Landscape Archaeology between Art and Science

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Published by Amsterdam University Press

Guttmann-Bond, Erika and Sjoerd J. Kluiving.
Landscape Archaeology between Art and Science: From a Multi- to an Interdisciplinary Approach.

Amsterdam University Press, 2012.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66303.

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Since the 1960s, ‘landscape’ has been a key topic of archaeological research all over the world. Initially drawing on environmental archaeology, and using models from the earth sciences as well as cultural ecology, landscapes have been conceptualised predominantly as the natural environments determining human behaviour or as a backdrop to human action. In the New Archaeology of the 1960s, ecology and settlement patterns were studied together with anthropology, with the aim of piecing together information on past economic and social systems (Trigger 1989, 295). Lewis Binford argued that the goal of archaeology should be to understand the range of human behaviours and the differences in culture, based on a belief that cultures were adaptive responses to our environment (Binford 1962), and archaeologists at the time were optimistic that culture and culture change were rational and could be predicted based on archaeological assemblages and settlement patterns.

In the 1980s, a new theoretical perspective, post-processualism, rejected most of the tenets of processualism. Ian Hodder, a key proponent of the new thinking, argued that cultures are not predictable and that artefacts and symbols have different meanings depending on context and culture (Hodder 1986). Within this new school of research, it is not so much the mechanisms of human adaptation to changing natural circumstances that deserve attention, as the different ways in which people in the past perceived and ordered their environments according to space, time and culture. New diachronic approaches were developed that highlight the continuous reuse of monuments and the constant reordering of landscapes within subsequent societies with different social, ritual and mnemonic systems. A similar development took place in the field of Historical Geography from the 1980s, mainly based on the ideas of the New Cultural Geography, with Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels as its main exponents (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1984). Landscape Archaeology in the 21st century is divided between, on the one hand, various interdisciplinary approaches based on intensive fieldwork, aimed at mapping and documenting landscapes and using quantitative methods for predictive modelling (Verhagen, this volume), and on the other hand, post-processualist approaches which aim to understand landscapes as reflections of past societies (e.g. David & Thomas, 2008).

In January 2010, the first international Landscape Archaeology Conference (LAC2010) was organised at the VU University, Amsterdam. The mission of the congress was to have multiple sessions within which scholars from the different disciplines could exchange and discuss research experiences, theories and ideas. The conference attracted many more visitors than originally expected, with over 200 abstracts of which 154, compiled by more than 180 authors, were accepted. In addition to seven keynote lectures, 41 abstracts were selected for oral presentation and 106 abstracts were accepted for poster presentations. In this volume the proceedings of the LAC2010 are presented in 35 papers, covering the wide field of landscape archaeology. In addition, a number of papers derived from abstracts of LAC2010 are published elsewhere in a special issue in Quaternary International (Kluiving, Lehmkuhl & Schuett 2012, see also).

This volume will begin with a discussion of Landscape Archaeology and its history, followed by a discussion of themes and summaries of the papers in this volume. We end with some concluding remarks.
and suggestions for future research. Although the editors have put a lot of energy into editing the text of this volume, please note that many contributors are writing in English as a second language. We have endeavoured to smooth out the English, but we apologise for the awkwardness of some phrasing in the text. All 35 papers of the LAC2010 proceedings have been peer-reviewed by at least two reviewers. The editors have approached a large number of peer reviewers within the participating institution within the VU University, the Cultural Heritage Agency and the international Advisory Board of LAC2010. We wish to thank the following colleagues who have made the realisation of the proceedings of LAC2010 possible.

Henk Baas (Cultural Heritage Agency, The Netherlands), Jos Bazelmans (Cultural Heritage Agency, The Netherlands), Sjoerd Bohncke (Earth Sciences, VU University, The Netherlands), Judith Bunbury (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom), Richard Chiverell (University of Liverpool, United Kingdom), Adrie de Kraker (IGBA, VU University, The Netherlands), Andrew Fleming (University of Wales Lampeter, United Kingdom), Eric Fouache (Université de Paris, France), Simon Holdaway (University of Auckland, New Zealand), Matthew Johnson (University of Southampton, United Kingdom), Henk Kars (IGBA, VU University, The Netherlands), Kees Kasse (Earth Sciences, VU University, The Netherlands), Jan Kolen (Faculty of Arts, VU University, The Netherlands), Menne Kosian (Cultural Heritage Agency, The Netherlands), Michel Lascaris (Cultural Heritage Agency, The Netherlands), Frank van der Meulen (Earth Sciences, VU University, The Netherlands), Antoine Mientjes (Faculty of Arts, VU University, The Netherlands), Hans Renes (Utrecht University, The Netherlands), Nico Roymans (Faculty of Arts, VU University, The Netherlands), Steven Soetens (IGBA, VU University, The Netherlands), Theo Spek (University of Groningen, The Netherlands), Simon Troelstra (Earth Sciences, VU University, The Netherlands), Ronald van Balen (Earth Sciences, VU University, The Netherlands), Jef Vandenberghe (Earth Sciences, VU University, The Netherlands), Philip Verhagen (Faculty of Arts, VU University, The Netherlands), Mats Widgren (Stockholm University, Sweden).

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VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands, April 2012