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Historical Landscapes  
Suggested definition and  
proposal plan of action

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## HISTORICAL LANDSCAPES

### Suggested definition and proposed plan of action

Throughout the history of mankind, wherever modes, styles or necessity has driven them to transform their dwellings, men have either deserted, destroyed or re-employed earlier constructions with a view to further rebuilding.

To safeguard and enhance monuments and sites of the past is a recent development hardly manifest before the 19th century.

Examples of universal renown were obviously the objects of this special care: the historic monument, symbol of culture, luxury or power.

Learning of the same type as archaeology, with all its implications of scholarship, minutiae and respect for the subject per se rather than what it represented is implicit for safeguarding and restoring.

The phenomena of town planning and demographic increase have led men of to-day, so acutely aware of the setting in which they should live, to go a step further.

Without disclaiming the motivations of the 19th century, they advocate the safeguarding, not solely of individual buildings but also that of large and complex ensembles made up of heterogeneous elements.

Thus, the problem of historical landscapes is brought up.

Representative of an entire period, they bear witness to the fact that history no longer is a chronological sequence of political data; rather they illustrate the invariability of the process of thinking from generation to generation, finally they assume the values of symbols for the consciousness of mankind.

Nor can one deny that, even on very different planes, historical landscapes do satisfy deeply rooted needs of the human spirit. This, for instance, may be applied to the notion of holiness, maintained throughout the centuries as in Kyoto where, despite destruction, the temples are perpetuated, or to the notion of the fatherland, as expressed in the reconstruction of Warsaw or again to the desire to preserve remains presenting special features or which may serve as models; to the need of apprehending the various aesthetic trends as expressed through subtly organised precious materials bringing an additional element of stability to the man of to-day.

A survey, recently carried out in France by a State governed financial body entrusted with the granting of loans to cities undertaking urban renewal, has shown that, immediately following the desire for amenities, the French population wishes to live in a town with a historical past.

That special attention should be given to landscapes fashioned by history is thus confirmed on all sides.

Nevertheless, to define a historical landscape is not, from the outset, as simple as one

might think. Given the need to clearly construe the subject of our discussion, surely it is advisable to carefully scrutinize a comprehensive definition acceptable in all parts of the world.

## 1. THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE; definition

The limits of every landscape, that is every "ensemble"\* grouping natural or artificial elements, lie within the field of vision of the observer.

That is to say, a landscape is part of a site encompassed within the field of vision of the onlooker.

This approach to the problem which, at the initial juncture (and this should be emphasized) assimilates the landscape to a kind of picture, has the advantage of calling forth all fundamental issues: building lines, harmonious relationships, relationships between volumes, characteristics, the nature of constituent elements, all of which should be accounted for if one is to fully understand what a landscape really is.

This approach also makes it possible to grasp the configuration of the landscape. It will accede to generalities by avoiding detailed enumeration of different kinds; by bearing in mind the intricate morphological import, it will henceforth circumscribe the types of acceptable interventions applicable to landscapes either remaining in their original state or created by the will of man.

### 1.2 The role of history

In another connection, historical associations will determine the characteristics to be preserved and will impose the nature of the constituent elements of the landscape under study.

History, as understood in this particular case, is interpreted by a series of operations, from actual constructing to the organisation of arable land.

History reflects the multiple aspects of social life, far more complex and, to my mind, far more revealing than a work of art, the qualities of which, often magnificent indeed, nevertheless interpret but a simple facet of a given period.

Let us further stress that in matters of artistic creation, the chosen forms are visualised in a concept itself influenced by physical, psychological, economic and cultural factors.

To rediscover the motivation of such concepts where sites are involved, is essential whenever are raised the problems of preservation and of enhancement with all this can imply when anachronistic components have been introduced.

Finally, the historical landscape is usually systematized around an essential element

\*Note for translator: The principle of the "ensemble" stems from the intimate union of appearance and structure.

dominating the setting. Thus this ensemble (element + setting) will create an environment exalting both the character and the spirit of these testimonies of the past. One finds oneself in the presence of a living factor, as opposed to the inert object lying within the silence of museum walls.

Bearing in mind these preliminary remarks, one can take a census of a number of historical landscapes fundamentally different in their nature.

- 1.2.1 **Urban landscapes** raising the problem of historical quarters, the monuments and their setting, groups of buildings which singly may be devoid of any great interest but which, as a whole, have created a back-drop one would wish to preserve.
- 1.2.2 **Natural landscapes** to be preserved either because they still remain unexploited by man (high mountains, virgin territories, etc. . . ) or because in the opinion of ecologists, they will, in the near future, become natural reserves for fast disappearing species of fauna and flora.
- 1.2.3 **Rural landscapes** representative of the ways the presence and activities of man have been introduced into a characteristic, and thereby a historical site.
- 1.2.4 **Heterogeneous landscapes** deliberately created by man by the introduction of his own constructions into a natural environment used as a setting.
- 1.2.5 **Modern landscapes** which nevertheless already belong to history as due to the importance of their characteristics (sites of dams, etc.,) must be preserved to enable the generations of to-morrow to better understand the achievements of those of to-day.

This classification is by no means exhaustive. It is set down here merely to show the diversity of the problems raised by historical landscapes and how much they deserve careful study. The heterogeneity of the subject matter bans all over-simplified solutions.

### 1.3 Threats to historical landscapes

The only denominator historical landscapes seem to have in common is that of the perils threatening them. These perils are dangerous because they are the product of a certain type of civilisation and because of the extent of their repercussions.

It will suffice to recall the upheavals caused in the modern world by the passing from an agricultural society to an industrial society; the demographic increase and con-

centration of population: as well as modification in the scale of construction due to the use of new materials (concrete, steel, glass) in traditional buildings as well as in civil engineering works which leave their imprint on any number of natural landscapes.

## **2. EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE ACTION**

This rapid survey of the main perils threatening historical landscapes by no means implies they cannot be fought against. The different types of possible action described below should, in my opinion, warrant the assumption that historical landscapes belonging to the national heritage can, in all likelihood, be presented and enhanced.

Evidently, methods and techniques applied to historical landscape vary widely in nature and in scope. Still, three major actions come directly to mind, whether they can be carried out independently or whether they be closely imbricated.

### **2.1 Preservation**

The first method to apply is to protect that which already exists. This is what should be done with regard to landscapes one may well believe will no longer change their character being distinctive enough to compel recognition.

### **2.2 Restoration**

When, due to the deterioration of the fundamental and constituent components of the landscape preservation proves to no longer be sufficient, restoration becomes imperative.

Obviously when applied to a historical landscape measures of restoration are carried out on a far wider scale than on an individual building.

Nonetheless, the spirit in which work of restoration are to be undertaken should be emphasized for it is a subject of great controversy throughout the world.

The first thing to be stressed is that when it comes to restoring plant or architectural ornamentation, it is exceedingly rare for one to be able to refer to indisputable records.

When unenlightened as to the original aspect, should restoration work be visible, or, on the contrary, should one strive to conceal it by using materials and techniques indistinguishable from those used in past ages?

Speaking for myself, I believe, that in the case of landscapes, character and environment should be the prime concerns in order to revive an image of the past for as many people as possible.

This is why the latter theory would appear to be the better and must be stressed

despite the criticisms it will not fail to provoke among scholars.

But this is certainly not the chief interest of the crowds visiting historical landscapes in quest of the spell of the past.

### 2.3 Reconstitution

Beyond the problems of restoration arise those of reconstitution, that is to say, the re-creation *ex-nihilo* of elements which one has every reason to believe existed previously and the presence of which is sadly missed.

There again, I shall not hesitate to advocate the primacy of character and environment on the archaeological concept, which, basic elsewhere, is purposeless in the context of landscapes.

This can be exemplified in the cases of natural landscape where the flora, un-escapable damned, will have to be replaced.

So far, preservation, restoration, reconstitution have given rise to many complications, very briefly stated above, but which, nevertheless, can be overcome in a setting the scale of which remains constant. And this, undeniably applies to the case of historical landscapes.

### 2.4 Introduction of modern elements

The need to maintain life in vestiges of the past will however often imply that, at a given time or at a given place, modern elements will interpenetrate the old ones. But, as it has already been stated, because of the varying possibilities of modern materials, contemporary works of civil engineering or architecture are in complete disharmony as to spirit and form with works of traditional architecture. Moreover, and this is even more serious, modern elements represent a disruption of programme.

As Monsieur Chastel, professor at the Sorbonne, has subtly remarked, results of historical surveys reveal a surprising complexity in the answers to the problems involved whereas, when it comes to constructions of the industrial era, they are, without reason however, totally stereotyped.

One can easily conceive the difficulties to be overcome in order to combine, within an ensemble — the unity of style and conception which must, by definition, be respected — elements having no relationship either on the ideological level or on the level of technical achievements.

A problem of doctrine will then occur. If it is acknowledged that materials of the industrial society are not consistent in character with that so vigorously expressed in ancient monuments, one will, perforce, be compelled to seek a compromise but only

on the condition that it be circumspect, for otherwise it could completely destroy the character of the work it is sought to revive.

In these circumstances, the pastiche endeavouring to respect both form and materials – so important to the significance of the general appearance – has its virtues. Though they may be criticised by the purist, they will be approved of by the public, for they will help it to rediscover the general likeness. In the scope of our present study, is this not the essential factor ?

I do not believe in so saying that precedence is given to popularization rather than to scholarship. But at least, let us remember that solutions do not come just as a matter of course.

May I recall that some of the most famous architects have often, and with the greatest restraint, completed works of their predecessors. Gabriel, for instance, one of the greatest French architects of the XVIIIth century did not hesitate for one instant to finish the Orleans Cathedral in the style of its original builders.

## **2.5 Transitional zones**

The various operations summarized above would be incomplete were attention not drawn to the fundamental importance of the maintenance of transitional zones in landscaping.

Setting of the landscape itself, this zone should imperceptibly lead the visitor to break off with a given context and afford him the freedom of spirit and freshness of vision required to fully appreciate all that the protected ensemble has to offer.

Differing in size, the transitional zone may exist in city landscapes where it will evidently be relatively small, and in natural landscapes where, on the contrary, it will be more or less extensive.

## **3. INSTRUMENTS OF ACTION**

### **3.1** It is unnecessary, before describing the measures to be taken ensuring the preservation and enhancement of a historical landscape, to dwell upon the reasons, so obvious are they, which compel specialists to acquire a thorough knowledge of the site to be safeguarded.

A great deal of information must be collected, the analysis thereof justifying a separate report.

All of them, however, should, in my opinion, concur to an awareness of the three constituent elements of historical landscape: structure, character, unity.

A landscape, like a building, has an internal structure determining its entire aspect



and, therefrom, the manner in which it is apprehended either by those living in it or observing it.

The components of the structure as opposed to the inert materials of its architecture are on a very different scale and of a very different kind (plants, living elements; buildings, inert elements; space and geological undulations.)

They are, however, connected by harmonious relationships: relationships between the different aspects of the geological structure; relationships between the site, the vegetation and the constructions.

To discover these relationships, analytics, inspired and renewed by the geometrical techniques adapted to architecture, seems, when it has been successfully applied to plans and volumes, to be the surest and most eloquent means of reaching a thorough and intimate knowledge, of the landscape so studying, as well as perceiving the possibilities of introducing fresh elements whether they be constructed or not.

Further than the internal structure, the knowledge of the "character" will result in an understanding, to my mind fundamental, of the environment of the landscape.

Among other variables, character is born of the climate, the undulations of the land, the plants of a specific species, the prevalent hues, the existence of buildings and the expression of their functions.

As to the unity that distinguishes an historical landscape (intellectually, aesthetically and historically), thus differentiating it from another, it stems from the conjunction of the originality of structures and the historical phenomenon (see above the definition of history no longer envisaged along the traditional lines but as a science affected by man's general outlook).

Well grounded knowledge of a site however does not directly lead to an ideally satisfactory action. A number of problems must have been resolved beforehand, the principal one being Regulations, the legal basis of any intervention.

### **3.2 Regulations**

The Regulations apply both to private persons and to public services but will differ according to whether the property is privately owned or not.

Ignorant of the laws prevailing in countries where property is collective, I cannot attempt to deal with their different facets. On the other hand, a certain amount of experience concerning the legislation and laws – particularly in regard to town planning – in Western European and American countries, entitles me – with all due reservations – to attempt a formulation of the legal and statutory principles preservation and enhancement of historical landscapes.

First of all, let there be no hesitation in declaring that historical landscapes form part of the national heritage, indeed of the international heritage. Given this assertion, any measures taken to preserve or enhance them are of general interest and should command the attention of public bodies and of private owners alike.

### **3.2.1 Specification of regulations**

Specific regulations applicable to historical landscapes, i.e. which warrant interventions affecting both the various components and, as the case may be, the entire natural territories, have not yet generally been applied in countries whose intention, however, is to adopt such policies.

With regard to the regulations hinging on national legislation applicable in the different countries, I will allude only to those I believe profitable to use as references.

To avoid burdening the community with far too heavy expenditures, it must be conceded that a private owner enjoying the disposal of his property, though having neither the right to modify nor change its character (interdiction to build, to deface facades, to deforest, etc.) may claim no compensation.

Every means allowing speedy and simple application of the procedures and regulations, at whatever level (local, regional, or national) must be found and an eventual appeal at law should follow the same process.

### **3.3 Participation and education of the public**

Law being, in fact, a codification of customs, the legislation pertaining to historical landscapes will be effective only if it is understood by a large portion of the public.

Public opinion, in Western Europe, at least, seems well prepared to admit operations as described at the beginning of this report. It is, nonetheless, ignorant as to the underlying problems.

This is a task of promotion to be assumed by governments. It will require, let us not be blinded to the fact, determination, perseverance, intelligence and financial backing.

On this particular point, one can, without exaggeration, argue that an international meeting devoted to this subject should be convened.

### **3.4 Financial aid to private owners from public sources**

One of the major difficulties encountered in the pursuance of safeguarding historical landscapes is to allow for the carrying on of today's activities in an ancient setting.

Otherwise, there is the danger that the inhabitants may abandon the historical quarters, which then become a kind of museum that the State is bound to keep in

repair. The financial implications thereof will be tremendous and in many cases impossible to assume.

In these circumstances, encouragement to private owners in the form of State financial aid or loans enabling them to carry on activities compatible with the character of the historic quarters seems to be the best solution.

In regard to scheduled monuments, the French system has yielded excellent results.

The continuance of life and activity in historic quarters must be borne in mind. Nevertheless, it is practically inevitable that traditional activities in urban or rural zones will be supplanted by activities revolving around tourism.

This may be deplored, but so far no satisfactory solution has been found and the subject remains under study.

### **3.5 Training of specialists**

No preservation activity can be undertaken without the cooperation of specialists. Training courses at university level must, therefore, be organised for landscape-architects, city planners and specialised technicians. Those countries needing but few specialists could have them trained in the UNESCO centers.

Finally, the education of the children through the channel of their teachers should be undertaken, in the countries concerned by such activities, under the auspices of the Ministries of Education.

Another medium would be to publish a manual (distributed by UNESCO ?) on an international level, which through by simple texts and illustrations would reveal the care a country, conscious of its cultural heritage, must take of its historical landscapes.

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