

Introductory explanation Draft White Paper.

Agenda point 3.1. UNISCAPE General Assembly, 5 July 2021

The White Paper on the Future of the European Landscape was announced during our Conference Cultivating Continuity of the European Landscape on 17 October 2020. It is intended as an integral element of UNISCAPE's ambition to set the scene for a reinforcement of the action perspective of the European Landscape Convention (ELC, or Florence Convention).

We observe an increasing need – after 20 years of the Florence Convention – to revisit the landscape as a fundamental starting point for societal transformation rather than considering it an object for impact studies. We received support for this position and for the White Paper idea from many colleagues and organisations in the landscape community. This was confirmed in an online meeting two weeks ago (16 June) with very constructive comments from a number of key players in this field. It is time to demand landscape-inclusive thinking at the level of policy makers and politicians!

After 13 years of activity, UNISCAPE does have something to convey, especially to the European Union, but also to our national and local authorities. We could definitely be more present in the political debate about European identity, spatial planning, land property, biodiversity, place making, agriculture, etc. Interestingly the EC has put forward the Green Deal, and the New Bauhaus; in such initiatives we think we could play a substantial role as well.

The White Paper – which is based on the Concept note distributed 18 June – should therefore be very reader-friendly and concise, using the language of policy makers and politicians. A longer version in academic wording will not be read. The present draft just indicates the basic ingredients, and thus will have to be thoroughly edited and nicely illustrated to effectively make our point.

However, we will invite all organisations interested to support the White Paper – as soon as finalised –, to confirm us their consent with it, and to send us a position paper explaining their specific position in the matter of the White Paper. These position papers will be published online with the White Paper on the UNISCAPE web site.

The White Paper Coordination Group

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20 years ago, the European Landscape Convention¹ saw the potential of a fully integrated landscape perspective to contribute to a more sustainable relationship between society and environment based on the recognition of mutual co-dependency. The unique strength of the Florence Convention is that it speaks directly to the existential standing of the living landscape as an evolving synthesis of natural forces and the human imagination. From the earliest cave paintings to modern street art, people have inscribed their values and identities onto the very landscapes that shaped them. From the paintbrush to the plough, it is in our nature to do so. The Florence Convention is a call not only to honour this essential fact but to understand and act on it.

Since the year 2000, new challenges and opportunities have entered the scene. Concerns around food and energy security, climate change, wellbeing, public health (e.g., pandemics), biodiversity loss, to mention but a few, are now central to societal and political agendas. On the other hand, systems thinking has expanded our possibilities to understand and take advantage of the synergic connections between the cultural, ecological, social, economic and perceptual dimensions of the landscape.

Within this new context, the goals of the Florence Convention are more valid than ever, best-practice case studies are in plentiful supply, but large-scale roll-out is lagging behind. As its *point de départ*, this White Paper is founded on the principle that the governance and management of the European landscape should be guided by sustainability, democracy, human rights, rule of law, and cultural and environmental diversity. It advocates throughout for a landscape-inclusive approach in all policy and planning fields that affect the landscape.

Following an open discussion with key social, political, economic and academic actors, this White Paper advances new strategic approaches to the further application and development of the Florence Convention. The White Paper addresses all of European society, with special emphasis on governmental bodies at international, national, regional and local level as the main visionary promoters of the future evolution of Europe, the European community, and the European Union. Four Priority Areas shape this White Paper.

Priority Area 1. MAKING EUROPE: A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Landscape cannot be created, understood or managed without people, hence the overarching importance of finding ways to widen public participation. Public participation generates social capital and builds social resilience. However, the extent to which landscape stewardship, governance and inclusivity has been democratised is questionable. Societies benefit greatly from concepts that unite people in mutual recognition of their common future, that define an intergenerational project and that link different interests for a common good. Landscape is one of those concepts and the Florence Convention offers a vision and a roadmap to construct the Europe we want by articulating different and complementary policies, directives and strategies.

With these considerations in mind, it is necessary to:

- Take advantage of the integrative potential of the landscape to advance the European project and to articulate its multiple socio-cultural, environmental and spatial dimensions;
- Promote deeper connections between people and places through landscape-inclusive community building and novel models of democratic governance;
- Link the landscape with a participative definition of strategies, designs and visions for the transformation of Europe, acknowledging the landscape as one of its most valuable and irreplaceable assets.

¹ *renamed the Council of Europe Landscape Convention by July 2021; in this White Paper Florence Convention, after the city where it was opened for ratification in 2000.*

Priority Area 2. LANDSCAPE AS MEDIATOR: TACKLING SOCIETAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

The challenge of our time can be conceptualised as the management of change. The integrative and systemic potential of the landscape approach to tackle complex and multifaceted challenges reveals its potential to mediate solutions to both societal and environmental challenges. Overcoming a metaphoric, passive or objectual approach, the landscape offers an integrative and necessary platform in which spaces acquire a cultural and experiential dimension and become places with identity, history, multifunctionality and a collectively envisioned and designed future.

The landscape acknowledges and fosters the diversity of Europe. The landscape frames at least eight EU Directives published since 2000 that speak, directly and indirectly, to the mutual dependency of people and environment. The landscape emerges as a concept with the capacity to amalgamate and find synergies between people's aspirations, policies and planning. Focussing on people while assessing the societal values of landscape connects strongly with the idea of the Anthropocene, and offers to guide responses to human-induced environmental problems, from climate change to social injustice.

With these considerations in mind, it is necessary to:

- Actively incorporate the landscape in all those policies that affect the landscape at different scales;
- Include the landscape in statutory planning tools and procedures at different scales, e.g. in Spatial and Land-Use planning, Rural Development, Urban planning, Green-infrastructure planning, Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment;
- Advance in the identification, characterisation and assessment of landscapes and in the definition of landscape quality objectives at different scales in order to inform planning and policies;
- Position the landscape as a pivotal concept in addressing broader challenges, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the EU Green Deal, etc.

Priority Area 3. LANDSCAPE KNOWLEDGE: BETTER DECISIONS – BETTER OUTCOMES

In-depth knowledge based on solid evidence is needed to link the landscape more effectively with decision-making processes. Reliable and up-to-date data are needed to inform and guide planning in a wide range of interconnected areas and to overcome short-termism and disconnected or competing policies. Managing the evolution of existing and future European landscapes will require increasing our capacity to define new trajectories and to envision desirable scenarios through a collective exercise of integration, creativity and imagination. Envisioning and materialisation of future European landscapes will require increasing our capacity to define new trajectories and to envision desirable scenarios through a collective exercise of integration, creativity, design and imagination. This exercise necessarily should be based on a deep understanding of the many dimensions of the landscape, in their synergic combination and in their alignment with the values that Europe wants to stand over.

With these considerations in mind, it is necessary to:

- Reinforce the socio-cultural and cultural heritage dimensions of the landscape and their role in the definition of operative and integrative frameworks supporting sustainable development;
- Engage an economic approach in landscape visioning and in the formulation of sustainable plans and policies safeguarding level playing fields, circular economies and an adequate balance between the global and the local;
- Acknowledge and describe the legal space of the landscape within the EU, national and regional juridical systems, recognising protection measures and acknowledging the rights of communities to participate in decisions affecting their landscapes. This means enshrining procedural rights beyond environmental aspects to also include the cultural and place-based dimensions of the landscape.

Priority Area 4. AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE LANDSCAPE

An Action Plan is needed to synchronise the Florence Convention with other policies so that in unison they can advance the programmes and aspirations of the European Union and the Council of Europe in respect of society, culture and the environment. It would be desirable to have internationally agreed benchmarks and inclusive platforms such as Landscape Observatories at national, regional and local level, to measure and report on the implementation of the Convention and its different measures: Awareness-raising; Training and Education; Identification and Assessment; and Landscape Quality Objectives.

Now, 20 years after the launching of the Florence Convention and its ratification by meanwhile 40 countries, with all the knowledge acquired during the last two decades, and with a better understanding of the challenges that we face and the Europe that we want, Europe deserves a strong reinforcement of the philosophy of the Florence Convention. Only a wide commitment to an Action Plan for the Landscape, based on a shared awareness of the urgency of the landscape-related challenges ahead, can renew and expand our compromise with the European landscape.
