

A Guide to Reading your Research Landscape

Coastal Areas

What processes have caused the landscape to appear like this? What secondary processes affect the rate of change?

How is the site best managed for environmental protection? What economic and social impacts will any environmental protection have? Is this protection sustainable?

What impact has this changing landscape had on the people who live here? How have the lives of people who live here been both a product and a cause of this landscape?

How does this landscape compare with others in the locality? In what ways is it similar or different to other locations like it?



Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight (Photo: Ian Foss)

How are the features seen at this site caused and affected by different long term local, regional and global changes?

How is this landscape used or misused by people? How do local people (and those from other areas) benefit from it economically?

What evidence is contained in this site that gives people a sense of its place on a geological timescale?

What indications are there at this site that natural cycles (such as water, carbon and rock) are active?

Useful sources of secondary data

- British Geological Survey
- Environment Agency – Coastal Erosion and Shoreline Management
- National Oceanography Centre – Coastal Erosion and Marine Hazards
- Natural England – Heritage Coastlines
- Old Maps Online

How has this landscape changed over time? How might it continue to change in the future?

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What would a sustainable beach resort look like in the UK? How can this area be managed for a more sustainable future?

What environmental impacts might be felt as a result of visitor numbers? How far does this impact stretch? How is the local environment being managed?

How does this place compare with others like it? Where does the most direct economic competition come from? How has this competition changed over time?

How does the local economy change seasonally? Is the local economy sustainable in the long term? How might future seasonality in the economy be managed?



Swanage Beach, Dorset (Photo: Herry Lawford)

Who are the different stakeholders involved in the use and management of this place? What conflicts might arise?

What evidence is there of alternative geographies in this place? How are people using the space in different and contradictory ways?

Who visits this place? Where have they come from? How has the visitor profile of the area changed over time?

What physical and human features of the area draw people to it? What other features might detract from this experience?

Useful sources of secondary data

- World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) – Country Data
- The Blue Flag Programme
- Environment Agency – Bathing Water Quality
- Office for National Statistics – People in work
- Communities and Local Government UK – England's Seaside Towns

How has globalisation had an impact on this space? What new pressures will the area face in a more globalised world?

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Rural Areas

Who works in this type of environment? What level of skill do they require? What long term opportunities might there be?

What is the relationship between this environment and the people who live and work here? How is this relationship set to change in the future?

How might climate change affect the way the land is managed? What effect would climate change have on biodiversity and future ecological adaptations?

Who are the various stakeholders involved in the stewardship of an environment such as this? How might they sometimes appear to be in conflict with one another?



Coniston, Cumbria (Photo: Yvonne Eijkenduijn)

What impacts have agricultural diversification and technical advancement in farming techniques had on this area?

What challenges come about by working in this type of environment? What pressures do local people feel economically?

How does the farming system witnessed in this location differ from that in other regions, or in other countries?

How has the UK's changing relationship with Europe affected how the land and its ecology is managed in this area?

Useful sources of secondary data

- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- National Farmers' Union
- DEFRA – Farming statistics data sets
- Soil Association – Organic Farming
- Red Tractor – Food and Farm Assurance

What levels of interdependence are there between the land, the atmosphere and water sources in this area?

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Rural Areas

How has this landscape been formed? What physical processes have caused the landscape to look like this?

How are people making a living from this landscape? What are the wider impacts of these practices? To what extent are they sustainable?

How have people shaped this landscape? Why have they made these changes? Over what time period have these changes taken place?

Why do people like to visit this area? Where do visitors come from? What activities do they take part in here? How are these activities monitored and managed?



Forest of Bowland, Lancashire (Photo: Frank Pickavant)

What are the causes of any threats to the natural environment in this area? Are these threats increasing or decreasing in intensity over time?

How do different weather systems affect this area? How have the intensity and frequency of these weather systems changed over time?

How is the environment being protected and managed? What protection status might meet the needs of the area and its people?

What evidence is there of water, carbon and rock cycles in this area? How have animals and plants adapted to living here?

Useful sources of secondary data

- Campaign for National Parks
- National Parks UK – Facts and Figures
- National Farmers Union
- Forestry Commission – Datasets
- Campaign to Protect Rural England – Publications

What forms of protection might this type of environment require in the future? Who might provide it?

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Rural Areas

How has the path of the river changed over time? What evidence can be found for this on the ground?

How likely is this river to flood? What particular factors will cause this river to flood? How prepared are people who use the river to the possibility of flooding?

How has the river been used by people? What social and economic effects have there been? What measures have been taken to reduce the harm done to the river?

How does the river play a role in the water and carbon cycles? How might its role change over time? What evidence is there that this role is already changing?



Glen Brittle, Isle of Skye (Photo: Adrian Kingsley-Hughes)

How might different weather conditions affect the processes taking place in the river channel? When are these conditions most likely to change?

How is the river system being managed to reduce harm to human life? What have been the environmental costs of these strategies?

What life does the river support? How important is the river in the local ecosystem and habitat?

How does the river provide employment for people? Are these economic gains sustainable?

Useful sources of secondary data

- Environment Agency – Environmental Data and Maps
- UK Rivers Network
- DEFRA – Water Quality and Abstraction
- National River Flow Archive
- Centre for Ecology and Hydrology – Environmental Information Platform

Where are the various features of the river? How closely do these locations follow the pattern found in other rivers?

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Urban Areas

Why was the site closed? What is the history of industries of different kinds on this site?

Who used to work here? What are they doing now? How has the plant closure affected them socially and economically? How do they feel about the changes?

What plans are there for the site in the future? Who is behind these plans? What are their motives? What are the costs and benefits of such plans?

How does a site like this relate to a wider, global historical context of industrial decline? How might its future play a role in other global initiatives?



Castleford, West Yorkshire (Photo: Engineering at Cambridge)

What social, economic and environmental challenges might be created by any redevelopment of the site?

Are sites like this a one off or increasingly common in this area? Why do they appear with this frequency or infrequency?

What environmental concerns may there be about the site at present? What might be done to address these concerns?

Who are the different stakeholders with an interest in the site? How might there be a conflict of interests with regards to this site in future?

Useful sources of secondary data

- The National Land Use Database
- ONS – Employment Statistics
- Campaign to Protect Rural England – Use of Brownfield Land
- The Sustainable Development Commission – Regeneration of Brownfield sites
- The Royal Town Planning Institute – Urban Renewal and Regeneration

How have sites like this been used for alternative purposes in other places?

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Urban Areas

What is the purpose of this style of workspace? Why has a need for this kind of workspace developed?

How has the development of high tech communication industries made alternative working practices possible? Who benefits most from these innovations?

How does the physical attractiveness of an area affect productivity and work ethic? How have new forms of industry used their landscape to create new models of work?

What connections does this work space have with the local community? Does the creation of industry in this space trickle down to other spaces around it?

How far do people travel in order to work here? What methods do they use? How has the location of this workspace helped or hindered this movement?

How has the work space been designed to be environmentally friendly? What measures have been taken to reduce its environmental impact?

How has the design of this workspace attracted certain industries? Where might these industries have previously located?

How might new forms of industry create new patterns of migrant labour? Who is most or least likely to migrate to new workspaces?



Cambridge Science Park, Cambridge (Photo: Prisoner 5413)

Useful sources of secondary data

- International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation
- UNESCO – Science parks around the world
- UK Science Park Association – Information and Resource Centre
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- Global Footprint Network

What global connections does this work space have? How does it relate to the wider geographical changes in global industries?

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Urban Areas

Why was this site built? What economic justification is there for building more retail spaces in towns?

What are the environmental impacts of building a shopping centre of this scale? What attempts have been made to reduce the impact? What is the ongoing ecological footprint of this site?

How does this retail space compare to the other retail opportunities in the local area? What factors make a shopping centre a desirable leisure space?

Has this retail space created competition for goods and services produced more locally? How has this competition affected people's shopping habits?



Westfield Shopping Centre, Stratford (Photo: Berit Watkin)

How might the geographies of crime be played out in a retail space such as this? What measures are in place to reduce criminal incidences?

Who uses this space? Who is the retail space aimed at? Who is marginalised by this space? Why and how do people use the space differently?

How far do people and workers travel to access it? How does it fit within a national picture of large scale retail sites?

What micro-geographies are in operation within the retail space? How have the shops and amenities been arranged?

Useful sources of secondary data

- Retail Economics – Latest Retail Statistics
- Centre for Retail Research
- CBRE – Shopping Centres
- Office for National Statistics – Retail Sales
- British Council of Shopping Centres – Industry Performance Reports

How has the way in which people use their leisure time changed? How does it look to change further in the future?

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Urban Areas

What socio-economic groups live here? Why are they drawn to this area? How have these groupings changed over time?

How does this street compare with others in the area? What similarities and differences are there between the different housing types?

What is the ecological footprint of the area? What evidence is there of environmental sustainability practices being employed? Why have they chosen these methods?

In what ways can the street be improved to increase its level of desirability? What are the costs and benefits of such a scheme?



Blackweir (Photo: Oscar F. Hevia)

How easy is it for people to access goods and services in this area? How does this street physically and conceptually link to the wider urban space?

What social, economic and environmental challenges do people here face as a direct result of their housing situation?

How do people feel about living here? How has it affected their life choices? What do they hope for the future of this area?

What is the history behind this style of housing? For what purpose was the street designed in this way?

Useful sources of secondary data

- Office for National Statistics – Housing
- Department for Communities and Local Government – Housing and Homelessness
- Shelter England – Housing Facts and Figures
- Home Builders Federation – Key Facts and Messages
- Neighbourhood Statistics

What goods and services are on offer to the local residents here? How easy is it to access higher order goods and services?

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Urban Areas

How have urban transport solutions changed over time? What might future transport systems look like?

How have the surrounding shops and amenities benefitted from the transport system? How might they have seen disadvantages from it?

How does this transport system play a wider role in connecting people across the region? What other factors are there to create a more connected region?

Who uses this transport system? Who is not able to use it? How might a transport system inadvertently discriminate against some potential users?



Hucknall Tram, Nottingham (Photo: Ian)

How is the transport system linked in conceptual ways to other spaces and places? How have they been affected?

Which transport solutions for the urban space are most sustainable? How could sustainability be improved in this regard?

Why do people choose to use this transport system over others? What are the costs and benefits of the different systems available?

How might passenger experience be improved in this transport system? How might one increase passenger numbers?

Useful sources of secondary data

- Department for Transport – transport statistics
- International Conference on Urban Transport and the Environment
- Local urban transport system sites e.g. Transport for London
- Transport and Environment – Campaigns
- Transport Focus – Publications

Where do the transport systems service? Which places 'win' and 'lose' as a result of a chosen route?