

2_Connected Landscapes

Understanding landscape; the process to a quality and sustainable space

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Introduction

This paper argues that, in order to have quality and sustainable spaces in regional landscapes, a landscape perspective needs to be ‘absorbed into all the decision making institutions and organisations responsible for policy, strategic or regional planning at a national or international level’ (Moore, 2010). According to Liang (2010) the low carbon concept can be used to ‘enrich theories and practices’, stimulating the process of low-carbonising regions. Two case studies are used to illustrate the potential of this approach. The example of the Landscape Observatory in Catalonia demonstrates the idea of landscape and the impact it has had on the landscape and the region. The Netherlands case study examined two national programmes, the Room for the River and the Dutch Waterline to demonstrate how the idea of landscape, low carbon and design quality can shape the implementation of landscape strategies.

The Landscape Observatory

The Landscape Observatory, established to help implement the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in Catalonia, has succeeded in bringing attention to the landscape and create a landscape oriented culture by using regionally based catalogues to identify landscape quality measures, criteria and goals (Visentin, 2013) moving away from earlier simple landscape character assessments towards representing intangible elements about landscape and its value as a cultural as well as physical resource. In addition, to introduce landscape objectives into spatial planning, a series of landscape charters (voluntary instruments aimed at promoting actions and strategies for landscape assessment and improvement), the Landscape Observatory has managed to integrate the concept and principles of ELC to such an extent that there is now a public law protecting landscape.

One of the key conclusions of this case study is that it is the emphasis on landscape quality and the impact that this has, not only as an environmental aspect, but also on the quality of life and the cultural and heritage strength of the area, that has successfully changed perceptions and institutional habits. Landscape is now recognised as being an integral, active and fundamental factor affecting the quality of people’s lives.

The Netherlands

The Room for the River is a landscape adaptation programme addressing a high-risk climate issue such as flooding, while the Dutch Waterline aims to preserve the existing landscape and historical infrastructure. The extent to which ‘spatial quality’ is integrated to the projects can be understood by the comment by Jan Van der Grift (senior advisor for spatial quality for the Room for the River) who states that ‘*Spatial Quality is not important, it is essential*’, explaining that the emphasis on landscape quality was given prominence in these programmes, through its incorporation in public law. The Room for the River was the first project in the Netherlands to address water safety and spatial quality, thereby securing environmental and aesthetic elements from initial plans right through to the implementation

phase.

Both of these infrastructure projects have had a tremendous impact on the region, by both empowering local communities and ensuring that landscape identity and culture as part of local transformation.

Conclusion

At this point the paper concludes with key lessons learned to establish this approach at an institutional, national and governmental level. Each case study focuses on how to deliver a quality and sustainable landscape.

The Landscape Observatory deals with spatial quality and sustainability in a conceptual level by integrating them to landscape planning and policies. The development of tools such as the Landscape catalogues and charters has strengthened landscape legislations and established a relationship with local and national administration. The production of educational material as well as being featured in local press has enhanced community liaison to landscape related issues.

The Room for the River and Dutch Waterline programmes illustrate ways that these landscape ideas can be interpreted to reality in a way that results to an aesthetic and valuable product. The development of procurement processes was one of the key elements to secure spatial quality and sustainability across the projects. Significant presence on media and webpages has increased the public interest and has promoted the social aspect of these landscape strategies.

References

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