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EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**

**CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
CONVENTION EUROPEENNE DU PAYSAGE**

***21st MEETING OF THE WORKSHOPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE EUROPE LANDSCAPE CONVENTION***

***21^e REUNION DES ATELIERS POUR LA MISE EN ŒUVRE DE
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***“Landscape and education”
« Paysage et éducation »***

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WORKSHOP 2 – General Debate on public policies

Mr Phaedon ENOTIADES

*Senior Spatial Planning Officer, Department of Town Planning and Housing, Ministry of the Interior,
Representative of Cyprus at the European Landscape Convention 2004-2018*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Cyprus ratified and adopted as national law the European Landscape Convention in 2006. Since 2004 an informal national advisory group had already been set up, bringing together government agencies (including spatial planning, forests, antiquities, the geological survey etc.), local authority associations, professional bodies and non-government organizations (among which, most notably, those concerned with architectural heritage and countryside regeneration).

After a formative period of internal discussions and baseline activities, our progress has been presented regularly in this Council of Europe's series of workshops, as results of on-going efforts came out, among other occasions, in Évora (2011), Montenegro (2013) and Andorra (2015). Last year in Brno (2017), my colleague Irene Hadjisavva-Adam presented our efforts in *Considering landscape at grassroots level*, that is, in close collaboration with local citizens. This is an important aspect of Landscape and Education efforts, concentrating on awareness-raising, which I will come back to later in this short presentation.

Before we discuss that important facet of landscape and education, let me give some general information on the subject concerning the current situation in Cyprus. Landscape is not officially at present a subject in primary and secondary education, although it is often referred to in student projects in subjects such as geography, ecology, local studies and natural sciences. At tertiary level, out of the three state universities today, only the Open University of Cyprus offers a program in the

management and protection of terrestrial ecosystems that has specific landscape components. In fact, it is through collaboration with this program that we have been able to prepare the first and second level Landscape Maps of Cyprus, as well as a zoom-in third level landscape map provided as input for the Akamas Peninsula Spatial Plan, currently under formulation, which I presented in Strasbourg last year. In the private sector, two universities offer landscape related courses; Frederick University in Nicosia offers a course in Landscape Architecture within its architecture programme at the faculty of engineering, whereas Neapolis University in Paphos offers a programme specifically devoted to Landscape Architecture, leading to professional degrees in Landscape Architecture. Progress on the implementation of the European Landscape Convention in Cyprus has been presented in all three aforementioned universities, in various formats, including a lecture webcast in 2015.

While it is important to promote the expansion of these admittedly scant opportunities for landscape education in Cyprus, it is just as important to acknowledge the role of government institutions and NGOs in educating the general public on landscape related issues within their all-important remit of awareness raising and enabling meaningful participatory planning. Landscape awareness was the underlying crosscutting theme within the national European Heritage Days events organised last year, which incorporated a series of lectures and presentations, including information on progress made in the implementation of the European Landscape Convention in Cyprus. In the same year, the Department of Town Planning and Housing's ongoing collaboration with the Cyprus Academy of Public Administration in implementing structured democratic dialogue processes at the grassroots level, specifically related to the protection, management and planning of landscapes in rural areas was highlighted in my colleague's presentation at the Council of Europe's Meeting in Brno. This association of landscape with countryside regeneration projects is very much a mainstream approach, but what about landscape education related to urban areas, where the most intense pressures and dilemmas manifest themselves?

Within the continuing framework of activities to raise awareness among citizens and associations, the need to start an in-depth public discussion concentrating on the relation between development, spatial planning, construction standards and the landscape has become evident. Concerned professionals and activists have long discussed the idea, developing arguments to which the layman could relate and respond, some of which were presented last year by my colleague at the Brno workshop. It is along these lines that an initiative by a group of professionals, academics and students has been recently unfolding in the town of Limassol. I was very excited to learn about it, first through a post on social media, followed by a request for comments, which reached me at the end of this summer. It might therefore perhaps be a bit early to present the work of his initiative, but I could nonetheless not resist the temptation to make some general references about its concept.

According to this initiative, it is important to educate professionals, students and the general public about the importance of understanding definitions used in the Convention; how landscapes evolve through time and how they interact with people's identities; how we perceive landscapes, as well as how conception and comprehension mechanisms work; about accessibility to knowledge and the need for a two-way communication between experts and the public; how landscape ties into spatial planning policy, about participatory processes, as well as the conflicting values behind public interventions. What's in it for the citizen and society; why is it important? It is, it would seem, imperative to promote landscape character assessment in clear and concise layman terms, in order to be able to incorporate landscape values into spatial planning processes. Landscape impact assessment, unfortunately still largely missing from our work, or at best insufficiently documented, is strongly recommended by this initiative, as an important process that focuses on the effect the sum of

interdependent, overlapping policies, even within ostensibly integrated planning approaches, can have on landscapes as a system, interacting with such policies in not always easy to predict ways.

From my perspective, *Landscape and Education* is a key component of strategies to implement the European Landscape Convention. Even in the case of small nations and small societies, where it is not always possible for the education system to offer all programs and all courses, particularly in times of austerity, the fact that we live in a global village facilitates a certain flow of information and ideas. It is in such cases where raising awareness and disseminating knowledge becomes all the more important in enabling constructive citizen participation in the protection, management and planning of their surrounding landscapes.

Thank you for your attention!