

Landscape following in the footsteps of Human Rights

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The European Landscape Convention is the first international treaty to focus exclusively on all aspects of European landscape. In a very short space of time, it has transformed our view of land. It has given landscape the value of a shared public asset, of a resource inextricably linked to human rights. It removes political and cultural lines and offers citizens a leading role in shaping their environment.

On October 20th 2010, in Florence, the Council of Europe celebrated the 10th anniversary of the opening for signature to member states of the European Landscape Convention. In the space of just ten years, this text, designed to promote the protection, management and development of European landscapes, has been able to attract the interest of governments, as we were reminded at the event by Gabriella Battainai-Dragoni, Director General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport. This convention has been signed by 38 of the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe and 33 have ratified it. Its influence has extended beyond the borders of

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Europe. It has inspired non-member countries of the Council of Europe and serves as an example on other continents. Many hope to take up its principles at global level.

Inscribing a new shared asset

The European Landscape Convention has profoundly changed our vision of land and how it is managed. The technical and political approach has undergone a paradigm shift. Unlike earlier policies that were too centred on inheritance and protection, defined only by experts at the request of one policy-maker, the text offers a progressive vision of landscape that derives its source and value from the viewpoint of the inhabitants. It encompasses all the various tangible and intangible elements that make up the living area of populations. It no longer seeks to line up a series of outstanding physical features, but adopts instead a holistic approach, be it at local or pan-European level, tied to all the resources and needs of human life. It represents a «shared asset of collective interest».

Incentive actions and mechanisms

The European Landscape Convention owes its success to five key factors:

1. A formal national commitment, through the signature and ratification of the treaty.
2. Theoretical, methodological and practical implementation tools, contained in the appendices of the Convention², that are, above all, non-normative, allowing each State to govern its own policy and freely define its own landscape quality goals.

² *Guidelines for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention*, CM/REC(2008)3.

3. Shared technical and scientific assistance through the provision of a common database, accessible on the Council of Europe website³, and by organising regular international workshops on common issues.
4. A standing invitation to improve education on the values of landscape. The Convention bodies require the Parties to promote awareness among ordinary citizens, private organisations and public authorities about the value of landscapes, their role and their transformation. With the combined help of the States and the NGOs, they encourage the training of specialists and associations. They encourage the promotion of “school and university courses which, in the relevant subject areas, address the values linked to landscapes and the issues raised by their protection, management and development”.
5. A new and effective awareness tool: the Council of Europe European Landscape Prize. This prize was established by the treaty and constitutes an educational tool with a cascade effect: more and more States have set up their own national prizes under the European Landscape Convention, so they can submit their winner as a candidate for the European Prize. The result has been a growing understanding of landscape factors as promoted under the Convention.

Furthering democracy and the protection of Human Rights

The most innovative aspect of this Convention is, without doubt, the place it gives to citizens with respect to the principles defended by the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

³http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Landscape/default_fr.asp. See also <http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/La-Convention-Europeenne-du.html>

Like the Rio and Aarhus Conventions before it, the Florence Convention makes a substantial contribution to democracy. From the definition of landscape to its management, the inhabitant is tied to each step of the decision-making process.

The Convention makes an even clearer statement on Human Rights. Designed to respond to the transformations that regions undergo, it invites States to “recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people’s surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity” (art. 5a). In addition to the appearance of the environment and the harmony rightly sought after, the fundamental living conditions of inhabitants are now taken into account: chief among them, the right to security. The protection and restoration of ecosystems, the reduction of pollution and threats from natural and industrial risks and the health of the habitat are all key considerations. The landscape of experts has given way to that of users.

The “social demand of landscape”, as analysed by Yves Luginbühl, one of the experts behind the Convention’s main concepts, meets these various expectations, be they aesthetic, cultural, economic, social or environmental. Expectations that should be, for the most part, inalienable rights.

A mechanism that promotes social cohesion

These second-generation human rights come with responsibilities for each of the landscape stakeholders. Here we find, paradoxically, the seeds of social cohesion: such cohesion is only possible if everyone takes responsibility for and a position to cooperate, without guilt, over a defined region that is not subject to prejudice.

In this respect, the European Landscape Convention offers, in my view, one of the most promising avenues of committed action at local level. The framing of landscape “as it is viewed by inhabitants” goes much further than “the voice of the inhabitant” and principles of good governance. Its approach is to draw on the “collective intelligence⁴” and bring to fruition a merging of parallel and even conflicting interests – an idea that would be improbable in other sectors. It encourages research with a common focus, essential in a multicultural context. It helps foster the cohesive identification with a place as this place now has a real sense of value. This last point explains the success of the landscape designers in completing work as “brokers”⁵ in some deprived urban areas. Two good examples of this are in Pau⁶ and Cenon in the Southwest of France.

Finally, this channelling of energies towards the improvement of our surroundings contributes to a “new landscape culture” as advocated by the Convention drafted by the Council of Europe on behalf of its main founder members.

⁴ Jean-François Seguin, chair of the Conference for the European Landscape Convention, representing France.

⁵ Association «Passeurs» (Antoine Luginbühl et Rémy Bercovitz), <http://assopasseurs.blogspot.fr/>

⁶ Agence nationale pour la rénovation urbaine (National Agency for Urban Renovation) (ANRU), Pena and Peña landscape architects, « Projet Parc-en-ciel, Pau, Quartier du Hameau, Les habitants imaginent leur parc (Park-in-the-sky Project, Pau, Hameau district, Inhabitants dream up their own park) » <http://www.anru.fr/Pau-Quartier-du-Hameau-Les.html>

The European Landscape Award

This biennial prize is awarded by the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe to local or regional authorities, or to an ONG proposed by a State that has ratified the convention.

Competition rules

The project, one per State, must have been open to the public for at least 3 years and meet 4 criteria:

- *Sustainable development.* It should be part of an overall policy and “demonstrate environmental, social, economic, cultural and aesthetic sustainability; counter or remedy any damage to landscape structures; help enhance and enrich the landscape and develop new qualities”.
- *Exemplary value.* It should set an example of good practice for others to follow.
- *Public participation.* It should involve the active participation of all the stakeholders.
- *Awareness-raising.* It should promote awareness among ordinary citizens, private organisations and public authorities about the value of landscapes, their role and their transformation.

The international jury is composed of 7 members and presents its proposal to the Committee of Ministers, the executive body of the Council of Europe. The inaugural Prize took place in 2009 and 8 entries were submitted to the jury (Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Turkey). France’s proposal (Parc de la Deûle) was awarded the top prize. In 2011, 14 entries were submitted.