

Symbolic significance and cognitive dimension of the Latvian landscape

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Abstract: As well as physical reality, the landscape is also an emotionally symbolic structure that closely intertwines with human cognitive perception, self-identification, with the perception of the homeland, as well as affects our daily habits. The landscape, as a cultural expression, forms a close connection with historical and political events, with traditions and customs, with each individual and with the nation as a whole, all of this manifests itself in a symbolic sense of the landscape, often used as a national recognition, for marketing purposes, but the symbols of the landscape are also a close connection between each individual and their native place and ancestors. The research analyses various aspects and phenomena that influence the symbolic importance of the landscape and relate to both cognitive aspects of each individual or community, nation, and collective memory and other expressions of identity and self-awareness. The landscape has a holistic nature that explains the close connection of several processes, both physical changes in landscape and changes in perception of each individual, according to the political and social situation of the country. Not least importance has the history of the development of the landscape perception of each country, which has been formed relatively recently in Latvia and art, photograms and the systematic division of the landscape created by researchers also play a big role in it. The regional context and cultural and historical division of Latvia should also be noted in the creation of landscape symbols. Cognitive processes are therefore associated with such concepts – Genius Loci, memory and event landscapes, landscape identity, place names, landscape biographies, etc. As a result, the author's model for the development and operation of the symbolic meaning of the landscape is presented, reflecting the structure and specificity of the symbolic creation of the landscape, as well as related processes that influence the symbolic meaning of the landscape.

Keywords: landscape symbols, cognitive landscape, model of the symbolic meaning of the landscape

Introduction

Landscape is not only a set of physical elements, but also an emotional, symbolic and ideological dimension, as well as a link between all parties, reflected in the process of cultural landscaping creation, which is consistent with the concept of landscape established in the European Convention [11]. Every day we call the set of emotional, symbolic and ideological dimensions as a “homeland” that accurately reflects the form of human-landscape relationships. The concept of “homeland” involves expressing of human-natural relationships through symbols, attitudes that forms like the storage and processing of events and symbols that are important in the past, present and even future through the physical and mental dimensions of the landscape. Through the concept of “homeland,” the phenomenon of collective memory or consciousness is most strongly reflected, as a fixed and visualized set of symbols [27]. In such a cut, the landscape is like a depository that stores events important to the nation on one side, and inspires or gives a ground, a connection to the past on the other.

In Latvia, the understanding of the landscape was developed under the influence to different traditions, political events and other factors, which are closely related to people's daily life, developing in parallel and of the same time at the close root with landscape science. Latvian **residents' understanding of “special landscapes”** is relatively conservative, because in surveys conducted in research the public,

as visually more prominent and attractive, highlights rural landscapes, even without signs of building and economic nature – such as “untouched rural landscapes”. In general, the paradox arises here and the link between nature, traditions and culture, which manifests itself directly in traditional construction and economic activity, disappears [5; 6; 14]. As cultural connection and layer disappear, the identity as well as connection to a nation or region are harder to read, because of the similar natural landscapes and views can be found in nearby countries. Admittedly, the nature of the building and economic activity may be contradictory and not always acceptable, as well as vary very narrowly directly at local level. On the other hand, the structure of the building is a very strong cognitive part of the landscape, linking “the prettiest scenery” to childhood, when a lot of time is spent in the countryside, forming a sort of peculiar “symbol of a beautiful landscape,” but also a misleading emotional “picture of memories.”

Latvian landscapes as a symbol of beauty, along with printed literature and magazines, already entered in the 1960's as a popular type of photobooks. For example, the book published in 1937, “Amber Land Homeland” (*Natural and Cultural Observations of Latvia*), which was also published in later periods, also included landscape views. Later there were also published maps of landscaped areas and cultural and historical objects. The book “The nature and landscapes of Latvia”



Fig. 1. Latvian publications dedicated to the landscapes [created by author]

by Kamil Raman published in 1971, is also rich in illustrations of outstanding landscapes. Such publications, on the one hand, promoted the Latvian landscape and, on the other hand, formed a symbolic image of the landscape in humans.

Later on, a number of publications were published about individual areas, national parks and coasts, which were rich in illustrations and supplemented by more detailed descriptions of landscaping, vegetation, cultural and historical and aesthetic values, such as book “Gauja National Park” by Aija Meluma published in 1977 with the photos by Aivars Āķis, describing the history, characterisation, zoning, etc. of the national park. Also, the book published in 1979 “The Ancient Valley of Gauja” (by Āboltiņš O., Eniņš G.) provides a broad description of the landscape of Gauja Ancient Valley, its structure, and is rich in colourful photographs from picturesque landscapes of Gauja. There were several such kinds of publications (Figure 1), later even a series about natural values in which the landscape was an integral part.

The popularisation of the Latvian landscape through maps, picture books and research had influenced the human visual perception of the landscape and had strengthened the symbolic image of the “attractive landscape” subconsciously, creating collective memory and understanding of the values of the landscape. Such images and printed materials also helped to strengthen the base of landscape identity, because almost every house had books or maps of this kind.

Within each national framework, the symbolic role of the landscape is also created by the **phenomenon of collective memory** [12]. On merging the collective memory and mythology together, a close connection with identity is created, which is manifested in both cognitive and physical

symbols in the landscape as well. In the process of creation of the symbolic importance of the landscape, inter-relationships and links between the different social and ethnic groups of the territory are also important, which is often also studied by landscape researchers in order to explore the population structure of the particular area and the development trends of the spatial structure, distinguishing distinct stages of landscape development, which are also marked by political and social processes as well as economic development. Such processes also explain new symbols of landscape identity, which are often also reflected in the landscape [22].

On analysing the performance of several scientists and the importance of the landscape in everyday reality, the symbolic importance of the landscape is a phenomenon that, on the one hand, is abstract and, on the other hand, is vividly marked in the physical shape of the landscape and important at both individual and national level as a whole. Complex structure and impact of this phenomenon is the purpose of this research.

Materials and Methods

The research is based on analysing and structuring, or systematization of different sources to get a clear path and process – how the symbolic meaning and nature of the landscape is created and how it depends, how the cognitive dimension of landscape symbols forms. There was used a comparative analysis method in the research in the process of developing the scientific basis of the research, as well as interpreting and comparing the obtained results.

The following materials were used in the research:

- Scientific literature that reflects the cognitive side of the landscape and associated phenomena and regularities;
- Various archival materials reflecting the path of development of the symbolic significance of Latvian landscapes – images, books, paintings and research by scientists;
- Materials of the Latvian cultural Canon and the project “The Landscape Treasures”;
- Interviews with industry experts on landscapes of national importance, where we also talked about the symbolic importance of the landscape (*interview results are not included in the Article, but influenced the amount and diversity of information obtained by the author*).

As the result of the research there were defined groups of factors that influence the symbolic shape of the landscape and how the link to the cognitive landscape perception dimension is formed. In the research there was created a model for the development and operation of the symbolic significance of the landscape adopted for Latvian landscapes.

Result and Discussion

The results section describes, by thematic group, various aspects that influence the symbolic importance of the landscape and are related to cognitive landscape perception processes. In conclusion, as the unifying part of the results, the author's created model for the development and operation of the symbolic meaning of the landscape is presented.

The holistic nature of the landscape

Landscape research is closely linked to the understanding and perception of the landscape as such, as the landscape has a holistic nature (a comprehensive nature). The landscape includes both of nature created elements, human created structures, and emotionally social connections. Consequently, the question of exploring and evaluating the landscape as a comprehensive phenomenon becomes relevant, which scientists actively began to use in their work at the beginning of the century, recognising that landscape research is not the sum of the results of individual landscape elements or phenomenon, but that there are much more complex regularities between the changes in individual elements or indicators, where a directly holistic approach is required [29,3, 24,25]. In general, the method of the holistic approach was born already at the beginning of the 19th century, when Alexander von Humboldt, one of the founders of geography, claimed that the landscape is a comprehensive description of a region/place (*Landschaft ist das Totalcharacter einer Erdgegend*) [3]. At the end of the 19th century, the holistic understanding of the landscape in geographical sciences actively developed in parallel with the understanding of holistic aspects also in landscape ecology, landscape planning and management, combining the opinions of scientists and creating a new direction in science, where the landscape was explored not as separate parts, but as a whole or totality, replacing the linear thinking with systems thinking. In his book "Landscape Ecology. Theory and Application" Zev Naveh and Artūrs Lieberman provide an explanation of the new systematic approach and understanding of landscape ecology [23, 25]. Developing the necessity for a holistic approach it necessitates a multidisciplinary approach, where the landscape is viewed not in terms of single science, but by searching for relationships between several branches of science, intersecting or interfacing. Scientists are trying to use methods of both natural sciences, social sciences and humanities and arts techniques in landscape research, creating new methodologies for landscape research, where one of the challenges is not only to combine different methods, but to create a deeper connection with society as a whole, perceiving it as an integral part and cognitive process.

Five dimensions can be selected in landscape research:

- spatial structure – reflects the reality of a part of the physical landscape that was for a long time the only focus of landscape description and exploration, as it accurately defines the material sphere of abiotic, biotic and artifacts that are closely related to each other;
- mental dimension – a human-oriented/ centred dimension based on the mental perception of the landscape, which reflects the emotions and memories acquired by an individual coming in contact with the physical landscape dimension. It's not just about the visual perception of the landscape here, it's about the holistic perception of the landscape, which is different for each individual;
- temporal dimension – both spatial and mental dimensions submit to this dimension, explaining the dynamic nature of the landscape because the landscape is never static, both the physical – spatial structure of the landscape changes, as well as the vegetation and the animal world change, the hydrological regime changes and everything is closely connected. It should be noted that the mental dimension of the landscape is also dynamic and constantly subjected to dynamic change processes;
- the connection between nature and culture – this dimension, therefore, is like a reflection of the process of interaction between the physical, mental and temporal dimensions, which can be physically read in each ethnically distinct region, such as interaction of human and nature in the temporal dimension – hence physical changes that reflect which specific cultural characteristics through land usage, architecture and other physical activities. A frequently used paradigm in landscape research, is also called “landscape biography”;
- landscape as a complex system – system thinking is an important step that took place in science in understanding the principle of the construction of non-linear and complex things. Landscape as a complex system includes geological, biological and neo spheric subsystems and their development in the temporal dimension. This approach enables to see and understand the complex interaction processes of landscape elements, as well as to realize the consequences that changes created in one element of the landscape can impress other elements in the temporal dimension – this dimension most accurately defines the nature of holistic thinking [36].

The development of the nature of the landscape concept in the Middle Ages (landscape as a painting) created a dual nature of the landscape, which is still

one of the biggest debates in science – the real and physical world against mental perception. The emergence of the very term of the landscape in science at the end of the 17th century/ beginning of the 18th century connects with such scientists like Alexander von Humboldt, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Karl Ritter, Henrik Steffens. During this period, landscape was defined as a physical reality, as a collection of characteristics for a given region. Later, as the “revolution” of science took place, the research methods used by scientists also gradually changed and a new era of landscape research began, where the landscape was no longer a separate part of it but a single whole. Carl Troll, in his research, explained the landscape as a complex process of interrelated factors, as well as in the research, the landscape was seen as a set of natural and human-made elements. But until the end of the 20th century, there was no mental dimension and subjective assessment criteria in landscape research. Later, multidisciplinary research had been applied to find out the landscape by interweaving environmental sciences, social and economic sciences with aesthetic issues and cultural research [36].

The dual essence or phenomenon of interaction between human and nature can be highlighted separately – on the one hand, a human is a part of the physical world of nature, the same as other living organisms, which are exposed to all the influences of nature – climatic conditions, on having physiological needs (eat, breathe), human is physically vulnerable, etc., but on the other hand, a human, as a thinking and acting individual, or a group of individuals, creates himself the landscape around him, directly influencing the physical environment around him – building buildings, roads and other infrastructure, farming or forestry, etc. [36].

In order to more clearly define the nature of landscape holism, the prerequisites for a holistic concept of multifunctional landscape are summarized:

- landscape perception as a dynamic self-organising/self-developing system/structure – this prerequisite is based on changing the paradigms of science. The basis is a view from a multidisciplinary perspective, as a multifunctional dimension of nature and culture. These theories are based on the laws of energy inviolability and the exchange of energy within the system, as well as theories such as “fluctuation order” and “chaos order.” The theory of a self-developing system describes not only the landscape as a system, but also the model of societal/human development [19];
- understanding the landscape as a whole rather than the sum of individual parts – this prerequisite is based on the Gestalt theory of

landscape perception as a spatial model/matrix, as a living space for living organisms, including humans and ecosystems, as well as an emphasis on the fact that the landscape is not a mathematical sum of their components, but which appears more in not only quantitative but also qualitative measurements;

- a hierarchical approach related to understanding of global ecology – by developing the Gestalt theory that emerged / arose in the approach of hierarchical landscape structure, the landscape is a multi-level open natural system, where the lower levels are filled by physical elements, while the upper levels display mental elements that form as cluster systems, in the sense of the globe and space [18];
- understanding that the landscape is a complex and interconnected system of human and nature – characterized as a continuous structural and functional interaction of diverse biotic and abiotic as well as cultural components with many variables, in several dimensions [37];
- the landscape has a multidimensional nature, which is reflected not only through physical but also temporal and cognitive factors – interactions between all these dimensions are essential;
- the possibility to measure both ecological and cultural diversity and economic factors that generate the total of landscape diversity rather than they being assessed separately – measurements can be used when analysing the impact of landscape ecological and cultural factors on landscape functionality;
- in a landscape, relationships are not always direct, they are often hidden and layered — because of multidimensional and multilevel nature of the landscape not all connections are direct, but many operate only in the temporal dimension and are visible after a certain period, other relationships are layered and gradually change the structure of the landscape or the perception of the landscape, which may again lead to a change in structure in the future, creating kind of a cyclical regularity [25].

Perception/sence of place as the concept appeared already at the end of the seventies of the last century and several scientists through this definition explored place affiliation, landscape usage, identity and other physically intangible and landscape and place-related aspects, explaining the relationship between the individual and the landscape. Later, the concept grew into the space soul/aura concept (*Genius Loci*) accentuating that the place is not just a physical expression, but it has the emotional side that creates the cognitive connection with a human. Both of these concepts are closely linked to the cognitive perception of the landscape, which is reflected in the characteristics of

the overall perception of the landscape and, together with physical factors, forms a common image of the landscape. It is the synergy of physical and emotional factors that creates the aura of space. The appearance of this concept in research triggered a kind of “revolution” in quantitative research, exposing the physically “invisible” part of the landscape [10, 4, 30].

It should be noted that the aura of the area consists of several groups of elements:

- physical elements – landscape elements and structures (building, vegetation, terrain, water objects, etc.), physical sensations of people through sensory organs (smell and taste, temperature, lighting, etc.);
- social elements – presence of other people and communication with them, social contacts (liked or disliked, amount of people, bustle or freedom, loneliness);
- psycho emotional elements – aura of place, soul made up of two prior groups, as well as history of the area, events, associative connections, personal experience of each individual, feelings and other factors [10].

On continuing the topic of “landscape aura/soul,” it is necessary to pay attention to such term as “**event landscapes**” and “**memory landscapes**”, which is a particular phenomenon – part of the symbolic perception of the landscape and bases on both the national and the personal or ancestral experiences of each individual. These adventures are often associated with specific landscapes, but sometimes are symbolized in abstract terms only in elements of the landscape. The determination of such landscape symbols would require research and analysis of extensive interviews, surveys, ancient descriptions, monographs and cultural and historical events, revealing the emotional connection of individual landscapes to former events. In several research there is noted the different perceptions of the landscape for local residents and visitors of the landscape, who do not know the background of the place [7].

Latvian memory landscape, event landscape and landscape stories. Anthropologist Vieda Skultans conducted major research in 1992, 1993 and 1999, interviewing a large number of Latvian residents to “read landscape stories” in people's memories and historical events for the period around 1920-1930. Exploring the historical events, the author highlighted a close connection with changes in the countryside – rural landscape and transformation during collectivization time, which also strongly influenced people's memories, as childhood memories for most respondents were associated to idyllic countryside – rural landscapes and rural works, marking the landscape of Latvia as a distinct agricultural state. Art also reflects rural



Fig. 2. The paintings with landscapes by V. Purvītis [from author private archive]



Fig. 3. The paintings by Ģ. Eliass [from author private archive]

landscapes through works by landscape painter Vilhelms Purvītis – like childhood memories – such “soft, smoky and somewhat dreamy”. By the words of Jānis Silins, this period was described as “sleeping silence in social life, literature and other arts” [32]. The paintings by V.Purvītis (*Figure 2*) and Ģ.Eliass (*Figure 3*) are included in the Canon of Latvian Culture and highlight the landscape of the beginning of the last century

In people's memories, landscapes are reflected through individual elements – meadows, trees, alleys, forests, gardens – they are very small elements of the landscape and very personal memories intertwined not only with the visual image of the landscape but also through flavours and smells (cow's milk, bread, forest berries, grass, hay, etc.). Landscape memories also relate to events, such as migration / resettlement, expatriation / deportation, festivities etc. The distinctly dual nature of the landscape is formed – physical and symbolic, which is on the one hand the common history of the entire country, and on the other hand the personal biography of each individual – all of which is reflected together in the landscape, and the landscape evokes in people, their memories. V.Skultans called the landscapes “the depositories of experience, with essential “baggage” of the past and future of the country and each individual”. A fine line arises here when we perceive the landscape as an objective reality, and when a particular landscape or landscape type gets a hue of personal memories or events [32].

The identity of the landscape and the development of the territory are closely linked to each other, as evidenced by the link between tourism and the identity of the place. For the purposes of development of the territory, landscape identity often becomes a business product in the tourism sphere, on the one hand allowing the territory to attract financial support and create new jobs, but on

the other hand the final “tourism product” of marketing pressure may be interpreted and adapted for sale, creating a false, simplified or modified identity of the place. In such a process and under the pressure of globalisation, the mental symbols of landscape or place turn into a commodity typical of the age of capitalism [16, 33, 35]. The concept of landscape identity itself encompasses many of the symbolic meanings and expressions of the landscape, so it can be concluded that the symbolic meaning of the landscape is a part of the concept of landscape identity, where cognitive aspects play an equally important role as cultural-historical and physical aspects of the landscape [26,28].

Regional context. Landscape can also be a reflection in a regional context, most often through architecture, culture, the spatial structure of nature or individual elements of the landscape. This link can be defined as two different directions: one with a very clear and prominent dominance of human or nature created elements – castles, manors or other buildings, even buildings of a technical or engineering nature (roads, bridges, railways, hydropower plants, etc.), as well as very prominent elements of nature and clusters of elements – steep banks, caves, river valleys, other prominent forms of terrain, rock outcrops, prominent vegetation, water bodies or water flows, etc. The other direction is the intangible overall structure of the landscape, which consists of many nuances, layers, both visible and emotional connections and layers, often referred to as the aura of place, belonging (*Sence of Place/ Genius Locci*), it can also be called the identity of place/landscape. These feelings are closely related to the individual's subjective perception, belonging to a certain country, nation, culture and traditions, even emotional state, season and weather conditions – creating a kind of mosaic-like “pattern” of emotions and physical matters through which a person perceives the landscape, remembers it, and further creates its own, highly intimate associations and symbols since childhood. The combination of different factors and aspects demonstrates that emotional – symbolic reflection of the landscape cannot be fixed very statically – rather, it is a variable and dynamic set of factors [13; 33; 9; 34; 31].

Regional landscape spaces had been traditionally developed in Latvia, which were related to the cultural and historical districts of Latvia – Zemgale, Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Latgale, which had a very symbolic visual image, understandable and recognisable to all residents of Latvia and related to the identity of each district. In addition, “functional” regions can be distributed – coast, river valleys, lake landscapes, agricultural landscapes, Pierīga Region, etc. [2]. Both historical regions and functional

landscapes together form a set of mental landscape symbols that we can call iconic landscapes or symbolic landscapes. A bill draft and a map of historic districts (*Figure 1.14.*) “Law of historic lands of Latvia” has now been prepared, also supported by the President of Latvia Egils Levits, raising the conviction that this document will help to strengthen the common identity of the population and draw attention to the preservation of the cultural and historical environment with characteristic and varied features of each region, which manifest directly through small cultural premises and local communities [21]. The bill draft itself is created as a part of the Law of administrative territories and settlements, which mostly focuses on the existence, management of economic and social areas and less on the identity and cultural and historical belonging of local communities. The Saeima points to the necessity for the development of a separate state policy, which would be the basis for cultural and historical preservation of the environment and ensuring of sustainable development of the territory with the provision of support to local communities, which is the key to preservation of the cultural space. This initiative promotes the implementation and introduction of the UNESCO Conventions “Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage”, “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, “Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions”. Implementation of this bill draft also supports the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Protected Values.

The symbols of the landscape of the historical districts of Latvia, on the one hand, are the identity carriers of each district, but on the other hand, allow the recognition of traditional landscapes and may be a part of the cultural Canon of Latvia. Several of the symbolic elements of the landscape are the entanglement of physical and cognitive elements, which were arisen as a result from both natural conditions and traditional management, through the nature and human interaction. Traditional cultural landscape is a part of the symbolism of the landscape as it is considered to be a valuable carrier of tradition. Landscape researcher Anita Zarina emphasizes in her article that cultural landscapes can be called iconic landscapes because there are concentrated both values recognized by society and they are linked to the peculiarities of collective memory, and to national identity as a whole. Regional-scale cultural landscapes are also a reflection of defined natural conditions and events for each region. In order to know and understand the landscape, one must take the view that a story or message that we can “read” on learning about the origins of the landscape, historical events that form

multiple layers, bringing changes to the landscape from feudalism times, through manor times, the Soviet period to the present day – these are “landscape biographies”. The author also distributes cultural landscape regions – the Seashore of Kurzeme, West Kursa, Ventava, East Kursa, Zemgale, Rigava, Lower Daugava, Selija, North Vidzeme, Gaujava, Vidzeme Hillocks, Maliena, Eastern Plains, Latgalian Lake District, Upper Daugava. The distribution of cultural landscape regions is a conceptual division and is based on the specific nature of natural conditions, traditions and historical events [38].

One of the symbols is also **the names of places** that mark specific landscapes in our memories and associations, creating a close connection between the real landscape and its cognitive image. The names cover historical events or the specific or assigned meanings of the landscape. An interesting connection is how people, knowing the symbolic meaning of the place, submit to the given characterisation and form a landscape/area image by name and no longer being able to perceive the place freely. Conversely, if we read the name of the place in a foreign language and don't understand its meaning, we have no expectations about the symbolism of the place, which partially destroys the connection to the identity of the place. The “special” or symbolic names of the landscape have a very strong influence on our perception and create the contextuality, emotional background and character of the identity of the place [13]. The name of the place may create a coherent and harmonious connection to the physical expression of the landscape, but may also show disharmony and even conflict, which is explained by the historical transformation of the territory and what we once called “great,” “big,” “little,” “new” these days no longer corresponds to reality.

Edmunds Bunkše noted in his research **the symbols of the rural landscape** as a strong foundation of identity, which helped to preserve Latvia's identity also during the years of Soviet rule. He named as the symbolic elements of the landscape or landscape spaces of the rural landscape:

- a farmyard with its own farm buildings, garden and agricultural land, pastures, fallows, surrounded by a forest or located on the seashore;
- meadows full of flowers where bees buzz;
- trees or clusters of trees — oak or birch groves;
- castles with an ancient history;
- seashore – both steep banks, dunes and rocky sea shores;
- river valleys - the valleys of the largest rivers in Latvia – Daugava, Gauja, Lielupe, Venta [8].

E.Bunkše called all these landscapes an icons, which have exactly the associative power and

symbolic meaning that were particularly important during the period of revival and the war. With the changing in highlights of the era, the understanding, demand and place of the symbolic importance of the rural landscape in the shape of each individual's identity and also in the shape of national identity also changed [8]. The beauty and nobility of the landscape were analysed by E.Bunkše through the prism of several paradigms, when both everyday perception and world pressure were able to reduce the aesthetic value of the rural landscape. On analysing the lyrics of the Latvian Dainas – songs, the events of both the world and Latvia and transformation of consciousness, the author showed “the beauty of landscapes” like a dynamic and variable quantity – through the prism of art, through ethical paradigms, through traditions and also through personal experience [7]. Such a research model relatively accurately demonstrates the changing nature of landscape perception, which is difficult to be settled within any bounds or captured in full size.

Landscapes, as the value, is included in the **Cultural Canon of Latvia**. Work is still underway to define the 8 landscapes to be included in the canon, but however the consciousness that landscapes are and will be the part of the culture has already been established. Definition proposed by experts is: “The cultural and historical landscape is formed by interaction between different factors of human activity and nature. It illustrates the evolution of humanity in time and space, has acquired a recognised value in society and reflects certain traditions, historical events or their representation in literary and artistic work through physical testimony in the landscape” [20]. Latvian Culture Canon includes:

- Abava Primeval Valley Landscape;
- The Daugava River Landscape;
- The Landscape of Zemgale Lowland;
- Gauja Primeval Valley Landscape;
- The Latgalian Lake District Landscape;
- The Landscape of Latvian Forests;
- The Seacoast Landscape;
- The Landscape of Vidzeme Hillocks.

The cultural and historical value of each landscape, which refers to the prepared document of the Cultural resolution and confirms the foundation of Latvian culture and traditions, is the main criteria for the nomination of the landscape in the cultural Canon [17].

The project “**The Landscape Treasures**” – as an attempt to involve the society in the assessment of landscapes by nominating “important and significant” landscapes for themselves in each region. Electronic voting lists (*43-50 units per planning region*) had been established, which were created from the landscapes sent in by the



Fig.4. Landscape treasures – cartographic representation [15, 20]

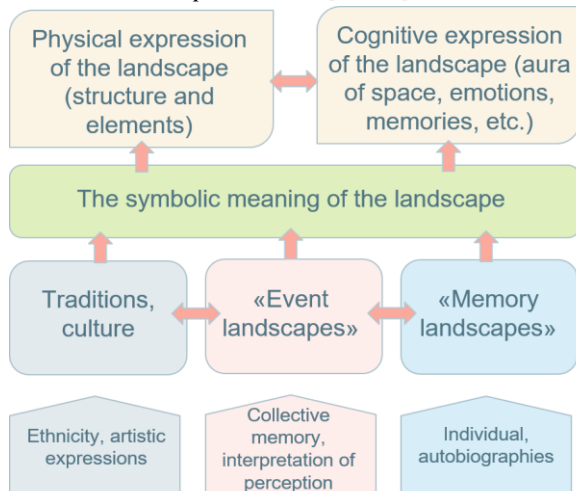


Fig. 5. Model for the development and operation of the symbolic meaning of the landscape [diagram created by author]

population by the Council of landscape experts, along with planning regions that well describe the landscape values of each region from the perspective of the population. A map of these precious landscapes had also been created [1] (Figure 4). As well as the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development sent this information to local governments, with an invitation to include these landscapes as values in planning documents.

It should be noted that the landscapes nominated within the framework of the project are different in their scale – mental landscapes, large-scale landscapes or landscape areas, large-scale landscapes or panoramas of urban areas, individual urban objects with cultural and historical value, individual rural landscape objects and territories. Such a wide variety of landscape types and scales proves that landscape symbols are perceived much more widely than one element of the landscape – they can be both extensive rural and urban landscapes or their parts, individual small-scale landscapes, cultural historic objects or individual elements of the landscape, as well as mental landscapes.

Model for the development and operation of the symbolic meaning of the landscape.

On summarizing the various symbolic meanings of the landscape, it can be concluded that the symbols are related to several aspects or their groups – ethnicity, collective memory of a certain group of people or all the people of the country, historical events and also biography of each individual (Figure 5).

The symbolic meaning of the landscape, like the landscape itself, has a dual nature – on the one hand, the landscape is a physical reality – all elements of the landscape and a common structure are clearly the essential part of the symbolism of the landscape. On the other hand, the cognitive expression of the landscape is powerful and is formed over several generations, intertwining traditions, culture, daily events and important national events associated with the memories of both each individual and Community. All together resonates through culture and art, creating a kind of dialogue and reflecting in the interpretation of landscape perception, both for each individual and varying regionally and narrowly influencing the course of each individual's life and connection to their landscape – with their homeland.

Conclusions

In Latvia, the symbolic importance of the landscape was easily and self-evidently accepted long ago, because the close connection of Latvians with nature is reflected both in beliefs, culture and traditions, and is in everyday life of every individual inherited from ancient generations. Consequently, that close connection with the landscape has also significantly formed the symbols of the landscape, which are readable both in a national, regional and local context and even at the level of each individual. Over time, not only beliefs and traditions created the perception and symbolic meaning of the landscape, a major role for both literature, art, and published photo books and other publications that were popular in the last century. Here, a two-sided, or dialogue-style connection is formed: landscape influences and inspires artists and artists through their works form the perception and contemporary context of the population.

At the same time, it is important to understand the context of landscape perception, where the landscape has a holistic nature and there are several dimensions of perception – spatial structure, mental dimension, temporal dimension, link between nature and culture, landscape as a complex system. Also, when the perception of the landscape is formed, it is important to note such factors: dynamic self-organising/self-developing systems/structures; Gestalt theory on landscape perception as a spatial model/matrix; a hierarchical approach connected

with understanding of global ecology; understanding that the landscape is a complex and interconnected human and natural system; the landscape has a multidimensional nature that reflects not only through physical but also temporal and cognitive factors; the regularities in the landscape are not always direct, but often hidden and layered.

In Latvia, landscape symbols are often used, also for commercial purposes, or as a promotional brand, attaching importance to research related to landscape identity and local symbols. By understanding the specificities of both the country and the region, even the links between

individual generations and even individuals and the landscape and landscape elements, one can make better use of them in the development and attractiveness of the area, not only for tourists but directly for local communities – by making this cognitive connection closer and stronger. Taking into account that the symbolic importance of the landscape is both physical and mental, as well as by studying the events of each place, the special features of culture and traditions, it is possible to more fully discover the symbols of each landscape and their context, connection with people in the memories of individuals.

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Kopsavilkums. Latvijas ainavas simboliskā nozīme un kognitīvā dimensija ir viena no ainavas būtiskām sastāvdaļām ainavas koptēla izpratnei. Ainava ir ne tikai fiziskā realitāte, bet arī emocionāli – simboliskā struktūra, kas cieši savija ar cilvēka kognitīvo uztveri, sevis identificēšanu, ar dzimtenes uztveri, kā arī ietekmē mūsu ikdienas paradumus. Ainava, ka kultūras izpausme veido ciešu saikni ar vēsturiskiem un politiskiem notikumiem, ar tradīcijām un paražām, ar katru indivīdu un ar nāciju kopumā – tas viss izpaužas ainavas simboliskā nozīmē, ko bieži izmanto, ka valsts atpazīstamību, marketinga vajadzībām, bet ainavas simboli ir arī katra indivīda cieša saikne ar savu dzimto vietu un senčiem. Pētījumā ir analizēti dažādi aspekti un fenomenī, kas ietekme ainavas simbolisko nozīmi un ir saistīti gan ar katra indivīda vai kopienas, nācijas kognitīviem aspektiem, gan ar kolektīvo atmiņu un citiem identitātes un pašapziņas izpausmēm. Ainavai piemīt holistiskā būtība, kas izskaidro vairāku procesu ciešu sasaisti – gan fiziskās ainavas izmaiņas, gan katra indivīda uztveres izmaiņas, atbilstoši valsts politiskai un sociālai situācijai. Ne mazāk svarīga arī katrs valsts ainavas uztveres attīstības vēsture, kas Latvijā veidojusies samērā nesen un tajā lielu lomu spēlē arī māksla, fotogramatas un pētnieku veidotas ainavas sistemātiskais iedalījums. Jāatzīmē arī ainavas simbolu veidošanā reģionālais konteksts un kultūrvēsturiskais Latvijas iedalījums. Kognitīvie procesi ir savukārt saistīti ar tādiem konceptiem – Genius Locci, atmiņu un notikumu ainavas, ainavas identitāte, vietas nosaukumi, ainavas biogrāfijas utt. Rezultātā ir attēlots autora veidots ainavas simboliskās nozīmes attīstības un darbības modelis, kas atspoguļo ainavas simboliskas veidošanas struktūru un specifiku, kā arī saistītus procesus, kas ietekme ainavas simbolisko nozīmi.