

Inventory of Dynamics

Applying Methods of Arts and Landscape Architecture to Capture the Complexity of the Cultural Landscape Wachau

Continuing Landscape Wachau

The Austrian Wachau Cultural Landscape was listed by the UNESCO List as World Heritage in 2000. It is classified as a continuing landscape, meaning that culture and landscape continue to influence each other. “The evolutionary process is still in progress” (UNESCO World Heritage Committee, 2023, p. 23). In addition to the ruins, historical human settlements and the agricultural use, traffic routes are integral parts of the landscape and characteristic for the riverine landscape. Nevertheless, there is little awareness that traffic routes are part of the designed landscape. And they are barely mentioned in the nomination file.

Since the nineteenth century, painters have played a significant role in generating awareness of the scenic beauty of the Wachau. The region has since transformed into a touristic hotspot, resulting in a constant expansion of traffic routes. At the same time, the continuous artistic engagement has raised awareness for the design integration of these routes into the landscape.

In our presentation, we show methods and preliminary results of the ongoing arts-based research project Wachau Routes conducted by a team of landscape architects (BOKU University Vienna) and visual artists (University of Arts Linz) exploring the region's traffic routes through their respective professional perspectives. Road, railway, cycle paths, and hiking trails are investigated within a four-years project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). The Danube as the oldest traffic route through the Wachau plays a key role within the project.

We present outcomes of the first two years with a focus on roads and railway and show that the interweaving of artistic practice and landscape architectural thinking enables a broader understanding of diverse aspects of this cultural landscape.

Material

This research is based on observations on site documented thoroughly in sketches, photographs, and videos. We conducted interviews with the landscape architect commissioned with the landscape design of Wachau road. This material was supplemented with photographs, technical plans, and written material from the Austrian State Archives, the Archive of the Lower Austrian road administration, private archives and literature.

Methodology

Arts-based and scientific methods are used to create a layered image of the Wachau that takes up the continuous artistic engagement and corresponds to the contemporary understanding of land-

scape. Various current and past artistic and technical representations of traffic routes and their designs are analysed, performatively developed, communicated, and critically reflected upon through methods of art and landscape architecture.

This is therefore not a classic inventory project. The innovative approach involves multidisciplinary investigations through art and landscape architecture, which build on a broad cultural understanding of landscape. Artistic film recordings (phantom rides) are a suitable medium for depicting the perception from various means of transportation and the dynamics of the landscape (Giot, 2002; Truniger, 2013; Balmori, 2014; Cureton, 2017). Landscape architectural analyses visualise the design qualities of infrastructure buildings in the landscape. Participation formats with students give a variety of perspectives.

Results and Conclusion

The various results show different aspects of cultural significance of the Wachau. The interdisciplinary collaboration enables methodological boundaries to be crossed, new perspectives to be adopted and skills and tools to be acquired and developed. Approaches from art and landscape architecture help to gain a broader understanding of the complex interplay of built and intangible attributes of the landscape. The results are constantly published on the project website (wachauroutes.at). In addition, presentations and exhibitions on site are a good way of communicating the cultural values of the landscape to the local population.

Discussion

The manifold aspects of cultural significance of landscapes go beyond the inventory of its physical components. What role can artistic methods play in the inventory of cultural landscapes? Can they help us to identify attributes that are beyond physical inventories? How can they be integrated into traditional inventory processes? The project outcomes contribute to an understanding of landscape as a system in constant flux. The understanding of these dynamics relates both to the development of the landscape and to the movement along different routes through the landscape.

References

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