Chairmanship of the Czech Republic
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EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
CONVENTION EUROPÉENNE DU PAYSAGE

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

NINETEENTH COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEETING
OF THE WORKSHOPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

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

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ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION

A View of the Future - The 4th Industrial Revolution: Competence and Architects

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We are living in a period of particularly rapid change. We can make plans for the future that can be nullified almost immediately by the discovery, or the development of new systems that can radically alter our view of where we are heading. We live in an age where, if we can imagine it, we can probably do it. As a consequence we are therefore more often constrained more by our capacity to imagine things and manage change than our ability to design and create new things and systems.

Three hundred years ago was the dawn of the 1st Industrial Revolution, an era that lasted about two hundred years which was largely based on coal, steam and steel. As this technology adapted to produce electricity by the use of steam driven generators we entered the Second Industrial Revolution - Electricity. It has lasted about one hundred years. And so, during the last fifty years

we entered the Third Industrial Revolution; that of computers. Now, we are in the dawn of the 4th Industrial Revolution - the Internet of Things (IoT), AI (artificial intelligence), quantum computing, robotics, biotechnology, driverless cars, air taxis, drones (autonomous vehicles) where human intervention will dramatically reduce. We can speculate where this will take mankind, how this will affect everyday life, how our cities will change and how, most importantly, mankind can learn and benefit from these changes rather than simply becoming victims of global exploitation.

In his book, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, Prof. Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, suggests that this revolution is fundamentally different to its forerunners. These earlier revolutions were characterised mainly by advances in technology, and more latterly by the potential to connect billions of people via the web drastically improve the efficiency of business and organisations including, for example, the regeneration of the natural environment through more sensitive asset management. This revolution is characterised by a fusion of physical, biological and digital technologies. The rapidity and scope of potential change is unknown except that it will be vast. It will affect every aspect of life. Previous revolutions were largely linear in development, this revolution is exponential, expanding in every direction with unknown sin-offs occurring all the time. It has the power to completely disrupt our lives as well as the potential to substantially improve them.

Seventy five per cent of Europe's population live in towns and cities. How will cities change in ten years, twenty years, fifty years? It is impossible to imagine the scale of the transformations that will take place and I suspect that we are ill equipped to deal with it. Will roads be largely abandoned as places to park cars? Indeed, why would we need to own a car if a fleet of autonomous vehicles can transport us about the city, about the countryside, about the world and such autonomous vehicles will not be restricted to the ground? What about air taxis? Places to land and to park. How long will it be before carbon guzzling cars are banned from city centres – next year, ten years, perhaps longer, but their future is limited? Why invest in an expensive tram system if it would be cheaper to invest in a vast fleet of 3D printed electric self-driven cars available to everyone? Just this one change would substantially transform cities, open manifest opportunities for recreation spaces, public squares, sport and entertainment. But what happens when your smart fridge starts ordering eggs?

What could to constrain us in this widespread change? Quite simply three things; our lack of imagination, our lack of commitment, and our lack of belief in democracy. Science fiction has been remarkably good at predicting the future; amazingly, the correlation between science fiction and economic history is quite remarkable. However, it is fundamental to remember that this totally interconnected revolution is still effectively only producing tools and that it is these tools that allow us, individually and collectively, to control more effectively the environment in which we live, enabling us to make educated decisions regarding our collective future.

This brings me neatly to my next point - the competent client and the competent manager. We often think of design, architectural design, industrial design, engineering design, landscape design, as representing change and generally mostly change for the better. To a degree this is true. But what most affects people's lives is the way that these changes are managed in the short and long term. We know that managing cities is a complex business and that urban planning is

no longer simply, as it was in Hausmann's time, a matter of design with strategic military objectives at its base. Indeed, with the advent of the 'smart city' opportunities for the development of intelligent, energy-efficient buildings, electric transport systems, low energy lighting systems and many other things will emerge. To manage this properly we really do need competent people, professionals as well as elected representatives; people not simply with good professional qualifications in a variety of disciplines but people also with wide experience and most importantly vision and commitment.

While seventy five per cent of Europe's population live in cities, a large proportion of Europe's landmass is countryside and it must be recognised that managing this is as equally important. A large part of our cultural heritage is invested in the countryside. It is essential that we look after it in a sustainable way. Badly managed agricultural production, forestry, wild life reserves, national parks will fall just as quickly into dereliction as any abandoned inner city site.

So, on this matter of competency, taking into consideration our need to set the right targets and our need to sensitively manage what we do, we need to move quickly away from some archaic rules that really belong to the end of the 19th century rather than the beginning of the 21st century.

In 1968, nearly fifty years ago, the profession of landscape architect, which had already been in existence for fifty or so years, was officially recognised by the International Labour Office of Geneva in a chapter entitled "Architects and Town Planners". On 29 August 1987, IFLA (the International Federation of Landscape Architects) was admitted to "Category A" as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) having an official working relationship with UNESCO. Why is it then that in many European countries, Italy, Poland, Spain, Greece, Ireland for example, as well as many others, is it still necessary to obtain the signature of an Architect, or an Engineer, or even a Planner in some instances, to present a plan to a local authority that has been drafted by a Landscape Architect? Indeed, in some countries even the title 'architect' is still protected by law, although in others, in Belgium, for example following a court case, a landscape architect can now use the name architect. So, why would you want an architect to sign off the work of a landscape architect?

I'm an architect, I qualified with distinction, before I specialised in Landscape Architecture. I know architects - I have worked with them, even ones with international reputations who have designed buildings that leak and bridges that wobble. If I were to say that they are prima donnas you might think that I am joking. I'm not and, most are lost as soon as the step outside the front door of the buildings they have designed; that is, if they, or the public, can find the front door. My experience of working with architects is that they are average at best. In my opinion, it is no longer in the public's interest to continue with this unnecessary, inefficient and expensive process. Effectively, I also believe that this legislation encourages a restrictive practice, something I understand the European Union is very keen to stop. Imagine; architects spend at least seven years, in full time education and initial practice to become anywhere near competent in designing reasonable buildings. Landscape Architects spend much the same time specialising in a very different, but related sector of work. How is it possible that architects can possibly be competent undertaking the roll of signing off landscape architects work when they know so little

about it? Can you imagine the reverse happening? It would be equally foolish. How would you feel about a brain surgeon signing off the work of a gynaecologist, or vice versa?

So, I will take this opportunity of inviting the Council of Europe and the European Union to meet with the International Federation of Landscape Architects Europe to discuss how this outmoded practice can be phased out or modified. I am an optimist; I believe the future holds huge benefits for mankind, but I would prefer that we invest in competence where it is due and avoid blundering in obsolete traditions.