

# Europe's Cultural Landscape: archaeologists and the management of change

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*Cover illustration: An early medieval stronghold at Moraczewo, in the Wielkopolska region of Poland, one of c. 7,000 entries on the Polish official register of scheduled sites and monuments. The stronghold is dated to between the 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century AD, and is associated with the power base of the Polanie tribe, one of the foundations of the future feudal Christian State. It sits within an agricultural landscape of much later date. Current agriculture activities on or near the site are monitored by the Service for the Protection of Monuments. The modern farm near the stronghold was built before the site was designated in 1972. Photo: W. Stêpień.*

# 19: Spessart goes Europe: the historic landscape characterisation of a German upland region

Gerhard Ermischer

**Abstract:** *The Archaeological Spessart-Project (ASP) deals with the cultural landscape of the Spessart, a German upland region with an image of poverty and lack of history. Since 1999 it has been one of twelve projects in ten countries participating in a pan-European EU Culture 2000 programme, called European Pathways to the Cultural Landscape. This programme is concerned with the study, communication and sustainable management of cultural landscapes. Historic Landscape Characterisation and GIS play an important role. The exchange of experience between experts of very different institutions coming from regions with different traditions is one of the main features of the programme. Coming after the first year of intensive networking, this paper is a report on the results achieved. New perspectives allowed the participants to review their own work and formulate specific answers to local problems. It seems unlikely to overcome all differences, but the diversity of perspectives has proved to be enriching and interesting to all.*

## Introduction

The Archaeological Spessart Project (ASP) is a locally-based community focussed project started in 1994 (fig. 19.1). Initially only concerned with very traditional archaeological research in a long neglected area, it has gradually shifted its interest towards a holistic approach to a cultural landscape. In 1998 a 'Spessart GIS' was initiated as a modern way of collecting and processing data about this landscape. Practical experience led towards something like historic landscape characterisation, without using the term at the time. It became clear that we had to start from the present-day landscape, even when we wanted to describe the history of a landscape and how it changed through time. It also became clear that the traditional archaeological approach of mapping dots and lines (eg finds, sites, historic roads) had to be shifted to define and describe whole areas when dealing with a complete landscape.

Thus important features of historic landscape characterisation were implemented in the Spessart GIS, but contact with colleagues from English Heritage allowed us to bind those experiences into a greater discussion of the aims and philosophy of historic landscape characterisation (see Fairclough, Lambrick & Hopkins this volume). This discussion became a major focus of the European partner project initiated by the ASP, European Pathways to Cultural Landscapes (EPCL), which achieved funding from the EU for a 3 years campaign ([www.pcl-eu.de](http://www.pcl-eu.de); see also Kraut, Nord Paulsson, and Darlington this volume). This paper will highlight some of the experiences of EPCL so far, and demonstrate the importance of networking and international communication for studying, understanding and communicating the values of cultural landscapes.

This paper will give a German perspective on historic landscape characterisation, although it is important to stress that it is only that - *one* German perspective, not *the* German

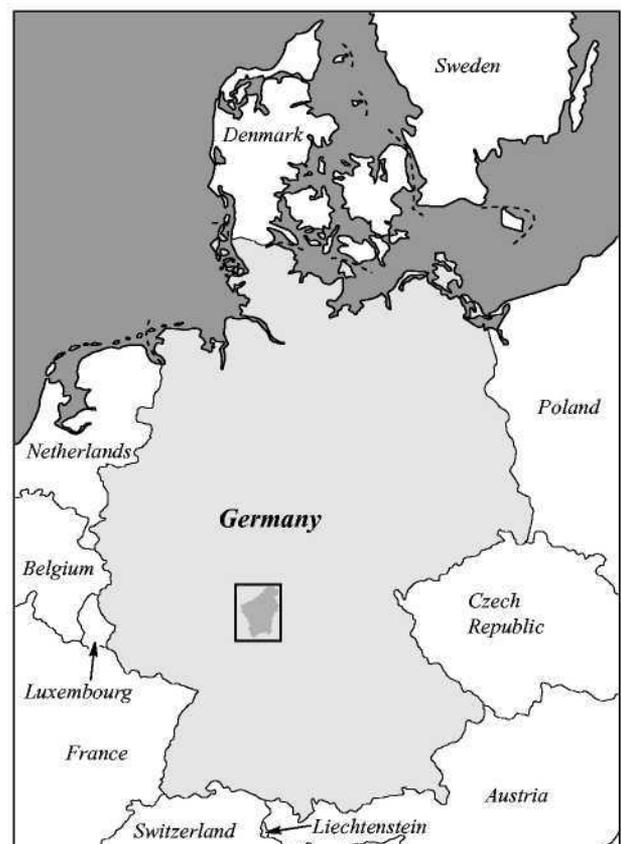


Fig. 19.1: Germany, showing the location of the Spessart region.

perspective. It would be impossible to give *the* German perspective, not least because of the federal structure of German heritage management and the very different approaches in different German federal states (the *Länder*). It should be stated that the study of cultural landscapes, historic landscape characterisation and the use of GIS is not very widespread in German heritage management, although single projects are proceeding, for example in the Rhine land and the Black Forest. However, no comparable schemes exist to the nation-wide campaigns for historic landscape characterisation by English Heritage.

The Spessart Project as a bottom up initiative has links with the local and regional heritage management, as well as with local government, but it started its work more from a scientific perspective than out of concern for planning and development needs. As a non-profit association or charity the Project is not involved directly in planning processes, but can only influence by discussion and persuasion. The Project's view is, therefore, not representative of all of Germany, and is highly subjective; its attitudes have also probably been more influenced by networking with partners all over Europe than by specific German approaches.

**Short description of the Spessart area**

The Spessart is a large upland region dominated by woodland (fig. 19.2). It is a mountainous area that together with the Odenwald and the Rhön forms the northern border of Southern Germany. In the south of the Spessart we find the river Main which divides the Spessart from the Odenwald in the west. The river Main provides good conditions for shipping, and it seems that this has been exploited since the Neolithic. It gives access to the Rhine valley, which can also be reached by various pathways through the Spessart, one of which is still used today as the A3, the most frequented highway of Germany.

The Spessart was first settled at the beginning of the Neolithic and since then human impact has changed this landscape several times, from a forested area to pasture and arable land and back to a forest. The 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly, have been times of poverty that have created an image of a landscape neglected and without history.

Today the Spessart is a highly interesting landscape - at second glance. It is a region with two major problems: its administrative structure and its image. Today the Spessart is divided between five districts, none of which is a pure Spessart-district. As well as fractions of the Spessart, each district includes considerable areas outside the Spessart, which are often larger and more densely populated. So the Spessart is hardly the main concern of the districts. More importantly a border between two different German *Länder* divides the Spessart: the larger southern part belongs to Bavaria, the smaller northern part to Hesse. To understand the importance of this border, one has to know the German

federal system. It gives considerable autonomy to all federal states, specially valued in the 'Free State of Bavaria'. *Culture*, by constitution, is an affair of the *Länder*, the federal states. So 16 different laws exist for the cultural heritage, and an even larger number of public structures dealing with it. This provides difficulties of its own, if one tries to define a common picture of the Spessart region. Research on both sides of the border has followed different paths as far back as the formation of the German states in 1814-15. Obstacles arise even on the most basic technical level. It is virtually impossible for example to bring together maps produced by the state heritage management in the two federal states. They use different scales, projections and even a different standard meridian. Try as you like, you cannot cut and paste the maps and simply form one for the complete region.

**Founding the Archaeological Spessart Project**

These problems became very obvious in 1994 when a cross border initiative was formed to develop the Spessart region. Local and regional administrations and public, private and economic institutions worked together to form the *Bayerisch-Hessisches Spessartprojekt* (the Bavarian-Hessian Spessart Project). In September 1994 a working group 'archaeology' was constituted. For the first time archaeologists of state heritage management, local museums and universities of the region met on a regular basis to

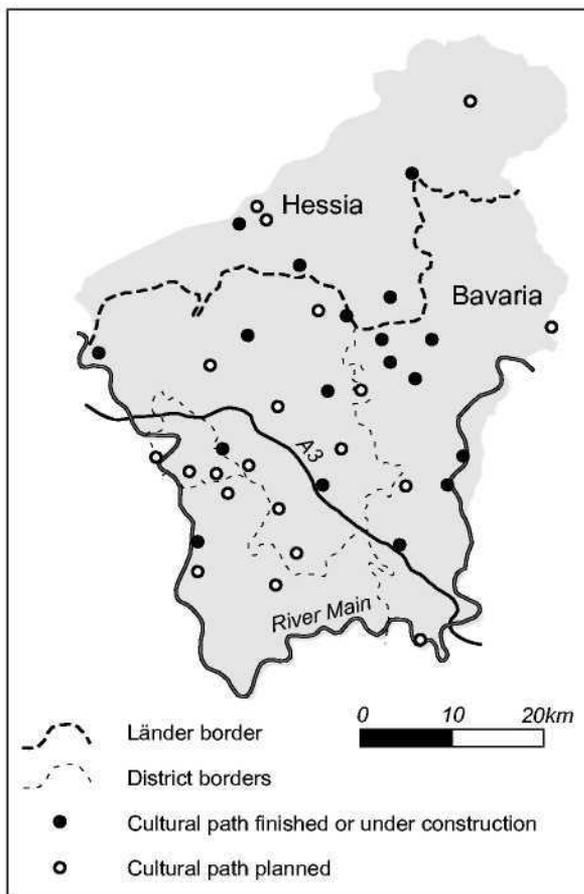


Fig.19.2: The Spessart region, with cultural paths, which have been completed or are under construction, and planned.

exchange information and experiences and define common goals for the future, however, the basis of information was poor.

One reason for this was the lack of interest in the heritage management on all administrative levels in the Spessart. Today it is a densely forested area and therefore the threat to potential archaeological monuments was considered low. Compared to the degree of destruction of archaeological monuments in urban centres and areas of industrialised agriculture, the Spessart region was a low priority. Limited available resources were directed to other areas, and systematic investigation did not and could not take place here. The second reason points to the second great problem of the Spessart: its image. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a good part of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the Spessart was a region of poverty, as are most upland regions in Europe. This image of poverty initiated the image of a lack of history, or at least any history of interest.

The lack of information and the small number of archaeologists interested, even marginally, in the Spessart, forced the working group to look for colleagues in other disciplines, who might be able to contribute more knowledge to the few shreds actually existing. It appeared that geographers, geologists and biologists had been much more interested in the Spessart than archaeologists, producing a lot of evidence for a much more vivid and interesting past than was generally assumed. Often they had difficulties in interpreting their data, as the common archaeological literature described the region as dull and of little interest. So the discussion between archaeologists, historians and natural scientists came as a revelation, and the picture of the Spessart changed dramatically for those who participated in this dialogue.

In autumn 1995, after a large congress on the Spessart, the working group for archaeology decided to formulate a follow-up project, the Archaeological Spessart Project (ASP), which was therefore multidisciplinary from the beginning. Nevertheless, the dominating archaeologists still formulated goals that were quite traditional, like combining existing data in a common (computerised) system and initiating research to compensate different interests in the Bavarian and Hessian part of the Spessart in the last century. There also was nevertheless a feeling from the beginning, however, that to gain a better understanding the Project should look at the landscape as a whole, and not just certain groups of monuments. It was also strongly felt that there must be public integration not least because volunteers managed by the district archaeologists of Gelnhausen played an important role in determining future research questions.

### **Spessart goes Europe**

All these intentions were merely academic at the time, as there could be no project without funding, and finding financial support proved difficult. This changed only when

the ASP came in contact with a small group of mostly Scandinavian organisations, which were just starting co-operation on cultural landscapes. Contact was established at the final congress of the Council of Europe's Bronze Age Campaign in Berlin in 1997. Eventually five partners came together - the City Museums of Odense (Denmark), Rogaland County Council (Norway), the National Board of Antiquities (Estonia), the ASP (Germany) and Föreningen Bronstid (Sweden) - to form European Cultural Paths (ECP), a project on the Bronze Age landscape, managed by the Swedish partner (see Kraus this volume). ECP's successful application for two years funding from the EC RAPHAEL programme made all the difference to the ASP and the new funding worked as a door opener to local and regional administrations. The European co-operation also changed the structure and intentions of the ASP. New ways of thinking and different perspectives influenced the ASP: the approach to the cultural landscape became more holistic, archaeology became less dominant, public awareness became more important and aspects of landscape management became its focus.

The co-operation within ECP has been extremely successful. The ASP had started a number of collaborations with universities and research institutes beforehand, mainly the Universities of Würzburg and Frankfurt, the Technical University of Berlin and, most importantly, the Senckenberg Research Institute. In 1998 a project was started with the University Frankfurt by Dr. Thorsten Westphal to produce a standard dendrochronology of the Spessart. In the meantime thousands of samples were measured and oak and beech can now be traced back well into prehistoric times. The immigration of spruce and pine in more recent times has also been investigated. The dendrochronological profiles are not only important for dating wood, but also provide a unique data basis for climatic research.

In 1999, for the first time a scientist could be employed fulltime by the ASP. Dr. Gerrit Himmelsbach is still responsible for all the public work of the ASP and is in charge of establishing and promoting cultural paths. Initially only a few cultural paths were planned, but soon these developed into a network that covers most of the Spessart. Every path has its own theme: transport and trade in the early modern period, hunting parties of the Bavarian kings, agriculture and forestry, mining, glass production, Iron Age hillforts, high medieval castle sites and so on. They take into account local characteristics as well as the whole picture of the cultural landscape.

When the RAPHAEL funding ended in 1999, all the partners decided at the final meeting in Odense to continue networking and to create a set of follow-up projects. One of these was the Northern Bronze Age Road, headed by the Norwegian partner; another was European Pathways to the Cultural Landscape (EPCL), a project studying, communicating and managing marginal landscapes, headed by the ASP. After Odense a preliminary meeting was

organised in Aschaffenburg (Germany) in December 1999, and another meeting in Kilkenny (Ireland) at the beginning of 2000. As a result, archaeologists and others working in ten European countries on twelve sample landscape areas flocked together to create EPCL: The Czech Republic (Prácheňsko), Denmark (Funen), England (Bowland Forest/Lune Valley, see Darlington this volume), Estonia (Kaali), Finland (Untamala), Germany (Albersdorf and Spessart), Ireland (Dowris), Italy (Paneveggio/Vanoi), Sweden (Bjäre, see Nord Paulsson this volume), and Halland, and Wales (Arfon). Participating organisations range from charities and non-profit institutes, local and regional museums, district administrations, state heritage managers to universities, research institutes and an academy of science. They represent the variety of organisations dealing with the cultural landscape, just as the sample landscapes themselves represent the diversity of Europe's landscape, ranging from coastal regions to high alpine areas, including wetlands, drylands, marshes, bogs, heather, pasture, arable land and woodland.

### **The Spessart GIS and EPCL**

In 2000, the staff working for the ASP could be increased. A physical geographer, Jürgen Jung, has joined the team, situated in the research institute for upland regions of the Senckenberg Institute, in the middle of the Spessart, with responsibility for developing the Spessart GIS. This is a powerful tool with a highly structured database collecting information about archaeological sites and monuments, geology, biology, agriculture and forestry, historic documents and maps and so forth. The GIS can combine this data in an unlimited number of ways, producing highly informative maps, allowing the modelling of the cultural landscape in time and even three-dimensional animations. Most importantly, it brings together the data of the whole Spessart region, crossing administrative borders. In its complexity as well as the size of the sample area it is quite unique in Germany.

At the end of 2000, the project team was informed that the bid for 3 years funding as a multi-annual, structured network in the framework of the EU Culture 2000 Programme (Directorate General for Education and Culture) had been successful. With a change of the leading partnership from the city of Aschaffenburg to the commune of Albersdorf, the project proceeded efficiently, with the ASP as organiser. Mr. Harald Rosmanitz M.A. was employed as project co-ordinator, with an office in the city of Lohr in the Spessart. Since then a multilingual Internet platform has been constructed, two general meetings and seminars have been held in Lancaster (England) and Fiero di Primiero (Italy) and four more are planned, a number of staff exchanges have taken place between partner organisations, an exhibition on the sample landscapes has been initiated and exchange and co-operation between the partners has flourished. After the first project year all partners could present extremely positive results at local level, with a lot of fascinating research, GIS work and publicity.

The ASP grew as well in 2001, when Sabine Hoffmann M.A. was employed to develop a local museum in Frammersbach, mainly dedicated to the famous teamsters of Frammersbach, who transported goods from Nuremberg to Antwerp in early modern times. They also serve as a good example of the problems the region experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when new technologies left the teamsters with their horse driven carts unemployed, and badly paid home textile production served as a weak economic surrogate (fig. 19.3). This is the time when the Spessart was associated with the image of poverty.

But more important still for the development of the ASP was the co-operation within a European network. The tools and strategies of landscape study, GIS mapping and historic landscape characterisation have been discussed vividly, and not uncontroversially, across the network. Different intentions as well as traditions led to very different perspectives, and for all partners there is much to learn and to teach. A number of common points are emerging, as discussion sharpens our view on our own approaches and alters them in many ways.

### **Historic landscape characterisation and the European discussion**

GIS and historic landscape characterisation are the heart of contemporary landscape study and therefore have been the main focus of PCL in its first year. The necessity for a European forum to discuss the aims, goals, methodology and philosophy of historic landscape characterisation and the study of cultural landscapes in general was a starting point for the new European project on cultural landscapes and an important argument in the application - an argument well approved by the EU and the international committee of experts evaluating the applications. It therefore may be quoted here:

As in many other areas of the human sciences the research of cultural landscapes is facing new challenges. The archaeology of cultural landscapes is still a young discipline, working with new methods and sources. So the experiences with these methods and tools are still very different. The goal of this project is to find common solutions and to foster a better understanding of the different attempts. Primarily we want to define our ideas. We have to ensure that we use a common language and speak about the same things. This will also help to disseminate the interesting results of these studies to a wide public.

Cultural landscapes like the Spessart reflect the cultural diversity of Europe and are an important element of Europe's natural as well as cultural heritage. Like all landscapes selected for this project the Spessart suffers from the image of poverty. This region often is not perceived as a cultural landscape at all. The European project will improve the image



*Fig. 19.3: Changes in the economic landscape of the Spessart in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were closely linked to the building of the railway. This picture shows the station at Lochmühle, today the buildings serve as the home of the Research Station of Upland Regions of the Senckenberg Institute - the railway no longer exists.*

of these landscapes and raise the interest of the local population. The project will also be an important contribution to a more European approach of the cultural landscapes in science. It will advertise simultaneously the European cultural heritage in the selected regions. European co-operation should raise the interest in cultural landscapes in general.

When setting up the application one aim was to involve partners from as many different regions and with as distinct scientific and cultural traditions as possible. Another goal was to involve organisations dealing with the cultural landscape on different levels. This proved particularly important during the project. Seen from a German perspective for example, the Anglo-Irish area seems to be quite monolithic in its scientific tradition and very different from German approaches, especially when talking about archaeology. On the other hand this area seems to be quite closely linked to the Scandinavian region. The discussions between the English and Welsh partners revealed, however, very distinct and different approaches to historic landscape characterisation and the underlying philosophy. Also within the Scandinavian partners quite different approaches became visible. Historic landscape characterisation and the way it is carried out very much depend on the goals formulated, and it is extremely dependent on scale. Scale is more than a mere quantity, but rather it is a factor of quality.

If large-scale historic landscape characterisation is to be carried out, covering complete counties all at once, and in a scheme to characterise a complete country, like England, it has to be restricted to a very basic approach. It is desktop based, working on existing maps and archival material and with little or no field work undertaken in the region concerned. On the other hand a characterisation of a very small area can be based on a variety of sources, including fieldwork and field survey carried out especially for the project. The difference in methodology makes it difficult to compare results. The English partner project in Lancashire, a county where historic landscape characterisation was completed quite recently (see Darlington this volume), is therefore dedicated to a small part of the county. This closer focus will allow characterisation on a much smaller-scale to be carried out in greater detail, so that it can be compared to the county-wide general characterisation, and the possibilities of inter-linking the results can be explored.

Scale is not the only difference between these approaches. The aim of historic landscape characterisation of course is to influence methods as well as results. If the first aim is to produce a tool for future planning decisions, interest will be focused on the actual state of the landscape and its character. If the project is driven by more scientific interests, for example modelling the change of a specific landscape through time and understanding the human impact on landscape change or even climatic change, the

process of shaping the landscape will be much more important. Also the form of the organisation undertaking the research has a significant influence. Bottom up approaches, like the ASP, which have to work with volunteers and get the interest of local politicians as well as private enterprises to find funding, are forced to do their work in close relation to the local population. They have to involve local people in their work and have to interest them in this work. Therefore they are more likely to appreciate the special perspective of local people to their own landscape and how they characterise their landscape, than top down projects, which are undertaken by big research institutes.

These approaches do not necessarily have to be exclusive. In fact there are some common features to any study of cultural landscapes and historic landscape character, which should not be neglected. They always have to start with the actual, modern landscape. Even when predominantly interested in the history of the landscape or the state of the landscape in a specific period, to get down to these vanished landscapes one has to start with the present working landscape. So historic landscape characterisation that is only interested in the character of the present landscape, which is dedicated to future change and future planning decisions, will nevertheless be a perfect starting platform for any research dedicated to past landscapes. A study of a whole landscape must lead to the characterisation of areas, not simply to the mapping of dots and lines, as described earlier. The classical find spots, sites and archaeological/historical features like roads, boundaries, field walls or hedges nevertheless can be a valuable source for characterising the landscape as well as exploring its history. Of course, they are often very subjective sources, as their density, quality or even the time they originate from is highly dependant on the interests and working capacities of researchers past and present. Actual field survey is labour intensive, time consuming and expensive, and therefore in most cases will only be possible in small chosen areas.

The difference between sources and their qualities is one of the greatest obstacles to achieving comparable results. Here modern technique can help to overcome this problem. The most important tool for historic landscape characterisation, for gathering and processing data, is the computer based GIS. Although GIS is a most powerful tool to produce maps, in the first place it is a database system. A highly structured database can be processed in any number of ways. If one respects some basic rules of scientific work, such as clearly stating the sources of specific information, it is easy to produce single source maps, however divers the sources of all data filed may be. Comparability therefore can be achieved very easily.

The full understanding of the potentials of GIS and an open view on historic landscape characterisation, its philosophy and purpose, can be a basis on which very different approaches can meet and different partners can

interact. What has been achieved in EPCL so far, and hopefully will continue and grow during the rest of the project, can be a model for future interaction and co-operation. The different approaches can be respected and continue alongside each other, not isolated, but within a network of exchange and communication. A good example for this was the first EPCL staff exchange between the Swedish partner in Bjäre and the English partner in Lancashire. It should help the Swedish partner to overcome some problems when setting up their own GIS system and historic landscape characterisation strategy - and proved to be extremely successful, although the Swedish solution was not a copy of the English approach. Experiences gained in Lancashire helped to formulate their own solution, tailored to their needs and aims.

### **From historic landscape characterisation to sustainable management**

Although the Spessart project started its work with the aim of understanding and describing the history of the cultural landscape of the Spessart area, it became involved in questions of planning, developing and managing the landscape. Initial ideas about fostering cultural tourism developed along with strategies to involve as many local people as possible in the study and communication of the cultural landscape, raising interest by showing economic potentials. Providing solutions for sustainable management became more important during the progress of the project, although the only way to communicate them continued to be by talking to decision-makers and through local forums and seminars. Another reason for this greater involvement in management questions was the success of the cultural paths, laid out originally to give local people access to the archive of their landscape, to make the hidden features of past human activities more visible and perceptible.

The cultural paths created in the Spessart are built in close co-operation with local historical societies, the Spessartbund (a regional rambling society with a large membership), the state heritage management and environment management, local governments, forest directories and many other organisations (fig. 19.2). They are dedicated to special themes typical for the chosen region, such as, traffic and transport in Frammersbach, hunting parties of the royal Bavarian court in Bischbrunn or mining in Biebergemünd (fig. 19.4). Seven cultural paths are finished and open to the public and a further 30 or so are planned. At present around 12 paths are under construction. For each path a concept of maintaining and communicating the path has been created with local organisations. A training programme for guides has been developed together with relevant institutions such as regional economic societies, tourist organisations and second chance schools.

To raise awareness of the cultural landscapes special events and activities have been organised, such as the 'Kunst-Rasen' (Art-Lawn), a project where artists produced



Fig. 19.4: The opening of a cultural path at Biebergemünd, dedicated to the story of mining in the area. The signposts and information boards are all produced in the same layout and information folders and leaflets are available to complement the paths.

works of art in local factories using the materials processed in those enterprises. Art reflected the cultural landscape were exhibited at the royal hunting lodge at Rohrbrunn, the park of Bad Orb, the castle gardens of Aschaffenburg, at the 'days of the region' in Gelnhausen, and some of the objects have been successfully display at local hotels in the region.

It may be typically German, but a great variety of activities organised by the ASP made many colleagues question the project. Some asked, if this was still an archaeological project, or even if there is archaeology in the project at all. Although some excavations and traditional field survey's take place, they are not dominant features in this colourful project. The holistic approach gives preference to no single discipline. Quoting one of the famous fathers of German archaeology, Rudolf Virchow, archaeology is about the history of man through his artefacts and traces of his actions, therefore it includes all human sciences, history, philosophy, anthropology, medicine and all natural sciences alike. Taking this seriously, the ASP is an archaeological project in its bones. Still some traditional funding programmes refused to accept it, on the basis that

it includes too many aspects, which are not archaeological or scientific at all.

The strict division between cultural heritage management and environmental/ecological heritage management as well as the strict division between archaeological heritage and built heritage seems to be a German speciality. But although the co-operation between these departments in Lancashire for example looks quite exceptional seen from a German perspective, quite similar problems are well known to many of our partners. The study of cultural landscape has been carried out by architects, landscape architects and others, sometimes under pure ecological aspects and without realising that it was a study of cultural landscapes. Bringing together all these players in the field of cultural landscapes is a considerable task. When undertaken by archaeologists, it is a way to get back to the roots of archaeology. It helps us through all means available to try to understand human beings and their interaction with the environment, just as we used all means to shape the environment to our needs - not always successfully of course, and often with unwanted side effects.

Some of these side effects, such as climatic change, make the study of cultural landscapes and their history so interesting and maybe even vital, well beyond the borders of archaeology. Some partners in the PCL, for example, have been asked if it were possible to calculate models of future developments from the past landscape change models. It might be over-stretching the archaeological evidence - but it brings archaeology into the middle of one of the most important and public discussions of our time.

### Conclusion

Historic landscape characterisation can be seen as just another method of managing the cultural heritage, or studying its past. But it has some totally new aspects, which change our archaeological perceptions. It is dealing with whole landscapes in a holistic way, it is multidisciplinary by definition, and it describes the landscape through the way it was used and shaped by human intervention. Most of all, it is always and primarily concerned with the actual

landscape, the landscape existing now and today. Unlike many excavations here it is impossible to strip the top layers and go down directly to the 'interesting' historic features. A landscape can only be understood by characterising its present state and then exploring its past step by step. The fixation with dots and lines, traditional archaeological finds and sites must be overcome when studying landscapes. All the space in between is important as well, and in fact of course it is the space in which we have lived and interacted with our environment.

Although historic landscape characterisation can be used in very different ways, and distinct regional scientific and cultural traditions influence the work of scientists, the basic common features are so strong and exciting that they overcome traditional borders and limitations. So historic landscape characterisation and the study of Cultural Landscapes in general can bring archaeology into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and make it a central human science for the future. There is great potential, but still a long way to go.



European Pathways to Cultural Landscapes



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