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LANDSCAPE POETICS

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FOREWORD

Interdisciplinary investigations for approaching complex phenomena of reality in contemporary research are increasingly applied in many subject areas. The fact of diversity enhances not only successful dissemination of ideas and statements in academic coterie, but also addresses general public providing historical and cultural data of the researched object.

The notion ‘landscape’ is treated in various contexts in scholarly investigations – it is a witness of the historical and cultural development of the society, an element of geographical space, and a part of ecological systems; due to human’s ability to use his / her imagination landscape has become a significant composition in design, culture, and art where perceived through any of the senses, especially sight or hearing, it is included in the aesthetic context.

The collection of research articles Landscape and Culture has united cultural geographers and the representatives of the humanities to present diverse methodological approaches to landscape studies in culture. The volume is a representation of different cultural models that strive for revealing their impact on human’s thought, activity, and performance results, as well as on the aesthetic and symbolic perception of the world.

In Part 1 Landscape as the Phenomenon of Cultural Geography, landscape is observed as a constituent of historical and cultural processes and embodiments of an individual’s performance. City landscapes present the magnificence of the urban space linking culture to the physical environment. In the essayistic opening article Landscapes of Berlin, basing on beliefs and statements of remarkable 19th and 20th centuries German authors and philosophers, as well as on his personal experience, Fjodors Fjodorovs ascribes to city landscape values for intangible reasons. As a unique cultural and social construct a city can be perceived through the prism of spirituality.

Parks, gardens, and squares as the most striking urban landscapes with historical significance, which the same as landscape in general possess the richest historical records, shape the cultural environment of any city and country. The history of development, as well as dynamics and tendencies of forming a Latvian city landscape, especially parks and squares in poly-cultural and multi-religious environment, have been researched on the basis of the two Latvian cities located in the very poles of the country – the western city Liepāja on the coast of the Baltic sea and the south-eastern Daugavpils, the geographical position of which is characterized by the proximity of borders. Mutual interaction among the nations and general influences of other cultures allow scientists applying comparative methodology when the local is being seen in a wider, i.e., supra-national and global context.

In Part 2 Baltic Literary Landscapes of the collection, landscape is viewed as a phenomenon of human’s phycial and spiritual freedom. Thematically papers can be grouped into three overlapping segments – emotional landscape and its connection with human’s memory in childhood narratives; exotic and symbolic (Australian, American) landscape as the operator of the human’s sense of the self, sense of one’s own, i.e., personal identity, as well as national identity and collective memory; and psychologized
landscape as the means of modelling human’s external and internal space. In the majority of the analyzed works, the autobiographical aspect and the category of memory are of great importance, thus landscape can be seen as the mindscape of the human’s thought.

Part 3 Landscape Poetics entails articles that analyze landscape in certain foreign (British, Austrian, French, Swedish) authors’ writing in the framework of the binary oppositions ‘the rural – the urban’, ‘the natural – the artificial’, ‘the native – the foreign’, ‘the sensual / sonorous – the bare / silent’, ‘the hospitable – the hostile and desolate’ emphasizing the mutual interaction between the human and nature where man is seen either as a part of nature or, vice versa, a complete stranger or alien.

On the whole landscape investigation in the articles of the collection reveals landscape as a complex phenomenon with manifold possibilities of actualization and representation in culture and literature that is rarely perceived neutrally as landscape itself is not neutral in its essence. Accepting the human’s life as a journey the landscape cannot be simply seen as a pretty scene or static text but as an expression of a never ending process of development, changes, and movement.

The compilers hope that the collection will address the needs of intended readership and provide the stimulus for further research and discussions on the landscape studies.

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Ilze Kačāne