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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

*Organised under the auspices of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers
of the Council of Europe*

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

**Brno, Czech Republic,
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*Study visit, 7 September 2017***

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

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The European Landscape Convention plays an important role in the practical protection of the cultural landscape, but not only there. Thanks to its philosophy it is also a tool for enhancing collaboration on all levels, and for all the phenomena and aspects covered by the term *landscape democracy*. Supporting democratic processes related to landscape is a crucial form of maintaining generally all democratic processes in the society. The importance and contribution of the European Landscape Convention as a tool for promoting and supporting democracy is especially evident in the post-communist countries that have to cope with reconstructing democratic processes after long periods of totalitarian regimes.

The 19th Workshop of the Council of Europe on the Implementation of the European Landscape Convention provided space for the presentation of many important ideas and messages. I selected several keywords that best characterise their content:

Importance of municipalities

Local municipalities play a crucial role in the practical implementation of the European Landscape Convention. Their activities have a direct impact on the character of the landscape and its changes. The bodies of the local authorities are directly responsible for the development of the territory entrusted to them, for its protection, its overall management, and planning. They are in daily contact with all the citizens, stakeholders, and users of the landscape. As such, they can influence the behaviour of the inhabitants and their approach to the protection and management of the landscape in the most efficient way. The discussions that took place during the workshop clearly proved that the role of the local mayor is the crucial one in implementing the convention in practical life – the mayors mediate contact and the flow of information between the citizens and the outer world; they are the creators and communicators of visions, and managers who organise and supervise actions leading to the improvement of the landscape. A mayor influences the character of the landscape, as well as the approach of the public to the landscape.

Enthusiasm and personal engagement

Landscape protection, management, and planning are only efficient if the mayor and elected representatives receive sufficient information, as well as methodological and financial support from the higher levels of administration (regional and national institutions), if they succeed in finding good experts and collaborators, have visions that inspire and enthuse their fellow citizens, and, aided by the citizens, define planning goals and implement them. The examples presented at the workshop clearly demonstrated that the quality of implementing ideas of the convention in everyday life is directly proportional to the intensity of the mayors' and municipal representatives' personal engagement.

Sharing and collaboration

Local governments (municipalities) have to deal with a large agenda and a great quantity of issues. If they remain isolated in dealing with problems, they lack the energy that is necessary for managing their territory in an optimal way and with a wider involvement of the public. An efficient implementation of the Convention's ideas could support a closer vertical linking of collaboration between the national, regional, and local levels (local authorities, planners, citizens). At the workshop we saw were some highly inspiring models of such collaboration, such as the "landscape planning clubs" in France, voluntary association of experts and citizens in Belgium, or the landscape planning forums in Italy. Depending on local individual customs and experiences, every country and region should systematically support the development of such platforms to contribute to a more efficient exchange of information and co-operative solutions to various problems and issues in the landscape.

Comprehensibility and transparency

To be able to help, the supportive system of co-operation and its vital agenda, as well as all the presented information and instructions, should be as simple as possible and formulated in a clear way that is understood by all the citizens. Bloated administrative systems, although created in good faith, in fact demotivate municipalities and increase their aversion to developing projects for which they were created in the first place.

There are no small projects

Small, practically-oriented projects are often much more effective in fulfilling the ideas of the convention than sophisticated large-scale ones. We saw many smaller landscape-developing projects here at the workshop (such as planting of fruit orchards, tree avenues or parks, church reconstruction projects, etc.). All these projects had one thing in common – they were innovative in their form and were implemented in close collaboration with all age groups of the local population. The results of such activities enhanced the actual site in question, but they also made the local community stronger and more coherent. A coherent local community is a vital condition of the citizens' ongoing willingness to participate in the protection, planning, and maintenance of the landscape.

Inspiration and sharing of experience

Throughout Europe, there are many examples of interesting and inspiring projects supporting collaboration in landscape management, focusing on local democracy. It would be great to have a common website or a similar information platform where such activities could be presented and serve as examples of good practice – benchmarks of excellence for other communities and municipalities.