

Ladies and gentlemen, Dear colleagues,

“ It is a pity indeed to travel and not get this essential sense of landscape values. You do not need a sixth sense for it. It is there if you just close your eyes and breathe softly through your nose; you will hear the whispered message, all landscapes ask the same question in the same whisper. 'I am watching you -- are you watching yourself in me?'”

Lawrence Durrell, Spirit of Place, novelist, poet, humorist, and travel writer best known for *The Alexandria Quartet* novels.

Landscape is more than just scenery: it is the interaction between people and place; the bedrock upon which our society is built. The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.’

Our landscapes are important to us for many reasons. They are a shared resource for everyone, irrespective of ownership, ability or background. They provide a living history of our past, and an inspiration for our culture. They provide a wide range of social and health benefits and underpin economy.

Whether rural or urban, coastal or inland, degraded or well-preserved, our surroundings reflecting our quality of life. It is not only areas of outstanding beauty which require our attention, but the rich variety of settings in which we live – many of which have been undergoing rapid change.

This year, Council of Europe Meeting of the Workshops for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, dealing with “National policies for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention: challenges and opportunities” in Yerevan, Armenia. Implementation of the Convention in national policies is always challenge for people who are creating landscape policies on the state and local level. Landscape don't have the borders and we need to cooperate and to exchange the knowledge, experience and different approaches.

“Landscape Award of the Council of Europe” recognizes policy or measures which local or regional authorities or non-governmental organizations have adopted to protect, manage and plan their landscape, which have proved to be lastingly effective and which can thus serve as an example to other territorial authorities in Europe.

The Council of Europe's Landscape Award celebrates projects which seek to protect, develop and improve those landscapes.

Together they embody the spirit of our European Landscape Convention – the first international treaty of its kind, which recognizes that sustainable environments are those which **balance our economic, social, cultural and environmental needs**. Successful landscapes support living, working communities in which we protect our natural heritage too.

It is a pleasure to bring together achievements in this two days presentations. I hope they will inspire others and, to all nominees of the Landscape Award, past and present: I wish you every success.