

Documenting Cultural Landscapes: Tools and Issues for Collaboration Across Boundaries

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Problem Statement

Cultural landscapes are formed over time and shaped by people. The terrain of a landscape can be unwinding and often embedded with artifacts of various scales. Cultural landscapes, such as old gravesites, abandoned factories, and seashores piled with debris, simultaneously present us with the remains of former human activity and bear witness to global change. How to effectively document them while ensuring the documentations remain accessible to diverse communities and reusable for multiple purposes, poses many challenges to researchers.

Issues

Audiovisual and survey materials about landscapes often are coded and indexed by the time and location when they are documented. As various encodings and vocabularies are in use, reconciling landscape documentations, including their metadata, from multiple sources can be difficult. This problem is further compounded by the larger cultural, historical, and socioeconomic contexts inherited in the landscapes. Given any cultural landscape, multiple documentations exist but are dispersed in different collections. They are not necessarily easy to find nor readily accessible. The annotation schemes, descriptive texts and/or semantic labels used by the collections can be heterogeneous hence not aligned for reuse.

Tools

We view documentation materials on cultural landscapes as research datasets about which the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) data principles apply. We propose that, with current tools and services, already landscape documentations can be made more findable, accessible and reusable hence facilitate research collaboration. Open repositories (e.g., data.depositar.io), persistent identifiers (e.g. [wikidata.org](https://www.wikidata.org)), data catalogue schema (e.g. DCAT), and common participatory practices (c.f. citizen science) are all helpful to collection development, enrichment, and sharing.

Showcases

We will show case several works done in collaboration with researchers and communities in Taiwan in documenting cultural landscapes, ranging from drone imaging for changing landscapes (<https://data.depositar.io/dataset/6ac93>) to preserving ephemeral street arts in a civil movement (<http://public.318.io/node/39425>) and to folk pictures and stories about the current COVID-19 landscapes (<https://th.covid19.commonsworld.org>).