



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

*National Symposium on the implementation
of the European Landscape Convention in Georgia*

*Interministerial Round-Table:
Integration of the landscape into policies*

*Tbilisi, Georgia
9-10 March 2018*

Implementation of the European Landscape Convention: Experiences of parties to the convention

Experience of Latvia: Implementation of the European Landscape Convention

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Latvia is one of the greenest countries in Europe: it signed the European Landscape Convention in 2006 and ratified it in 2007. The elaboration of the Latvian national Landscape policy was begun in 2008. It is underlined in the first long-term planning document of the State – Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia up to 2030, approved by the Parliament in 2010, that landscapes are one of the most valuable components of the Latvian cultural and natural heritage at national level. The Spatial Development Perspective of this Strategy defines preservation of natural and cultural heritage and landscapes as one of the main targets to be achieved.

In order to implement the Strategy and the European Landscape Convention, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MoEPRD) was set as the responsible authority

for elaboration of a Landscape Policy Strategy (Landscape Strategy). Therefore a Working Group was established in 2011 and information on the development of the Strategy was placed on the ministry's website, to ensure public participation.

The Working Group concluded that the current landscape management is ineffective and the existing situation in landscape inventory, assessment and planning varies highly from region to region, and from municipality to municipality. There were intense discussions in this working group, because some experts wanted to set strict requirements for landscape planning, while others argued against them by stressing the need for flexibility.

The Landscape Strategy was approved by the Government in 2013 and its overarching aim is "To identify and plan the necessary measures and define the competences of the parties involved in the implementation of the European Landscape Convention". Two main priorities were defined as "Improvement of landscape governance and legislative framework" and "Building of understanding about landscape values and enhancement of education, expert training and research in the field of landscapes".

The most important actions of the Landscape Strategy are:

- definition of valuable landscapes on national and local level;
- preparation of landscape plans for nationally-valuable landscapes;
- preparation of electronic landscape atlas;
- preparation of suggestions for improvement of legislative framework in spatial planning;
- preparation of guidelines for evaluation, management and planning of landscapes at local level;
- organisation of different activities for society about landscapes.

The first mid-term evaluation of the Landscape Strategy was carried out and a report was prepared by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development in 2017. This report includes information

related to the implementation of priorities of Strategy and the implementation of the convention in local municipalities. At local level there are many practical activities on the implementation of the convention, such as site greening, joint landscaping, competitions for the most treasured house and others. These activities are mostly planned and implemented in the short or medium term (up to 7 years). The ministry devoted particular attention to finding out how the local governments work with the landscape planning in long-term spatial development documents.

The Ministry has evaluated the inclusion of landscape planning and management aspects in Spatial Development Strategies, which set long-term spatial development priorities, as well as Land-use or Territorial Plans, which contain zoning for use of the territory. During the development of this report, MoEPRD found that almost all Spatial Development Strategies of local government (around 80%) have defined the framework for preserving landscapes. There is a tendency that the municipalities near the capital describe the value of landscapes less frequently than the average of all Latvian municipalities. This can be explained by the more active use of the territory in the area near the capital of Latvia, and the willingness of municipalities to avoid discussions about the protection of areas with high landscape value.

More than 90% of the Territorial plans include general conditions for the preservation of landscapes, but only 50% of these plans have spatially defined valuable landscapes with specific conditions. In addition, some municipalities have developed thematic landscape plans that serve as the basis for

developing other planning documents. However a new approach to landscape assessment in Latvia is needed: to date, the assessment of landscapes was mostly done in the field by experts: the general public just faced to the consequences of these researches. Therefore the conclusions of experts tend not to be accepted by the general public or are widely discussed.

The Ministry recognised that the national selection for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe is an important instrument for raising awareness of the importance of landscapes for local municipalities and the general public. It has organised four national selections for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe and the number of participants has doubled each time. There were two nominees in 2012; four nominees in 2014 and eight in 2016. In the 5th Session of Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, *Daugavpils Fortress Regeneration Project* was granted the Landscape Award. For the 6th Session of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, the Ministry is organising the national selection in five regional contests, to encourage smaller initiatives to participate and share their achievements.

In the vein of awareness-raising and involvement of the general public and municipalities, it is important to mention that on 18 November 2018 we will celebrate Latvia's centenary – 100 years as an independent country. A celebration programme with more than 100 events and campaigns is being prepared and one of these events is dedicated to landscapes. Since the middle of 2017, the Ministry has been organising a public campaign, “*Treasured landscape values of Latvia – yesterday, today and tomorrow*”, for identification of treasured landscape values. The campaign is organised in three phases:

- Phase 1 – Public participation (submission of landscape treasures; voting and selection of 10 landscape treasures per region, or 50 treasures for the whole country; donation of historical and actual photos, sharing memories and future wishes);
- Phase 2 – Development of electronic storage for landscape treasures;
- Phase 3 – Regional discussions and gala forum with exhibitions.

In the first phase of the campaign the activity of citizens was astonishing – more than 1,000 proposals for landscape treasures were received during the first two months. Taking into account the visual and cultural values, landscape experts selected 243 of the 1,000 proposals that were submitted for electronic voting on the website of National Library. There were 46,000 votes during two months and a dedicated board of landscape experts summarised them and developed a list of 10 treasured landscape values for each of the five Planning regions. In the concluding part of first phase, additional information, photos, memories and wishes for the future was collected. Over three months, 959 photos and 72 personal memories about landscape treasures were submitted by citizens.

Currently a mobile exhibition with historical and contemporary photos and descriptions of 50 treasured landscape values is being prepared. It will be ready by August 2018 and will be put on display back-to-back with regional discussions on the value and importance of landscapes. This will be held in all five regions in September 2018. To summarise the findings of regional discussions and to celebrate the beauty of Latvian landscapes, a Gala forum will be organised in the National Library for 400 participants. All 50 landscape treasures and collected information will be incorporated in electronic storage which will be a present for the Centenary of Latvia in November 2018. It is also planned to make this electronic storage available in English in early 2019.

We hope that these activities will be a good stimulus also for local municipalities to include the values of the landscape set by the society in their development planning documents and to develop necessary measures to save these landscape values. And we believe that this electronic storage will serve as a base for collection of memories, stories, events, notable persons, historical photos, as well as wishes for the future and actions needed for maintenance of these values also in future!

[Powerpoint presentation](#)

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