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Networking European Landscape Observatories: the Florence Charter

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1. A Changing Context

The adoption of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2000 has, by general consensus, indicated a profound change of concepts, paradigms and political and cultural attitudes which in modern times and especially in the last half a century characterized the relationship between society and landscape. Hence the need, already felt during the drafting of the Convention, to promote debates, scientific research and theoretical reflections to explain and justify the proposed changes. For this reason the Convention places emphasis on awareness-raising and the promotion of education and training, which should pave the way for more mature landscape policies. This is the perspective found in the initiatives launched even before the signing of the Convention for the establishment of a European landscape observatory, which then resulted in the creation of three complementary organisations (the European Network of Local and Regional Authorities – RECEP-ENELC; the network of universities – UNISCAPE; and the network of non-governmental organizations - CIVILSCAPE).

The three networks have assumed by various means a coordination role with respect to the inter-governmental cooperating activities carried out by the Council of Europe in the implementation of the ELC, as well as the initiatives carried out at national, regional and local levels that have found recognition in the establishment of the Landscape Observatories. The 5th Careggi Seminar on “Landscape Observatories in Europe: from ELC Recommendations to Local Initiatives 2000-2013”, which took place in Florence on the 27-28th June 2013, represented an occasion of cooperation and scientific exchange on the issue. The outcomes will be discussed at the end of this paper.

Despite or thanks to the extraordinary developments at the international level, in scientific research and publications in various capacities inherent in the landscape and its role in a changing society, the “landscape question” poses an extreme variety of positions and interpretative models. These considerations may explain why the Landscape Observatories (from the three networks mentioned above) cannot but assume a decisively critical role with respect to the way in which the activities concerning the principles and guidelines established by the ELC should be carried out. This does not imply that the Observatories should lose their natural function of documenting, observing and describing the experiences relative to the ELC; but it does imply that the experiences observed can go towards reflecting on those principles and guidelines, with a view to more efficient and fairer landscape policies.

In the numerous observatories established or in the process of being established in various countries, such an aim is obviously articulated according to the needs of protection and safeguarding or of promotion and valorisation specific to the territories in question. However, in general, it should be noted that the title of ‘Observatory’ now evokes a very heterogeneous set of tools, institutions, places of meeting or simple initiatives, with little or no coordination and recognition. In an attempt at creating unity, a Landscape Observatories’ Coordination could be seen as intersections between landscape policies pursued by the competent institutions at various decision-making levels and other policies relating to the territories of competence (agricultural, urban, infrastructural, etc.). Such a mechanism must ensure, in the context of the development of the European territory, the pursuit of the objectives set down by the ELC:

- Expansion of landscape policies, in terms of protection and enhancement, of the entire territory, beyond the constraints and safeguards traditionally applied to ‘landscape assets’.
- The strengthening of landscape policies, in terms of knowledge and awareness of structural factors, public interests and values at stake, multi-sectoral strategies, and more efficient instruments and guidelines.

- Effective participation of the stakeholders and local communities, based on their expectations and perceptions; recognition of the values and issues at stake; design of intervention strategies, social control and the public regulation of processes.

2. Mission of the Observatories

It is in relation to these objectives that the mission of the Observatories is to be defined. In the logic of the ELC, the Observatories have a two-fold mission:

- On the one hand, they constitute **instruments of defence** and local, regional and national enhancement, both with specific reference to landscape policies, and to the policies of growth and consolidation of identity of the different territorial systems, from the local to the national level;
- On the other hand, they are configured as **points of intersection** that branch off at different scales, maintaining a territorial anchorage and operation “in the system”, in order to promote the protection, management and planning of landscapes and the organisation of European cooperation in this field (Art. 3, ELC).

In the Statute of RECEP-ENELC, approved in 2007, there looms a significant expansion of the tasks of the Observatories: in addition to fostering a deeper insight, dissemination and expansion of technical and scientific knowledge, they should also assist stakeholders in decision-making processes related to landscape in the individual states, European institutions and other relevant international organisations; as well as promoting cooperation with other local bodies, including bodies of management of protected areas, non-governmental organisations, universities and research centres, and public and private agencies engaged in activities related to the landscape.

Each signatory state is committed (Art 5d) “to integrating landscape into its regional and town planning policies and in its cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies, as well as in any other policies with possible direct or indirect impact on landscape.” From this point of view, the Observatory should have as its objective not so much or not only the landscapes of the territory in question, but their relationship with contextual dynamics. This is a somewhat ambitious objective, but unavoidable if we want to influence such dynamics with effective regulation of the processes of change.

In an attempt to understand the structural roots of landscape degradation, the Observatories are called to take into consideration the emerging issues of territorial policy, such as those concerning:

- sustainability* (environmental, social and economic), which since the beginning of the ELC has been closely associated with landscape policies, not without ambiguities inherent in the concept of sustainability and its tendency to be misinterpreted as development;
- cultural heritage*, which in the tradition of many countries, such as Italy, includes landscape values, with a double meaning: on the one hand, ‘common goods’ which constitute the living spaces of local communities and define their identity; on the other, universal values with which the local context (specific units or areas of landscape) represent themselves to the global arena, typically but not exclusively in the world heritage sites recognised by UNESCO;
- natural heritage* which in the European context is inseparable from cultural heritage. The areas forming ‘islands of excellence’ (‘protected areas’ classified by criteria established by the IUCN, 1994) need to be reconsidered, according to the ELC, as an integral part of the landscape value of the whole territory;
- territorial governance*, which in the European context constitutes systems that are more or less complex institutional structures, legal frameworks, administrative guidelines for planning, public regulation and control of processes of change; systems that are divided into various forms of ‘governance’, largely exceeding the specific needs of landscape policies which are necessary in order to ensure the effective participation of communities in ‘territorial projects’.

3. Open questions and research prospects

In the light of past experience, it is time to consider the prospects for the development and qualification of the Landscape Observatories, in accordance with the tasks and objectives assigned to them. The first requirement that arises concerns the **coordination** of initiatives, experiences and activities underway or

planned, not least to ensure that they can stimulate and nurture ideas and shared reflections, and be useful for policies of innovation (for, on) the landscape. This requirement currently clashes with the difficulties resulting from the extreme diversification of experiences, spontaneity and dispersion of initiatives, which also hinder mutual knowledge, but which reflect, at least in part, the inherent meaning of landscape, the inherent subjectivity of the landscape experience, and the indispensable role of local input in landscape protection. For this reason, the attempt to “create a network” of activities carried out by observatories can only start from the coordination of the three networks already established at the European level: RECEP-ENELC, UNISCAPE and CIVILSCAPE. A move in this direction could consist of a concerted redefinition of the tools and tasks of each of them, with more explicit and direct references to the relevant social targets: local and regional authorities, universities and non-governmental organisations. In this way, we could also better define the role of the Scientific Committee, to be reconsidered as a transverse member at the service of all three networks.

Co-ordinated action of the three networks may also be able to respond more effectively to the needs of pan-European policies that significantly affect cultural heritage and the landscape, but which are beyond the powers of the Council of Europe, and to invest instead in those of the European Union (EU), such as agricultural policy or mobility and transport. A more direct relationship with organs of the EU (reinforced if possible by the EU’s accession to the ELC) is particularly opportune in order to take into account the possible impact that community policies have on regional and local landscape policies. A field of action of great interest to the network of observatories is that of the relationship between landscape policies implemented by the ELC and those of parks and protected areas and especially those of Natura 2000 sites (Sites of Community Interest and Special Areas of Protection) which cover a substantial part of the EU territory, in which therefore landscape protection intersects with ecological protection.

A second need is the role that the Observatories can play in support of policy intervention, as instruments of knowledge, assessment and social communication. Since the establishment of the Observatory of Catalonia, there has been an emphasis on the need to configure the Observatories as **meeting places**, where expert knowledge intersects with ordinary and common knowledge, gathering scientists, technicians, administrators and members of civil society. If the activities of evaluating and monitoring and critical knowledge are part of a rational context, (such as for example the one proposed by the EEA, the DPSIR), the problem of comparison becomes complex. In particular, ‘data’ should not be considered as totally neutral and objective, such as the data provided by the indicators of the various ‘sectors’ (biological quality, environmental quality, quality of urban life, tangible culture, intangible culture, aesthetics, institutional action, education, communication capital).

This reiterates the need, already mentioned, that the Observatory take into consideration the whole territory concerned, the plurality of territorial, urban planning, environmental and cultural issues occurring there, and the social processes through which local communities react to such problems regardless of administrative boundaries and areas of expertise in the institutions concerned. The field of attention cannot be reduced to a few areas of special interest, somehow detached from their context, to areas of “excellence”, “natural beauty” or “natural monuments” which for a long time were the focus of traditional action of protection. Not in the sense that the action of protection should give up defending the hallmarks of public heritage and save the unsavable, combating the risks and emergence of degradation, but in the sense that the new focus on the relationship between cultural heritage and territory cannot avoid questioning the traditional logic of “protected areas”, in particular the criteria for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List and the IUCN for the conservation of nature. It is enough to think of the requirement of ‘Outstanding Universal Value’, and of the category of “protected landscapes”, which in Europe cover over half of the total protected surface area. It is within this setting that the highly symbolic European Landscape Award, established by ELC, can also be found.

The central challenge that the ELC has launched concerns, in essence, an attempt to develop landscape policies effectively extended to the territory as a whole and not – exclusively – to individual objects of particular prestige, as in single cultural or landscape goods. This shift from **single properties to wide landscapes** applies in all European countries, albeit in different ways due to the various mechanisms of

protection and consolidated cultural administration in the countries and regions. Typically, in the case of Italy, the Code outlines a two-pronged approach:

- On the one hand, it extends the protection of landscape properties, identified by agreement between the regions and the Ministry of Heritage and Cultural Activities (taking into account studies, analyses and proposals of national and regional observatories).
- On the other, conservation and management policies are articulated through territorial planning and with reference to **landscape areas**. Planning activities (in particular, 'landscape' planning) therefore assume autonomous relevance, also for the purposes of the Observatories, regardless of the presence in these areas of 'landscape assets' of specific value.

In this second direction, landscape policies are 'territorialised' (with reference to 'landscape areas'), crossing the plurality of 'environmental' policies (water management, biodiversity protection, energy policies, etc). Above all, however, they:

- claim a **holistic** consideration that defies the rationality of single sector intervention,
- invest largely in the **intangible** aspects, such as those typically aesthetic or anthropological-cultural.

In this sense, the Observatories can play a central role in the definition of quality objectives to pursue in each landscape, "taking into account the particular values assigned to them by the interested parties and the population concerned" (Art. 6, ELC). Here, it is crucial to distinguish between "**quality**" (somehow measurable and rationally comparable) and "**value**" as the integrated expression of "subjective" appreciation and "common sense" of landscape.

After almost a decade of the first experiences of the Observatories, it is questionable whether and to what extent they provide feedback on the perspectives outlined here. The optimism reflected in landscape rhetoric, the declamatory emphasis that often pervades every public speech on landscape, the illusions or hopes that many communities (in fact, especially the 'losers' marginalised by the current processes of economic and social development) attach to the image of landscape as a flag of civil redemption, should not obscure the critical analysis of delays, failures and inconsistencies that occur at all levels. At the regional and sub-regional levels, crucial questions concern the consistency and effectiveness of landscape planning, apparently a powerful weapon in the hands of the public administration (regional and state); but too often weakened or rendered ineffective by the detachment of the choices of protection from those inherent in the range of territorial policies impacting on the landscape: a detachment that threatens to condemn the Observatories to a merely "inventory" role. At the local level (individual municipalities, parks or sub-areas of specific interest such as the areas of eco-museums or UNESCO sites), one wonders whether and how the effervescence of the initiatives of the Observatories may recover the relationship with "place" that represents the promise of the more attractive enhancement of landscape, away from "garden" flattery or street furniture.

This last observation draws attention to the need for an "alliance" between the policies of landscape conservation and nature conservation, in particular the conservation of parks and protected areas, both inside and outside the city. In both cases, landscape is currently in danger. The risks and processes of environmental degradation related to global changes in climate and ecological, as well as economic and social, dynamics meet the new imperatives of fairness required by the world's population, calling for new visions and new strategies of development. In the "new frontiers of conservation" that are emerging, the "Western view" is increasingly being questioned. It may be interesting to recall that in the early 2000s the problem of extending the application of the ELC to the euro-Mediterranean context was raised, in particular the scope of the ARCO LATINO. More generally, the strong correlation between the philosophy of the ELC with the "new paradigms" for the establishment and management of "protected areas" launched by the IUCN World Congress in IUCN (Durban, 2003) was highlighted.

Hence the proposals in 2011 for the creation of a World Landscape Convention, to gather the new initiatives occurring at the international level. These proposals were obviously destined to clash due to insurmountable difficulties presented by the enormous socio-environmental, economic, political and cultural differences involved. However, against this dramatic background of change, the conservation, management and enjoyment of the landscape - in the broad meaning provided by the ELC - poses unavoidable instances of public regulation of the transformation processes that occur at all levels. The "right to landscape" implies

that new citizenship rights should be protected by public authorities, against any limitation or incapacity. At the same time, public regulation, as required by the ELC, must strengthen the role of local communities in creating and managing their landscapes, ensuring openness, accessibility and free enjoyment. In this double direction, the task of the networks of Observatories is of utmost importance.

4. The Florence Charter

On the 27-28th June 2013 in Florence, at Villa Ruspoli, the 5th Careggi Seminar on “Landscape Observatories in Europe: from ELC Recommendations to Local Initiatives 2000-2013” took place. It was organized by UNISCAPE (the Network of 51 European universities to enhance education and training and the implementation of the European Landscape Convention) in collaboration with Università di Torino (Italy), Politecnico di Torino (Italy), RECEP-ENELC, CIVILSCAPE and with the support of the Tuscany Region and CIST (Inter-university Centre of Territorial Science).

With more than a hundred participants, coming from different Countries and belonging to institutional bodies, public offices, universities and civil society, the Seminar discussed the following themes:

- Awareness, education and participation;
- Documentation, assessment and monitoring;
- Relationships with landscape and spatial policies, planning, and design;
- Landscape Observatories Networks;
- Research in progress.

During these 13 years many national and regional bodies have established institutional centres for landscape observation, which show a varied panorama of missions and relationships within the activities of spatial and landscape planning. In Italy, for example, Regional Observatories, created by a national law, collect geographical data, accompany the landscape planning process, and rarely, carry out participation experiments. In Spain too, the Regional Observatories are actively involved in the elaboration of landscape planning instruments. At the same time, a good number of “spontaneous” initiatives, by civil society and local organizations, carry out awareness raising, participation, and sometimes, elaborate projects and concrete actions on the territory. This second kind of observatory shows a strong tendency towards creating networks, at the regional or international level. This seminar promoted an international overview of the activities of landscape observatories, as well as reflecting on their mission and effectiveness with regard to the ELC objectives, and the relationships between the different subjects.

Furthermore the participation of UNISCAPE, RECEP-ENELC and CIVILSCAPE around the same discussion table was one first important result of the Seminar, as they represent the privileged landscape observatories at the European level.

During the final conclusions of the Seminar the Florence Charter for the Establishment of the Coordination of European Landscape Observatories was drafted and signed by the participants. Experts from different European countries agreed on the importance of the Landscape Observatories in order to achieve the full implementation of the European Landscape Convention and drafted a text that takes into account the auspices of the Council of Europe for the establishment of Landscape Observatories and Landscape Research Centres throughout Europe. The UNISCAPE representatives of the Università di Torino and Politecnico di Torino (Italy) have been encharged to manage the organizational aspects for the establishment of the Network of the European Landscape Observatories in order to coordinate future initiatives, exchange experiences, and promote scientific research.

Thus, **networking European Landscape Observatories** is the mission. Three international networks gathering universities, civil society and territorial public authorities in support of the ELC already exists. The next step is crossing their activities, thus strengthen the relationships among researchers, stakeholders (including the general public), and decision makers in landscape policies.

The future actions might analyse the existing observatories (being them public institutions, initiatives from the civil society, or research centers) and produce technical and political guidelines, thus promoting the application of the ELC among the populations and within the territories which still doesn't have landscape observatories.