Iterative digital photo-based assessment of rural landscape perception: A small experiment from County Wicklow, Ireland

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Introduction to the problem: subjectivity of landscape experience and its assessment

Methods: participant generated photography and survey

Results: grouping, similarities and differences

Discussion
“Landscape” means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. (European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe 2000)

“Even though we gather together and look in the same direction at the same instant, we will not – we cannot – see the same landscape.” (Meinig, 1979: p. 1)

Dichotomy of approaches: expert-led vs. participatory

Perception influenced by individual’s identity, culture, intention, motivation...

Assessments generally strive toward convergance - what about differences?
Introduction

Photo-based assessment generally accepted as credible and reliable - but questions arise when it comes to sampling.

Sampling of photos should include general public’s choices (Hull & Revell, 1989).

Digital photographs as an abundant source of information.

Visual information (content) + metadata.

How to interpret them? How to find meaning, beyond statistical calculations? Lack of methods for interpreting participant generated photographs (Balomenou & Garrod 2016).

How can digital photography be used to find main characteristics of a landscape? How can it be used to find main differences in perceptions? Is this a convergent process?

Finding a common landscape character or plethora of characters?
Research questions

Do experts dealing with landscape share their conception of a “representative view” of a landscape near Dublin, Ireland?

What do they base their pick on, what is the narrative of their choice?

How do representations differ?
Method

Participant generated photography followed by a survey - narrative

Selection of most representative photos by participants

Content analysis of participant’s photos

Clustering

Setting:
County Wicklow, Ireland
COST RELY Training School
“expert tourists”
Results - generated pictures
Results - narratives
Results - generated pictures

- **Camera parameters consideration**
  - Point and shoot: 89%
  - Considered camera parameters: 11%

- **Training school context consideration**
  - Considered just landscape: 74%
  - Considered windfarms: 26%

- **Typicality of photos as stated by participants**
  - Ordinary: 79%
  - Extraordinary: 16%
  - Both: 5%

Most common adjectives: All-inclusive, landmark, farmland, meadow, antrophogenic footprint
Finding groups - clustering

Cluster Dendrogram

3 groups
Iteration
Iteration - most often chosen

group 1
vegetation - heather meadow,
hills in the background,
deliberately leaving out signs of human interventions

“...only wild use/nature, without infrastructure...”
“...leaving out the road and powerlines...”
“...avoided Sugar top because it is so unlike its surrounding.”
“...as much detail as possible (hills, flowers, trees).”

nature,
undisturbed landscape,
homogeneity,
landscape as nature

group 2
landmark (Great Sugar Loaf),
fields, hedges, built objects,
extraordinary, iconic

“...the big hill - main characteristic in landscape...”
“...a landmark in landscape...”
“...image of Sugar loaf mountain as it's iconic and most representative...”
“...high cultural attachment feature of the landscape (Sugar Loaf)...”

localised, specific,
aknowledging human interventions,
differentiation from other landscapes
landscape as a specific place, genius loci

function of the landscape,
production,
common, ordinary
landscape as commodity, a functional entity

group 3
flat,
all-inclusiveness,
anthropogenic and natural elements,
cultivated land, fields

“...objects and characteristics common in all directions/views (i.e. it was all inclusive)...”
“...not only how the landscape looks but as well how the landscape is used...”
“...same objects that sum up the landscape (plains, hills buildings and trees)...”
“...showing land use and how it functions...”

Iteration - most often chosen

“...as much detail as possible (hills, flowers, trees).”
Discussion and conclusions

Finding common points, but more importantly also the differences.

Narratives gave important insight into meanings of landscape, going beyond physical characterization.

Freedom of participants to give their own understanding reduces research control.

Is there one character - a fusion of all three - or (at least) three different characters?

How does this relate to evaluation of landscape? Focus groups to discuss such issues

Role of demographics?

Limitations:
Small sample size
Only experts
Bias when interpreting
Non english speakers
Thank you

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