

# Landscape: from knowledge to action

Martine Berlan-Darqué,  
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## Foreword

As a result of the growing interest in the landscape, landscape issues became involved at every level of public action. Legislation explicitly concerning the landscape was enacted. Some of these laws aim at protecting specific sectors (those related to coastal and mountain regions), or at planning economic development, particularly in rural areas.

More recently, the European Landscape Convention, which went into effect in France on 1 July 2006, is the first international treaty specifically devoted to the landscape.

This convention, known as the Florence Treaty, provides a precise definition of the landscape and also defines notions of ‘landscape policy’ and ‘landscape quality objectives’. It promotes the simultaneous development of landscape policies at three different levels: protection, management and land use. Moreover, the Florence Treaty sees the landscape as a guiding principle for the improvement of the quality of life of concerned populations, encouraging contracting countries to implement public policies in which the citizenry has had a say.

The aim of the research programme, ‘Landscapes and Public Policies’, launched in 1998 by the French Ministry of the Environment, was to evaluate the effects of these different public policies on the landscape. This research programme was innovative because even if scientific communities had already been mobilised on landscape issues, no research programme actually existed whose prime objective was to contribute scientific knowledge on this theme to public policy. Within the framework of this programme, 24 research projects were thus initiated between 1999 and 2001. In order to make the findings of this programme available to all those concerned (e.g. governments, elected officials and professionals, users and citizens), different ways of disseminating scientific knowledge (symposia, articles and training) were implemented and encouraged.

In support of the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, and in order to promote the role of landscape in European research and to strengthen the role

of French research teams, the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development organized a European conference in Bordeaux, in partnership with Cemagref, to provide an opportunity to present the major results of this research, the aim of which was to understand the role of public action on the landscape.

We feel confident that the synthesis of the different points of view presented in this book will strengthen the action implemented by the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development and, in particular, that of our two departments. We also hope that these contributions will give impetus to the emergence of landscape research with a specifically European character.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who contributed to the success of this research programme: the programme's entire scientific advisory board and, in particular, its two successive presidents, Georges Bertrand and Yves Luginbühl, as well as Daniel Terrasson who was responsible for the scientific co-ordination of this programme, and Martine Berlan-Darqué, who spearheaded it alongside Jean-François Seguin, head of the landscape office.

**Guillaume SAINTENY**  
Director of Economical Studies Landscapes  
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**Jean-Marc MICHEL**  
Director of Nature  
and Landscapes

# Introduction

Daniel TERRASSON

Within the global context of the rapidly increasing concern for the environment, the landscape has progressively become a social issue, particularly in Western countries. However, the conditions that led to this growing awareness were very specific. The landscape was not the focus of urgent warnings from the scientific community, nor did it provoke major controversies like those brought about by global warming, natural or technological risks, pollution, health issues, erosion of biodiversity or water shortages. The landscape was not the rallying point around which major environmental organizations challenged our forms of development. Rather, it evolved on its own impetus, an issue whose importance became increasingly obvious as a result of the convergence of two dynamics. On the one hand, an elite, initially made up of several isolated personalities, became interested in the landscape, especially when it revealed a distinct cultural or outstanding aspect. This elite progressively acquired a stronghold at the operational level, as well as in the domain of research. On the other hand, ordinary citizens became concerned with a degradation of their living environment that was becoming increasingly evident. A phenomenon of society in the beginning, this concern then spread to the political and scientific arenas, and evolved from the extraordinary to the ordinary. The landscape issue has invaded the media today where it is now a recurring theme. We no longer count the number of books, exhibitions and TV shows devoted to the landscape. It is a vehicle used to promote travel and local products; it is adopted by multiple associations that take responsibility for its protection, its transformations, etc.

Nevertheless, the landscape was not a priority issue in policy discussions within international fora. Most Western countries developed a wide range of regulations and public action policies aimed at protecting or managing the landscape. These measures differ considerably, depending on the cultural and political context of each country. The European Landscape Convention (ELC), adopted by the Council of Europe in Florence on 20 October 2000, and which came into effect on 1 March 2004 after its ratification

by ten member states, provides new momentum. It endows the landscape with a value of general interest and emphasizes the necessity of looking for a higher degree of consistency in public action between the different European countries. It also implicitly recognizes the inherently innovative character of public action by recommending the exchange of research results and experiences.

Initiatives also increased within the scientific domain. With its multiplicity of meanings, the landscape touches on a variety of fields, both in the social sciences and the natural sciences. It is the focus of organizations, as well as research programmes, geared exclusively to the landscape. In the first case, we can mention the International Association for Landscape Ecology (IALE), the Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape (PECSRL), Landscape Europe, Landscape Tomorrow, the Nordic Landscape Research Network (NLRN) in the Scandinavian countries, the Landscape Research Group (LRG) in UK, the European Council of Landscape Architecture School (ECLAS), etc. In the area of research, national programmes exist or have been recently completed – in Austria (‘Forschungsprogramm Kulturlandschaft’), in Switzerland (PNR 48: ‘Landscape Development in Mountain Regions’) and in France (‘Landscape and Public Policies’, and since 2005, ‘Landscape and Sustainable Development’). Finally, several European projects of the Fifth and Sixth Framework Programmes for Research and Development deal extensively with the landscape or are exclusively devoted to it: ATLAS, ELCAI, FORAM, REGALP, SENSOR, etc.

Many books intended for the general public and much academic literature on the landscape have been published in recent years. We would, therefore, like to explain the underlying motives and the originality of this volume by taking a closer look at the series of events that led to its publication.

This book is the outcome of the wish to compare the ideas discussed within the framework of the national research programme, ‘Landscape and Public Policies’, implemented in France at the initiative of the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development, to research carried out in other countries. It is also an attempt to evaluate its results from the perspective of the European Landscape Convention. The French research programme, which took place from 1998 to 2004, had two major objectives ([www.ecologie.gouv.fr/article.php3?id\\_article=5665](http://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/article.php3?id_article=5665)). First, it set out to address the government’s concerns about the real effectiveness of a recently implemented policy concerning an issue for which it was difficult to define an administrative and a standardization framework and, second, it attempted to give impetus and structure to a scientific activity that seemed to be in need of new dynamics. Several observations could be made upon completion of this programme. First, a dynamic scientific community was established in France as a result of this programme, and original results were produced at different levels: theoretical reflections on concepts linked to the landscape, the design and implementation of public action, the role of stakeholders, etc. On the other hand, this research, published in French, was rarely distributed abroad. Generally speaking, there appeared to be a lack of dialogue at the international level between different research communities, reinforced by disciplinary or thematic barriers and affiliations with schools of thought limited by geographical boundaries. Finally, from a general point of view, the scientific community only partially satisfied the needs of public action. Knowledge had obviously advanced in the analysis of landscape transformation dynamics and the explanation of the determinants of these dynamics, the functioning of ecosystems and consequences in terms of the

erosion of biodiversity, social representations in relation to cultural contexts, landscape characterization and inventory, and data management and mapping tools. Nevertheless, gaps remained in linking these different approaches, in the knowledge of the long-term impacts of landscape policies, particularly at the economic and social levels, in the methodologies for evaluating these policies and in the dialogue between the scientific and operational arenas.

These observations led to the organization of a conference that was held in Bordeaux (France) in December 2004. This book is not the proceedings of this symposium, which is available on CD-Rom and the website, *SYMPOscience* ([www.symposcience.org](http://www.symposcience.org)), nor an assessment of the results of the 'Landscape and Public Policies' programme, but instead, an additional effort to compare and find a common ground between similar experiences that took place and are taking place in Europe today. Its aim is to bring together a certain number of research projects devoted to public action on the landscape for the purpose of improving it. This concern with the relationship to action led us to give preference to actual case histories, chosen for their exemplariness and mutual resonance, instead of attempting to cover the entire diversity of public action forms that exist at this time. These examples were primarily chosen within the European context to address the concerns of the Council of Europe.

The first section includes five papers that deal with the way the landscape issue interacts with ecological and social priorities. In some countries and particularly in France, theoretical debates and power struggles have sometimes led to separating and assigning priorities to these issues in heated debates: man and nature, nature and culture, the elite and the ordinary, the subjectivity of the landscape and the reality of the erosion of biodiversity, etc. The authors remind us just how much the idea of landscape leads to the overlapping of these priorities without exclusion. They also show, as emphasized in the European Landscape Convention, that this issue is above all related to the relationship of ordinary people to their daily living environment, and that the areas within proximity of this environment, whether they be urban, forest or other, play a very important role.

The second part deals with the relationship between landscape and public space in an urban environment from two different perspectives: open spaces and the role of vegetation in the city. Parks and gardens have played an historical role in the emergence of landscape theory. We must go beyond aesthetic considerations in this case in order to develop the social priorities inherent in their role as public spaces and find a meeting ground between the inhabitants' individual practices and city planning. The issues involved in public space and its opening are also applicable to rural environments, as suggested in several of the papers in the first section. Therefore, comparative analysis of the subjects covered in these two sections reveals that the question of landscape involves considerations that transcend the traditional boundaries of the rural and the urban.

The third section describes examples of public actions in favour of the landscape stressing the principles that led to their design and the conditions for their implementation. It demonstrates the necessity, on the one hand, of taking stock of them, characterizing them, developing instruments for action and evaluating them and, on the other hand, of coming to terms with the time frames of public action, landscapes and perceptions. These aspects are illustrated in the range of papers presented here.

The last section deals with the contribution of citizens to public action as recommended by the European Landscape Convention. It reveals the considerable differences

in practices and conditions under which initiatives were implemented. The idea here is not to analyse these differences but to show, in terms of the landscape, several examples of applications where scientists and those responsible for public action interact. The reader's attention is drawn to the experimental nature of this new form of governance.

Finally, the conclusion, by integrating the findings of actual local experiences presented here, interprets them within the framework of landscape research today.

## Section 1

# **The landscape, between social and environmental issues**





## Chapter 1

# Landscape, an interpretative framework for a reflexive society

Marie-José FORTIN

What kind of connections exist between the concepts of landscape and environment? The question is ambitious. To begin with, we should note that this query implies that the two concepts are not equivalent. It is in fact in line with the first theoretical efforts aiming to distinguish between landscape and environment.

Such a distinction was strongly advocated by Augustin Berque (1995) and Alain Roger (1978, 1997), among others. With skill, they both showed how the landscape experience is above all a process of social and cultural mediation. Furthermore they considered that landscape would be a matter of sensitivity, fundamentally subjective in nature, while the environment would be made up of objective facts (Berque, 1991).

Roger (1997) defends this dissociation, in particular to limit the claims of an environmental science that might become too insatiable, by attempting to absorb the subject of landscape and reducing it to its physical dimension. In his opinion, the aesthetic dimension represents landscape's original contribution and basically draws its source from art and institutionalized culture. In support of this idea, Roger (1997) refers to, among other things, a proposal by Bernard Lassus, who believes one may consider a polluted area as beautiful landscape. According to such postulates, environmental considerations could be excluded from the aesthetic experience associated with landscapes. Following this line of reasoning, landscape would essentially be a sensory experience tied to formal characteristics.

Berque (1995) underlines that the dissociation between the environment (as 'fact', object of physical geography) and landscape (as a 'sensitive' relation, object of phenomenology) is more the result of a cognitive position, inspired by scientific traditions based on modern ontology, than of the experience of reality. He explains this as an historical transition phase leading to a new ontology, linking environment and landscape in a dynamic relationship. He thus puts forward the *ecoumene* theory, based on the notion of

*mediance*, of which landscape would be an expression (Berque, 2000). Berque thereby opens an interesting area of inquiry<sup>1</sup>. Since, however, the issue is to describe the notion of landscape, we feel that his insistence on a strongly art-based conception of the aesthetic experience reduces its scope<sup>2</sup>.

Following these theoretical efforts, we will suggest taking a broader approach to this experience, and seeing in it a wider social practice, referring to people's lives, perceptions, knowledge, relations of intersubjectivity and the materiality of their surroundings. This suggestion is the result of empirical research carried out in France and Quebec. After briefly presenting a few findings (part 1), we suggest a series of reflections to feed this theoretical debate (parts 2 and 3).

## Describing industrial landscapes: interpretations by affected parties

Our research was based on a hybrid concept that challenges the ideas of landscape and environment, the concept of 'industrial landscape'<sup>3</sup>. One of the questions was whether a major industrial landscape, whose activities have a negative impact on the environment, could be described in a positive manner and even be considered 'beautiful'?

From the outset, the perception of landscape is conditioned by the concerned individual, social group, or institution that depicts landscape in relation to a specific geographical and historic context. For our research, this involved two communities where a major smelter for aluminium production has been built, one in France (in Dunkerque, in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region) and the other in Quebec (at Alma, in the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean region). In connection with the principles of sustainable development and environmental justice, we gave priority to the viewpoints of those who are potentially affected, i.e. residents whose homes are located near the industrial sites and the land developers<sup>4</sup>.

One research objective was to better understand the process of interpretation of industrial landscapes and how their social meanings are built. This analysis made it possible to outline three areas, or 'chains' of relations, that appear to be especially important in this

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<sup>1</sup> This, moreover coincides with a pioneering project supported by a number of other landscape researchers including G. Bertrand, H. Décamps and Y. Luginbühl.

<sup>2</sup> Three of the five criteria highlighted as conditions for the existence of a landscape culture refer to artistic representations (e.g. painting, gardens and literature) (Berque, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> This research was carried out within the framework of a doctoral thesis (Fortin, 2005) as part of a multidisciplinary research programme on social impact follow-up, in connection with the example in Quebec ([www.uqac.ca/msiaa](http://www.uqac.ca/msiaa)). Landscape research received funding from this programme and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC); the Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche (FCAR); the programme to support Quebec-France thesis co-supervision; and the Fonds d'action québécois pour le développement durable (FAQDD). The dissemination of results during the symposium in Bordeaux and within the scope of this publication was made possible through the financial support of the 'Décanat des études de cycles supérieurs et de la recherche' of the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. We thank all these organizations for their support.

<sup>4</sup> Twenty or so individual and semi-directed interviews were conducted among residents of Dunkerque and four focus group interviews were conducted in Alma. These were enriched by a review of documents, direct observations on a multipartite environmental monitoring committee, individual interviews, etc.

process. They concern, first, landscape's materiality and visible forms, second, land use dynamics and third, social relations. They are described briefly below.

### The materiality of visible and planned forms

According to certain theoretical approaches, the formal and plastic dimensions are decisive in the landscape experience. The research project set out to test this postulate by asking residents to give their opinion on the way the industrial site had been planned and managed, its architecture and its integration into the landscape. The material forms of the production units do indeed appear to be a first key component in their interpretation. This could hardly be otherwise, since the aluminium production complexes cover several hectares of land and are made up of buildings that measure nearly 1 km in length. Moreover, in Dunkerque, the industrial zone covers some 20 km of coast. The interviews revealed, however, that from the residents' point of view, the form could not be separated for long from other social considerations.

### *Trees to forget the industrial sites but not to 'hide reality'*

The residents and developers we met, both in Dunkerque and Alma, generally appreciate the efforts undertaken by businesses and public authorities in major 'landscaping' projects in industrial sites and zones. Planting trees and making other landscaping improvements make it possible to reduce the cognitive presence of industry: a city with an abundance of plants and flowers helps "forget" the factories and the pollution with which people live on a daily basis. A well-planned landscape is synonymous with "tidiness". By extension, it gives the impression of no pollution. More broadly, landscape designs are perceived as a way of reinvesting a part of the profits generated by big business into the local area. They are part of the new conscience that companies should have, in connection with today's 'mentality' aiming for better integration of production sites into the local surroundings. In this sense, 'landscaping' sites is considered by local populations to be a new indicator, both manifest and visible, of companies' social responsibility.

In certain ways, landscape designs may have *concrete* effects on the quality of their environment. For example, trees located near production plants make it possible to capture part of their gaseous emissions. Similarly, for residents, plantlife is an indicator of the state of the environment. This is why they inspect their gardens, looking for any abnormalities or unusual events in their surroundings (e.g. significant loss of leaves in summer, plants suddenly turning brown, decreased fruit yields, dust, unusual odours, etc.). Plants' appearance around the edges of factories is also used in the same way, to distinguish between the factories, according to the greater or lesser degree of pollution they generate. For example, when plantlife is absent or has difficulty growing, it is considered to be a sign of the existence of pollution that prevents 'nature' from developing.

In addition, despite these various positive effects attributed to landscaping operations in industrial areas and cities, respondents anticipate the potential downside of an approach of landscape that might be too cosmetic and reductive. A number of respondents thus interpreted these operations as strategies promoted by productive businesses to protect their image, or influence the way they are perceived locally. Such a strategy may be risky because, as they warn, landscape planning and planting gardens must not be used as ways to "hide reality". And yet, in the case of industrialization, particularly in