

The implementation of the European Landscape Convention in the municipalities of the North Calotte area

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Background

As a key element of individual and social well-being and quality of life, landscape plays an important part in human well-being and in reinforcement of European and Nordic identity. It has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activities. Unfortunately, development in agriculture, forestry, industrial and mineral production techniques and in regional planning, town planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism and recreation and, at a more general level, changes in the world economy, have often damaged the landscapes or obliterated their distinctiveness. The Nordic landscapes are affected by fast and drastic societal changes. The economical values that can be counted in numbers are often against the other values that are more difficult to count in Euros. As an example of these kinds of values are ecosystem services, cultural and natural biodiversity and local's rights on land. Although the individual undoubtedly has an important role in preservation of landscape quality, laying down the general framework for protecting landscape quality is the public authorities' responsibility. The European Landscape Convention establishes the general legal principles by which national policies on landscape and international co-operation are guided.

The landscapes in the North Calotte area are extremely wide including border crossing continuous entities with magnificent special characteristics. The valuable cultural characteristics, like Sámi cultural heritage and reindeer herding are noticeable in the environment in several ways. The traditional land uses of the local and Sámi people are strongly related to the natural environment and its offerings such as fishes, game, berries and pastures. The municipalities are responsible for land use planning and they are in key position in implementing the European Landscape Convention and landscape management in practice. The municipalities should be able to take the special characteristics of the North Calotte area into account more strongly than today in their planning work and this can be a major practical challenge in many small and likely poor municipalities of the North Calotte.



Picture 1: The area of North Calotte and Sámi

Many variable landscapes or one variable landscape?

The identification of the Sámi landscapes is difficult. First of all we have the seasonal variations which effects to many visible and invisible characteristics of the landscape. Eight seasons in a year with multiple amounts of different kinds of weather conditions cause a major variation in landscapes and its use. Reindeers are dependent for instance on suitable pastures and paths, and the exact location of these in practice is dependent among other things on the weather conditions. Although nowadays it is hard to follow the natural movement of the reindeers because of different kinds of land use practices and national borders between the North Calotte countries (Conijn A. 2013).

The various Sámi languages can be originally located to certain areas of the North Calotte. The origin of the language could be one of the factors influencing on landscape identification. Most of the Sámi speaking people live in the southern cities nowadays, so this kind of identification would be based mainly on the origin of the languages and historical facts.

The structural examination should also be one part of the landscape identification. Most of the natural structures of the landscape can be considered permanent (geological formation, habitats, rivers, lakes, some of the infrastructures etc.). Many of the sacred places of Sámi have been mapped already and the old migration routes are quite well known. Sámi homeland crosses all the national borders of the area. Because of the national borders some of the traditional routes cannot be used any longer by the herders.

Mr. Jean-François Seguin shared some of these ideas with us after the meeting in Montenegro, Cetinje. One of the questions he brought up was that is there several different kind of Sámi landscapes or only one? This is an interesting question and it is not easy to find the correct answer for that. That we can tell for sure, that if one this is the answer, the landscape would be the largest one in Europe. Of course the large scale landscape can be divided to smaller scale variations, in time and space.



Picture 2: Common landscape; the three border area of Norway, Finland and Sweden.

Why North Calotte?

Some of the variable land use practices can be considered as a threat to the area of North Calotte. Besides these threats there are also many possibilities in the area. The area is in common use of the local people and visitors; there are no borders when they move from an area to another. Different regulation and legislation in countries often lead to misunderstandings. Remarkable growth of tourism and pressures to increase energy production and mining industry are the main challenges that cause cultural and economical conflicts and disturb reindeer herding. Sámi and local people often feel that the share of costs and benefits is uneven.

The unique, arctic environment and culture offer a lot of possibilities in the field of “sustainable” (if growth can ever be sustainable) and international nature tourism. Planning of the area should be implemented together and in a close interaction with all the stakeholders from each country. Common regulations, planning and supervision of the border areas of the North Calotte countries would lead to more comprehensive and balanced result. Through good co-operation the possibilities to offer better public services would increase. Larger scale guidelines and recommendations could be assumed to have effects on the local level decisions. Common research and monitoring system would also support this. The fact is that northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia have more in common with each other than with southern parts of their countries.



Picture 3: Popular winter activity in the North Calotte landscape

Literature: Conijn A. 2013, "A Landscape across borders" - a multiperspective research on the influence of the national borders in the border area of Finland, Norway and Sweden, unpublished