

Landscape mosaics



Thoughts and proposals
for the implementation
of the Council of Europe
Landscape Convention

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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for the implementation
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Landscape Convention

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Contents

Preface	5
Chapter 1 – Towards a grammar of European landscapes	7
Introduction	8
1. Methodological references	8
2. Methodological guidelines	15
Conclusions	26
Chapter 2 – Designing agricultural landscapes for sustainable development	31
Introduction	32
1. Landscape and agriculture: a long story	32
2. The contribution of landscape to agriculture	50
3. Landscape diagnosis and the agroecological project	60
Conclusions	70
Chapter 3 – The rural landscape in transition: energy, agriculture and demography	73
Introduction	74
1. Rural landscapes in energy transition	78
2. Rural landscapes in agricultural transition	81
3. Rural landscapes in demographic transition	86
4. Rural landscapes in digital transition	88
Conclusions	88
Chapter 4 – Experiences of rural landscape	91
1. Experience of Tuscany, Italy	92
2. The Manifesto for the Beauty of Rural Landscapes in Campania, Italy	95
Chapter 5 – Urbanisation, town planning and landscape	99
Introduction	100
1. Urbanisation, urbanism and landscape: elements of a complex equation	100
2. The negative effects of urbanisation and contemporary urbanism on landscape	104
3. Landscape as the foundation, means and purpose of a new type of urbanism	108
4. Principles for a new, landscape-based urbanism	111
Conclusions	117
Chapter 6 – A review of integrated approaches to landscape monitoring	123
Introduction	124
1. Theoretical background	124
2. Principles of landscape monitoring	126
3. Landscape monitoring bodies and initiatives	129
4. Proposing a typology of landscape monitoring	134
5. Future challenges for landscape monitoring	136
Conclusions	137
Chapter 7 – Experiences with public funds and the landscape	147
Introduction	148
1. Austria	148
2. France	148
3. Ireland	149
4. Latvia	150
5. Poland	150
6. Switzerland	150
7. United Kingdom	152
8. Canada	153
9. United States	153

Chapter 8 – Landscape and responsibility	155
Introduction	156
1. The concept of responsibility	156
2. Responsibility and landscape	164
3. Towards shared responsibility	167
4. Responsibility, landscape and well-being	170
Conclusions	177
Chapter 9 – Professional recognition of landscape architects	181
Introduction	182
1. Professional bodies and global recognition	183
2. Professional training and practice	186
3. Professional recognition	188
4. Investment in landscape	191
Conclusions	195
Acknowledgements	197
Chapter 10 – Dry stone in the landscape: inheritance and innovation for rural sustainability	203
Introduction	204
1. Dry stone: timeless and universal	204
2. The use of dry stone: a contribution to sustainable development	208
3. A range of uses for the dry stone construction system	217
Conclusions	229
Chapter 11 – Walking the landscape	235
Introduction	236
1. A short history of walking	236
2. From walking to hiking: the effects of industrialisation	240
3. The development of hiking organisations	242
4. Walking the landscape: an impression	245
5. Walking the industrial landscape	248
6. Walking the urban landscape	251
7. Organised walking of the landscape	252
Conclusions	254
Chapter 12 – Traditional forms of thought and spirituality	257
Introduction	258
1. The Waldviertel region in Austria	258
2. Songlines in Australia	258
3. Ise in Japan	259
4. Traditional Chinese concepts	260
Conclusions	264
Chapter 13 – Urban landscapes and climate change: the contribution of landscape architects to improving the quality of life	265
Introduction	266
1. Quality of life in towns and cities – Science-based studies	267
2. Landscape solutions	270
3. Learning from landscape	277
4. Opportunities and issues	279
Conclusions	281
Chapter 14 – Landscape and the responsibility of stakeholders for sustainable and harmonious development	285

Preface

The landscape reflects a present which interacts with a mosaic of memory traces which have diverse symbolic values.

Valerio Di Battista

The European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 176)¹ aims to promote landscape protection, management and planning and to organise international co-operation. It applies to the entire territory of the parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding, but also everyday or degraded landscapes. The convention represents the first international treaty exclusively devoted to all the dimensions of landscape, considered from a perspective of sustainable development.

The Council of Europe is continuing the work undertaken, since the adoption of the convention in 2000, to examine and illustrate certain approaches to landscape.² This book, entitled *Landscape mosaics – Thoughts and proposals for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe*, explores certain ways of understanding the landscape and makes proposals for more attention to be paid to it.

It brings together the reports presented by Council of Europe experts on the occasion of the Council of Europe conferences on the European Landscape Convention, organised at the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg, on 23-24 March 2017, 6-7 May 2019 and 26-27 May 2021. Representatives of governments and international organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, who took part in these meetings were able to discuss the subjects dealt with and make progress in the implementation of the convention.³

The experts who contributed to the production of this book are warmly thanked for the quality of their reflections and their proposals:

- ▶ Valerio Di Battista – Towards a grammar of European landscapes;
- ▶ Régis Ambroise – Designing agricultural landscapes for sustainable development;
- ▶ Patrice Collignon – The rural landscape in transition: energy, agriculture and demography;
- ▶ Mauro Agnoletti – Experience of Tuscany, Italy;
- ▶ Carmine Nardone – The Manifesto for the beauty of rural landscapes in Campania, Italy;
- ▶ Jean Noël Consalès – Urbanisation, town planning and landscape;
- ▶ Felix Kienast, with F. Wartmann, A. Zaugg and M. Hunziker – A review of integrated approaches to landscape monitoring;
- ▶ Barry Hynes, Valentin Riehm, Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons, with the contribution of Enrico Buergi – Experiences with public funds and the landscape;
- ▶ Yves Luginbühl – Landscape and responsibility;
- ▶ Michael Oldham – Professional recognition of landscape architects;
- ▶ Claire Cornu – Dry stone walls in the landscape, inheritance and innovation for rural sustainability;
- ▶ Gerhard Ermischer – Walking the landscape;

-
1. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 19 July 2000, the European Landscape Convention (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/176> ETS No. 176) – now entitled “Council of Europe Landscape Convention” – was opened for signature by European states in Florence on 20 October 2000. A protocol amending the convention (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatyid=219> CETS No. 219), which entered into force on 1 July 2021, aims to promote European co-operation with non-European states wishing to implement the provisions of the Convention, by opening it to their accession.
 2. *Landscape and sustainable development – Challenges of the European Landscape Convention*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2006; *Landscape facets – Reflections and proposals for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2012; *Landscape dimensions – Reflections and proposals for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention*, 2017. www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/publications.
 3. Conference reports: Documents CEP-CDPATEP (2017) 19; CEP-CDPATEP (2019) 20; CEP-CDPATEP (2021) 16. www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/conferences.

- ▶ Klaus Fürst-Elmecker: Traditional forms of thought and spirituality;
- ▶ Michael Oldham, with the contributions from Ana Luengo, Niek Hazendonk, Leor Lovinger, Indra Purs: Urban landscapes and climate change: the contribution of landscape architects to improving the quality of life;
- ▶ Régis Ambroise: Landscape and the responsibility of stakeholders for sustainable and harmonious development.

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Chapter 3

The rural landscape in transition: energy, agriculture and demography

Patrice Collignon, expert to the Council of Europe

Administrator of the Rurality-Environment-Development International Association, Belgium.

Photo credits: P. Collignon (unless otherwise stated).

Introduction

The rural landscape has already been the subject of work (Council of Europe 2009) which has emphasised its deep historical roots as a witness to changes in rural societies over the centuries. In the minds of many people, it is a bucolic, green-tinged setting dotted with a few villages, surrounded by agricultural areas and pockets of woodland, against a pleasing background of hills and mountains. But it is more than that.

The landscape is also a living environment and a potential vector of development, which is part of the social, economic, environmental and cultural forces specific to rural areas. By introducing this local and regional dimension, the theme is enriched by the complexity and diversity of rural areas and acquires a dimension that is both political and technical.



Figure 1. A renatured landscape in the Semois valley, Belgium



Figure 2. A mountain landscape in Gsteig, Switzerland



Figure 3. The village of Biertan, Romania



Figure 4. A tree-lined road in Lorraine, France



Figure 5. Lectoure, France: country heritage and farming

What are Europe's rural areas? The definition of the word "rural" has varied over time but most frequently rural areas are defined in relation to densely populated major urban conurbations. Another approach is to define rural areas through their own characteristics.

The term "rural area" denotes a stretch of inland or coastal countryside, including small towns and villages, where the main part of the area is used for: agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries; economic and cultural activities of country dwellers (crafts, industry, services, etc.); non-urban recreation and leisure areas (or natural reserves); other purposes, such as housing (Council of Europe 1996).

Rural areas are not just agricultural and forestry land and natural areas. They include the villages and small towns located in these areas and areas given over to other economic activities. Rural areas are of course still the main production sites for food and raw materials but, like society as a whole, they are also changing. They now perform many other functions in spheres such as production, leisure and tourism. In the emerging debate on climate change and a low-carbon society, they provide crucial reserves of renewable resources and have a major carbon-capture capacity.



Figure 6. Rural areas accommodate many areas of economic activity offering a large number of jobs, as seen here in Germany

On the European level, rural areas offer a wide diversity, ranging from very sparsely populated areas to peri-urban areas. Their inhabitants also display a great variety of cultures, which are the legacy of societies closely tied up with the characteristics, assets and hardships of their living environment. Rural life also harbours a large share of Europe's natural, architectural and historical heritage. These aspects are combined with certain more subjective sociocultural features, which mean that their inhabitants have a special relationship with space, nature, the passage of time and the climate.



Figure 7. The Chapel of Saint Nicolas of Flüe, Wachendorf, Germany (Photo: P. Zumthor)



Figure 8. The village of Valea Viilor, UNESCO World Heritage site, Transylvania, Romania

Rural areas were originally given over to primary functions linked to food and the supply of

elementary goods, but they are now the site of much more diverse activities, production processes and services. Such areas meet new demands from society, which are becoming increasingly linked to quality rather than quantity (food safety, well-being and leisure pursuits, environmental questions, animal welfare).

The rural landscape is still strongly influenced by agricultural and forestry activities carried out on the land. This visual characteristic biases the popular view of rural areas, in which it is assumed by analogy that these two sectors are these areas' only social and economic vectors. However, the socio-economic reality of rural areas has changed and is continuing to change. The dominance of agriculture and forestry is diminishing and secondary (and, above all, tertiary) activities are growing. Likewise, the inhabitants' working practices are changing. Rural tourism, and its diverse attractions, has increased substantially, drawing considerably on the quality of landscapes.

The "green" dimension of rural landscapes is a fundamental component of their quality and appeal, hence the interest attached to and the emphasis placed on the work of farmers in this area. However, this dimension must not cause us to overlook the change and increasing diversity in rural life in the 21st century, at least in terms of economics and culture.

Rural areas now represent an asset for Europe – one that is both rooted in history and capable of a form of growth which can meet today's challenges.

Shifting definitions of rural areas

In 1991, to categorise geographical areas, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted a statistical approach based on degrees of urbanisation, which has become a widely used and recognised benchmark. It identified three degrees of urbanisation: densely populated areas, relatively rural areas (renamed intermediate areas in 1997) and sparsely populated areas.

These areas, studied through the prism of the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), corresponding to the provincial or departmental level, were considered predominantly urban if less than 15% of their inhabitants lived in local administrative units, intermediate if this figure was between 15% and 50%, and predominantly rural if it was above 50%. In 2014, in response to an inability to reflect actual local conditions due to statistical inconsistencies, EUROSTAT adopted a new statistical approach combining the notions of density and contiguity. It is based on an analysis of "grid cells", which are areas of 1 sq. km that can be used to measure

degrees of urbanisation. A rural grid cell has a density of less than 150 inhabitants per sq. km, while an urban grid cell has a density of more than 300 inhabitants per sq. km.

In this classification a region is said to be:

- ▶ predominantly rural if over 50% of its population lives in rural grid cells;
- ▶ intermediate if between 20 and 50% of its population lives in rural grid cells;
- ▶ predominantly urban if less than 20% of its population lives in rural grid cells.

Furthermore, in order to incorporate the notion of “urban clusters”, a population is considered “urban” if its living area over a cluster of contiguous cells exceeds 5 000 inhabitants.

This new approach has given rise to relatively stable statistical changes overall, but ones which accurately reflect regional differences at national level.

Statistical approaches provide useful indicators for the conduct and assessment of regional policies, but they cannot reflect the actual circumstances and the inevitably subjective views of inhabitants in terms of whether they see their environment as rural, semi-rural or urban. They do illustrate, however, how large a share of Europe’s territory is given over to rural life.



Figure 9. Loch Katrine, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, United Kingdom



Figure 10. Maar de Meerfelder, Vulkaneifel Geopark, Germany



Figure 11. Wine-growing landscape in Black Forest Nature Park, Germany



Figure 12. Saint-Cirq Lapopie, in the Causses du Quercy Regional Nature Park, France

Rural areas cover most of Europe. Of the area covered by the member states of the European Union (EU), 56% is categorised as rural and 34.9% as intermediate, and the landscape in the latter category has either an urban or a semi-rural aspect, as is the case with many areas around major conurbations. Through a cautious extrapolation therefore, at least 75% of Europe’s landmass is covered by rural landscapes. The management, protection and planning of almost all this territory is a major challenge.

Rural areas and landscapes: a multiform existence

The diversity of rural areas is an asset whose value has been underestimated for many years but is currently regaining the status of an almost structural resource in these times of globalisation and standardisation.

Rural areas: inhabited geographical areas with their own personality and specific potential for development, which form part of the solution, as they have an energy and a spirit that are there to be mobilised; a patchwork of regions which tie the geography of Europe together and contribute to or even shape the diversity of cultures by which it is characterised. (RED 2016)

These areas are obviously full of natural amenities and resources which are now seen as part of the keys to our future, such as water, air and biodiversity.

They are also the repositories of cultural and heritage resources which are crucial for a knowledgeable understanding of the timeline and the path of humankind's development.

The rural landscape therefore serves as an open book for inhabitants and visitors enabling them to understand the mechanisms of the past so they that can better gauge the threats and the prospects of the future.

National and regional nature parks and other recognised natural areas (biosphere reserves, protected landscapes, etc.) account for a remarkably large share of rural areas. The decision to set them up or grant them certification is mostly linked with their environmental, landscape or biological features. Preserving or enhancing these qualities lies at the heart of the criteria which guide decision makers' development goals. These are also areas for which an overall strategic approach is expected, although the focus is probably more on environmental and natural outcomes than economic ones. They cover 25% of the territory in some EU member states. In France the surface area on land and/or sea of the 52 regional nature parks and 10 national parks is 148 728 sq. km or 24.5% of the territory. In Scotland the 40 National Scenic Areas cover 13% of the territory.

By their nature, these areas enjoy a favourable natural environment and political framework, which confer a special status and special tasks on them and their landscapes. They are also often areas in which new landscape approaches and tools (such as charters) are tested. Moreover, when states and regions talk of the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, they often illustrate their words with examples from these exceptional areas.

It is necessary to avoid thinking about the issue of rural landscapes in the same manner as nature parks, or other natural areas with high environmental standards. As the European Landscape Convention applies to landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes, this approach would tend to sideline ordinary or low-quality landscapes. Yet these lie at the core of the efforts that the Convention must advocate, as they bring together a large share of the rural population and provide numerous activities and jobs. The management, protection and enhancement of these ordinary rural landscapes is therefore a major issue, not only for the inhabitants and visitors but also for the economic players.

The participatory processes of rural development

The physical, climatic and socio-economic features of Europe's rural areas vary and are sometimes diametrically opposed in terms of accessibility,

attractiveness, population density, assets and natural conditions. What could be more dissimilar than a Norwegian fjord, a semi-desert area of the Iberian Peninsula, a Greek island or a stretch of Ukrainian farmland?

To overcome this obstacle through a consistent policy of support for rural development based on central sources of power, rural regions have long been testing innovative forms of development enabling them to build strategies that match their potential and their aspirations. Following an exploratory phase beginning in the 1970s in a number of European rural communities – particularly in France and Belgium – an integrated local development method was set up in many states. It promotes a holistic development approach, in which local stakeholders play an active and decisive role.

This methodology was transposed to the European level from 1991 onwards under the title Links between actions for the development of the rural economy (LEADER). These local development schemes have been enriched and consolidated over the years through experimentation. Under the present European programme, this scheme has been renamed, becoming the Community-Led Local Development Strategy (CLLD), but it has not lost any of its original features, having simply diversified its funding sources.

The main features of this methodology are as follows (European Parliament 2013):

- ▶ a local development strategy at intermunicipal or sub-regional level, drawn up in accordance with an integrated, cross-sectoral approach and based on a bottom-up, participatory process;
- ▶ a local partnership between the public and private sector, set up formally as a local action group, with at least half its members from the private sector;
- ▶ support for innovation in the broadest sense (new products, processes or markets, adaptations of innovations devised elsewhere);
- ▶ a networking strategy facilitating exchanges of best practice and co-operation with other rural areas.

There are many uses for this approach in relation to the themes of this report:

- ▶ the cross-sectoral approach required with local strategies clearly covers landscape issues: thus, landscape protection, management and planning are frequently among the activities carried out;
- ▶ the exemplary participatory approach of this methodology meets the requirements of the European Landscape Convention, particularly the provisions of Article 5 on local participation;

- it treats landscape as both a reference framework and a development factor, by valuing knowledge and studies on landscape but also by promoting the preparation of projects and products based on landscape quality.

The major challenge therefore is not to pit rural development strategies against the aims of protecting, managing or planning of landscapes but to ensure that these aims form part of the factors that are taken into account when these strategies are devised. Landscape is becoming one of the key components of strategic thinking and conclusions, and this changes perception of landscape when it comes to the collaborative work stage. It is regarded not as a yardstick for retrospective validation but as a factor of development, forming part of the choices to be made.

1. Rural landscapes in energy transition

The energy and climate background

The energy transition towards a low-carbon society is mainly prompted by climate-related considerations. Whereas, some decades ago, energy policies were decided mostly in relation to the geopolitical context, there are now new constraints weighing on our energy future arising from the urgent need to limit the scale of climate change and adapt to it.

This need is felt throughout the world to varying degrees, which sometimes amount to a matter of life or death. It has given rise to an almost worldwide movement, and a major landmark in this was the Paris Climate Agreement, adopted on 12 December 2015 at the 21st Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and in force since November 2016. Nonetheless, that agreement makes no mention of the landscape and does not refer to rural areas.

However, the 5th report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2014) described the threats to rural areas. This was summarised as follows:

Rural areas are exposed to very short-term risks such as a drastic fall in water supplies, a decline in food security and a drop in income from farming. The effect of this would be the relocation of farming and harvesting areas and, by extension, population displacements. (Caroli 2014)

In line with the international agreements they have ratified, or their voluntary commitments, states and regions have undertaken to carry out major, accelerated changes in their energy mix, such as increasing the share of renewable energy, reducing CO₂ emissions and increasing carbon-capture measures. These strategic policies are combined with a desire

to enhance regions' resilience to climate-related problems, and reduce the risks thereof.

Whether they are imposed or proactive, these choices require all regions to be involved. Just like stakeholders in urban areas, stakeholders in rural areas must contribute to solving the problems resulting from climate change (both through actions aimed at reducing climate change and through adaptation to climate change). Rural areas must also play a part in the climate debate, and the issue must be included in discussions on landscape management. The key challenge is not just to take measures to protect, manage or conserve landscapes in a way that enables the impact of climate change to be limited, but also to manage them in a way that makes rural areas part of the means of meeting the challenges posed. The goal, for instance, should not be to oppose the installation of wind turbines or photovoltaic fields but to seek technical and regulatory solutions that enable them to be installed with minimum impact on landscape. To avoid the risk of side-lining rural areas still further, landscape management must be conceived in terms of a proactive stance vis-à-vis the challenges to be met.

This change of perspective on the importance of rural areas in the climate debate will ultimately lead to a new recognition of their role. It could form the basis of a new rural pact conveying a new vision and a clear recognition of the specific contribution of all territories. Through a dynamic and proactive approach to forward planning of the landscape, this would involve responding to the concerns that climate change arouses among public and economic actors by placing the future of the rural world among the central issues.

Integrated approaches as methodological responses

The expected growth of the various types of renewable energy could encourage addressing this development by sector (the main sectors being solar and wind power, biomass and water power). To do this would be to ignore regional energy solutions which combine all forms of energy consumption and generation in an integrated approach, increasing their efficiency and innovative nature. The challenge is to arrive at solutions which, by reducing energy consumption and diversifying the alternative energy generation in a region, make it possible to reduce other forms of investment which place greater pressure on the landscape. As this response is primarily a regional one, it is the entire range of opportunities in the region (some of which may be quite specific solutions such as geothermal energy, hydropower, biomass or suitable arrangements for district heating) which must be mobilised to facilitate a low-carbon transition, and deal with the energy question.

These broad-based approaches have proliferated at local level in the form of regional and local climate plans, energy pacts and the European network of small rural communities committed to the energy transition (www.rurener.eu). Among the types of activity they support are joint schemes to take full advantage of local biomass, which are more conducive to decisions on site location designed to reduce pressure on landscapes.

The merit of this kind of all-embracing thinking and action is that local potential can be identified and specific obstacles can be overcome without resorting to the standardised but not always optimum turnkey solutions offered by commercial operators. It makes it possible for local inhabitants and stakeholders to get involved, meaning that the resulting energy programme will be more adapted to local circumstances and attract more support. It also paves the way for an integrated overview of energy consumption over an entire region, and hence for measures which transcend conventional thinking about energy by developing “smart rural” means of increasing the viability of movements in the flow of goods and persons, in order to limit infrastructure needs and help inhabitants to stay put.

Fostering participatory approaches to strategic joint development helps to limit adverse effects on landscapes, as the importance of landscape becomes clearer much more quickly when it is part of a regional approach than as part of a form of development built solely around energy sectors, where landscape can seem irrelevant. The energy-sector approach is often based on putting together various individual investments, which will end up producing more adverse effects than some form of integrated solution would.

This local and regional approach makes it possible to reconcile national and international obligations, as well as local issues and landscape considerations. It is attracting increasing political support, extending beyond sectoral activities promoted by the private sector.

The European Parliament ... recognises the importance of effective and efficient adaptation action, strategies and plans, including the use of ecosystem-based solutions to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change in the context of the Paris Agreement. (European Parliament 2018: §39)

Contributing to the production of renewable energy

The share of renewable energy in total primary energy production is growing. Production of renewable energy in the European Union-28 increased by 71% between 2005 and 2015, or by an average of 5.5% per year. In 2015, the European Union-28's

largest renewable energy producers were Germany (19% in total), Italy (11.5%), France (10.4%), Sweden (9%) and Spain (8.2%). It is worth investigating how these various sources can be gauged in terms of their impact on landscapes. Biofuels and renewable waste are the main sources of renewable energy, accounting for nearly two thirds.

Though water power is in second place in terms of importance, it has not been growing much because it has already been widely exploited using major infrastructure. Its impact on landscapes therefore has not changed. One change, although a minor one in absolute terms, could be brought about through the increased exploitation of local water-power by setting up or restoring minor local infrastructure (mini plants) which have no real impact on landscapes.

Energy production through wind power and solar power is admittedly less widespread but is growing rapidly. It also has a major impact on landscapes, particularly in rural areas.

Climate conditions and natural resources are decisive factors where it comes to producing certain types of renewable energy. For instance, water power accounts for over a third of renewable energy in relatively mountainous states such as Austria, Slovenia, Sweden, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. The figure is even over two thirds in Albania and Norway. This diversity is also found in the figures for the proportion of solar power, which are, for example, 83.1% in Malta and 66.8% in Cyprus.

It is hardly surprising that the share of wind power is particularly high in Ireland (57.6%), in Denmark (34.4%), in Spain (25.1%), in the United Kingdom (29.3%) and in Portugal (19.3%). Some mention should also be made of certain atypical circumstances linked to countries' special natural features, such as the prevalence of geothermal energy in Italy (23.2%), Turkey (30.8%) and Iceland (75.8%).

The same types of disparity can be found in the figures for average growth rates, but these of course must be placed in relation to absolute production figures. Examples of states with an annual growth rate in renewable energy of over 10% are the United Kingdom, Belgium, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ireland.

Wind power

The installation of wind power sites usually forms part of an industrial project involving several turbines. Such projects often face public reactions along the lines of Not in my backyard (NIMBY), based on objective information or on local political considerations.



Figure 13. Landscape to the north of Vienna, Austria



Figure 14. Seeking wind power efficiency, Col des Bagenelles, France

The location of these sites is governed, at different levels according to the state or region, by mandatory regulations and by geographical zoning reflecting safety, aesthetic or noise-level requirements and environmental (biodiversity) and landscape concerns. On this point, an effort should be made to apply the new knowledge which is being gathered in the landscape analysis of geographical areas (using landscape atlases, for example) as quickly and as widely as possible.

Through their capacity to open and encourage dialogue, participatory regional approaches to energy transition can foster local acceptance and the integration of landscape considerations because they presuppose that exchanges between planners and the public will take place more often and further in advance of projects. They also offer greater prospects of passing on financial benefits to host areas and making local provision for shared investment.

Research should be conducted on the development of wind turbines, assessing them not just in terms of their profitability or technical efficiency but also according to their impact on landscapes. In a similar vein, more thought should be given to the installation of small wind turbines, opening possibilities of growth in this area to be supported by more active research and development work.

Solar power and solar panels

Another renewable energy source which has an impact on rural landscapes is of course solar power. Solar electricity production has expanded

considerably in recent years, frequently with the backing of policies supporting this alternative source.

When dealing with the landscape impact of solar panels on rural areas two aspects need to be investigated, depending on the scale of the installation.

Installing panels on a single roof has an adverse visual effect, whose severity depends largely on their integration into the surroundings (colour, placing, etc.). Uncontrolled installation poses a threat to the landscape quality of many villages whose heritage features form an essential part of their appeal. Research in this field should – and this applies as much to urban buildings as to rural ones – be actively turning towards more discreet panels which fit more readily into the built environment. This is easier to achieve in new buildings but, for existing ones, the design of the panels should be altered, adopting forms more in keeping with regional features. This calls for better knowledge of specific local characteristics, which are probably difficult for non-European manufacturing firms to perceive.



Figure 15. Solar unit on a farm building, Germany



Figure 16. Jointly owned solar panels installed discreetly on a sports hall in Beckerich, Luxembourg

An alternative to individual installations is jointly owned group installations. They are often the result of partnerships between public bodies and inhabitants, offering installation sites by grouping together panels financed by individuals, with centralised management of costs and receipts. In addition to providing operation and management facilities, such arrangements may be accompanied by forms of joint funding, enabling individuals to favour joint investments on shared sites, avoiding unwelcome

visual impacts. The panels may for instance be placed, with little impact on the landscape, on the unused roofs of public buildings.

Photovoltaic fields (also known as solar parks or solar fields) are increasingly being set up in Europe and thorough consideration of their landscape impact is essential. Photovoltaic field projects are one of the most profitable solutions in this sector but they must be preceded by impact assessments, including as many viewpoints as possible and landscape-protection measures which are implemented and respected in the long term. A financial contribution to support landscapes when such installations are set up could be envisaged. In some countries, a percentage of total investment in road infrastructure is given over to landscape development.



Figure 17. Photovoltaic field beside a motorway, Portugal



Figure 18. Eifel, Germany

Many rural areas have already been spoilt by energy or mobility infrastructure, which is prejudicial to landscapes, but such infrastructure can also provide possibilities for new forms of solar energy production (such as solar roads and shade structures) or innovative settings (such as motorway verges). Research in this area is particularly active; it could be directed towards solutions in which reducing landscape impact is one of the criteria to be applied.

2. Rural landscapes in agricultural transition

The agricultural sector plays an essential role in the development of the landscapes of rural areas. In the EU, forests and farmland cover 84% of the total surface area. Farmers manage nearly 50% of Europe's land, not including its forestry areas:

farmers and forest managers are key players in the landscapes of rural areas.

Europe has a large variety of types of farming, which are substantially differentiated by their soil, climate, geographical situation and altitude. The diversity of rural landscapes, which result from the types of agriculture carried out locally, is part of the wealth of Europe.

Developments weakly favourable to landscapes

European agriculture is broadly conditioned by European and national agricultural policies and the framework established by commercial international agreements. In recent decades there has been a marked decline in the number of farmers and agricultural workers. This has gone hand in hand with an enlargement in the average surface area of farms. The quest for maximum productivity has also led to the increasing use of mechanised techniques and inputs that are detrimental to the quality of soils and the preservation of biodiversity.



Figure 19. Intensive farming and loss of landscape quality



Figure 20. Greenhouse growing in Costa Almeria, Spain

A major development has been the entry of global financial speculation into the farming sphere, resulting in greater price volatility, which increases the risks run by farm managers. Added to this is the scale of investment needed to bring about the requisite increase in productivity and the pressure to bring

down prices. This means that farms often have high levels of debt which make any strategic changes all the harder.

For a decade, momentum has been gathering in favour of a form of farming which pays more attention to soil quality, animal welfare and the environment in general. This green transition is a slow process. The percentage of farmers adopting this agroecological or organic approach is still low even though it is steadily increasing. Intensive farmers are also adopting, by choice or by obligation, more environmentally friendly practices, although this greening of farming policies has not yet resulted in anything more than a relatively small shift to “good” practices.

This issue is closely linked to the quality and development of landscapes. The more that financial support for agriculture is geared towards family farming and reasoned management practices, the more the quality of agricultural landscapes will be restored in terms of variety, biodiversity and resilience to climate events.

There seems to be a political consensus on the fact that the family farming model is the most suited and the most conducive to preserving biodiversity, landscape diversity and control over the quality of products. Changes in the structural and financial circumstances of European agriculture, made in an ever more competitive environment, are not yet moving in this direction, as highlighted by the many studies or reports on the environmental and wildlife situations of agricultural areas. This is even though studies show that small and medium-sized farms make a greater contribution to the overall growth of the agricultural sector than larger farms. A study prepared for the European Parliament’s AGRI Committee said:

The promise of small farms becomes even more evident when the contribution that they make to the overall growth of the agricultural sector is taken into account. Our data show that small and medium farms make a far larger contribution to overall agricultural growth than large farms, by many times. To mainly, or only, stimulate and support large farms is a clear case of betting on the wrong horse. (Ploeg et al. 2016)

The agricultural landscape situation is therefore somewhat gloomy. Landscape features are often still thought of by farmers as a curb on productivity and mechanisation, which is always seen as a growth generator. Curiously, European agricultural policies which, like national and regional ones, are tied up with international trading practices, seem as a result to be taking a somewhat paradoxical approach. On the one hand, they generate and amplify adverse developments affecting many environmental aspects (such as biodiversity, soil quality, landscape and water) but on the other hand they

allocate funding to protect the environment, as reflected for instance in the increased support for agri-environment measures.



Figure 21. Crops and wind turbines, Germany



Figure 22. Grassland in the Jura, France

The example of grasslands is particularly instructive. They play an essential part in sequestering and capturing carbon in the soil. They have a central role in many regions’ rural landscapes. When they are managed rationally, they can make a major contribution to preserving biodiversity and efforts to contain flooding through their limiting effect on run-off. However, the dairy and meat farming sectors they sustain are among the most exposed to world competition and competition from enclosed livestock farming. Agreements already negotiated and the expected terms of future negotiations show that exposing these sectors to increased competition – competition which could be considered almost unfair if the livestock-raising restrictions in many European states are considered – is seen as a minor matter. Yet increased imports from non-European states in these areas will pose still more of a threat to farms which protect grasslands.

A political and societal momentum

The Cork Declaration 2.0 “For a better life in rural areas”, adopted on 6 September 2016, at a conference organised by the European Commission, gave an impetus to consider the realities of the rural world. The idea has been put forward for a form of rural proofing (Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016), which would establish the principle that the most important decisions need to be evaluated in terms of their impact on rural areas. For this

idea to be successfully implemented, however, a strategic rural reference framework would have to be adopted and approved jointly by national governments and European institutions (NAT-RED 2017). This European Rural Agenda would reflect the EU's ambition to foster the development of its rural areas. It would provide a political framework and operational guidelines for a future policy specifically geared to the development of rural areas, catering for their diversity and the multisectoral aspects of their economies (RED 2020).



Figure 23. Replanting fruit trees on grasslands, Luxembourg

Furthermore, society's expectations in the agricultural sphere are changing. More and more consumers are now pondering what the balance should be

between the lowest possible price and the product's quality levels and are paying more attention to the environment and animal welfare. The political momentum could be conducive to a major shift in agricultural practices towards a more sustainable family-based farming model showing more regard for its surroundings. Rural landscapes would gain from this as such a commitment would result in a more strategic and assertive positioning of agricultural measures in favour of the environment and landscapes.

A transition phase is necessary – for finances, soil management and agricultural practices to be transformed – but it must be clear that this is the consequence of a strategic choice, not an opportunistic measure arising from financial or tactical considerations.

Agriculture in transition

European agriculture is affected, like other sectors, although probably more intensely, by the various manifestations of climate change. Europe is sufficiently large for these changes to have impacts on rural areas which vary greatly in their intensity from area to area and sometimes have quite opposite effects in different areas.

Variables	Climate impact	South	North	West	East
Temperature	Heat stress for plant production (high regional variation).	--		-	
	Increased temperatures and reduced frost period leading to increased crop range and suitability.		+		
	Increase in temperature and humidity leading to livestock stress and mortality.	--	-	-	-
Water availability	Reduced summer rainfall, overall decrease in water availability with droughts. Aquifer and groundwater recharge rate is reduced.	--	-	-	-
	Increased flood events and frequency. Crop damage and limits to soil workability. Impact exacerbated by hard flood defences in urban areas, e.g., river canalisation, flow restrictions, water supply in rural areas and flood plains.		-	--	--
Water quality	Salinisation and increased pest and disease problems in watercourses.	--	-	-	-
Pests and disease	Spread of pests and diseases from increased range varying by pathogen (arthropod-borne diseases tend to favour warmer and drier conditions, whereas mildew and cereal stem rot may reduce, as a result of higher temperatures.) This impacts both crops and livestock.	-	--	--	-

Variables	Climate impact	South	North	West	East
Fire risk	Increased frequency of fire risk with high interannual variation. Primarily on forests but risks also to cropland.	---			
Wind damage	Increased risk of wind damage to crops and forests.	-	-	-	-

Summary of projected impacts of climate change on EU agriculture by region

Key: The significance of the impact is denoted by the type and number of symbols.

- means a negative impact

-- or --- means an even more negative impact

+ means a positive impact

Source: Research for Agri Committee – The consequences of climate change for EU agriculture (follow-up to the COP 21-UN Paris Climate Change Conference (IEEP) by Kaley Hart, Ben Allen, Clunie Keenleyside, Silvia Nanni, Anne Maréchal, Kamila Paquel, Martin Nesbit, Julia Ziemann) © European Union 2017.

Rural landscapes are closely linked to agricultural practices and also undergo the effects of climate change. These are mainly either event-related (including fires, floods and storms) or adaptive (enforced crop changes or preventive structural adjustments).

In the quest to mitigate the causes of the greenhouse effect and hence climate change, the most beneficial options are reforestation – and in some areas, a halt to deforestation – and the adoption of new crop farming techniques restoring the organic quality of soils (restrictions on industrial inputs). Forms of agroforestry which reintroduce tree plantations into crop-growing or grazing land also contribute to carbon capture. These choices also directly affect the quality of rural landscapes.

There is a strong and positive connection between measures to improve soil quality, preserve biodiversity and combat climate change, which benefits rural landscapes. This confirms the need for a major shift in farming support policies towards measures of joint benefit for the environment, the climate and product quality.

Biomass and landscape

Efforts to reduce the greenhouse effect and the related geopolitical considerations have led to the adoption of binding aims regarding the diversity of energy sources. The share of renewable sources is on the rise. The EU has set itself the target of producing 20% of the energy it consumes from renewable sources by 2020. For 2030 the target is 27%.



Figure 24. Biomethanisation plant, Jura, Switzerland

Among the main renewable sources, biomass plays a major part. It takes different forms with varying degrees of impact on landscapes, such as energy wood, high-yield woody plants, energy crops and short-rotation coppice. When targets encouraging the use of biofuels are set, agricultural crops are heavily affected, and this raises major concerns about the quality of the environment. The maintenance by the EU of a 7% target for the incorporation of so-called first-generation biofuels into the transport sector has had a strong impact on rural landscapes in a significant number of countries outside Europe by promoting deforestation. Shifting a share of agricultural production from food goals to energy use often results in changes in the choice of crops to be cultivated. When speculation comes into play, the resultant changes in the landscape are even more marked.

One striking thing about the adoption of national or European energy targets is how very little attention is paid to the regional impact of these choices. There is a need to introduce mechanisms to assess this impact, particularly in rural areas.

Agriculture's role in mitigating climate change

Rural areas make a major contribution to combating climate change by mitigating its adverse effects. Fire prevention calls, of course, for specific measures to be taken to limit the sources of fires and their spread. The adverse effects on the landscape that can result from such precautions – particularly ditches or planting of particular tree species to the detriment of others – are minor compared to the issues of risk prevention.



Figure 25. Fire damage at the Franco-Spanish border

Flood prevention is a concern for urban areas as much as (or even more than) it is for rural areas. However, rural areas should be able to contribute more to preventing disasters by providing buffer zones for increased river flow and slowing down flow rates. It is easy to imagine that rural areas will be called on more frequently in this respect in future, possibly through the construction of new infrastructure to impede or reduce flows. Landscape impacts will of course have to be looked into and reduced, but it is also possible to look at this climate contribution from a more societal and political angle, seeing it as reflecting a concern for supportive co-operation between different regions. More carefully thought-out agricultural practices and relatively inexpensive preventive equipment should also make it possible to prevent soil erosion and mudslides.

Rural actors as partners

The various contributions of rural areas in the fight against climate change and in response to the energy challenge make them partners, on an equal footing, with urban centres. Their contributions should cause greater attention to be paid to rural areas and the living environment they provide for their inhabitants, who are the keys to their vitality and their contribution to society.

This work of persuasion should be stepped up through the adoption of more directive policies to bring about change in agricultural practice. The climate challenge, to which energy policy should be more closely adapted, and the need for a form of farming that shows more regard for the soil and biodiversity, and for realignment with social expectations, are all arguments which call for a reinterpretation of agricultural policies, from which the landscape will also benefit. If such a change is combined with a strong commitment to local development strategies, this will also make it possible to strengthen ties between farmers and other country dwellers, increasing cohesion in rural societies.

This reorientation has become all the more necessary because of the weakening of public policies to provide financial support for farmers, particularly in view of newly emerging needs. Having less money means that funding needs to be more precisely targeted, especially in view of the changes already seen in the climate and which will take hold still more in future, despite the efforts made. If adverse changes are unavoidable, we need to anticipate them with future-orientated investments, rather than trying with no real prospect of success to prolong activities which the effects of climate change (such as drought or erosion) will soon render obsolete in terms of location, products or practices. If we pursue this line of thinking, the landscapes of rural areas will also have to change, because this will be

the key to preserving their vitality and their political and societal significance.

Most rural landscapes which are now recognised for their quality are the result of ancient practices, and some people fear that agricultural responses to climate change will threaten these landscapes. Such fears must be put into context because responses to climate change often draw their inspiration from these ancient practices. Making rural areas resilient to climate change and seeking landscape quality truly seem to be not only compatible goals but convergent ones.

How landscape is taken into account in the EU Common Agricultural Policy

Hedges, isolated trees, trees in line, copses, ponds, terraces and ditches are all features which shape landscapes. Since 2014, they have been valued more as a result of the greening of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In French they are referred to as topographical components whereas in English they are called "landscape features", which places much more emphasis on their landscape dimension. Although they do not contribute directly to agricultural production, they are taken into account at various levels:

- ▶ through requirements linking grants of European aid to keeping land in good agricultural and environmental condition: farmers are required in particular to avoid harming habitats and to preserve landscape characteristics, and Good practice No. 7 relates to the preservation of particular topographical features;
- ▶ through the rules on eligibility for the agro-environmental and climate measures in the second pillar of the CAP;
- ▶ through the green direct payments that make up 30% of the first pillar of the CAP: to be eligible for these aids linked to farmed areas, farmers must undertake to carry out a number of activities in favour of the environment (habitat, water, soil) and the climate, such as crop diversification, the maintenance of permanent grassland and transforming 5% of arable land into ecological focus areas (EFAs), if they have not already done so.

To meet the latter requirement, farmers with more than 15 hectares of arable land must ensure that at least 5% of this land forms an EFA made up of components of benefit to the environment chosen by the national authority from a standard list drawn up by the EU.

The EU list contains the following types of EFA: land lying fallow; terraces; landscape features, including features adjacent to the farm's arable land but not included in the eligible area; buffer strips, including strips covered by permanent grassland if they are

distinct from contiguous agricultural land; agroforestry areas which receive support through, or have been granted aid under, the forestry measures of rural development programmes; strips along forest edges; short rotation coppice in which no use is made of mineral fertilisers and/or plant-protection products; wooded areas still eligible for direct payments; catch crops (fast-growing crops grown between plantings of main crops) or green cover established by the planting and germination of seeds; nitrogen-fixing crops (European Commission 2017). EU member states and farmers have been given great flexibility regarding the means of meeting their EFA obligations. It should also be said that these areas strengthen farms' resilience to climate change. An indication of the interest in landscapes can be inferred from the choices made between the various types of EFA that are possible. In 2015, the types of EFA declared most often were those linked to productive or potentially productive agricultural areas: nitrogen-fixing crops (37.4% of the physical EFAs on the ground), catch crops (33.2%) and land lying fallow (25.9%). These choices seem in fact to be determined by a desire on the part of farmers for maximum flexibility and simple administrative procedures. Authorities and farmers from only a few states have accorded much importance to landscape features when choosing EFAs, apart from Ireland.

Various measures in the second pillar of the CAP, such as agri-environment and climate payments, can provide funding for landscapes. Non-productive investments linked to agri-environment measures attract funding and these often relate to items of interest to the landscape such as field margins and walls, green buffer strips, hedges, copses and wetland areas. The measure specific to the maintenance, restoration and rehabilitation of cultural heritage and rural landscapes also has a major positive impact on landscapes. Aid targeting areas affected by natural drawbacks helps to prevent the loss of agricultural landscapes with high natural value by limiting the major risk of abandonment of farmland.



Figure 26. Recently restored stone walls, France

Moreover, landscape is taken into account in the EU's LEADER programmes. Their participatory approach almost inherently includes landscapes as reference points for local development strategies. Many

products with a label linking them to a specific geographical area come from regions with good quality landscapes. It is common moreover for the marketing of these products to highlight this aspect in their advertising. In regions where local conditions are not very conducive to agriculture, the added economic value of these products helps to keep farms going and hence to prevent abandonment of these areas, which is a latent threat to the landscape in many areas where farming is difficult. More proactive policies in favour of products linked to specific geographical areas could have a positive impact on the landscape.

3. Rural landscapes in demographic transition

Demographic trends in rural Europe diverge between and within states and their regions. Whereas practically all rural areas with major natural disadvantages or access problems are undergoing population declines which are undermining their home-grown potential, the population in other rural areas is increasing. Proximity to an urban centre seems to be an important factor.

One common demographic feature is found in all European regions, however, and that is the ageing of the population, which is connected in particular with longer life expectancy. The phenomenon is more apparent in rural areas, where the proportion of the population who are elderly is significantly higher than in urban areas. This is combined with the departure, though possibly temporary, of the younger generations. This raises many questions, not only about the need for services geared to this younger population but also about the durability of these areas' economic activities. In some rural areas, the decrease in the active population even poses a threat to the survival of activities on the land and hence has a potential impact on the preservation of landscapes. Finding new farmers is a key question for European agriculture.

The effect of demographic transition on rural landscapes can be illustrated by two different yet stereotypical scenarios of varying degrees of intensity:

- areas of endogenous growth with special appeal (thanks to their natural assets, distinctive characteristics or regional dynamics) or of exogenous growth arising from their proximity to urban centres or to areas undergoing re-urbanisation;
- areas undergoing abandonment (as a result of declining activities, declining employment or an ageing population), which are often remote.

In both cases, rural landscapes, outside central built environments and the internal landscape of villages, are subject to major pressures which can undermine their quality or even their identity.

Territories under demographic pressure

Growing metropolisation in Europe goes hand in hand with population movements towards the largest cities and, in particular, to their peripheries. Besides the many daily movements between urban centres and nearby rural areas that it fosters, this trend has a significant impact on the landscape of rural entities on the urban periphery. These municipalities are experiencing major population growth resulting in transformations in their built environment and a need for new housing and public infrastructure.

This demographic pressure results in a relentless depletion of farmland, forest and natural areas, resulting from urban sprawl. This may take the form of the expansion of residential areas but also includes the creation of transport infrastructure, shopping centres and industrial areas, which can be a somewhat disorderly process. The quality of the urban planning in these new residential areas is a key factor in the development of the landscape. The interplay between the existing fabric and any new sites should avoid the easy option of juxtaposing detached houses, which can lead to a breakdown in spatial and social cohesion. There is also a pressing need to rethink the practice of building shopping centres on the peripheries of towns and cities, to take account not only of the aim of reducing the depletion of agricultural land but also of landscape considerations relating to the individual and collective features of their sites.



Figure 27. Integration of new buildings in Vianden, Luxembourg

The first and key issue for the landscapes in these rural areas under pressure is the management of land use, based on the assumption that the spatial development must be controlled by means of management tools and forward-planning measures, which can be rendered more effective through the use of new digital tools.

These processes of knowledge-gathering, monitoring and management of land use must include a landscape component with both a preventative role prior to the adoption of land-use strategies and a creative role, offering advice or criticism, when investments that will have an impact on landscapes

are being decided on. It is important to provide local decision makers with a body of information and knowledge on the landscape (including good practices and recommendations), enabling them to support their choices with arguments when faced with applications for new settlements.

Landscape actors should not just be observing change; they should also be establishing partnerships to promote landscape quality. For instance, with regard to urban sprawl, the advocates of quality rural landscapes and farmers who wish to retain workable production areas may have shared interests. This is an under-exploited forum for co-operation which would help to take more account of real agricultural and landscape concerns in peri-urban planning approaches.

Rural areas in demographic decline

Many rural areas, mainly the least accessible and the most remote ones, are undergoing a demographic decline, which is often combined with the increased ageing of their populations. This development affects the landscape in many ways: the setting aside or abandonment of agricultural land; the uncontrolled reforestation of landscapes, or their desertification, in the event of extreme climate events; the deterioration, abandonment or decay of buildings.

The future of these regions in difficulty or sometimes in a state of complete neglect, is an entirely political matter. It raises questions of regional solidarity and equal access for citizens to services. It is very difficult to mobilise regions and revitalise local activity when the population and the number of working persons has fallen below a certain level. Participatory development approaches, which are inherently supra-municipal, can only be implemented with financial support, forming part of proactive policies for regional cohesion and equity.

The need to preserve landscape assets can be one of the arguments for this. Likewise, a concern to avert major natural hazards also justifies such operations. Ensuring that these areas are accessible and preserving their landscapes, even on a fairly modest scale, meets a need to manage many major natural events, fires being those that attract most media coverage.

Threats to the quality of landscape in small towns and villages

A village's "internal landscape" can be divided into two aspects:

- ▶ the visual arena of street areas, with its many component parts, including roads and paths, building facades, natural features, undeveloped plots, gardens and public amenities;

- vistas or views towards the outside of the village, forming the scenic transition out towards the countryside.

In rural municipalities that are expanding, particular attention must be paid to internal landscape quality to preserve its inherent architectural or heritage features. This is a key to positive perception of the living environment by inhabitants and visitors, serving as a muse for the *genius loci*, so to speak. Densification is liable to damage internal landscapes, particularly where property development gives rise to major price rises, because too many (often poorly located or integrated) new buildings are being constructed and public spaces are increasingly occupied by cars. There is a strong temptation in such villages to move towards an “urban” approach to spatial development, which results in public spaces being paved or concreted over.

Harmonious development or revitalisation of small town or village centres calls for the simultaneous pursuit of several objectives, which are not necessarily convergent but do need to be reconciled:

- making versatile use of space, allowing for the coexistence of, among other things, multimodal transport routes, stops and stations, recreational spaces and municipal information boards or amenities;
- taking account of collective time frames to cater for the various activities that punctuate the village calendar: markets, various events;
- maintaining a rural character, marking the historical interaction between inhabitants and their natural and landscape setting, to be reflected by paying attention to significant landscape features or by taking account of the place’s characteristics through the choice of materials, styles and wood types, a concern that should not prevent high-quality contemporary creativity;
- a concern for durable functionality, with the use of technical components combining longevity and low maintenance costs;
- a concern for social cohesion and conviviality, placing particular emphasis on user accessibility and safety.



Figure 28. The bridge over the River Loue, Ornans, France

Combining perceptions of public and private spaces, the internal landscape is an obvious base on which to build local participatory processes centring on its development. Concerted thought about the development of small towns’ and villages’ internal landscapes is a natural part of the local development approach owing to its potential for citizen consultation. It may lead to the adoption of a charter, managing or advising on interior landscape development in villages.

4. Rural landscapes in digital transition

It is difficult to talk about the future of rural areas without also talking about the digital transition, which is expected to foster the emergence of “smart” territories. While the concept of “smart cities” is already widespread, its transposition to the countryside is also gaining ground.

The term “smart village”, often used, is simplistic because reducing the desire for spatial intelligence down to the scale of a village gives precedence to often fleeting media actions over lasting approaches which require more spatial and human potential. “Smart rural areas” are rural or semi-rural areas with an integrated development strategy making socially aware use of new technologies – in terms of personal data protection – based on the following lines:

- improving existing public services, particularly those that are thinly spread or remote (healthcare, training, administrative services, cultural facilities);
- developing new activities (movement of goods and persons, tourism);
- improving daily management and planning of spatial and landscape issues;
- facilitating democratic processes to support participatory local development (such as living labs) and stimulating internal local and regional networks;
- strengthening links with external partners to enhance development processes (through research, etc.) or to increase profits (markets).

The two prerequisites for the final transition to a smart rural area are a high-performance communication infrastructure (access to very high-speed internet connection, 5G) and support engineering geared to inhabitants’ and economic players’ needs. The scope for the development of applications, social practices and technical tools is so vast that it is difficult to properly gauge its limits.

Conclusions

The political attention that is and will be paid to both ordinary and outstanding rural landscapes is linked to the importance that decision makers

attach to rural issues. The value that both rural and urban society and the elected representatives of regions accord to the economic potential and the natural and cultural amenities of rural areas is clearly a factor that will determine how much attention and impetus national, regional and local policies will give to rural dynamics and their landscapes.

More political recognition, a joint objective

The way in which politicians perceive rural issues differs from state to state but it is most frequently influenced by the prevailing message in economic circles, which is that growth is built on the vitality of capitals and other large cities, the rest of the country being assimilated with areas which simply provide support for this economic process.

In this context, the political focus and the accompanying funds will be directed first and foremost to urban processes and the international networking of their economic players. The pre-eminence given to urban centres marginalises rural areas, which tend to be seen as nothing more than support areas or places that are falling into abandonment. This territorial imbalance, which already exists and is threatening to increase, endangers the very bases that European identity and its historical development are founded on. Regional imbalance also undermines local potential to manage ecosystems and resources linked to water, land and biodiversity properly, along with the many and widespread heritage assets in rural areas, and it poses a threat to rural landscapes, because landscape issues are trivialised as much as other concerns of the areas in which they are found.

Citizens are faced with a form of globalisation, many of whose codes are hidden from them but whose effects and uncertainties they must endure, with a growing feeling of being excluded from the decision-making process. In this context, citizens generally look on the amenities provided by rural areas as an anchorage point, enhancing a feeling of security and a capacity to adapt. Do we not frequently talk of the “healing” that a stay in a rural area can provide? This movement, which is reflected in new attitudes to food, recreational practices and so on, may contribute in future to a renewed interest in rural areas as potential sources of improved well-being.

Positive interaction between urban and rural poles to develop and enrich landscapes

The future quality of rural landscapes seems to be linked to a recognition of rural areas as partners in territorial development, on the same footing as urban centres.

If the opportunities that rural areas can provide are more fully acknowledged, these areas can serve

as breeding grounds for ideas to meet the major European and global challenges we face in the issues of social and spatial cohesion and climate change (RED 2016; RED 2020). These areas, whose history attests to their ability to adapt to or anticipate changes, should be identified as social and economic development and innovation poles. As a result, this vision could be based on balanced, positive and respectful relations between urban and rural poles.

A rural development pole must be based on a strategic vision rich in potential and must lead to the harmonious development of the area and its landscapes. The Spatial development glossary presented at the 14th Session of the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT) of the Council of Europe, provides a clear definition:

A rural development pole is an inhabited, significantly rural area where the social, economic and territorial evolutions are led within the framework of an integrated and prospective development plan. A rural pole is not an agglomeration, but a rural territory as a whole, which may include one or more small towns. The territorial development plan determines the objectives of results in short, medium and long terms. It specifies the guidelines for development, the human and material means to achieve the results targeted. The civil society, public and private actors must be partner for its development and its assessment. (Council of Europe 2007)

This strategic approach provides a framework which makes it possible, both on a daily basis and in the long term, to regard “landscape quality” as a decision-making criterion in the so very diverse sphere of spatial planning and economic development. It makes it possible to identify urban and rural poles without pitting them against one another, and to take decisions on matters of urban sprawl. The future of rural land on the urban periphery can be dealt with in an alternative non-conflictual manner. A rural development strategy adopted in advance brings decisive benefits, which will make the optimisation of farm activities and their viability, the strategic use of land by rural stakeholders and hence landscape quality in peri-urban areas the subjects of a more balanced debate.

The following matters should be considered: the strong links that exist between local capacities for the management and planning of rural landscapes, and the vitality of rural areas; the need to protect the many high-quality rural landscapes without turning them into museum pieces but instead incorporating them into plans to consolidate the assets of rural areas to meet citizens’ expectations; consistency between the participatory approach advocated by the European Landscape Convention and

local development approaches being tested in rural areas; and the aim of bringing landscape concerns into economic planning and development projects as early as possible rather than raising them further down the line in the form of a counterproductive objections.

In terms of tangible results, the implementation of the European Landscape Convention in rural areas is therefore closely linked to the recognition of rural areas as development and initiative poles, and the implementation of integrated, participatory local development procedures.

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