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EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

***National Symposium on the implementation
of the European Landscape Convention in Georgia***

***Interministerial Round-Table:
Integration of the landscape into policies***

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Implementation of the European Landscape Convention: Experiences of parties to the convention

Experience of France: Implementing landscape quality objectives

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Incorporation into French law

The concept of landscape quality objectives was first incorporated into the French Town Planning Code. In March 2014, the Law on Access to Housing and Renovated Town Planning (le Loi pour l'accès au logement et un urbanisme rénové, the ALUR Act) made landscape quality objectives compulsory in Territorial Cohesion Strategy (Schémas de cohérence territoriale, SCOTs).

A Territorial Cohesion Strategy is a town-planning document which sets out broad strategic guidelines on housing, mobility, commercial development, environment and landscape, which are then replicated at local level in local land-use plans.

Thus, in line with the landscape quality objectives introduced in the Territorial Cohesion Strategy, the Local Urban Plan must also, at its own level and in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity,

provide detailed guidelines for the protection, management and / or landscaping structures at local level.

Subsequently, the concept of landscape quality objectives was incorporated into the Environment Code. The Reclaiming Biodiversity, Nature and Landscape Act (la Loi pour la Reconquête de la biodiversité, de la nature et des paysages) of 8 August 2016 introduced a chapter specifically dealing with landscape. As well as defining “landscape quality objectives” (« objectifs de qualité paysagère » (OQP)), this chapter requires them to be included in the charters of National Regional Parks and treats them as a landscape policy tool.

Feedback

Regarding planning, our discussions with local stakeholders, including the Federation of Territorial Cohesion Strategy (la Fédération les schéma de cohérence territoriale), have shown that the concept of landscape quality objectives is little understood. It is perceived as being too abstract and therefore difficult to translate into practice. So, although the statutory obligation is met, and territorial cohesion strategies do in fact contain landscape quality objectives, they often take the form of policy statements which are too general to generate any real momentum.

One explanation for this situation can be found in the history of landscape policies which initially relied on a purely aesthetic and heritage-based approach. The first piece of legislation on landscape was the Act of 1930, which is still in force today and establishes the principle of classification and listing of natural sites and monuments. Even now, landscapes are too often viewed as beautiful, sacrosanct objects and not seen as being an asset to be developed, and an instrument for tackling the challenge of ecological, social, environmental and other transitions.

A further explanation for the current situation lies in the method of transposition. Incorporation into French law was carried out on a strategic level of planning. In France, however, there is a strict hierarchy of norms, based on a top-down logic which inhibits local project development. As a result, landscape quality objectives are disconnected from the operational level and the local and regional project approach of which they are meant to be a reflection. Similarly, landscape quality objectives are insufficiently underpinned by a methodology based on consultation with citizens, which is difficult to organise on such small territorial scales. The issue then arises of how to strike a balance between technocratic expression and the expression of the public will.

Shift in landscape policies

From this perspective, incorporating the European Landscape Convention into French law has created tension between two different mind-sets. On the one hand, there is a fundamentally centralist approach, even though devolution has transferred decision-making power from the state to local authorities, and on the other hand, there is a citizen participation approach which raises the question of how decisions are made.

This tension has helped to drive change. By introducing a section on “landscape” into the Environment Code, for example, the Reclaiming Biodiversity, Nature and Landscape Act of 8 August 2016 has enabled landscape policies to break free from the restrictive regulatory framework of urban development and planning and to forge an alternative route.

It has helped re-focus landscape policies at the operational level, and to restore the close link between landscape policy objectives and local and regional projects. Landscape policy objectives are thus understood as a blueprint formulated through a landscape analysis and local consultations, and which serve as a benchmark for the implementation of local action plans.

[Powerpoint presentation](#)

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