



КАРАКОЛЬСКИЙ
(ЭТНО)ПРИРОДНЫЙ ПАРК
ҮЧ-ЭНМЕК

KARAKOL VALLEY – THE LANDSCAPE SPEAKS

International Field Seminar Monday 1 August – Sunday 7 August 2016

Karakol, Ongudai District, Uch Enmek Nature Park (Altai Republic, Russian Federation)



SLOW
RESEARCH
LAB

At a certain moment a small bird flew into the conference room and it couldn't find the way out. In a joint effort we managed to catch it to release it outside. But the Altaians stopped us and said we should give it milk first: "you never let a guest go without offering from the produce of your household".

So we feel after this week: enriched with the unselfish gifts of the Altai culture.

Summary - about meaning, the right time and the good measure

The earliest form of nature conservation was born from the belief that the landscape lives and is inseparable from ourselves. For the Altai indigenous people the native identity grows out of the land. The Karakol valley represents the spiritual heart of the Altai Republic. Through the ages its natives have taken great care to protect the valley from harmful practices and a wonderful wealth of stories explains the sacredness of specific places, objects and living beings, the role of spirits in daily life, and the guidelines for behaviour. The Altaian worldview can be summarised in three ground rules: to only do things that have meaning, to acknowledge that there is a time and season for all undertakings, to keep measure and proportion, and never take more than one needs. Such key concepts of balance and harmony immediately make clear why the Altai culture is often at odds with the modern Russian and Western utilitarian worldview.

This pilot seminar intended to promote an exchange of ideas about the future of the Karakol valley with respect to the traditional values held by its inhabitants. The project connected scientific and traditional knowledge during a concentrated week of fieldwork in the valley. Participants¹ were local residents, experts and scientists from diverse countries. A Dutch artist was present to instruct and help visualize the outcome of the survey, which included the hidden aspects of spaces and places. During this intensive week the participants have surveyed and mapped the mythological, cultural, ecological and geographical aspects of the Karakol valley. The process, called *deep mapping*, brings together observations in the field with interviews of local people. Sharing and reporting our findings enhances the exchange of ideas and beliefs about the landscape. The outcome is presented in a visual document, a multi-layered digital map. The map conveys the stories, personal memories, historical events and cultural practices connected with the venerated landscape, as well as information about flora, fauna and topographical elements of the mountains and watersheds. The map enables its users to communicate with policymakers the unseen but deeply felt meaning of native flora, fauna and sacred natural sites.

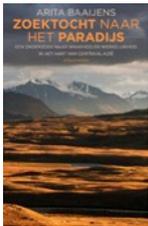
¹ See list of participants



Karakol Valley – The Landscape Speaks

Why this project

From 2007-2014 Arita Baaijens made several journeys in the Altai Mountains to research the meaning of landscape. Does living and animated nature exist? And what if science rejects the notion of animated nature while inhabitants of the Altai deeply ascribe special powers to the land? Would such an outcome underscore the limitations of science or rather imply that the Altai people live in a fantasy world? Baaijens discovered that 'nature' and 'place' are not objective and fixed realities, nor is nature 'out there'. In the Altai, man and nature are one and a separation between the two exists in the (western) mind only.



Baaijens published her findings in the book *Search for Paradise* (Atlas Contact, 2016) and concludes that, in the end, it does not really matter whether or not nature is animated. What matters is which version of the story we believe and how our society responds to our belief. A child growing up in a culture that believes that the forest has a self or soul, will grow old together with the forest. A child who looks at the trees as lumber or future firewood, a utilitarian view, will see that forest being cut down during her lifetime.

Today, significance of place is often reduced to economics and ownership, which is why nature of world fame² has come under threat in the Altai. To reverse this trend and to promote a better understanding of cultural and ecological aspects of venerated landscapes The 'Landscape Speaks' pilot was launched. A principal goal of the study is to establish a dialogue between local communities and policy makers about the value and future preservation of the living landscapes, landscapes that are essential to their survival. For this purpose the project attempts to convene the sciences, traditional knowledge and the arts to document the tangible and non-tangible qualities and values of the Karakol valley.

Location and participants

Our research site, the Karakol valley, was chosen after careful consideration. The valley is a part of Uch Enmek Nature Park³, which was founded in 2001 by geologist Danil Mamyev - born and raised in the valley - for the purpose of preserving the area, its communities and its sacred natural sites. This was at a time when this traditionally sacred landscape was in danger of being divided into privatized plots following the demise of the Soviet Union. Today, the park management actively seeks cooperation with scientists and students to work together in its field study center and has designed an education program to incorporate traditional values into the local school curriculum. The park management strives to integrate

² IUCN - <http://sacrednaturalsites.org/items/sacred-valley-conservation-management-and-indigenous-survival> ;

WWF - http://wwf.ru/about/where_we_work/altay/eng ; UNESCO - <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/768>

³ Chapter 23: Sacred valley, Conservation Management and Indigenous Survival: Uch Enmek Indigenous Nature Park, Altai Republic, Russia in: Sacred Natural Sites, ed. Bas Verschuuren, et al. IUCN, 2010

traditional values and knowledge with scientific research. This approach is exactly what our pilot project aims for.



Uch Enmek Nature Park encompasses 60.551 hectares, the mountainous territory is watered by the Ursul and Karakol rivers. Vegetation ranges from tundra, moss, lichen, (sub)-alpine meadow to mountain steppe, marsh and meadow landscape. The park is rich in rare, endemic, relic and endangered species of flora and fauna. Approximately 2500 indigenous people live in six villages. The majority depend on raising livestock, hunting and deer farming.

Team - From the very start dr. Yuri Badenkov (RU) and Wayne Poulsen (US) were part of the core team. About a year later professor Matthijs Schouten and dr. Bas Pedroli joined in. Artist Marjolijn Boterenbrood strengthened the team several months before the pilot started. All the other participants were handpicked by or chosen in consultation with Danil Mamyev, founder of Uch Enmek Nature Park.

Deep Mapping

The seminar used a methodology inspired by the Deep Mapping practice, analogous to the ‘deep ecology’ tradition: to explore not only the material layers of reality but also the ‘deeper’ ones related to the identity and character of the landscape⁴. For this purpose we focussed on carefully observing nature and landscape, and exchanging the observations, holding back our personal preferences, convictions, associations and intellectual knowledge. Listening to the stories and experiencing the Altaian ceremonies were an integral part of the work. This phenomenological approach⁵, taking for real the phenomena that we could observe with our own senses, allowed us to come nearer to the essence of the nature, people and landscape of the Karakol valley. The field exercises in silently observing the visual, audible and smellable landscape, and exchanging these observations, substantially supported a deep and shared acquaintance of the participants with the characteristics of the Karakol valley.



⁴ Deep mapping is a relatively fluidly defined field engaging human scientists interested in the spatial distribution of landscape characteristics: Bodenhamer, D. J., Harris, T. M., & Corrigan, J. (2013). Deep mapping and the spatial humanities. *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing*, 7(1-2), 170-175.

see also: Roberts, L. (2016). Deep Mapping and Spatial Anthropology. *Humanities*, 5(1), 5

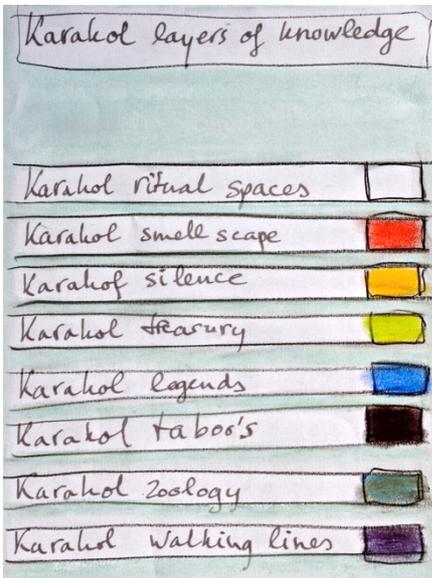
⁵ Bockemühl, J. (1992). Awakening to landscape. *Natural Science Section, Goetheanum, Dornach*.

Seamon, D. (2015). *Lived Emplacement and the Locality of Being: A Return to Humanistic Geography*. *Approaches to Human Geography*, edited by. S. Aiken and G. Valentine. London: Sage.



Obervation in the field: landscape and perception

Exploration and discovery



Legenda Deep Maps Karakol Valley: Layers of Knowledge and Perception

Layers of perception -

The deep mapping exercises resulted in conceptual maps, stories, sketches, drawings and recordings. These observations and recordings represent a keen reading of the landscape by participants both native and foreign, in its many layers, explored by the senses: seeing and describing the landscape to each other, listening, smelling, tasting and moving, which resulted in the creative production of the *Karakol scentscape*, the *Karakol taboos*, the *Karakol Zoology*, etc. Together these observations map a consensual perception of the living landscape of the Karakol valley, as revered by the local people. Truly, when sensed and seen through this manner of perception the entirety of the Karakol valley might be considered a sacral landscape. Such a conviction strongly supports the desire of natives and local communities for the preservation of the values in their living lands.



Deep Maps in the making. From left to right: Anomaly zones, Treasury (flora), legends, scents and smells of Karakol valley



Deep Maps in the making at the drawing table

Altaian peoples and nature - The Altaian peoples represent a rich culture in which knowledge has been passed down orally from antiquity through narrative, song and storytelling. Related with the diversity in landscapes and the associated land use there is a diversity of accents in the traditions that are observed. An impressive wealth of stories explains the unique and sacral qualities of specific places, objects and living beings, as well as taboos, and guidelines for behavior and the role of spirits in daily life. The Altaian worldview is essentially holistic and based on individual responsibility. For the Altaian cultures it can be summarized in three ground rules: to only do those things or tasks that have meaning, that every action has its proper time and sequence, and to observe measure and proportion, never taking more than one needs.



Meaning - In Altai tradition everything has meaning. Details in traditional clothes mirror the natural environment. The inside of the ail - traditional wooden house - reflects the organisation of the cosmos. One's actions also have to have meaning, to pick flowers for fun is taboo, but it is, for example, allowed to harvest grass as winter fodder for the animals.



The proper time - The appropriate time to burn Juniper and use the smoke to cleanse the house of negative emotions and energies is during the last two quarters of the moon. Festivities and rituals cannot be performed within a year after a close relative has died. Whatever is planned for, native Altaians pay attention to their customs and signs, and adjust accordingly.



Measure - Never take more than is needed. It's a man's job to collect Juniper branches, which are used for ritual purposes. The journey may take a whole day as the bushes grow at a high altitude. Nevertheless, a man only takes a few branches at a time and for his family only. He picks a small amount after performing the required ritual and only at a specific time of the month, when the moon is in its 3rd or 4th quarter.

Teamwork and intercultural understanding - The participants of the fieldwork week, seminar, explored, surveyed and recorded the ecology, topography and beliefs connected with venerated places in Karakol valley. Sharing the results within the team was an important part of the process as it contributes to a better mutual understanding. The project resulted in a multi-layered mapping that conveys both the seen and unseen qualities of the valley, such as sensory qualities, places of power and worship, taboo's and stories of past and present that relate to special sites and flora and fauna which are recognized across the community.

Mutual trust is essential in making all of the above successful. This trust does not come easily in the Altai. Long time experience has taught Altaians that most outsiders do not comprehend, let alone appreciate, Altai values and beliefs. Even anthropologists, who are mostly sympathetic to the indigenous viewpoint, more often than not consider statements about nature spirits and totem animals as symbolic, not to be taken seriously as founded in reality⁶.

Off-site project preparation was complicated by difficulties in communication, translation and agreement in terminology. This was in part compensated for by our on-site preparation of three days.

Comprehension of the oral tradition of the Altai required personal introductions, discussions and joint activities in the field. To achieve a shared and functional understanding of key concepts in four languages was a challenge. We were able to do so through the assistance of very capable Altaian interpreters, who spoke Altaian, Russian and English. All participants made strenuous efforts in adapting to the circumstances, and accepting unforeseen changes in the programme. As a result, a high level of mutual trust and confidence was achieved.



In the seminar two worldviews merged: The empathic Altai one and the more intellectual Russian/European view.

⁶ See Chapter 1, *Soul Hunters*, W. Rane. University of California Press, 2007.

The world in images



Above: The Karakol valley as visualized and expressed in maps and objects, see also attachment

Discussion / Evaluation

- The creative organization of the studio, in which we pursued various activities in mornings and evenings, worked very well. We placed a large drawing table in the center of our space and, with rolls of paper, were able to use it to illustrate maps and stories of that which we had observed and collected in the field. Others could watch, comment, add information. The good thing about drawing is that one is able to exceed the limitations of language. The creative process makes for an intimate and informal atmosphere; there is no need to look the other in the eye. We are drawn into the world as it is seen and experienced by the one who draws an impression on paper. The act of drawing actively engages participants and viewers together in the deep mapping process. The same was true for the sheets of papers that were suspended from the ceiling. We collected our findings on these hanging sheets: describing scents, sounds, medical use of and stories about plants.
- Field observation exercises enhanced bonding of participants. The exchange of impressions showed the distinctions in perception between cultures in a natural way. Many insights and aha-moments.
- The rituals that were performed under the guidance of local people were very important for building consensual understanding and for fostering an increased sensitivity to the Altai culture. Participants from Karakol valley felt that they were better understood and appreciated when tasks were approached in protocols following the Altaian customs.
- Taking time at the beginning of the seminar to identify the right questions
- Participants from the Altai appreciated the western approach but insisted also that we include in our process the Altaian protocols and traditions. See notes on meaning, time and measure. Also: less directive way of working + immerse in culture by participating in activities of local people + visit local people in their homes. We did observe some of the traditions in our planning, for example the seminar dates were in accordance with the lunar calendar in response to Altaian traditions. In the Altai, rituals and important enterprises can only proceed during the last two quarters of the lunar calendar. Our program was flexible and we often adjusted the program when circumstances changed.

Follow up and future plans

- Open source webpage The Landscape Speaks which offers reports, digital maps and articles about the project and relevant literature, English and Russian (Dec 2016)
- Article about the project in Vice Versa, issue Land rights (Feb 2017)
- Review of the project in Russian by dr. Maya Petrovna
- Clip The Landscape Speaks for Social Media, English and Russian (Nov 2016)
- Seminar and exhibition The Landscape Speaks in cooperation with Artis Zoo, Amsterdam, Netherlands (Spring 2017)
- Follow-up project Deep Mapping, Geography and Archaeology of the Karakol valley by dr. Bas Pedroli (Wageningen University) in collaboration with Gent University (preparatory meetings started). Inclusion of the Karakol case in a project proposal for 'heritage-led rural regeneration' under the Horizon 2020 research programme of the EU (Bas Pedroli, deadline for submission March 2017)
- Paper in an international scientific journal about the methodology and use of deep mapping by dr. Bas Pedroli (Wageningen University) and dr. Maya Petrovna (Altai University, Altai Republic) (2017)
- Follow up project deep mapping in Karakol valley by Danil Mamyev, founder of Uch Enmek Nature park (2017)

Conclusions - an inspiring seminar

The seminar – or rather, this pilot seminar – was a great success: the process of observation exercises and reporting in the form of drawings and stories led to an intensive exchange of perceptions and knowledge. The phenomenological methodology that we used was inspiring for all and could definitely be further elaborated in subsequent seminars. The emphasis on unbiased (field) observation inspired exchanges and discoveries: working together in the landscape unites. Getting acquainted with colleagues from other cultures helped each of us to observe nature and landscape with fresh eyes. Also the combination of science and art allowed for the integration of tangible and non-tangible but perceived qualities of the landscape. This new integrity enhances a dialogue between community members and policy makers deciding on a future vision for the Karakol valley. The process of such a community-based approach requires patience, cooperation and respect. When one wishes to walk from one village to another it will take as many steps as it takes to get there.

Experiencing nature from within, through ones own body, is very much in agreement with the Altai respectful attitude towards nature. A new lexicon of symbolic landscape elements remains to be further developed, and respect and preserve insights into to the tradition of oral narrative.

A deeply shared concern is the question of how these vulnerable societies may be affected by emerging new development policies. We have concluded that deep mapping provides the communities with tools to best express how their values might be accounted for in policy development. It is our conviction that the Karakol valley and its communities are a persuasive model for equally vulnerable landscapes in other nations.



Attachments:

1. List of participants
2. Seminar program
3. Seminar and digital maps: a visual impression

Amsterdam, 18 Oct 2016

Arita Baaijens, Marjolijn Boterenbrood, Bas Pedroli, Wayne Poulsen

The Project Mapping Paradise is an initiative of Arita Baaijens in cooperation with Slow Research Lab