Chapter 8
A Novel Approach to Studying Cultural Landscapes at the Watershed Level

Carlos José Lopes Balsas
University at Albany (SUNY), USA

ABSTRACT

Watersheds are natural-ecological regions characterized by a strong sense of unity. In contrast to the current administrative jurisdictions, watersheds form natural units guided by common hydrological, climatic, and, increasingly, cultural landscape planning mechanisms. The main purpose of this chapter is to shed light on a novel approach to using watersheds to inventory, preserve, and promote cultural landscape resources. The Hudson River region of New York (USA) is examined to assess the formation, evolution, and preservation of cultural landscape resources between New York City (south) and the state capital, Albany (north). It includes mixed methods, combining literature reviews on regional planning, professional practice, and multi-scalar governance with selected case study analysis and the assessment of policy priorities. The significance of this research is in the application of a novel cultural landscape resources planning approach to the study of the Hudson River region of New York.

INTRODUCTION

Watersheds are natural-ecological regions characterized by a strong sense of unity (Balsas, 2016a; Balsas, 2016b; Platt, 2006). In contrast to administrative jurisdictions, watersheds form natural planning units guided by common hydrological, climatic, and increasing cultural landscape planning mechanisms. Cultural landscape resources within watersheds have developed over time, frequently combining human actions with natural processes. Waterfront locations have traditionally been perceived as possessing special qualities from real estate and tourism perspectives (Balsas, Kotval, & Mullin, 2000). Many cities have developed on the waterfront, and some of their most significant urban fabric faces water bodies (Cengiz, 2013). In the northeast part of the United States, many water-powered industries have developed on riverfronts (Lewis, 1994). With the deindustrialization, some of those structures were abandoned,

while others have been renovated and now have a multitude of uses ranging from residential, business, studio-workshops for artists, and co-ops, among others. In this chapter, the Hudson River region of New York is examined to assess the formation, evolution, and preservation of cultural landscape resources between New York City to the south and the state capital, Albany, to the north.

The main purpose of this chapter is to shed light on a novel approach to using watersheds to inventory, preserve and promote cultural landscape resources. The research is guided by three questions. The first question is whether the unity of a watershed has advantages over the often quite fragmented jurisdictional nature of non-watershed areas. Second, to what extent can the mismatch between natural and jurisdictional borders be minimized or even offset by active planning measures, such as cultural and environmental watershed plans at supra-regional levels. And third, what are the implications of utilizing the watershed as the fundamental unit of analysis and preservation for cultural planning theory and practice.

The Hudson River watershed's aesthetic value and cultural recognition dates back, at least, to the nineteenth century Hudson River School movement in modern art. Although this movement highlighted mostly the natural and unspoiled natural landscapes of a pre-industrial era, many upstream cities and towns were important bastions during the industrial revolution. Such is not the case today. Most of those water-powered and water-dependent industries have left the region, and the urbanization is now centered on a network of small and medium-sized cities along the river. It is argued that these rich cultural landscapes have not developed randomly, they have resulted from a combination of natural conditions and active management by a myriad of mostly public and non-profit organizations. In fact, the regenerated landscapes resulted from the concerted effort of various cultural and ecologically minded organizations under the umbrella of state and federal programs such as the urban cultural parks, the greenway compact, and the national heritage areas.

The state of New York coordinated the development of the urban cultural parks and the Greenway Compact Community Program in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively, while the federal government approved the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area in 1996. Although economic activity is key to sustaining the vibrancy of the region, the protection of its cultural landscapes through active planning measures and collective stewardship is fundamental to preserving the socio-economic, cultural, and above all, the ecological value of fragile natural ecosystems. Multi-scalar governance approaches with interventions at various levels is responsible for the preservation of cultural landscape resources. The national status conferred by the National Park Service designation has had clear benefits regarding awareness, legitimization, protection, and promotion of the region's cultural landscapes.

This chapter identifies and discusses the role of some of these planning instruments as well as how various supra-regional entities (i.e., Hudson River Valley Greenway, Scenic Hudson, Historic Hudson River Towns) have been attempting to preserve cultural landscape resources in the Hudson River region. This research is based on fieldwork conducted mostly from summer 2014 onwards. It is based on mixed methods combining literature reviews on regional planning, professional practice, and multi-scalar governance, with selected case study analysis, and the assessment of policy priorities. The chapter's significance is the utilization of the Hudson River watershed in New York to demonstrate the value of a novel methodological approach centered on the use of multi-scalar and multi-pronged perspectives on the preservation of cultural landscape resources at the watershed level. Moreover, the chapter also demonstrates other innovative aspects of contemporary planning processes, namely how actual professional practice and planning processes have evolved from local to regional, and from top-down to bottom-up initiatives and vice versa; the increasing involvement of stakeholders in the planning process; and the voluntary adhesion of the administrative communities to the regional planning mechanism.

Related Content

Simplified Toolbar to Accelerate Repeated Tasks (START) for ArcGIS: Optimizing Workflows in Humanitarian Demining
Pierre Lacroix, Pablo de Rouletand Nicolas Ray (2014). *International Journal of Applied Geospatial Research (pp. 87-94).*
www.irma-international.org/article/simplified-toolbar-to-accelerate-repeated-tasks-start-for-arcgis/119619

Geospatial Mashups in Web GIS for Tourism Infrastructure: Internet-Based Channel Perspective Promotional Measures
Somnath Chaudhuriand Nilanjan Ray (2019). *Geospatial Intelligence: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1334-1352).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/geospatial-mashups-in-web-gis-for-tourism-infrastructure/222950

An Examination of Job Titles Used for GIScience Professionals
Thomas A. Wikle (2010). *International Journal of Applied Geospatial Research (pp. 40-56).*
www.irma-international.org/article/examination-job-titles-used-giscience/38922

Similarities between Competitors and the Implications for Location Strategies
Lawrence Joseph (2012). *Geospatial Technologies and Advancing Geographic Decision Making: Issues and Trends (pp. 132-150).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/similarities-between-competitors-implications-location/63601

FogLearn: Leveraging Fog-Based Machine Learning for Smart System Big Data Analytics
Rabindra K. Barik, Rojalina Priyadarshini, Harishchandra Dubey, Vinay Kumarand Kunal Mankodiya (2019). *Geospatial Intelligence: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1225-1241).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/foglearn/222944