

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year commemorates the 20th anniversary of the European Landscape Convention, the first international treaty devoted to sustainable development. There are now forty States, parties to the Convention, who have committed to the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and co-operation on these.

In undertaking this commitment, recognising the landscape as an essential component of the natural environment, it ensures not simply the well-being of the landscape but also the well-being of people. The focus of the Landscape Convention is, ultimately, on human well-being, whose territorial dimension, the landscape, a mosaic of four dimensions of sustainable development (natural, cultural, social and economic), must be an important subject of national policies.

The Convention refers to and conveys the Council of Europe's values: sustainability, the principle of subsidiarity, the need to use democratic instruments. It defines concepts of landscape, landscape policy, landscape quality, landscape protection, and landscape management, because of the different approaches and shortcomings of national legal systems. Importantly, the premise of the Landscape Convention is to take all landscapes into consideration, regardless of these condition or legal status. It does not imply that the same measures and policies must be applied to all landscapes. Measures should be adapted to each landscape as well as a need to various forms of treatment at local level.

The Convention lays down general and specific measures leaving the Parties the choice of means to fulfil their obligations without any derogation but must recognise landscapes in law, as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity. In doing so, establishing procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other parties with an interest in the definition and implementation of the landscape policies is fundamental. Importantly, as a general measure, the landscape, as a territorial dimension of the implementation of policies, and their area of impact, should be integrated in all policies which may have a direct as well as an indirect impact.

The Convention recognises that landscape has no frontiers and the future holds great potential for more cooperation between bordering countries. Preserving the special characteristics that exist across borders, ensuring comprehensive and sympathetic management happens on both sides, will require that landscape is considered at an international level. However, in more general terms, landscape must become a mainstream political concern since it plays such an important role in the well-being of people, their quality of life, and their future. Well-conceived policies will help to combat climate change and poor air quality.

Giving people an active role in decision-making on landscape, will help them identify with the areas and towns where they live. A good experience in the participatory planning process will ensure their continued involvement helping to promote sustainable development and respect of the area concerned, appreciating and enjoying a landscape that has an important bearing on social initiatives and economic success.

However, to achieve this, a multi-disciplinary, cross sectoral approach is also required, giving greater recognition to the expertise in landscape design, planning, science and management which can contribute hugely to a more holistic approach. Failure to do this, will not simply be ineffective, inefficient and counter-productive but also not in the public interest.

We are at a crucial moment in time, largely brought about by climate change. We already know the effects this is having on the health of natural communities, but some of the greatest changes will be experienced in urban and peri-urban areas.

I believe that it is crucial to devise broad-ranging plans for the protection, management and planning of all landscapes, incorporating these plans in specific comprehensive strategic documents, in which the condition of the landscape and the triggering effects for change can be handled together. To do this it will be necessary to explore and understand causal effects and consequences, to determine responsibility, and to plan for change.

To this end, the Convention is contributing to the achievement of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, in particular with regard to:

- Good Health and well-being;
- Sustainable Cities and Communities;
- Climate action;
- Life on land, and
- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Let us work together, not simply for individual communities but for Europe as a whole.

Please, consider landscape in all decision-making processes; adapt and apply the recommendations of this treaty for our health, well-being and, most importantly, for future generations. And, please, guarantee the right to participation by the general public, local and regional authorities, and other relevant parties with an interest in the definition, implementation and monitoring of landscape policies, and set the frame of sustainability by laws based on cross sectoral co-ordination and the expert knowledge of a wide range of professions.

Thank you for your kind attention.