What's Next for Historic Landscape Preservation?

Cari Goetcheus, Assistant Professor, Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, United States

Many of the issues raised by contributors to *Exploring the Boundaries of Historic Landscape Preservation* reinforce a thirty-year pattern of questioning within the field, particularly with respect to recurrent debates about whether it is possible to systematize or codify landscape preservation treatments, how to engage multiple professional disciplines and the general public in the preservation process, and how to determine appropriate interpretation and management technologies. Several authors discussed landscape preservation projects that challenge the applicability and lack of evolution in codification systems defined nearly fifty years ago. A number of contributors actively explored relationships between ethnic heritage, cultural values, and landscape preservation. Some of the papers offered a refreshing perspective of how landscape preservation is related to gender, culture, race, and economics (Wilson and Groth 2003), while others prompted questions about how historic landscapes might be maintained in the face of ongoing cultural and social changes. If such questions are hardly new ones, it is because they arise from the paradoxical nature of landscape—an entity not easily bounded because it is simultaneously product and process, artifact and system, nature and culture, "real" and socially constructed (Alanen and Melnick 2000).

While the collected papers in *Exploring the Boundaries of Historic Landscape Preservation* constitute an extended reflection on the continued relevance of long-standing debates within the field of historic landscape preservation, they also represent an opportunity for speculation about critical issues that may affect its future. For example, ongoing research on climate change, genetic engineering, and sustainability will likely fuel continued discussion about the usefulness of thinking about landscapes in terms of nature/culture dualism. Further innovations in communication technologies, coupled with an increased understanding of the breadth of learning methods, almost certainly will spur new ways of thinking about landscape interpretation. The development of new building materials and design technologies also will likely prompt continued exploration of how, and whether, contextual design approaches may facilitate the interpretation and rehabilitation of historic spaces. Lingering uncertainties about where to draw, assert, and transgress boundaries are thus essential to the future vitality of historic landscape preservation.

As practitioners continue to seek new ways to answer old questions, they reformulate or re-contextualize those questions in ways that open up new avenues for exploration. For example, a number of papers in this volume tangentially addressed concerns such as the interplay between historic landscapes and the environmental movement, the growing importance of interdisciplinary

collaboration, and the need to address the education and training of future landscape preservation professionals and advocates. Although these concerns were not central to the papers presented in this volume, they nonetheless appear in the background. Moreover, in light of some of the social, cultural and technological changes that are clearly impacting contemporary landscape architectural and preservation practice, interest and momentum may be building toward some of these lesser worked topics and ideas in historic landscape preservation. The themes that thread through these papers, lively discussions during the annual meeting, and recent commentary on cultural landscape studies (Longstreth 2008; Birnbaum and Hughes 2005; Page and Mason 2004; Wilson and Groth 2003; Alanen and Menick 2000) all suggest that the central imperative for the field of historic landscape preservation is to incorporate an understanding and respect for the historical and cultural values of landscape into the social, ecological, economic, and political lives of individuals and communities. In other words, preservationists need to more effectively define the relevance of historic landscapes to people's everyday lives.

Defining Relevance

Although relevance has always been critical to making anything "real" and hence imperative, the field of historic landscape preservation, if it is to continue to expand, must foster an appreciation for the many ways in which cultural landscapes shape a person's experience of daily life. Accomplishing this goal means shifting our focus away from the material elements and visual character of landscapes and toward a greater emphasis on the multiple dimensions of *agency* in landscapes. This view of landscape has been articulated recently by Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (2003, 15), who have observed that, "in one way or another, philosophical debates among cultural landscape scholars revolve around the relationship between agency and structure. … seeing the landscape as an arena of agency and structure requires a shift from viewing landscape as the somewhat passive result of human activity to essentially an active influence on social, economic and political processes. … This inextricably links landscape to perceptions of and actions within everyday built environments." Such an outlook also harkens back to the landscape-as-system perspective presented in D.W. Meinig's classic essay in landscape studies, "The Beholding Eye." By conceptualizing landscape as a dynamic, hybrid medium that links various human and non-human entities, the collective *acts* and performs landscape as a system of relevancy.

While such a shift in perspective is important, landscape preservationists also must recognize that the structure and agency of cultural landscapes can be revealed only by more effectively engaging in public conversations about the quality of the environments in which we live. Indeed, one of the key difficulties for landscape preservationists is the changing definition of the word "landscape." From the 1598 Dutch painters' term *landschap*, the word has had numerous connotations and simultaneous meanings. Today, the most pervasive understanding of the term is broadly framed by everyone from the media to academics and practitioners as context, setting or backdrop, a kind of passive medium for active manipulation by humans. Given such definition, it is hardly surprising that the public does not see landscape as a central concern or imperative. Landscape preservationists must somehow find a way of talking about landscapes that enables people to experience landscape as more than an aesthetic image, and something more than a mere setting or backdrop for human

life. Preservationists must find ways to open up new dialogs about landscapes—conversations that enable material and emotional connections to be experienced as "real." If people are not having conversations about the presence of history and culture in their landscapes, then it is impossible for them to experience those kinds of connections.

In this regard, historic preservationists might take their cue from the recent accomplishments of the contemporary environmental or "green" movement. Much of the influence of the green movement stems from the extent to which key concepts and keywords have been embraced by the general public. Recently, for example, terms such as "green" and "sustainable" have become commonplace in everyday conversations. These terms allow people to communicate a concern for the environment or a level of ecological consciousness in the course of day-to-day conversations. To characterize a particular object or practice as "green" is to relate it implicitly to a body of knowledge and values, even if the characterization itself is disingenuous. These keywords have gained currency because they are useful not only for communicating meaning, but for constructing relationships among things in the world. In both revealing and constructing relationships, words are always a means to power.

If the movement to preserve historic landscapes does not yet enjoy a degree of political and cultural influence comparable to that of the contemporary green movement, it is because comparatively few people talk about it; the "everyday world" literally does not speak our language—more pointedly, preservationists have not yet conceived how to clearly speak to the public about historic landscape preservation. Yet everyday people engage in conversations that, in unacknowledged ways, touch upon some of the concerns that are central to historic landscape preservation. These conversations represent opportunities for preservationists to increase greater awareness of the values of historic landscapes. In particular, there are three broad contexts in which preservationists should become more actively involved in order to gain relevance: environmental sustainability, design of "place," and economics.

Historic Landscape Preservation and Environmental Sustainability

Although most design and preservation advocates interpret the word environment broadly as "built environment," including all buildings, structures and spaces between buildings as they interact and relate to the ecosystem, the public generally perceives this term more narrowly. For many people, "environment" carries ecological connotations that exclude humans and anything produced by human hands or minds. Indeed, advocates for "natural" land stewardship have done an excellent job during the past fifty years of encouraging the public to think about the environment in ecological terms. Particularly since the late 1960s, the popularization of an "ecological perspective" has translated into increased public funding for ecological science, a growth in academic programs and professional positions devoted to environmental work, an ever-expanding array of lands subject to conservation management, and a proliferation of non-profit environmental organizations and volunteer environmental restoration projects. As human society worldwide reawakens to the keen interconnectedness of ecological and cultural systems, landscape preservation advocates should learn from the accomplishments of advocates for this ecological view of the environment.

Within the ranks of conservation biologists, ecological restorationists, and others who focus on the health of natural systems, there has recently emerged an increasing awareness of the importance of engaging local communities in the stewardship process and the need to develop conservation measures that respect local cultural values. This new, more inclusive approach, or paradigm, has been called "ecosystem management." In essence, those who traditionally have focused on the "nature" side of the nature-culture dialectic have gained a greater appreciation for the need to embrace the human dimensions of the places in which they work. A similar exchange has occurred within the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, and city planning—professions that, in approaching the problem of environmental design and management, traditionally have privileged the needs and desires of humans. Both of these trends represent opportunities for advocates of historic landscapes.

Sadly, even though "sustainability" has emerged as a critical discourse within landscape architecture and building preservation—and within practically every profession that is involved with environmental management—the topic has not been prominently discussed within the field of historic landscape preservation. The field of historic landscape preservation has not yet done an adequate job of asserting itself while also relating and integrating into the various environmental fields. Because the "built environment" has already become an extremely important issue for historic landscape preservation, we collectively need to encourage more active discussion and debate about the topic, creating much-needed connection with the growing number of people who now see environmental sustainability to be a global imperative.

Historic Landscape Preservation and Design of Place

Several papers in this volume explore frameworks for understanding the continually evolving relationships between environment and culture, and the ways in which this understanding might inform the design of new spaces in old places. This is not a new concern. More than forty years ago J.B. Jackson expressed his exasperation with designers who applied landscape study too quickly, looking only at visible surface of landscape and not doing the kind of personal observation, research, or reading that lead to deeper analysis. Jackson's readers found inspiration and encouragement for contextualism and regionalism (Wilson and Groth 2003).

During the 1960s through the 1990s, inspired by the work of Jackson and other landscape scholars, designers and critics engaged in a fairly robust conversation about the tangible link between historic landscapes and design. Unfortunately, the trajectory of that conversation has shifted in recent years within the design field's current focus on ecological sustainability. In fact, a recent discussion concerning the content of a landscape architecture certification test debated the need for history questions on the exam, suggesting that historical knowledge is no longer viewed as essential to "good" design.

So, what can make history and cultural values relevant within the practice of design? Designers, although creating places for people, need to be much more engaged in designing socially, ecologically, economically and politically sustainable "place systems." Design and preservation practitioners broadly recognize that "sense of place," walkability, community setting, economic and

political structure impact people's daily lives, although the public often is unaware of these relationships. Unfortunately, even when the public considers these factors, the complex layers of cultural landscapes are not easily visible. Hence the historical and cultural values of landscapes remain underappreciated and unprotected. Expanding a designer's understanding of how people experience places as systems would make visible to both the designer and the public their relationships to historic and cultural landscape. Relating with a landscape is a first step to caring about it, and caring about a landscape is a first step to caring for it (Thayer 2003).

Perhaps one way to encourage designers to think about their work in these terms is to rehabilitate the time-honored principle of genius loci—the pervading spirit of a place. All communities have genius loci, even if it is not readily appreciated by and/or visible to residents and visitors. Is it the combination of two-story Federal style brick buildings bounding narrow streets with the overlay of urban renewal; the pastoral landscape dotted with suburban shopping centers, or the still thriving economy of merchants, cafes and big box hardware stores? Because it may be all of this and more, genius loci is difficult to deconstruct into useable design elements for "placemakers." Many generations of designers have attempted to quantify the ingredients of place; sadly, most attempts by designers to create or mimic genius loci tend to focus only on aesthetic qualities, rather than on the entire system of social, ecologic, economic and political structure of place.

Doesn't good design embrace a full understanding of "place"? If designers study and analyze genius loci in order to comprehensively understand how a place functions socially, ecologically, economically and politically, then perhaps they will be more likely to create designs that respect and enhance all of those relationships. Indeed this would reinforce the tangible link between history, cultural values, and design. Ultimately, contextual design that incorporates cultural landscapes would further assist notions of the commonplace being of value, hence respected and protected through design.

Historic Landscape Preservation and the Economy

To many people, a proposal to save a historically significant rural farmstead or an industrial landscape is perceived as an emotional response to history that is disconnected from today's economic values. It is not news that historic landscapes are not valued as critical to the economic system. A shift in the land development discourse that places other values on par with economic arguments is desperately needed. Although the idea that quality of place has economic repercussions is not new, in the current context of economic globalization the idea may be gaining greater credence and importance. Richard Florida's provocative research and writings suggest that people are more open to considering the relationships between quality of place and economic sustainability. As such, this represents an opportunity for preservationists to spark conversations that reveal how historic landscape preservation is directly connected to quality of life issues and economic vitality. Environmental design is certainly one context in which preservationists need to encourage such conversations. When designers and placemakers fully embrace the study of landscape to create places, historic landscapes can then be seen as valued, relevant and

contributing piece of the economy. Yet landscape preservationists must engage in conversations about economics that venture beyond the realm of design to consider more broadly the role of landscapes in all sorts of economic activities. Land development and land use have always been tied to economic stability or gain. For historic landscape preservation to have any kind of long lasting physical impact, especially in sensitive areas where there are no concentrations of advocates or planning mechanisms in place to assist in conservation efforts, there must be a shift in conversations about land.

Growing popular interest in food and sustainable agriculture represents one context in which landscape preservationists might succeed in achieving greater recognition of the relationships between the cultural and historical values of landscapes and economic viability. While a major principle of sustainable agriculture is minimizing the use of synthetic chemicals, of greatest importance is the ability to sustain the local economic stability of farms and ranches. By minimizing their use of external and purchased inputs and maximizing their use of locally available renewable resources, agricultural producers increase local self sufficiency and ensure a source of stable income that may allow more people to stay on the land and hence strengthen rural communities. Farm and ranch transfer programs have been created to help agricultural lands remain under the stewardship of farmers and ranchers as generations come and go. Broadly addressing marketing needs by establishing farmers' market outlets, supplying restaurants and grocers with local products, and developing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) may empower communities to get involved in local agriculture, understand the methods and practices of harvesting and become active participants in their food systems. Finally, a variety of laws and policies at the federal, state, and local municipal level, as well as non-profit educational efforts, address farmland conservation. Collectively, this attention to detail on a variety of scales attempts to value land for a continued use and thus make the economy a fundamental part of the sustainable agriculture equation. Similar attention to detail to the "place system" is needed by preservation advocates, so that historic landscapes can be seen as valued, relevant and contributing to economic viability.

To advance the view of landscape as a network of relations, the scale and approach of bioregionalism and ecosystem management may be an opportunity for exploring how to frame and engage historic landscape preservation. Bioregionalism brings together concerns for ecological sustainability, quality of place, and economics. Although bioregionalism is not confined to a particular discipline or vocation, it has emerged as a viable framework for thinking about the design and stewardship of both community and place (Thayer 2003). Likewise, amongst resource management experts, the paradigm of ecosystem management attempts to integrate all of the ecological, cultural, and economic values. Within both professional circles, and within the broader realm of public discourse, there exist opportunities for greater communication and collaboration, and perhaps the emergence of new ways of thinking about and implementing historic landscape management. The meshing of these approaches could potentially influence built environment policy and stewardship—looking more comprehensively at social, ecological, economic and politically designed places as systems.

Attaining Relevance

For historic landscape preservation to gain relevance in the broader world through conversations engaging other professions and the general public, it is critical to turn to conversations and actions that must occur among the various entities *within* the field to attain relevance. How do cultural landscapes become integral to our conversations on a daily basis? Those who work in historic landscape preservation need to address several different contexts simultaneously to achieve greater clarity, relevance and power. These arenas include institutional context, professional training, public involvement, technology, and politics and public policy.

Institutional Context

Landscape preservation remains a nebulous specialty, occupying ambiguous ground between historic preservation, landscape architecture, geography and numerous other disciplines. During the 1970s and 1980s, when the idea of historic landscape preservation was first gaining a foothold within the larger fields of landscape architecture and historic preservation, the development of landscape preservation theory and technology occurred largely within two interrelated institutional contexts: agencies and policies of the U.S. federal government and academic programs. Since that time, and in many ways as a result of the successful cooperation of those entities, there has been a proliferation of organizations, private consulting firms and a new class of professionals who work under the title of "historical landscape architect." New institutional actors also have emerged, such as the Library of American Landscape History, the Landscape Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians, and the Cultural Landscape Foundation. An increasing number of private consulting firms now take on projects dealing with historic landscapes, while agencies such as the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) have vastly increased their own capacity to effectively manage historic landscapes. These changes have resulted in a decline in the historic contractual relationships between NPS and the academy in providing such expertise. What do these trends mean for the future of the field as a whole? Is it merely expanding, or is it fragmenting in too many directions at once? If the latter, do landscape preservationists collectively need to take steps toward consolidation so that the field remains coherent?

Ultimately, it will be necessary to take on the challenge of redefining the future form of the institutional context of historic landscape preservation. The profession continues to ask hard questions about just what it is that we are and what we should be doing. A profession remains relevant even when its members fail to resolve the contradictions that motivate them; it only becomes moribund when its members stop *doing the work* that aims toward resolution.

Professional Training

The question for historic landscape preservation now is twofold: what role and responsibility does the institutional framework have in the education of young architects, landscape architects, planners, and preservationists; and what is its role and responsibility to educate the public? The need to redefine the institutional context of the field directly influences how and if one may acquire

expertise in this specialized area of historic preservation practice.

Preliminary results of how landscape preservation is taught in the academy currently suggest that there is reason to be concerned for the future of our specialty (Goetcheus 2008). A cursory review of existing academic programs in landscape architecture and historic preservation indicates trends of concern, including: a lack of interdisciplinary discourse; preservation trainees having little exposure to design, the environment or "landscape" as critical context for preservation activities; designers-in-training having little exposure to history let alone preservation philosophy; neither group exposed to the reality of economics and politics even on a rudimentary level; the alarming recent loss to retirement of academic and practitioner mentors who defined and created this profession; and, the erosion of institutional knowledge and leadership in federal agencies that historically led training efforts, placing heavier burdens on ill-prepared non-profits to define and take a leadership role in the realm of landscape preservation education

All of these trends give rise to a question that has been avoided far too long. Can and should training become more formalized? If so, this implies defined curricula, codes of practice, and policing of professional work. Where will the next generation of landscape preservationists come from? What and how will they be taught? Who will teach them and how will they gain entry into the field?

Public Involvement

The complexity of cultural landscapes inherently demands an interdisciplinary approach. Many contributors to *Exploring the Boundaries of Historic Landscape Preservation* expressed a desire to make landscape preservation more democratic and more accommodating of public involvement. No single discipline reigns supreme in interpreting the meaning and significance of landscapes, and it is critical to engage a diversity of viewpoints in the study of every cultural landscape, from the variety of discipline "experts" who are interested in the topic to individuals who live in cultural landscapes—experts of another sort. Enhanced involvement must occur through more exchanges between discipline experts working together, as well as many more locality experts working with the variety of discipline experts. Ultimately, interdisciplinary management paradigms that afford the opportunity for baseline values of place to be reinforced encourage expansion beyond the boundaries of conventional preservation practices.

Technology

New technologies and concepts—many borrowed from other professions and disciplines—are ever-present forces in pushing the boundaries of landscape preservation. Invention of new techniques, tools and apparatus that inspire discovery of new conceptual tools can broadly address the diversity of scales and values in historic landscape preservation. This process of invention reflects the continuing influence of multiple disciplines. As these disciplines generate new ways for communicating, understanding scale, and reformulating protocols, they assist in defining new ways to approach old issues—in essence new ways to *see* and interact with the landscape, making the cultural landscape visible. This visibility makes historic landscape preservation relevant where technology acts simultaneously as a constraint on what is possible and as a frontier for new possibilities.

Politics and Public Policy

Richard Walker, the Marxist geographer, argues that early ideas about cultural landscapes were too evasive about the systematic forces of political economy in answering the question of who and what creates urban and rural environments (Wilson and Groth 2003, 21). To have any kind of effect on future landscapes, historic landscape advocates must jump into the fray of politics and policy at the local, regional, national and international levels. To better understand political dynamics at the local level, preservationists might learn from the practices of socially conscious landscape designers like Randy Hester. At the beginning of every project, Hester insists upon creating a power map—a depiction of the individual, group, corporation, and public agency dynamics in any place—as a way to begin to understand the network, movement and uneven relationships of power. Relationships of power often are manifested not only in conscious political actions but also in common daily practices and patterns of consumption that directly impact cultural landscapes. Landscape preservation advocates desperately need to take note of the lessons revealed by such power mapping exercises because power is formalized in both public policies and political relationships that directly affect landscape preservation efforts.

Although much landscape preservation activity occurs at the local level, this work often is guided by the historic preservation framework that is institutionalized at the national level. Thus, the future evolution of the field of historic landscape preservation demands that practitioners remain engaged in debates about the direction of these national programs and policies. Such vigilance is needed in the United States, as well as in other countries where national-level preservation programs are less formalized. For example, the U.S. National Register of Historic Places criteria for determining historical significance and integrity are now approximately forty-five years old. Although the framework and criteria have worked well for built structures and contiguous historic resources, because the National Register criteria emphasize physical and material qualities of a resource, many preservation practitioners have struggled to employ the framework in ways that fully acknowledge ethnographic cultural values, as well as intangible values and dynamic materials of cultural landscapes. Continued engaged debate among professionals and the public on the relevance and applicability of these criteria for evaluating historic landscapes is needed. Models that may be useful, but also have their own weaknesses, include Canada's recent legislation akin to the U.S. national register framework, as well as ICOMOS and UNESCO.

Conclusion

Ultimately, for the way forward to become clearer, future forums on historic landscape preservation should be devoted to these topics and more. Such forums undoubtedly will raise new questions that will instigate broader discussions about the relationship between landscape preservation and place. While all of the papers presented at *Exploring the Boundaries of Historic Landscape Preservation* address contemporary problems that are relevant to practitioners, perhaps the greatest contribution to the field arises from the articulation of ideas that spark controversy and debate. These are the conversations that are most likely to generate fresh ideas and thereby advance exploration of the boundaries of historic landscape preservation.

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