



# Reframing the relationships between people and place

## Transitions leading to new landscapes

22 years ago, the European Landscape Convention saw the potential of a landscape perspective to contribute to a more sustainable relationship between society and environment based on the recognition of mutual co-dependency. Since 2000, new challenges and opportunities have entered the scene, inevitably changing the European landscape. Clear visions of future landscape are needed to allow for backcasting and to define landscape planning pathways to such a future. As such, landscape should be part of the solution, rather than the negative effect of the new challenges.

The European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000) focused on a fully integrated landscape approach to contribute to a more sustainable relationship between people and place. As a matter of fact, almost all policies – be it on a local, national or international level – at the end of the day, have an impact on the character and identity of landscape. As Robert Macfarlane put it: ‘On almost every front, we have begun a turning away from a felt relationship with the natural world’ (Macfarlane 2019). In other words, character and identity – as expressions of a felt relationship with the landscape – are getting less and less attention in spatial policies. The natural world, transformed in landscape, is generally not considered a prime policy issue for various reasons to be discussed in this paper. Since roughly the year 2000, specific major transitions have come to the foreground (Pinto-Correia *et al.*, 2018). Concerns around agricultural practices, climate change, food and energy security, well-being, public health (e.g. pandemics), biodiversity loss, globalisation, to mention but a few, are now central to societal and political agendas (see also Kienast, this issue). Planetary boundaries make that the earth is in the danger zone of various indicators, such as genetic diversity and nitrogen flows (Rockström *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, systems think-

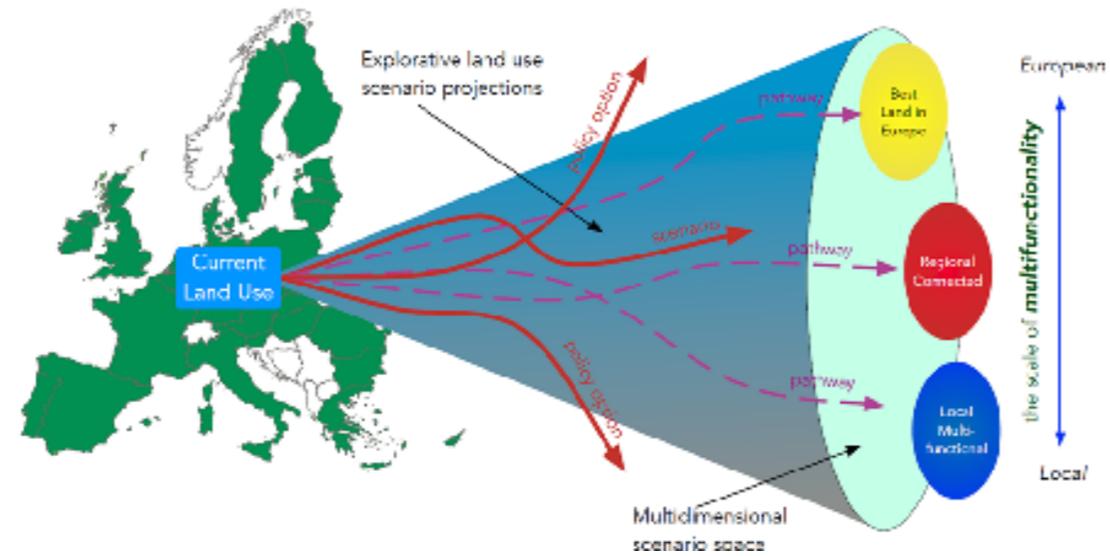
ing has expanded our possibilities to understand and take advantage of the synergic connections between the landscape’s cultural, ecological, social, economic, and perceived dimensions, but the large-scale roll-out is lagging behind. Reaching beyond the mere protection, management and planning of landscape from a national policy point of view, which as such formed a substantial policy innovation in 2000, landscape is now increasingly also approached as a vehicle itself for urban and spatial planning, rather than as an object to be protected, managed or planned (Nassauer, 2012). It could be claimed that landscape should not be considered the inevitably remaining problem inherent to the interaction of different sectoral interests, but rather the solution in complex urban and spatial planning projects (van Rooij *et al.*, 2021). Within this new context, this paper explores the challenges and opportunities of a landscape-inclusive approach (a landscape approach in which the landscape is a local to regional social-ecological system (Opdam & Steingröver, 2018)) in all policy and planning fields that affect the landscape. This 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 (UNISCAPE, 2021).

transitions  
visions  
pathways  
revitalisation  
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**Figure 1** Roadmapping process in the VOLANTE study (Pedroli *et al.*, 2015; Metzger *et al.*, 2018). Red arrows indicate pathways of land use transitions, of which some policy options are outside safe operating space; violet discontinuous arrows indicate pathways to the three visions defined. The funnel contains all scenario projections considered on the basis of stakeholder consultation.



### Which future visions do we prefer?

Roadmaps provide policy advice by suggesting possible strategies to achieve a desired future, e.g. for the journey to a post-Kyoto protocol (Cléménçon, 2008), linking plausible visions of desired futures to numerical models that incorporate uncertainties about future projections; roadmaps identify the pathways to reach the desired outcomes and broad and in-depth stakeholder engagement on scenarios, visions and trade-offs. However, a single roadmap for landscape development is difficult to develop given the dominant divergent archetypical visions in policy development. Still, a single unified vision could perhaps be derived by integrating elements of the various visions through a further iterative stakeholder engagement process, as suggested by Dammers *et al.* (2017) in a study focused on visions for future nature in Europe. Nevertheless, Pedroli *et al.*, (2015) (figure 1) reflected

on specific policy implications for three visions (summarised in box on next page).

The *Local Multifunctional* vision appears popular among European citizens (Metzger *et al.*, 2018), but also seems the most challenging vision to achieve given land use legacy effects and the need for complete transformation in society and decision-making processes underpinned by individual behavioural change. It is characterised by local food production, self-sufficiency and mechanisms to support payments for ecosystem services, to better manage natural capital and mainstream nature-based solutions.

*Best Land in Europe* would supply the greatest quantity of ecosystem services on a continental scale, but many rural areas would struggle to support local communities without major restructuring of economic activities away from agriculture. Global market forces and many current EU policies favouring specialisation

and efficiency, make optimal use of the opportunities to adapt the existing rural development policy, greening of the CAP and climate mitigation & adaptation policies to support the vision.

*Regional Connected* would require strong regional autonomy and regulation – to protect regions from global market forces – and a broad acceptance of this by society. This vision is characterised by living closer to the nature, a compact urban development and enhanced connectivity, while minimising interregional trade in resources.

Modelling land use according to these visions results in disquieting observations:

- Current developments lead to a polarised European land use characterised by land sparing (segregation): on the one hand, highly efficient production-oriented spaces are increasingly dominating the agricultural sector, while on the other hand, small-scale, peri-urban multifunctionality is a dynamic phenomenon cherished by many urbanites, but easily replaced by stronger economic functions (van der Sluis *et al.*, 2015).
- The traditional family farm that is at the basis of the European landscape diversity is disappearing, with large, but initially often hidden effects on landscape pattern, structure and character (Pinto-Correia *et al.*, 2018).

### Three stakeholder-based land use visions for Europe

(Pérez-Soba *et al.*, 2015)

#### Best land in Europe – optimal use of land resources

Global market forces and many current EU policies favour specialisation and efficiency. There are opportunities to adapt the existing rural development policy, greening the CAP, and climate mitigation & adaptation policies to support this vision. However, considerable European coordination and enforcement would be required, including European planning policy to determine the best locations for land use and land functions across scales; support for managed abandonment or restructuring in marginal and remote rural areas; and mechanisms to support payments for ecosystem services, to better manage natural capital and mainstream nature-based solutions.

#### Regional Connected – living closer to the nature

Compact urban development and enhanced connectivity are established EU and national policy aspirations. The first has proved difficult to achieve, and the latter is subject to substantial financial investment. The vision would also require strong governance structures that promote collaboration between regions, while minimising interregional trade in resources. Specific measures required include coherent regional land use planning that ensures sufficient provision of all ecosystem services within the region, support for the transition from specialisation to achieve regional self-sufficiency, and mechanisms to support payments for ecosystem services, to better manage natural capital and mainstream nature-based solutions.

#### Local Multifunctional – self-sufficiency for communities

Although interest in local food production and self-sufficiency is growing, and despite many examples in local multifunctional living, a radical shift in behaviour, supported by bottom-up governance, would be required for this vision to materialise across Europe. Policy measures that can help this vision are limited because the vision embraces a hands-off approach that empowers communities to make their own land use-related decisions. However, specific measures include promoting the upscaling of grassroots initiatives through incentives and by removing barriers to success as well as mechanisms to support payments for ecosystem services, to better manage natural capital and mainstream nature-based solutions.



**Figure 2** Grazing cows in Sredna Gora, Bulgaria. (Photo: Hans Kransen.)

- Serious threats to landscape degradation are a consequence of uncontrolled land abandonment, biodiversity decrease, loss of ecosystem and landscape services, decline of rural liveability and volatility of the land market (Metzger *et al.*, 2018).

However, based on a wide interactive stakeholder consultation, it was found that policymakers and civil society alike do express the wish for a different future consisting of multifunctional landscapes (Pérez-Soba *et al.*, 2015). Under current socioeconomic and policy conditions, none of these visions can be achieved without accepting significant trade-offs (Verkerk *et al.*, 2018). The conclusion of this study was therefore: We don't get what we want! Although a large majority of stakeholders prefer an attractive diversified landscape sharing many functions, all current economic tendencies seem to lead to a substantially different future of monofunctional spaces.

Despite major contrasts between the three visions defined (see box on previous page), there are also important similarities which highlight the need for bold and coordinated change in European land use (Pérez-Soba *et al.*, 2018). All visions require society to embrace governance structures with strong land use planning policies, and a willingness to reallocate budgets to fund land use change that will, in some cases, result in land systems that are distinctly different from those we know today. Public participation will need to be strongly facilitated, paving the way for such relatively rigorous visions. The public and private sectors will need to collaborate to develop mechanisms to support better management of natural capital and to mainstream nature-based solutions.

Community and citizen engagement in equitable decision making will be crucial for success in reaching each of the visions. And, there is a clear need for targeted interventions in marginal and remote rural areas. Land use planning is not an EU competence, although a range of EU sectoral policies largely determines land use development. Hence, a priority action in EU policy should be to foster cross-sectoral strategies and support governance structures that support land use planning from local to regional and European scales. Realising a true policy roadmap toward sustainable land use in Europe would be a major political endeavour and require substantive dialogue among divergent stakeholders with major economic stakes – including the farming, food, forestry and energy sectors. Policy advice should acknowledge trade-offs between sectors and regions, take into account geographic context and stimulate and support creative solutions by regional and local actors. Initiating the transition towards a truly sustainable landscape sys-

tem – in whichever way is envisaged – depends on the political and societal willingness to act.

### How to proceed?

Reframing the relationships between people and place requires a reorientation on the qualities and characteristics of the European landscape, as developed through the centuries. Landscape cannot be owned, it is just an “area as perceived by people” (Council of Europe, 2000), but this implies that landscape does not automatically unify the people, instead, it often divides (Latour, 2012). Conflict management is essentially at the core of landscape planning (Pinto-Correia *et al.*, 2018), where landscape governance can only be based on facilitation, not regulation. This facilitation is a task of public authorities as explicitly defined in the European Landscape Convention (COE, 2000), but it is in the power of the individual, based on personal rights and responsibilities, that the art of compromise should be refined (Schmid, 2008). Common law does not impose order but grows from it; it is based on use rights rather than on property rights (Olwig, 2015). This notion of common law is fundamental to landscape because it basically responds to social realities and citizen's initiatives, as opposed to parliamentary law that imposes regulation because it does not acknowledge attachment and accountability as motives that drive human behaviour (Scruton, 2017).

As referred to in the previous section, there seems to be a general consensus about multifunctionality, reduction of ecological footprint, careful landscape planning, and rural regeneration among stakeholders responsible for spatial planning (Metzger *et al.*, 2018). But by identifying policy implications, one discovers



**Figure 3** Herded sheep in Canjuers, Var, France. (Photo: Hans Dekker, Saxifraga).

that traditional assessment methods are not adequate to simulate visions strongly departing from existing land use patterns. Formal agricultural statistics do not take account of the numerous non-commercial farming practices by hobby farmers, pensioners and care farms, that still keep up the small-scale landscapes of Europe, and do not receive support from EU subvention schemes (Pinto-Correia *et al.*, 2021). Creative visionary thinking is needed to overcome these shortcomings in current policy development, in which investment costs and trade-offs should be seriously evaluated. There is a niche for a visionary think tank at the level of the European Commission to address the opportunities of forward-looking visionary roadmaps! Perhaps a Landscape Charter could be initiated to stimulate positive thinking about the role of landscape in the European society (cf. The New Leipzig Charter on the transformative power of cities for the common good (EU2020.DE, 2020)).

## Europe - the continent of cheese

Although the past two centuries have shown an increasing differentiation in landscapes, Europe is still largely marked by landscapes representing palimpsests, i.e. various imprints on the land, originating in different historical layers (Palang *et al.*, 2011). Similar palimpsests can be found in the landscapes of many other parts of the world, e.g. in Japan, East China, the Middle East, but the measure and scale to which this is the case in Europe is probably unique (Pinto-Correia *et al.*, 2018, p. 11). Generalising the features of current European landscape in all its diversity, one could perhaps characterise it in its ensemble of walls, trees, cows and fields.

Permanent grassland and associated grazing animals are a unique feature of the historic European rural landscape (Luginbühl, 2012, p. 43-46), typically based on the arrangement of a number of farms into villages. The typical farm type to manage this range of functions was the mixed family business, which dominated European agriculture for centuries (Antrop, 2000), and which almost everywhere produced cheese. Indeed, Europe can be characterised as the continent of cheese! Practically every village in Europe had its own typical cheese, be it from cows, sheep, goats or other animals. A pattern of meadows, cropland, scattered trees and forest were needed to produce these cheeses.

Many variations of the mixed family farm system still exist. Almost all of them struggle to survive, but they still contribute to the diversity of the European landscape. This is as true for wine and olive oil production in the Mediterranean and in mountainous regions across Europe, as for nomadic grazing on tundra in the north, and all landscapes in between (Pinto-Correia *et al.*, 2018). Making Europe a place for everyone requires taking care for all these landscapes as a public good and recognising them as one of Europe's most valuable and irreplaceable assets.

### Towards revitalisation of the European Landscape

Based on the above considerations, UNISCAPE (2021) launched a Manifesto for the Future of the European Landscape, focussing on three priority areas:

#### Priority Area 1. Making Europe a place for everyone

Caring for places, for the landscape as a public good, is an intergenerational commitment. It safeguards the future by uniting people behind a vision and a roadmap to deliver the kind of Europe we aspire to. Place-making is a communal and participative project that generates social capital, builds social resilience and is central to the future of the European landscape and communities. This priority area asks to:

- Recognise landscape as one of Europe's most valuable and irreplaceable assets (see box).
- Make optimal use of the integrative platform landscape offers to envisage the potential future character of the European space.
- Promote deeper connections between people and places through landscape-inclusive community building and a revised governance architecture that embraces bottom-up participation.
- Link the landscape with a participative definition of strategies, designs and visions for the evolution of Europe.
- Resource socio-cultural, environmental and cultural heritage activities in recognition of their role in reinforcing sustainable development at local and regional levels.

#### Priority Area 2. Landscape as mediator: tackling societal and environmental challenges

While the landscape paradigm has framed different national policies and EU Directives that speak, directly and indirectly, to the mutual dependency of people and the environment, the Florence Convention has not been fully mobilised in this regard. Landscape as such, is also a conceptual framework where real-time synergies between social and environmental policies, planning and action occur (Landscape-based Solutions). The future implementation of the Florence Convention should be employed to this end by:

- Advancing in the identification, characterisation and assessment of landscapes to inform planning and policies.
- Developing landscape quality objectives based on open, collective dialogue.
- Incorporating the landscape in all policies that affect the landscape at different scales.
- Including the landscape in statutory planning tools and related management and procedures at different scales relevant for landscape quality.
- Developing a Landscape Charter that positions 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

Reliable, up-to-date data can inform and guide planning in a wide range of interconnected areas, offering protection against short-termism and competing policy objectives. To manage transitions in European landscapes, we have to improve the integration of disciplinary knowledge, data capture

and analysis, and bridge the gap between scientific modelling and societal values and trends.

The educational challenge is to match sustainable development goals with appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding at all levels and across sectors. Without these, even minimal sustainable development goals will not be achieved, and we will not realise the values that define Europe. Therefore, it is essential to:

- Promote key competences for a sustainable society and environment, such as systems thinking, anticipatory/future thinking, values thinking, strategic thinking and collaboration.
- Reinforce the socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of the landscape and its role in the definition of operative and integrative frameworks supporting sustainable development at local and regional levels.
- Engage an economic approach in landscape visioning and in the formulation of plans and policies for sustainable landscapes, safeguarding circular economies and an adequate balance between the global and the local.
- Acknowledge, describe, and expand the legal space of the landscape within the EU, national and regional juridical systems, recognising protection and management measures, and acknowledging the rights of communities to participate in decisions affecting the cultural and place-based dimensions of the landscape.

It is clear that these are essential elements to realise how we identify with our landscapes and with what makes up the value of its past. They should guarantee a living landscape for the future, i.e. a landscape for

which the history and specific character is recognisable in pattern, process and people's commitment (Baudry *et al.*, 1990; Jones & Stenseke, 2011). The increasingly dominating global market orientation of the agricultural sector (and of the many other policy sectors impacting landscape development) means that the European landscape undergoes serious and, at times radical, changes. This is because the current land use is different from the use that led to the landscape character as we can still perceive it in many places. Landscape change is normal, but it can have very detrimental effects if it has not been consciously envisaged, including its trade-offs. Taking care for today's landscape and for the functions that it can have for society is a precondition for a living landscape.

## Summary

Since the opening for ratification of the Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe in 2000, new challenges and opportunities have entered the scene. Agricultural practices, climate change, food and energy security, migration, public health (e.g. pandemics), biodiversity loss and economic globalisation have impacted landscape much more vehemently in recent years than 20 years ago. Spatial transitions in these fields will inevitably lead to new landscapes, which calls for a reappraisal of the Landscape Convention. Future visioning of land use is presented as an essential means to develop a new culture of landscape-inclusive thinking, and define pathways to plausible futures.

Such engagement will not come from policy. This challenge is increasingly a task for urban people that now form the majority anyway in Europe, whether living in cities or in the countryside. Engaging means getting involved, based on shared interests, using local and scientific knowledge, and paying respect for today's land managers and the unique character of the landscape. This evidently calls for a European Action Plan. If we manage, we can responsibly live the future of the European landscape.

It appears to be difficult to envisage the small-scale multifunctional landscapes, which are preferred in the future by most of the stakeholders consulted, because of global market developments focused on profit maximisation.

Three priority areas for proactive policymaking in a more sustainable way are addressed:

1. Making Europe a place for everyone;
2. Landscape as a mediator for societal and environmental challenges;
3. Landscape knowledge for better decisions and outcomes. This clearly calls for an Action Plan for the European Landscape.

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