

## **TOWARDS A NEW POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: THE EXPERIENCE OF CYPRUS**

A diversity of natural and human conditions defines the landscape of our territories. This is the consequence of the interaction between a varied geography and the peoples that have modelled these conditions through their history and through a variety of cultural processes. We have been confronted with two theories: the first that our cultural background defines the landscape and the second that there is intrinsic value to landscape which exists independently of this background. The latter theory shows our strong links to nature. Throughout the years we have tried to remove the landscape, closing it up in museums or changing it into an artistic artifact or into a monument. At the same time the development of a civilization mainly based on increased consumption patterns has produced a breach with landscape and nature.

Our efforts towards cultural landscape conservation and management need to be redirected towards taking into account nature parameters. Nature and landscape are the same concept. To modify the landscape is to modify nature.

And here I would like to congratulate the organizers for hosting this meeting fostering such an important issue to be discussed.

Cyprus is an island steeped in history and tradition, with the distinction between natural and cultural landscapes not always being clear. What's more, landscape policies do not concern just outstanding landscapes but also apply to simple landscapes with everyday figures. Thus, whether landscapes are evaluated as commonplace or outstanding whether they are located in areas with significant natural or cultural character, or whether they even include brownfield and derelict sites, they must all be taken into consideration in the formulation of landscape policy. Regardless of its character assessment, each landscape is the environment within which everyday life unfolds and as such it is important to manage, preserve and enhance, as appropriate in each case. With the signature of the European Landscape Convention, Cyprus has embarked on a quest to identify, evaluate, protect and manage and plan its landscapes.

The main premise on which the efforts for policies for landscape protection, management and planning through a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to be effective are based, is that a supporting mechanism has to be in the process of development. Thus one of the first steps undertaken, in collaboration with stakeholders, was a program of work to initiate the mapping of landscape characters across the island.

The result was the preparation of the first landscape type map of Cyprus, which although significant in many ways, still lacked an adequate consideration of cultural elements. It was nevertheless, useful in two important ways, first to raise awareness among stakeholders on landscape characterization procedures, and second, to create landscape-specific datasets for the first time.

As it was found that no historic or cultural maps of the required level of detail were available, it was decided to proceed with the mapping of cultural landscape elements in order to provide this missing input to the overall process. More recent efforts have concentrated in the landscape character assessment incorporating in the map the cultural landscape data. This process is still under way.

Therefore, bearing in mind the steps undertaken as described above, the critical question which arises is how do we go forward? How do we explore synergies that would promote an effective and efficient management of cultural heritage? How do we incorporate the results of landscape described above in town planning policies?

I believe this is the crucial issue which made us all gather here today to seek for joint solutions or actions concerning the protection and management of cultural as well as natural heritage.

Here I would like to remind you that as a Minister of the Environment, I cannot but emphasize the importance of searching for synergies where nature protection and management take place.

In Cyprus important cultural landscapes are in NATURA 2000 sites as is the case of the Larnaca Salt Lakes where the muslim temple Um Haram is located as well as an old aqueduct and the Kato Paphos area where ancient mosaics are located. The threats which the two areas face could affect both their biodiversity as well as their historic and cultural value. The spread of the urban and touristic sprawl, the ongoing pressure for several uses of the areas need to be tackled through appropriate management and monitoring.

This effort requires joint and coordinated action of the authorities dealing with either cultural or biodiversity issues, something which is yet to be applied in the appropriate degree. The role of ecosystem services, and benefits provided from them could be linked to culture. On the other hand, practices protecting cultural landscapes can contribute to the protection of natural capital and in particular the NATURA 2000 sites. The measures needed to be taken under nature directives towards the creation of the conservation framework for the NATURA 2000 sites could include measures for the protection of cultural elements in the areas.

The role of local communities is important in the conservation efforts and we should involve them early in the process. In these years of economic austerity joining forces to manage and thusly promote our cultural and natural capital together could constitute a source of employment through the support of tourism.

Cyprus has a long history and culture which is deeply embedded in peoples' lives and nature protection is part of it. Therefore common awareness "engines" could constitute an important driver for creating the appropriate conditions for societal acceptance and appreciation of the protection efforts.

In brief, I want to stress that our efforts should focus on finding balanced solutions for the protection and management of our cultural landscape. It should be remembered that the aim is not preservation or freezing of the landscape at a particular point in its lengthy evolution. Landscapes have always changed and will continue to do so both through natural processes and human action. The aim rather, should be to manage future change in a way that recognizes the great diversity and the quality of landscapes that we inherit; and seeks to preserve, or even enhance that diversity and quality, instead of allowing it to decline.

Thank you for your attention.