

## **Integrated European Landscape Circle Studies**

### ***Guides for Implementation at Local, Municipal & Central Level***

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#### **Introduction**

The themes of this workshop are close to my heart – landscape; landscape identification and assessment; exercising democracy; democracy itself, the future and the future of the past - all profound themes central to the very essence of civil society – deep and perhaps complex themes that have in various ways energised my own advocacy of landscape in Ireland and Europe over the past 20 years.

On landscape the questions I first posed 20 years ago were simple - perhaps deceptively so:

**Why** are some of our landscapes attractive and others less so?

**How** could the situation be improved?

**What** means should be employed to achieve this?

**Who** should be charged with responsibility for same?

**Where** the finance if necessary could come from?

I might word the questions somewhat differently today, but the broad thrust would be unchanged.

The answers may not be as simple, but the delivery process should not be so complex as to obstruct and frustrate the development and implementation of the answers. Have we come up with straightforward delivery processes in the intervening 20 years? Or could it be that we have fallen into that age-old human cul-de-sac – devising solutions so increasingly complex that they ultimately fail. For my part I would like to believe that I tried to keep the solutions simple!

**In 1995** I initiated the ‘National Landscape Forum’<sup>1</sup> in Ireland – an open forum for all with an interest in landscape. It convened on 7 occasions over the period 1995 to 2003.

**In 2003** I read the ‘European Rural Heritage Observation Guide’<sup>2</sup> published by CEMAT and based on two French guides on rural heritage – a clear, concise, comprehensive publication.

**In 2006** while working on a community further education project in West Cork, Ireland and supported by the local LEADER enterprise, I developed a circle methodology for local community landscape studies in Ireland – intended to be straight-forward and free of academic ‘jargon’ and therefore accessible to all citizens.

**In 2008** with the assistance of the Irish Heritage Council I published the ‘Guide to Undertaking a Landscape Circle Study in 7 Easy Steps’<sup>3</sup> — an accessible booklet to assist democratic access to identifying, assessing and managing landscape at the local level into the future – my guide was intended as a companion publication to the ‘European Rural Heritage Observation Guide - CEMAT’

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<sup>1</sup> Proceedings available as pdf's or hard copy from Landscape Alliance Ireland ([lai-ireland.com](http://lai-ireland.com))

<sup>2</sup> Available as a download on the Council of Europe website

<sup>3</sup> Available as a download/hard copy from the Landscape Alliance Ireland ([lai-ireland.com](http://lai-ireland.com))

**In March 2009** with the support of the Council of Europe I developed a universal version of the guide and delivered a presentation on the ‘European Landscape Circle Study Guide’<sup>4</sup> at the ELC conference in Strasbourg. The title of my presentation in the original workshop programme refers to that paper.

**Since 2009** the feedback I received on the landscape circle guide suggested that the methodology might have wider applications than its original community capacity-building and empowerment role – at local, regional, municipal and central level and also as a support in the management of the landscape dimensions of cultural and natural heritage sites.

Recently the opportunity has arisen to prepare documentation in support of such wider applications and to test them on the ground.

### **Integrated European Landscape Circle Studies at Municipal Level (currently the subject of a pilot study in Kosovo<sup>5</sup>)**

This year in association with my role in recent years as Council of Europe expert assisting the Promotion of Cultural Diversity in Kosovo PCDK<sup>6</sup> project, the opportunity arose of working with the PCDK team and government experts to develop draft guidelines for landscape identification, assessment, and management at municipal level based on the landscape circle methodology. The guidelines are being developed for use with pilot studies and will be refined in the light of the outcome of the pilot study and the feedback from the study team.

The landscape circle methodology has been adapted from the Landscape Circle Guide to provide a straightforward process for the identification, assessment and management of landscape at municipal level in Kosovo in compliance with current legislation and within the framework of the provisions of the European Landscape Convention. The methodology should be equally applicable elsewhere in Europe and further afield particularly where resources and baseline data are limited. The methodology may also be useful as a complementary measure in support of other more established methodologies

The use of the landscape circle methodology is intended to facilitate the early development of a basic landscape management framework and landscape management plan at municipal and central level which can be advanced incrementally to a more sophisticated level as resources and capacities permit.

The completion of a landscape study at municipal level will provide a resource and data-base that will:

- Inform the municipal and central development planning process including the EIA process where relevant
- Serve as an educational and awareness-raising mechanism in landscape at both official and community level
- Support and reinforce other important cultural/natural heritage and environmental measures in an integrated sustainable framework

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<sup>4</sup> Available in English and French as a download on the Council of Europe website

<sup>5</sup> *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.*

<sup>6</sup> The PCDK project in Kosovo is implemented by the Council of Europe and funded by the European Union

- Guide landscape protection, management and planning at municipal and central levels
- Facilitate compliance with relevant legislation

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the more detailed ‘Guide to Undertaking a Landscape Circle Study in 7 Easy Steps’, the ‘European Rural Heritage Observation Guide - CEMAT’ already referred to and the European Landscape Convention & its explanatory notes.

The landscape circle methodology has also been adapted for use in the undertaking of landscape studies on cultural heritage sites.

The methodology involves 7 integrated steps which are broadly similar for studies at community, municipal and cultural heritage site level, but obviously there will be some differences in the aims, processes and outputs at each level.

The composition of the study team is important and should be multidisciplinary if possible embracing experts from a range of planning and heritage disciplines.

These particular guidelines highlight the differences for studies at municipal level.

## **Methodology**

The 7 steps of the methodology as modified for municipal studies are as follows:

### **Step 1 - Scoping the Study Area:**

For municipal studies the overall scoping is straightforward – the study area is the total area of the municipality. It is recommended that the study might extend over boundaries in so far as landscape patterns are being identified. The mapping used can be to a range of scales depending on the availability of detailed maps. For steps 3 & 4 it will be helpful to divide the municipality into manageable areas and the circle methodology can be used for this, though in some cases it may be simpler to just divide the municipality into obvious sections as defined by main roads.

If the study team is already familiar with the landscape of the municipality they may at an early stage begin to identify potential landscape character areas and to apply the circle template to such specific areas. There is no rigid rule for the size of these initial circles but it should not be so large as to be too unwieldy and difficult to manage.

### **Step 2 - Research:**

There are three interrelated strands to researching the study :

1. - understanding landscape,
2. - understanding the landscape of Kosovo
3. - understanding the landscape of the selected municipality.

In many administrations landscape is a relatively new concept and to improve their understanding of landscape and reach consensus between the study team members it is recommended that the pilot study team might engage in preparatory workshops to review and discuss the landscape in general and the landscape of the study area in particular adapting the European and the specific Irish examples provided in the reference texts to the landscape that is the subject of the study.

The third strand moves the discussion to the subject municipality and this will involve the team drawing on their own reference resources – previous experience & study together with books, libraries, bookshops, local authority facilities and the internet. This strand should lead into the beginning of a written description of the history and evolution of the landscape.

### **Step 3 - Creating an Image Observatory:-**

It is said that “A picture is worth a thousand words” and that is certainly true of landscape. Even more valuable are pictures of the same scene taken a years or even years apart as these illustrate the process of change in the landscape.

The creation of an image observatory building up a portfolio of current representative photographs of the existing landscape taken from key viewpoints which are then replicated in subsequent years.

The image observatory also involves sourcing old images (including paintings etc) of the landscape and comparing them with photographs of the same landscape today.

### **Step 4 - Information gathering:**

The objective of the identification process is to identify and list the elements of the landscape in each landscape area – separated into the landscape strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A specific location for each element should be identified on maps, although for dispersed elements it may be adequate to refer to a particular circle (or oval).

A comprehensive reference inventory is included in Appendix 2.

The identification of landscape elements will range over the built (old and new), the natural and archaeological heritage as well as ‘non-heritage’ elements. It also adds its own important component – an understanding of the composition of the landscape and the interrelationship between existing built and natural heritage, and present-day interventions, e.g., construction work or changed land use practices.

The extent by which landscape elements are common, occasional or rare must be recorded and the pattern of their occurrence should be indicated by shading or cross-hatching a map section.

### **Step 5 - Evaluating the landscape:**

This step involves a significant difference from the other two levels as the various landscape circles will have to be decided, mapped and described. Whilst it is envisaged that quite a range of landscape circles and ovals may be required for a detailed landscape study, it is anticipated that the pilot study will result in a relatively small number of circles.

Because the landscape is a composition of many elements or ‘jigsaw pieces’, an analytical process is required. The LANSWOT analysis (Landscape Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is highly suited to evaluating the diverse elements of our landscape in the context of their role in defining and deciding landscape quality.

It lends itself to everyday use in avoiding the complexity of deep scientific analysis, whilst requiring the pilot study team to adopt a structured, critical approach in their assessment of their landscape. It has the added advantage if the methodology is later applied in other municipalities of enabling municipalities to compare and contrast their conclusions in a comparative framework.

## **Step 6 - Identifying Landscape Management Actions and Actors:**

Landscape Management involves identifying/recording the actors and the actions needed in response to the prioritised lists produced by the LANSWOT analysis, encouraging best practice; where possible leading to the conservation of landscape elements (or at least a continuity of these elements within the landscape); and determining the character of interventions in order to - reinforce the strengths, address the weaknesses, capitalise on the opportunities and avert or mitigate the threats.

The actors envisaged for landscape management at the municipality level will be the officials and professionals working in the municipality and those working at regional and central level whose responsibilities involve interventions or administrative procedures within the subject municipality.

But the wider community will also involve key actors as they engage with the landscape on a daily basis.

## **Step 7 - The Landscape Study Report and other Outputs:**

A landscape study report will feature the following:

- An introduction to the study
- An outline of the methodology adopted
- A description of the landscape of the municipality, its history and evolution
- A landscape image observatory of the municipality.
- A listing of the defining landscape characteristics of the municipality
- A prioritised listing of the landscape strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- An associated listing of the actions and actors involved in the landscape management of the area
- An action plan to publicise and give effect to the conclusions of the study

Completing a landscape circle study report will achieve much in informing and alerting the municipality about their landscape. It will provide a vital section of the municipality development plan. It will inform the development planning process and environmental impact assessments (where relevant).

And most fundamentally it will initiate an educational and awareness-raising process.

## **Concluding Reflections**

Since 2009 the landscape circle methodology appears to have demonstrated a level of versatility that may enable it to develop the potential to realize the objectives of the European Landscape Convention at local, municipal, regional and central government levels as well as at the level of designated natural and cultural heritage sites.

I lack the resources to validate this ambitious suggestion but I am hopeful that the current pilot study in Kosovo and possible future work in Kosovo may provide the proof. Other municipalities and states are welcome to trial the methodology in their own landscape settings.

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