

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AND THEIR ROLE IN HERITAGE CONSERVATION

in less than 1000 words...

Landscape as heritage

Landscapes have accompanied humankind in our stroll through time, and as such landscapes represent the living archive of our civilization in its struggle to adapt to the natural environment and changeable circumstances; a palimpsest recording the layers of history. Landscapes include the traditional landscapes we are accustomed to such as the 'seascapes' along our coasts, the 'townscapes' of all urban and rural settlements which are now home to most of the planet's population, including plazas, squares, historic gardens and parks.

Landscapes have been created through an organic and cumulative process including both geological episodes lasting many millions of years as well as through human influence achieved by innumerable generations of people for millennia. Changes in landscape have accelerated in the last decades through the effects of demographic and climate changes, economic globalisation and crises, social divisions, etc., all of which have disrupted the traditional balance that existed between people and place.

Landscape architects manage these historic layers and the identity they provide together with the dynamics and integrity of natural ecosystems. Our aim is to reassert collective interests by surpassing cultural differences, therefore strengthening the links between people and their environment so as to ensure a quality of life for all. Our knowledge, skills and practical experience in landscape planning and development is used to provide advice to administrations, NGOs and civil society.

Landscapes are us

Landscapes are both cultural and natural constructs; but strangely, landscapes have not been recognised as heritage until fairly recently. UNESCO (1992) included Cultural Landscapes in the list of typologies for the World Heritage Convention¹; whilst in 2000 the Council of Europe approved a fundamental text, the European Landscape Convention². The Convention establishes landscape as a major component for the wellbeing of European citizens and promotes the protection, management and planning in order to achieve sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity and the environment.

A place for all

Another fundamental document for landscape heritage conservation has been the Florence Charter on Historic Gardens³ (1981), a doctrinal text which is the foundation stone for the preservation of historic parks and gardens worldwide. It understood these type of parkland landscapes as living monuments, the result of the work of nature and humankind in a fixed and limited space, and therefore subject to special conservation rules.

This Charter was produced by the ICOMOS-IFLA International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes⁴ (1969). This joint committee of both ICOMOS -the International Committee for Monuments and Sites⁵, a consultant NGO for UNESCO's World Heritage- and IFLA -the International Federation of Landscape Architects⁶ (1958)- is made up of professionals from both associations dedicated to landscape heritage. As such, we have provided our input to many important national and international texts. Landscape Architects are recognised by the United Nations and registered in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva⁷. According to this organisation, and as regards landscape heritage, one of the tasks of landscape architects is to undertake planning, design, restoration, management and maintenance of cultural and historic landscapes, parks, sites and gardens.

Landscape in Europe

In Europe, IFLA is represented by the European Region of the International Federation of Landscape Architects⁸ (1998), which is present in 34 European countries by means of a national representative organisation. Being itself an NGO, IFLA EUROPE not only aims at defending the landscape architecture profession, recognizing excellence in educational courses and promoting the best practice operations in all member countries, but strives to enhance the quality of the landscapes we live in.

In the last years, IFLA EUROPE has provided documents on Landscape Democracy (Oslo Resolution 2014⁹), Cultural Landscapes (Lisbon Resolution 2015¹⁰), Urban Landscapes (Brussels Resolution 2016¹¹), Migration (Bucharest Resolution 2017¹²), and Climate Challenges (London Resolution 2018¹³) so as to encourage the administration at European level but also all professionals and citizens alike to promote actions in favour of our landscapes.

Providing guidance

The Council of Europe has been giving guidance as regards our landscapes via other Conventions, namely:

- ✓ the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage (known as the [Granada Convention, 1985](#)¹⁴), which includes “sites” -defined as the combined works of man and nature- and obliges signatory countries to undertake their adequate conservation.
- ✓ the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society ([Faro Convention, 2005](#)¹⁵) which established the need to put people and human values at the centre of an enlarged and broader concept of cultural heritage.
- ✓ As landscapes are the combined works of humankind and nature, the Council of Europe has also produced important documents for the protection of nature amongst which the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats ([Bern Convention, 1979](#)¹⁶). These habitats constitute a natural heritage of aesthetic, scientific, cultural, recreational, economic and intrinsic value that needs to be preserved for future generations.

The above Conventions set a framework for actions by the European countries, which were taken one step further by the Council of Europe via its Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning to encourage the protection, management and enhancement of landscapes through the [Guiding principles for sustainable development in Europe, 2000](#)¹⁷.

Contribution to Strategy 21's goals

By means of the [European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century](#)¹⁸ the Council of Europe is proposing an active implementation of heritage conservation policies whose core values rely on democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms along with equal dignity and sensitivity to diversity. Landscape architects embrace the call on professionals for participatory management in the Strategy as we believe firmly in landscape's potential as a means to reach these aims. At present, many landscapes are undergoing a deterioration in both their cultural and environmental processes which is having significant impact on human livelihoods with many communities forced to change the way they live, work and socialise. Humanity must act.

Link references

- 1 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>
- 2 <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680080621>
- 3 https://www.icomos.org/charters/gardens_e.pdf
- 4 <http://landscapes.icomos.org/index.php/en/>
- 5 <https://www.icomos.org/en/>
- 6 <http://iflaonline.org/>
- 7 <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>
- 8 <http://iflaeurope.eu/>
- 9 <http://iflaeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/03/IFLA-EU-resolution-Landscape-democracy.pdf>
- 10 <http://iflaeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/03/IFLA-EU-Resolution-2015.pdf>

Landscape is integrative

Participatory governance of our common landscapes will mean stepping forwards from a national based identity to a European culture established on diversity and plurality, offering the opportunity of a shared democracy in its management towards a sustainable future. Landscape, with its culture and history, is part of our sense of home, so the preservation of its characteristic elements is vital and can assist in ensuring a 'sense of place' and social cohesion. (Strategy 21- S1-S3-S4-S5-S6-S8-S9-S10).

Landscape is dynamic

Managing our landscape heritage in an integrated and holistic approach must draw from local traditions, using innovative solutions to ensure efficient use of resources and environmental sustainability. Together, professionals and administrators alike, must make effective use of our natural capital to deliver cultural ecosystem services so as to inspire social and economic transformations thereby providing a quality of life for our populations. (Strategy 21- D1-D2-D3-D4-D5-D6-D7-D8-D10- D11).

Landscape is knowledge

Landscape education is fundamental as a repository of our past and as the founding stone of our future. Cultural policies are required in order to enhance education, training and professional competences will help raise awareness with regard to landscape heritage and perception. The use of our skills and experience are necessary to help create true quality of life for generations to come. (Strategy 21- K1-K2-K4-K5-K6-K7-K8-K9-K10-K11).

- 11 <http://iflaeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/03/2016-Resolution-Urban-Landscapes-signed.pdf>
- 12 <http://iflaeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/03/2017-Resolution-Unlimited-Landscapes.pdf>
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- 17 <https://rm.coe.int/1680700173>
- 18 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/strategy-21>

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