

Landscape dimensions



Reflections and proposals
for the implementation
of the European
Landscape Convention

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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**Reflections and proposals
for the implementation
of the European
Landscape Convention**

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Chapter 7

Wealth and variety of terms, instruments and approaches to landscape in Europe

*Jean-François Seguin, Council of Europe expert, former Chair
of the Council of Europe Conference on the European Landscape
Convention*

INTRODUCTION

As we all know, the term “landscape” has multiple connotations: it is not uncommon for the word to have several meanings in the same country, and sometimes even in the same language. A hundred languages are officially spoken across the 47 states which make up the Council of Europe. Within these 100 languages, 120 words are used to denote landscape in all its various meanings.

The Council of Europe, however, is no Tower of Babel and its members have managed to agree on a single, common definition as a basis for the European Landscape Convention.

This definition – an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors – is the fruit of an intelligent compromise that has enabled it to find its way into a growing number of domestic laws.

The wealth and variety of underlying meanings attached to landscape have not been erased by the convention, however, and when discussing landscape, it is always worth remembering that the people we are speaking to may not have the same understanding of landscape that we have.

I recall the meetings of the group of experts tasked with drafting the convention. The group was chaired by a representative from the United Kingdom, the head of the Countryside Agency. It was only after several meetings that this gentleman realised that, for the French, "landscape" encompassed towns as well as countryside, whereas for him it referred solely to the countryside. "Countryside", indeed, would seem to be a more accurate translation of the German "*Landschaft*" and the French "*paysage*" than "landscape".

Since then, I have taken a close interest in the terms and meanings of landscape, as used by the many people encountered at meetings held in connection with the convention. Through these interpersonal contacts, I have managed to put together a collection of definitions and comments that reflect a personal, rather than an expert, perspective.

In the light of all these discussions, it is clear that this linguistic and semantic diversity has not been, and is still not, a barrier to implementing the European Landscape Convention. Far from it.

In order to better understand this seemingly paradoxical situation, I propose to begin by looking at the words used to denote landscape, and the meanings assigned to them, across the vast pan-European area. Just as language is a reflection of how populations think, so the law is a reflection of how societies think. The second part of this report deals with the various accepted meanings of "landscape" in the international instruments that apply in Europe. The third and final part provides a brief description of how words and their meanings have inspired methods of identifying, assessing and describing landscapes under Article 6.c of the European Landscape Convention.

1. LANDSCAPE IN THE LANGUAGES OF EUROPE

The word "landscape" is relatively recent. Experts have found references to "*landschap*" in the Netherlands in 1462 and to "*paysage*" in France, "*paesaggio*" in Italy and "*paisagem*" in Portugal around 1550. In the Netherlands, "*landschap*" refers to the abundance that was expected to flow from the cultivation of land reclaimed from the sea. Flemish paintings are a wonderful testimony to this very close link between *landschap* and a social utopia characterised by abundance born of intelligent spatial planning. Evidence of this kind of thinking can be found in the famous frescoes *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* which, since 1339, have adorned the walls of Siena town hall in Italy. The French term *paysage* differs from *landschap* as the oldest known definition in French, meaning "a painting depicting a rural scene or a garden". In this instance, therefore, landscape thinking is, above all, the expression of satisfaction in the aesthetic relationship with the land.

A third important word that one comes across in Europe is "*krajina*", derived from the Slav languages. This refers first and foremost to an area or province, clearly delineated by a well-guarded border.

One feature common to all of these words is the fact that their root (land, *pays*, *kraj*) signifies country, land, place. Such roots are to be found in most

languages. The Finnish "*maisema*" and the Estonian "*maastik*", for example, have a common root, "*maa*", which means country, land, province. From the very beginning, therefore, landscape has been tied, in one way or another, to the territory where people live.

1.1. The first factor in the wide variety of meanings assigned to landscape is the way in which words have migrated within Europe

As we know, Europe is a tremendous hub for interchange and cross-pollination. Since they first emerged, the terms "*landschap*", "*paysage*" and "*krajina*" have spread far and wide. While, in many cases, the terms themselves still sound familiar, their meaning will sometimes have changed considerably, depending on the country.

The German word "*Landschaft*", for example, made its way to Russia where "*ландшафт*" (*landshaft*) denotes the immense expanses of nature that are so much a feature of that vast country. The French "*paysage*" likewise travelled to Russia and "*пейзаж*" (*peyzazh*) means tracts of land that have benefited from the attention of a landscape architect. The word was most likely imported in the 18th century by Catherine II who brought in French landscape gardeners to work on numerous extensive projects to beautify her native land.

Elsewhere, words were imported in response to changing concepts or policies.

1.2. A second factor in the diversity of meanings assigned to landscape is the variety of languages spoken in a given country

In Finland, three official languages are spoken: Swedish (*landskap*), Finnish (*maisema*) and the Sami language (*eanadat*). In Belgium, there are also three official languages: French (*paysage*), Flemish (*Landschap*) and German (*Landschaft*).

In some countries the picture is more complex because, even though there is only one official language, several languages and dialects are spoken, each conveying a different understanding of the word "landscape".

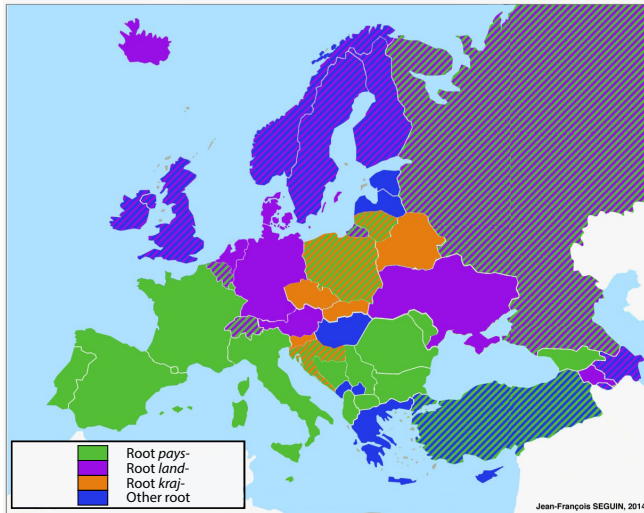
In France, the official language is French. Depending on the region, however, the Alsatians will talk about "*Làndschaft*", the Bretons "*maezad*", the Basques "*paisaia*", the Catalans "*paisatge*", the people of Provence "*païsage*" and the Corsicans "*païsiu*".

1.3. A third factor in the wide variety of meanings is the existence of several words, or several meanings of the same word, within the same language

In some countries, two distinct words, reflecting two different approaches to landscape, have emerged from the same linguistic root. In Croatia, for example, two terms are employed: "*krajolik*" and "*krajobraz*". *Krajolik* is used mainly in human and social sciences while *krajobraz* tends to be employed more in the field of life and earth sciences.

Conversely, within one and the same country, the same word may have two meanings. In Sweden, for instance, “*landskap*” refers to landscape as “an historical, political territorial unit founded on cultural and geographical features which many people identify with”, *landskap* being equivalent here to “province”. *Landskap* is also, however, “the physical setting or environment in general terms, including a scenic dimension”.

Figure 84. Map of the main roots of the words used to denote “landscape”



Some initial conclusions from this brief survey

Throughout Europe, landscape is the reflection of a very powerful bond between individuals, their communities and where they live. This bond takes many shapes and forms but it is fair to say there are three main types of relations:

1. Through landscape, individuals and communities express satisfaction with the harmonious nature of the area where they live and which they have transformed in order to make it habitable. This harmony is reflected in the patterns observed, which are in keeping with aesthetic values. Landscape, in this sense, is about both the land and how it is portrayed in art and literature. This visual connection with the land is expressed through the notion of expanse, which explains, for example, Europeans' attachment to what are referred to as “open” landscapes.
2. Through landscape, individuals and communities express satisfaction with the natural resources which the land places at their disposal, as it were. The French geographer Vidal de la Blache, indeed, defined the French term “*contrée*” as follows: “a ‘*contrée*’ is a reservoir where energies lie dormant. These energies, of which nature planted the seed, depend for their use on Man”. “*Contrée*” is the origin of the English word “country” which most definitely implies places where humankind has succeeded in harnessing the forces of nature. Landscape is, in this sense, more “rural” or even “natural” in character.

3. Through landscape, individuals and communities express satisfaction with the quality of their surroundings. Landscape here means our everyday surroundings, as shaped by social and economic relations, and cannot be reduced to nature or culture alone. The Norwegian representative in the group of experts responsible for drafting the European Landscape Convention said that, in her view, “nature is our culture”. Landscape is both a window and a mirror of these surroundings, and of individual and collective well-being. Our relationship with this landscape is the ambivalent one of the spectator-cum-actor. The European Landscape Convention acknowledges this fact in its preamble: “Wishing to respond to the public’s wish to enjoy high-quality landscapes and to play an active part in the development of landscapes”.

“Landscape”, in all its linguistic diversity, is understood by Europeans to mean a visual and aesthetic relationship with the land, as a natural territorial resource and as the territorial setting which “contributes to human fulfilment”. These three aspects of the concept of landscape are not disjointed, however. Each individual, and each community, makes use of these three approaches to landscape, depending on the time, place and circumstances.

It was no doubt thanks to this that the Council of Europe, drawing on the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, was able to come up with a single definition of landscape, one that owes its success partly to the fact that the definition is open-ended and respects the wide range of linguistic features. At the same time, this definition provides an aid to communication and discussion, which all Europeans can adopt and use.

2. LANDSCAPE IN LEGAL INSTRUMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

If language is a reflection of a population’s culture, then the law is a reflection of society’s culture. It is interesting, therefore, to examine the different meanings of landscape that have informed law-making.

It was neither feasible, nor indeed desirable, to examine all the domestic laws within the compass of this brief report. Attention has therefore been focused solely on international instruments: European Union directives and conventions at various levels.

Recommendation No. R(79) 9 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states concerning the identification and evaluation card for the protection of natural landscapes reads: “natural and semi-natural landscapes: the natural environment including the physical environment as a whole (climate, soil, water), the biocenoses (flora, vegetation, fauna), the whole more or less formed by man and by past and present social and economic factors”. Although, strictly speaking, this text has no legal force, it is interesting because it provides a definition of “natural and semi-natural landscape”. This natural landscape is understood to mean the physical environment and biocenoses, more or less formed by man. Landscape here is not a place for people to live in, but first and foremost a habitat for wild flora and fauna.

European Council Directive 85/337/EEC of 27 June 1985 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (Article 3) states that: "The environmental impact assessment will identify, describe and assess in an appropriate manner ... the direct and indirect effects of a project on the following factors:

- ▶ human beings, fauna and flora;
- ▶ soil, water, air, climate and the landscape;
- ▶ the interaction between the factors mentioned in the first and second indents;
- ▶ material assets and the cultural heritage."

In this directive, landscape is understood to be one of the component elements of the environment in the widest sense, since it also includes cultural heritage. These components are divided into four categories, with landscape being classed among the abiotic elements (soil, water, air, climate).

European Council Directive 92/43/CEE of 21 Mai 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora calls upon member states of the European Union to encourage, through land-use planning and development policies, "the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora". This binding legal instrument sees in landscape (or at any rate landscape features) an environment conducive to wild flora and fauna, rather than to the growth of human settlements.

The UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) does not deal with landscape. It was not until 1994 that the "Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention" introduced, within cultural heritage, the concept of "cultural landscapes", meaning landscapes which "represent the 'combined works of nature and of man' designated in Article 1 of the convention" ("cultural heritage" includes sites that are "works of man or the combined works of nature and of man"). In the interests of efficiency, the guidelines explain that "cultural landscapes fall into three main categories, namely:

- (i) ... clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man. This embraces garden and parkland landscapes constructed for aesthetic reasons, which are often (but not always) associated with religious or other monumental buildings and ensembles.
- (ii) ... evolved landscape. This results from an initial social, economic, administrative, and/or religious imperative and has developed its present form by association with and in response to, its natural environment. ...
- (iii) ... associative cultural landscape. The inclusion of such landscapes on the World Heritage List is justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element, rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent".

Landscape is regarded here as a product of culture, that is to say, as a work "constructed for aesthetic reasons", in "response to its natural environment" or as a projection of "religious, artistic or cultural" phenomena on the natural element.

Interestingly, the convention makes no mention of landscape in the context of natural heritage even though this natural heritage can also have a powerful aesthetic dimension. The guidelines, indeed, state that among the criteria used to determine outstanding universal value, sites must “contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance”.

The objective of the protocol on the implementation of the 1991 Alpine Convention which relates to the conservation of nature and the countryside (1994) is to “protect, care for and, to the extent necessary, restore nature and the countryside in such a way as to ensure ... the diversity, specificity and beauty of the natural and rural landscape”. Landscape here is viewed primarily in terms of an aesthetic relationship with natural and rural areas. The aesthetic qualities of alpine landscapes are based on three “values”: “diversity, specificity and beauty”.

The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus, 1998) recognises landscape as one of the environmental elements, namely “air and atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscape and natural sites, biological diversity and its components, including genetically modified organisms, and the interaction among these elements” (Article 2.3).

Although it is a United Nations document, this convention adopts the concept contained in the European Union directive of 1985 on the assessment of the impact of certain public and private projects on the environment. Landscape is an element of the environment but, this time, it is not confined to abiotic features. What is interesting about the concept of landscape that seems to have inspired the Aarhus convention is that some languages, such as Creole and at least one of the Sami languages, do not, strictly speaking, have a term for landscape. Instead, another word is used, such as *alentou* in Caribbean Creole or *eanadat* in the Inari region of Finland, which means that which is “around” a person or community, that is, the surroundings. Because of the lifestyle of these population groups, landscape is conceived in terms of a place in which to live.

As far as the European Landscape Convention (2000) is concerned, landscape is “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (Article 1.a). This definition deliberately invites us to view landscape from the perspective of well-being and quality of life. The preamble to the convention is quite clear in this respect: “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere” and “the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being”. “Landscape” here is considered with reference not to nature or culture, but rather to close interaction of “natural and/or human factors”.

The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (2003) takes into account “the high ecological importance of Carpathian mountain ecosystems, such as natural and semi-natural grasslands, as part of the ecological networks, landscapes and traditional land-use”. This convention proceeds from the position that ecosystems, which may be anthropised, are part of the landscape. Landscape is thus understood here as the “traditional”, highly environmentally responsible relationship between communities and nature.

What broad conclusions may be drawn from this quick glance at the international instruments on landscape?

The first is that, since 1979, the concept of landscape has not evolved in a linear fashion over time. The variations in the meaning of landscape show that, instead, the concept has acquired various additional meanings depending on the focus of the different instruments developed.

These various meanings can be divided into three broad categories:

1. *Landscape is the aesthetic face of territory.* The UNESCO World Heritage Convention and the Alpine Convention are both examples of this approach.
2. *Landscape is the natural face of territory.* More accurately, landscape is first and foremost a concept that relates to pieces of land where human action is not the dominant feature. In this view, landscape is synonymous with the natural environment and ecosystems, as well as rural areas, usually ones that have been developed by farmers. The directive on natural habitats, the Carpathian Convention and the 6th Environment Action Programme¹ are all typical of this approach.
3. *Landscape is a place where populations live.* Legal instruments assign it the task of humanising the notion of environment in order to turn it into a political issue, a question of democracy rather than a subject for experts alone. The Aarhus Convention and the European Landscape Convention best exemplify this approach.

3. CONCEPTS OF LANDSCAPE AND METHODS OF IDENTIFICATION

It appears from this brief overview of the different connotations of landscape in language (as a means of expressing a population's culture) and in legal instruments (as a means of expressing society's culture) that there are three approaches to landscape which are distinctive yet interconnected: a visual, aesthetic approach; a natural, biological approach; and a political, societal approach.

Together these three facets form the "prism" of landscape, as it were. For each of these approaches, scientific and technical concepts have been developed which can be used to implement Article 6.C of the European Landscape Convention: "each Party undertakes: to identify its own landscapes throughout its territory; to analyse their characteristics and the forces and pressures transforming them; to take note of changes; to assess the landscapes thus identified, taking into account the particular values assigned to them by the interested parties and the population concerned".

A study of the various methods for identifying and assessing landscapes shows that these methods can be divided into three categories, with one for each landscape approach.

1. The 6th Environment Action Programme (European Union 2003) takes the view that "preservation and improvement of landscapes are important to quality of life and rural tourism as well as to the functioning of natural systems". This action programme differs from the other texts in that it assigns an economic value to landscape through "rural tourism". Yet although the programme refers to quality of life, and 80% of Europeans live in towns or cities, it very clearly associates landscapes solely with rural and natural areas.

3.1. The “sensitive” approach

The first method is based on the visual, aesthetic approach. Known as the “sensitive approach”, it relies on the “expert sensitivity” of landscape designers, a sensitivity that allows them to translate what they, as experts, feel about a particular landscape into “landscape ambience” which confers a distinctive character on the territory in question.

This approach was developed in France in the late 1960s, when the “Délégation à l’aménagement du territoire et à l’action régionale” launched the “Organisations d’études d’aménagement des aires métropolitaines” (OREAM). According to the landscape architects, who played a key part in the scheme, this approach helps unify landscaping practices from designing parks and gardens to creating larger landscapes.

The “sensitive” approach is first and foremost a visual one in which areas are assessed by a “trained eye” in terms of their land-use features, internal organisation and “kinetic” aspects.

Landscape units are identified by “locating the visual boundaries of the study area as physical barriers apt to restrict the field of vision and hence provide information about the shape and size of the spaces engendered”.

The landscape units thus identified can be divided into different types of landscapes that are clearly based on visual characteristics, such as “compartmentalised landscape”, “enclosed landscape with clearings”, “theatre wings landscapes”, “open landscape”, and so on.

3.2. The elements-based approach

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, England’s Countryside Commission developed guidelines for “Landscape Character Assessment” (LCA) and “Historic Landscape Characterisation” (HLC).

“Landscape character” is based on a series of analyses of geological features, geomorphology, hydrography, soil, vegetation, land use and human settlements.

The perception of “landscape character” is guided here by the choices made when defining, selecting and prioritising the various elements.

NCA [National Character Areas] divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries (Natural England 2014).

This approach proceeds from the assumption that:

The character and biodiversity of the landscape are closely linked. Many of the features that contribute most to our appreciation of the landscape – trees and hedges, ancient woodlands, the flowers of old meadows, pastures and heaths – are an essential part of its biodiversity. (Durham Landscape, UK, 2011)

3.3. The “structuralist” approach

The “structuralist” approach is inspired by the concepts and principles of spatial analysis popular among geographers. Here, landscape is understood as being the place where populations live, as “a key element of individual and social well-being”.

It first emerged in France in the early 1990s with the passing of the 1993 “Landscape Act” which introduced the terms “landscape unit”, “landscape structure” and “landscape elements”. The publication of *Méthode pour des Atlas de paysages* (Luginbühl et al. 1994) marked the birth of this approach.

The “structuralist” approach is based on the study of landscape structures and focuses on the organisational structure of landscape elements over the territory in question.

Landscape structures are a reflection of the tangible and intangible relations that connect these elements to one another and how they are perceived by populations. In this respect, they arise from the interaction between the biophysical structure and the social structure of a particular territory. They represent the characteristic features of a given landscape, enabling it to be identified as a landscape unit, which is the piece of territory corresponding to the presence of specific landscape structures, one of which is said to be the dominant landscape structure.

In order to describe landscapes, the structuralist approach studies and spatialises the “forces and pressures transforming” landscape structures. These forces and pressures are symbolic, social, economic, natural and political in nature. The forces and pressures are studied over the long term (history of landscapes) or in the present.

Another characteristic feature of the structuralist approach is that, in order to assess landscapes, it studies and spatialises “the particular values assigned to them by the interested parties and the population concerned” (European Landscape Convention, Article 6.C). This assessment can be used “with the active participation of the interested parties” (Article 6.C) through the introduction of “procedures for participation by the general public” (Article 5.C).

Landscape units can be mapped on any scale and attached to various types of landscapes.

This structuralist approach is effectively a synthesis of the so-called “sensitive” approach and the “elements-based” approach in that it is concerned with how populations make spontaneous connections between nature and culture. In this view, landscape structures are the idea of interconnectedness between the physical (natural) components of a particular territory or piece of territory, according to sociocultural systems.

CONCLUSIONS

The great multitude and variety of terms and meanings of landscape across the different countries which have signed up to the European Landscape Convention have not generated misunderstanding and incomprehension between populations or between “specialists in landscape appraisal and operations”. Far from being a

Tower of Babel, Europe affords tremendous opportunities for the interchange of terminology, ideas and experience, populations and social and political systems.

The multitude and diversity of the terms used both in conversations between people and in international legal agreements are not an indication of disagreement, and hence a weakness. Rather, they are a reflection of the three faces of the “prism of landscape” on which populations and societies draw, depending on the time, place and circumstances.

The European Landscape Convention is, quite deliberately, not prescriptive. It cannot be used, therefore, to impose any one of the three main accepted meanings of landscape, even though the definition set out in Article 1 refers to landscape in the sense of people’s surroundings.

The convergence of meanings of commonly used words, legal terminology and methods is reassuring, because it means that everywhere in Europe, landscape policies and tools for implementing them can be devised that accord with the “aspirations of the public with regard to the landscape features of their surroundings”.

APPENDIX

Selected multilingual glossary

Terms gleaned from participants in workshops, conferences and meetings held by the Council of Europe Secretariat of the European Landscape Convention

Albanian	<i>peizazh</i>
Alsatian	<i>Làndschàft</i>
Andorran	<i>paisatge</i>
Azeri	<i>mənzərə, landşaft</i>
Basque	<i>paisaia</i>
Belarusian	<i>peizaj, kraiaivid</i>
Breton	<i>maezad</i>
Catalan	<i>paisatge</i>
Corsican	<i>paisagiu</i>
Creole	<i>alentou</i>
Croatian	<i>krajobraz, krajolik</i>
Czech	<i>krajina</i>
Dutch	<i>landschap</i>
English	<i>landscape</i>
Estonian	<i>maastik</i>
Finnish	<i>maisema</i>
French	<i>paysage</i>
Galician	<i>paisaxe</i>
Georgian	<i>peizaji</i>

German	<i>Landschaft</i>
Greek	<i>τοπίο (topio)</i>
Hungarian	<i>táj</i>
Icelandic	<i>landslag</i>
Irish	<i>tírdhreach (tir: land, native soil)</i>
Italian	<i>paesaggio</i>
Latvian	<i>ainava</i>
Lithuanian	<i>kraštovaizdis</i>
Macedonian	<i>сцена (scéna), пејзаж (pejzaž)</i>
Moldovan	<i>peisaj</i>
Montenegrin	<i>predio</i>
Norwegian	<i>landskap</i>
Polish	<i>krajobraz</i>
Portuguese	<i>paisagem</i>
Provençal	<i>païsage</i>
Romanian	<i>peisajul</i>
Russian	<i>ландшафт (Landschaft), пейзаж (paysage)</i>
Sami	<i>eapadat</i>
Serbian	<i>предео (predeo), пејзаж (pejzaž)</i>
Slovak	<i>krajina</i>
Slovenian	<i>krajina</i>
Spanish	<i>paisaje</i>
Swedish	<i>landskap</i>
Turkish	<i>peyzaj (development), manzara (view, vision), yatay (horizon)</i>
Ukrainian	<i>ландшафт (Landschaft), пейзаж (paysage), краєвид</i>
Valencian	<i>paisatge</i>
Wayana (Amerindian language of Guyana)	<i>ëwutë (village)</i>
Welsh	<i>tirwedd</i>

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