

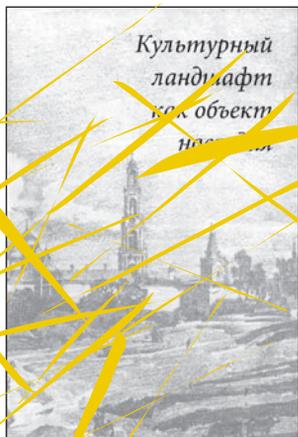


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# Library



**Yuriy Vedenin,  
Marina Kuleshova (eds)  
Cultural Landscape  
as a Heritage Site  
(*Kulturnyi landshaft kak ob'ekt  
naslediya*, in Russian)  
Dmitriy Bulanin  
Moscow-St.-Petersburg 2004  
pp. 618**

## **Grigory A. Isachenko**

Cultural landscapes are arenas for the life and activity of mankind. One could compare mass comprehension of this fact nowadays with the hero of one of Molière's plays' discovery that he speaks in prose. Today, few places do not bear the imprints of human activity or are not at least known to humans. The "antagonism" between nature and culture, which until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a given for most people, is actually contradicted by numerous examples of long-term co-authorship of man and nature.

The current interest in cultural landscapes found today in various scholarly disciplines and branches of practical activity is quite appropriate: people, having satisfied their primary needs, make greater and greater demands on their nearby and distant environment. As the intensity of human transforming activity increases, landscapes change ever more swiftly, and features that many generations had grown used to irrevocably disappear. This is why more and more landscape features (of both natural and human origin), as well as landscapes as a whole, are beginning to be perceived as heritage that should be conserved and protected. The awareness of the need for conservation of landscape diversity on the Earth follows, with some delay, in the wake of the recognition of the importance of preserving all varieties of biological

organisms, irrespective of their utility for man. Tourism, now a world industry, has played a major role in this process.

The tradition of studying landscapes as natural phenomena long dominated Soviet and post-Soviet Russian geography. The “humanisation” of landscape research has become appreciable only during the last two decades. Therefore, almost every new book devoted to cultural landscape in Russia is an event. This is especially true of the fundamental monograph reviewed here, published by the Russian Institute of Cultural and Natural Heritage (Moscow). It should be noted, incidentally, that the creation of this institute in the post-Soviet period was a significant event. One of its main objectives is to break the barrier between science and the humanities in the study of cultural landscapes.

The book is opened by a brief preface by Francesco Bandarin, director of the Unesco World Heritage Centre. The author’s team (18 people) gathers scholars from the Institute of Heritage, the universities of Moscow and St.-Petersburg, and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The monograph comprises 4 chapters. Chapter 1, “Methodological background: The investigation of cultural landscapes as heritage” (Yuriy Vedenin, Marina Kuleshova, Evgeniya Andreeva, Vladimir Kalutskov, Maria Obolenskaya) formulates theoretical approaches to the study of cultural landscapes, and principles and methods for their assessment, and examines factors in cultural-landscape diversity. It also provides a brief analysis of cultural landscape concepts in Russian geography. Chapter 2, “Typology and descriptions of cultural landscapes as heritage” (Marina Kuleshova, Yuriy Vedenin, Tatiana Isachenko, Alexander Gorbunov, Nataliya Vedernikova, Michael Jones, Sergey Chernov) gives a systematic outline of different types of cultural landscapes: the estate, the monastery, the battlefield, the northern Russian peasant landscape, the industrial landscape, etc. Chapter 3, “Cultural landscape differentiation” (Yuriy Vedenin, Marina Kuleshova, Irina Chalaya, Irina Ivanova, Denis Tormosov, Alexander Gorbunov) formulates theoretical approaches to cultural-landscape regionalization and presents samples of descriptions of the cultural landscape of large regions in Russia. It also provides a detailed differentiation of cultural landscapes in some areas of European Russia. Chapter 4 “Cultural landscape management” (Marina Kuleshova, Alexander Gorbunov, Yuriy Vedenin, Alexander Kozykin, Denis Tormosov, Valeriy Novikov, Galina Massalitina, Pavel Shul’gin, Galina Onufrienko) gives examples of actual cultural land-

scape conservation programs in some national parks and museum estates in Russia, and also provides information about organizational and legal aspects of the protection of cultural landscapes in Poland. Each chapter includes six or seven thematically connected sections, supplemented with detailed bibliographies and English abstracts.

The editors of the book give a clear presentation of the theoretical background, the detailed characteristics of concrete examples of cultural landscapes, and current issues in the management of cultural landscapes in protected areas. The book is constantly punctuated with references to key areas studied by the authors in detail, notably the Kenozero national park, the Solovetsky Archipelago (Arkhangelsk Region), the Ugra national park (Kaluga Region), the Borodino field in the Moscow Region (in 1812 the site of a historical battle between the Russian and the French armies), former old estates near St.-Petersburg, as well as others.

Space constraints do not allow me to examine the content of each section in detail; I shall therefore focus only on the most interesting and controversial issues addressed in the book.

*The concept of cultural landscape and the methodology  
for the study of cultural landscapes as categories of heritage*

The works of the Institute of Cultural and Natural Heritage are based on an informational-axiological approach to cultural landscapes as a joint work of man and nature, representing a complex system of material and spiritual values, and yielding a high degree of ecological, historical, and cultural information. Yuriy Vedenin and Marina Kuleshova define a cultural landscape as “a natural-cultural land complex which has formed as a result of an evolutionary interaction between nature and man’s social, cultural, and economic activities, and displays characteristic combinations of natural and cultural elements in a state of constant interrelation and interdependence”.

According to this approach, in a cultural landscape natural and cultural components form a whole, and hence do not merely influence one another. By the way, the borders of natural-cultural and tout court natural land complexes do not necessarily coincide. The authors categorize cultural landscapes at three levels: a) by type; b) by geographical region; c) as concrete individual units.

On these theoretical premises, cultural landscape becomes a rather broad concept. The authors note that any landscape can be regarded as a cultural landscape, insofar as it possesses heritage values in greater or smaller measure. Heritage value is intrinsic in any process of landscape development, including that of its non-material forms – a landscape’s representation in art, etc. In this perspective, the geographical frontiers between “natural” and “cultural” landscapes practically disappear, and the study of cultural landscapes becomes a special aspect of (or approach to) landscape research in general. The approach presented in the book, however, is especially well suited for investigating especially valuable cultural landscapes and making management decisions regarding their conservation and maintenance. It should be noted that the approach to cultural landscapes proposed in the book is in accordance with the methodology developed by Unesco for the safeguarding of world natural and cultural heritage.

### *Informational paradigms for cultural landscapes*

Informational saturation is a major feature of cultural landscapes. One of the types of cultural landscape regarded by Unesco as heritage is the “associative cultural landscape”, i.e., one connected with the memory of a certain historical event and/or outstanding personalities. Quite often, such landscapes lack any material manifestation of this memory, and in this case, the authors argue, the true value of the landscape resides in the information itself. Moreover, according in the authors’ opinion, as a landscape gains in importance in national or world culture, the significance of its intellectual and spiritual implications increases. Science, art, and religion begin to be perceived as the principal elements determining the functioning and development of a landscape and reflecting its essence.

This idea is actually debatable. Only to a certain degree is it possible to regard the above-mentioned manifestations of human culture as “outcomes” of concrete landscapes. As a rule, the further life of religions, art works (or whole artistic currents), or scientific procedures sprung up in a given landscape is only tenuously related (if at all) with the landscapes which have “generated” them. As to the decisive influence of human intellectual-spiritual activity on landscapes, we obviously cannot deny it, but with a very important reservation: landscapes are influenced by

human intellectual activity, but human intellectual activity is not generated within a given landscape. In the modern world, with its capabilities for communication, practically any product of spiritual-intellectual activity is accessible and can be reproduced in any part of the globe; therefore, almost any attempt to connect instances of human intellectual activity to a concrete landscape is doomed to failure.

One could argue that a cultural landscape will differ from the natural landscape it is superimposed on by its greater number of information layers. Examples of such layers include local toponyms, local folklore, and certain sounds (e.g., bell chimes in a traditional Russian rural landscape). These information layers can be regarded as special non-material states whose time of existence is always shorter than the landscape which “generated” them.

*Factors in cultural-landscape differentiation: The natural structure*

The authors of the book under review here pay significant attention to the natural structure of cultural landscapes. This is understood as “the system of the most significant geographic morphostructures responsible for the basic processes of matter-power exchange in geosystems, ecological stability, and differentiation of a landscape.” The book looks at natural structures in several key areas (the Kenozero national park, Anzer island in the Solovetsky Archipelago, the Kungur area in the Perm Region, etc.).

What is immediately evident as one reads through these case-studies is the discrete character of these natural structures (and the cultural structures based upon them). The authors, instead of studying continuous landscape patterns (natural land complexes), strive to discern “significant nodes and lines”; as a rule, these correspond to watershed lines (or the crests of mountain or hill ranges) and surface drainage networks. For example, the book maps and describes “run-off distribution nodes” and “run-off accumulation nodes” on Anzer island. As is well known, however, the superficial flow over a flat landscape is not formed at specific nodes (e.g., watershed bog massifs), but over the whole basin area. The authors repeatedly affirm that the matter-energy exchange along drainage lines involves the whole area under consideration. However, superficial run-off being always unidirectional, an exchange of matter cannot occur along drainage lines .

What the authors call the “key morphostructures” (or “automorphic knots”) of the natural structure include watershed lines, other positive forms of relief, and their intersections with break lines. It is at such places, according to the authors, that Orthodox churches and other local “spiritual centers” are often situated. However, it is impossible to verify this thesis, as the book does not provide maps of the local tectonics of the areas under investigation.

The sections devoted to the natural structure of cultural landscapes abound with terms that are not explained by the authors: “geoenergy potential,” “axis of a geosystem exchange,” “intra-island pseudo-zone borders,” “ecomorphic nodes,” etc. Furthermore, the authors make insufficient use of mapping, which is the most effective method of spatial simulation. As a consequence, some of their descriptions of cultural landscapes are excessively verbose.

### *Delimiting cultural landscapes*

Chapter 3 looks at examples of cultural-landscape regionalization at different area scales, ranging from the whole territory of Russia down to national parks (Kenozero, Ugra) and battlefields (Borodino).

This regionalization of the cultural-landscapes of Russia is entrusted to Yuriy Vedenin, who distinguishes two scales: cultural-landscape areas and cultural-landscape regions (respectively 7 and 38 within the territory of Russia). The majority of cultural-landscape units indicated here comprise several existing administrative-territorial units of the highest level (subjects of the Federation). The criteria employed by the author to delimit individual landscape units raise many questions. For example, western and eastern Karelia, which are quite similar in ethnic structure and culture, are considered as distinct cultural landscapes (respectively, “Karelian area” and “Russian Europe”), while the cultural-landscape area “Multinational Northern Caucasus” includes areas as different from one another – in aspects ranging from natural features to ethnic and confessional structures – as Kalmykia and the Chechen Republic. The same is true of the Komi and Bashkiria Republics, which are quite different from one another, but are nevertheless lumped together in the “Multinational Volga-Ural area”. Vedenin’s regionalization abounds with such incongruities. Furthermore, it does not reflect in the least the undeniable influence of the natural features on regional cultural peculiarities.

The notes on the individual features of each of these regions are rather trivial. Such information could easily be gathered from guidebooks. The characterizations of some of the regions in the subtitles sound like advertising slogans; for example: “The Russian Amur region and Primorski Krai – The land of courageous travellers, tigers and ginseng.” In sum, this regionalization of the territory of Russia into distinct cultural landscapes is the weakest part of the monograph.

*Conservation and management of cultural landscapes in protected areas*

The authors argue that the federal legislation of Russia regarding the protection of cultural heritage is inadequate. Departmental barriers split single natural and cultural heritage entities between distinct spheres of management, and this results in poor coordination of management actions. Legal and organizational opportunities for an integrated approach to the management of cultural and natural heritage only exist in national parks and on some memorial estates. Only in two national parks (Kenozero and Ugra) are concrete actions to promote, conserve and use cultural landscapes being undertaken. These actions take the form of special programs and management plans, which the book looks at in detail.

The main problems confronting the authors of management plans to preserve the Russian rural landscape include uncontrolled building (especially of summer cottages) marring the landscape, and the overgrowing of arable lands and meadows with trees and bushes, with the subsequent loss of their economic value and aesthetic qualities. The overgrowing of agricultural lands also results in the loss of visual communication between key points of the landscape and the disappearing of characteristic spatial proportions and landscape patterns. In some cases, this process goes hand in hand with the simplification of biocoenoses. An undeniable merit of the book is that it views the decline of agricultural land as a threat to the traditional cultural landscapes of Russia. The authors repeatedly emphasize that rural (or peasant) cultural landscapes should not be regarded as areas that are negatively impacted by human activity (as is traditionally held for natural protected areas) but as reserves of cultural as well as natural heritage.

The current programs for the conservation of the cultural heritage of the national parks of Kenozero and Ugra recognize, for the first time

in the history of land management in Russia, the value of rural landscapes as cultural heritage. These programs stress that the conservation and maintenance of the Russian rural/cultural landscape can only be achieved through social support of local populations as carriers of local land-use traditions, as well as an understanding of space semantics, which are a necessary component of the structural kernel of a cultural landscape.

In conclusion, the monograph *Cultural Landscape As Heritage* gives an important contribution to the multidisciplinary study of cultural landscapes. The book offers a broad overview of the cultural landscapes of Russia and some other countries, demonstrates the continuity of cultural landscapes in modern times, and advocates a sophisticated approach to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, which is threatened today by the speed of social and economic changes.