

'Linking Cultural Landscapes to Lake Protection'

The Trasimeno Statement

'Lakes, their wetlands and the water catchments from which they are formed shape historical, spiritual and aesthetic landscapes that hold the richest biodiversity on earth and contribute to the physical and cultural well-being of all people and all life. Yet lakes are being degraded and are disappearing at a speed unprecedented in human times. An increased understanding of the functioning of wetland systems leads to the conclusion that it is only our inability to agree procedures for the sustainable management of lake systems that is allowing so many lakes to continue their spiralling degradation. It is the responsibility of all people to work together to resolve their conflicting interests so that living lakes can continue to provide the cultural landscape values and ecosystem services on which the future of human life depends. This situation has become critical, and action must be taken now'.

This was the consensus reached by over 100 members and associates of the Living Lakes Network from 30 countries, representing 55 lakes of the Living Lakes Network, who discussed these issues at the Network's 12th Annual Meeting entitled 'Linking Cultural Landscapes to Lake Protection' held at Lake Trasimeno, Italy, between 22 and 27 September 2008, and hosted by Provincia di Perugia, Regione Umbria, Comunita Montana - Associazione dei Comuni 'Trasimeno-Medio in Trevere', Legambiente, Italy and Global Nature Fund (GNF), Germany.

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The participants at the symposium urge governments, the private sector, academic institutions, non-government organisations and all citizens to make commitments and take action now to manage lakes within a framework of sustainable development, noting the following conclusions from the conference:

- The status of lakes today and the modifications made to the natural landscapes of lakes and their catchments are largely a consequence of practices that are deeply rooted in human culture. Lakes are important indicators of the state of our culture and the environment in which we live. The speed of lake degradation and loss of many lakes is a reflection of confusion in our contemporary culture, yet the overwhelming majority of people value and seek to re-establish our cultural integrity.
- Biodiversity that is sustained by and sustains lake systems is a key component of cultural landscapes and the way our cultures have evolved.
- All citizens, whether local or distant, have a stake in maintaining lakes. It is often indigenous people who are the true custodians of their lakes, and their cultures are often rooted in a respect for nature and lakes. Local people, especially subsistence farmers and fishers, are most vulnerable when lakes are degraded and may have little opportunity to articulate their concerns.
- Cultural landscape is most closely linked to food production therefore agriculture and fishery production should be given priority attention in planning for lake conservation.
- All land-use planners should recognise and take into account the fact that we live in a worsening 'water crisis' and that the majority of people already do not have access to free water.
- Well used economic valuations, such as GDP, do not necessarily measure cultural values other than through financial returns from tourism - which can be substantial.
- Culture and knowledge are inseparable. Culture is hard to measure scientifically, although scientific data on the ecology of lakes and landscapes provide essential information on which to base decisions.
- Sustainable management of lakes contributes to the implementation of national and international commitments, such as the protection of UNESCO World Heritage and Man and Biosphere Sites and to international conventions such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

- Water, as the source of life, is central to many cultural practices – spiritual and religious practices in particular.
- Climate change is changing the way we think about the world – and thereby changing our culture. We must respond to climate change with positive interventions and adopt a culture of sustainability.
- Culture makes an impression on people's attitudes. Art, in all its forms, and celebration can make a strong contribution to linking culture with lake protection.
- Many steps have already been taken to improve the management of lakes in order to sustain their cultural values. We need to build on success stories such as that of Mono Lake in California and other examples presented at the conference.

The conference participants concluded that the cultural and spiritual values of lakes, together with the environmental and economic services that lakes provide, make an undisputed case for lake protection. They pledge to take action in the following areas:

- **Strengthen collaboration and seek new partnerships between the sectors concerned with lake productive and protective systems, especially within and between governments, non-government organisations and the private sector, so as to respond to the varying cultures of our societies;**
- **Continue to strive to increase the public's awareness of the need for lake protection out of respect for and in order to conserve landscape and human cultures;**
- **Adopt new, more innovative and inclusive approaches to people's participation in decision making and co-management and monitoring of lakes, and help build the capacities needed to be part of these processes;**
- **Adopt a culture of sustainability in our own practices and promote this culture beyond our own organisations;**
- **Support knowledge-based initiatives such as the proposed Academy of Lakes;**
- **Make the interrelationship between lakes, water and culture a mainstream part of international and national policies, plans and strategies. For example, define specific lake targets and indicators that link sustainable lake management to the Millennium Development Goals;**
- **Convey this Statement and other results from the Living Lakes Conference to the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel, other international conventions committed to the conservation and wise management of lakes, and to local, national and regional planning authorities;**
- **Help build capacity for more integrated approaches to lake and water management for the benefit of all citizens. For example, create opportunities for learning outside formal structures, with an emphasis on district and local levels; build on and apply local and traditional knowledge;**
- **Learn from the experiences shared at the Living Lakes Conference and take immediate action so that the degradation of Lake Trasimeno, and the many other lakes whose decline was described at the conference, can be halted and the degradation they are now suffering reversed.**

The conference participants expressed their unreserved gratitude to Provincia di Perugia, Regione Umbria, the Comunita Montana – Associazione dei Comuni 'Trasimeno-Medio in Trevere' and Legambiente, Italy for hosting the conference in a venue of unique cultural heritage. They had greatly appreciated the generous local gastronomy and the cultural displays that had stimulated the rich debate amongst conference participants and fuelled their determination to promote these actions within and beyond the Living Lakes Network.

Trasimeno, 27 September 2008