations as the starting point for judgements about the ability of different types of landscape to accommodate change of specific types, such as wind energy schemes or housing

development.

Two related topic papers (R2, R5) were also produced by Swanwick as part of a series published by the two agencies to complement the main guidance. Swanwick also wrote a book chapter, at the invitation of the Countryside Agency, to summarise the state of the art in this area of work for a wider audience (R4).

3. References to the research

- R1. *Swanwick, C. and Land Use Consultants (2002) *Landscape Character Assessment - Guidance for England and Scotland* CAX 84. Countryside Agency, Cheltenham and Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh. 84pp. (<http://tinyurl.com/oqu5555>).
- R2. Swanwick, C., 2002. Recent practice and the evolution of Landscape Character Assessment. Topic Paper 1. Countryside Agency, Cheltenham and Scottish Natural Heritage, Battleby. 9pp. (<http://tinyurl.com/otqwb82>).
- R3. *Swanwick, C. (2003) *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance. Topic Paper 6. Techniques and Criteria for Judging Sensitivity and Capacity*. Countryside Agency, Cheltenham and Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh. 15pp. (<http://tinyurl.com/otqwb82>).
- R4. *Swanwick, C. (2003) *The Assessment of Countryside and Landscape Character in England: An Overview*. In "From Global to Local: Developing Comprehensive Approaches To Countryside and Nature Conservation". Eds. Bishop, K. and Phillips, A. Earthscan, London. 109-124.
- R5. Swanwick, C., Bingham, L. and Parfitt, A., 2003. *Landscape Character Assessment - How stakeholders can help*. Topic Paper 3. Countryside Agency, Cheltenham and Scottish Natural Heritage, Battleby. 17pp. (<http://tinyurl.com/otqwb82>).

The three starred publications were part of the Department of Landscape submission to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise all of which was rated 2* or above.

4. Details of the impact

This research has had a significant impact on practitioners and professional services in the UK and internationally, evidenced by its influence on guidelines, citation in strategy or other similar documents, debate among practitioners and resulting changes in professional behaviour.

Routes to Impact

Following publication in 2002, the *Landscape Character Assessment - Guidance for England and Scotland* was made widely available by the funding bodies in both hard copy and online. The hard copy was reprinted as the first run of 2000 copies ran out within 12 months. It has always been, and remains, free to download from three websites (Countryside Agency (now Natural England), Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside (later Landscape) Character Network (LCN)). Statistics from the sites are patchy but to give a sense of the continuing demand for the documents, the most recent available figures from the LCN, for six months in 2010, show total hits on the guidance document of 20,709, or an average of 3,451 per month, with a maximum of 5,313 in January 2010. On the Natural England website the guidance was downloaded 5,001 times in the 13 month period from the end of September 2012 to the end of October 2013. The topic paper on sensitivity and capacity (R3), the only available guide to this difficult area of practice, is also free to download from the same websites and LCN statistics show total hits of 3,704, or an average of 617 per month, with a maximum of 815 in January 2010. Swanwick has been widely involved in dissemination of the guidance and applications of the approach to practitioners. She was invited to deliver six regional launches of the LCA guidance in 2002; keynote addresses at national events on Sensitivity and Capacity, notably at a Countryside Character Network launch event in 2003, at the ICOMOS/IUCN Conference in May 2004 and the annual conference on Historic Landscape Characterisation for the Society of Antiquaries in 2008; seven training events in the period 2003 to 2005 for agri-environment advisors who would be using LCA to inform their advice; and, in 2013, a series of 14 'Masterclasses' on the application of LCA to 420 members of the Landscape Institute.

Impact case study (REF3b)

Swanwick has also contributed to a number of events on LCA and its use in relation to the European Landscape Convention, signed and ratified by the UK in 2006/07. She was invited to give advice on the application of the LCA approach in Denmark (Danish Ministry for the Environment and their advisors) and in Sweden (National Board of Cultural Heritage) and helped to develop training on LCA for the Heritage Council in the Republic of Ireland. The work has been the subject of presentations at many conferences and workshops including the 2008 US IALE conference in Madison, Wisconsin, two workshops in Japan, (Tokyo and Ohmi Hachiman) in 2007, and in China (Nanjing) in 2009.

UK Impact on practitioners and professional services.

The *Landscape Character Assessment - Guidance for England and Scotland* is the definitive statement about the UK approach to landscape character and has had a substantial impact on policy and practice in the UK.

Since its publication in 2002, a significant proportion of local authorities in the UK have used the guidance to develop their own Landscape Character Assessments. The Landscape Character Database, which retains a record of all LCAs carried out until 11 Nov 2010, shows that from 2008 until the database was closed due to lack of continuation funding, the majority of LCAs referenced the guidance as their key source. (S1)

The Topic Paper on sensitivity and capacity has had an equally significant impact and has led to a considerable number of studies by various tiers of local government to assess the sensitivity and capacity of their landscapes to different forms of development. The proliferation of wind energy developments has meant that there has been widespread use of the approach to produce sensitivity and capacity studies for wind farm developments in different parts of the country and there has also been emphasis on their use in relation to housing.

The research has had an impact on practice in Europe and in particular has helped to shape the approach set out in the European Landscape Convention (ELC). It has been described by Tveit (S9) as internationally one of “three of the most widely applied practical frameworks for analysing visual qualities.” The EU funded research project on a European Landscape Character Assessment Initiative (ELCAI) acknowledges the influence of this work on practitioners in its final report (S6, S10).

Two 2009 articles, one in *Landscape and Urban Planning* (S3) and one in *Land Use Policy* (S4), a journal aimed at practitioners and policy makers as well as academics, mention the influence of the approach in developing a parallel approach in Belgium. The Danish guidance on landscape character assessment emerged directly in response to the influence of the UK guidance (S2).

In 2012 the LCA work had an impact on policy development in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Heritage Programme through a study intended to improve guidance for the application and assessment of criterion (vii), one of the ten criteria used by the World Heritage Committee to identify land as having Outstanding Universal Value sufficient to merit World Heritage status. The study report (S9) makes extensive reference to the LCA method and the UK guidance and devotes a separate annex to explaining the approach, concluding that several aspects of LCA are particularly relevant to the application of criterion (vii). It notes, for example, that “*LCA offers guidance on techniques and vocabulary that can be adapted to different environments and provides a level of consistency across similar types of areas that may be assessed by different individuals. A similar type of guidance could be developed for assessment of aesthetic values under criterion (vii)*”. The lead author, Nora Mitchell, commented “*our thanks – [...] for all your work in this field which has been foundational*” (e-mail, 30th January 2013).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. In the Landscape Character Assessment Database (undated), Section 2.4 of the individual database entries indicates the Guidance used to inform methods in each case, demonstrating the influence of the 2002 LCA Guidance on subsequent assessments, including those prepared in or after 2008. The database is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/p725wo5>

- S2. The paper by Caspersen OH (2009) - Public participation in strengthening cultural heritage: the role of landscape character assessment in Denmark. *Geogr Tidsskr* 109:33–45, which is based on a practice project for the Danish Government, corroborates the claim that the Danish guidance on landscape character assessment emerged directly in response to the influence of the UK guidance, noting (see p. 34) that *“It was in order to meet with this challenge that the method for LCA (Swanwick and Land Use Consultants, 2002) was adapted and transformed to fit to Danish Conditions.”*
- S3. The paper by Eetvelde, V. V., Antrop, M. (2009a) - A stepwise multi-scaled landscape typology and characterisation for trans-regional integration, applied on the federal state of Belgium. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 91: 3, 160–170 refers extensively to the UK approach, as set out in the LCA Guidance, describing it as *“a specific toolkit for landscape classification”* and using it to help to develop a multi-level method for identifying and mapping contemporary landscapes in Belgium. (see p. 163)
- S4. V. V., Antrop, M. (2009b) Indicators for assessing changing landscape character of cultural landscapes in Flanders (Belgium) Original Research Article. *Land Use Policy*, 26: 4, 901-910 corroborates (see p.901) the role of the UK and the UK guidance in initiating Landscape Character Assessment in Europe noting that *“Landscape character assessment was performed first in England. Guidelines for landscape character assessment were developed by the Countryside Agency and are now widely practiced also outside the UK”*.
- S5. Grant, A. in association with Clarke, P. and Lynch, S. (2010). *Landscape capacity studies in Scotland – a review and guide to good practice*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.385. corroborates the influence of the research on sensitivity and capacity on practice (see p.2 and p.19).
- S6. Haines Young, R. and Potschin, M. (2005) *Building Landscape Character Indicators*, in Wascher, D.M. (Ed) (2005) *European Landscape Character Areas – Typologies, Cartography and Indicators for the Assessment of Sustainable Landscapes*. Final Project Report, the authors corroborate the claim that the research, and the resulting LCA Guidance, has influenced European practice in relation to landscape indicators noting that *“Such ideas have been developed, stimulated as a result of an extensive body of work in the UK in the 1990s”* (see p. 93).
- S7. Land Use Consultants (2009) *Integrating landscape tools – a review and scoping report*. Unpublished Report for Natural England South West Region, corroborates the claim that the LCA Guidance has influenced UK practice noting that in a survey of work in the south west region *“At a unitary, district, borough or city level 29 Landscape Character Assessments have been completed, of which 21 follow the 2002 Guidance”*.
- S8. Mitchell, N (2013) *Study on the Application of Criterion (vii) Considering superlative natural phenomena and exceptional natural beauty within the World Heritage Convention*. IUCN World Heritage Study No. 10. IUCN Publications. Gland, Switzerland. 105pp. (see p.60-70 and 99-102) corroborates the influence of the research on new thinking about practical methods for assessment of criterion (vii), one of the ten criteria used by the World Heritage Committee to identify land as having Outstanding Universal Value sufficient to merit World Heritage status.
- S9. Tveit, M. Ode, Å and Fry, G. (2006): *Key concepts in a framework for analysing visual landscape character*, *Landscape Research*, 31:3, 229-255 corroborates the claim that the research has had an impact on practice in Europe.
- S10. Wascher, D.M. (Ed). (2005) - *European Landscape Character Areas – Typologies, Cartography and Indicators for the Assessment of Sustainable Landscapes*. Final Project Report. (deliverable from the EU’s Accompanying Measure project *European Landscape Character Assessment Initiative (ELCAI)*, funded under the 5th Framework Programme on Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development) corroborates the influence of the research on European practice (see p.1).