

## Marc Antrop - a revolutionary transdisciplinary scientist or a traditional geographer?

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*Published in:*  
Re-Marc-able Landscapes

*Publication date:*  
2009

*Document Version*  
Early version, also known as pre-print

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Brandt, J. (2009). Marc Antrop - a revolutionary transdisciplinary scientist or a traditional geographer? In V. Van Eetvelde, M. Sevenant, & L. Van De Velde (Eds.), *Re-Marc-able Landscapes: Liber Amicorum Marc Antrop* (pp. 74-76). Academia Press.

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## Marc Antrop - a revolutionary transdisciplinary scientist or a traditional geographer?

Few people might consider Marc Antrop to be a radical revolutionary. Within his academic life he certainly is: always at the edge of the disciplines, where the battles of scientific development and cooperation for the solution of practical problems of the real world are fought. He has been an outstanding and vigorous fighter for integration in landscape research.

Somebody might find this as a surprise. Marc neither looks as nor behaves as a typical fighter. By nature he rather prefers diplomacy, arguments, cooperation and sense of diversity. But as long as I have known him, he was always eager to challenge accustomed ideas, and to brake down established schemes of scientific thinking and behaviour. Not just in words, but also in practice.

I met Marc at the first international seminar of the International Association for Landscape Ecology (IALE) in October 1984. IALE was founded in 1982 as a broad interdisciplinary scientific organization within landscape science, including professional landscape practitioners. Three main problems have faced IALE since the very beginning: to ensure landscape science collaboration (1) between east and west, (2) between disciplines across the boundaries of nature science, social science and humanities, and (3) between academic disciplines and professionals such as agronomists, foresters, landscape architects and planners.

This first seminar of IALE was held at Roskilde University Center (RUC), Denmark. This was partly due to the need for a neutral place following the foundation based on a close cooperation between landscape ecologists in the former Eastern and Western Europe. Each of these scientific communities developed strongly but separately in the 60ties and 70ties during the cold war. But it was also due to RUC's landscape ecological research, taking advantage of the special possibilities at this new university, fulfilling many of the expectations to interdisciplinarity, project- and practice orientation. The University was established in the 1970ties, shortly after the student revolt, developing in a radical way fully reflecting the time after 1968. The method of working of RUC was focusing on problem-oriented research and an interdisciplinary, practice-oriented, groups-work-based learning practice among enthusiastic students, with a minimum of bureaucratic regulation.

Marc immediately felt at home at our University. In fact, through many years of cooperation, he proved to be a better representative of the best qualities of such a loose and flexible structure than most colleagues at RUC, today back in a rather normal disciplinary academic tradition. He liked the open atmosphere and culture of working and tried to introduce and apply it in the small groups of landscape research and management courses in his home-department in Ghent.

The logo of Roskilde University is a coral, with the text *In tranquillo Mors – in fluctu Vitae*: on the inner parts of the coral reef, the corals waste away due to the quiet, standing water, giving rise to standstill and death. On the edge, however, the coral grows strong and beautiful as an optimistic reaction to the wind and heavy sea constantly attacking the reef. This is the position of Marc. He goes gladly to the edge to meet the storm. When the storm turns into another direction, he runs to meet it there.

Coming from a very classical geographical department, he joined IALE to enrich geography with the new inspirations from landscape ecology and all the very different disciplines and professions related to this area. He also added a lot in a variety of areas, from the development of spatial indices for the study of landscape heterogeneity over the broad study of landscape development in semi-urban areas to the history of geography and landscape science. The development of landscape ecology has certainly not been without tensions, e.g. between the very quantitative and model-oriented academic American landscape ecology, and the more qualitative, humanistic, stakeholder- and practice-oriented European tradition. Characteristic for Marc, he managed on the one hand to support a strong independent European development within landscape ecology with emphasis on the human aspects. At the same time, he jumped into the core of the very nature science-oriented American tradition as the European Associate Editor for the Journal Landscape Ecology, traditionally closely related to American landscape ecology.

Beside IALE, Marc has been very active in other European networks. He developed a good cooperation between landscape ecology and landscape historians, especially the Permanent European Conference for the Study of Rural Landscape (PECSRL). He has used much energy as ambassador for landscape ecology within European Landscape Architects, one of the most important groups of landscape practitioners, and has been in constant collaboration with a variety of institutions dealing with landscape planning and management in Eastern Europe.

Also at the internationally educational level, he has been radically active: in the beginning of the 90ties Marc initiated an Erasmus Programme for a European Certificate in Land Information Surveying. Students from different disciplines in Roskilde, Ghent, Limoges and Evora were put together in groups, travelling around to make land surveying project in different parts of Europe and incorporating the certificate as an addition to very different study plans. It was an extremely efficient and flexible way of studying. At the same time, the program worked well for the integration of the very different academic traditions among the European Universities involved. I remember once I proposed also to include some Dutch and German universities to strengthen the landscape ecological profile. Marc immediately turned down this idea: he was very aware that a too strong proliferation of specific theoretical or methodological schools would mean an end to the flexible collaboration among the very different traditions existing in Europe.

Marc has also constantly been on the staff-list of the many international PhD-courses being arranged within Landscape Ecology since the mid 90ties, thus being inspiring new generations of landscape researchers from different disciplines, not only in Europe, but from all over the world.

In this very systematic way, Marc has delivered a considerable contribution to the formation of a very broad coalition around landscape studies both within research, education and practice. This coalition will be extremely important in the coming years, when landscape changes and landscape adaptation without doubt will be main themes both in the necessary transformation towards sustainable development, but also in the endeavour of regional and local authorities to attract economic activities under globalised competitive conditions. Also for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, to support the involvement of stakeholders and the general public in these processes, the close cooperation between different scientific disciplines and professional will be a necessary condition.

The growing importance of landscapes for research, regional economic and social activities and local identity, has actualised the need for a better organisation and cooperation within landscape research, planning and management at the European level. IALE has built up local chapters in many European countries, but not yet an organisation at the European level. So, naturally, Marc has been heavily involved in the preparations for a European chapter of IALE during the later years. A European IALE is planned to be launched during the coming European IALE Congress in Salzburg in June 2009.

It was very well-deserved that Marc, at the IALE World Congress on Landscape Ecology in Darwin, 2003, received the IALE Distinguished Scholarship Award *“in recognition of his important contribution to the theory and practice of holistic landscape ecology and his devoted service to IALE and the journal “Landscape Ecology”. As an outstanding scholar, researcher and educator, and as a leading European geographer and landscape ecologist he has opened new vistas for a better comprehension of the dynamics of urban landscapes and has provided innovative tools for their study and management.”*

There might of course also be another explanation for the enthusiastic radical way Marc is working in international networks and activities. He might have done it, just simply because he is a traditional geographer. With his heart beating for the regional geographic synthesis, despite all trends and fashions of many ‘geographers’ trying to move this discipline into a more or less spatial version of a variety of other disciplines. But to me, this only shows the radical perspective of geography as a holistic science. We need it, and Marc has shown the perspectives insisting on that challenge.

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Old IALE-friend -  
the popes of  
Landscape Ecology -  
at the IALE-World  
Conference 2007  
(Wageningen)  
Jesper Brandt,  
Jacques Baudry,  
Marc Antrop  
(photo: Sandra Luque).