



Strasbourg, 19 November 2001

T-FLOR 1 (2001) 9

**EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
– Florence Convention –**

***FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING AND
SIGNATORY STATES TO THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION***

*Council of Europe, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg
22-23 November 2001
Room 10*

Theme 2

**Landscape identification, assessment and quality objectives
using cultural and natural resources**

by

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*Document by the Secretariat General
prepared by the Regional Planning and Technical Co-operation and Assistance Division*

The task of identifying and classifying landscapes is the first challenge facing institutions and organisations responsible for landscape development, protection and management. This is because all decisions relating to the future of landscapes are necessarily based upon an assessment of the *status quo* or changes in progress.

Landscape identification and assessment entails determining the boundaries of zones in which one or more types of landscape can be found and describing them in terms both of their condition at the time of identification and of the changes they are undergoing. Until recently this task was performed along the lines of the traditional geographical procedure of analysing homogenous features, as a result of which it could be concluded that the zone in question exhibited identical visual, structural or compositional features which were the hallmarks of a certain landscape type. However, over the past twenty years research has moved on and has established new identification and assessment criteria which have been subjected to various tests and have proved to work. Research has sought to bring out the multiple connotations of the term “landscape”, as a result of which, rather than this single approach to identifying and characterising landscapes, it has become necessary to apply other methods too. Through the various principles which it contains, the European Landscape Convention makes provision for these different criteria, and in so doing it offers recognition for the specific cultures of European regions and the need for participation on the part of the populations concerned. The methods in question, both traditional and new, are as follows:

1. Identification and assessment by means of an on-site landscape analysis which consists in determining and marking out the boundaries of “landscape units”. These units are not zones of identical land use. Instead they go beyond the notion of land use and provide a territory-specific tool for establishing the exceptional characteristics of a landscape in order to raise awareness among decision-makers and other interested parties of the resources and potential of existing features.
2. Identification and assessment of controlled landscapes – in other words, those which are already subject to a specific protection or management procedure and therefore enjoy a certain status in the eyes of society. These are usually marked out and easy to identify.
3. Identification and assessment of landscapes which have been recognised in one way or another by writers or artists and have thereby become part of the national or regional cultural consciousness.
4. Identification and assessment of landscapes prized at local level. Different criteria operate in this respect. At the local level, recognition for landscapes is usually strongly influenced by local community history and, more particularly, by social ties which have contributed historically to shaping landscapes as they now appear, in which local communities see the reflection of their own traditions of spatial planning. The local level is also that at which the collective imagination is expressed, which enables the population concerned to attach significance to certain landscapes.

These different methods of identifying and classifying landscapes can be approached in one of two ways:

- The static approach involves describing and classifying landscapes at a fixed point in time in terms both of their composition and structure and of their emotive significance. By this means, account can be taken of the community’s attitude towards them. This approach may make use of many of the same sources as the methods of identification and assessment outlined above, but it includes both objective and subjective criteria ranging from the analysis of relief forms shown in geological and geomorphological data to the study of works by authors and artists who have described or depicted the landscapes in question, to consideration of the views of local populations.
- The dynamic approach describes changes in progress and measures their extent. A variety of sources are used, including statistics relating to changing patterns of land use (such as the balance of agriculture and settlements and the development of economic activity) and social sources containing

information on plans laid by various interested parties (whether individuals or public or private consortia) to make more or less lasting landscape changes.

There is still room for these methods to be developed and improved. Their strength is that they take account of the various meanings attached to landscapes – especially by giving a hearing to the populations concerned – or that they assess landscapes from the point of view of the transformations they are undergoing, which alter the use of cultural and natural resources in the zone under consideration. Social demands on the landscape are made in two dissimilar areas which are nonetheless bound by complex ties. On the one hand, communities view the concept of landscape as an ideal for a society's relations with its spatial surroundings and as a means of valuing its existence and history – in this respect landscapes are a physical manifestation of social harmony. On the other hand, landscapes provide confirmation that a society is capable of successfully managing and renewing cultural and natural resources and ensuring that they are used equitably.

Society's demands on landscapes thus highlight two connotations of "landscape". Firstly, there is the field of social relations, which promotes the legitimacy of communities' insistence that they participate in determining the future of their surroundings – not just as a space in which they live their everyday lives but also as a space into which they project their desire for a shared "community life" for the resolution of social tensions. Secondly, the landscape embodies a different social demand which focuses more on the question of access to resources and their renewal for future generations – the role of the communities concerned is not to manage a formal environment but to be able to ensure the sustainability of resources by sharing them equally among members of society and avoiding placing too great a burden on existing strengths. In this way, landscapes enable a link to be forged with environmental concerns, which certain experts would like to leave out of the equation (which of course is not the same as saying that landscapes and the environment are strictly identical in meaning).

By emphasising the need for participation by the populations concerned and formulating its aims in the context of sustainable development, the European Landscape Convention provides a response to the essential basis of social demands. The presentation to be made in the course of this workshop will address these points at greater length.