



## COUNCIL OF EUROPE

### EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

#### *FIFTEENTH COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEETING OF THE WORKSHOPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION*

#### *Sustainable Landscapes and Economy*

*On the inestimable natural and human value of the landscape*

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#### *Sustainable Landscapes and Economy* **ON THE INESTIMABLE NATURAL AND HUMAN VALUE OF THE LANDSCAPE**

#### **HOW MUCH FOR THE VIEW? ... HOW MUCH FOR THE LANDSCAPE?**

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#### **Abstract**

Most lovers of landscape have the instinctive feeling that it is something beyond price; something that should not be measured in the metric of money, or traded against commercial values. This applies clearly to elite protected landscapes such as national parks. At a personal level it applies too to landscapes cherished from our individual past: the landscapes of our childhood, of our falling in love, the ones that formed the background to life's deep experiences. It is a natural instinct to regard such sources of value as "inestimable", and it is an instinct that the author shares: "I too would prefer to walk through a world of beauty forever unthreatened, forever intuitively appealing." But we come to be aware that in practice some such landscapes *are* threatened by materialist development, and that some of them have succumbed to such threats. We are moreover forced to recognise that our own comfortable

lives are supported by intrusions on other people's landscapes. A trade-off is unavoidable between the aesthetic environment, material well-being and sustainability. The question is only, are such trade-offs to be made by political or by economic processes? The designation of protected areas of landscape under IUCN's protocol represents a political resolution. But it is not absolute, and is susceptible to the making of exceptions. The recent decision in the UK to prohibit "fracking" for shale gas in national parks can be varied by the "appropriate" minister, in the event of deemed strong economic and social pressure for development. Given distrust of politicians' agendas, how is the economic and social case to be judged "strong *enough*"? How, furthermore, is landscape to be protected appropriately outside protected areas, in that universe of territories all of which are special to someone? The decision may in the end be political, but it is possible for economic appraisal to inform that decision – as was done 40 years ago in considering an electricity transmission line through a protected area in Scotland. Economics cannot tell people how to feel intuitively, but it can give guidance on how well grounded their intuitions might be. Recent interest in "payment for ecosystem services" has resurrected a long tradition in economics of evaluating environment in money terms – not for the sake of a perverse intrusion in inappropriate areas of human value, but as a service to resolving unavoidable conflict. The interest has been heightened by a perception that (in a few particular cases) economic evaluation may seem to give an unassailably large value to aesthetic resources. They may appear to be "priceless", in economic terms. But those who have long studied evaluative techniques impartially know their limitations, and their potential, when employed "to give a particular result", to be abused. Landscape value is a great thing, but it is not the only great thing for human beings. If nothing else, economic appraisal can force us to confront the terms of the trade-off, and oblige those who disagree with the appraisal to identify the basis of their disagreement. From this point, dialogue between political and economic viewpoints may be opened. Among the questions for discussion might be: can the value of landscape be merely the sum of values of the views that it affords, or is there a wider significance?