Cultural Landscapes in International Charters

by Cecilia Sodano

Cecilia Sodano, architect and art historian, is Director of the Civic Museum of Bracciano (Rome). She was president of the Commission for the Landscape of the Bracciano Municipality for five years. She collaborates with the School of Specialisation in Architectural Heritage and Landscape of Sapienza University (Rome) on research projects in the field of historical and artistic heritage. She is an active member of the ICOM Italy board and previously served as coordinator of the Italian Committee of Museology.

Cultural landscape are fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area the medium, the cultural landscape the result (Carl Sauer 1925).

Cultural landscapes are those where human interaction with the natural environment has, over a long period, formed a distinctive landscape. The cultural landscape is one that we inhabit, and is thus charged with memories, meaning and values. Cultural landscapes are the basis of the culture, identity and beliefs of the people who live within them and shape the possibility of long-term survival from the point of view of integrated and sustainable development. But the landscape is cultural also because it is seen through the eyes of observers whose view is influenced by their own tastes, lifestyles and convictions. The concept of cultural landscape has been developed from the 20th century until today through various international documents, which demonstrate that in the debate on landscape, a number of different points of view exist, and that the topic of cultural landscapes has contributed to the broader debate on cultural heritage.

Historical overview

The first international document voicing the need to safeguard landscapes is the 1962 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection of the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites. The document arose from the observation that the ill-regulated development of urban centres and the undertaking of extensive works and vast plans for industrial and commercial development at the time was causing damage to the beauty and character of landscapes and sites in the natural environment. That Recommendation emphasised the aesthetic value of these landscapes and sites, both natural and artificial, in keeping with the typical view of that time period, which considered the landscape's beauty and special features.

In the second half of the 1960s, the first international UNESCO treaty on cultural heritage materialised. UNESCO, with the help of ICOMOS (founded in 1965), began to work on the preparation of a draft convention on the conservation of cultural heritage of outstanding universal value. The need for this instrument increased as awareness grew on how, alongside traditional causes of disrepair, social transformations and the changing economic conditions of those years threatened the conservation of cultural heritage, as did the natural disasters such as the 1966 Florence flood, which damaged sites and historic areas whose value was recognised worldwide.

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November, 1972. The Convention defines the natural and cultural sites that may be included on the World Heritage List as having outstanding universal value and establishes the following duties for member states that have signed the Convention: the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory. It supported the idea of cultural heritage as a set of material goods, divided into the two categories of cultural and natural heritage. Each of the two categories was split into three subcategories: the cultural heritage category included monuments, groups of buildings and sites. The natural heritage category included geological/physical formations and the specific habitats of animal species, as well as the natural sites of exceptional value from a scientific, conservation or aesthetic point of view.

The World Heritage Convention proposed the innovative idea of the protection of world heritage as a set of natural and cultural elements. It contained *in nuce* the idea of cultural landscape in the definition of sites:

[W]orks of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view (UNESCO 1972).

The strict separation between nature and culture, reflecting the fundamental opposition between these two entities typical of knowledge in Western civilisation, over time proved to be a problematic issue in relation to UNESCO's vision, which conceives of world heritage as a whole. In subsequent years, the World Heritage Convention was revised in order to overcome this dichotomy.

Cultural landscapes and the global strategy

In 1992, the interest in landscape, already present in UNESCO starting in the 1960s, materialised according to a new concept with the adoption of the category of cultural landscapes by the World Heritage Committee. This marked a special year: in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the first 'Earth Summit', the UN Conference on the environment and development, was held. The evaluations and ideas related to the summit opened a new way of thinking on human beings and their environment, linking culture and nature with a vision of sustainable development. This cultural climate was helpful in defining cultural landscapes as one of the categories of the World Heritage List. The criteria were revised and the following definition was inserted: [c]ultural landscapes represent the combined works of nature and of man' designated in Article 1 of the Convention. They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal (UNESCO 1994).

The World Heritage List thus amended represented the first international legal instrument to recognise and simultaneously protect both cultural and natural heritage of universal value as an expression of particular cultural interaction of people with their environment in every geo-cultural context.

The Guidelines describe three categories of cultural landscape:

– The first includes garden and parkland landscapes constructed intentionally by humanity for aesthetic reasons, which are often (but not always) associated with religious or other

monumental buildings and ensembles. It is possible, in this case, to use the term 'landscape design'. In French, this is correctly translated as 'construction des paysages'.
- The second category defines the organically evolved landscape. This results from an initial social, economic, administrative and/or religious imperative and has developed its present form 'by association with' and 'in response to' its natural environment. It is divided into two subcategories: relict (or fossil) landscape, in which an evolutionary process came to an end at some point in the past (think of the archaeological landscape); continuing landscape, which retains an active role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress.
- The third category includes the associative cultural landscape, which presents powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations with natural elements rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent. This category is particularly suited to hunter-gatherer cultures where the physical and symbolic relation with the land is inseparable from the religious beliefs and their cosmogony, where human beings are an element of nature among many others.

The concept of associative cultural landscape was created precisely to give the freedom to think about 'landscapes of ideas', a concept which has been widely welcomed in regional expert meetings, for example Munjeri (2000) adapted it specifically and to the African context Rössler and Saouma-Forero (2000) provided a general articulation. But it is a concept for all cultures, one within which to recognize that alongside the world of things there are worlds of ideas from oral traditions, folklore, art, dance and music, and thinkers, talkers, writers and poets (Fowler 2003).

In the three described categories, cultural landscape is used in practice to mean 'rural landscape', although the existing categories and criteria allowed many historical city centres to be included on the list of World Heritage cultural landscapes. The towns are indeed a marked characteristic of these cultural landscapes; as claimed by Fowler, the urban landscapes can be considered cultural landscapes *par excellence*. In 2011 the UNESCO General Conference adopted a recommendation on historic urban landscapes, with the aim of improving the integration of urban heritage conservation strategies with the goals of sustainable development. It suggests a landscape approach for the identification, preservation and management of historic areas within their urban environments, considering the interrelationship between their physical and spatial forms, their natural characteristics and position and their social, cultural and economic values.

Somehow, the category of cultural landscapes was also a forerunner of the Global Strategy for a balanced, representative and credible World Heritage List. A series of studies conducted by ICOMOS between 1987 and 1993 showed that the World Heritage List contained sites located mainly in Europe belonging to categories related to historic cities, especially Christian religious monuments and specific historical periods. Living cultures and traditions were completely absent, and so, in 1994, the Committee adopted the aforementioned Global Strategy to ensure greater fairness in the distribution of properties around the world. It represented both a conceptual framework and an operational methodology for the implementation of the Convention and, without changing the text of the Convention, gave indications in the Guidelines that were necessary to exceed those limits.

The observation of imbalance in the representation of properties on the List led to extensive reflection on the concept of heritage and cultural memory that focused the debate on the intangible dimension, fully recognised only in 2003 with the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This helped in overturning the traditionally western and Eurocentric vision of heritage. In 2005 the Guidelines of the World Heritage List were completely revised, and the new criteria leave room not only for the cultures and civilisations of the past, but for cultural traditions and living communities as well. The development of the subsequent debate has led to the recognition and legitimacy of the concept that in all cultures, tangible and intangible appearances are always both present and interrelated because all monuments and other physical objects are always the bearer of intangible values.

Differing visions

The European Landscape Convention, commissioned by the Council of Europe, was adopted on 19 July 2000 in Strasbourg, France, and was opened to the signature of member states in Florence, Italy, on 20 October of the same year. Preparatory work provided an important space for debate, starting a process of collaboration between different European countries during which the different interpretations of landscape, as the expression of different cultures, emerged, and points of connection had to be found. The Convention defines itself not only as an international legal instrument, but also as the expression of a common European project, whose central point is a new and broader conception of landscape, defined as follows: 'Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'.

In the text, the term 'cultural landscape' is deliberately avoided. Riccardo Priore, head of the committee that drafted the project of the Convention, explained: *One often hears the mentioning of 'cultural landscape'; this definition is not compatible, in our view, with the concept of landscape expressed by the Convention; and this not because it is wrong to speak of 'cultural landscape'—the landscape is, in fact, as a human experience always a cultural thing—but because in the administrative practice the adjective 'cultural' lends itself to misinterpretation. If not properly interpreted, in a definition this adjective threatens to assign a specific value added to the noun 'landscape', and this regardless of the real data; such an interpretation would have us believe that if the landscape is not cultural, it is not landscape. In the article of the Convention concerning the definitions, the adjective 'cultural' was hence deliberately avoided* (Priore 2005).

The European Convention underlines the value of the landscape as an area of human activity and considers each of its aspects as a bearer of meanings: the aspects of particular beauty, the landscapes of everyday life and the

degraded landscapes. The principal idea of the European Convention is that the landscape must be recognised and protected independently of its value. The actions to be performed on the landscape emerge from its particular features: protection, justified by heritage value of the landscape derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity; management, from a perspective of sustainable development; and planning—also meaning the requalification of landscapes—in the case of everyday and/or degraded landscapes.

The UNESCO conception of landscape

Herein lies the profound difference with the concept of cultural landscape expressed by UNESCO, which the General Secretariat of the Council of Europe has openly criticised as elitist and 'making artificial distinctions based on specific features regarded as indicative of an exceptional landscape'. In support of UNESCO, Fowler argues that the approach of the World Heritage List is not elitist because by recognising cultural landscapes, it is possible to recognise the particular value of 'places that may well look ordinary but that can fill out in our appreciation to become extraordinary; and an ability of some places to do that creates monuments to the faceless ones, the people who lived and died unrecorded except unconsciously and collectively by the landscape modified by their labours. A cultural landscape is a memorial to the unknown labourer' (Fowler 2003). UNESCO publications recognise landscape as a place of everyday life for people, which may or may not have aesthetic value:

> The appeal of the idea of landscape is that it unifies the factors at work in our relationship with the surrounding environment. Landscapes, whether of aesthetic value or not, provide the setting for our daily lives; they are familiar and the concept of landscape links people to nature, recognising their interaction with the environment (Mitchell, Rössler and Tricaud 2009).

This shows that the apparent conflict in the conceptions of landscape provided by the World Heritage List and the European Landscape Convention is rooted in the different objectives and different views laid out in the two documents. The UNESCO Convention, with a worldwide vocation, wants to openly establish a list of the goods of 'outstanding universal value' only, as bearers of values of importance that transcend the property of any State, becoming the heritage of the entire international community. The European Convention considers the landscape an essential component of people's surroundings, with a regional vocation and the need to consider all kinds of landscapes, even those that are degraded, assessing exceptional and ordinary values alike. It is therefore understandable that it includes not only protection, but also actions to improve degraded landscapes. The European Convention holds the innovative meaning of a project that focuses on landscape policies as an essential part of the territorial participatory government, to enhance the quality of life of the people inhabiting the landscapes.

The Faro Convention

In 2005, the Council of Europe approved the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, called the Faro Convention from the Portuguese city where the opening meeting for signature by member states took place. That same year, UNESCO adopted the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, the culmination of a path regarding cultural diversity, which had been an object of reflection for UNESCO for many years. Both instruments offer a broader view of culture and heritage. The Faro Convention defines cultural heritage as: a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time (Council of Europe 2005).

A similar concept of heritage, albeit with some differences, is expressed in the *Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections*, adopted in 2015. Both documents offer a vision of cultural heritage considered as subjectively interpreted entities and as a resource that can contribute to human development, for the improvement of quality of life and the building of a peaceful and democratic society. The definitions of heritage in the two documents are based on the same participatory vision which, in the identification of heritage, focuses on populations, as in the European Landscape Convention, where the perception of the population is what identifies the character of landscape.

Cultural heritage and landscape have common features: both are elements of identity; both form the interface between the world and the perception of the world that the people have. However, there is not an identity shared by landscape and heritage, because heritage implies the choice and selection of what has value (regardless of who makes the choice), while landscape holds value as a whole, as an area of human life.

Landscape, it might be said, is how we perceive the present world, heritage is how we perceive and understand the past and all that it has bequeathed to us (Fairclough 2009).

Finally, it is important to mention the contribution of the 24th ICOM General Conference, held in 2016 in Milan, Italy, to the topic of museums and cultural landscapes. This contribution, expressed in the conference's Resolution No.1, emphasises the responsibility of museums regarding landscape and highlights the need for museums that, by definition, are 'in the service of society and its development', to extend their mission, making themselves responsible for the protection, conservation and presentation not only of their collections, but also of the cultural heritage that lies beyond their walls. This responsibility opens the museum up to territory, involving the community in the recognition of what is or may be recognised as cultural heritage.

Museums are part of the landscape. They collect tangible and intangible testimonials linked to the environment. The collections forming part of their heritage cannot be explained without the landscape.

Museums have a particular responsibility towards the landscape that surrounds them, urban or rural. This implies a dual duty: on the one hand, the management and upkeep of heritage in a sustainable development perspective for the territory; on the other, attention given to images and representations that identify and connote the landscape itself (ICOM General Conference 2016, Resolution No.1).

In the World Heritage Convention, the concepts of natural heritage and landscape overlap and are complemented by that of cultural heritage, encompassing landscape as bearer of special value. While the ensuing debate is not the result of an organic evolution, a trend within which the idea of heritage has developed over time can nevertheless be identified. Initially conceived as a set of material objects corresponding exactly to the two categories of nature and culture, the concept of heritage subsequently expanded through an interdisciplinary approach that has included not only tangible and intangible elements, but also ideas and values.

The reflection on landscape and cultural landscape has been a focal point of this process, inextricably linking nature and culture, people and places, tangible and intangible elements.The concept of heritage was further expanded with the European Landscape Convention (2000) and the Faro Convention (2005), which consider landscape and heritage as a fundamental resource for human well-being and sustainable development. Both European documents have shifted the focus from the object landscape/heritage to people, called upon to acknowledge it. This has opened new perspectives for public participation in a vision that has shifted from object to action, from product to process. Involvement in the process of recognition of the value of landscape and heritage by the community involves shared responsibility for its protection, conservation and, in the case of landscapes, management and planning. This responsibility involves museums, who are entrusted with the important role described in the aforementioned Resolution of the ICOM General Conference in Milan, which constitutes a major challenge for the years to come.

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