

Finland's Cultural Environment Strategy — a tool for landscape awareness and activities

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Finland does not have any specific national policy or strategy for landscape issues. Instead, we have a national Cultural Environment Strategy, which also includes the cultural landscape.

The first national Cultural Environment Strategy was prepared in 2014 by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Education and Culture. The overall objective of the strategy is to establish the preconditions for a comprehensive policy on the cultural environment. Another important objective is to enhance the national implementation of international treaties, such as the European Landscape Convention.

The Government resolution on the strategy was approved in 2014, and in 2015 the Ministry of the Environment prepared an implementation plan. The implementation plan is available only in Finnish and in Swedish, but the strategy has been translated into English. A coordination group consisting of specialists from the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Board of Antiquities are engaged in following up and coordinating the activities of the plan.

A starting point of the strategy is to see the cultural environment, as defined in Finland, as a totality comprising cultural landscapes, the built environment, archaeological heritage and semi-natural habitats. The cultural environment is formed by different kinds of elements of our everyday environment, as it is stated in the 2nd article of the European Landscape Convention: "It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes." It also includes large areas as well as individual sites.

We have five strategic choices in our strategy:

- Cultural environment is a resource
- Legislation on the cultural environment and its application are of high quality
- The importance and value of the cultural environment is recognised
- Strength from cooperation
- Information on the cultural environment is sufficient and of high quality.

When it comes to raising awareness and encouraging actors to undertake different activities, the strategy stresses two crucial points. First, the cultural environment should be seen as a positive and valuable entity, not a burden. It is an important cultural, financial, social and ecological resource, and a catalyst for new activities. And the strategy is aimed at increasing people's understanding of the opportunities these offer. Secondly, everybody has the right to enjoy our cultural environment. Accordingly, everyone also has to take responsibility for it.

How do we work to carry out the strategy and achieve our goals?

Public administration, such as ministries, heritage authorities, municipalities, among others, contributes to implementing the strategy on three levels. For the first level, we examine our activities so we can improve our work. To do this, we start by asking the following questions:

- How do we recognise valuable built heritage in land use planning?
- What kinds of problems are there in legislation?
- How do we use subsidies to help people and NGOs?
- What should be done to improve environmental consciousness?
- What kind of academic research has been done?

Secondly, we carry out different projects to develop the everyday work of public administration. And finally, we take steps to enhance the cooperation between different public organisations, and between the public administration, NGOs and companies.

However, the most interesting way of implementing the strategy is to work with people. This is why we have developed a new tool: a cultural environmental commitment. This tool serves as a way to tell the public what you want to do to reach the goals of the strategy.

In May 2015, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Education and Culture made a commitment under Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development (<https://commitment2050.fi>). The ministries committed themselves to implementing the Cultural Environment Strategy. The ministries also invited organisations, municipalities, schools, museums, property owners, individuals and others to participate in implementing the strategy and to make their own cultural environment commitments.

The Finnish Local Heritage Federation accepted the ministries' challenge and made its own commitment, in which it invited all its member associations around the country to join in. The Federation has approximately 800 different associations working on the local level with different issues, such as the built heritage, landscape management, museums and so on.

A number of local heritage societies have already accepted the Federation's challenge and have made their own commitments. Some have committed to sustaining the local culture and contributing to the preservation of the regional cultural environment. Some others have committed to collecting information about the region and providing it to any interested party. The main point is that associations or actors can determine their own way to contribute to implementing the Strategy.

In this way, the various commitments and invitations are triggering a snowball effect and consequently the implementation of the Cultural Environment Strategy is improved. The Ministry of the Environment, with its partners, is arranging a seminar on 12 October for NGOs, volunteers and activists working in the cultural heritage and cultural environment fields. Through the seminar, we want to encourage and help them to make their own commitments and in that way, to make their valuable work visible. When you tell others about your plans through the website, you also have a greater incentive to fulfil your own plans. We also hope that the NGOs will share their experiences with each other during the seminar.

Social media is another important way to encourage people to take part in cultural environment activities. In order to activate young people and others comfortable with using social media, for example, snapshot applications, we carried out a photo competition. People were asked to post their photos to #kulttuuriymparistomme (in English 'our cultural environment') and direct it to our Instagram account. Furthermore, we asked them to explain why they thought a site was a valuable cultural environment or an important place to them. Each month we awarded five participants by means of random drawing with excellent book prizes.

Over the course of five months, we got more than 1200 photos of great variety. There were many very traditional scenes and artistic high-quality photos, but also an abundance of quite contradictory photos. At the beginning, when I was glancing through the snapshots posted to the competition site, I was astonished: "What is this! It's not a cultural environment!" But very soon I realised that the competition was a great way to give people the possibility to participate in defining what can be regarded as a cultural environment. We learned a good lesson from this, too. The Ministry or the public authorities should not be the only ones to have a say in what is right or wrong. At the end of September, the competition closed, and we will now analyse the results. We are definitely interested in summing up what we received and what we learned from this competition. We need to be where people are, to speak in their language and to use their terminology. This is why we actively use Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, for example.

Finland's Cultural Environment Strategy offers good tools for taking care of our cultural environment and landscapes, if we are open to new working methods and if we reach out to people and work with them.

Links:

Cultural Environment Strategy website (English): <http://www.ym.fi/culturalenvironmentstrategy>

Cultural Environment Strategy 2014-2020, the strategy text (English):

https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/135508/Cultural%20Environment%20Strategy_2014.pdf?sequence=1

Cultural environment commitment:

<http://www.ym.fi/en->

[US/Land_use_and_building/Programmes_and_strategies/Cultural_environment_strategy/Cultural_environment_commitment](http://www.ym.fi/en-US/Land_use_and_building/Programmes_and_strategies/Cultural_environment_strategy/Cultural_environment_commitment)

Cultural environment, Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BLGJfbXBSHv/>