



Landscape and Sustainable Development

The French Perspective

Edited by Yves Luginbühl, Peter Howard
and Daniel Terrasson

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ASHGATE

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LANDSCAPE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Reviews for

Landscape and Sustainable Development

The French Perspective

Landscape means as much to the French as it does to us, but language makes it hard for French experience to reach our shores. This volume of translated essays breaks down the barrier. It reveals a detailed analysis and understanding of French landscapes that challenges our preconceptions. As we also explore the potential of the European Landscape Convention, British landscape policymakers and practitioners will find here a rich mine of ideas.

Adrian Phillips, IUCN and National Trust

The adoption of the European Landscape Convention in 2000 by the Council of Europe transformed landscape policy, which had hitherto been preoccupied with the protection of exceptional landscapes. This important book, the outcome of an international and interdisciplinary research project led by the French Ministry of Ecology, demonstrates the role that ordinary, everyday landscapes have to play in issues of sustainability and resilience, and argues that landscape is a res publica, a matter that concerns everyone and should be debated by everybody.

Ian Thompson, University of Newcastle, UK

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& Associates (Traduction et Interpretation), and to
Stéphanie Touvron, assistant to IRSTEA at Bordeaux, who
has managed all the complex liaisons required by this edition.*

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Preface

For about 15 years, the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy has been involved in initiating research programmes relating to the issue of landscape, with two objectives – to increase knowledge and to support public policies.

Within the framework of the priorities defined at the Environmental Conference held on 14 and 15 September, 2012 relating to biodiversity and ecological continuity, the Ministry has upheld its interest in landscape, both as a focus of research and in support of public policies, with an approach geared around diagnosis and place-based projects, while liaising with stakeholders in civil society.

Long reduced to a merely aesthetic dimension, landscape has only recently and gradually been recovered in all its complexity and implications, both material and immaterial, concrete and symbolic.

Including both ‘exceptional’ places, in the sense of sites listed as UNESCO cultural heritage sites, and ‘ordinary’ places including countryside, mountains, forests, coastlines and man-made areas (dense cities, outlying suburbs and business parks), landscapes form an extremely varied and differentiated reality.

The combination, peculiar to landscapes, of numerous individual factors and an overall dimension seems moreover to echo the consideration at all levels of sustainable development, taken as a set of environmental, social and economic aspects of place.

The need to verify, clarify and prove this hypothesis is at the centre of the ‘Landscape and Sustainable Development’ (PDD – Paysage et Développement Durable) programme launched in 2004 to take over from the ‘Public Policies and Landscapes’ programme (PPP), which ran from 1998 until 2003.

Understanding landscape in all its forms and dimensions implies input from several disciplines, including social sciences (geography, economics, sociology, development and urban planning) and natural sciences (biology and ecology), as well as appropriate ways of governing landscape. The PDD programme, around which this entire work revolves, has therefore engaged available expertise in all these various fields of knowledge.

The wish to apply the European Landscape Convention, ratified by France in 2006, has led to a reorientation towards projects involving other member states of the European Union and to the choice of a comparative approach in research.

The composition of the programme’s Scientific Council, with experts from the United Kingdom, Belgium, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, illustrates this approach, which has allowed French investigators to cooperate at the heart of their research projects with scientific teams from around 20 laboratories in 11 other European countries.

Some regions studied in the programme, being located on both sides of international borders, have provided a comparative angle on subjects as diverse as the location of plants and biodiversity (the characteristics and ecological coherence of green infrastructures, the meaning of isolated trees to agrarian history or as a soil indicator), the perceptions of public policies for the development of wind energy by inhabitants, the respective importance of ordinary and exceptional landscapes, the interactions between landscape and economy, etc.

The organisation by the ministry, within the framework of the PDD programme, of an international symposium on the subject 'Landscapes in daily life: A cross-perspective between research and action' which was held in Perpignan (France) and Girona (Spain) in March 2011, also demonstrates this trans-disciplinary, comparative approach based on action.

Beyond scientific questions, it is also necessary to try to engage with the attempts of all the stakeholders engaged in landscape and/or development projects – the State and its decentralised services, local organisations, associations, landscapers, farmers, other economic stakeholders, etc.

The first research results have caused tensions to arise between the different concepts of landscapes held by inhabitants, managers and public and private decision makers: a natural resource to be preserved and shared; an aesthetic product to be consumed like a show where man is also an actor; historic heritage and cultural patrimony; a construction resulting from collective, social, economic and environmental actions.

Researchers have also highlighted the difficulty of being fully aware of the articulation between the material components (geophysical and ecological) and the immaterial components (perceptions, emotions, personal history and collective culture) of landscape. The programme's Scientific Council has also regretted that work has focused on the social and cultural representation of the landscape to the detriment of its physical and biological reality and the ecosystem function which this reveals.

Another strong point of the programme is the central nature of landscape as a framework for the life of the population of the different countries, that is, as an holistic element of daily life. Stemming from this is also an increased demand for the reciprocal transfer of knowledge between experts and laypeople, development projects, and the need for reflection about the process of citizen participation in the decisions to 'co-construct' the landscape within the terms of the European Landscape Convention.

I would add that the PDD programme associates, in a symbolic way, researchers and land stakeholders in its organisation, even in its research, and that the notion of landscape favours the development of a participatory, more complex way of governing.

This work is based both on advances in research and dialogue between all parties at seminars and symposia, both national and international, led by research teams or by the scientific and technical organisation of the programme.

Thanks to the diversity and expertise of its authors, it presents, at this stage of reflection, a clarification, which is both transversal and deep, of the interface between landscape and sustainable development, which is at the heart of the PDD programme.

The relevance of these contributions and the emergence of new questions led the Commission on Sustainable Development to launch a new appeal for research propositions in December 2010 for the period 2011–2014. Emphasis is placed on the qualities of landscape evolution processes, on landscape as a product of the economy (from the point of view of services rendered) and on the participation of inhabitants in the public decision-making process in this area.

The ongoing work can only reinforce the benefits which have been listed here with great expertise. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participate, alongside Research and Innovation Management (DRI-CGDD), in the programme 'Landscape and sustainable development': all the French and European researchers involved in the work, the members of the Scientific Council, and especially its president, Yves Luginbühl, the members of its orientation committee, the landscape and publicity office of the DGALN

(Direction Générale de l'Aménagement du Logement et de la Nature) and finally Irstea, (Institut national de recherché en sciences et technologies pour l'environnement et l'agriculture) its scientific and technical organiser. They participate in the multidimensional understanding of one of the conditions of well-being of our fellow citizens, one which is too often underestimated and little understood – the landscapes where they live.

Jean-Paul Albertini
Commissioner for Sustainable Development