

THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION AND TOURISM

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Abstract

On 17 September 2007 the Hungarian Parliament passed the act that put into force the European Landscape Convention and it will be operative in the country from 1 January 2008. There are decision on the renewal of the functioning of the National Committee, which has a scientific workgroup, in connection with the promulgation process of the Landscape Convention. Due to its high importance, tourism can be the sector that fully recognize the role of landscapes relevant to the ideas outlined by the Convention.

Keywords: European Landscape Convention, landscape preservation, tourism

1. Introduction

The general human demand to leave the well-known social-natural environment behind for mental and physical renewal regularly became available for the gross of the people in the developed countries during the past century (Head, 2000, Pedroli et al. 2007). The experience of journeys or – as Goethe wrote “being travelling” (“Unterwegs zu sein”) – can play that kind of refreshing role alone, but for most people, anyway, reaching their destinations promises real recreation. Those destinations are, in most cases, some kind of cultural-historic reminiscence of humankind or special geographic environments, like coasts, mountains, deserts etc (Pedroli, 2000). Naturally, those destinations are the most preferred ones, where attractions are combined, for instance, if a harmonic, authentic landscape is visible from the steps of an ancient amphitheatre and our sight does not fault with high voltage cables, or mental perception is not hindered by the unholy noise of a motorway (de Haas, et al. 1999, Haaren, 2002).

It is quite natural for European people of the 21st century that each pieces of our cultural-historic heritage must be protected and it sounds weird that ancient and medieval ruins had been used merely as stone pit until the 19th century. After the protection of cultural-historic reminiscences nature protection became important in the early 20th, what lead to a great change social approach again. Plants and animals became protected, but it turned out soon that protection of individual plant or animal species without the protection of their ecotops do not provide

permanent results. The process has gradually led to the protection of associations, from where to realize the necessity of landscape protection was only one step ahead (Tress et al. 2003). European landscapes worth protection are those cultural landscapes in most cases, where nature, past, and present of the society, what uses the landscape live together in balance and harmony (Graham et al. 2000, Robertson – Richards, 2003). Systematic landscape protection – beside the protection of natural and earth scientific values – takes on the conservation of two types of values that are not, or not only natural ones today (Kiss – Benkhard, 2006). Those cultural-historic values, artificial landscape forming elements considered valuable by the society belong to the first category, which are linked to human socio-economic activities. On the other hand these values are in close relationship with their natural environment. The second category consists of landscape values that are examples of harmonic union of natural and artificial landscape forming elements.

The first statutory law on landscape protection was released in Hungary in 1986, but an unfortunate decision passed the control over its execution to the ministry of agriculture in 1990. The idea of an independent landscape act rose in those years, what would have been a pioneer step in Europe, but later the blueprint got the “Landscape and nature protection” title. Its parts that dealt with landscape protection became even weaker subsequently and its final version act LIII, got the “On the protection of nature” title. However, in the 7th paragraph of the act it is emphasized that regulations are valid not only for Natura 2000 and protected areas but all landscapes in Hungary. Statutory order 166 (XI.19), was released in 1999, Gábor Duhay and his team (Duhay, 2004) compiled a useful handbook in order to help its execution. Second revised edition of the handbook was published in 2007.

Landscape protection issues on European level remained in the frame of workshops of researchers until the mid 1990’s, although there were some international projects like the Bio- and Landscape Diversity Strategy of the European Union, which had a broad publicity (Csorba, 2002). Real political commitment to landscape protection evolved in the last years of the past century and we experience the era of its legislative establishment and awareness today. Geography is most closely involved in this third change of paradigm and it can bring the most direct results, tasks, jobs and power for representation of interests.

2. Immediate premises of the European Landscape Convention

The Declaration of Basel – *On the value of the European landscapes* and nature contains the conclusions and proposals of the congress held with the participation of 30 countries in Basel in 1997 (Declaration of Basel 1997). Most important initiative of the Conference is the elaboration of the method called

“Environmentally Appropriate Practice”. The Declaration of Basel provided the basic work material for the Conference of the Ministers of the Environment held in Aarhus (Denmark) one year later in 1998. In spite of the time consuming preparatory process the wording of the declaration on landscapes initiated by the Council of Europe took several years. In connection with actual issues, it turned out that due to the high degree of landscape diversity and multifunctional land use characteristic for Europe, it is a very hard task to elaborate a program that does not hurt the interests of anybody. For this reason landscape protection, landscape management, landscape-planning ideas often generate conflicts between social groups, nations, regional or local interests. Blueprints were argued at the sessions of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.

The thorny path of wording the declaration was characterized by the activity of regional politicians and settlement managers. It is tangible that the blueprints compiled during the preparatory phase are stricter than the European Landscape Convention, what was opened for signature on 19th October 2000 in Florence. For example, a paragraph that blames globalization and media was simply dropped out from the preamble;

“The protection of landscapes means the protection of spiritual values and emotions as well, which enables citizens to affect for their everyday environment in a way that makes possible a cheerful and calm existence in a society, which is an object of stock market and consumption news too often.”

There is not any tangible data or schedules for tasks in the brief document, what consists of 8 pages only. It is rather a framework material, what should be fulfilled with content by the national regulations. The Convention ETS no. 176, proclaimed in Florence has processed the conventional painfully long way of international treaties. The European Committee, which has 45 members much more than the members of the European Union, since some East-European and Caucasian Countries are members in it as well (like Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine), can promulgate it in a three step process:

- by signing the treaty, what means the declaration of accession;
- by ratification, that is by integration into the rule of law of the given country and finally;
- by promulgation of national rule of law, by the release of a document that put it into force or by an enacting clause.

18 countries have made the first step in Florence, and only 2-3 countries have declared such intent annually since then. Ratifications have occurred rather leisurely. Almost four years had occurred by the time the tenth country has ratified the document what is the minimal requirement for its promulgation. By that act in

2004, the treaty has become part of the European rule of law. The first countries were Norway, Moldova, Romania and Ireland to ratify it. Hungary was not very fast to react, with the ratification in 2005 (statutory order 2051/2005; IV 8) we were not in the advance party but still in the mid group. Hungary signed the Convention on 25 September 2005 and the Parliament passed the act that put it into force on 17 September 2007 (no. CXI) and it will be operative from 1 January 2008.

The ratification process in Hungary was hindered by that every step required inter portfolio reconciliations, and in some issues cooperation between the National Bureau (previously Ministry) of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Environment and Water was not easy. The situation improved much when act number CXI designated the Ministry of Environment and Water as the so-called first place responsible for the execution of the act.

29 countries have committed itself to the Convention until December 2007. It is edifying to overview which countries have showed little interest. Countries that have significant weight like Greece, Sweden and Switzerland have not ratified the document yet. Austria, Germany, Estonia and Russia for example have not taken the first step, the signature yet.

3. Intellectuality of European Landscape Convention, some focuses

In the Convention landscapes has not been defined in the traditional way as physical geographic or nature conservation entities, but as culture landscapes:

„Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”

According to the document, there are two important features of European landscapes from the aspect of landscape geography:

Diversity, what means a high degree of landscape diversity, outstanding landscape quality, that is due to their endowments European landscapes have high social use value, and they are suitable for multifunctional use.

These two base features support the European Landscape Convention, the declaration of that in the continent coordinated landscape **protection**, **management** and **planning** is necessary. Most frequently cited articles can be found in the justification of the Convention;

„...the landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity.”

„Landscape must become a mainstream political concern, since it plays an important role in the well-being of Europeans who are no longer prepared to tolerate the alteration of their surroundings by technical and economic developments in which they have no say. Landscape is the concern of all and lends itself to democratic treatment, particularly at local and regional level.”

Authors mention in the text of the Convention several times that the fundamental reason for the release of the document is that European landscapes are endangered. There are many human activities that threaten healthy, from ecologic aspects well functioning, multifunctional landscapes in Europe.

„...developments in agriculture, forestry, industrial and mineral production techniques and in regional planning, town planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism and recreation and, at a more general level, changes in the world economy are in many cases accelerating, the transformation of landscapes.”

It is interesting that Explanatory Report of the Committee of Ministers, released in 2003, mention those landscapes that are cut into two by frontiers.

„...there are landscapes which have identical characteristics on both sides of borders, and therefore require transborder measures to implement the action principles.”

Although Gömörzölös village (North Hungary) and its environment got the „**Landscape award**” in 2003, the initial dash has been lost since that time. Landscape evaluation method that makes possible to qualify reliably landscape values, landscape conditions and dangers, has not been elaborated yet. There were several attempts to develop that method in the recent years. British/Scottish/Wales Countryside Commission and the studies “European Landscape Character Areas” (Wascher, 2005) coordinated by the Dutch research center Alterra got the highest respect. There has been a similar attempt in Hungary as well with the title “*Program for Environmental Quality Assessment*”. It is coordinated by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. There had been a ministerial decision on the renewal of the functioning of the National Inter Portfolio Committee, which has a scientific workgroup, in connection with the promulgation process of the Landscape Convention.

It is strange a coincidence, but the acceptance process of the Convention occurs in the same period when the shift of higher education to the so called “Bologna-system” takes place. It is a great chance to strengthen the positions of landscape protection in education, what has a special emphasize in the Convention. Hungary made a step forward that landscape research and protection have become an independent orientation at Basic and Master level of the education of geographers. Landscape protection has kept its position in the education of landscape architects. Additionally, at the B level of science and technical education there is an opportunity to learn about these kinds of European treaties in the frame of the compulsory subject “European Studies”.

There are many publications on this topic especially since 2005, what deal with the professional consequences of the Convention (Csorba, 2002, Tardy – Duhay, 2007, Schuchmann, 2007). Authors hope that the present study will contribute to the tourist concerns of the Convention.

4. Tourism and the European Landscape Convention

According to the text of the Convention, tourism is one of the social activities that lead to the accelerated alteration of landscapes. Undeniably, mass tourism has stronger landscape forming impacts in some regions of Europe than forestry, agriculture or mining industry; and even the extent of areas affected by industrial activities has been left behind the degree of landscape changes in the Mediterranean coasts or recreation centers in the Alps (Fig. 1-2.). The astonishing sizes of holiday estates in the Mediterranean and the spread of mountain roads and enormous parking lots for the better availability of winter sport centers and recreation sites in the Alps alter dramatically not simply individual landscapes but landscape appearance and landscape functions of whole regions.

It is obvious, that mass tourism, what causes extreme loads on landscapes is only a part – but not a minor part – of tourism. It is a fact that in regions of mass tourism the density of build-up, thriftless water consumption, serious air pollution caused by traffic, high energy demand, and additionally, the seasonal nature of loads is highly dangerous for landscape functioning. Landscape forming effects of hotels, roads, airports, overwhelmingly enormous parking lots, yacht ports, sewage works, energy systems, etc. is seriously disadvantageous in almost each case.

Although European Landscape Convention mentions tourism and recreation in the category of activities that means loads of landscapes, the content and aims of the document can easily be related to environmentally conscious tourism. However, the main aim of the Convention is to maintain, plan, and – if it is necessary – to

rehabilitate diverse and good quality European landscapes. Such landscapes can attract tourism, since healthy clean and safe landscapes are the best destinations what can provide aesthetic, mental and physical experience. Landscape types supported by the Landscape Convention are the same, what are preferred by soft tourism and those are the areas that are suitable for recreation as well.



Fig.1. Holiday village in South Portugal (Albufeira)



Fig. 2. Parking lot at the village of Täsch, 15 km away from Matterhorn (Switzerland)

5. Relationships between tourism and natural values

The number of visitors of natural values and cultural landscapes depends merely upon their visual value they are for tourists not on their scientific or educational importance. Most tourists are not interested in forms or living creatures that are important from scientific aspects, but nature is a source of entertainment for its beauty and aesthetics for them (Kiss – Benkhard, 2006). Tourists choose the destinations of their trips usually by allocating a region first and they make a list of attractions in the chosen area then. In other words in the selection of their destinations the landscape is principal and all other natural values have secondary importance only. Naturally, in the case of some especially remarkable and world famous attractions, the order can be reversed, but the first case is much more frequent. For instance, its basalt capped buttes makes the Tapolca-basin in the Balaton-uplands one of the most beautiful (if not the most beautiful) landscape of Hungary (Fig. 3.). Anyhow tourists, who visit that place are not motivated usually by the opportunity that they can study the signs of the ancient basaltic volcanism while climbing the rocks. The before mentioned buttes mean simply excellent look-out points for an average tourist, they are outstandingly good locations from landscape aesthetic aspects and their importance from geologic and geomorphologic aspects is of secondary importance. On the contrary to researchers, for an average tourist the scientific function has only additional information content what can be acquired from tables along the study-trails created with educational purposes. Although these information undeniably contribute to the

development of environmentally conscious education of tourists; and for this reason, they should be welcomed, but for most tourists, they are not the main reasons to visit a butte, but **for their visual value**.

It is supported by the fact that even in the case of Baradla-Cave or the castle hill of Füzér what has been protected since 1940 and 1941 among the first protected areas in the long history of Hungarian nature conservation practice, the main reason of protection was not their scientific importance but their visual value (Kiss – Benkhard, 2006).

The importance of the European Landscape Convention – among others – lies in the fact that it urge with its means the elaboration of a uniform and complex European inventory that contains landscape value. Such initiative was for instance, the Hungarian Earth Scientific Nature protection Survey, where it turned out that 25% of the values was not protected at the time of the survey (Kiss – Benkhard, 2006). Obviously, we can protect what we know only. Presentation of the values can help the improvement of their social acceptance and strengthen landscape empathy and identity of people as well.

6. Relationships between tourism and cultural-historic values

Cultural-historic values are those artificial landscape forming elements that were created by human socio-economic activities. Major proportion of landscape values are connected to historic or active land use forms, vegetation cover and water bodies. The environment impregnated with human activities, what is present in the landscape is our heritage in the widest sense (Konkolyné, 2001). European landscape approach has left far behind the situation, what was typical for the mid 19th century, when the railway tunnel in the Loreley-cliff, along River Rhein, the railway lines and the building of the railway station itself were considered the symbols of technical advance, to such a degree that most expensive hotel rooms were those that looked onto the railway, the railway station (Dix, 2002.)! However, certain elements of our technical heritage still have landscape values today. Among the reminiscences of our past the spiritual heritage has an increasing importance, what is involved in the landscape as well. Those together form the characteristic landscape structure, what is manifested in the landscape and it is typical for the society what lives in the landscape (Fig. 4). Substantially it is represented in the Cultural Landscape category of the World Heritage.

The European Council launched its campaign called “Europe our Collective Heritage”. It was emphasized at a conference held in Wien in 1999, that “Cultural heritage enriched by diversity “can contribute to “democracy in the broad regions of Europe” European heritage is the collective mind and heritage of the European

continent, that is our collective property. The same ideas are reflected in the text of the Landscape Convention.

One of the important motives of cultural tourism, what makes people travel is to experience the cultural heritage of different people, to visit landscape forming values, which are in harmony with the landscapes; therefore they are parts of them. Europe excel from the continents with its diverse landscape and land use structure (Kollányi, 2004). It is not accidental that more than half of the landscapes that got the World Heritage status can be found in our continent. For local people the reinforcement of landscape identity is the most important, while thematic routes, like the “Balkan route”, the “Network of Historic Universities”, the “Network of Applied Arts and Crafts”, etc. and connected programs wait for the tourists.



Fig. 3. The Tapolca-basin one of the most beautiful micro regions in Hungary



Fig. 4. Cultural landscape in the Alps (St. Georgen, near the Zell am Zee, Austria)

Authors believe that the most important feature of the European Landscape Convention lies in its holistic approach (Konkolyné, 2007). The most important message of the Convention is the recognition of **interactions between landscape and culture**, and the necessity of adequate actions. The ratification of the Convention has proved that European thinking is able to apprehend our environment as a system, and the opposition between the structural and the molecular approach will not characterize the future.

7. Conclusions

Tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy today. For this reason its impacts on the landscapes has stressed importance. The giant investments and enormous amount of material transported, this way, can cause significant alterations, in other words the degradation of landscapes. It is only one – and the ugly – face of tourism. Due to its high importance, tourism can be the

sector that recognize the role of landscapes in tourism and will be able to help their long-term conservation, since it endangers its own existence – the tourist attraction itself – if alters the environment. Since main objects of soft tourism are natural-, and landscape values within that category, therefore tourism desperately needs attractive and aesthetic landscapes. Its elemental interests lie in the maintenance of natural and diverse landscape mosaics, which reflects human culture!

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