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Protection and management of cultural landscapes in Europe

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Thankyou for this opportunity. I salute the members of the Living Lakes network, and the Global Nature Fund.

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The conference title 'Linking Cultural Landscape Values to Lake Protection' places lakes firmly within the landscapes of which they are part. In many regions of the world, lakes are the focal point of the natural systems within their water catchments; of the historic and modern culture, and the cultural heritage, of the area; and of the visual landscape.

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For this reason, the health of the lake may depend upon the sound management of the natural systems, the protection of the cultural heritage, and upon the harmonious protection and management of the landscape. This is well recognised in the declared mission of the Living Lakes network, namely "to enhance the protection, restoration and rehabilitation of lakes, wetlands and other freshwater bodies and their catchments all over the world". Conversely, the condition of a lake can affect the well-being of the wider landscape.

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I offer an example of this link between cultural landscapes and the health of lakes or wetlands. The great farmhouses of the Altes Land, on the south side of the river Elbe in Germany, have traditionally been thatched with reed from the Elbe estuary. But pollution of the river by run-off from farms and factories has so weakened the reed that it can no longer be used for this thatching ...

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So, the farmers have turned instead to reed from Lake Balaton in Hungary – a member of your network - where the water is still clean enough to produce strong and suitable reed. Harvesting of the reed helps to sustain the landscape of the Altes Land, the health of the Balaton ecosystem, and the income of the reed cutters.

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That simple example illustrates two further crucial points, namely :

- the different geographic scale of catchments that may affect the health of our lakes and water systems
- the intimate link between landscape, nature and culture

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Geographic scale. Lake Balaton, like Lake Trasimeno, has a small catchment. By contrast the river Elbe is one of the great rivers of Europe : the pollution in its estuary may come from sources far upstream. Some of Europe's rivers flow through many countries, which greatly impedes the integrated management of the catchment. For example, clear felling of forests in the Ukraine contributed some years ago to the disastrous flooding along the Tisza river in Hungary. In 2000, a tailings pond burst at a mine in Romania, releasing cyanide and heavy metals into a tributary of the Tisza, with devastating impact of all aquatic life. In response to this and other problems, the states in the Tisza Basin have agreed on close co-operation, aiming to achieve integrated management of the Basin.

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In other continents, multi-national demands upon rivers and lakes are becoming increasingly critical, for example the serious draw-down of the waters of the Sea of Galilee, shown here.

Our thinking about management of rivers and of landscapes has to be capable of dealing with this multi-national dimension.

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Culture and nature. Until recent years, most global and national systems for protection of the natural heritage were separated from those for the cultural heritage. Now, these great traditions are coming together, and landscape is seen as a powerful unifying concept. This has been recognised, for example, by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, and in the context of the pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy.

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This integrating approach to culture and nature is the central idea behind the European Landscape Convention, created by the Council of Europe and already ratified by 29 member states. Before it was adopted, in the year 2000, the Council of Europe had pursued separately the two strands of heritage protection - conservation of nature through the Berne Convention ...

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... and protection of the architectural heritage through the Granada Convention. Landscape brings these two strands together. In a continent like Europe, with its rich and highly varied biodiversity, and its millennia of human activity, one can indeed say that all its landscapes are natural and all are cultural.

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The Convention is the first international treaty in the world to focus in this way upon landscape.

The stated aim of the Convention is to promote the protection, management and planning of Europe's landscape, and to organise European co-operation on landscape issues.

The Convention has a strong base in democracy. It relates to all landscapes – urban, peri-urban and rural; the ordinary and even the despoiled, as well as the exceptional. Landscapes are perceived as the setting of people's lives : so, the general public should take an active part in caring for them. Moreover, Europe's landscapes – in all their high diversity – are seen as being of value to all Europeans : therefore, public authorities in each country should take action to protect, manage and plan landscapes; and should cooperate with each other at European level.

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The parties to the Convention are the member states who ratify it. They commit themselves to recognise landscapes in law; to establish and implement policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning; to establish procedures for the general public, local and regional authorities, and others to participate in this activity; and to integrate landscape into all relevant policies.

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The Convention's focus is on 12 active verbs :

1. to **recognise landscapes in law**
2. to **integrate landscape into all relevant policies**

These are jobs for government, and very demanding ones. The challenge is to get landscapes into the policies not only for agriculture or forestry but also for such fields as transport, water supply, energy and spatial planning.

The next seven verbs define the action that is needed everywhere, for every landscape. The action on them lies mainly with public bodies, but working closely with all stakeholders.

The key verbs are :

3. to **identify landscapes**, that is to describe their character and the key elements in that character :

4. **to assess the landscapes**, that is to analyse what contributes to, and what detracts from, their quality and distinctiveness
5. **to define objectives for landscape quality, after public consultation** : these objectives should form the frame for the main process of physical action, embodied in the next three verbs
6. **to protect what should be protected**
7. **to manage what needs management in order to be sustained**
8. **to plan, in the sense stated in the Convention, namely to take strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore and create landscapes**
9. **to monitor what is happening to the landscapes**, in terms of change and the impact of that change upon the character of the landscapes and upon the achievement or not of the stated objectives.

These seven verbs are the heart of the matter ... and, as I will show, can have high relevance to the health of lakes and their catchments. They are an integral package, in that :

- the objectives for landscape quality must be based upon the sound identification and assessment of landscapes, and of external needs which may need to be met within the landscapes
- in turn, the objectives form the basis for the action to protect, manage and plan : most landscapes in Europe need some action within all three of these verbs
- monitoring is vital, in order to judge the results of action within all the preceding verbs and to provide a basis for sharpening policy and action where that is needed.
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The next two verbs provide an essential supportive context.

10. To promote education and training

The tasks which are set by the earlier verbs are indeed demanding. Landscapes, and the processes that affect them, are so diverse and complex, so linked to the cycles of nature and the demands of people, so subject to change as policies and human actions evolve, that the understanding of them is a major inter-disciplinary challenge. It is a great task for the universities, professions and schools of Europe.

11. To raise public awareness and participation

This is a vital task, for three main reasons – democracy, in that landscapes belong to everyone; co-responsibility, in that every citizen, every property owner, every user of land, can influence the look of the landscape for good or ill; and governance, in that concern within the population can lead to a commitment in government.

The final verb is ...

12. To cooperate at European level, through exchange of experience, of information and of specialists.

There is much to be gained through such cooperation, notably between governments; between regional and local authorities; between Universities; and between non-government organisations.

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External needs. I mentioned that the statement of objectives for landscape quality is a crucial step in the process. These objectives must be based upon the sound identification and assessment of landscapes, which is the heart of the landscape character idea. But most landscapes are affected also by external needs, such as demands for town expansion, production of renewable energy, or growth in tourism; or by external forces such as climate change. The statement of objectives must take account of these external needs and forces as well as the internal logic of landscape character, and must strive to reconcile the two, so

that change to the landscape leads to enhancement, not diminution, of its distinctive character.

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I offer an example of a major development, the bridge over the Tarn Gorge in France, for which the British designers have found a solution which heightens the sense of drama in this cultural landscape.

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Policy and practical action

Those countries in Europe who had ratified the Convention have accepted a challenge of policy-making and practical action which will be long-lasting and which should bring widespread benefit in enhancing the quality and diversity of landscapes and the well-being of lakes and their catchments. Some European countries are well advanced in the process : others are at early stages of thinking about landscapes as a public good. Meeting the challenge will depend on the action of public authorities at all levels, and of a wide range of stakeholders, notably all who own or manage land and physical structures of all kinds. The care of our landscapes is indeed a shared responsibility.

To show what is being done, I refer to five key types of action

- Surveys of landscapes
- Review of relevant policies
- Bringing landscape into territorial plans
- Landscape character
- Protection, management and planning

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First, national or regional governments may put in hand a survey of the whole territory in order (in the words of the Convention) to 'identify and assess' landscapes. This map of the Character of England, defining over 150 distinct landscape areas, is the product of such a survey. It is an essential basis for the expression, at local level, of landscape objectives which in turn feed into spatial management plans. It is based on the concept of areas of distinct landscape character, because the aim is to protect the distinctiveness as well as the quality of each landscape.

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For example, the two areas in England which are in membership of the Living Lakes network – the Lake District

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...and the Broads - are wholly different in character.

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Second, state and regional authorities should progressively review their policies in all fields that significantly affect landscape; and, in doing so, should bring landscape considerations into each policy.

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This may best be done sector by sector, for example the policies related to wind energy ...

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... or tourism, in order (for example) to promote an appropriate new use of redundant traditional barns as simple accommodation for walkers

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... or (closer to your own major interest), water catchment, as in this landscaped reservoir.

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Third, regional or local authorities, when preparing or reviewing their territorial plans, may fully incorporate landscape objectives, based upon the process stated in the Convention. This map shows part of the landscape assessment prepared for the territorial plan of Toscana region. This embedding of landscape concerns into the management of whole territories can be a vital safeguard for the well-being of lakes, precisely because the lake is often the focal point of the territory and may be the 'downstream' beneficiary or victim of the good or bad management of habitats and cultural landscapes within the territory.

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Fourth, the idea of landscape character can be a guide to sustaining and enhancing the quality and diversity of cultural landscapes. The glory of European landscapes lies in their diversity, which itself arises from Europe's tremendous variety in climate, land form, geology, vegetation and the impact of human activity over thousands of years. Compare, for example the Venetian hill towns in the Istrian province of Croatia ...

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... with the flat plain of the Hortobagy in Hungary, with its famous local strain of white cattle.

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The process of identifying and assessing each landscape will reveal the features which form the individual character of each landscape. Such character assessment is then the starting-point for stating landscape objectives, which feed in to the spatial planning policies and detailed decision-making for each area. For example, understanding of landscape character can bring new development harmoniously into an existing settlement, such as these new houses in a village in England ...

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... or in guiding the new use of traditional buildings, such as these farmhouses in the Saarland converted sensitively into homes. In all cases, the aim may be to sustain those elements of the character which add to quality and distinctiveness; to remove or screen those which are antipathetic; and, where change is needed, to use that change to enhance the character.

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Fifth, I offer you again the three key verbs of the European Landscape Convention – to protect, to manage and to plan landscapes. Some landscapes need protection as a totality, while others need the protection of particular features. Some landscapes need planning, in the sense of strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create them anew. All landscapes need management, in order to sustain their character and their quality. Let me illustrate these points.

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Protection. Europe has a great legacy of Protected Areas, within all the categories recognised by the World Conservation Union. The long history of human settlement in this continent, taken with its topography and climate, has left us with very little wilderness. Many of our Protected Areas, such as National Parks in the United Kingdom and the Regional Parks in France, fall within IUCN Category V, Protected Landscapes. This example is the Yorkshire Dales National Park in England, with its own lake at Malham Tarn. These Protected Areas contain farms, villages and towns, and are largely in private and very variegated ownership. Their landscapes are indeed cultural, having been created by the activity of generations of foresters, graziers, farmers, quarrymen and others. In such places, protection is not a matter of seeking to 'freeze' the landscape, but rather to sustain the essential character and the quality of the landscape through the inevitable process of change.

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In other landscapes, protection may involve zoning. Lake Bled, in the peripheral zone of Triglav National Park in Slovenia, is a major feature in the cultural landscape and absorbs a large part of the tourism to the Park, which helps to protect the more central parts of the park.

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Planning. Many parts of Europe offer both the need, and the opportunity, to create new landscapes ... for example where cities are transforming their docklands or river frontages, as in Amsterdam, Copenhagen and (shown here) around the new Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, an addition to the landscape which has greatly strengthened the economy of that city.

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In England, many peri-urban landscapes, despoiled by neglect and vandalism, ...

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..... are being transformed through the creation of community forests. Similar opportunities may be offered by the areas of brown-coal mining in Poland, Czech Republic and east Germany, or in the war-affected regions of Croatia.

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Management. I want to end by describing the challenge of management. The nature of cultural landscapes is that they were created by human action. That human action has changed over the millennia. We no longer use stone tools, or worship as pagans in stone circles, such as this at Avebury in England : but the landscape contains the evidence of that historic activity, and we wish to protect that evidence. We must therefore manage the land, for example through avoidance of ploughing or removal of scrub on the site of ancient field systems.

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But the greatest challenge and opportunity for management of landscapes lies in the continuance of traditional practices which are still alive today. Many Mediterranean landscapes embody the products and ways of life handed down for classical time – olive oil, wine, goats and sheep

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This farming may depend upon terracing of steep land, like these dry limestone terraces in Cyprus which are a modest equivalent of the great irrigated terrace landscapes of China or the Philippines. The continuance of such landscapes, created by a way of life, depends upon the continuance of that way of life. But farming, like all economic activity, is subject to competitive pressure and the rising expectation of the younger generation. Many of these terraces in Cyprus are collapsing through disuse, or even though government-aided mechanisation. If we want to protect the distinctive landscapes, we have to treat them as a public good and to subsidise the way of life.

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That is why Europe has developed ambitious and complex programmes, which we call agri-environmental measures. Through these measures, national governments and the European Union offer payments to farmers to continue traditional practices, such as maintaining terraces and their related irrigation systems, or – as here in England – the dry-stone walls which have formed field boundaries for 500 years.

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This farmer, using his traditional skill to repair the wall, may get £5000 a year, within a 10-year agreement, to repair the walls and do other work to sustain the landscape features on his farm.

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As a final example, I show the western flank of the Triglav National Park in Slovenia, where the revival of traditional practices is helping to maintain the landscape and the livelihood of the people. These upland meadows have long been used for grazing, but recent years have seen many meadows abandoned.

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Now, with support from the government, small farmers have formed an association and brought back the cows to the fields.

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The association has built a new milking-shed in traditional style ...

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... with modern equipment

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... and set up a cheese-making plant, producing high quality cheese. The revived traditional life sustains the cultural landscape.

I conclude by saying that this Europe-wide initiative related to landscape is quite new. The draft Convention was produced in the same year that your Living Lakes network was set up. It only came into force in 2004. But I believe it will have an increasingly powerful impact on the protection and management of Europe's cultural landscapes. If the practical actions that I have described can be effectively linked to the process of catchment management and protection of lakes and wetlands that your network promotes, then we may see the emergence of a powerful force for good in a troubled world.

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