

Editorial

# Cultural Landscape Preservation and Social–Ecological Sustainability

María Fe Schmitz  and Cristina Herrero-Jáuregui \*

Department of Biodiversity, Ecology and Evolution, Complutense University of Madrid, 28040 Madrid, Spain; ma296@bio.ucm.es

\* Correspondence: crherrero@bio.ucm.es

## 1. Introduction

Cultural landscapes are the result of social–ecological processes that have co-evolved throughout history, shaping high-value sustainable systems. They are an interface between nature and culture, characterized by the conservation and protection of ecological processes, natural resources, landscapes, and cultural biodiversity [1]. The adaptation to the environment and the social–ecological resilience of cultural landscapes depends, to a great extent, on the transmission of culture associated with the so-called traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of recognized importance in the sustainable use of natural resources and the conservation of ecological processes and biodiversity [2]. Therefore, the conservation of naturalness and culturalness must be considered together within the socioecological framework of biocultural heritage, which requires adequate protection and management [3,4].

The current processes of global change, such as agricultural intensification, rural abandonment, urban sprawl, and socioeconomic dynamics, are threatening cultural landscapes worldwide. Even though this loss is often unstoppable because of rapid and irreversible social–ecological changes, there are also examples where rational protection measures can preserve cultural landscapes while promoting the sustainability of social–ecological systems. In Europe, significant efforts have been made in recent decades to preserve TEK and cultural landscapes [5]. However, not all conservation policymaking processes consider the value of cultural landscapes, which makes their preservation even more difficult.

Indeed, protected areas (PAs) designed to safeguard remaining habitats and species represent the cornerstone of conservation efforts [6], and their effectiveness can range from areas with inclusive and adaptive programs for sustainable management to areas with no active management, known as “paper parks” [7,8]. Land conservation policies have frequently been defensive, and management plans have often neglected or even restricted traditional rural activities, forgetting the local population, which has contributed to the high conservation values recognized in cultural landscapes [9]. These nature conservation efforts based on wilderness and naturalness have resulted in the decline of functional species composition and plant diversity of pasture systems [10], loss of natural and biocultural diversity and, ultimately, in the abandonment of the rural landscape and the reduction or disappearance of traditional knowledge [9]. Additionally, management plans of PAs are too often dependent on administrative boundaries and political legislation, and not on social–ecological relationships, biophysical processes, and ecosystem services fluxes, which reduces their effectiveness in protecting landscapes based on social–ecological interactions [1,11].

Therefore, there is a growing need of developing innovative theoretical and methodological approaches that are focused on management strategies for preserving cultural landscapes and natural heritage.



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decolonizing efforts must be understood and updated within an Indigenous-led research and sustainability planning paradigm that facilitates autonomous place-based decision making. Finally, Nthane et al. explore how information and communication technologies (ICTs) in South African small-scale fisheries are leveraged towards value chain upgrading, collective action, and institutional sustainability—key issues that influence small-scale fishery contributions to marine resource sustainability. Authors demonstrate that Abalobi's ICT platform has the potential to facilitate deeper meanings of democracy that incorporate socioeconomic reform, collective action, and institutional sustainability in South Africa's small-scale fisheries.

The second group of papers focuses on cultural heritage around cities and how urban development is affecting its conservation and thus, its potential as tourist attraction. Authors offer innovative strategies and solutions in order to achieve a win–win balance where heritage is preserved in the context of urban renewal, contributing to the sustainable development of cultural heritage landscape and urbanization. Chen et al. explore the coexistence between the protection and management of cultural heritage landscapes in Japan and urban development in cities from a novel perspective. They propose an indicator of landscape morphology, namely sky view factor, that predicts the perception of tourists in heritage gardens in an urban context. Authors find that tourists' attitudes towards the high-rise buildings outside the traditional gardens are increasingly diversified, and the impact of this phenomenon is not necessarily negative. Meanwhile, Udeaja et al. recommend a thoughtful integration of sustainable heritage urban conservation into local urban development frameworks and the establishment of approaches that recognize the plurality of heritage values in India. Their paper reveals a myriad of challenges such as inadequacy of urban conservation management policies and processes focused on heritage, absence of skills, training, and resources amongst decision makers and persistent conflict and competition between heritage conservation needs and developers' interests. Furthermore, they denounce that values and significance of Surat's tangible and intangible heritage are not fully recognized by its citizens and heritage stakeholders. In addition, Molina et al. emphasize the need of specially considering urban and peri-urban riverbanks as landscapes in expansion due to the continuous growth of built-up spaces. Their paper characterizes four urban Mediterranean riverbanks describing the richness and composition of bird species and examines the interventions and urban planning criteria applied. Authors infer the need to reassess urban planning in river areas to ensure its compatibility with their operation, values, and possible uses of these systems.

In the third group of papers, authors focus on tourism development and offer innovative solutions for the sustainable preservation of cultural landscapes. On the one hand, Martin et al. foster cultural identity preservation and responsible communal living in nature by presenting a set of architectural actions for the integration of campsites in cultural landscapes along the Catalan coast. The paper highlights the capacity of these settlements to preserve the identity of the place and its culture, organizing communities based on itinerancy and temporality with a high degree of respect for the environment. On the other hand, Pollice et al. show the first results of what they define as a "maieutic reworking of local heritage" in Cape Verde through the sharing of narrative and symbolic artifacts. They highlight the use of Placetelling® as a particular type of storytelling of places that promotes local development and helps to develop a sense of identity and belonging among the members of the community. They defend Placetelling® for supporting local communities to become directly engaged in the preservation of their common legacy in order to transmit it to coming generations and promote it as a particularly useful tool for sustainable tourism development.

The last group of papers is descriptive. This group characterizes and describes cultural landscapes and TEK in different contexts (China, Hungary, and Japan) as a first step to understanding social–ecological dynamics and, thus, design appropriate land management policies to protect them and promote sustainable tourism. Li et al. explore changes in the relationship between humans and land in the farming area of the unique farming

settlements in the Chengdu plain (China). Their study introduces the concept of “demand” and “restriction” in sustainable development to explore a future strategy for maintaining the cultural landscape, which is expected to provide a basis for future policy formulation to protect the traditional rural landscape. Chrastina et al. characterize a landscape colonized by Slovaks at the beginning of the 18th century as part of the cultural heritage of the Slovaks in Hungary, showing that a long-term stable cultural landscape has a similar potential for the development of ecotourism as a landscape protected by its wilderness. Finally, Tokuoka et al. examine the spatial distribution, uses, and folk nomenclature of farmland demarcation trees planted in the Niyodo River area in Japan. Authors highlight both the commonalities and uniqueness of demarcation tree culture in different regions of Japan, deepening our understanding of this agricultural heritage.

#### 4. Conclusions

The presented papers cover a wide spectrum of topics from community management to urban heritage preservation and TEK with different methodological approaches and involving regions from all over the world. Therefore, in our opinion, this Special Issue can be interesting for both researchers and practitioners. The presented papers also suggest management policies that we believe can be of interest for further increasing sustainability in cultural landscapes.

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