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A landscape biography of the 'Land of Drumlins': Vooremaa, East Estonia

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12 Conclusions

Biographical narrative is both, a method and a result of this landscape study. A landscape narrative is always changing and will never be complete. In addition to immanent dynamics, landscape conveys various layers of meanings, connotations and values. Landscape is a dynamic palimpsest of transforming heritage.

The three main aims of the current study stated in the introduction were as follows:

- to write a detailed landscape biography for a region in Estonia: Vooremaa
- to test and further elaborate the biographical approach in the process
- to test landscape biography as a tool for heritage management in order to find applications for bridging theory and practise.

In order to achieve these goals, four research questions were posed:

1. What is “landscape” and what are the main concepts involved in landscape biography?

Analysing the discussion on the evolution of the concept of “landscape”, the most essential features characterising a landscape can be highlighted:

- Human dimension: the notion of landscape can not exist without human presence. Landscapes are created by people for people. Landscape in its very essence is utterly anthropocentric notion.
- Place and space (area) in the definition of landscape equal to nature or environment observed, perceived and designed by people. Place on the face of the earth becomes space through structured human-induced activities.
- Time characterises the dynamics or processes in landscape evolution: to study the present and the future of certain landscapes, we must look into the past.
- Interaction between people, places and time create landscapes, which can be perceived by all human senses, and as a result are always individual.

The other important concepts involved with creating landscape biographies include understanding the palimpsest of heritage and its values, which often formulate the bases of stakeholder identities.

2. How to construct a landscape biography for Vooremaa?

The landscape biography of Vooremaa was constructed applying the methods of historical GIS. The landscape narrative was based on the analysis of historical map layers and land use in close correlation with archaeological and folkloristic data. As result a multi-layered landscape narrative for Vooremaa was developed. Data extracted from the historical maps demonstrated that the land use around archaeological sites has always been transforming, and the archaeological monuments, such as settlement sites, burial places, hill forts and natural sacred sites, are part of the changing landscape story, which is still in progress. A landscape biography based on historical GIS also helped to indicate the parts of landscape, which have been more stable and traditional, but also areas which have gone under considerable change.

3. What constitutes a landscape biography for Vooremaa? What are its key elements?

Because the current study had its focus on archaeology, the key elements in the landscape biography of Vooremaa also included the aspects of understanding the long-term human impact on its surrounding landscape. The main topics in the landscape biography of Vooremaa included:

- environmental evolution – how the landscape was formed and changed during the past c. 10 000 years,
- settlement transformation – settlement dynamics based on archaeological knowledge,
- burial sites and natural sacred sites as places of collective memory – how people have buried their dead in the past and how the understanding of supernatural landscape features have been expressed in place-related folklore
- centres and communication – hill forts as central places of power, wealth, trade and movement indicate the focal nodes in the landscape, which have actively been engaging people to exchange knowledge through centuries,
- historic land use around archaeological monuments – in what extent the landscape around archaeological sites has been exploited, and what has been the overall human impact on the archaeological heritage we know today,

4. What is the practical output and value of the landscape biography of Vooremaa and how to integrate it with heritage management goals?

The method of landscape biography very effectively demonstrated that we are not living in “museum landscapes”, and the mission of heritage management is to find sustainable ways of

development and conservation at the same time. Historic GIS could be one application to detect the parts of landscapes, which need to be developed in more subtle manner.

Even though, through historic land use analyses we can detect, which features of the landscape have been most stable, we cannot always conclude that the change itself is of negative nature. Of course, large scale landscape changes (quarries, new high ways), which destroy historic features or layers could be considered negative, but at the same time they add extra new layers to the landscape.

The future of historic landscape and heritage management is in proactive engagement of evidence-based landscape knowledge and stakeholder groups. Landscape is transforming heritage, which is part of everybody's identity and this needs to be explicitly expressed.