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## ***Reasons to be optimistic: Implementing the European Landscape Convention***

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### **Introduction**

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) provides a Europe-wide initiative to understand the evolution, present state and potential future of European landscapes. In particular what constitutes 'cultural' landscapes, how we regard and protect landscape heritage, the importance of social and economic driving forces, the understanding of the participation of ordinary people in the evolution of landscapes and the role of 'ordinary' landscapes in our cultural heritage and future health, wealth and happiness. It also provides a holistic approach to the management of landscape change. The ELC is seen as a landmark in the recognition that all landscapes should be considered as valuable, and that landscape is '*a key element of individual and social well-being and quality of life*' (CoE, 2000, preamble).

There are now 30 European states that have ratified the ELC, including the UK, where it has now come into force. The UK had been working towards ratification for some time and it was recognised in Europe that the UK already provided good examples of landscape-related policy and practice. This was partially because the instigation for and inception of the ELC included prominent figures in the field in the UK.

The Council of Europe is now focussing on the implementation of the ELC has provided *Draft Guidelines for Implementation* which were adopted by the Committee of Ministers in February 2008 (CoE, 2008). The basis for implementation is set out in ELC Articles 5 (General Measures) and 6 (Specific Measures). Implementation is now under way in a number of countries within Europe and some useful feedback on this is now emerging through the Council of Europe documents and seminars.

**Figure 1: Member States of the Council of Europe and status of the ELC as at 10.6.09**

States	Signature	Ratification	Entry into force
Albania			
Andorra			
Armenia	14/5/2003	23/3/2004	1/7/2004
Austria			
Azerbaijan	22/10/2003		
Belgium	20/10/2000	28/10/2004	1/2/2005
Bosnia and Herzegovina			
Bulgaria	20/10/2000	24/11/2004	1/3/2005
Croatia	20/10/2000	15/1/2003	1/3/2004
Cyprus	21/11/2001	21/6/2006	1/10/2006
Czech Republic	28/11/2002	3/6/2004	1/10/2004
Denmark	20/10/2000	20/3/2003	1/3/2004
Estonia			
Finland	20/10/2000	16/12/2005	1/4/2006
France	20/10/2000	17/3/2006	1/7/2006
Georgia			
Germany			
Greece	13/12/2000		
Hungary	28/9/2005	26/10/2007	1/2/2008
Iceland			
Ireland	22/3/2002	22/3/2002	1/3/2004
Italy	20/10/2000	4/5/2006	1/9/2006
Latvia	29/11/2006	5/6/2007	1/10/2007
Liechtenstein			
Lithuania	20/10/2000	13/11/2002	1/3/2004
Luxembourg	20/10/2000	20/9/2006	1/1/2007
Malta	20/10/2000		
Moldova	20/10/2000	14/3/2002	1/3/2004
Monaco			
Montenegro	8/12/2008	22/1/2009	1/5/2009
Netherlands	27/7/2005	27/7/2005	1/11/2005
Norway	20/10/2000	23/10/2001	1/3/2004
Poland	21/12/2001	27/9/2004	1/1/2005
Portugal	20/10/2000	29/3/2005	1/7/2005
Romania	20/10/2000	7/11/2002	1/3/2004
Russia			
San Marino	20/10/2000	26/11/2003	1/3/2004
Serbia	21/9/2007		
Slovakia	30/5/2005	9/8/2005	1/12/2005
Slovenia	7/3/2001	25/9/2003	1/3/2004
Spain	20/10/2000	26/11/2007	1/3/2008
Sweden	22/2/2001		
Switzerland	20/10/2000		
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	15/1/2003	18/11/2003	1/3/2004
Turkey	20/10/2000	13/10/2003	1/3/2004
Ukraine	17/6/2004	10/3/2006	1/7/2006
United Kingdom	21/2/2006	21/11/2006	1/3/2007

Source: Council of Europe Treaty Office on <http://conventions.coe.int>

## Reasons for Optimism

The Convention is not as strong an instrument as an EU Directive. Council of Europe Conventions rely on agreement and consensus; enforcement of this Convention is through voluntary compliance and potentially through challenges made under domestic law. The 'parties' to the ELC are therefore the member states who sign and ratify it. The Council of Europe depends on Member States to develop their own implementation strategies, emphasising the need for creativity in the way authorities should '*draw up legal, operational, administrative and technical landscape-related instruments*' (CoE, 2007a, p.4). This means in practice that much of the action may lie not only with individual governments but with regional or local authorities. A number of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) throughout Europe have had a considerable input to the development of thinking in relation to the ELC and its implementation.

The **first reason for optimism** is that the ELC is, I would suggest, a 'People's Convention' because it provides ordinary people with a tool to address issues of landscape, to argue for better decisions about landscape and to become involved in landscape policy decisions and management operations. It recognises that the whole community has rights and responsibilities in relation to landscape. This has implications for the obligations of those responsible for managing landscapes to ensure that local communities are involved in decision-making at all levels, from policy-making to action on the ground. Of course people often do not wish to take on responsibilities even if they want to exercise their rights and there are difficulties in relation to some groups such as children where issues of responsibility in relation to landscape are difficult to define.

The **second reason for optimism** is that the ELC is about setting the agenda for governments in Europe who have finally recognised the importance of landscapes of every kind; whether they are protected or ordinary, large or small, degraded or despoiled, whether they are the city landscapes of Newcastle, or the water or snowscapes of Finland (and everything in between). This idea of the 'everywhere' landscape could have considerable implications for the priorities that are given to landscape and the way they are funded, protected and managed. By ensuring that all landscapes have the potential to hold some meaning, provide identity and be of value and that ordinary people have a say in those landscapes the ELC aims to remove the elitism in both the view of landscape – i.e. only 'special' landscapes should have attention – and the view that only 'experts' are able to experience the landscape fully and therefore are 'qualified' to make decisions about the landscape. The Convention brings the attention firmly back to encouraging ordinary people to be creators and managers of the landscape. It is about all scales of landscape including the neighbourhood landscapes that most landscape managers spend their time with.

As Landscape Managers, it may feel that what happens in Strasbourg is a long way from the day-to-day issues that have to be faced on the ground in our respective countries. But this leads to the **third reason for optimism**, and a key one for landscape managers which is that landscape management is recognised in the ELC as a key input to sustainable development, that it has a dynamic role in landscape quality and in achieving community desires. The Convention specifically highlights the importance of training and education under Article 6 for professionals in landscape, including managers. There is an important recognition for all levels of education including schools and this provides some basis for the development of multidisciplinary training programmes in particular and for the promotion of learning about landscape management within all sectors.

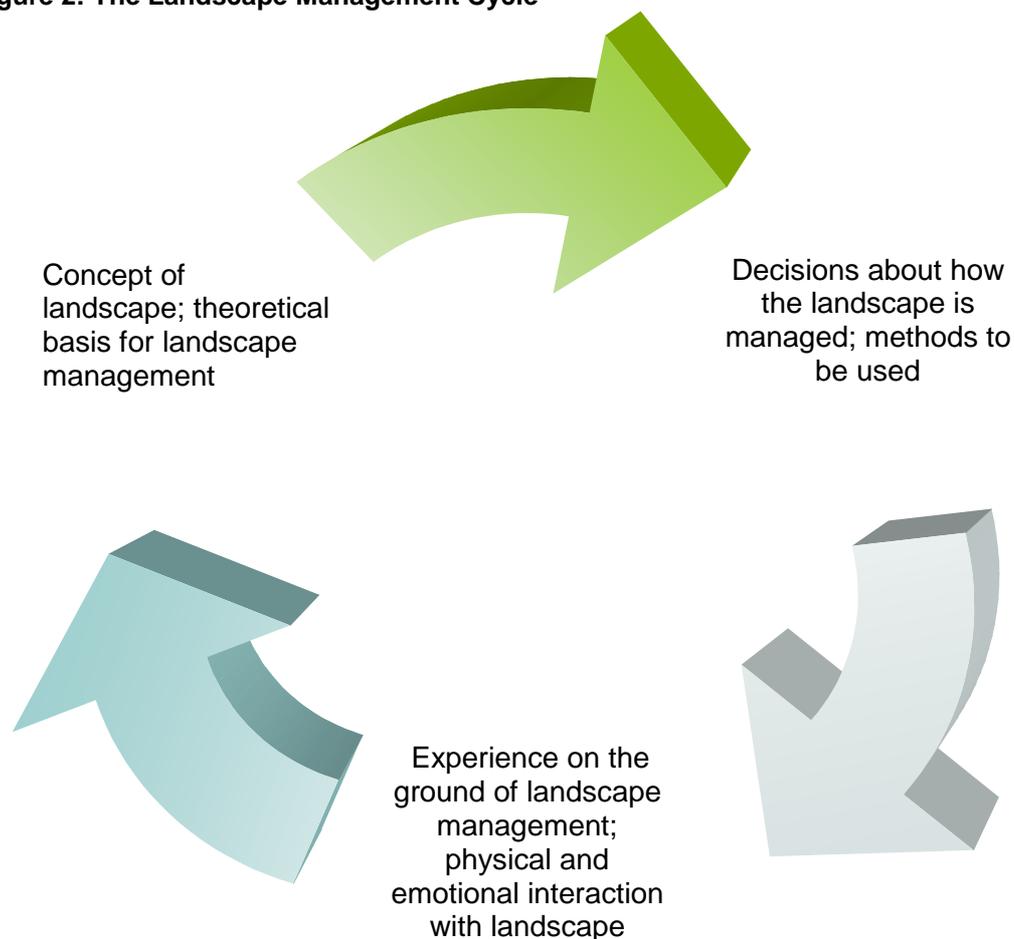
The issue of quality is particularly important and this is the **fourth reason for optimism**. The ELC introduced the concept of "landscape quality objectives" into the protection, management and planning of geographical areas. The ELC recognises that landscape is '*a key element of individual and social well-being and quality of life*' (CoE, 2003: *preamble*). Enhancement of quality of life for communities covers a wide range of interests and needs inevitably linked to social and economic conditions. Within this the *environmental quality of life* can be identified as a particular area of interest.

Implementing the ELC provides inspiration to those involved in landscape protection, management and planning to reconsider what 'balance' is or could be between contemporary

societies and 'nature'. The ELC is primarily about people's relationship with the landscape, our desires, needs and visions. Much has been written about the dichotomy between 'culture' and 'nature'. This reveals the **fifth reason for optimism** which is that not only has the ELC provided a 'hard' recognition that landscape is about humans and nature as is clearly seen in the definition of 'landscape which *means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*' (CoE 2000 Definitions), but it has understood that a critical characteristic of cultural landscapes is change in the same way as natural processes and change develop the richness and biodiversity of natural landscapes. Indeed, although the ELC is primarily anthropocentric in focus, it also recognises that the separation between 'natural' and 'cultural' landscapes is a false one and it *'seeks to preserve, or even enhance, that diversity and quality instead of allowing them to decline'* (CoE, 2009).

In recent research in relation to how ELC intent was reflected within a wide range of policy documents at the national and sub-national level in England it became clear that good communication was important and for organisations to provide explicit indications of their support for the intent of the ELC within documents such as their organisational action plans, policies and practice. This can be done at all and any levels from small community-based organisations to national governmental institutions and the response to the findings of this research is I think the **sixth reason for optimism** because guidance on how this can be done is already being developed by government agencies in England.

**Figure 2: The Landscape Management Cycle**



Finally, I believe what we have found in the research in England provides reasons for great optimism in relation to the general and specific recognition of the importance of landscapes to our lives and the particular importance for those working on the ground. Ratification of the ELC seems to have provided a new energy to those working in both policy and practice in Landscape issues. Research has revealed some interesting issues aside from the main findings. For example in regional level policies in England the performance related to reflection of the ELC was better generally than in national level policy, so the expectation that there was a 'trickle-down effect' where national level policy was affecting policies at 'lower' levels could not be clearly identified. There may even be an opposite effect, where understandings from those nearer the ground are performing better in relation to the ELC than national policy and that there is some kind of 'trickle-up effect' going on. However in policy analysis this is almost impossible to discern. Nevertheless it does reveal a good reason for landscape managers to be particularly optimistic (the **seventh reason**): regional and sub-regional policy may be influenced more by what is happening on the ground than by what is stated in national level policy. If the requirements of the Council of Europe are then working on government policy and there is also positive influence and feedback from lower down the scale then there is more likelihood that policy and practice at many different levels will respond to the principles set out in the ELC.

## Conclusions

In the UK there is a tradition that says in times of uncertainty buy into property; bricks and mortar are constant in value. However the 'credit crunch' seems to be proving this to be an erroneous view and I would suggest that there are much better investments to be had. These are investments in the land and investments in people: in nature and culture; in other words the landscape. Our sustainability depends upon it.

The ELC is an optimistic note in the global gloom because it reflects the fact that there is a shift in thinking with regard to the way policy-makers and planners regard landscape and, potentially, in the way communities perceive, interact and envision landscapes. Landscape managers have an important role to play in helping communities to realise this potential through helping to provide technical solutions and rebuild notions of identity, moral responsibility and emotional connection with landscapes. There are interesting and important differences in the way different cultures relate to the natural world. However in Europe the ELC has provided a vehicle for reconsidering such culture-nature interactions.

The ELC is important, new and radical but it still requires 'buy-in' to the notion that it is potentially a very powerful and constructive tool for enhancing and protecting landscapes. As such it may be useful as a model for developing landscape management in other regions of the world since it provides us with a way for considering important questions such as: how do we want our present 'culture' to be reflected in our landscapes? What landscape change is desirable and how should this be monitored?

There are four key messages in the context of IFPRA's work:

- Landscape Managers should be recognised as key facilitators in the realisation of community visions of landscape;
- The ELC can be put to use by Landscape Managers in helping to achieve these visions;
- This requires familiarity with the principles, scope and Articles of the ELC and a 'buy in' to the ELC thinking;
- The ELC provide a way of rethinking how cultures connect with landscapes; in particular how we can devise new ways of management for 'ordinary' or everyday landscapes; the landscapes that the majority of us live within.

Acknowledgement:

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