

Is There Satoyama in Europe?

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Abstract

In most European countries long-standing relationships have developed between human activities and the natural world. Some of these are small in scale, as with archaeological sites; others cover tens of hectares, as with English woodland and Swedish wooded meadows; others cover entire landscapes, as with the networks of hedges that surround fields in England and the many types of savanna-like landscape in which trees (especially ancient trees) are scattered in grassland. All these places have been maintained, if not created, by various forms of land management, often extending over hundreds of years. Sites and features that are valued for one reason tend to be significant for an apparently unrelated reason: thus English churchyards have a spiritual function but are also very significant for plant and animal life and especially for lichens. Ancient trees are not only historically significant (as in Japan) but are the homes of specific animals and plants for which young and middle-aged trees are not a substitute. These satoyama-like places are threatened as much by the decline of historic management as by direct destruction. The people responsible for them need to be aware of the many layers of significance that such places carry.

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