

LANDSCAPE SCHOOL

Meaning of Landscape School

In geography, a landscape analysis is simply a study of a large piece of physical space with the goal of describing it and the processes that made it that way. In landscape school geographers generally tried to understand the human relationship to a particular physical space and future usage of it. In human geography, we specifically look at the human impact on shaping a landscape. How have people used this land? What parts do they use, and what parts to they avoid? Why? What are the physical characteristics of the landscape? Has human use had an impact on those characteristics? These are all questions you may seek to address in a landscape analysis in order to understand human relationships to the landscape and future usages of it. Do some areas require more conservation efforts than others? Are parts of the landscape more naturally suited for trailheads and recreational space? These are some of the questions that landscape analysis school tried to answer.

In **human geography**, a **landscape** analysis is a process of studying and describing a **landscape**, generally with the goal of assessing the impact of **humans** on that space. This school of study is used to provide physical context to concepts of **human-landscape** interaction and help plan for future land use or restoration.

The study of landscape was a core topic of human geography. It was seen as a unique synthesis between the natural and cultural characteristics of a region. This synthesis embraced geo-ecological relations, spatial patterns and aesthetical properties. To study landscape, information was gathered from field surveys, maps, literature, sketches and photographs. Since the Second World War, aerial photography, and from 1970 on also satellite remote sensing, gave a completely new approach in the study of landscape school.

History of Development of Landscape School in Geography

The landscape school was first used by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1895–1896), and was in frequent use among other German geographers in the early 20th century. The term was introduced in the field of Geography by Carl O. Sauer (1925) and became central in the work of the Berkeley school of geography. Carl O. Sauer was regarded as the father of landscape school in geography. From the 1960s, the term landscape school became increasingly adopted in other disciplines and entered the terminology of environmental management.

Different branches of geography conceptualize the goals and methods of a landscape analysis in slightly different ways but nearly all come back to the ideas of 20th-century American geographer **Carl Sauer**. Sauer (1889-1975) wrote some of the most influential works on how we understand the concept of landscapes, particularly as they apply to the relationship between humans and the environment.

One of Sauer's assertions was that human influence over the landscape was a by-product of culture, so all these ideas had to be understood together, holistically. He claimed that even landscapes that looked unaltered were almost always impacted by human activity in some way, and geographers need to use spatial models to connect all these dots and contextualize the space in which the interaction occurred. These aspects should be studied in a separate geographical domain of landscape school. The main essence of landscape school is to study the interaction of human with different landscape.

Landscape school studies, as geographer Carl Sauer and the 'Berkeley School' developed them from the 1940s on, focused on the evolution of places and included the 'combination of natural and man-made elements that comprises, at any given time, the essential character of a place'. Landscape school emphasized the connection of natural environments and built interventions. Yet landscape school methods for studying places, and people's shaping of them, tended to stress the physical and not the political dimensions of places, leaning to the study of rural, pre-industrial landscapes, vernacular house types, and patterns of cultivation, considering ecology but avoiding issues of political contestation.

As in the beginning the study of landscape was situated mainly in departments of regional geography, these new technical disciplines were introduced here as well. They stimulated the study of landscape on a more holistic basis and in a broader multidisciplinary field. The landscape became the common framework for regional geography, historical geography, landscape ecology, as well as more applied research in land classification and evaluation for planning purposes. Since the 1960s, the quantitative approach in many sciences initiated scientific specialisation and divergence between human and natural sciences. In geography, this 'new orientation' considered the purely descriptive geography of regions and countries to be old-fashioned and non-scientific. In many countries the geographical curriculum was restructured and resulted in a definite split between physical geography and social geography, while regional geography, including the study of landscapes

was abolished or became marginal. At the same time, interdisciplinary relations were lost or became lost.

However, soon this split and the loss of a holistic synthesis was missed, especially by geographers concerned with the landscape. Geography, ecology, soil science, history, archaeology, psychology and aesthetics started to study landscape more independently. A new synthesis, a new trans-disciplinary approach emerged with landscape ecology. Landscape research no longer is restricted to geography alone. Therefore, it is not appropriate any more to speak about the geography of landscapes, but rather about what geography can bring to the study of landscape. The whole of the disciplines involved in landscape research will be referred to as landscape science. In most countries the number of researchers studying the landscape is limited and fortunately this stimulated in the development of an international network. Many landscape researchers meet under the umbrella of the International Association for Landscape Ecology (IALE), which has national, (supra) regional groups and thematic workshops. Also important is the Standing European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape (Verhoeve & Vervloet, 1992). Landscape research is no longer restricted to local or regional interest groups, but has become really international.

Approaches of Landscape School

The concept of landscape school has at two approaches to study human landscape relationship. It refers both to an empirical object of analysis (objective analysis), and to an approach to studying that object (subjective analysis). Landscape as an object of analysis refers to the material–cultural expressions of human modifications of ‘nature’ as they appear on a particular surface of the earth. The landscape is generally thought to include all of the elements of the built environment (e.g., buildings, roads), as well as land-use patterns. By contrast, the concept of landscape used in subjective approach tends to be more focused on nature and natural processes instead of the emphasis on culture and cultural mechanisms that forms the basis of the concept used in geography and the social sciences more generally. These two meanings have an intertwined history, although the former meaning (object of analysis) proceeded, and led to, the second. This essay is not divided into two parts, but rather how and why the different meanings emerged and often converged are pointed out (when relevant).

Methods of Landscape Analysis

For many geographers, the first step to a landscape analysis is to examine the landscape from above. **Aerial photography** is a great tool for viewing large-scale space to help identify major patterns of use and development. Some obvious things you may notice are zones that have been developed for agriculture or residential areas, areas that are seemingly untouched, or evidence of roads, trails, and other forms of use.



Aerial photo of the Nile showing clear patterns in landscape change between the unused desert and cultivated agricultural space

These patterns can help geographers start thinking about the kind of processes that are in play. The next step is to conduct actual **field work** to see if the patterns they observed from above match the evidence on the ground. Geographers in the field may record information on soil types and chemistry, water, rates and the kinds of vegetation, elevation, and obvious signs of human impact. In the past, these had to be recorded and compared by hand, but today geographers largely rely on **Geographic Information System (GIS)** technology.

GIS software compiles data into a spatial framework, laying them over cartographic maps. One can organize data by layers, displaying all at once, or selecting only data that meets specific criteria. By comparing all of this information, GIS helps illustrate the spatial implications of your data, and that's what geography is all about. We need to know how things relate to each other across physical space.