

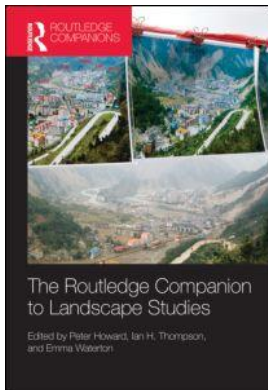
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The anthropology of postenvironmental landscapes

Werner Krauss

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Environmentalism is often identified with singling out stretches of land in order to protect them from the ills of modernity. Since the 1970s, the number of protected areas has constantly been on the rise, and they have significantly shaped our ‘way of seeing, understanding and (re)producing the world’ (West et al. 2006: 252). This strategy has recently come under critique from a newly formed movement or strategy called ‘postenvironmentalism’. Postenvironmentalism was introduced by the American activists Nordhaus and Shellenberger (2004) in a manifesto called ‘The Death of Environmentalism’. They argued that creating just another nature reserve is not enough to face the challenges posed by global climate change. Instead, the need for mitigation of greenhouse gases and adaptation to the effects of a changing climate makes active management of landscapes indispensable. In the anthropocene, they argue, the separation of nature from culture and landscape from development does not make sense any more. The concept of the anthropocene was introduced by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) as a consequence of the increasing and irreversible influence of humanity on the earth system, with anthropogenic climate change as the most prominent example.

In this chapter, I discuss the anthropology of landscapes in light of these recent developments and in order to adjust its theoretical and methodological foundations accordingly. In the first part, I introduce the current dilemma of environmentalism and show the relevance of the concept of postenvironmentalism for landscape studies. In the second part, I apply this concept to the anthropology of landscapes. From early on, cultural anthropology and related disciplines such as cultural geography were critical of environmental concepts which tried to explain cultural behavior exclusively as a result of natural constraints or to legitimize politics in the name of nature. Instead, there is a long tradition of focusing ‘on the ways in which naturalized environments reverberate with cultural significance’ (Ogden 2011: 27) and on ‘the social, economic, and political effects of environmental conversation projects’ mainly in protected areas (West 2006: 251). The question is how people actively shape, administer and inhabit landscapes (Krauss 2005b); a question which is already addressed and reflected for example in the European Landscape Convention (Olwig 2007). In the last part, I present some examples of my own fieldwork at the German North Sea coast, which includes both a ‘classical’ national park and a newly emerging wind energy landscape. In the conclusion, I will argue that the anthropology of postenvironmental landscapes focuses on the dynamics of assemblages and networks that

bring the landscape into being. In doing so, landscape studies contribute to the adjusting of environmental politics in the face of current and future global challenges.

Postenvironmentalism: defining the field

While it is true that global climate change in the United States does not have the public and political attention it has in Europe, it is easily forgotten that the topic already leaves its traces even on its most iconic landscapes. In 2011, two op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* attracted my attention. From different perspectives, they perfectly illustrate the postenvironmental dilemma for nature conservation.

In September 2011, the former commissioner of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department argued against the erection of wind turbines on the mountain ridges of Vermont's green mountains (Wright 2011). His argumentation follows the agenda of traditional nature conservation and perfectly illustrates its limitations. For him, the bulldozers 'crawling their way through the forest to the ridgeline' in order to pave the road for the erection of 21 wind turbines are a 'desecration, in the name of green energy'. Roads will replace current 'travel lanes ... now made by bear, moose, bobcat and deer'; healthy forests will be cut down and erosion of water streams will affect 'wild and human'. In his opinion, the implementation of this technology does not even contribute to the reduction of global carbon emissions; instead, it brings profit to a few and destroys landscape values on a large scale. He argues that the existing and intact landscape brings '\$1.4 billion in tourism spending', provides its inhabitants with an identity and with 'clean air and water and healthy wildlife populations'. He concludes:

The pursuit of large-scale, ridgeline wind power in Vermont represents a terrible error of vision and planning and a misunderstanding of what a responsible society must do to slow the warming of our planet. It also represents a profound failure to understand the value of our landscape to our souls and our economic future in Vermont.

(Wright 2011)

The author presents here in a nutshell the basic arguments of environmentalism in opposing nature and culture, sacredness and profit, (destructive) technology and (intact) landscape.

In another op-ed piece entitled 'Hopes in the age of man' (Marris et al. 2011), four conservation scientists fully embrace the concept of the anthropocene, which is challenged by many of their allies and stands in full contrast to the attitude of the Vermont wildlife commissioner:

Some environmentalists see the anthropocene as a disaster by definition, since they see all human changes as degradation of a pristine Eden. If your definition demands that nature be completely untouched by humans, there is indeed no nature left.

For these authors, the acidification of oceans, the changing of the climate, the regulation of most river flows, or the replacement of plants and animals are a fact of human history. Contrary to the wildlife commissioner, the authors argue that it is humanity's mission to actively create and shape the environment. They list a series of examples of what 'we can do', for example 'moving species at risk of extinction ... , design ecosystems to maintain wildlife ... , or restore once magnificent ecosystems like Yellowstone and the Gulf of Mexico'. They self-confidently conclude:

The anthropocene does not represent the failure of environmentalism. ... This is the Earth we have created, and we have a duty, as species, to protect it and manage it with love and

intelligence. It is not ruined. It is beautiful still, and can be even more beautiful, if we work together and care for it.

(Marris et al. 2011)

The authors clearly mark the difference to traditional nature conservation and make an argument for postenvironmentalism as most prominently propagated by the activists Nordhaus and Shellenberger, who had already circulated their 2004 manifesto 'The Death of Environmentalism' on the Internet. Their radical approach suggests a new environmentalism which embraces the car industry, accepts the need for mobility, for cheap energy and progress in order to maintain America's leadership and standard of life. In their book 'Breakthrough' (Nordhaus and Shellenberger 2007), they attack the politics of fear as for example presented by Al Gore and argue that the apocalyptic discourses of guilt and limits have to be substituted by those of aspirations and human possibilities:

Through their stories, institutions, and policies, environmentalists constantly reinforce the sense that nature is something separate from, and victimized by, humans. This paradigm defines ecological problems as the inevitable consequence of humans violating nature. Think of the verbs associated with environmentalism and conservation: 'stop,' 'restrict,' 'reverse,' 'prevent,' 'regulate,' and 'constrain.' All of them direct our thinking to stopping the bad, not creating the good.

(Nordhaus and Shellenberger 2007: 7)

Recently, they published an edition with the programmatic title *Love Your Monsters: Post-environmentalism and the Anthropocene* (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2011), in which authors from a diverse field of disciplines support their argument. 'Love your Monsters' is the title of Bruno Latour's (2011) contribution, a sociologist who reinterprets Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; he blames the creator of the monster for not being proud and taking care of his creation and instead hiding in fear – the analogy to environmentalism is obvious. Dan Sarewitz (2011), a political scientist, argues that the green movement on the one hand has an excessive belief in scientific rationality in defining the problem of climate change, while on the other being sceptical about technology in order to mitigate or adapt to its harmful effects.

A group of conservation scientists rides a fundamental attack on the hallmark of American environmentalism, the national parks, and one of its founders, John Muir:

Muir has sympathized with the oppression of the Winnebago Indians in his home state, but when it came time to empty Yosemite of all except the naturalists and the tourists, Muir vigorously backed the expulsion of the Miwok. The Yosemite model spread to other national parks, including Yellowstone, where the forced evictions killed 300 Shoshone in one day.

(Kareiva et al. 2011)

As an abundance of literature shows, this was no exception: 'About half the land selected for protection by the global conservation establishment over the past century was either occupied or regularly used by indigenous peoples'.

These publications show that the concept of postenvironmentalism results from a detailed critique of environmentalism as practice and ideology; the anthropocene is understood as a fundamental ontological and epistemological change. Due to their manifesto character, the definitions, criticisms and suggestions remain on a very general level; they do not really count with diverse populations, cultures, beliefs or specific social interactions and situations. In

other words, they still have to be ethnographically grounded or rooted – time to change perspective, from the bird's eye view of the political strategist to the grassroots perspective of anthropology.

The anthropology of protected landscapes

On the one hand, landscape studies always had a more or less hidden environmental agenda. When identifying, describing and classifying cultural and natural heritage, they contributed to the demarcation of landscapes worth of protection and the creation of ever more national parks or other conservation areas. On the other hand, there is a long tradition in critically debating landscape not as something simply 'out there', but as an activity and a process. This is especially true for cultural anthropology as well as cultural geography and their long tradition of analyzing protected landscapes (West 2006, Olwig 2007).

The more 'natural' landscapes appear, the more carefully constructed they are – this is one of the troubling insights of landscape studies. Book titles like *The Culture of Nature* by the late Alexander Wilson (1991) or *Uncommon Ground: Reinventing Nature*, edited by the cultural geographer William Cronon (1996), early set the tone: nature no longer was innocent; instead, it was something that had to be defined, to be singled out, to be domesticated, invented or constructed. In their reader *National Parks and Resident Peoples*, West and Brechin (1991) presented a series of oftentimes shocking examples such as the deportation of entire human populations in order to protect wildlife. *Misreading African Landscapes* by Fairhead and Leach (1996) became one of the hallmarks of this kind of research; while scientists and policy-makers had regarded the islands of forests in Guinea as remaining parts of originally huge forests, the anthropologists found out that it was in turn the villagers who had grown and maintained these islands of forest around their villages.

As these examples demonstrate, nature and environment are concepts with their own cultural history, which is more often than not one with a European or 'Western' background. This contrast between a generalized 'Western' notion of landscape and the meaning local people give their natural surroundings and the use they make of it serve as the departure point in Hirsch and O'Hanlon's (1995) *The Anthropology of Landscape*. The ethnographic field and the anthropologists' argument unfold as a result of the inherent tension between the two concepts.

In *Parks and People: The Social Impact of Protected Areas*, West et al. (2006) give an excellent overview of the anthropology of protected areas, whose number has considerably grown in the last two decades (West et al. 2006: 251). The authors understand protected areas as 'a way of seeing, understanding, and producing nature (environment) and culture (society) and as a way of attempting to manage and control the relationship between the two' (West et al. 2006: 251). The focus is on the 'social, economic, scientific, and political changes in places' in both the protected areas and the centres that are in charge of them. National parks indeed can serve as form of 'virtualism', as they have a profound effect on the overall perception of our surroundings: 'Protected areas have increasingly become the means by which many people see, understand, experience, and use the parts of the world that are often called nature and the environment' (West et al. 2006: 255). While there was and still is a strong focus on power and conflict in anthropological landscape studies, West et al. (2006: 251) remind us that 'anthropology needs more to move beyond the current examinations of language and power to attend to the ways in which protected areas produce space, place, and peoples'.

Once the focus is on the production of space, the whole network of people and things come into sight. Almost as in a laboratory, in a national park the anthropologist can follow the process of how a landscape comes into being, and how environmentalism changes 'the social

nature of people's surroundings' (West et al. 2006: 264) and thus people, too. This process mostly includes what West et al. call a 'simplification process', when natural scientists start to redefine for example flora and fauna and classify them according to transnational criteria such as the list of endangered species. In doing so, they legitimize environmental or conservation projects such as national parks and profoundly change the relationship between people and their environment. As a consequence, complicated social interactions between people and things are 'condensed to a few easily conveyable and representable issues or topics'; the surroundings become 'resources', and people are labelled as 'ecologically pristine native to fallen-from-grace native to peasant' (West et al. 2006: 265). In the end, local residents find themselves at best reduced to mono-dimensional stakeholders. But West et al. do not end up in pessimism. In this mostly critical perspective, new ways to conceptualize landscapes take shape. In order to refine the notion of postenvironmentalism from the anthropological perspective, I will turn to individual case studies.

Case studies

Just like Nordhaus and Shellenberger, anthropological studies of protected landscapes are also highly critical of environmentalism. But anthropologists have the advantage of mostly long research stays, and most of them frequently return to their field sites again and again. In this long-term perspective, conflicts come and go and allow to observe subtle changes in attitudes and values; ethnographic fieldwork offers insights into processes of social differentiation and globalization as a result of strange encounters between local people and scientists, conservationists, activists, planners and practitioners.

'Conservation is our government now': environmental miscommunication

Paige West's (2006) field study over a time span of seven years at the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area in Papua New Guinea is called *Conservation Is Our Government Now* and describes in detail the disconnect and mutual misunderstanding between those who run the project and the indigenous Gimi people. The global dimension of this misunderstanding is illustrated in the opening story of the book: the city journal *New Yorker* published an invitation for an anthropological event in New York about New Guinea, entitled 'The Gimi and the birds of paradise'. The invitation tells the story of how the inviting anthropologist and the local Gimi guide observed the mating display of a bird of paradise: 'As they watch this splendid creature, the Gimi envisions the spirit of his ancestor; the scientist one of the last of a spectacular species' (*New Yorker* 1985: 36, cited in West 2006: 1).

In a nutshell, this anecdote contains the central arguments of West's analysis: the conservation and development project in the Crater Mountain Wildlife area is part of a 'transnational loop', with the Gimi existing inside of it, being part of it and causing it simultaneously. The imagery of New Guinea and its people as untouched and exotic attracted scientists, environmentalists and those who want to sell and explore it, and the same imagery is the one that drives the conversation and development project today.

The different perspectives of the bird are reflected in the misunderstanding about this project. For the Gimi, the environment exists in their engagement with it:

It generates Gimi, and Gimi generate it – through their life force and exchange as manifest in procreation, hunting, and initiation – and there are times in which person and forest are one, the moment a man becomes a bird of paradise during initiation, for example.

(West 2006: 218)

Furthermore, for the Gimi, the conservation for development deal is an offer to enter into a long-lasting relationship. They have dreams of technology, medicine and development, and they see the environmentalists as means to become those developed people; the Gimi interpret the deal as a social relationship. For the environmentalists, in turn, conservation for development means, 'labor for money or be it not hunting in exchange for "income generation projects"' (West 2006: 219). Paradoxically, it is wildlife management that turns the environment into a commodity and connects Gimi to global capitalism.

One wishes that those international environmentalists would learn from West how the project looks from the side of the Gimis. West presents many details as to how conservation penetrates ever more niches of Gimi life. The closer she looks at the manifold implications of the Crater Mountain Wildlife project, the more globally connected the social construction of the Gimi environment becomes. West takes on a decidedly postenvironmentalist perspective throughout her book; a perspective which she adopted by learning to see such conflicts through the Gimis' eyes.

'Wild Sardinia': postenvironmental dreamtimes

Tracey Heatherington (2010) conducted fieldwork in Sardinia, where local Sardinians fiercely contested the implementation of the Gennargentu national park. Here, the WWF and the nation state together seek access to this peripheral region via environmental protection. The title of her book, *Wild Sardinia*, refers to both the natural landscape, as seen by nature lovers and conservationists, as well as the 'wild Sardinians', who compare themselves in an ironic response to the stereotypes of conservationists to people from the Wild West as known from the Spaghetti-Western films. At the core of the conflict there is a simple constellation: non-governmental environmentalists from the WWF suspect local shepherds of overusing the common ground and want to declare it a national park; in turn, local residents feel themselves incorrectly blamed, overruled and treated like Indians in a reservation. Heatherington (2010) calls this process 'ecological alterity'; a process which is strikingly similar to the one West reports from New Guinea. Environmentalism and nature conservation are permanently engaged into a form of cultural production of alterity 'precisely by failing to treat the people affected by conservation initiatives as competent and valuable interlocutors, anytime they appear to reject the prevailing models of scientific conservation' (Heatherington 2010: 230).

This kind of discursive gridlock is common in conflicts surrounding protected landscapes and can block communication and agreement in conflicts for many years. In my own fieldwork in Portugal (Krauss 2001) or northern Germany (Krauss 2005b), I encountered exactly the same problems. Locals bring the anthropologist into an uncomfortable situation: 'You cannot be both an anthropologist and an environmentalist' (Heatherington 2010: 4). This quandary haunts her throughout her research, and she finds a solution in her vision of postenvironmentalism. Heatherington borrows the metaphor of 'dreamtime' from the Aboriginal Australians, where 'the Dreamings are ancestral journeys that link people, place, and nature in Aboriginal deep time, or transcendent time, called the Dreamtime' (Heatherington 2010: 21). This metaphor serves well to describe and analyze 'the global dreamtime of environmentalism', which itself can never be free of 'culture, history, class, religious sentiment, or realworld political contexts, although they may tend to obscure or efface some of these connections' (Heatherington 2010: 23). Anthropological fieldwork and scrutiny helps to rethink the practice of protected areas and 'to reinvent environmentalism through richer, more respectful dialogues with indigenous and local cultures' (Heatherington 2010: 27). Her understanding of 'post-environmentalisms' – she uses the term in plural form – contrasts the often time naïve and implicitly hierarchical

‘westernized’ multiculturalism embedded in global environmentalism. Her postenvironmentalism sounds romantic, but is deeply rooted in anthropological experience:

Where ... actors are self-critical of their positions within networks of power and privilege, where they remain fundamentally in touch with culturally situated epistemologies and daily lives of marginalized local groups, and where they are committed to principles of environmental justice, their collaborations support truly creative ways of thinking about culture and ecology.

(Heatherington 2010: 236)

‘Frictions’, productive miscommunications and postenvironmentalism

In all of these studies, ‘frictions’ play a vital role – frictions between the local and the global, the inside and the outside, conservation and development, conservationists and local people. *Frictions* is the title of Anna Tsing’s (2005) study about wildfires in Indonesia, where international environmentalists, scientists, North American investors, Japanese desires, advocates for Brazilian rubber tappers, UN funding agencies, mountaineers, village elders, and urban students perform what she calls a ‘social drama’. This social drama develops in different settings along a narrative, which shows many structural similarities and regional specifics. On the one hand, it is the tale of modern environmentalism, which swept across the globe in order to protect the beautiful from the evils of modernity. On the other hand, it is a story of many encounters which produce new frictions and alliances, in oftentimes unforeseen ways. Even in messy situations, there are possibilities for unexpected coalitions and events. This is the postenvironmental landscape, which is entailed in all of these strange encounters which anthropologists witness. According to Tsing, it is not necessary that people think alike in order to help each other. There are creative misunderstandings on both sides, and it is important that there is a political dialogue at all about things environmental. The long-lasting conflicts, the endless public hearings, complaints and protests finally make local epistemologies heard. Only then, the postenvironmental vision of Nordhaus and Shellenberger is rooted in social relations, in the reality of the everyday. Only then, post-environmentalism will not be another free-wheeling dreamtime full of assumptions about the others and the world; instead, it will be a dreamtime ‘born from the institutional and philosophical failures of modernist schemes for conservation, from the failures of participatory or traditional models for ecological management, and from the disillusionment of apparent cultural loss’ (Heatherington 2010: 237).

In the following, I will sketch the challenges and opportunities of the postenvironmental landscape concept with examples from my own fieldwork, which encompasses nature conservation and climate protection in the anthropocene. I will show that sometimes it is technology that opens up new ways to understand and to theorize landscapes. In doing so, I will also introduce into actor-network theory as an additional approach to research postenvironmental landscapes.

Ethnography of a postenvironmental landscape

At the outset of this chapter, I introduced postenvironmentalism via the conflict about wind turbines on the mountain ridges of Vermont. I will end the article with examples from my own fieldwork in northern Germany, which reflects this conflict constellation in a different way. In the course of about one decade, I followed the conflicts surrounding a national park and the emerging of an ‘energy landscape’ (Krauss 2005a; 2008; 2010). Thus, northern Friesland turns

out to be a landscape where nature and culture are dynamical concepts which come, as the landscape itself, permanently into being through technological intervention.

In northern Germany, nature and culture were at the centre of conflicts surrounding the implementation of a national park. They were semantic strategies, authoritative arguments or scientific entities, but most of all they were brought into being in unanticipated ways. For almost two decades, coastal inhabitants fought against the implementation of a National Park in the tidal flat area, the so-called Wadden Sea. Local organizations questioned the status of the Wadden Sea as 'natural' and argued that it is a cultural landscape, made by the interaction of humans and the sea. Both sides argued in the name of an absolute nature or culture, and the conflicts were only closed after each and every part of the border of the national park had been weighed and discussed in terms of traditional use and access on the one hand and natural value or endangered ecosystem on the other.

As an anthropologist interested in these conflicts, I travelled literally back and forth from the National Park administration to local communities, and between the National Park territory and the inland, desperately trying to make sense of the borders between nature and culture which played such a crucial role in this conflict. As it turned out, I found the answer in the movement itself, by driving in my car from one side to the other. One day, it came to me as a shock that I had indeed literally crossed the border between culture and nature when trying to get to a small Hallig – a miniscule island which was a leftover from the damage done by a previous storm surge (see Figure 6.1). This Hallig was accessible via a dam across the tidal flat area. Before entering this dam behind the dikeline, one had to stop at an electronic barrier. In order to lift the bar and pass through, the driver has to pay five euros. And it was exactly here where I realized one day that I had finally found the border between nature and culture: it was



Figure 6.1 The border between nature and culture is a quandary for philosophers, a result of negotiations for anthropologists, and a 5 euro expense for citizens who want to pass it.

the barrier itself. The barrier not only separated nature from culture, but it actually brought them into being. I learned accidentally that the border between nature and culture was nothing but a compromise, gained in long and contested negotiations between the national park administration and the local municipality.

The barrier turned out to be a mediator in the strict sense of actor-network theory as suggested by science and technology studies. It connects and assembles the sea, the wind, endangered ecosystems and the farmers, the mayors and the administrators, the environmentalists and the scientists, the migratory birds and the tourists and the NGOs, or, to put it into the terms of Bruno Latour (2005), it assembled people and things, human and non-human actors. And it assembled them in a highly effective way: it demarcates exactly what is acceptable for both sides of the conflict, for the coastal population and the national park administration. The barrier does not give a philosophical answer; instead, it is pure sociology. Following the making of this barrier is a long and complicated story, full of archived documents, bureaucracy and demonstrations, public hearings and sometimes violent conflicts. It is also the story of how nature and culture came into being. Of course, the barrier is only a temporary solution. Once there are new actors in play, for example climate change, each agreement has to stand the test of time again.

It appears almost to be an irony of history that the former enemies of nature conservation today are among the world's most successful wind farmers (and, consequently, protectors of climate). From early on and often times at their own risk, they had started to invest into wind energy. Based on a tradition of investing into modern technologies, they easily adopted governmental test-programs for wind turbines and turned them into a completely unexpected success, which in turn pressured the government to subsidize wind energy. While nature conservation still was completely fixed to protect ecosystems 'on the ground', coastal inhabitants discovered the wind as part of their heritage and made it explicit as a new and renewable commodity.

By way of technology – be it the barrier or wind turbines – the coastal landscape turns out to be a truly postenvironmental landscape, including the national park. There is no better vocabulary yet which fits this only seemingly paradoxical situation of having an almost over-protected area side by side with a highly technological area, both united in one and the same coastal landscape. Familiar conflict constellations such as natural versus cultural landscape, modernity versus backwardness, development versus conservation and so on are obsolete, new ones emerge such as those about ownership. But the coastal population is well prepared for the future; for coastal inhabitants, landscape is a dynamic process, an arena for conflicts over matters of concern such as coastal protection, ownership, senses of belonging, technological innovation or the challenges posed by climate change. And there is little doubt that this will be any different in the future.

Conclusion

Postenvironmentalism and anthropocene are two terms which mark a substantial change in both conservation policies and landscape studies. The European Landscape Convention with its focus on perception and people's activities clearly reflects these changes and the political relevance of landscape studies. The anthropology of postenvironmental landscapes is a step towards a greater pragmatism. Each of the cases presented here has a history of its own; each landscape turns out to consist of specific assemblages and conflict situations, and each one of them is connected in its own ways to global challenges such as anthropogenic climate change. Nature conservation and the history of environmentalism were always rife with fantasies about social hierarchies and

governance, which more often than not ended in conflicts with local populations. The concept of postenvironmentalism helps to further reveal these hidden agendas. While Nordhaus and Shellenberger's vision of postenvironmentalism is developed from the bird's-eye view, the critical anthropological approach systematically introduces the grassroot perspective. It is no longer the big philosophies about nature and culture which inform the environmental agenda; instead, the focus is on the 'complex and permanently changing assemblages of relations that dissolve and displace the boundaries of nature and culture' (Ogden 2011: 29). While environmentalism restricted itself to singling out ever more landscapes from the whole of society, postenvironmentalism brings landscapes back into society and democracy.

In the anthropocene, landscape studies are no longer obsessed with nature and culture; instead, an ethnographic account of postenvironmental landscapes as a dynamic process contributes to figure out which form of intervention is adequate for a specific problem, what is acceptable for the public and feasible for politics.

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