



## COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANDSCAPE AWARD EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

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**Planning policy for conservation and sustainable development of 20 national landscapes in the Netherlands, Stichting Nationale Landschappen (NGO), Netherlands**

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### **Introduction**

Many of you may know the Dutch polder landscape with its windmills, waterways and flat open spaces. Indeed this is a striking example of the way we managed to cultivate our swampy delta. But of course the Netherlands has more to offer. We also have sandy areas with small scale bocage landscapes and even a hilly region in the south. No less than twenty of these landscapes are designated by the national government as National Landscapes. Together they cover almost 20% of the country.

I am proud to stand here before you as a representative of the newly formed Foundation for National Landscapes in the Netherlands. This is a non-governmental organisation for the protection and the further development of these landscapes. I will tell you more about the goals and methods of this organisation and I will show you some of the projects we do. But first let me tell you more about the history and the nature of the twenty National Landscapes of the Netherlands.

### **History and nature of the National Landscapes**

National Landscapes are outstanding examples of typical Dutch landscapes. They represent the different historical landscape types we find in the Netherlands, such as the Green Heart in the western urbanised part of the land, the river landscape of the lower Rhine, the reclaimed islands in Zeeland, the small scale bocage landscape of the Achterhoek, the country estates of Twente and the forests of the Veluwe. Together they also represent the range of visual landscape qualities in the Netherlands, from very open landscapes to very dense landscapes.

In 2006 these landscapes were designated by the national government as National Landscapes. The central goal was to ensure the cultural and spatial diversity of the Dutch landscape as a whole and to improve recreational accessibility and sustainable management of these landscapes. Since 2006 a lot has been invested in improving the landscape quality as well as raising public awareness. New organisational bodies have been set up and all kinds of plans for landscape improvement and maintenance have been carried out. By now it is widely recognised that National Landscapes improve the national economy. They support the tourists industry and attract international businesses. Furthermore they bring people into contact with nature, cultural heritage and agriculture. They offer tranquillity, relaxation and clean air. In such a densely populated country as the Netherlands this is of immense value. The contribution to the wellbeing and health of all the Dutch people is more than money can buy.

### **Goals and methods of Servicenet National Landscapes**

This brings us to Servicenet National Landscapes, which is the operating body of the Dutch Foundation for National Landscapes. Servicenet was founded as a NGO in 2012, so it is in fact a very young organisation. The reason for its founding was that the national government decided to end their policy for the National Landscapes, in fact for landscape as a whole. From that time on landscape maintenance and landscape development became a prime responsibility for regional authorities, namely the twelve provinces. Although the provinces were willing to take over this responsibility, there was a problem that national funding for the National Landscapes also ended. Each province deals with this problem in a different way. There is no central guidance any more. And there is also little cooperation between the twelve provinces. That's where Servicenet comes in.

We think it is important to have a central organisation for the promotion of National Landscapes. These landscapes are an essential part of our cultural heritage and have an international value as examples of typical man made landscapes. Of course actual maintenance and development of these landscapes have to be organised on a regional and a local scale. We agree with our national government on that. But common marketing, knowledge exchange and also financing cannot do without a strong national organisation. That is our prime mission. Servicenet National Landscapes seeks to improve cooperation of all parties involved and to develop new forms of public participation and financial management.

As I said Servicenet is the operational body of the Dutch Foundation for National Landscapes. This is a non-profit organisation. The board consists of people who are nationally known for their vision and commitment and who are professionally involved in different fields of environmental planning. We have a provincial governor as chairman and members with a background in agriculture, financial management, recreation, landscape architecture and even housing development.

Servicenet works closely together with other national NGO's on recreation and nature conservation. On a regional and local level Servicenet works together with regional and local public organisations and commercial parties. We are involved in several projects to enhance the involvement of the public in landscape management and sustainable development. These projects are partly financed by governmental organisations, because they are in line with national and provincial policies.

The national government wants to promote public and private participation in landscape development. Servicenet National Landscapes is an answer to that on a national scale. We are financially supported by the national government, but also by regional authorities and private organisations.

### **Projects of Servicenet National Landscapes**

So what do we do exactly? We have a program with four lines of action:

1. knowledge exchange
2. marketing and raising public awareness
3. enhancing regional identity and promoting sustainable development
4. finding new ways of organisation and financing

Let me give some examples of ongoing projects in these four lines.

#### **Ad 1. Knowledge exchange**

We organise seminars and workshops on issues that are relevant for all National Landscapes, such as financing, marketing and organisation. These meetings are meant for representatives of local and regional organisations, but also for national and commercial partners. Because we have twenty National Landscapes a lot of experience and knowledge is available, but often people don't know what is happening elsewhere. By organising these meetings we want to create a 'community of practice', where people can learn from each other. Especially we want to bring together different groups of people: scientists and planners, nature conservationist and private investors, farmers and city people. It often turns out that these people have more in common than they think. There are many mutual gains to be found in landscape. Thus we encourage new partnerships and coalitions. I think also international knowledge exchange is important. That's why I appreciate being here at this conference. Certainly I learn a lot and I hope we can strengthen our networks.

#### **Ad 2. Marketing and raising awareness**

In the field of marketing Servicenet works closely together with the Dutch office for tourism and congresses. This office is responsible for the promotion of Holland internationally. Next to the famous canal cities our finest historical landscapes are presented on their website. This is important for tourism and for attracting international investors. We are now working on a special media campaign for our neighbouring countries Belgium and Germany. Part of this is the making of a television series. Special attention is given for cycling as an ideal way to experience the landscape.

#### **Ad 3. Enhancing regional identity**

Landscape for us is a living organism. We are not only concerned with conservation, but also with development. Because the Netherlands are highly urbanised there is a constant pressure on the landscape. Further more climate change is an extra challenge. We think development is vital for any landscape and that also goes for National Landscapes. But in National Landscapes extra attention is needed to fit new developments in historical structures and to make sure that these developments are sustainable. New developments can even be used to actively enhance regional identity. We think the National Landscapes can be examples for this. The Dutch are well known for their water management and landscape design. Let the National Landscape be our primary showcases.

So we promote good design practices and support sustainable development. One example of this is our ongoing project on 'leisure landscapes'. Here we support farmers in the Green Heart to supply recreational services that fit well in the landscape. And we support them to work together and pick up joint promotion. This can be an economically viable alternative to bigger tourist resorts, which often have little relation with the landscape. Based on the results in the Green Heart we are now working on a national strategy for leisure landscapes. We do this in cooperation with the ANWB, the biggest recreational organisation of the Netherlands.

#### **Ad 4. Finding new ways of organisation and financing**

Our biggest challenge is to ensure that the National Landscapes have a firm organisational and economical base. Actually now this is not the case. Because of changing politics there is great

insecurity in the future. A few National Landscapes still have a regional organisation with a budget of its own, but many of them do not. All of them lack structural funding. This is reflected in the level of public involvement and popular support: some of the National Landscapes are widely known, while others are hidden secrets. We think that a firm organisational base in the region is essential. Servicenet cannot enforce this, but we can help local partners to organise themselves and help them to find extra funding. We have done a pilot project in the National Landscape of the IJssel delta near the city of Zwolle. Our main task here was to involve private investors. We arranged meetings with housing developers, leisure entrepreneurs, farmers, health organisations and even the local football club. It turned out that they were not unwilling to invest in landscape, if they were only given the right opportunity. A new task force has been set up that is now preparing what we call 'business cases for the landscape'. That means that private investments are combined with public investments in an integrated approach that is beneficial for landscape and economy at the same time. This approach we are now extending to other National Landscapes.

### **Concluding remarks**

This brings me to my concluding remarks. I think the Netherlands, and perhaps also other countries, are facing great challenges for the landscape. Urban development, climate change, energy transition and food production will dramatically change the face of the landscape. I am convinced that this can very well be combined with the demands of cultural heritage and biodiversity. But we have to put in an extra effort, especially in our most valuable landscapes. At the same time we see that our national government cuts budgets for landscape maintenance and wants more public and private involvement. Servicenet National Landscapes is an answer to this. We have been working for two years and we have managed to keep the National Landscapes on the political agenda. We are very proud that our national government chose Servicenet National Landscapes as the Dutch candidate for the European Landscape Award. But still we have a long way to go to really create new ways of thinking and working. We are only beginning to meet the challenges before us. And although the actual work has to be done on the regional and the local scale, we cannot do without national and international support. The European Landscape Convention offers an inspiring guideline, but also a great responsibility for all nations involved. We hope and trust that the Dutch government will live up to that responsibility. Servicenet National Landscapes is glad to help.