



The European Landscape Convention: Challenges of Participation

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Book Reviews

The European Landscape Convention: Challenges of Participation

Michael Jones & Marie Stenseke (Eds)

Dordrecht, Springer, 2011, 326 pp., 129.95 Euros, ISBN 978 90 481 9931 0

Recent years have seen much talk of participation in relation to landscapes, particularly following the adoption of the European Landscape Convention. The latter emphasises, at a fundamental level, that people should be extensively involved in processes of landscape protection, planning and management, based on an understanding of landscape being “an area... as perceived by people”. There has been comparatively little work, however, addressing the substantial challenges involved in the actual implementation of participatory approaches. This volume is a first in addressing this overlooked dimension of the landscape discipline and it provides a much needed and very timely contribution.

In their introductory chapter, Michael Jones and Marie Stenseke set the scene, concisely explaining the evolution of the landscape concept, and outlining the legal and regulatory developments which led to the demand for landscapes to be managed in a participatory manner. Jones then provides an extensive evaluation of the participation brief in chapter two; the chapter makes a strong case for public participation, but also sounds a warning note about the dangers of ‘mis-participation’. Jones’s discussion provides a sharp reminder of the complexity of a concept which is all too often bandied about without a real appreciation of what *participation* truly implies. The subsequent five chapters then present perspectives on the implementation of participation in landscape initiatives, in the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Greece. Although the link between these chapters is perhaps not readily apparent, they all provide interesting perspectives on the role of people in different aspects of landscape protection, planning and management. Both successes and limitations are evident. The Dutch approach outlined by Baas, Groenewoudt and Raap in Chapter 3, seeks to involve people in different landscape planning mechanisms; of particular interest is the concept of landscape biography, which through its cultural-historical character, embraces the incontrovertible fact that landscapes change over time. The development of participatory approaches that work with this intrinsically dynamic nature of landscapes is important, both because of the urgent need to manage change, and because public perceptions of change are often negative. In Chapter 4, Daugstad then explores the challenges of participation in relation to nature conservation in Norway, and highlights an important dichotomy (and tension) between bottom-up participatory processes, and top-down science-based decision-making. Such aspects are of particular relevance where the

landscape includes important habitats that are protected under scientific criteria that have not been subject to democratic scrutiny. Majchrowska also sounds a note of caution in Chapter 5, when noting that the Polish experience has tended to be negatively influenced by a gap between research and policy domains, and by fragmented sectoral responsibilities. The marginality of landscape on political agendas, “something to be taken care of later” (p. 95), will certainly ring a bell with many readers. Chapter 6, however, presents a more positive outlook relating to developments in Spain. Elorrieta and Sánchez-Aguilera highlight innovations at the regional level that are perhaps unrivalled elsewhere, providing strong support for the European Landscape Convention’s advocacy of subsidiarity and decentralisation. Conversely, however, Terkenli gives a sobering presentation of the Greek situation (Chapter 7), where historical and social factors combine to produce public apathy where landscapes are concerned. What emerges crystal clear from all of these chapters in Part I of the book is the fact that participation cannot be addressed as an isolated issue but is embedded within a framework of social norms, cultural traits, policy mechanisms and governance structures.

Part II of the book includes seven chapters that present experiences of participation in different parts of Europe. The chapters outline different tools and methods for the engagement of people in decision-making. In Chapter 8, Michelin, Joliveau and Planchat-Héry advance a useful typology of landscape representation techniques, summarily evaluating the pros and cons of both ‘top-down’ and ‘from the inside’ approaches. Planchat-Héry then discusses the use of ‘Prospective Vision’ in France and Belgium (Chapter 9), whilst Ramos looks at the use of scenario planning in Portugal as a means of defining Landscape Quality Objectives that reflect the aspirations of the public (Chapter 10). In Chapter 11, Clemetsen, Krogh and Thorén explore the challenges of participation from a phenomenological standpoint, drawing on experiences in Norway, whilst in Chapter 12 Spencer outlines encouraging experiences in participatory planning from the River Dart catchment in the UK. In the final case studies, Larsson, Peterson, Bjärnberg, Haaland and Gyllin highlight the difficulties of reconciling the opposing interests of equestrians and land-owners in Sweden (Chapter 13), whilst Suškevičs and Kūlvik draw attention to the crucial importance of knowledge for effective participation, through a case study in Estonia (Chapter 14).

The narratives presented in these chapters suggest that experiences are mixed. On the one hand, there are clear successes—the River Dart case study (Chapter 12) shows that not only is participation feasible, but also that it can render excellent results. Similarly, the use of Prospective Vision methodology (Chapter 9) and scenario planning (Chapter 10) show how well thought-out participatory processes can serve to collaboratively build plans for future landscapes. Indeed, the various techniques and methods used in these different case studies highlight the fact that the ‘how’ of participation is limited only by the creativity and innovation of researchers. However, participatory planning is still likely to be an uphill struggle. For example, whilst many techniques can be used to map out the range of public views, there are still no easy ways to reconcile opposing visions. In the Portugal case study, Ramos finds that the views of experts and the lay public diverge, and this presents challenges for the development of Landscape Quality Objectives. Similarly, Clemetsen, Krogh and Thorén find that plans developed by experts may not be in accordance with

public views of landscape. The editors synthesise these various positive and negative findings in their concluding chapter (Chapter 15).

The volume undoubtedly makes a very valuable contribution to our understanding of participatory landscape protection, planning and management; it shows that we have made some progress but that we also have a long way to go. Perhaps the one unfortunate aspect of this publication is its (very) steep price tag; this will likely place it out of reach of many who would otherwise have found it to be extremely useful. Given its cost, the book would also perhaps have benefited from a stronger theoretical discussion of the challenges of participation, rather than a predominant focus on case studies. Whilst the editors' introductory and concluding contributions serve to situate the case studies within their wider context, the publication did leave me with a slight sense of frustration in that the case studies raise many interesting questions that remain somewhat unexplored. This criticism is, however, perhaps unfair—given that this is a first publication on the subject, the case studies at least allow for an identification of these various dilemmas. Perhaps the next step would be to critically analyse the identified influences on participation—which range from the role of multiculturalism and democracy, to the development of effective administrative and political structures, to the relevance of social and personal dynamics—in a more general manner. In the meantime, however, this book is certainly a very valuable addition to the landscape literature.

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Design with Microclimate: The Secret to Comfortable Outdoor Spaces

Robert D. Brown

Washington DC, Island Press, 2010, 162 pp., Black & white illustrations, Paperback, ISBN 978-1597267403

Design with Microclimate focuses on how students and practitioners of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design can create external spaces that are 'thermally comfortable'. The book is available in paperback and includes a small number of black and white images, sketch illustrations and tables. The text draws on the wealth of research, teaching and practice experience that the author has on this topic, a subject on which he has previously published. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, he does not make significant reference to other literature or research in this area. Instead the style is informal, and the text highly anecdotal. Explanations for different concepts and ideas presented typically reference the author's personal experiences of working and travelling abroad and supervising student research projects. The book is organised into the following five chapters: Experiential, Vernacular, Components, Modification and Principles and Guidelines.

In Chapter One, the author makes a strong plea for designers to appreciate the importance of providing for thermal comfort rather than purely focusing their efforts