

Danish delight

Words & Pictures | Dr Shelley Egoz, senior lecturer in the Landscape Architecture Group, Lincoln University.

How and why the countryside is changing is the focus of a visiting teacher's study.

PROFESSOR JORGEN Primdahl is a landscape architect, professor of countryside planning and head of the masters programme at the Danish Centre for Forest, Landscape and Planning, the Royal Veterinary Agricultural (KVL) in Copenhagen.

He spent nine months in New Zealand from September 2002 to June 2003 as guest of the Landscape Architecture Group at Lincoln University and was funded by the Danish Agricultural Research Council. Primdahl (right) was here to conduct a comparative study of the relationships between agricultural landscape change and public policy interventions.

Primdahl's study, still underway, includes a theoretical analysis coupled with detailed empirical studies. He is focusing on the local level in three countries: Denmark, Portugal and New Zealand, investigating current landscape structure and the kind of landscape changes that have taken place since World War II.

In New Zealand two South Island areas that are going through dramatic landscape changes were selected as case studies: Te Pirita on the northern plains of the Rakaia River (below), and Banks Peninsula, south west of Christchurch (above). Te Pirita has recently been transformed from extensive sheep grazing to irrigated dairy farming, and in Banks Peninsula the change is that a great percentage of farming properties had become lifestyle blocks.

"What is so fascinating in looking at these two areas," says Primdahl, "is that in both areas, while landscape change has been driven by the dynamics of market forces and technology, universal factors that tend to affect landscape change, it is clear that it is the behaviour of individual farmers and the role they took in transforming their landscape



that has affected the environmental consequences."

Local adaptation to world and surrounding market conditions, local responses to governmental policies and social interaction with change have all contributed to landscape changes. This stands in contrast to a design-oriented process of change.

Primdahl has some pertinent observations about, and an outside viewer's insights into, the qualities of the New Zealand agricultural landscape and the possible role of the profession in shaping our future landscape. "All the above-mentioned forces created tremendous qualities all over the world, including New Zealand. The result is outstanding scenic values and remarkable cultural heritage values found in vernacular agricultural landscapes.

"Some examples from European agricultural landscapes are the


Portuguese Montado and French bocage landscapes, English hedgerows and highly sophisticated meadow landscape areas in Norway. All comprise significant cultural assets to their societies but they are non-designed qualities, produced over a long time by a local adaptation to a number of factors including ecological factors.

"Traditionally these landscapes have been characterised by the dynamics of market orientation and endogenous development. But today one of the things that we as a profession begin to be much more involved in, are the opportunities and constraints of landscape design for agricultural landscapes."

"Even though we acknowledge that the mix of vernacular design and social interaction type of development cannot be replaced by some kind of centralised designing attitude

and can certainly not be part of an internationalised general style, landscape architects certainly have skills and traditions to contribute to the whole process of landscape design and landscape policy-making concerning the agricultural landscapes.

"In a place like Te Pirita where everything is changing, it is landscape architects who have the ability and proficiencies to combine function and space, to create new entities and make things work, have meaning, incorporate ecological integrity and appear attractive at the same time.

"Of course you have a design task there: the problem is how you define the balance between intervention and deregulation, and how is a planning process best organised? This is where I see the potential contribution of the profession." 

* For the full version of this story, email the writer: egozs@lincoln.ac.nz

