

HOW TO ANALYSE A LANDSCAPE? THE 8 LANDMARKS PROPOSED BY J.-P. DEFFONTAINES, J. RITTER, B. DEFFONTAINES ET D. MICHAUD (DEFFONTAINES ET AL. 2006)

Pierre Le Ray

We have seen which elements of the landscape can be decisive for the agricultural and social organisation of a territory. It is therefore important to bear them in mind when you observe a landscape to make sure you don't miss any key elements.

However, the observation of a landscape does not simply consist in the mechanical observation of a set of elements; all observations include reflection, attitudes and postures. These are detailed in the eight landmarks proposed by *Deffontaines et al.*

1. When looking at the landscape, ask the right questions

The purpose of the observation is to answer one or several questions that vary according to our skills and area of interest (geologist, botanist, agro-geographer, mayor of a town). Our approach consists in combining several disciplines (cross-disciplinary posture) to note a maximum number of indications and explanations of how the local farming system functions.

2. Refer to an observation framework

An in-depth observation can be split into 3 stages:

- 1) Single out, name and describe the objects
- 2) Examine how the objects are organised in relation to each other
- 3) Form hypotheses on the relationships between them

3. Go from detail to global ... or the contrary

Observation is a constant to-and-fro between the general observation of a territory and the more in-depth analysis of certain details. This methodology should, moreover, be continued in the subsequent sequences (agrarian history, farmers' strategies)

4. Observe time

Time blends into the landscape: geological, historical, technical...

We in particular observe multiannual and seasonal objects: shrub and tree vegetation indicates abandoned or fallow land, while grass height reveals recent use, etc.

At the time of observation, ombro-thermal diagrams will be a precious tool to study the possible evolution, over the seasons, of the state of the landscape...

5. Take the time to observe

Once the first impression has been gained, from a high point for example, it is necessary to take the time to proceed with a detailed observation of the landscape: to do this, it is preferable to explore the transects on foot (when working on a small area).

Taking the time to talk about the landscape with a farmer, or a local inhabitant, can also be valuable. Lastly, a second visit, the next day or in another season, certainly provides a new interpretation.

6. Represent the contrasts

When working on agricultural development it is essential to divide the landscape into large homogeneous zones: action requires understanding, understanding requires simplification and simplification requires modelling.

Our objective will be to identify the units of a contrasted landscape, i.e. with significantly different biophysical characteristics and farming methods: agro-ecological units.

7. Compare viewpoints

It is always useful to compare our results on objects, their interaction and their division into agro-ecological units, with those of other disciplines or local inhabitants.

8. Take the sensitive dimension into account

“The quality of the first impression far surpasses what we gain once engaged in the observation process - it is an immediate, ephemeral impression that can help build our knowledge” The first general sketches will thus hold a great deal of information.

► **Bibliography:**

Deffontaines, Jean-Pierre, Jean Ritter, Benoît Deffontaines, and Denis Michaud. 2006. *Petit guide de l’observation du paysage*. Editions Quae.