

Cultivating the Continuity of European Landscapes. Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the European Landscape Convention and discussing challenges for the future in UNISCAPE 2020 International Conference

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“European Landscape Convention is so much broader than a law”¹: the international treaty, approved by the Council of Europe and opened in Florence in October 2000, is a document which generated reflections, discussion and impact on different disciplinary fields and scientific communities for its progressive and innovative idea of landscape, common heritage and ground upon which building European governance policies actively linked to the communities.

The anniversary was celebrated in Palazzo Vecchio in Florence², same location where the Convention was signed, in two days of international conference organised by UNISCAPE, network of European universities whose aim is to promote and support the ELC, work accordingly to its principles and provide academic and scientific drive towards innovations and horizons on landscape research³. The work of UNISCAPE puts into practice the idea of exchange between European countries and networking between institutions, in reason of the quality and diversity of European landscapes, a common resource for which we have to co-operate (ELC, 2000). To address this ‘common diversity’ the network is based on a transdisciplinary and collaborative approach open to different expertises and actors of the scientific discourse on landscape, necessary to understand its complexity (Morin, 1993). Moreover, in

a year whose events have put into question several assumptions on the equilibrium of planetary ecosystems, UNISCAPE 2020 Conference was also occasion to reinforce academic collaboration aimed at understanding complex global challenges, emerged with strong evidence in the last twenty years and more frequently outbreaking in ‘surprises’, as keynote speaker Lučka Kajfež Bogataj (climatologist, member of IPCC, University of Ljubljana) would define the current pandemic and other pressure factors which effect the Earth and towards which we have to develop more resilience and adaptation. On the latter note, the programme of the event was adapted to the mutable conditions due to the current health measurements so it could not be held in presence, yet on the other hand this constraint made the conference have instant worldwide coverage with online streaming and a skillful direction which organized the activities in blended mode, in a mix of virtual sessions chaired live from Sala d’Armi of Palazzo Vecchio, parallel thematic virtual sessions and a final live session from Salone dei Cinquecento, broadcasted in online streaming⁴.

Setting the scene

Twenty years is a sufficient time to gain historical perspective on what has been achieved and which directions can be outlined for the implementation

of ELC. The treaty to date has acted as an extraordinarily significant generator and cluster of relations between disciplinary fields - an "interface between landscape and law, between landscape research and landscape policy, between space and people" in the words of Amy Strecker, University College Dublin - to the extent that "landscape has become a powerful model of thinking", states the opening call of the conference, setting the basis for discussion. From the acknowledgement of the increased awareness of the systemic relations rooted in the co-existence of all life forms, future work will be oriented towards deeper understanding of these relations, sharing ideas and investigating all the layers which make up the evolving mosaic of European landscapes.

In the vision of UNISCAPE, cross collaboration between universities and institutions is a fundamental key to changing the model with which we work on landscape, and the title of the event itself is result of joint work of the academic network, declaratory of the networks' transdisciplinary approach. The act of *Cultivating* involves care, dealing with time, preparedness for the unexpected and it requires dynamic knowledge to assist the growing process in cooperation with all elements of the ecosystem, similarly to the actual practice of cultivation of a garden. The object is the *Continuity* of European landscapes, to be found in the space between the disciplines where relations develop, whose growth contributes to define a landscape perspective.

Accordingly, the idea of 'landscape as a common good' becomes essential to address societal, environmental, economic challenges embedded in the evolution of European landscapes with increasing contribution and awareness of communities and institutions, empowering the shared and collective dimension, the "community driven landscape mosaic" (ELC, 2000). Interpreting 'landscape as project' brings out the possibilities to build continuity through experimenting solutions and investigating new project categories and tools in the practice of

landscape making, with the actions of protection, management and planning.

Shifting paradigms

The crossing of disciplinary boundaries was a common thread of the contributions of the first scientific session; the diversity of the highly innovative academic profiles represented in the panel, chaired by Sasa Dobricic (Vice President of UNISCAPE, University of Nova Gorica), was indeed unusual and extremely inspiring for the scenario of possibilities and openings offered by the presentations. The panel discussed shifts of paradigm upon which mutual ground for research might be built, going beyond consolidated hierarchies or putting into question well-established antinomies, like the opposition between human and non-human introduced by the first speaker Emanuele Coccia (philosopher EHESS, Paris). Disrupting the idea of wild entails starting to see landscape as the result of the interaction of multiple design agencies, not just human action: in this light everything is designed and the project can be found everywhere, being all forms of life landscape and landscape architect of the other in a relationship in which they share a mind, as the combination of ecosystemic relations. Questioning the idea of human centrality would imply clearer consciousness of the relations which mutually shape the landscapes of all beings interacting dynamically; to do so maybe we could restart from the awareness of the impact of humans on the planet, not for a sense of moral or cultural superiority towards non-human, but from the evidence that the first are indeed the most impactful specie operating on the Earth, as Lučka Kajfež Bogataj stated in her following contribution. Amy Strecker (expert in International Law and Spatial justice, University College, Dublin) discussed the paradigm of property to stress the importance of clearly defining a third dimension of right, the right of the collective dimension, as "people wish to be active part in the



Fig. 1 – The direction board of the conference, broadcasted live from the control room of Palazzo Vecchio.
Source: UNISCAPE website; photo: T. Zanaica, 2020



Fig. 2 – Layered panorama on Florence from the historical Giardino Bardini on the hills of Oltrarno.
Source: UNISCAPE website; photo: G. Galletti, 2020

development of landscapes" (ELC, 2000); in addition, revising the notion of property would also help to tackle the issue of social justice, essential to actively include the collectivity as recognizable actor in landscape governance.

Collectivity may be not just made of human life forms: the cartography research work presented by Frederique Ait-Touaiti (historian of literature and modern science, theatre director, CNRS Paris) aims to represent those multiple agencies overlapping in the definition of the strata of the Earth: by putting the atmosphere at the centre of a new representation it is possible to acquire new points of view, focus on new landscapes, such as soil stratification, and reflect on the impact, intensity and implications of the co-existence of different beings shaping space in time. So the last keynote speaker provided not just a shift of paradigm but a literal shift of geographical references to understand landscape, aimed also at finding a new aesthetic language able to describe the visible and invisible agents on the Earth.

The design of time

The "production and continuous transformation depending on a project" - as Margherita Vanore (University IUAV of Venice) and Rita Occhiuto (University of Liège), chair of the thematic session *Landscape Design and Time*, defined 'landscape making' - is a dynamic process modeled on a set of actions, dealing with interrelated factors and through time, because "what you design as walls might become wings centuries after" (guest speaker Michael Hoëssler, Agence Ter) stated in the following discussion. In the experience of landscape, the stratification of the different historical times of all beings - recorded in the traces and visible features - manifests with synchronicity; on the other hand, time is a fundamental agent in landscape making, a factor imbred in the work of landscape architects and planners, to the extent that a new project catego-

ry of landscape design could maybe be identified in 'anachronism', or the ability to manage the different times of the project, as suggested in the final plenary session by Juan Manuel Palerm (President of UNISCAPE).

The landscape project - declined in the actions of protection, management and planning, all of which implying a different relations with time - can be the testing ground to design and manage this factor as a dynamic project component. If time becomes designed, it can activate multiple relationships, an integrated project vision that is open, adaptive and able to cultivate continuity, as illustrated by the projects presented in the session. Guest speaker Marco Navarra (University of Catania) discussed 'geological architecture', infrastructural projects and the possibility to simultaneously describe time, space and movement through the dissection of existing and project elements into tomographic sections; the tool was used to catch and investigate the dynamics of relation so the project could be developed taking all the factors into account and leaving space for future alterations, which cannot be imagined completely in the act of design, with a balance between the durable and the flexible components. Michael Hoëssler presented a design of time in Agence Ter's work on the Vilaine Valley, an ongoing landscape project on a vast area which needed to be activated in its relations before the actual design of its physical features, through the design of a process of community involvement in the making of the project, planning a set of shared and co-consultive activities in order to make the existing landscape emerge and to put its heritage into value.

Where the disciplines meet

The final session of UNISCAPE 2020 Conference was the occasion of presenting forthcoming horizons and work in the direction of actively implementing the principles of ELC through "forward-looking actions" (ELC, 2000). The first action is the launch of a



Fig. 3 – The final event of UNISCAPE 2020 Conference, live from Salone dei Cinquecento in Palazzo Vecchio. In the picture: Tessa Matteini (Director of UNISCAPE and chair of the first session), Franco Zagari (founding member of UNISCAPE) and Conor Newman (NUI University of Galway). Source: UNISCAPE website; photo: T. Zanaica, 2020

year-long collaborative research project coordinated by UNISCAPE Executive Board, to develop a shared document with new strategic approaches and key points for the European landscapes in the next 20 years, the *White Paper on European Landscapes*, whose draft was discussed in the event and will be open for scientific contributions until its presentation in October 2021. Cultivation is not possible without dissemination: we must not forget the central role of education in the agenda of the ELC and in the scope of UNISCAPE, so the transdisciplinary work on the topics of the conference will continue throughout the year, following the tracks of the call with online events such as the presentations of the submitted papers⁵ and online lecture series⁶, to collect and co-produce scientific research around complex issues and drivers of change, including the discourse in the landscape perspective⁷.

Continuity may be cultivated between the disciplines, through the relations which mutually define them and make them co-evolve, adapting and adjusting along the path on the lines of the values of ELC but with new categories, themes, directions and instruments to be achieved through research and project experimentations, because as Conor Newman (NUI University of Galway) would say “landscape itself is the platform where the disciplines meet”.

Endnotes

¹Quote of Amy Strecker (expert in International Law and Spatial justice, University College, Dublin) paraphrased by Sasa Dobricic (Vice President of UNISCAPE, University of Nova Gorica) in the opening speech of the scientific session *Challenges: Landscape as a project/Landscape as a common good* (17 October 2020).

²The European Landscape Convention's 10th anniversary was also celebrated in Florence by UNISCAPE, with the international conference *Living Landscapes* (17-18 October 2010) and other events and publications, such as *People's Landscapes* photo competition or the issue of *Landscape as a project. A survey of views amongs UNISCAPE members in reaction to a position paper of Franco Zagari* (Pedroli B. & Goodman T. Eds., 2010).

³ "UNISCAPE is a European Network of Universities dedicated to landscape studies and education according to the principles of the European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000). It was created in Florence in January 2008 as a result of the joint initiative of 23 European Universities. Founding members of UNISCAPE are 42 universities from Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Belgium, Slovakia and France. Currently the Network is composed of 56 Universities members from 15 European Countries and 2 private Foundations promoting landscape studies and research." (<<https://www.uniscape.eu/about-us-presentation/>>).

⁴The conference was organized in plenary sessions and parallel thematic sessions on the following topics: A. Landscape Policy and Governance; B. Landscape Design and Time; C. Observing Landscape; Special Session on Agriculture and Forest Heritage (Topic 1. Governance and restoration of forest heritage systems, Topic 2. Governance of agricultural heritage systems). The session chairs were not just responsible of moderating the thematic and plenary discussions in the event, but up-

stream curated also the scientific coordination and the paper selection for the sessions.

⁵ A list of the selected papers for publication divided for each thematic session can be accessed at this URL: <https://uniscapeconference.myquadra.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Selected_Papers_2020Conference.pdf>, (01/21); Video posters of submitted papers can be accessed online at the following URL: <<https://uniscapeconference.myquadra.it/repository-video/#b>>, (01/21).

⁶ Programme available at the following URL: <<https://www.uniscape.eu/online-lecture-series-where-the-disciplines-meet/>> (01/21).

⁷The conference proceedings will be published by Springer and available in the second half of 2021.

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