

A forward-looking convention: European landscapes for the 21st Century*

by Graham Fairclough

Landscape is the most accessible and inclusive of all aspects of heritage. It is everywhere, so that every citizen has continuous access to some part of it, and it is personal and inclusive, because out of memory, associations and knowledge everyone builds their own perceptions. It is therefore highly appropriate that the Council of Europe's newest convention concerns landscape as living culture. The sustainable and democratic management of Europe's landscape is essential for shaping the future setting of peoples' lives, as well as for passing on the landscape that we have inherited. Landscape management is about finding ways to negotiate the transition from yesterday's world to tomorrow's landscape. This transition needs to create a well-managed, thriving landscape that people need for social, cultural and economic health whilst at the same time sustaining the rich palimpsest of landscape history and nature that helps to explain our history, culture and identity.

An important step forward

The European Landscape Convention is the first Instrument devoted exclusively to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It is an important step forward, taking the Council of Europe's family of heritage conventions (Bern, Grenada, Valetta) into new territory. It does not simply add another type of heritage to the canon, but takes a new approach by promoting the cultural significance and social value of all landscapes. It expands the concern of earlier conventions for parts of the heritage to a concern for the whole landscape.

The convention breaks new ground in several ways. Its new definition is significant because of its simplicity and inclusiveness: "*landscape* means an area, perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". These words emphasise the importance of people, today ("perception") as much as in the past, and they embody recognition of the part played by human actions and the passage of time as well as by the processes of nature. They also underline the dominance of the interaction of nature and culture in making landscape, thereby encouraging integration and co-operation between separate disciplines. The convention also recognises that ordinary, typical, "everyday" landscapes, often characterised as much by human impact as by "natural beauty", have their own special value, contributing to the rich variety of the European landscape.

A product of peoples' perception

The definition of the European Landscape Convention, significantly, begins with the promise that landscape is a product of peoples' perception. Landscape in other words is not simply another word for environment - it is created in the eyes, minds and hearts of beholders when the material, "real" components of our environment are seen through the filters of memory and association, understanding and Interpretation. Landscape appreciation is not solely a matter for expert judgments, and one of the convention's strengths is its recognition of the need for dialogue and exchange across the full spectrum of society. Everyone can create their own perceptions of the landscape where they live or work, and it is these democratic perceptions that give landscape its cultural and social as well as environmental and economic significance. Democratising landscape, however, requires citizens to have access to the processes of deciding which landscapes are most valued and, more importantly, access to the decision-making processes by which landscape is changed, protected and managed. The convention is therefore a democratising Instrument, stating unequivocally that landscape is a common heritage and a shared resource. It emphasises that everyone therefore has the right and the responsibility to help in constructing and protecting our perception of it. Action on landscape, reflecting local circumstances, is needed at every level, from the pan-European to the local, from the expert to the personal, and at local and regional as well as national government level.

Innovative insistence

This democratic aspect is underlined by the European Landscape Convention's innovative insistence that its aspirations and ambitions apply everywhere, to the whole landscape. Other measures may apply particular protection to especially beautiful or apparently natural areas

within the landscape, but the convention's democratic approach requires its application to so-called ordinary, "everyday" landscape, even to landscape perceived as spoiled or damaged. Any area of landscape has reached its current state by human/natural interaction through time, and whilst some aspects may be ugly or unnatural, they are nevertheless part of the cultural landscape's rich story. Whether very old or very recent, all landscapes are part of Europe's culture, the setting to someone's life, a focus of identity, and the foundation for creating Europe's landscape for the new century. Perhaps the convention's main message is that there is only one landscape, that all parts of it matter to someone, and that both cultural and natural aspects are essential to its character and explain its current appearance. It is not helpful to overlook the human impact on Europe's landscape any more than it is to ignore nature's role. Nor is it sustainable to pretend that the landscape is more natural than it is, nor to believe that biodiversity can be sustained in isolation from the cultural processes that created it. If the landscape that we have inherited is to be adequately managed and protected for the future, it is essential that all citizens have a clear understanding of what has made the landscape. The convention above all has a strong concern for awareness-raising, exchange of information and expertise, multidisciplinary approaches and the process of understanding and assessment: from mutual and widespread understanding can grow sustainable management. Foremost, however, is the need for better and stronger understanding, both of the landscape's history and character, and of people's perceptions, valuations and requirements of it.

European pathways to the cultural landscape - a European network

European pathways to the cultural landscape (EPCL) is a network of ten countries funded by the EU Culture 2000 programme. It works to promote awareness of the cultural landscape in twelve under-studied and often-overlooked areas of landscape. It is an enlargement of an earlier group of five projects, and we hope that it will continue to extend its scope in future programmes to other parts of Europe.

The network extends from Ireland to Estonia and from Finland to Italy, and thus covers a very wide range of European landscapes and environmental zones. The nine countries and their twelve projects are:

Czech Republic (Prachensko), Denmark (Funen), Estonia (Kaali), Finland (Untamala), Germany (Albersdorf and Spessart), Ireland (Dowris), Italy (Pan-evaggio/Vanoi), Sweden (Bjare and Halland), United Kingdom (Bowland/Lune Valley, Arfon).

The network thus covers an enormous diversity of European landscapes, all of which, however, have in common a significant archaeological and historic dimension to landscape character. A major aspect of the programme's work is staff exchange and seminars among members, ensuring the interchange of distinctive methods and the emergence of a shared appreciation of the landscape character and significance of each area. Our work is directed in the first instance to improving understanding and communicating this to the community. A particular emphasis, taking its cue from the network's title, will be the creation of both real (landscape trails) and virtual (web-based information) pathways into and through the landscapes.

In our work we have adopted the European Landscape Convention as a set of guiding principles; we also share a common philosophy of historic landscape characterisation, based on shared ideas about the historic and archaeological depth of the present-day landscape. Our project will also enter new territory by trying to understand people's perception of their own landscapes. We do not only wish to promote our own, experts' views of the significance and value of landscape, but also to learn from community and individual perceptions. The EPCL project has a website at <http://www.pcl-eu.de>