

Place, landscape, ecology, and the practice of cultural heritage preservation

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The two themes discussed in this paper concern historical ecology (landscape history) presented as a guiding idea for cultural resource management (CRM) practices, and the concept of place as a time-space identification of past human activities. Historical ecology is the study of the relationships between people and the various environmental variables. Its multidimensional orientation combines the knowledge of all aspects of human activity with the theory and methodology of ecology. Generally, the practice of heritage preservation depends on the policies geared towards preserving selected evidence of human behavior from the past. Such an approach usually contributes a limited knowledge about the past set up on seemingly blurred data compiled through the application of imprecise archaeological methods. Contrary to a popular opinion, however, CRM should not be viewed as a lesser variation of academic archaeology. In my opinion, it encompasses far broader, ecological outlook, for it deals with various ecological aspects that concern diverse human interactions from the past, present, and future. In theory, all ecological variables labeled as cultural resources refer to various aspects of culture. I argue that, although CRM remains undefined as a scientific discipline, its methodology may profoundly benefit from the integrative approach offered by historical ecology (landscape history).

Another topic discussed in the paper relates to the decision-making present in cultural heritage preservation policies. The obvious question is: What should be preserved, and why? Because the problem is of political nature, perhaps it should be discussed separately for specific political context. I would like to offer a proposition, however, which goes beyond the politically charged concept of culture. As we move away from ethnically bounded polities, the concept of place rather than culture will, in my view, become the critical focus of decision-making, which stipulates the pragmatics of cultural heritage preservation policies. I identify cultural heritage domain as a “cultural landscape”, place filled symbolically with diverse meanings and encompassing all details of human behavior within an ecosystem. The concept of place delineated here concerns, therefore, not just the material objects, but also certain memories, feelings, sense of belonging, *etc.* Place, however, does not replace culture. Its meaning is composed of two distinct realms: cultural (recognized) and natural, and both could be experienced simultaneously. The full potential of place is in its specific cultural designation.

KEY-WORDS: cultural resource management, cultural heritage preservation, place, landscape, historical ecology

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For Sharla

*We come and go but the land is always here.
And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it – for a little while
Willa Cather, O Pioneers!*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1999, Sharla Azizi invited me to contribute a paper for a session she was co-organizing during the 4th World Archaeology Congress in Cape Town, South Africa. The symposium was devoted to answering several key questions, which arose from the frustration felt by many archaeologists and cultural resource management (CRM)¹ practitioners about the malaises pertaining to the practice of CRM, especially in relation to archaeological research and its methodology. The frustration is deeply rooted in the illusory, in my opinion, dichotomy that is often used to separate the CRM's domain from the academic world. Simply put, the critics of CRM say that the sort of archaeological pragmatics employed in cultural heritage preservation strategies is not "scientific", whereas academic archaeology, by definition, remains within the realm of science. Therefore, the main focus of this session oscillated around debating the future of CRM and its role in heritage preservation strategies. Although we all have agreed that the current *status quo* of CRM will change, we could not reach a consensus about what direction the change will take. Knowing the practice and pragmatics of CRM in the United States, I share some of these fears and doubts. Thus I have provocatively offered a hypothesis, which may eventually have far reaching consequences: FORGET ARCHAEOLOGY! CURRENT OR FUTURE, CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IS NOT JUST ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY AND METHODS! It encompasses a far broader, ecological in its nature outlook, for it deals with various ecological aspects that concern diverse human interactions from the past, present, and future.

Those who degrade CRM archaeology today usually emphasize its mediocre theoretical and methodological background. Often than not it is a legitimate claim. Perhaps, even those who practice CRM archaeology are not fully aware of what intellectual drift concerning their archeological activity do they follow at the moment. Having seen an assortment of CRM type of archaeology in several countries, I concur with these allegations. But I also think that CRM archaeology suffers from the same ills that academic archaeology does. I do not see a far greater utilization of diverse theoretical approaches among academic archaeologists either. Such a situation

¹ I will continue using the acronym CRM in reference to the American version of a set of methods and legislature employed to manage cultural heritage preservation policies. British colleagues have labeled a similar approach as Archaeological Resource Management, but I believe the difference remains in semantics rather than the philosophy of the approach.

concerns most European countries, Poland included (*cf.* Ostoja-Zagórski ed. 1997), but it is also present in the United States and elsewhere (for instance Latin America; O.H. Benavides, personal communication).

In this paper I favor the ecological approach, and argue that CRM archaeology in its general outlook (*cf.* King 1998; Hodder 1999) delineates an integrative approach, deeply rooted in ecological models. The ecological approach is primarily concerned in addressing the two major issues: what are the consequences of a mutual relationship between environment and organisms? and, what are the consequences of interactions between organisms within the same environment?

In the most classic terms, ecology is “the study of the relations between organisms and the totality of the physical and biological factors affecting them or influenced by them” (Pianka 1974: 3). Human ecology differs from the above in only one aspect; it is exclusively interested in humans and their actions, present or past, and not other organisms. The main questions remain the same. Thus, ecologists who study interactions between humans and nature usually examine a variety of sometimes overlapping aspects, like adaptive patterns and their changes, decision-making processes and their consequences, and biological/evolutionary diversities.

The diachronic use of the concept of human ecology has been coined into the idea of historical ecology (Crumley 1994a, 1998), or landscape history approach (Tilley 1994; Ashmore and Knapp 1999). The historical ecology approach offers diverse methodology, which allows for a very comprehensive insight into the human conditions in the past. Its multidimensional, multiscalar approach (Crumley 1994b) links various disciplines including: anthropology, biology, geography, demography, economics, *etc.* Historical ecology combines the knowledge of all aspects of human beings with the theory and methodology of ecology. As Carole Crumley indicated (1994a), historical ecology encompasses “evidence of the human past with evidence about the environment by studying the evolution of landscapes”. Archaeologists who use ecological models are forced to accept interdisciplinary approach, which combines physical, and natural sciences with the humanities.

Implicit in various ecological models is the connection between ecology and evolutionary theory, for the crucial factor in the evolutionary process is an ecological factor – the fit between organisms (humans) and their environment, manifested in a created (cultural) landscape. Ecological models have to be approached carefully, though, for as Bates (1996) suggested they may not always be adequate to study the complexity of human-made cultural landscapes, as our “unique attributes pose problems for modeling local interactions”. The difficulty relies in the fact that although our actions are always caused by ecological conditions, some are forced deterministically, while other may derive from the randomness of decision-making process (Lozny 2000). Nonetheless, I feel especially obliged to strongly emphasize the need to study diverse ecological conditions as the knowledge concerning

environmental changes becomes critical particularly now, after the first case of extinction among the primate order has been recorded (Oates *et al.* 2000). Clearly, certain enduring ecological relations begin to tremble.

It seems obvious to me that the aim of CRM is to identify and preserve all the evidence of interactions between humans and their environments, using diverse methodologies. I argue therefore that historical ecology approach fits the task well. The practice of historical ecology encompasses several relevant subdisciplines such as archaeology, ethnography, ethnohistory, history, geography, and environmental sciences. This approach allows for making a comprehensive record of the ongoing dialectical relations between humans and nature, and concerns diverse evidence of all human activities physical or intellectual, which are manifested in the landscape. The application of the historical ecology approach requires a rigorous methodological design however. Regardless the fact that a landscape may testify about who, what, when and how, the problem remains in the ability to read the landscape correctly. The real challenge, then, rests in the ability to read, decipher the landscape, and furthermore in the ability to manipulate and use landscape histories to fit local or regional or global agendas (Lozny, in preparation).

Through the application of historical ecology to examine specific human populations, we can address the following two major questions: 1. What is the population's place in its particular ecological system? and 2. how are particular behaviors characteristic of this population relate to its place in the ecosystem? I feel that any attempt to answer either one of these questions coherently requires the employment of the idea of place rather than the elusive concept of an archaeological site or another culture-specific signifier. As we move away from ethnically bounded polities into another, multiethnic level of political complexity, the concept of place rather than culture will, in my view, become the critical focus theoretical advancement within the practice of CRM.

The two major qualities of place (regardless its location) will play a significant role in this progression: 1. humans occupy a remarkable diversity of ecosystems (diversity of places), and 2. we are the dominant species of our ecosystem (therefore, we will change it; we may turn any place into "our place", even for a while). Humans create both qualities through their unique way of adaptation that is distinctively flexible, for adaptation is at once the solution to a particular problem and the source of unanticipated changes and new problems.

2. A SENSE OF PLACE IN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

A few years ago (Lozny 1997), I have observed large-scale infrastructural alterations taking place in Eastern Europe. Watching all these changes caused by either

political agendas or practical reasons, I tried to analyze the spectrum of attitudes towards modifications of the landscape expressed through actions such as removals of certain elements of the landscape or additions of new ones. Primarily, I was wondering how would all these changes be perceived on local, regional, or national level? My main interest was to find out how members of a society create a meaning of “their” place. What kind of symbols and meanings matter? I have thought that if I discover what matters to them, I may eventually learn what does matter to all of us now, at this time, and perhaps what did matter to people in the past. I was after creating a specific methodology that would allow for identification and examination of various changes and their cultural meanings introduced by people to the same place, but at different times. While pursuing my inquiries, I tried (Lozny 1997) to design feasible trajectories for identification procedures and preservation policies in culturally diverse and sensitive regions, which are going to be heavily impacted during the next few decades. My first conclusion was: don’t panic! What follows should be regarded as my introductory exploration of the concept of place and specific strategies for its management. I probably should have titled this section of my paper: “The politics of cultural landscape”, because that is precisely what cultural heritage preservation practices are all about. If anyone wonders what a sense of place might be, I argue that place is multivocal for it bears the meanings that researchers and preservationists create in addition to whatever meanings other people may attached to it and accept. Place contains multiple senses, and even if we can read all of them through the application of diverse methodologies, not all of these meanings may be preserved.

3. PLACE AS AN ECOSYSTEM

First, let us consider place as an ecosystem, a very dynamic and constantly changing cycle of matter and energy and their links. The concept applies to any environment, but more important, it describes organisms (humans) in a very dynamic interplay with other elements of the system (including other humans). Thus the ecosystem concept gives us a way of describing how human populations influence and are influenced by their surroundings (Moran 1990). Yet, each ecosystem, although kept in equilibrium or near equilibrium, can be described as relations among the component populations. These relations are constantly changing (Holling 1973).² Unfortunately, there is no room in this paper to elaborate in these two ideas any further. So, I will move onto discussing the concept of place.

² Two ideas describe continuity and change within ecosystems: resilience, a measure of change a system can undergo while still maintaining its basic elements or relationships, and stability, a measure of the speed with which a system returns to equilibrium after absorbing disturbances.

For anthropologists, **Space** comes first; for the native, **Place**; and the difference is hardly trivial (Casey 1996). Anthropologists and archaeologists are primarily interested how “being-in-place” articulates. It is why we use the concept of culture and relate it to a concept of space rather than a concept of place. From a philosophical point of view, it is place that is most significant to people. There is no knowing or sensing place but by being in that place, meaning, being able to perceive it. Therefore, knowledge of place is a consequence of experience (practice), constituted by cultural and social structure. As humans, we are place-bounded creatures; place is universal. Still, historians, ethnographers, anthropologists are mostly interested in space and time relations. Philosophers could retrieve a sense of place (see for instance Casey 1996), but can anthropologists do the same? Anthropological approach to place is to identify and map it out within a space. In doing so, we are not very different from geographers, historians, sociologists, or political thinkers. Recognizing the crucial interactions between people, place, and motion could identify a place. Concluding from the above, we may say that people are never placeless; places belong to them, and depend on them. We always create our own place in form of a matrix of symbols we identify with at the time (Lozny 1998). Because the approach followed by CRM practitioners to investigate and preserve traces of human adaptation (cultural landscape) continues to be both: diachronic (through time), and synchronic (primarily concerned with the present), the above conclusion is worth taking into consideration.

4. THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY APPROACH

There are valuable contributions by cultural geographers to the concept of place, and some refer to aspects known to anthropologists (Buttimer 1993; Entrikin 1991; J. Jackson 1994). Cultural geographers seem to incorporate modern philosophical thought, guided by the idea of “dwelling” as described by Martin Heidegger (1971). Feld and Basso (1996) point out that all these ideas are blended with social theory and produce two types of syntheses: 1. closely related to the sociological notion of “placeways” developed in the work of E.V. Walter (1988), and 2. critical and deconstructive analyzes for application in the fields of environmental design, urban planning, and architecture (Mugerauer 1994; Seamon 1992).

Another trend in cultural geography is concerned with the neo-Marxist cultural critique and with global postmodern theory (Harvey 1989; P. Jackson 1989; Soja 1989). These works are oriented towards discussing various aspects of geographies of struggle and resistance, like issues of representation, gender, political action (Duncan and Ley 1993; Keith and Pile 1993; Massey 1994), and most are based on Foucault’s discussions of spatial analyzes of repression, institutional power, and social control.

5. PLACE, CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY AND OTHER HUMANISTIC STUDIES

The cultural geography approach is linked somehow with other humanistic studies of place including perspectives from anthropology and archaeology in works exploring relationship between landscape and authority (Bender 1993), or issues concerning indigenous people and preservationist (for instance sacred places – Carmichael *et al.* 1994; Kelly and Francis 1994). Recent cultural anthropology approach has been directed towards theorizing social identities (essays presented in published in 1984 *Place: experience and symbols*). Most of these essays focused on the social well being attached to the sense of rootedness in place. Other cultural anthropology directions studied place largely from its contestation and its linkage to local and global power relations (issues like exile, diaspora, displacement, struggles by indigenous people and cultural minorities for ancestral homelands, land rights, and retention of sacred places. These days, narratives of place once presented under such headlines as “national integration” and “political evolution” are being framed in much harsher terms: as economic development by state invasion and occupation, or as the extraction of transnational wealth at escalating cost in human suffering, cultural degradation, and environmental degradation (Bodley 1988; Burger 1990; Cultural Survival 1993). Place, in other words, is a site of power struggles, and therefore ethnographies of place are stories about contestations, in which previously absent “others” are now portrayed as fully present, no longer presumed as “them” removed from “us”.

6. PLACE AND SOCIAL MEMORY

Places consist of specific elements beyond the human component. Casey (1996) says, “places gather”. Among these “gathered” elements are specific histories, memories, thoughts, cultural traits, like symbolic meanings, linguistic features, etc. There is also specific experience attached to it. We have this experience every time we go back to places we have been, places that are full of memories, individual and social. Place becomes a powerful form of identification. Being in place also means being in a configuration of complex things (material, symbolic objects that define the form of a place).

Memories of place could be attached to personal experience or social experience. We can return to “our” place we keep in our memory; it is always the same place. Our place does not change, only people who occupy it. Place is not something simply physical (this is how we, anthropologists or archaeologists see it). Place is something for which we continually have to discover or invent new forms of understanding, new ideas (Casey 1996).

As archaeologists, we do not recover one place but diverse and dynamic time and space relations. What we find is constantly changing qualifications of different places, qualified by their contents and contents articulations in various cultures. We designate these places to specific cultures. Place is composed of physical things but also memories and thoughts. The physical attributes include artifacts and the environmental surroundings. In this sense place is inseparable from the region it occurs. A cave containing the Upper Paleolithic assemblage will be a cave existing not only in the Upper Paleolithic; this makes the cave to be a regional (spatial) feature and not just temporal (Upper Paleolithic). In such a context place contains a variety of meanings: historical, physical, and also emotional (assumed). Despite its nature, it somehow contributes to the character of the entire region. Places constitute the regions content historical and social of diverse people. The essence of place is to be regional, and the essence of a region is to be composed of places.

7. CONCLUSIONS

My intention was to examine how people encounter places, perceive them, and grant them with significance within specific ecosystem (cultural landscape). I tried to move beyond generalizations about place being culturally constructed by describing specific ways in which places contain different words of sense. Others present more detailed discussion of the topic. Margaret Rodman (1992) *Empowering place: multilocality and multivocality* provides an excellent review of power positions and assumptions underlying comparability of “place” and “location”. Rodman advocates studies of place that take discontinuities and multiplicities into greater account. Such studies must reject “boundedness” models of culture and the ways they privilege the authority of persons in positions of power. Also, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) in *Space, identity, and the politics of difference* see the need for reevaluation of the “assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture”. They imagine this space as one “beyond culture”, where hybrid and fluid zones replace stabilized territories such borderlands, characterized by place indeterminacy (the notions of “ethnospace” as a respond to the bounded culture syndrome Appadurai, 1992; see also Clifford’s critique of anthropological approach promoting the idea of dwelling over travel).

British social anthropology produced an anthology titled *The anthropology of landscape: perspectives on place and space* (Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995). From this book we can get an insight that anthropology can, in fact, provide a theorization of landscape as cultural process that is dynamic, and constantly fluctuating between “place” (everyday lived locale) and “space” (social potential; see also Tilley 1994). The meaning of place is therefore recognized as a discursive entity – the floating signifier. Feld and Basso (1996) point out to a very specific behavioral quality: “that as people fashion places,

so, too, do they fashion themselves". Filling places with meanings exemplifies maintaining order of how things should be. And those meanings help us to answer the question: why do we hold on to what we like? From the above I conclude that we always identify place within a certain cultural pattern. It is embedded in culture, and expressed through behavior or symbols. Place needs to be classified. But how? Using what signifiers? Place has its own specific connotation in time and space, because people always attach specific meanings to it. Such unique articulation of place is manifested through the meanings given to place by people. Culture is found in place, and it gives place its meaning. Yet people carry culture into place, and therefore place is known by means set by the people who occupy it at the time. Culture, therefore, assigns the way in which place is perceived. There is usually something left aside, the unknown or unrecognized ("wild" in Casey's, 1996, terminology). Why though should place be identified and classified as one? Why so? No doubt place is a reality, but what kind? Place, therefore, will be composed of two distinct realms: cultural (recognized) and natural; but people will experience both simultaneously. To be fully in place means to know both dichotomic aspects of a place, to experience both, cultural and natural. In this sense, we could assume that the time/space dichotomy will also arise from the experience of place. Place provides a common matrix for time and space. The matrix is filled with events, time-space units. The full potential of place is in its cultural designation. Place can only be identified in a context. Time and history cannot be separated from place, although place will be known by its most manifested culture (event). Therefore the meaning of place is discursive because it depends on how we make sense of it within a specific cultural/political context. Place is a part of our discursive explanation of reality. Place that cannot be recognized and identified within our discursive way of explanation will not be noticed or given any meaning.³

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³ This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the 4th World Archaeology Congress, Cape Town, South Africa.

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