

# What does landscape mean to people? Investigating the holistic human-environmental relationship



Landscapes result from continuous interactions between humans and their physical environments. This dynamic reciprocal interaction is strongly determined by the understanding people have of landscapes, which is continuously influenced by cultural values and social processes between individuals and different groups with shared collective ideas and valuation systems.

Different perspectives on the environment meet in the holistic landscape system. These should all be included when striving for a sustainable, democratic landscape development. In that way, the physical environment acts as a unifying common ground where different individuals and groups, with their various understandings and valuations of the landscape can find each other, and thus aiding in community building. Therefore, it is paramount to further understand this complex human-environmental system and the underlying social processes, identifying different landscape perspectives and how they are represented in the landscape system.

The main topic of this PhD research is to get a clearer, in-depth understanding of the holistic, complex human-environmental system, investigating its main components, underlying processes and influencing factors. One of the main challenges this research presents is to combine different landscape perspectives, translated in different research traditions. Bridging the two main research traditions in Landscape research – landscape ecology, starting from the bio-physical environment and its human management and on the other hand a more socio-cultural approach, starting from human perception of landscapes as put forward by disciplines such as environmental psychology and human geography – has proved to be an important but difficult challenge over past decades. However, as explained above, it is essential to get a full understanding of the holistic human-environmental system landscapes are. This is paramount in striving for sustainable landscape management.