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

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WORKSHOP 3

Experiences of taking into account the landscape dimension at the local level

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Slovenia is a country with some of the most diverse landscape and remains an oasis of intact nature. Both nature and landscape are a reflection of human adaptation to nature and socio-economic conditions. Over time the interaction of natural processes and human activities has created the diverse and wonderful landscapes that are so important for Slovenian's people, its economy, and its international reputation. Within the area of our country, numerous exceptional patterns of land-use typical for different structures of physical geography have formed in the course of time.

Our landscape is important to us for many reasons. It provides pleasant surroundings, the attractiveness, and an important amenity for the everyday quality of people's lives. Slovenian landscape is valued for its natural beauty and attractiveness and for providing a strong sense of place at the local and regional level, a part of our national identity. Some of our landscapes are considered national icons.

Unfortunately, this image of Slovenia is changing rapidly because of the choices society makes about the built development and land management. The scale and speed of change have increased with technological progress, and this can be positive if it is well planned and managed.

Nevertheless landscape is the most recognisable quality and has an extensive value to Slovenia. They are a shared resource for everyone. They provide a living history of Slovenian's past and an inspiration for Slovenian's nature and culture. All offer relaxation, challenge, and inspiration and an opportunity to experience first-hand our natural and cultural heritage. They provide a wide range of social and health benefits and underpin Slovenian's economy. Slovenian's landscapes and wildlife attract tourists from near and far, and are consistently given as the top reasons for visiting Slovenia. In the competitive global market, our landscape is a key part in promoting Slovenia as a desirable location, attractive to businesses and their staff.

People's views and perceptions of landscape is an essential part of efforts to look after it. Looking after our landscape is a responsibility shared by all of us. Looking after our landscape is not about preserving all landscapes in their current form. This unique resource should be looked after for the benefit of future generations.

One of the challenging tasks is for us to finding common approach for sustainable landscape through the promotion of co-operation at a national and local level among governments, local communities, and all other stakeholders, for increased public participation in the decision-making process. This means that we must follow on the local level an integrated and holistic approach to plan and ensure early involvement of the local communities in this process. By working together, national bodies, planning authorities, communities and developers can maintain and enhance the diversity and quality of our surroundings, and improve the quality of our landscape.

A few words about important projects and activities in Slovenia

The objective of the project "We are making our Landscape" was to educate and raise awareness of the public in general about the landscape, especially children and their teachers.

Vital Landscapes project was implemented through the Central Europe Transnational Territorial Co-operation Programme. The project involves eight Project Partners from seven countries, including Slovenia (using the case of the Ljubljana Marsh). Ljubljana Marsh is an exceptional landscape, area of nature conservation, rich cultural heritage and specific habitats. The project was targeting the area of Ljubljana Marsh and focused on exploring the possibilities of marketing landscape as a trademark, in a close collaboration with the local community, as well as potential new stakeholders. Ljubljana Marsh is branding itself, through life and through how people see and feel it.

The aim of the project “Landscape variety” was to prepare guidelines for landscape features, important for biodiversity conservation in Slovenia. A list of landscape features, important for biodiversity consists of 18 vegetation, geomorphologic, built and water features. The general recommendations for conservation and management of landscape variety include protection of the identified features and the extensive use of their surroundings especially on the intensively used agricultural land and they can be implemented through nature conservation and agricultural policy on the national and local level.

The Slovenian Association of Landscape Architect have organised in April, which is the month of the Landscape, a lot of events dedicated to different landscape issues in different cities and other places in Slovenia. Basic principles that guide their work are among others increasing public participation, accessibility and the use of local knowledge in landscape management. On the local level they, stimulate debate about the future evolution of the landscape, promote a ‘landscape scale’ approach that incorporates the landscape interest through the range of strategic plans (including the development plan).

To conclude, we must be conscious that the decisions how we change the landscape today can have a strong impact on the life of generations to come. Many communities are changing the way they live with urbanizing or abandoning their landscapes. Once a long lived balance is lost, it is very hard and also costly to renew it.

Creating new landscape quality is namely a very difficult task.