

EDITORIAL

Open Access to Rural Landscapes!

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The academic study of rural landscapes covers a broad range of academic disciplines and thematic, methodological and theoretical concerns and interests; including questions concerned with resource use (e.g. agriculture, forestry, water and mining), settlement, livelihoods, conflicts, conservation, culture and identity. This diversity is clearly a strength (the rich empirical and intellectual base), but also presents a challenge, as the dissemination of research findings is distributed through a plethora of publishing channels, which do not necessarily encourage exchange of results and ideas that are not already perceived as germane to already established academic networks.

Our initiative to start a new academic journal for landscape research, builds on the long-standing practice of fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration in landscape research and with recognition of the many critical insights gained through diachronic studies and dialogue across disciplines. By launching the journal *Rural Landscapes: Society, Environment, History* we wish to highlight this legacy and the critical importance of continuing the practice of blending, contrasting and bridging research on historical and contemporary landscapes and environmental and societal perspectives. The geographical scope of *Rural Landscapes* range from the local to the global, and contributions on landscapes from all parts of the world are welcome.

The three keywords—society, environment, history—in the journal title marks our dedication to promote debate and intellectual exchange concerning research on rural landscapes. We therefore welcome contributions based on genuine interdisciplinary collaborations as well as pieces written according to sharp disciplinary conventions. The common denominator for all contributions should foremost be a keen interest and focus on rural landscapes, its material and immaterial dimensions, and an openness towards cross disciplinary dialogue. The peer-review process will be guided by the principle that disciplinary contributions are primarily reviewed by peers in that discipline. It is by promoting diversity in terms of disciplinary contributions, while at the same time emphasizing coherence in terms of thematic engagement, that we hope to create a leading forum for cross-disciplinary dialogue and debate. Different styles of writing, used within natural science, social science or the humanities, are thus equally welcome.

The three keywords should also be a reminder of that all societies, contemporary to prehistoric, depend on resources drawn from rural landscapes and that all landscapes have emerged over time. Landscape resources can be located near or far from the sites of consumption, and the use of resources can be organized in a multitude of ways. Biophysical processes and humans shape landscapes and leave legacies that impact on societies and nature. Recursive societal and environmental dynamics and change in rural landscapes lie at the centre of discussions about sustainable land and other resource use (e.g. issues of food security, energy provision and nature conservation), conflicts and cultural identity. This is why research on rural landscapes is as urgent as it is multifaceted.

All research articles and commentaries submitted to *Rural Landscapes: Society, Environment, History* will be subject to rigorous peer-review and published open access according to Creative Commons licences. We believe that researchers, when selecting channels for publishing their work, primarily reflect on the credibility and quality standards of the peer-review and editorial process, the potential impact and spread of their work, and if publishing costs are reasonable. Gold standard open access, where authors pay to publish their work in open access journals, does not guarantee any of this. Costs for publishing are ubiquitous, either researchers pay directly for open access, or indirectly by overheads to university libraries that pay subscription charges. The principal issue here is the scope for reducing cost while maintaining high quality standards through well-crafted studies and a reliable peer-review process. Publishing in *Rural Landscapes* is currently free of charge for authors through a publishing grant. The objective is to ensure a fair price to authors also in the long-run, by using a low-cost model.

In a time when academic publishing is on a fast track towards promoting open access to research findings, and numerous new open access journals and other forms of open access publishing are being launched, we have opted to enter this open access bonanza with a journal that: 1) combines well-made studies, reliable peer-review and a fair price, 2) covers a broad topic, and 3) blends, contrasts and bridges research findings. We believe that this intention and scope will provide just the right mix of qualities to facilitate and promote a creative and lively intellectual engagement with rural landscapes.

Finally, we like to stress that the content and topics covered in *Rural Landscapes: Society, Environment, History*, should be open, in a genuine way, to those who contribute

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to the journal. As a consequence, we have avoided academic references and theoretical positioning in this editorial. Instead, we have invited scholars that represent different approaches to landscape research to comment on the focus and scope of the journal. The first two commentaries by Ove Eriksson (2014) and by Elisabeth Watson (2014) are thus intended to complement this editorial in order to capture a part of the diverse and rich territory of rural landscapes research.

We hope you will find the content of *Rural Landscapes: Society, Environment, History* useful and intellectually stimulating, and we invite you to contribute to the journal by submitting research articles and share critical insights with us and others engaged in rural landscapes research. Our primary intention is to publish research articles that are empirically grounded and theoretically informed, but conceptually and methodologically oriented contributions, review articles and short commentaries are also

welcome. Why not follow the lead by Eriksson and Watson and extend this discussion on rural landscape research further by sending us a commentary or a research article from the perspective of your field of speciality—on a topic or issue that you like to see expounded and elaborated in *Rural Landscapes: Society, Environment, History*.

The Editors

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