

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Recommendation 292 (2010)<sup>1</sup> Landscape: a new dimension of public territorial action

1. Landscape makes an essential contribution to citizens' well-being and to the consolidation of Europe's identity. It is the privileged domain of the relationship between human beings and their natural and built environment and is emblematic of the territorial distribution of human activities.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which instigated the European Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176), is convinced that the landscape is a political topic of general interest and a common public good.

3. The fundamental issue raised by landscape is no longer simply protecting sites regarded as highly exceptional, but rather the urban, peri-urban, rural or natural landscapes in which the vast majority of people in Europe live.

4. This is because landscape is a key component of people's quality of life and entails a collective responsibility. Action concerning landscape constitutes an opportunity to work from a grass-roots democracy and human rights perspective. It provides a response to people's aspirations to have a high-quality living environment and to their demand to participate in decisions that transform their everyday surroundings.

5. The Congress notes that landscape policies are gradually becoming an essential means of linking the requisite improvement of the territories of local and regional authorities with their economic development needs and the long-term conservation of resources, natural habitats and biodiversity.

6. Furthermore, it considers that maintaining and improving the quality of European landscapes must be a priority and that the questions raised by the continuing transformation of landscapes must be addressed from a sustainable development perspective. In this respect, the speed of the development process in certain countries and the resulting changes in the landscape call for special vigilance.

7. The European Landscape Convention, the first international treaty linking landscape quality and the quality of life of people throughout Europe, is innovative in spirit and has modified the concept of landscape. It has opened up a new dimension of public action at the international, national, regional and local levels and has triggered genuine, significant advances in landscape policies implemented in many European countries.

8. The Congress notes with satisfaction that it has become an operational instrument which has met with a very positive

response. It welcomes the significant number of signatures and ratifications ten years after its adoption in Florence in 2000.

9. It believes that there is a real interest in landscape in today's Europe which needs to be sustained because the failure to take account of landscapes in planning processes may cause an irreversible destruction of an important element of our societies' cultural and geographical heritage.

10. Therefore, implementation of the European Landscape Convention requires rigorous and careful interpretation which takes into account all the dimensions it covers, that is to say, social, economic and ecological. A hasty or simplified implementation of the convention could lead to a superficial, and possibly even merely cosmetic, approach with detrimental effects on landscape.

11. The Congress points out that the institutional contexts in which landscape policies are implemented differ from one country to another and that the unequal development of democracy in European countries, the innovative methods that the convention proposes and the lack of practical experience are all impediments to be overcome.

12. It accordingly considers that there is a need for wide-ranging exchanges of experience and for reinforced international co-operation to improve the quality of European landscapes. It also recommends promoting cross-border action on landscape, as landscapes form a continuum that does not end where it crosses a frontier.

13. Improvement of the landscape entails greater democratisation and, in particular, more public participation in decision-making processes. It also requires the development of teaching, training and awareness-raising measures targeting the public and, especially, elected representatives.

14. The Congress welcomes the desire of a growing number of local and regional authorities to take action regarding the landscape quality of their territories, as they have a key role to play in protecting, managing, developing and enhancing landscapes in areas for whose development they bear responsibility. This new dimension of public territorial action must be supported and assisted.

15. Consequently, so as to guarantee the effective implementation and the optimum monitoring of the European Landscape Convention, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

*a.* give full recognition to the experience of local and regional authorities by ensuring that the monitoring system under preparation pays significant attention to their action on the landscape;

*b.* take into account the issues of citizens' democratic participation, of their involvement in local affairs and of their right to a better living environment when it renews the terms of reference of the steering committees in the heritage, landscape and spatial development sectors;

*c.* invite the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP) of the Council of Europe to reinforce

the involvement of civil society bodies in the convention monitoring process.

16. The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage member states that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the European Landscape Convention.

17. The Congress also invites the Committee of Ministers to call on member states when implementing the European Landscape Convention:

*a.* to incorporate the concept of landscape into all national legislation and sectoral policies having a direct or indirect impact on the quality of the living environment;

*b.* to comply with all the principles laid down by the convention, in particular the principle of subsidiarity as defined by the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy.

18. In addition, the Congress asks the European Union to take greater account of the landscape dimension in its spatial development policies and to support the exchange of experience among local and regional authorities through purpose-built programmes. In this connection, it draws attention to the advantages of reinforced co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe, notably through joint programmes, with a view to fostering implementation in the field of the principles enshrined in the Council of Europe's landscape and heritage conventions.

19. Lastly, the Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to support its efforts to foster greater participation by local and regional authorities in the implementation of the European Landscape Convention.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 October 2010, 2nd Sitting (see Document [CG\(19\)14](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: D. Çukur, Turkey (R, SOC) and I. Linge, Sweden (R, EPP/CD).