

# LANDSCAPE PLANNING AT A LOCAL LEVEL IN EUROPE

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Since its approval in October 2000, the European Landscape Convention (ELC) has become the European benchmark *par excellence* for landscape management. Gradually, institutional, regulatory and planning changes and adaptations have been taking place throughout Europe, as indicated by the ELC. One of the commitments in which most progress has been made in some European countries is that of managing and planning the landscape at a local scale, which in many regions of the continent already had a long tradition.

Local people are increasingly seeing the landscape as a driving force for their development and a way of increasing the general public's level of self-esteem, identity and quality of life. The relationship between landscape and the local world is precisely one of the pillars of the roadmap of the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia: *Catpaisatge2020. Country, landscape, future*, and the reason for which the Landscape Observatory created the website *Landscape and the local perspective* ([www.catpaisatge.net/monlocal](http://www.catpaisatge.net/monlocal)). For the Andorra's Government, the implementation of the National landscape strategy has been the occasion, among others, to include the need to integrate protection measures for landscape in a recent amendment to the urban planning law.

The significance that landscape is taking on in the local area coincides with a growing need to review existing tools and strategies in Andorra and Catalonia. We are looking at a change in the way in which people relate to their territory and their nearby environment and which calls for changes in the way of looking at this relationship, from conventional planning tools—which are not providing optimum responses to all the demands of the local world—through to forms of local governance. It is time to reflect on the validity of some tools and strategies on which landscape policies at a local level have been based to date and to analyse the opportunities to overcome current challenges.

## 1. A COMPARATIVE STUDY AS A BASE

The next comments and reflections regarding landscape planning at local level in Europe are obtained from the knowledge acquired in the subject and from the results of the comparative study “Landscape planning at local level in Europe. The cases of Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the Walloon Region in Belgium”, produced in 2015 by the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia with the collaboration of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of the Andorran Government. The document aims to provide some answers to the previous challenges.

The initial step to prepare the document was to go beyond our borders, asking a series of questions: what tools exist around Europe to integrate landscape at a local scale? How are these tools linked to local planning (not just urban planning)? How effective are they? Is their application only dealt with in territorial policies or do they have a more systematic, global focus? What is civil society's role in them? How are they organised in the planning systems and in the respective landscape policies? The document also wanted to contribute to the debates started by the governments of Catalonia and Andorra regarding their respective territorial and urban policies which should lead to new, more innovative and efficient regulations.

To write up this document, existing landscape tools and planning regulations in Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the Walloon Region in Belgium were studied, as they have territorial and landscape policies that are recognised in Europe. The

landscape planning tools on which the study focused are eminently driven and managed by local, regional or national administrations. However, we are observing the birth of a series of initiatives led by local civil society, which are increasingly more dynamic and committed to the territory, that also opt for quality of the landscape as a way for its development, and which cannot be forgotten if we wish to take a complete look at the current situation.

## **2. SOME REFLECTIONS REGARDING LANDSCAPE PLANNING AT LOCAL LEVEL**

In the following section are some comments and reflections regarding landscape planning affecting local planning in Europe. They do not intend to be a magical recipe for incorporating landscape into the local world, but rather a series of guidelines and principles which, based on what is being found here and in Europe, could contribute to the construction of new, more efficient models.

### **2a) From the European Framework to Local Action**

Without the backing of the ELC, many of the political, legislative, investigative, professional and educational initiatives with respect to landscape that have been undertaken in Europe in the last few years would be incomprehensible. A large number of the challenges that face Europe in terms of landscape (identity, individuality, competitiveness, interaction, creativity, local development, entrepreneurship and research) are being tackled - and everything indicates that they will do even more in the future - through the implementation of local policies.

### **2b) Growing Interest in Landscape from the Local Scale**

The fact that landscape represents a direct experience of the everyday life of people does a great deal to explain the growing interest of the local world with respect to the landscape. Some local institutions (councils, local and county governments, etc.) view the landscape as a possible driving force for their development, a local attraction and a way to raise levels of self-esteem, identity and the public's quality of life. On the other hand, many municipalities have realised that in the current context of globalisation, the quality of the landscape may become a competitive factor in terms of individuality and of enhancing their primary characteristics.

### **2c) Landscape Planning at a Local Level begins at a National Level**

The most successful landscape policies in Europe are those with strategies at all levels of administration, from national to local levels and which are clearly linked, so providing uniformity to the system as a whole. These are policies that are based on national landscape strategies, which are implemented in planning instruments on different levels and which culminate in definitive measures and projects in municipalities or neighbourhoods.

### **2d) Moving from the Territorial to the Urban Scale**

Landscape policies are often centred in a territorial area and do not reach the municipal level. However, the Netherlands possesses tools for urban regulation (regulations on aesthetic quality, *Welstandsbeleid* and *Welstandsnota*; and plans for landscape quality, *Beeldkwaliteitsplan*, *BKP*) that affect well-defined urban details (volumes, disposition, texture, colour, the organisation of specific factors in landscape structure, etc). On the other hand, tools such as the Green and Blue Network (*Trame verte et bleue*, *TVB*) and the Perimeter for the Protection and Valorisation of Suburban Agricultural Areas of France (*Périmètre de protection et de mise en valeur des espaces agricoles naturels et périurbains*, *PAEN*), or the British Green Infrastructure (*GI*) are especially useful in the organisation of the landscape through urban planning and have become true tools of landscape creation and of the re-naturalisation of the cities.

## **2e) Landscape Units as an Area for Planning**

Landscape units have become a marvellous base for linking landscape planning decisions with urban planning in order to formulate local landscape strategies, develop determined projects or to provide integration guidelines on undevelopable land. Firstly because they define territory in accord with a logic applicable to the landscape and not to administration. Secondly, supramunicipal processes allow synergies to be found and resources and efforts to be coordinated. The majority of the instruments analysed appear to function better when applied in a supramunicipal form - as with Swiss landscape development plans (*Conception d'évolution du paysage, CEP*), the quality plans of the Netherlands (*Landschapsonwikkelingsplan, LOP*), the French landscape charters (*Charte paysagère*) and landscape plans (*Plan de paysage*) and the Wallonian landscape programmes (*Programme paysage*).

## **2f) Beyond Regulation: the Force of Recommendations and Good Practices**

Another useful way of affecting local planning is that of manuals or documents of good practices to improve the quality of the landscape, aimed at the authorities, the promoters of projects and/or the public. These recommendations may influence local urban planning, while also providing highly useful criteria and guidance for building, facility and infrastructure authorisation process, and have a high potential in terms of raising awareness in both institutions and promoters. Some good examples are the detailed recommendation guides that are used in Wallonia so that constructions strengthen the character and the quality of a location (*Construire le paysage de demain*), or the guides created for French regional natural parks (*Charte du Parc naturel régional*), which deal with questions such as maintaining quality at the entrance to towns, as well as architectural characteristics, etc.

## **2g) Linking Landscape and Urban Planning is not enough: Articulation with Local Political Sectors**

Territorial and urban planning methods are not the only way to improve and enhance the landscape as determined by the ELC. Agricultural or tourism policies, for example, have an enormous influence on the landscape and are often influenced by it. A modern landscape policy at a local level must be interactive, it must involve and raise the awareness of all technicians in all areas of local administrations and strengthen in this manner, or those where landscape may involve a future opportunity (economy, culture, education, innovation, etc.). The landscape strategies used in the Netherlands are good examples of tools based on interaction and agreements between actors in the territory such as landscape charters (*Charte paysagère*); and the charters of French regional natural parks, (*Charte du Parc naturel regional*).

## **2h) Exemplary Projects**

A modern policy at a local level also has to be proactive; it must establish well-designed projects of organisation and intervention in territorial and collective landscapes that go beyond the cosmetic, ornamental or merely formal in character and which enhance the quality, the character and the vitality of these places, from both a physical and an environmental, economic and social viewpoint. These projects may also have an enormous catalysing and multiplying effect for other similar landscapes that lack responses. In this sense, the landscape partnership projects of the UK's national Lottery are very interesting.

## **2i) The importance of dealing with Open Space**

The management and organisation of open space are complex issues. The landscape transforms it from a dispersed accumulation of artefacts of all kinds, which on their own do not create a significant transformation, but together, place its character at risk. In the Netherlands, landscape quality plans (*Landschapontwikkelingsplan, LOP*) have defined very clear, detailed criteria for new constructions, rehabilitation projects and/or new developments. In a highly similar line, the guidelines for organisation and programming (*Orientations d'aménagement et de programmation, OAP*) linked to French local urban planning plans (*Plan local d'urbanisme, PLU*) establish guidelines that are almost projective on how to integrate new urban developments and how to deal with the limits between classes of land. Other tools include the Green and Blue Network (*Trame verte et bleue, TVB*) and the Perimeter for the Protection and Valorisation of Suburban Agricultural Areas of France (*Périmètre de protection et de mise en valeur des espaces agricoles naturels et périurbains, PAEN*), or the British Green Infrastructure (*GI*). Serious emphasis must be placed on this question taking into account the landscape unit (the character of an area) and the fact that if the interventions are well made, they should provide new values instead of damaging those existing.

## **2j) Tools of Landscape Planning and Management based on Public Involvement and Agreements**

The role of the public is highly relevant in the development of the majority of the landscape planning and management tools analysed. Tools of a voluntary nature proliferate, these are promoted both by authorities and civil society or local actors, and are based on conciliation, on creating consensus, in agreements and in actions and where the actors, either individually or as a group, take responsibility in society to work in order to attain those commitments made, so attaining a greater level of involvement, a factor which facilitates the success of the initiative .

## **2k) The Clear Definition of Responsibilities**

Initiatives often arise with good intentions and with a definition of objectives and proposals, but where no definition is provided on the how, the who, the when, the cost involved, or who has to pay, or who is responsible, how coordination is made or how they are integrated with other plans and programmes etc. The efficacy of landscape policies at a local level also involves the clear definition of the actors and their responsibilities at all times. In the Netherlands, some landscape development plans (*Landschapontwikkelingsplan, LOP*) define a very clear and precise programme of actions, which details each actor's responsibilities, the operational schedules, a budget breakdown and channels of finance. Something similar occurs in the German cases and some successful French examples. Greatest efficiency is however attained when a figure with a plan is to be followed exists. The offices of the French regional natural parks (*Charte du Parc naturel régional*) or the figure of the 'Landscape Coordinator' in the Netherlands are obligatory references here.

## **2l) Don't punish – motivate**

Another basic way to promote agreement (and social acceptance) at a local level is by maintaining the positive and constructive characters of both landscape rules and regulatory laws, as well as initiatives and projects themselves, avoiding tools and approaches that are reactionary, prohibitive or penalising in nature, and which may be counterproductive. This constructive spirit favours landscape joint landscape involvement and results in the favourable consideration of the landscape, which is seen as an opportunity by all those areas and actors in a specific territory. Another manner of motivating any initiative is by means of recognition in the form of an award. The majority of European countries (Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Lithuania, etc.) possess national landscape awards as a tool for the public recognition of initiatives, which are often of a local level.

## **2m) Local Landscapes, Local Mapping**

Landscape mapping helps to make the complexity of local landscapes intelligible and should be used as a decision-making tool, while contributing to the raising of public and institutional awareness on the landscape. It is therefore essential to possess a clear, local, direct and precise local-level mapping process that allows improved orientation and definition when incorporating landscape into urban planning and sector strategies, focused above on action too. Some initiatives from local Dutch (*Landschapsonwikkelingsplan, LOP*) and French local landscape plans (*Plan de paysage*) or German transition mapping models are good examples.

## **2n) The Mark of the Past, Heritage and Ordinary Landscape**

One innovative factor in policies on cultural landscapes centres lies in avoiding the extreme difference between excellent landscapes and others that are not so good, which are usually inhabited on a daily basis. These are not those institutionalised assets (architectural assets or monuments, for example) that stand out in the landscape, but landscapes that are valued as heritage as they become viewed as such by the communities who construct them through links and experiences between the population and the land on a daily basis. As such, territorial and urban land policies must take 'impregnated' cultural heritage into serious consideration, whether or not it has been documented, and ensure its involvement in regional planning. Tools such as the British Historic Landscape Characterisation (*HLC*), the Dutch landscape biographies and France's areas for the valorisation of architecture and heritage (*Aires de mise en valeur de l'architecture et du patrimoine, AVAP*), applied at a local level, are good examples for local-level landscape policies.

## **2o) New Ways of Funding for the Landscape**

It is important to establish different funding alternatives that involve agreements and the involvement of territorial actors. One example in Europe is the Swiss Landscape Fund (*Fonds suisse pour le paysage*). Also noteworthy is France's *1% Paysage et Développement*, which is not dependent on regular public budgets, and comes from tax revenues collected for a specific purpose. Another formula is one that uses a small percentage from the national lottery for this purpose, as in the Heritage Lottery Fund in the United Kingdom or the Dutch National Lottery. Another question that needs to be dealt with and improved at a local-level is public-private cooperation (companies, foundations, banks, etc.), as a formula to promote determined landscape initiatives and actions, either through patronage, sponsorship or other imaginative systems, yet to be explored.

## **Final considerations**

In short, landscape planning at a local level requires us to be innovative in both content and in the way we act. It compels us to re-invent ourselves, to take on many points of view, to be open to new forms of organisation, new methodologies and new tools of interaction and participation among all those involved. It has been shown that countries with a more solid landscape culture are those that enjoy a greater associative network and a society that takes on a greater role in actions of restoration or creation, or in landscape planning and management. Today's world requires new forms of democracy and governance in landscape, the step from more centralised procedures to a system that takes agreements from the very beginning with those closest to the region into account.

The time has come foster more cross-cutting, speedy and pragmatic approaches, which are focused on agreement and public-private cooperation and which are aimed at the challenges facing today. Tools that focus efforts on aspects that are considered truly essential in a determined context are gaining popularity: it is better to face a few, shared, joint and powerful commitments than many dispersed objectives that are finally unattainable, unrealistic and which therefore cannot be fulfilled. To put it another way, advances are being made to tools that are

increasingly more flexible and dynamic, which facilitate the attainment of visible results and with a feasible, clear assignment of responsibilities to each party involved.

In addition, the European context is increasingly facing landscape planning and management processes at a local level that is shared among various areas (urban planning, agriculture, tourism, etc.), representatives (the authorities, economic sectors and society) and disciplines (geography, architecture, environmental sciences, mapping, sociology, design, agronomy, etc.). The places in which this convergence of areas, stakeholders and viewpoints takes place to a greater extent and in which each party has a determined bond and empathy to the place and in which viewpoints linked to regional character and identity are broadened are those that provide more suggestive, innovative, successful solutions.

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