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## **EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**

***CEP-CDCPP***

### **8th COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONFERENCE ON THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**

*Conference organised under the auspices of the Belgian Chairmanship of  
the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe*

### **CONSIDERING INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE HUMAN LANDSCAPE, SPATIAL PLANNING, HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY**

Council of Europe  
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*Document of the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe  
Directorate of Democratic Governance*

*Summary*

- It is now almost 15 years since the European Landscape Convention was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 19 July 2000, and opened for signature by the Organisation's member States in Florence on 20 October of that year (Council of Europe - CETS No. 176);
- The 7th Council of Europe Conference on the implementation of the European Landscape Convention (Strasbourg, 26-27 March 2013) stated that "*Landscape and spatial development are important issues in any democratic society, and the European Landscape Convention was initiated for the reason of democracy and participation*";
- This reflects the three main pillars of the Council of Europe: *human rights, rule of law and democracy*;
- The 16th CEMAT held in Napflio (Greece) on 17 June 2014 agreed on guidelines for public participation in spatial planning - Declaration on "*Promoting territorial democracy in spatial planning*".

In light of this, and in order to advance the significant activities by the Council of Europe within the framework of the European Landscape Convention, the Parties at this 8th Council of Europe Conference are invited to adopt a joint statement on "*Interrelationships between the human landscape, spatial planning, human rights and democracy*".

The following draft serves as the initial step in the process. It is open for amendments and improvements. The Parties are invited to examine the draft carefully. Proposals for amendments and improvements should be presented in writing during the Conference.

The Parties at the 8th Council of Europe Conference on the European Landscape Convention are invited to adopt a joint statement on:

*"Interrelationships between the human landscape, spatial planning, human rights and democracy"*.

**Draft Statement of the 8th Council of Europe Conference on the European Landscape Convention on interrelationships between the human landscape, spatial planning, human rights and democracy**

Concerned to achieve sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity, cultural identity and the environment;

Recalling the provisions of the European Landscape Convention indicating that landscape protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone;

Considering the importance of highlighting the issues of human rights and democracy in the context of their interrelationships with the landscape;

***The Conference agrees as follows:***

The European Landscape Convention introduced a new and unique view on landscape, putting *man* at the centre – across natural, humanistic and social sciences. In this way, the Convention recognizes *human* qualities in the territory – tangible as well as intangible.

**1. Quality landscapes are important**

The landscape – including its cultural and natural dimensions – constitutes our living environment and settlements. At the same time the landscape is a habitat for flora and fauna, and important for biodiversity. Any loss of biodiversity reduces the value of the landscape also for human beings. Landscape is therefore not just scenery to look at – we live our complex lives in the midst of an equally complex landscape.

*i. The landscape influences our emotional reflections and sense of personal identity*

We perceive the landscape through all our senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. In any given situation, the landscape also presents physical opportunities and obstacles, influencing where we may move and what we happen to experience along our way.

Such interactions give rise to emotional and personal reflection, contributing to our sense of belonging and our deep-seated roots. Whether we find the landscape appealing or not, it has a profound bearing on the quality of our life, and on our ways of thinking and acting. This is important at all ages of life, and of particular importance for children and youth. It is the setting for our childhood memories, and contributes to the shaping of our developing sense of identity.

*ii. The landscape is important for our quality of life, physical and mental health*

According to the World Health Organisation, health is not merely the absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Today good health has become a resource – perhaps a country's most important resource for sustainable development, both for individuals and for the country.

Quality landscapes offer recreation, relaxation and help us in coping with stress. The emotional effects may give us a sense of pride, security and self-confidence. And at all times, the landscape has been a vital source of inspiration for artists (literature and poetry, painting, drawing, architecture, music, photography, movies etc.).

*iii. Human rights – the Right to Landscape*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 was an aspiration to guarantee both the basic necessities for survival and the spiritual, emotional and psychological needs that are quintessential to the human experience.

The landscape, with its tangible and intangible dimensions, overlaps with the rights that support both life and human dignity. Landscape is now being redefined as a vital public good, breaking new ground for a dialogue on the convergence of landscape, human nature and well-being.

*iv. The landscape may affect the economic and social development, positively or negatively*

Quality landscapes may generate creativity, entrepreneurship and jobs, linked to the tangible and intangible assets of the territory. It is therefore of utmost importance that we understand the particular characteristics, dynamics and attractions of the landscape. This we have to protect and care for.

Today, people seek to live in places where there is a quality environment and landscape for themselves and their children. Employers have to follow. Therefore, the landscape is now a competitive factor in the efforts of communities and their authorities to attract investment and address depopulation.

This fact works two ways. In an environment that is no longer healthy or appealing, those who can afford it move out. The less fortunate who do not have this option stay behind. This can lead to a downward spiral resulting in increasing health problems, stress, social unrest and crime.

## **2. Quality landscapes depend on careful spatial planning**

The landscape is always changing – due to natural processes and / or human activities. The human activities are by far the most significant. The Convention does not aim at preventing changes. On the contrary, its measures are designed to ensure that the landscape changes are planned and managed in a way that realises the aspirations of the community.

The spatial development impacts on our lives, maybe far more than we are aware of. It affects everyone in society, regardless of age or background. It influences our choices concerning where and how to live, where to go to work or school, how to get there and subsequently what we happen to experience along the way. Of particular importance is the public realm – streets, public spaces and places of contact – their locality and atmosphere can often decide the character and quality of the communal interaction between individuals and groups.

*i. A sensible development requires political attention and long term policies*

Development cannot be left to the market alone. In a market economy land is mostly considered only as property. Property developers exploit the land and sea with the primary objective of making profits. Exploitative development results in such well known problems as overdevelopment, touristification, city centre depopulation, gentrification, pressure on green spaces and urban sprawl.

To ensure balanced development spatial planning should be undertaken to:

- identify and enhance the high quality landscapes, favoured by the citizens;
- encourage a development, in which the inevitable changes result in quality environments and landscapes;
- control changes that would otherwise lead to an undesirable development.

National, regional and local authorities are responsible for the spatial planning of their communities. The Convention offers the authorities a range of measures in the protection, management and planning of landscape (Articles 5 and 6).

Training and education of landscape experts is a key issue. Experience to date indicates a demand for multi-disciplinary experts with the requisite skills to address the broad range of functions required to:

- identify, visualise and communicate landscape concepts, characteristics and features, having account of the culture and aspirations of the local community;
  - introduce perceptions by artists, authors and others, as well as relevant scientific evidence;
  - apply this knowledge in awareness-raising among the general public, local, regional and national authorities, and private development actors;
  - facilitate active citizen participation and interaction in landscape quality assessment, definition of quality objectives and implementation of the objectives.
- ii. *Spatial planning that is exploring the landscape quality potentials encourages citizen involvement and active participation*

The knowledge, creativity and ingenuity of a population is ultimately the primary resource of a modern society. In a decentralised democracy, it is acknowledged that local challenges are most effectively met by local initiatives. Mobilisation of entrepreneurs, young people and voluntary associations has indeed brought new life to many communities.

With regard to landscape issues, people are not considered as experts or non-experts. Professionals and citizens should all have equal status – regardless of academic, ethnical, social or cultural background. Everybody has a relationship of perception, understanding and experience of the place where they live or work. Nor indeed does the landscape, according to the Convention, belong to one academic discipline alone. It is a common meeting ground for a number of professions.

New approaches may emerge in our increasingly multi-cultural societies, where citizens come not alone from diverse cultural backgrounds, but also from very diverse landscape backgrounds. Sensitive, flexible and creative spatial planning approaches will be required to ensure that the shared communal landscape is not alien to any one cultural population segment.

Active citizens and public participation bring new life and new approaches to the political debate. If people understand, accept and recognize the quality of their living environment, they are likely to defend it and pursue solutions that they will be happy with. In addition, voters who are aware of these issues will back their politicians, for example when facing developers presenting glossy but unsustainable schemes, likely to cause detrimental changes to their living environment.

- iii. *Active citizens require transparency and openness in planning and decision-making processes*

Landscape and spatial planning with active public participation can be seen as an educational exercise in democracy:

- raising the citizens' awareness and sense of responsibility for their local community;
- providing training and experience in participatory democracy;
- generating policies and measures that the citizens themselves decide.

Such civic participation is likely to encourage and support political creativity and increase the range of conceivable decisions. The transparency, openness and good governance that is associated with active citizen participation can discourage attempts at bribery and corruption.

In this way, conflicts are prevented or solved in open, transparent and democratic processes. The consideration of spatial development and landscape is based on political reasoning and democratic debate – rather than being governed by developer profits, complicated legal procedures and court decisions.

**3. The Conference asks the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP) to request the Committee of Ministers to:**

- take note of the interrelationships between landscape, spatial planning, human rights and democracy;
- recognise that active public participation is a key factor in ensuring human rights, democracy and a living environment;
- advise all levels of government in the Council of Europe member States to ensure that landscape concerns are included in spatial planning with active public participation;
- ask the secretariat to prepare a short information brochure to the Council of Europe member States, emphasising the importance of this approach.

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