

Cultural landscape: joint platform for interdisciplinary field course for geographers and landscape architects

Markéta FLEKALOVÁ^a, Jan TRÁVNÍČEK^b

^aMendelova univerzita v Brně, marketa.flekalova@mendelu.cz

^bMasarykova univerzita, jan.travnicek@mail.muni.cz

Abstract

The article deals with theoretical and methodological questions of interconnection of natural sciences, humanities and applied sciences, all oriented to landscape. This is shown on the example of teaching cooperation between Department of Geography (Masaryk University) and Department of Garden and Landscape architecture (Mendel University in Brno). The possibilities of interdisciplinary cooperation had been tested on joint field course “Landscape Interpretation”, conceived with respect to traditions and present stage of both physical and human geography, landscape ecology, landscape architecture and nature protection praxis. The course was based on interpretative approaches, which had the potential to overcome atomistic disciplinary view. The article points out specifics of both disciplines (landscape architecture and geography), documented in large students’ evaluation of the course and detects the potential of interdisciplinary cooperation for overcoming the barriers and narrow views.

Keywords: landscape, interpretation, interdisciplinarity, Pozořice, South Moravia

Klíčová slova: krajina, interpretace, interdisciplinarita, Pozořice, jižní Morava

1. Úvod

In recent years, attention to the countryside is continuously increasing both in the level of individuals and transnational activities. Landscape is now an important topic in both parts of academic division: in natural sciences focused on empirical work in material reality as well as in humanities which deals with social construction, practices of academic thinking and recently also with production of power-knowledge nexus in terms of Foucault works (2002). Landscape is both material entity and is constructed in process of interpretation according to subjectivity and positionality of observer (or participant). Nevertheless we can't find social constructivism for example in geosystem approach, both polarities are carefully separated out. The aim of the interuniversity course Landscape's Interpretation is to disturb this dichotomy with connection and cooperation of approaches of landscape architects and physical, human and applied geographers and cartographers in the context of interpretative approaches.

The first year of the interuniversity course Landscape Interpretation took place on the 2nd of October 2009. It had 26 participants (13 students from each university), including four PhD. students. The main aim was to intermediate approaches to landscape assessment, to understand landscape both in broader relations and local context, to gain the contacts for future cooperation and to develop interdisciplinary communication. The course prepared the conditions to reach the target in joint students' fieldwork, aimed to analysis of particular

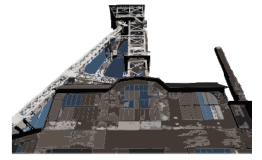
landscape components, their visual indication, perception of landscape, joint interpretations, discussion, proposal of landscape management and confrontation with local activists.

The cadastral areas of Pozořice and Tvarožná, nearby the Brno agglomeration, have been chosen for the realization of the course (Picture 1). Due to localization on transition of different natural conditions, socioeconomic characteristics and historical development (the Dražanská highlands x the Vyškov gate) has the area specific combination of diversity and considerable gradient of both natural and cultural characteristics (geology, morphology, sites, settlement, utilization, ownership, development etc.) and with presence of the border phenomenon – strong transition concentrated into tectonically caused southern edge of Dražanská vrchovina. Historical continuity is strengthened with the area of Slavkov battle in 1805 (listed historical zone). Such a diverse landscape in touch with Brno (Trávníček 2010) means illustration of cultural landscape in the long term formed by many influences and gives the optimal platform for realization of the course.

2. Theoretical background

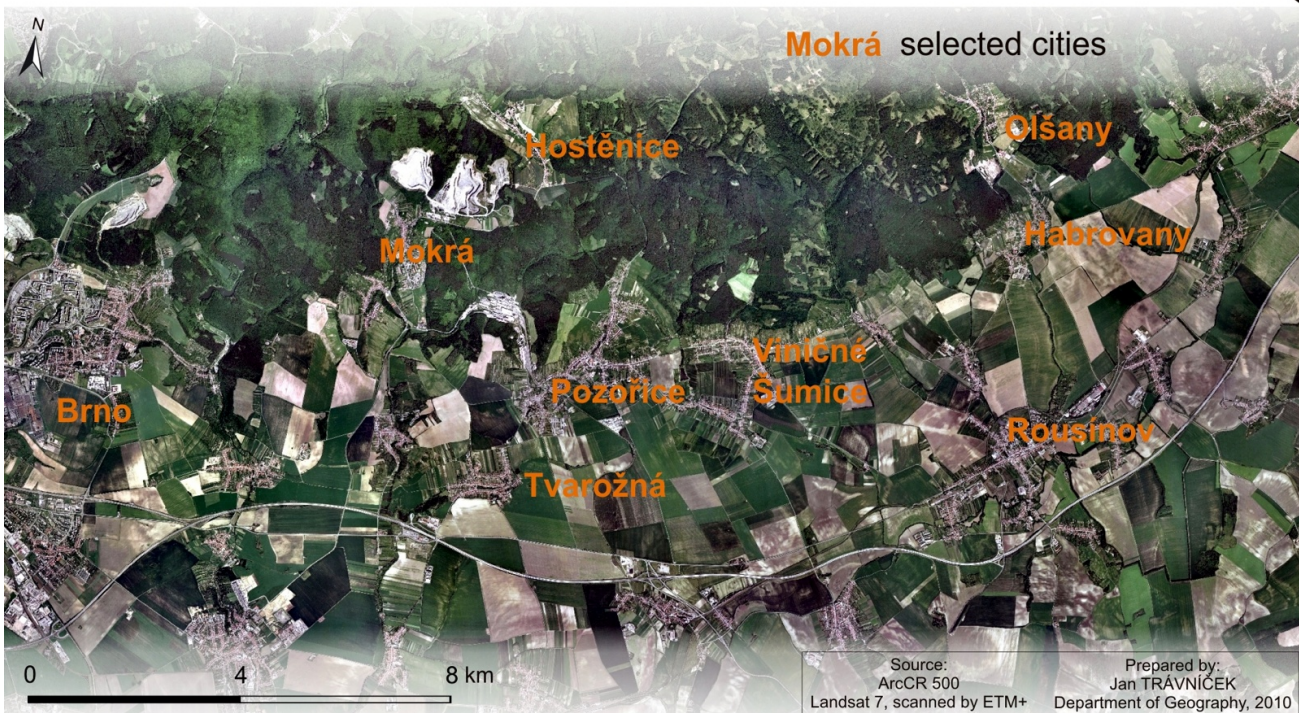
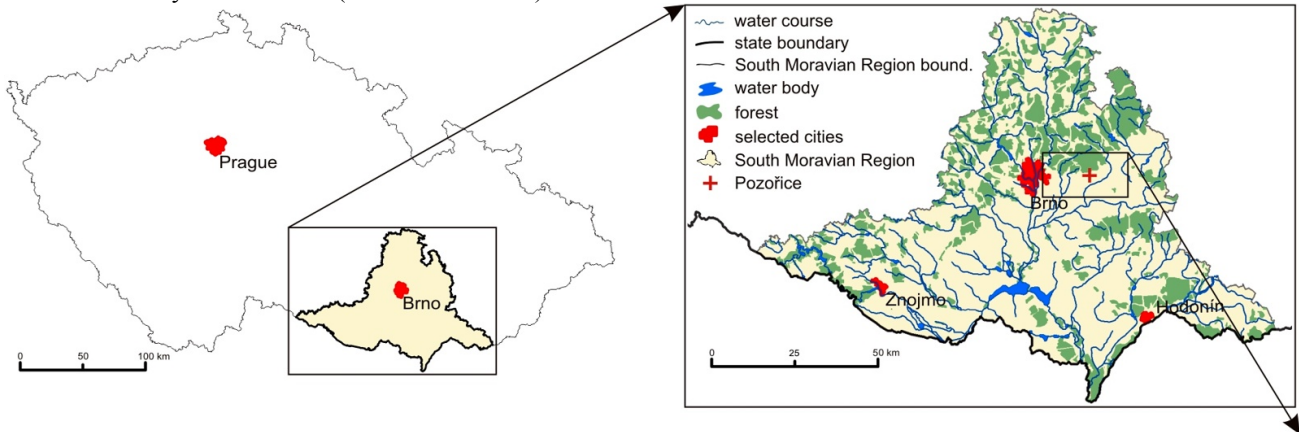
2.1. Cultural landscape in prism of cooperating disciplines

We can indicate a complicated development in the landscape research (see Wylie 2007) from the strict separation of natural environment and human agency to



current understanding of cultural landscape as being the “complex interaction among human ideas, social structures and the physical features of the human environment, in which natural forces and human agency are inextricably entwined” (Jones 2003: 39). This

concept of cultural landscape enables to pick up the approaches and traditions of geographical disciplines, landscape architecture and landscape ecology



Picture 1: Localization of Pozořice on transition between Dražanská vrchovina and Vyškovská brána,
Source: Jan Trávníček

Department of Geography in Masaryk university (previously UJEP) in Brno has a tradition of interdisciplinary team research of interaction of human and nature in cultural landscape, with emphasis to spatial taxonomy units and integrated landscape studies (Hynek, Trnka 1984). This tradition is developed in the course together with principles of complex physical-geographical research (Minár et al. 2001). We don't avoid recent trends of Anglophone human geography (Cloke et al. 2005) or the concept of landscape ecosystems as a capital (Hynek, Hynek 2007) according to Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Alcamo 2003).

Nowadays landscape architecture approaches the landscape often from the perceptual point of view (Salašová 2006), with emphasis on landscape memory (Graham, Howard 2008) and identity of inhabitants (European Landscape Convention 2000). This view is combined with the aspiration on ecological optimizing of landscape management and complex natural view (Míchal in Supuka et al. 2000). Landscape architecture as the discipline taught in Faculty of Horticulture in Mendel University in Brno is based both on architecture and arts (garden, park and urban space design) and biological sciences (dendrology, ecology). The necessity



of linking these approaches is visible also in investigating landscape (Salašová, Vorel 2004). Basic inspiration for interdisciplinary cooperation is connection of geography and ecology in landscape ecology with until now applicable tradition of Czechoslovak applied investigation (LANDEP method) and geosystem concept of landscape. Another inspiration are interdisciplinary overlaps (Marsch 2005) and transdisciplinary concepts in public participation (Tress, Tress 2002). Tress et al. (2006) suggest enhancing complexity of landscape management in projects solved by interdisciplinary teams.

2.2 Cultural landscape, its perception and assessment

The landscape in Central-European space is as a matter of fact everywhere influenced by humans, therefore can be identified as cultural. Its perception and assessment is influenced by many factors, their understanding requires interdisciplinary interpretative approach. They are: biologically given preferences (Stella, Stibral 2009), cultural context (Stibral 2005), fashion (Fingerová, Finger 1999), education (Vorel 1999), profession and home-place (Librová 1987), partly gender and age (Rose 1993), psychological type (Valenta 2008), domestic landscape (Librová 1988), previous experiences with landscape (Kolektiv 2008).

Respect to many layers of cultural landscape and interpretative approach to its perception and assessment becomes a demand for communication of experts dealing with landscape both among them and with “laics”, who enter assessment and decision making processes as interested public – local people with legitimate requirements for management and use of landscape (European landscape convention 2000). However, opinions of experts and public often differ (specified by Vouligny et al. 2009). In this way landscape is not only an objective reality or three-dimensional space with visible objects. It is also an expression and perception of an area, local knowledge and meanings which are (re)produced in social and cultural practices of local people (Olwig 2007). Introduced course has been conceived to prepare student for these actual trends.

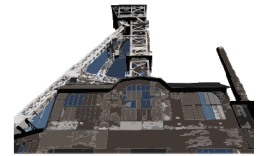
3. Results of the course

To fulfill the aims of the interuniversity course and its importance for communication of both disciplines can be illustrated on one hand by differences in carrying out the tasks in the terrain (on the example of landscape sketch), on the other hand from evaluation of the questionnaire in the end of the course, which has been in the same time the source for enhancing the course in next years. The evaluation questionnaire contained basic identifications (name, school, study specialization, year) and six questions:

1. What did I expect and the course brought or not (c. 15 lines):
2. What did I like and what not, what to do differently – suggestions (c. 15 lines):
3. What did I learn new in the course? (c. 5 to 15 lines)
4. What did I knew about the landscape in Pozořice surrounding? (c. 1 to 10 lines)
5. What do I think about the landscape in Pozořice surrounding after the course? How much is it influenced by training and activities done in the course? (c. 15 lines)
6. My suggestion for landscape management in Pozořice surrounding and why (c. 15 lines):

The expectations (Question 1) of geographers are equally distributed among the fear of a dull course and expecting new, interesting approaches. Among landscape architects the expectations are mostly positive, they accent the landscape, to which they will go. After the course (Question 2) landscape architects assessed affirmatively in advance got information about the course and the atmosphere of the course. Geographers appreciated new teaching methods and they missed the possibility to prepare for the model area, which was kept in secret. The difference is visible in the suggestions for changes in the course as well – landscape architects would like to have more cooperation in mixed groups, geographers suggest more work in groups according to disciplines with the confrontation of different opinions afterwards.

New knowledge gain in the course (Question 3) is more admitted by landscape architects, both in expert and social level. Previous knowledge of landscape in Pozořice surrounding (Question 4) had almost no one from both groups. The geographers accent the role of human and his connection to landscape in model area – cultural landscape (Questions 5 a 6), they do not admit the change of mind after the course. Among landscape architects the assessment through “official theorems” prevails (intensively used agricultural landscape, emphasis on vegetation in landscape) – Picture 2. Landscape architects but discuss more their position to landscape related to the course, they admit changing the opinion and perception of landscape in broader context afterwards. In suggestions for landscape management the landscape architects more often aims a particular place and are more focused on role of dispersed vegetation and with concrete suggestions they solve recreational potential. For the significant landscape element Poustka the landscape architect are more radical, but similar in opinions – they accent people and their needs (benches, orchard), but this is the usual formula applied by all the students. The geographers, on the other hand, apply more the environmental opinions, which doubt the necessity of managing landscape elements if there is not an economical use and therefore they give space for succession.



Picture 2: Landscape character assessment workshop, photo: Daniela Vítovská

The differences between disciplines could be clearly seen during the landscape sketch as well (the technique of fast drawing to catch main landscape features). Landscape architects (artistic talent is the condition of entering the studies) have precise sketches, the understandability is but subject to artistic quality. Sketches are similar and impersonal, the personality is shown in the text. The page is fulfilled equally and step by step enhanced by details (consequence of education) with shown depth, as the quality of landscape the diversity is shown. The geographers (hand drawing is not developed during studies) do not have both the technique and speed. In the limited time they catch only (for them) important things, the genesis of sketches is more visible and so interpretation is easier – the dominant features usually mirrors study specialization (e.g. human geographers accent the human presence in landscape by drawing the highway, airplanes, other participants of the course or own legs). Both disciplines then emphasize vegetation (precise drawing) instead of buildings, equally catch positive (the church in Pozořice) and negative (high voltage line) manmade dominants.

4. Discussion – evaluation of the course according to aims of interuniversity cooperation

The landscape architects can be described as more flexible and open, thanks to the education style of the discipline able to improvise (they do not mind not knowing the model are in advance and therefore not being able to prepare) and argue for their own invention. They are prepared better to accept innovations and they admit changing their opinion during the course (the strongest example is the Manor garden, first seen as the adaptation not respecting history of the place, which was perceived negatively, but after discovering it was a result of participatory planning, the form became more acceptable – Picture 3). Landscape is not seen only as a study subject, but as well as place for future realization. Social aspects of education are of the same importance as knowledge and abilities gained. The gender difference

can be observed (landscape architecture is a domain of women) – stronger tendency for cooperation. In the same time the uniformity of interpretations and preferred solutions, according to a current paradigm of the landscape architecture. Anyway, landscape architects have limited ability to identify and link physiographic characteristics of the area with secondary and tertiary landscape structure. Cooperation with geographers can strengthen a complex approach to landscape by combination of elementary and holistic view. The inspiration is in geographers' emphasis on causality, visuality and interpretation of landscape elements and relations between them directly in the terrain.

The students of geography are more rigid and traditionalistic in their positions, they find limitative the disability to prepare in advance, they do not improvise and are afraid of showing lack of knowledge. They have more strict ideas and expectations. They perceive the course with the prism of expertise and anything out of this frame (relations, atmosphere) didn't touch them, or they do not find it important. The opinions to management are diversified, the geographers can avoid the schematic solution and are more critical to biocentrism concepts. Quite often they do not realize basic parameters of subjectivity, they do not acknowledge pluralistic approach and intersubjectivity in scientific work. The interdisciplinary cooperation helps them to stronger flexibility and self reflection through interpretative approach and interdisciplinary overlaps, with which the landscape architecture has long-lasting experience.



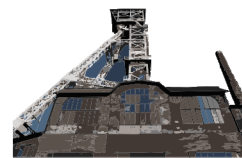
Picture 3: Discussion with local activist A. Tinka in Manor garden in Pozořice, photo: Daniela Vítovská

5. Conclusion

There have been discovered big differences (through discussions, landscape sketch and final evaluations) in approaches of both disciplines to landscape. Opinions of students show up being formed by the climate of the discipline in standard education. Joint course has been for participating students benefit especially in opening



XXII SJEZD ČESKÉ GEOGRAFICKÉ SPOLEČNOSTI OSTRAVA 2010



new perspectives, disturbing the stereotypes and overcoming barriers between disciplines. Cultural landscape is thus a visual aid intermediating variability of approaches to its assessment and understanding and ideal communicational platform.

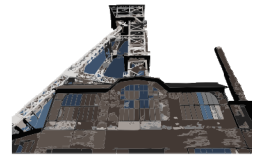
The course has positive effects in out-of-school level as well. Students' proposals of arrangements for significant landscape element Poustka have been given to public utility company Větrák Pozořice and are used as one of the basis for management proposal. New personal connections led to participation of some students in development of Pozořice. Continuation of the course (in extended form) is prepared for October 2010.

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XXII SJEZD ČESKÉ GEOGRAFICKÉ SPOLEČNOSTI OSTRAVA 2010



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Authors' addresses:

Ing. Markéta Flekalová
Ústav plánování krajiny, Zahradnické fakulty
Mendelovy univerzity v Brně
Valtická 337
691 44 Lednice
marketa.flekalova@mendelu.cz

Mgr. Jan Trávníček
Geografický ústav
Přírodovědecké fakulty
Masarykovy univerzity
Kotlářská 2
611 37 Brno
jan.travnicek@mail.muni.cz