

## Landschaft und Heimat – ein Resümee

### Summary<sup>1</sup>

Nature and landscape conservationists in Germany have again begun dealing with the terms *Heimat* (homeland<sup>2</sup>) and *Heimatschutz* (homeland conservation). After years of being tabooed, the term “*Heimat*” is experiencing a sort of renaissance – perhaps in reaction to globalization and, consequently, many people’s growing feeling of anonymity. A major factor in the debate is that the word is burdened by a lack of distance among actors in nature and homeland conservation to the ideology of the Nazi era. Another factor is the cautious question whether a new understanding of the word “*Heimat*” could perhaps serve as an additional line of reasoning for justifying, accepting and implementing nature conservation objectives and measures. The broad public uses the word more freely and far more impartially.

“Landscape and Heimat” was the title of an event held by the Institut für Landschaftspflege, the Akademie für Ländlichen Raum Baden-Württemberg and the Deutsche Rat für Landschaftspflege (German Council for Land Stewardship) on 18-19 November 2004 in Freiburg/Breisgau. Its aim was to look at landscape and *Heimat* from different viewpoints and academic traditions: *Heimat* and landscape as a human contrivance, as the result of contemporary thinking, as a normative frame, as a concrete object for the fields of landscape and historic monument preservation, as the object of political decisions and as the object of research in the natural sciences and humanities. The meeting was intended to step up the debate on the connection between *Heimat* and landscape in an interdisciplinary way, to gain insights into its access, to deliberate options for dealing with the *Heimat* landscape as well as to work out research questions. It aimed to illuminate the connections between nature conservation, the cultivated landscape, preservation of historical monuments, *Heimat* and *Heimat* management as well as the relationships between the actors. The field of landscape management possesses the specific competence of dealing with the value and the making-valuable of landscapes. Now, it must assess how the term *Heimat* – as re-discovered by nature conservationists – should be treated.

The word “*Heimat*” is over a thousand years old. The noun *Heim* is closely connected to the words for “settlement” and “place of residence” and originally referred to an individual’s “house and home.” In the middle ages, *Heimat* was used as the opposite of terms like “abroad” or even “misery.” The word became emotionalized the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to a number of simultaneous factors:

- Many people lost or were uprooted from their familiar surroundings due to wars and political unrest, secularization, overpopulation, lack of rural jobs, early industrialization due to new inventions, poverty, changes in the use of land and increasing urbanization.
- In the Romantic period, painting and literature promoted a much-idealized interest in and attitude towards natural and cultivated landscapes, predominantly among the urban population. Early garden and landscape designers joined with architects to create romantic ideals of nature and culture. In beautification of the landscape – perhaps an early approach towards sustainable development – the romantic element was combined with cultural as well as urban planning, hygienic and social objectives. Eventually, parks were created, like the English Garden in Munich, to transport the landscape into cities and towns. The strong impression of what was “natural” or “nature-like” hid the fact that this was not “nature,” but land cultivated, sometimes quite intensively, by farming and forestry and therefore man made. There was a clear contradiction between the progressive ideas, scientific knowledge and the agricultural and forestry reforms of the Enlightenment – that chiefly had effects on the landscape – and the idyllic notions of the Romantics.
- In addition, public dissemination of scientific findings – for example through the popular lectures of Alexander von HUMBOLDT – led to a growing interest in nature and the landscape. This did not solely apply to middle class intellectuals; the curricula of primary schools included subjects in the natural sciences and homeland studies from the 1870s.

Nature conservation, *Heimatschutz* and historic monument preservation movements

arose in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost simultaneously and their concerns became part of the *national* interests of the German Empire founded in 1872. The motivation behind this movement was based on emotions, ethics, cultural ethics and aesthetics and strived to prevent damages to the native nature and landscape wherever possible.

In 1904, a number of associations dedicated to these preservation ideals merged to form the “*Bund Heimatschutz*” (homeland conservation alliance). It was difficult to achieve contextual unity and solidity within the alliance, one reason being the often regional and landscape-related self-conception of the member associations, and the alliance therefore became an umbrella organization. The nature conservation groups split off in the mid-1920s as they felt that their ideals were always seen as a mere partial aspect at the conferences of the *Heimat* and historic monument conservationists. *Heimatschutz* and nature conservation moved even further apart after the First World War, yet the concerns of both movements were accounted for in the Weimar Constitution of 1919 and both historic monument preservation and nature and landscape conservation were adopted as national objectives. Over time, both the representatives of *Heimatschutz* and of nature and landscape conservation became receptive to the antidemocratic, racial and nationalist movements in the 1920s and 1930s, allowed themselves to be monopolized through legal measures and more or less adhered to the ideologies of National Socialism. *Heimatschutz* remained separated from nature and landscape conservation when work recommenced after the Second World War.

In everyday life and in everyday language, the word *Heimat* has been used continually, uninterrupted and without prejudices. The love of *Heimat* is frequently considered an

1 Übersetzung/Translation: Faith Gibson-Tegethoff.

2 Translator’s note: Since the word *Heimat* can be used to describe one’s home country, home region or even hometown, I will use the German word throughout this summary.

innocent emotion. Often *Heimat* is associated with childhood and the word evokes a touching allusion, combined with emotions related to memories and the ir retrievable loss of childhood. Nevertheless, such “affectionate,” “heart-warming” and “touching” terms in particular are by no means morally and politically harmless. The love of *Heimat* can be, on the one hand, an innocent emotion for many. Yet, the concepts of *Heimat* and nature conservation must be very critically examined, ethically and historically, for their emotional contents indubitably led to misuse in the Nazi era. Certainly, love of one’s homeland, the desire for familiarity, manageability, belonging, security and community can be positive basic attitudes in people; nevertheless when dealing with them, we must remain aware of latent threats of their renewed misuse and critically examine the pros and cons.

One “learns” one’s cultural or *Heimat* landscape during childhood or experiences it as an adult moving to the area. To feel at home in one’s surroundings, we need certain features and props: a specific blend of natural characteristics. These include the land’s geology, relief, altitudes, soils, waters, climatic gradients, a specific flora and fauna and territorial history, confessional differentiations and mixtures, the history of settlement and land use, types of settlements and houses, architectural and art history, unique utilizations of nature (mining of raw materials), the history of the mentality, legends, customs, dialects and other aspects. The *Heimat* landscape is oriented to natural or territorial/political borders and therefore possesses a unique spirit or *genius loci*. The word *Heimat* is closely linked to regional perceptions and is usually used today by nature conservationists and landscape managers in this sense. Natural or cultivated landscapes, historical cultivated landscape (historic monument landscapes), landscapes formed by industry or cities can be *Heimat* in this sense. There is broad consensus in society on the general need to preserve various types of landscapes in a very open form and without any clearly higher-ranked models. This is expressed in laws such as the German constitution, the Federal Regional

Planning Act, Federal Nature Conservation Act as a framework law or the historic monument laws of the federal *Länder*.

On a local or regional level, doubt is often cast on the general social consensus on the necessity of conserving, managing and developing natural or cultivated landscapes, historic cultivated landscapes or historic monument landscapes when it comes down to genuine measures and their possibly restrictive effects on personal lives. For this reason, concrete models for the development of natural and cultivated landscapes should be jointly worked out on these levels, for example as part of Local Agendas, roundtables and public involvement. This is the only real way to achieve general acceptance of measures. When developing such models, the target conflicts between historic monument protection and nature conservation, which can arise in matters concerning the conservation, management and development of historic cultivated landscapes or historic monument landscapes, must also be clarified. *Heimat* and landscape or the visual features and the condition of the cultivated landscape are among the so-called “soft” local factors. It is therefore short sighted to consider the value of the cultivated landscape merely in ideal terms. Its existence influences decisions on where to live, where to settle businesses and recreational use and is therefore of high economic importance as well. Consequently, management of the landscape pays off.

General political decisions that affect landscapes are made globally (for example WTO negotiations), in the European Union and by the federal and *Länder* governments. They are rarely oriented to sustainability, but, particularly in agriculture, mainly to economics and the anticipated world market prices. This has led to the consequences already intimated in the form of landscape transformation (intensive use in areas remaining in agriculture, retreat from peripheral areas, drop in jobs in agriculture). If the farmers working within the landscape were paid solely according to world market prices, it would be impossible to preserve the *Heimat* and cultivated landscape that is

so important for many people. Expert political decisions, for example in the offices and ministries responsible for agriculture and the environment, can mitigate higher decisions. Here, funding is based on the EU Regulation on Rural Development, the Joint Task for the Improvement of Agricultural Structures and Coastal Protection and the cultivated landscape programmes and nature conservation programmes on the *Länder* level. Individual solutions are needed on the regional or local levels for managing and keeping cultivated landscapes open and these must additionally consider the ideals of historic monument and *Heimatschutz* and nature conservation. This can ensure that nature and landscape conservation are not regulated from “the top down,” but are implemented with and for the people, i. e. in ways that reflect the public’s interests and are democratic.

Political decisions such as the promotion of renewable energies can also affect the landscape; examples include the production of wind power or farming of renewable resources, both of which involve effects on the characteristic scenery of the cultivated landscape.

In its résumé, the Deutsche Rat für Landespflege concludes that many partial aspects in conjunction with landscape and *Heimat* require further study. It is impossible to make a conclusive or even generally valid definition of *Heimat*. The *Heimat* landscape is oriented to natural or territorial/political boundaries and therefore has a unique spirit or *genius loci*. Each of us experiences and assesses this in a personal way. Our love of *Heimat* reflects our yearning for real community and harmony with nature. Landscape is an aspect of *Heimat* and the love of *Heimat*; this landscape can also be called cultivated landscape. The Deutsche Rat für Landespflege does not think it is necessary to taboo the word *Heimat* and its use in the debate on landscape management work. Nevertheless, the arguments must be carefully examined and acknowledged as environmentally ethical. They may not be allowed to lead to segregation. *Heimat* does not evoke positive memories in all of us