

landscape
research
group

Our Research Strategy

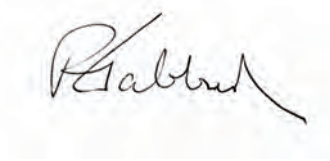
Chairman's foreword



The anniversary of the Landscape Research Group (LRG) in 2017 marks 50 years since the charity was established to promote research and education in the field of landscape. The 21st century world faces environmental challenges scarcely dreamed of when the organisation was founded.

Modernisation has brought about huge improvements in terms of wealth, health and well-being, but also huge challenges in terms of environmental degradation, and the threats posed by anthropogenic climate change. At the same time our understanding of the significance of landscape has advanced; how people interact with it, and the consequent effects on physical, social and psychological well-being. It is clear that narrow technical or single-discipline approaches to analysis are unlikely to produce sustainable solutions.

LRG offers its research strategy to promote a multidisciplinary landscape approach to analysing and finding solutions to environmental problems, and to identifying and promoting those interactions with landscape that lead to human flourishing. This approach includes social and human considerations together with those of a biophysical nature. The strategy sets out our current research priorities, and indicates how we hope to cooperate with others to put them into practice.



Landscape Research Group

The Landscape Research Group (LRG) is a UK-registered charity with an international membership and remit. We are an independent organisation founded in 1967 to promote education and research in landscape and any related subject. In current terms, we seek to contribute to improved understanding of landscape in the interests of sustainable development.

Membership of LRG is open to all and we promote interdisciplinarity through our activities. We foster exchange and interaction between researchers, practitioners, administrators and policy-makers, and we support and seek to catalyse cooperation between professionals and the public. We work together with others who share our goals.

We have developed this Research Strategy to articulate our vision for landscape research and to provide direction for our own activities. As an independent voice, we would like the landscape approach on which our work is founded to be more widely understood and applied.

"The landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being, and..[..]..its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone."

European Landscape Convention

Our strategy for action

"We believe that landscape research can make a significant contribution to achieving positive cultural, social, economic and environmental outcomes and, ultimately, just and sustainable relationships between people and the landscapes in which we live."

The charitable purpose of the Landscape Research Group stipulates that we advance research in the 'field of landscape and any related fields'. We strongly believe that landscape research can contribute to and drive positive responses to some of the major challenges facing modern society.

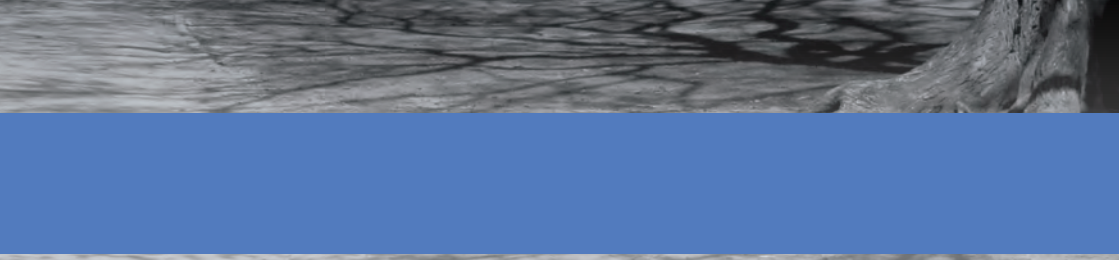
All research has the potential to improve our knowledge of the world. Research focusing on landscape has the additional ability to change the way we think about our relationships with each other and the places we inhabit.

We believe that landscape research can make a significant contribution to achieving just and sustainable relationships between people and the landscapes in which we live. Such research can help to frame policy in new ways, and can promote just and participatory landscape governance. Research is needed to translate the idea of sustainable development into practice.

Our Research Strategy, adopted by the LRG Board in December 2014, promotes creative, critical and collaborative approaches that will help all sectors of society to flourish.

Within this strategy we will promote activities that foster and support research and those that help to ensure that the public benefits of research are realised. More specifically, we will:

- fund research and related activities through our Strategic Research Fund
- provide practical support for the development of landscape research networks



- collaborate on the conceptualisation and delivery of specific research projects
- disseminate research through our peer-reviewed journal *Landscape Research* and other print and digital media
- enable exchange and discussion through conferences, workshops and other events
- plan and deliver research capacity-building activities
- support engagement with landscape research amongst early career researchers and practitioners, for instance through our student awards and through targeted events.

Our priorities

"Our over-arching priority is to advance research that contributes towards just and sustainable relationships between people and landscapes – rural, urban and maritime."

The Landscape Research Group's over-arching priority is to advance research that contributes towards just and sustainable relationships between people and landscapes – rural, urban and maritime.

We promote a landscape approach because it emphasises the holistic, dynamic and cultural nature of people's interaction with the world. A landscape approach also calls on a wide range of disciplines, sectors and perspectives.

The concept of landscape integrates different and, often, competing perceptions and uses of resources and the environment. Taking a landscape approach is necessary to address the major challenges facing humanity today such as climate change, migration and population growth, finding sustainable energy futures, largescale ecosystem destruction, poverty and inequality.

We have identified four strategic research priorities:

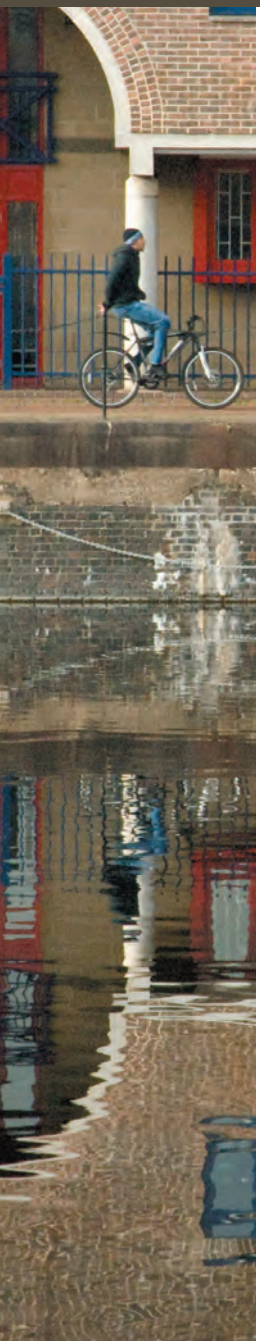
- landscape justice
- rapid environmental change
- landscape governance
- critical landscape thinking.

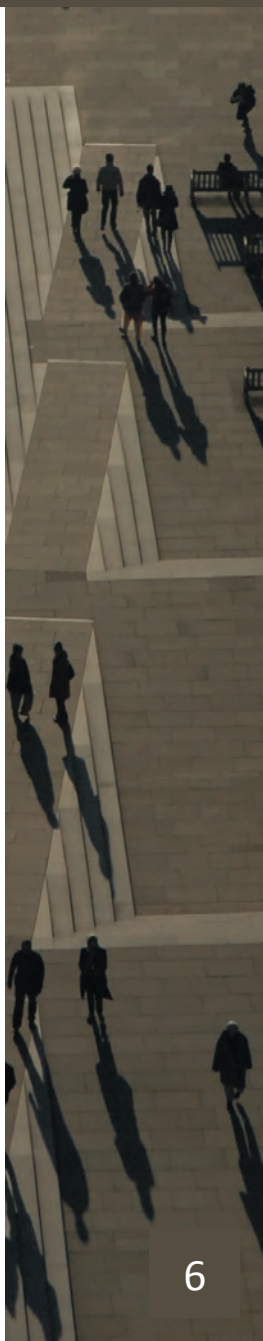
These fields are not neatly bounded, but overlap and connect with each other. They cut across and connect individual disciplinary and sectorial domains.

Images © MacSee Photography







Landscape justice

The term 'landscape justice' has emerged to reflect a new and integrated approach to the well-recognised problems of social and environmental justice. The wider context for this development is a growing emphasis in public discourse and in public policy on problems of power, exclusion and inequity in decision-making relating to environmental and landscape issues.

Landscape justice is concerned with issues of access and exclusion, ownership and dispossession, connection and disconnection within and across communities, societies, generations and species.

It concerns decision-making power and disenfranchisement, and fairness or lack thereof in the distribution of the potential benefits deriving from landscape.

Better analysis and understanding of landscape injustice is needed in order to enable us to tackle it. We will, therefore, support research:

- into the circumstances in which injustice is generated and sustained in landscape contexts
- into injustices that are historically-embedded in the landscape, that are emerging now or that might emerge in the future
- that contributes to the development and implementation of policies, practices and actions that address landscape injustice.

Image © Lou Linwei/Alamy Stock Photo



"Our planet is scarred by inequality; and inequality is growing and the gaps are widening..."

President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, September 2015

Rapid environmental change

"There is a pressing need to review human-nature relations, and to secure more sustainable ways of living in a radically changing environment."

Change is an intrinsic characteristic of landscape, in which environmental processes are a significant factor. Rapid environmental change can have dramatic effects on people and on our relationships with the landscapes we inhabit. Acting in appropriate ways at the landscape level is vital to sustaining and developing landscape quality, human well-being and environmental sustainability.

There is a pressing need to review human-nature relations, and to secure more sustainable ways of living in a radically changing environment. Environmental change impacts on landscapes directly (e.g. on species, habitat, agricultural management practices) and, indirectly, through our responses to it (e.g. renewable energy development in response to climate change).

Environmental change and responses to it are often handled at the global scale or otherwise removed from specific circumstances. There is a need for research that connects environmental change with particular places and particular lives, and that moves debate and action beyond single interests or perspectives. The research needs to involve environmental science but not be limited to it. Research should consider energy needs, but not in isolation: approaches to development need to move beyond purely technological responses.

A 'landscape response' would achieve this by integrating cultural, social, economic and environmental questions, problems and opportunities.

Image © MacSee Photography

We will advance research that:

- identifies and understands the transformative landscape effects of environmental change
- recognises and develops the opportunities inherent in change for positive landscape development
- helps to deliver paths to the future which are both environmentally and socially sound.



Landscape governance

"..what can great places do? A great place can bring life.. [..]..by bringing purpose and meaning to people – not just in the finished product, but in the process...by getting people to build it themselves... The arduous common task creates community – which is common life".

Rev. Christopher Rowe, church minister, Glasgow

In working to address injustice and respond positively to environmental change, it is important to consider how landscapes are governed. Policies and decisions relating to landscape need to be more closely linked to our lived experiences and the problems, challenges and opportunities we face.

Landscape research considers who has voice and power in landscape contexts, and how justice, democracy and citizenship are exercised. Such issues have come to the fore in recent years as part of a growing call for more participatory forms of governance.

There is a substantial body of research relating to the principles and methods of participation. However, much of this work treats participation as a narrowly-defined, socio-political activity arising from the need to formulate particular plans and take particular decisions.

We believe that such time-limited and short-term actions often do little to promote real participatory governance (participation with power as opposed to participation without).

We wish to help link the socio-political sense of participation (in planning, decision-making, management) and the cultural sense of participation in the living landscape.

Our aim is to shift understanding of participation away from a restricted, controlled process intended to define stable

Image © Ross Clark/Northlight Heritage

outcomes. We wish instead to see participation being firmly embedded in decision-making processes – building positive relationships between diverse people, sustaining those relationships over the longer term and linking them to how the landscape is governed and developed. We believe that this will strengthen the connections between governance and the ongoing processes of living, protecting and developing the landscape.

We will advance research that:

- critically evaluates landscape governance and development regimes, including past and present participation measures and their results
- develops new ways of thinking and acting in relation to the question of 'participation' in the governance of landscape
- helps to realise embedded participation in the interests of improving and sustaining well-being and landscape quality for public benefit over the long term.



Critical landscape thinking

Thinking about landscape has a long and complex history, characterised by cultural, philosophical and ideological variability. This has resulted in the existence of many different and often competing and contested ways of understanding what we mean by 'landscape', and of how we should act in relation to landscape.

Landscape can be understood, for example, as a resource to be exploited, a heritage to be curated, an aesthetic quality of the environment, a natural world worth conserving and enhancing, a physical space with quantifiable material characteristics or a lived cultural and social experience.

Particular ways of thinking about and acting in relation to landscape have become enshrined in policy and practice, with a particular emphasis on seeing and treating landscapes as ideally 'natural' or solely 'material' in character. Think, for example, of the potency of concepts such as 'cultural landscape', 'ecosystem' and 'ecosystem services', 'natural beauty' and 'wilderness'.

Uncritical adherence to any historically-embedded and dominant discourse concerning landscape militates against our ability to develop new ways of addressing landscape injustices and adapting to environmental change.

It is important to investigate how critical landscape thinking can be communicated to, and developed with, different audiences, for instance through artistic media.

We will promote research that:

- helps society to aspire to new ways of interacting with landscapes, responding to and thinking about them
- critically appraises the conceptual foundations of landscape policy and practice
- challenges received wisdom and current thinking to develop new visions for sustainable landscapes.

Blued Trees: Art, Science and Activism. New York State © Aviva Rahmani



“Uncritical adherence to any historically-embedded and dominant discourse concerning landscape militates against our ability to develop new ways of addressing landscape injustices and adapting to environmental change.”



landscape research group

The Landscape Research Group (LRG) is a charitable organisation that acts to stimulate and encourage enquiry into people's relationship with landscape.

We wish to empower people to question and understand how they shape and are, in turn, shaped by the world in which they live.

Our over-arching priority is to work towards just and sustainable relationships between people and landscape.

To make that happen, we invest our resources to advance creative and innovative research and practice in landscape. We work in the UK, where we are based, and around the world.

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