

The future of the European landscape

The 20th anniversary of the European Landscape Convention

In 2000, 22 years ago, an important meeting took place in Florence. During this meeting, the European Landscape Convention (ELC) was adopted by the Council of Europe. Last autumn (September 2021), during a symposium organised by the *Werkgemeenschap voor Landschapsonderzoek* (Dutch Community for Landscape Research, WLO) and the *Netherlands Society for Garden and Landscape Architecture* (NVTL) about *The Future of the European Landscape*, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the ELC and took a look at the future of this Convention.

D. (David) van Zelm van Eldik
Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations
david.zelm@minbzk.nl

The ELC made an important contribution to raising awareness about European landscapes in the fields of law and policy and among citizens, particularly in its early days. This was also the case in the Netherlands, where the ELC was ratified in 2005. During the first years of this treaty, Dutch policy already met many of the criteria of the ELC, as can be read in the article written by Gerrit-Jan van Herwaarden and myself (this issue).

Due to the decentralisation of landscape policy in the Netherlands in 2011, landscape policy lost its national coherence. It could also be stated that a similar “European” coherence is lacking. Pieces of landscape policy are divided into different sectoral programmes of the European Union, such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Farm to Fork strategy or the Biodiversity strategy. This is both a strength and a weakness for the landscape. On the one hand, it could be argued that landscape at a European level is already an “integral” part of different policy fields, but at the same time, nobody is directly responsible for the landscape. Therefore, at present, landscape is all too often the accidental result of different sectoral choices for the short term. In other words, our landscape is frequently the aspect that suffers the most in regard to new spatial developments.

During the symposium, we concluded that although the (European) perspective of landscape is still not fully incorporated in many sectors, there are many opportunities to do so. Our Dutch programme “ONS Landschap” promotes the idea of a landscape-inclusive policy in which landscape is fully included in the major challenges ahead of us. The call from the Manifesto on the Future of the European Landscapes, which was drawn up by UNISCAPE as a result of the symposium, promotes this idea of incorporation by advocating, amongst other things, a European action plan and to include landscape as a part of the Green Deal.

Nowadays, the tide seems to be turning for landscape-inclusive policy, at least in the Netherlands. The Manifesto’s aim for landscape-inclusive policies is fully acknowledged by our new minister of Public Housing and Spatial Planning in his programme *Mooi Nederland* (Beautiful Netherlands). In this programme, spatial quality becomes an integral part of the challenges ahead of us, such as the energy transition, the effects of climate change and the housing crisis. In this special issue of *LANDSCHAP*, we discuss the challenges and opportunities for European landscapes.

This issue contains six articles all based on the different lectures given during the symposium “The Future of the European Landscape”.

In “Trends in European landscapes and their challenges for European landscape policies” Felix Kienast identifies four challenges for European landscape policies based on different landscape development trends. Preserving arcadic cultural landscapes should be complemented by policies for dynamic landscapes capable of accommodating the needs of a mobile society, adapting to climate change and serving energy transition.

In “The European Landscape Convention in the Netherlands”, Gerrit-Jan van Herwaarden & David Zelm van Eldik describe twenty years of implementation of the European Landscape Convention in the Netherlands. After a good start, national landscape policy was cut back and decentralised. Recently, it returned to the national stage with new environmental legislation and a new spatial planning. Much has been achieved, but still much is to be desired.

In “Mapping Europe’s landscape”, Johan Meeus & Thomas van den Brink analyse three different maps of European landscapes, made between 1995 and 2018, showing a development from technical to social mapping. The three maps show different ways of naming landscape units, from scientific to familiar geographic names. Naming of landscapes is important for identification with landscapes. Engagement of inhabitants in naming should be enhanced.

In “Community-based landscape awareness”, Pere Sala i Martí describes the role of the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia in awareness raising, a rather unique institute in Europe based on the ELC. The experience of the Landscape Observatory is that direct

action in the territory and dialogue have proven to be an effective way to positively influence a community’s attitudes toward the landscape and, indirectly, improve the state of the landscapes. Sala i Martí illustrates this with the landscape catalogues of Catalonia and the Cross-border Plan of La Cerdanya.

In “Landscape justice and vulnerable groups”, Jos Dekker, Kris van Koppen & Arjen Buijs explore the inclusion of vulnerable groups in landscape use and planning. Immigration brings new people from other cultures to the European continent with different visions and preferences regarding the landscape. Because of these differences, cultural minorities may lack access to landscape use and planning. In this contribution, the focus is on cultural minorities in the Netherlands.

In “Transitions leading to new landscapes”, Bas Pedroli sees a number of new transitions affecting the landscape. He explores the challenges of a landscape-inclusive approach founded on the principle that the governance of the European landscape should be guided by sustainability, democracy, human rights, rule of law, and cultural and environmental diversity. He reflects on three plausible visions for the desired future of the European landscape and the pathways leading to these.