

Landscape Preference and Human Survival Well-Being

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Abstract

*Humans have always been fascinated by the landscape. Aspects of the landscape that are intriguing play an important role in people's preferences for landscapes. Since classical times philosophers such as Plato and Socrates, have made inquiries about aesthetics; and numerous theories have emerged. These theories can be categorized into two paradigms. Even though both paradigms focus on the role of landscape in determining landscape preferences one group believes that the aesthetic qualities of a landscape are inherent in the landscape, the other argues that landscape aesthetics lies in people's cognition or mental understanding of the landscape. However, beginning with the seminal work of Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960) and his classification of landscape elements that are important to the imageability of urban landscapes, attention has been given to the later paradigm that emphasizes the role of human evolution and cognition in shaping landscape preferences and thus aesthetics. However, this paper argues that, after several decades, no central theory related to landscape preference or aesthetics has emerged, even though many researchers who subscribe to the later paradigm based their theory on the same assumption; human well-being. Therefore, the recognition of the relationship between landscape preference and human well-being should be redeveloped and strengthened by bringing in new evidence.*

Keywords: Preference, Perception, Aesthetics, Well-being, Landscape Aesthetic

1. Introduction

Humans have always relied on their visual sense for understanding the world around them and landscape has been a source of particular fascination.

This phenomenon has caused scholars to inquire into what makes a particular landscape beautiful and why? These questions have bothered philosophers and scholars of aesthetics for many years, and yet there has still been no unifying answer found. In other words, there is an absence of a central theory that can convincingly explain or knit together the many competing theories that constitute landscape aesthetics today.

One of the problems of not having a strong and persuasive theory to explain landscape aesthetics is that scenic or preferred landscapes are often neglected and dispensed with during development stage. This is not to suggest that no theories have been found strong enough to explain landscape aesthetic. However, the theories are overlapping if not, at odds with one another, causing confusion. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the theory of landscape aesthetic and landscape preference.

The question now is, on what basis should the theory stand. What are the similarities among the available theories that can be used as a unifying argument? This paper attempts to provide suggestions for the development of a stronger landscape preference theory by analyzing available paradigms of aesthetics and landscape aesthetics theory.

2. Paradigm of Landscape Aesthetic Theory

In general, there are two broad landscape aesthetics paradigms (Lothian, 1999); objective and subjective approaches and both of the paradigms have their own philosophical arguments. It is important as a researcher to understand these paradigms and the advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches before making a decision on which approach is suitable for study.

