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Dóra Drexler

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Landscape, Paysage, Landschaft, Táj: The Cultural Background of Landscape Perceptions in England, France, Germany, and Hungary



DÓRA DREXLER

ABSTRACT

This research explores the historic cultural backgrounds of landscape perceptions in England, France, Germany, and Hungary, which use the words landscape, paysage, Landschaft, and táj, respectively. The German and Hungarian landscape words can be traced back to the early 19th century landscape perceptions of the counter-Enlightenment and the national Romanticism. The English and French landscape words focus on the visual-aesthetic experience of nature and correlate with the late 18th, early 19th century interpretations of landscape as a symbol of the liberal British state and the democratic French state.

INTRODUCTION

Differences in landscape perceptions (i.e., the way we think about and judge landscapes) have long been a central issue of landscape research, although there is little consensus in academia about the causes of landscape perception variance. In this study, landscape was defined as a cultural phenomenon and the roots of landscape's different perceptions were sought after in cultural history, although this manuscript primarily intends to present the data rather than give full treatment to theoretical considerations. Four countries were selected as examples for the study: England, France, Germany, and Hungary.

METHODS AND MEASURES

Two linguistic methods were combined in order to indicate the existing differences of the examined countries' current words for landscape or its rough equivalent—landscape, paysage, Landschaft, and táj. The two methods are word-field theory (Trier 1931) and language comparison (Wandruszka 1969). The word-field theory is a classic method for identifying a word's content. According to Trier's (1931) original idea, the conceptually related single words build a word-field, like mosaic tiles. A word-field is thus defined by the correlation of its content-related single words. At the same time, the single words acquire their meanings by distanc-

ing themselves from other words within their word-fields. These relations show, according to Trier, the linguistic separation and connection of word meanings within a language community. The application of the word-field theory in this research helped to map the relations between the meanings of the landscape-words and their content-related words inside one language. For example, in this study the meanings of landscape were related to the meanings of the words country, land, site, and region. The content-related words were chosen for pragmatic reasons based on the work of Hard (1970), Hard and Gliedner (1977), Oßwald (1977) and Leuprecht (1996). The list of the content-related words is not complete, because one could easily involve others, such as scenery or prospect in English, or the word Gebiet in German. This research, however, is aimed at showcasing the major differences of the landscape words' meanings, and not at conducting an exhaustive linguistic analysis.

In order to compare the semantic structures of the examined languages with each other, the word-field analysis was combined with Wandruszka's (1969) language comparison method. The language comparison shows if the meanings of the lexically equivalent terms of the four languages, which were identified by the word-field analysis, are identical or different. The language comparison thus renders a practical supplement to the word-

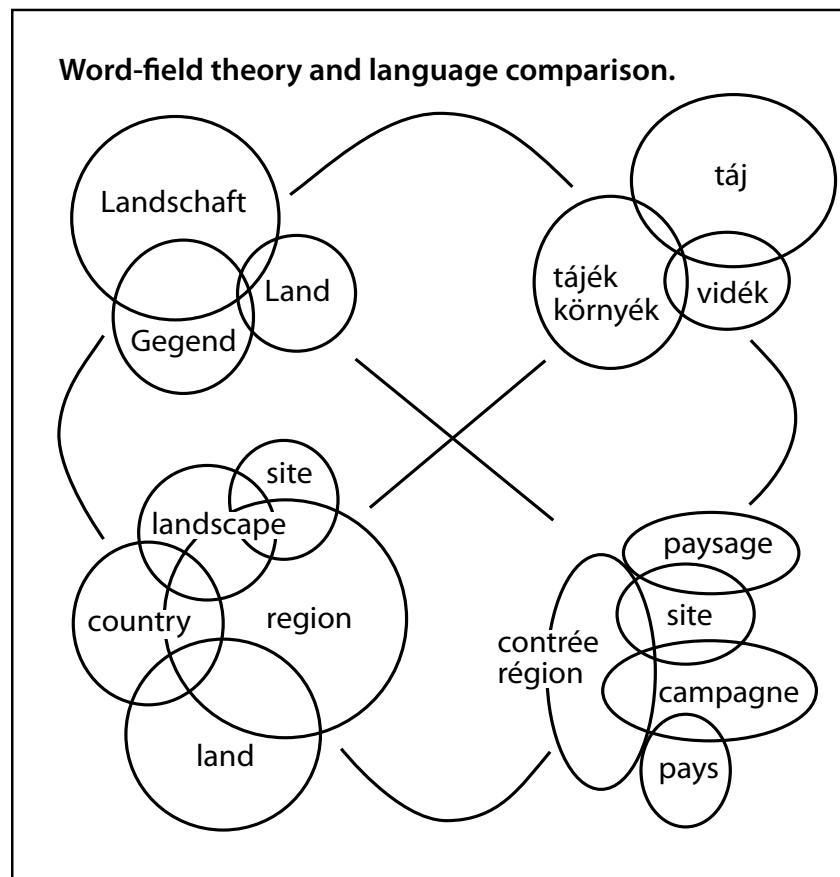


FIGURE 1. Structure of the linguistic analysis. The circles illustrate the word meanings and the groups of circles the word-fields. The lines between the word-fields refer to the method of the language comparison.

field analysis, and allows the identification and presentation of the interlingual differences and similarities of the word meanings (Figure 1).

I used a cultural-historical analysis to examine the development of the English, French, German, and Hungarian landscape perceptions during the 18th and early 19th centuries. This time-frame was chosen based on literature and the assumption that the foundations of the countries' current prevailing landscape perceptions have evolved during this period (see Cosgrove 1984; Olwig 2002; Thomas 1984:15).

Throughout the analysis, special attention was first paid to the social and political standing of the classes that were free from nature's direct constraints since, by definition, only the people who are free from nature's constraints can perceive landscape aesthetically (e.g., Piepmeyer 1980; Ritter 1963; Simmel 1903). Second, special attention was also paid

to the ideal ways of life formulated in philosophy and politics by intellectuals in each study society. These intellectuals are usefully seen to be a social group (Mannheim 1929:11) that “exists in every society and whose special task is to provide society with an interpretation of the world” (Pikulik 1992:63). Third, attention was paid to the representations of landscape, i.e., the works of art (primarily in literature, theater, painting and garden art), which express the correlations between the real social standing and the social ideal in the form of natural scenery.

Altogether, one can say that special attention was paid during the cultural-historical analysis to the symbolic meanings of landscape as an expression of an imagined “natural way of life” (Hirsch 1995:3), and to the forms of landscape representations in art. The theoretical background of the cultural-historical analysis is described in more detail in Drexler (2010). The cultural-historical analysis was partly based on primary literature and dominantly on secondary literature sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic Analysis

The results of the linguistic analysis show that there are significant differences between the word-fields of the four landscape concepts. While landscape and paysage possess quite

TABLE 1. Word-field of the English word landscape and some content related words.

Definition order	'landscape'	Definition order	'land'	Definition order	'country'	Definition order	'region'	Definition order	'site'
1	Visual-aesthetic characteristics of a rural area	4	The rural area, the opposite of town	1	The rural area, the opposite of town				
2	Depiction of a specific 'natural' scenery								
3	A genre in art								
4	The forming of an area into a 'natural' scenery								
1	The opposite of sea								
2	Property							2	A piece of land for construction purposes
3	Place of origin			2	(Nation-) State, state of birth				
				3	The people of a land				
						1	Approximate definition of an area, without a precise scale	3	Imprecise definition of a (small) area
								1	A place where something interesting or memorable happened

distinct meanings with only minor overlaps with their content-related words, Landschaft and táj seem to aggregate meanings plus semantic content overlaps with that of their content-related words (see Tables 1-4).

Table 1 shows the word-field of the English landscape. The column heads contain the primary words, and the cells below them illustrate the meanings of the exam-

ined words. Cells located on the same horizontal line of the table have shared contents or very similar meanings. The numbers refer to the order generally given to accepted word definitions in current dictionaries. We can see that there are only few shared meanings between landscape and its examined content-related words, as well as between content-related words themselves (e.g., land and country as a place of birth).

TABLE 2. Word-field of the French word *paysage* and some content related words.

Defini- tion order	<i>paysage</i>	Defini- tion order	<i>pays</i>	Defini- tion order	<i>campagne</i>	Defini- tion order	<i>contrée,</i> <i>'région'</i>	Defini- tion order	<i>site</i>
1	A view of the earth surface							1	A view of a picturesque area
2	Depiction or description of the area perceived as <i>paysage</i> in art								
		1	A local surrounding						
		2	Place of birth						
		3	(Home) State						
				1	Terres outside the settlement				
				2	Opposite of town				
				3	Rural settlement area				
				4	Rural way of life				
						1	Approximate definition of an area without specific scale		
								2	A piece of land to build on
								3	Landscape-protection area

Similarly to landscape, the French *paysage* has a set of relatively distinct meanings as displayed in Table 2. There is only one meaning that it shares with its content-related words, and the content-related words share no meanings with one another.

However, the word-field structure of the German *Landschaft* and its content related words differs from that of

the English and French words. Table 3 shows that there are numerous horizontal overlaps in the word-field table, showing that *Landschaft* merges a lot of its content-related words' meanings. However, *Landschaft* has fewer content-related words, as does *táj*, considered in Table 4.

Similarly to *Landschaft*, the Hungarian *táj* and its content-related words have a lot of shared meanings.

TABLE 3. Word-field of the German word *landschaft* and some content related words (the white cells indicate the featureless meanings of *Land* and *Gegend* that are not part of the meanings of *Landschaft*).

Definition order	<i>Landschaft</i>	Definition order	<i>Land</i>	Definition order	<i>Gegend</i>
1	A part of the earth's surface that has acquired its special character - and thus differs from other areas - through its ground formation, land cover, and settlement.	1	Mainland		
		2	An enclosed tract of land or tillage (property)		
		3	Rural area, the opposite of town		
		4	Synonym of <i>Landschaft</i> and <i>Gegend</i>	1	Approximate definition of an area without a specific scale
2	The (artistic) expression of a specifically formed earth surface.				
		5	A sovereign territory with distinct borders		

TABLE 4. Word-field of Hungarian word *táj* and some content related words (the white cells indicate the featureless meanings of *környék/tájék* and *vidék* that are not part of the meanings of *táj*).

Definition order	<i>táj</i>	Definition order	<i>környék, tájék</i>	Definition order	<i>vidék</i>
1.a	A delimited area that is coherent because of its natural and/or social factors			1	An area that is coherent in light of a geographical aspect
1.b	The surrounding visible nature				
2	Synonym of <i>környék</i> and <i>tájék</i>	1	Approximate definition of an area without a specific scale	2	A rural area that is located near to something particular (e.g. a city)
				3	All areas outside of the capital city, Budapest
				4	The people living in rural areas, and their way of life that is first of all characterized by agriculture

These are particularly the meaning of a characteristic tract of land, and a vague spatial orientation. This is illustrated in Table 4.

The language comparison of the word meanings enabled the distinction of three major theme-pairs, where similarities and differences exist between the landscape words of the four languages. These are:

- visuality versus substantiveness
- rural versus urban character
- a connection to the notions of homeland, place of origin, and a traditional country life.

While landscape and paysage primarily indicate a visual experience and do not contain the meaning of the land itself, Landschaft and táj can be readily understood as material reality—for example, as a geographic space or area that can be conceptualized even without thinking of scenery. All landscape words refer to the rural character of the land. However, while in English, German, and Hungarian an ‘urban landscape’ would mean a destroyed landscape (which eventually might not be a landscape at all), the French word paysage can refer positively both to the rural and the urban scene. Its common usage as paysage distinguishes its application to the rural experience (Leuprecht 1996: 39). Landschaft and táj have strong connections to the notions of a homeland (Heimat, haza), the place of origin, and a traditional, pre-industrial country life. However, these formative characteristics play only a minor role in the everyday meanings of English landscape and French paysage today.

Cultural-historical Analysis

The first conclusion of the cultural historical analysis was the identification of three main historic forms of landscape perceptions that have developed successively in the countries. These are the landscape perceptions: 1) through perspective drawing and stage design; 2) via garden art; and 3) in the forms of landscape painting and lithography. The last forms (painting and lithography) were already connected to

the perception of landscape as the surrounding nature outside of the garden, which is the common modus of perceiving landscape today in every investigated country (see also Olwig 2002:164).

The second conclusion of the study is that in Germany and Hungary the different forms of landscape representations were practiced simultaneously for a much longer time than was the case in England or France (see Table 5). For example, while stage design in England and France ceased to express the dominant landscape idea of the intelligentsia once its main proponents—the absolutistic courts—had fallen (notably this has happened approximately 100 years later in France than in England), stage design in German and Hungarian landscape perceptions remained a relevant form of representation (together with the different, partly enlightened forms of absolutism) even until the 19th century. The slower, much longer development of the German and Hungarian landscape perceptions and representations seems to correlate with the specific socio-political development of these countries.

The third and most important result of the cultural-historical analysis is the fact that despite their formal similarities, the historical expressions of landscape in the four countries symbolized and legitimized very different social ideals. The ideas of a “natural way of life” experienced through seemingly similar forms of landscape representations were, in reality, fundamentally different.

By the end of the 18th century in England, the social ideal behind the landscape idea developed to modern liberalism from 17th century absolutism through the moral-philosophically inspired humanism and a new-Whig politeness. In France, absolutistic ideals were for a long time only contested—and not supplemented—by enlightened physiocratic images of a “natural” future. By the early 19th century, landscape became a major symbol of the French Nation, and only after Napoleon’s defeat, and as the cultural contacts with Britain were renewed, could the picturesque style and the liberal social order become widespread in France.

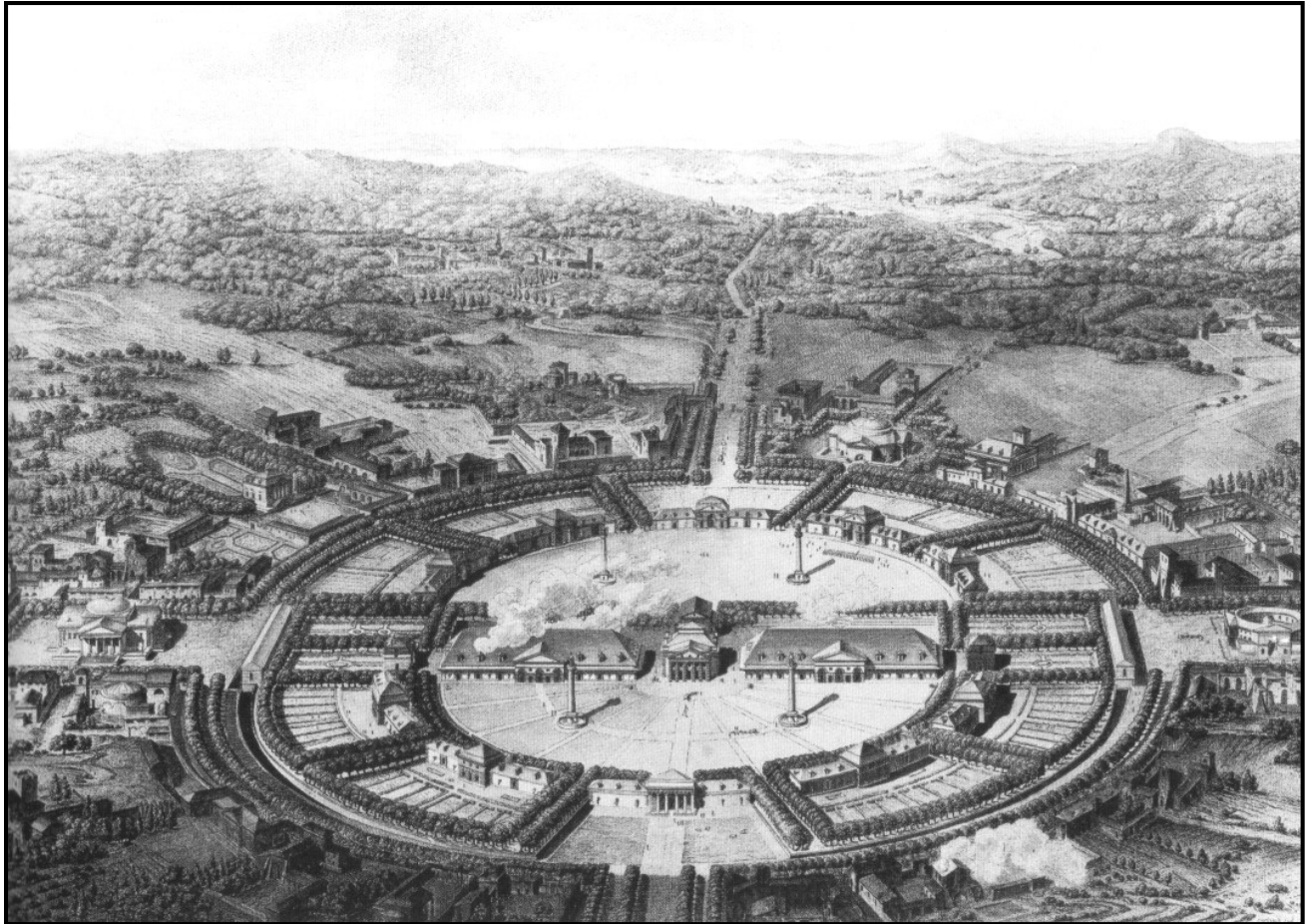


FIGURE 2. Ledoux's depiction of his ideal salt-mine city of Chaux (1803).

Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The development of the landscape concept and related new social ideals was similar in the various independent German States (well before the German nation-state), although occurring at a very different pace than in England and France. *Landschaft* began in more progressive absolutistic German states as stage design, then was interpreted by different enlightened-absolutistic courts as various forms of landscape gardens, and finally was taken as a liberal and democratic symbol and as a view of the unrestricted natural surroundings. However, a main difference occurred in the development of the landscape idea in the German states, compared to England and France, around 1800, during the so-called counter-Enlightenment. An old link to the land and its traditional local (that is, not universal) use—captured by the archaic word *Landschaft*—was

thus re-established in the German landscape concept. *Landschaft* became laden with both visual-aesthetic and substantive meanings, and was perceived and appreciated as a traditional, pre-industrial, and pre-modern rural area and its scenery.

In Hungary, similarly, *táj* first represented the absolutistic ideal (as stage design), then expressed enlightened-absolutistic and modestly liberal social aims (as a landscape garden), then became a symbol of the democratic interpretation of naturalness (as national landscape). Courtly (Hapsburg) landscape interpretations were present throughout the whole 18th and early 19th centuries, though continuously contested by noble-patriotic and, later on, civil-national landscape interpretations, a uniquely Hungarian develop-

TABLE 5. Summary of the identified historic landscape perceptions (light grey indicates stage design, middle grey

Time	England		France	
17th c.	Landscape of absolutism		Paysage of absolutism	
18th c.	Landscape of the moral-philosophically inspired humanists			
		Landscape of the Whig-politeness		
			Paysage of Rococo	
			Paysage of the enlightened aristocracy	
19th c.		Civil liberal landscape		Paysage of the bourgeoisie
				Paysage of civil society

ment. Additionally, the German counter-enlightened ideas of a local-specific, traditional community and its “organically developed” landscape underpinned the discovery and the artistic appreciation of the Hungarian national landscapes, most of all that of the Great Hungarian Plain, known as the Puszta. The Puszta was perceived from the 1840s on as a “natural” legitimization of the Hungarian claims for an independent nation-state (Sárkány 1935: 112). Despite this, the *táj* was not connected to a critique of the enlightenment ideas—*táj*’s most important notion remained the progress of the homeland.

Table 5 summarizes all landscape perceptions identified through the cultural-historical analysis. The shading of the cells indicates the forms of expressions used to represent and to perceive landscape. Light grey is stage design, middle grey stands for landscape

gardens, and dark grey indicates the perception of landscape as a view of the surrounding nature.

Comparison of Results

Finally, I compared the results of the linguistic analysis to the cultural-historical analysis (see Table 6). The column heads show the characteristic features of the respective landscape-words: visibility, substantiveness, urbanity/rurality, and the connection to the notions of a homeland and a traditional country life. Light grey highlights current meanings of the respective landscape words. The rows of the table indicate historic landscape perceptions. Those which correlate most with the appropriate linguistic characteristics are colored dark grey. It is apparent that the last landscape perceptions of the investigated time-frame (those

stands or landscape gardens, and dark grey indicates the perception of landscape as a view of the surrounding nature).

Germany		Hungary			
Landschaft of absolutism	Landschaft of the civil sensibility				
Landschaft of the noble sensibility			Táj of absolutism		
Landschaft of the enlightened absolutism			Táj of Rococo		
Landschaft of the sentimental nobility	Landschaft of the civil democratic and liberal ideals		Táj of the enlightened absolutism	Táj of the feudal patriots	Táj of the enlightened patriotic nobility
	Landschaft of the counter-Enlightenment	Landschaft of Romanticism		Táj of the bourgeois patriotic aristocracy	Táj of the civil sensibility
			Táj of the enlightened absolutism	Táj of the feudal patriots	Táj of the liberal reform-nobility
					Táj of the radical democratic reformers

of the 19th century) have the most correlations with today's landscape perceptions.

The most recent landscape perceptions of the examined time-frame showed the most common features with today's landscape interpretations. These were: in England and France the perceptions of landscape and paysage as symbols of a respectively liberal and democratic civil society, in Germany the counter-enlightened perception of Landschaft as a substantive tract of land, and in Hungary the national Romantic perception of táj as the cradle of an independent nation-state. The main differences existent in the current landscape perceptions (as indicated by the linguistic analysis) seem to be rooted in these last historic perceptions. The older landscape perceptions are useful to explain the processes by which these more recent perceptions have evolved.

CONCLUSION

The cultural-historical research enabled the identification of the roots of the differences between the examined countries' current language-based landscape perceptions. The presented approach of using both linguistic and cultural-historical analyses is an effective method for gaining new knowledge about the historical background of current differences in comparative landscape perceptions. The time frame used in the present study can be broadened in the future to create a comprehensive assessment of our landscape perceptions' more recent cultural-historical development.

Dóra Drexler, *Department of Landscape Ecology, Technische Universität München,*
dora.drexler@uni-corvinus.hu

Table 6. Comparison of the results of the linguistic and the cultural-historical analyses (light grey indicates current meanings of landscape words. Dark grey indicates historic landscape perceptions that correlate most with the appropriate linguistic characteristics).

England	Visuality	Substantiveness	Urbanity	Rurality	Home, place of origin, and traditional country life
Landscape of absolutism	X			X	
Landscape of the moral-philosophically inspired humanists	X	X		X	X
Landscape of the Whig-politeness	X	X		X	
Civil liberal landscape	X			X	
France	Visuality	Substantiveness	Urbanity	Rurality	Home, place of origin, and traditional country life
Paysage of absolutism and Rococo	X			X	
Paysage of the enlightened aristocracy	X	X		X	X
Paysage of the bourgeoisie	X	X		X	
Paysage of civil society	X			X	
Germany	Visuality	Substantiveness	Urbanity	Rurality	Home, place of origin, and traditional country life
Landschaft of absolutism	X			X	
Landschaft of the civil sensibility	X			X	
Landschaft of the noble sensibility	X	X		X	X
Landschaft of the enlightened absolutism	X	X		X	
Landschaft of the sentimental nobility	X	X		X	X
Landschaft of the civil democratic and liberal ideals	X			X	
Landschaft of the counter-Enlightenment	X	X		X	X
Landschaft of Romanticism	X			X	
Hungary	Visuality	Substantiveness	Urbanity	Rurality	Home, place of origin, and traditional country life
Táj of absolutism and Rococo	X			X	
Táj of the feudal patriots	X			X	X
Táj of the enlightened patriotic nobility	X	X		X	X
Táj of the enlightened absolutism	X	X		X	
Táj of the bourgeois patriotic aristocracy	X	X		X	X
Táj of the civil sensibility	X			X	
Táj of the liberal reform-nobility	X	X		X	
Táj of feudal patriotic historicism	X	X		X	X
Táj of the radical democratic reformers	X	X		X	X

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