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***National policies for the implementation of  
the European Landscape Convention:  
challenges and opportunities***

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**GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

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A national policy to implement the European Landscape Convention must, first of all, lay down general guidelines: what kind of landscapes do we want? Choices have to be made between landscapes shaped by economic activities, which are currently globalised and far removed from the concerns of citizens, landscapes close to people's everyday lives, landscapes under binding protection and landscapes where people feel good. This basically raises the question of the kind of society in which Europeans want to live and the economic options which should be pursued to achieve that goal. These general choices accordingly flow into strategies for action.

What do we mean by strategies for action? The definitions vary between dictionaries and languages; for instance, the *Trésor de la langue française* defines a strategy as “*Ensemble des choix d'objectifs et de moyens qui orientent à moyen et long terme les activités d'une organisation, d'un groupe, d'une entreprise*”, the Oxford dictionary gives “*The process of planning something or putting a plan into operation in a skilful way*” and the *Treccani* Italian dictionary the following: “*La tecnica di individuare gli obiettivi generali di qualsiasi settore di attività pubbliche e private, non ché i modi e i mezzi più opportuni per raggiungerli*”.

With reference to the European Landscape Convention, we would propose a concise definition here: “Definition of general guidelines for the protection, management and planning of landscapes on the basis of the overall national policy directions of states and their administrative bodies”.

## **I. Landscape strategies**

It is necessary, first of all, to go back to the philosophy or fundamental approach of the European Landscape Convention and respect the definitions and, in particular, the expression “interaction of natural **and**/or human factors”, which means acting in the context of interaction between nature and culture rather than separating them.<sup>1</sup> The terms cultural landscapes and natural landscapes are inappropriate as regards implementation of the European Landscape Convention; they refer too closely to the approach of the 1992 version of the World Heritage Convention, which, although entirely legitimate in the context in which it was drawn up and in relation to its objectives, is not in line with the thinking behind the European Landscape Convention. All landscapes have a natural dimension and a cultural dimension; for instance, Mont Blanc, is just as much a natural mountain landscape as a cultural and even artistic point of reference which has helped shape the European collective imagination.

The measures proposed in the convention involve the protection, management and planning of landscapes (including the rehabilitation of degraded landscapes, which is becoming increasingly important),<sup>2</sup> which complement rather than exclude one another: depending on the features of a given area, policies may protect, manage and/or plan landscapes. While the main tendency among administrative authorities is to protect areas regarded as outstanding, where implementation is easier, as can be seen in the statements made at the workshop, there are too few projects involving planning for other types of landscapes. It is therefore essential to further develop landscape plans or to include landscape in spatial development plans, particularly in the case of everyday landscapes, which are most important for the residents concerned, with appropriate management plans. A landscape plan must be regarded as an ongoing measure and a medium to long-term process that is monitored over time with a view to injecting the new knowledge generated by the project and shifting the focus where necessary.

All stakeholders must be actively involved in all the types of action (protection, management and planning): elected representatives, institutions, scientists, NGOs, local residents and, in particular, the staff of the relevant institutions such as the agencies responsible for town planning, energy, agriculture, transport, culture, education, etc., and even the environment. As the European Landscape Convention ties in with human rights and the exercise of democracy (founding principles of the Council of Europe), policies must include arrangement for public participation. It is vital that the participation arrangements are not restricted to consultation but also involve negotiation leading to compromises and action or they will lose effectiveness and credibility. Participation draws on knowledge sharing between scientists, NGOs and residents, i.e. between scientific, technical and lay or empirical knowledge which complement one another; the scientific and technical knowledge must be validated with strict protocols, hence the importance of research on landscape, which is too limited in Europe, both nationally and in European Union research programmes (Horizon 2020). The empirical knowledge reflects the collective memory, cultures, nature and social relationships and the three types of knowledge each have a value which must be considered on its own level.

One of the strategic choices is to aim for landscapes which ensure public well-being, as provided for in the preamble to the European Landscape Convention: *“Believing that the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being”*. Well-being is a criterion used in economic theory; it is

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<sup>1</sup> See the proposals of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), which has recommended moving away from the distinction between nature and culture, in particular at two major recent colloquies (Australia, Chicago).

<sup>2</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec (2008)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the guidelines for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention.

no longer assimilated to gross domestic product; all economists propose methods for evaluating amenities, i.e. non-commercial goods such as landscape, and recommend the introduction of qualitative criteria rather than mere quantitative criteria. It is now essential to assess the well-being generated by landscapes as an economic resource and element rather than landscapes themselves, having regard to the following:

- a) Landscape as a product of the economy and at the same time an economic factor: economic activities alter landscapes and the stakeholders' images or perceptions of them are altered in turn.
- b) Well-being varies according to the changes in economic activity, social factors, culture and technology, which themselves bring about changes in landscapes.

## II. Issues and challenges surrounding strategies

These issues may vary in nature and involve separate sectors (financial, environmental, agricultural, energy, economic, etc.):

– Financial and budgetary issues

– Issues relating to climate change, which has an impact on:

- Landscapes,
- Biodiversity,
- Populations (migration, natural disasters, reorganisation of society, cultural changes, etc.),
- The local and global economy.



– Economic issues:

- This mainly involves the role assigned to businesses (small and medium-sized enterprises or multinational corporations) in economic development,
- The development of alternative economic models: short supply chains, citizen networks,
- And it is now vital to ask questions about the relevance of growth (what type of growth is acceptable to us?)

– Energy issues:

- In particular, it will be necessary to resolve the conflicts between renewable energy sources and their impact on landscapes (wind farms, solar panels, etc.); this can only be achieved through participatory democracy mechanisms.

– Agricultural issues:

- The importance of rural landscapes for public well-being must be underlined, and we should not assimilate the development of rural areas and urban areas, even though they are complementary; some scientific theories place too much emphasis on urban areas as the only relevant category (given their economic importance and the concentration of population), with all other areas being dominated by them. That is wrong; rural landscapes and urban landscapes have their own specific features and cultures. At the same time, it is true that there is a need for a comprehensive approach here, as urban and rural areas are closely

interconnected in functional and spatial terms, especially in major metropolitan areas; moreover, most of the statements made at the workshop focused on rural landscapes.

- It is also vital to consider agriculture's role in shaping landscapes:
  - This is a vital issue: what type of farming do we want for the future of Europe (and the world)?
  - There is an urgent need to break away from the focus on output and move back to sustainable agriculture based on quality foods and short supply chains.
  - There is a vital need in terms of innovation in high-quality, citizen-friendly farming (new products and practices).
  - One new prospect involves the multifunctionality of agriculture and the relevant landscapes (areas for recreation, agri-tourism, education concerning nature and culture, the culture of nature and social activities, etc., alongside agricultural production.
  - It is also essential to reduce as far as possible the use of pesticides, which are responsible for serious illnesses and the disappearance of bees and many beneficial or pollinator species.
  - And it is also essential to limit/avoid further urban sprawl and the use of fertile land, whereas degraded land must be regenerated and recovered for agricultural purposes.
- More than ever before, questions need to be asked about the globalisation of trade in food products and the practices of multinationals and their impact on sustainable development.

### **III. Policy monitoring**

Monitoring policies of whatever kind means keeping track of their impact on landscapes. Monitoring may be performed on an ongoing basis by implementing measures to report on the impact of the policies (dedicated or sector-specific) on landscapes in the longer term.

This process is essential in that a landscape project (protection, management or planning, or all three together) is never-ending: in this sense, it differs from an architectural project where a completed building or structure is delivered to the owner. Admittedly, the building may change over time, but this will always be marginal, whereas all landscapes evolve almost naturally on a constant basis through the daily actions, however insignificant, of the many stakeholders who live there (residents, farmers, etc.) or take decisions there (officials, workers, etc.). Buildings can also be converted, as is the case when developers retain frontages or outside appearances while converting interiors; in the case of landscapes, it is impossible to alter the outside appearance (in any case, what is the outside appearance of a landscape?) without altering its composition and specific features.

– Monitoring is essential and may be carried out by the relevant stakeholders and the residents themselves.

– Assessment – and related communication – involves assessing the practical, tangible impact of protection, management and planning policies on landscapes; however, the impact may also be intangible because it can alter the stakeholders' images or perceptions of the changes; the stakeholders will then be able to take new decisions with different impacts on landscapes. While there is too little emphasis on assessment in protection, management and planning projects, it is vital as a means of reporting on the effectiveness of the measures taken.

- Assessment guarantees the long-term success of the planning, protection and management project or programme.
- One of the best ways of conducting assessments is to involve residents in the process.
- It is therefore essential to include assessment in specifications for landscape projects or spatial development plans and also to make sure that the relevant information is properly shared and communicated.

#### **IV. Avenues to be explored**

- It seems worthwhile looking again at the original approach of the European Landscape Convention, which places the three types of action on the same level (protection, management and planning, with no special emphasis on protection), and
- Continuing to recommend that it be taken into account in the States Parties' policies (see the Council of Europe Information System on the European Landscape Convention 'L6' tool developed by the Council of Europe),
- Studying the consequences and effectiveness of this approach in terms of landscape planning and spatial development and the practical, tangible impact on landscapes, as well as the intangible impact on perceptions of landscape, while taking account of the contemporary economic and social context in the relevant countries.

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