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“The implementation of the European Landscape Convention at local level: local democracy”

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WORKSHOP 4

Implementation of the European Landscape Convention in local municipalities: reality and future challenges in Latvia

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Latvia ratified the European Landscape Convention in 2007 and the main task regarding implementation of the convention was the development of landscape policy in Latvia. In order to identify and plan the necessary measures and define the competences of the parties involved in the implementation of the convention, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MEPRD) elaborated the Landscape Policy Strategy (Strategy).

The Strategy was elaborated in co-operation with other ministries and a working group including representatives from ministries and planning regions, as well as universities and NGOs, was established.

119 Latvian municipalities in this working group were represented by the advisor of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments.

We had intense discussions in this working group, because some experts wanted to set strict requirements for landscape planning, while others argued against them by stressing the need for flexibility. For example, a question of landscape planning in the municipalities: is it mandatory or not? Therefore, consultations were carried out within municipalities and a compromise was reached – that the final decision about the necessity of landscape planning is made by the municipality. This was decided because the professional and financial capacity of municipalities differs substantially – some bigger cities have designated posts for landscape planners, whereas some have only very basic administrative staff.

This year a mid-term evaluation of the Strategy and a report was completed by the MEPRD. This report includes information on the implementation of priorities of the Strategy and implementation of the European Landscape Convention in local municipalities as well.

At the local level there are a lot of practical activities on the implementation of the convention, such as site greening, joint landscaping, competitions for the most trusted house and others. These activities are mostly planned and implemented in the short or medium term, within seven years, therefore the ministry devoted particular attention to finding out how the local governments work with landscape planning in a spatial development document.

Therefore the MEPRD has evaluated the inclusion of landscape planning and management aspects in all areas of spatial planning documents on municipalities: both a Spatial Development Strategy, setting long-term spatial development priorities, and a Land-use or Territorial Plan, which contains zoning for use of the territory, and a development programme that includes concrete measures and tasks.

During the development of this report the MEPRD have found that almost all Spatial Development Strategies of local government (around 90%) have defined the framework for preserving landscapes. The importance and value of landscapes has been described by about 80% of local municipalities. There is a tendency that the municipalities near the capital describe the value of landscapes less frequently than the average of all Latvian municipalities. This can be explained by the more active use of the territory in the area near the capital of Latvia and the willingness of municipalities to avoid discussions about the protection of areas with high landscape value.

More than 90% of the Territorial plans include general conditions for the preservation of landscapes, but only 50% of these plans have spatially defined valuable landscapes with specific conditions. In addition, some municipalities have developed thematic landscape plans that serve as the basis for developing other planning documents.

Almost all Development programmes of municipalities include tasks or activities which are related to landscapes. These programmes do not mention the preservation or development of landscapes directly, but include tasks and measures promoting the preservation and development of landscapes, such as improvement of public space, brownfield revitalisation, or establishment of a Landscape architect's post.

Although activities of local government are different, national and regional initiatives across the borders of municipalities are very important. Therefore the MEPRD has organised a national selection for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe and is currently working with identification of landscape treasures in co-operation with the general public.

This national selection for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe gives a great contribution in building the awareness of both stakeholders and the general public. There were four nominations and the number of nominees doubled on 2016: the national nomination to the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe was selected out of 8 nominees. One of them - the Daugavpils Fortress Regeneration Project, which was nominated from Latvia to the European final, was rated by the international jury as the best project of the Fifth Session of Landscape Award of the Council of Europe.

But coming back to awareness-raising and involvement of the general public and municipalities, it is important to mention that on 18 November 2018 we will celebrate Latvia's centenary – 100 years as an independent country. A celebration programme with more than 100 events and campaigns is prepared and one of these events is dedicated to landscape.

The MEPRD has developed a concept for a public campaign on identification of treasured landscape values. Every citizen was able submit a proposal on valuable landscape in their area in the initial phase of the campaign – we received more than 1000 proposals.

Taking into account the visual and cultural values, experts selected 243 of 1000 applications that were submitted for electronic voting on the website of National Library. Votes will be summarised and a dedicated board of landscape experts will develop a list of 10 treasured landscape values for each of the five planning regions in the next two months.

All selected values will be incorporated in electronic storage which will be named according to the overall slogan of the campaign – “Treasured landscape values of Latvia – yesterday, today and tomorrow”. It will be a base for collection of memories, stories, events, notable persons, historical photos, as well as wishes for the future and actions needed for maintenance of these values.

A mobile exhibition will be developed in 2018. The exhibition will consist of both historical and contemporary photos with descriptions of treasured landscape values. There will be regional discussions on value and importance of landscapes and regional selection of landscapes in each planning region.

We hope that these activities will be a good stimulus for local municipalities to include the values of the landscape set by the society in their development planning documents and to develop necessary measures to save these landscape values.