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The Landscape Observatory of Catalonia

Managing and Planning the Landscape with the Communities

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Abstract In December 2000 the Parliament of Catalonia (Spain) signed the European Landscape Convention (ELC). Five years later, in 2005, Parliament passed the Landscape Protection, Management and Planning Act 8/2005, and the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia was set up as the Generalitat of Catalonia's assessment body and as a way to create public awareness on landscape. Managing and planning the landscape with the communities is one of the main challenges of the ELC. This paper will explain a short selection of initiatives promoted by the Landscape Observatory or in which the Landscape Observatory is involved, which clearly show that different dimensions of the landscape are generating increasing local interest, as local communities perceive the landscape as a catalyst for development and a way to increase self-esteem, identity and quality of life.

Keywords Landscape Observatory. Landscape management. Landscape planning. Community. Participation.

Summary 1 The European Landscape Convention as a Framework. – 2 The Landscape Observatory and the Communities. Fifteen Concepts and Reflections for Fifteen Years of Activity. – 3 Some Community-based Managing and Planning Initiatives in Catalonia. – 3.1 The Landscape Catalogues, from (Collective) Knowledge to Planning and Acting. – 3.2 Roads, Landscape and Tourism: A Pilot Project. – 3.3 Rethinking Planning the Territory from Landscape Issues: The Cross-border Plan of La Cerdanya. – 3.4 The Landscape Management System of El Priorat: A Roadmap Build from the Community. – 3.5 From Society to the National Government: The National Landscape Strategy of Andorra. – 3.6 Collaborative Landscape Management as a Common Good: *Wikipedra*. – 4 Looking Ahead.



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291

1 The European Landscape Convention as a Framework

In December 2000 the Parliament of the autonomous region of Catalonia (Spain) signed the European Landscape Convention (ELC)¹ promoted by the Council of Europe and adopted on 20 October 2000. Without the institutional (and moral) impact of this Convention, many of Europe's subsequent political, legislative, academic and professional initiatives on landscape would have been unthinkable, and Catalonia is no exception.

Five years later, in 2005, Parliament passed the Landscape Protection, Management and Planning Act 8/2005² as the basis for landscape policy in Catalonia. With the passing of this act, landscape ceased to have an exclusively aesthetic connotation and became an active element in regional planning and management and a driving force in development. A few months before the act was drawn up, the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia was set up (and eventually recognized in the act) as the Generalitat of Catalonia's assessment body and as a way to create public awareness on landscape matters. The Observatory has been operating since 1 March 2005.

2 The Landscape Observatory and the Communities. Fifteen Concepts and Reflections for Fifteen Years of Activity

Managing and planning the landscape with the communities is one of the main challenges of the ELC.³ And this has also been one of the main objectives since the beginning of the Landscape Observatory, 16 years ago. In this sense, the book *Quinze anys*⁴ was published in 2020 to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Landscape Observatory. It contains fifteen concepts and reflections that resonate and connect with the entity's objectives, tasks and *raison d'être*, and the raw material with which it works: the landscapes of Catalonia and their values. The fifteen concepts are: journey, place, laboratory, knowledge, action, mirror, dialogue, community, bridges, atmospheres, values, emotions, gazes, colours and edges.

Since the Landscape Observatory started this amazing journey sixteen years ago, it has been joined by many travelling companions from Catalonia, Spain, and around the world (institutions, organisations and networks, from local to international levels). With their help, it has generated an enormous body of knowledge about land-

1 Council of Europe 2000.

2 Generalitat de Catalunya 2006.

3 Most of the text in this section comes from Sala (forthcoming).

4 Observatori del Paisatge de Catalunya 2020.

scape that has reached institutions and society in general and guided public policy. After sixteen years, level zero has been covered; in other words, the Observatory has laid the foundations that are indispensable to take a leap forward and go even further afield.

The Observatory is the place where theoretical reflection and practical application come together to serve landscape policy, and it has been located from the beginning in the city of Olot. It is a shared, open, receptive meeting point, midway between civil society and government and academic and professional sectors, in all areas related to landscape culture. The Observatory is completely open to new and emerging approaches, to what is happening today, and not just what happened yesterday, and has come down to us through that extraordinary palimpsest of our landscape.

The Observatory is constantly evolving and redefining itself; by applying the principles of pluralism and diversity, it has become a laboratory, an incubator for innovative projects. It is open to creative, imaginative initiatives, and it explores and creates new tools and instruments that often go beyond the limitations that inevitably constrain government activity (Nogué, Sala 2018b).

One of the main functions of the Landscape Observatory is knowledge generation. Knowledge is fundamental for taking decisions both locally and nationally regarding landscape (Sala 2012); knowledge that, by definition, must be holistic and cross-cutting. The Observatory generates, shares and transfers knowledge and methodologies to all parts of society, inviting participation from all its stakeholders. And it does so in the conviction that expert knowledge requires the interchange of many and diverse inputs, from the knowledge of specialists to the perceptions and opinions of civil society. To this end, landscape catalogues have become the main instruments for generating knowledge about landscape in Catalonia and for introducing landscape quality objectives into urban and regional planning as well as into sectorial policies, such as agriculture, heritage, tourism and energy, with the cooperation and participation of all stakeholders.

Knowledge must always precede action. The Observatory is a space for reflection and action on landscape issues; its purpose is not merely to provide support for public policies but also to educate, imbuing society as a whole with knowledge and increased awareness. In addition to landscape charters and plans, projects, guidelines, documents, symposia, seminars, courses and publications, the landscape catalogues continue to be one of the tools we use to directly impact society by fostering more specific planning, management and protection measures. Despite the fact that Catalan Landscape Policy has been in existence for sixteen years, landscape is only beginning to penetrate public and political debate, so the task ahead of raising awareness is immense.

We could also say that the Observatory acts as a mirror of landscape: through its action, indeed, it reflects landscape's true state of health, detects emerging dynamics and provides input for future agendas.

The next three concepts (dialogue, community and bridges) are absolutely crucial. The daily dialogue that contemporary societies have with their everyday landscapes demands continuous interdisciplinary methodology exchange and spaces for sharing ideas, cooperation and consensus between government and civil society and between the public and private spheres, leading to new forms of participative democracy in territorial management (Nogué, Sala 2014). Such experiences as the UNESCO Candidature of Priorat (see § 3.4) or the Cross-border Plan of La Cerdanya (Observatori del Paisatge de Catalunya (see § 3.3) show that the Landscape Observatory can promote new forms of participatory democracy in all aspects of territorial governance and management. Closely related to this issue, landscape is generating increasing local interest as local stakeholders perceive landscape as a catalyst for development and a way to increase self-esteem, identity and quality of life. The current COVID-19 crisis is reinforcing this situation.

There is no landscape without community. We live in a community and it is with this community that we share our perceptions and experiences of landscape. This is why landscape provides such an excellent tool for addressing the complexity of territorial management and for promoting community organization by constantly eliciting new forms of engagement and governance. Collectively, we cannot be indifferent to those landscape values that may help us transition toward a new model of society inspired by cohesion, solidarity, diversity, cooperation, the common good, integration, peaceful coexistence, tradition, innovation or beauty.

Dialogue and community are inseparable. Integrated visions of landscape have the capacity to build (political, cultural, economic...) bridges between broad sectors of society and find a middle ground and areas of consensus between often opposing visions. The aim is to promote landscape quality that has positive effects on people's well-being, generates economic opportunities and invigorates territories both socially and culturally.

Another function of the Observatory is the creation of atmospheres, spaces for sharing diverse, contrasting experiences and sociability that, in turn, generate new atmospheres... in an infinitely repeating cycle. Building landscapes implies creating synergies, complexities and interdependencies from a sense of proximity and everyday experience.

One of the main Observatory's efforts during the last 16 years has been the identification of landscape values. That is right; landscapes treasure has an extraordinary diversity of values: natural, aesthetic,

historic, social, symbolic and productive. These values are acknowledged both by the scientific community and by the general public. And some of them are increasingly recognized as crucial in addressing the challenges and uncertainties of today's world, such as climate change, health crises or forced migrations.

The concept of 'values' is closely linked to another: emotion. Landscape can generate individual emotions and, at the same time, be a depositary of scientifically recognised and socially shared values. Landscape is full of meaning; it summons memories and awakens emotions that have a direct impact on our well-being and health. This is why the methodologies and work of the Observatory have always considered the emotional and affective dimension resulting from the relationship between people and their landscape to be inseparable from the physical and material dimensions.

Values and emotions lead us directly to the idea of gazes. The landscape is the result of the confluence between different gazes, perceptions, interpretations and sensibilities. Every one of these gazes is needed to understand a landscape's logic and idiosyncrasy and to ensure its adequate management, as the European Landscape Convention establishes.

And of the final two reflections related to the last sixteen years, the first is colours, because blending a few primary colours in different proportions gives an extraordinary range of complementary colours. The Observatory is a primary colour, a space in which extremely diverse sensibilities converge, interacting to generate new projects and new relational frameworks. The 134 landscape units identified by the Landscape Observatory (which are understood as areas that share the same landscape character) define the first map of Catalonia's landscapes⁵ and provide a metaphorical expression of this chromatic diversity. Far beyond being the basic territorial units for the application of specific landscape policies, or even new political-administrative entities rethinking landscape governance, they are spaces for life, meeting points, repositories of collective memories.

The last idea is edge. The Observatory is at the interface between science and management. Similarly, landscapes are thresholds between different territorial situations and - sometimes - mental attitudes. To act on these fringes, we need to find transitional spaces, the edges between their time and space scales, and understand their social and symbolic references.

5 Observatori del Paisatge de Catalunya 2019.

3 Some Community-based Managing and Planning Initiatives in Catalonia

After mentioning some of the reflections and challenges connected with the activity of the Observatory over the last 16 years, and permanently inspired by the need to work together with the communities in each territory, next pages will explain a short selection of initiatives promoted by the Landscape Observatory or in which the Landscape Observatory is involved in one way or another, and that they are all impregnated with the 15 concepts.

They clearly show that different dimensions of the landscape are generating increasing local interest, as local communities perceive the landscape as a catalyst for development and a way to increase self-esteem, identity and quality of life. As such, these initiatives signify a turning point in landscape knowledge and management due to both their ability to document and guide public policies and their enormous potential for educating and raising public awareness. And the current COVID-19 crisis is only reinforcing this situation.

3.1 The Landscape Catalogues, from (Collective) Knowledge to Planning and Acting

The Landscape Catalogues have become the main instruments for generating knowledge about landscape in Catalonia as well as for introducing landscape quality objectives into urban and regional planning and into sectoral policies such as agriculture, heritage, tourism and energy. In this regard, the Landscape Catalogues have brought about a paradigm shift in landscape knowledge and management thanks to their ability to enrich public policies and to educate and raise public awareness of the importance of landscape values and diversity (Sala 2012). The Landscape Catalogues are therefore a tool that acts as a nexus between knowledge and action, recognition, commitment, co-responsibility and awareness-raising [fig. 1] (Nogué, Sala, Grau 2016).

Ordered to be drawn up by the Department of Regional Planning and Sustainability of the Government of Catalonia, the catalogues are technical documents conceived by the Landscape Protection, Management and Planning Act 8/2005 as tools for planning and managing landscape from a territorial planning point of view (Sala 2010). The Act defines them as “Descriptive and prospective documents determining the typology of the landscapes of Catalonia, identifying their values and state of conservation and proposing quality targets they must meet”.



Figure 1 Participation process of the Landscape Catalogue of Penedès

The catalogues have also been an attempt to overcome classical sector-based logic and have developed participatory and interdisciplinary ways of working and generating knowledge. The absence of a unanimously recognised participatory methodology in the area of landscape has led to the process being pioneering, experimental and under permanent construction (Nogué, Sala, Grau 2016). In order to have an impact on all phases of drawing up the catalogue, and seeking maximum representativeness, various participation techniques were combined, such as telephone interviews, opinion studies, consultations via the Internet, interviews with agents and experts, workshops, information sessions, etc. [fig. 2].

Drawing up the seven landscape catalogues has made it possible to obtain a map of the landscape units (landscapes) of Catalonia for the first time. With 134 landscapes, the map shows the great diversity and wealth of landscapes in Catalonia – among the highest levels anywhere in Europe – which make landscape the most important type of heritage. The landscape units, covering an average area of 23,700 ha, are areas that have landscape of the same character. In other words, they are characterised by a distinctive combination of elements that make them idiosyncratically different from the rest of the region and contribute to making one landscape different from another (but neither better nor worse). It would not have been possible to identify these most intangible aspects without the participation of the population.

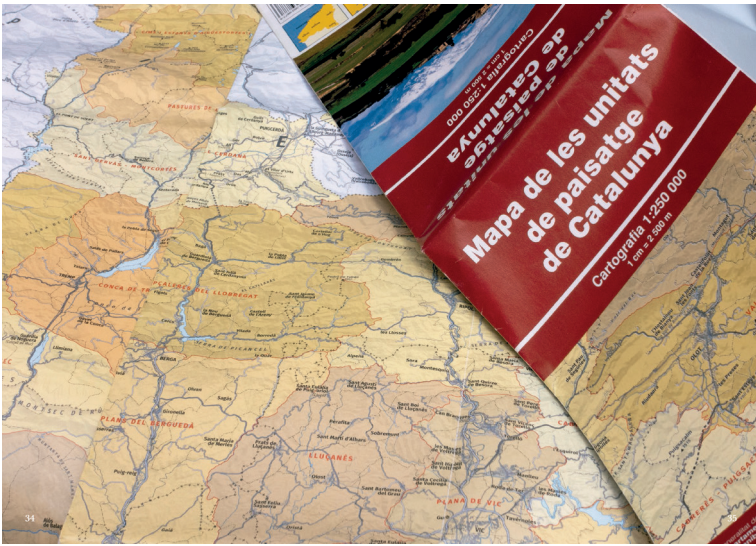


Figure 2 Documentation of the Landscape Catalogues.
Source: Landscape Observatory of Catalonia

Figure 3 Map of the Landscape Units of Catalonia.
Source: Landscape Catalogues of Catalonia

The experience of landscape catalogues shows the tremendous usefulness of defining landscape areas or units, not just as an area for the comprehension and description of a particular landscape, but also as an area for management, planning and action. The map of 134 landscapes is therefore something more than a mere landscape map, and the landscape units become truly functional areas of reference, making it possible to move from the general to the specific. They are basic territories within which to apply initiatives and local strategies, to implement landscape directives, give guidelines for open spaces, and apply rules or design projects for specific landscapes. To these qualities must be added their great capacity for education and awareness-raising [fig. 3].

3.2 Roads, Landscape and Tourism: A Pilot Project

The knowledge generated by the catalogues is been applied in different sectorial areas, in line with the community of a particular place. An example has to do with roads. Roads, today, are the main way for travelling to different parts of Catalonia and for wide sections of the population they are a key infrastructure for perceiving and enjoying its landscape resources. In addition, they lead to highly diverse touristic and leisure experiences and can consequently become instrumental in the service of culture, local development and even a tool for activating and conserving the heritage.

In what way can a road contribute to recognizing, to culturally, socially and economically activating, and to spreading the country's landscape values? In a context marked by the climate crisis and deep changes in systems of mobility, the document *Roads, landscape and tourism. Bases for defining a model for Catalonia* (Sala i Martí et al. 2019), prepared by the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia, within the framework of its collaboration with the General directorate of tourism of the Ministry of business and knowledge of the Government of Catalonia, presents an opportunity for a landscape to no longer be perceived from inside a vehicle merely as a setting or scenic background but to become the protagonist of new experiences of travelling and connecting with the territory. In this sense, a broad understanding of landscape, along the lines promoted by the European Landscape Convention and the Catalan Landscape Law, offers a very interesting perspective for creating touristic products that are more respectful of the territory.

In this sense, the Landscape Observatory promoted meetings with the main cultural and tourist actors in the Garrigues area in order to work together on a pilot project (define the final route, objectives, actions, synergies, etc.), promoted by the General directorate of infrastructures of the Ministry of land and sustainability of the Gov-

ernment of Catalonia. The actors know more about their territory, its values and its needs than anyone else. This is an example of these bridges that we often build between administration, professionals, and local stakeholders, among other sectors, in a particular territory.

A trip can thus become an experience that collectively creates new landscapes, born from the local community itself, and giving visitors the opportunity to play an active role in the creation of value. The project can therefore also involve the local community and prompt the exchange of knowledge, understanding, proximity, and a host of other values that must needs be rediscovered (Sala i Martí et al. 2020).

3.3 Rethinking Planning the Territory from Landscape Issues: The Cross-border Plan of La Cerdanya

In 2012, the institutions of La Cerdanya, from both the Catalan (Spanish) and French sides, aware of the strategic importance of preserving their landscape and enhancing its quality, made a concerted effort in collaboration with the territory's main agents to think about and establish the bases that would guide its future treatment and highlight its value (Sala, Puigbert, Bretcha 2015). The result was the Cross-border Plan of La Cerdanya, a tool for knowledge, action, awareness and commitment that applies the principles of European cooperation established by the ELC (Nogué, Sala 2018a). The Plan's methodology, developed jointly by the Regional natural park of the Catalan Pyrenees and the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia, is based on agreement with the territory's main actors. The Plan itself attempts to rethink the territory on landscape unit scale at a time when local administrations are seeking alternative and imaginative formulas for landscape management and planning [fig. 4].

It must be said that this Plan has also been a way to reinforce a collective view of a common landscape historically divided by a border since the Treaty of the Pyrenees in the seventeenth century. In a territory whose rules vary greatly depending on the side of the border (urban planning and water management included) and where it is difficult for both administrations to plan together, the landscape is a meeting point, a catalyst, when it comes to finding new ways of seeing, thinking and acting in the territory. It is also a factor for territorial dynamism linked to local development and the creation of economic opportunities.

The actions developed by the Plan are diverse, and all of them contribute to the generation of knowledge and the promotion of management, planning, training, dissemination and awareness-raising, in line with the principles of the ELC.

One of the key elements of the Plan is the La Cerdanya Cross-border landscape map,⁶ which through a joint approach seeks to plan, manage and design collective actions on the landscape. The map is special for several reasons, the first of which is that it is cross-border in nature. Secondly, it not only identifies and describes the landscape, but also embodies six agreed landscape quality objectives and a territorial project for La Cerdanya, based on the territory's values and the landscapes perceived and experienced by the population. The map also has a more project-based approach, grouping together 29 actions.

To draw up the map, prior work needed to be carried out to find equivalences, not just literal translations, between the Catalan and French languages to express the main concepts and terms linked to the landscape of La Cerdanya. Respecting the sensibilities of each individual language and culture allowed the concepts' true meaning to be grasped and at the same time provided a more personal view of the places. The final design of the map came from joint, collaborative work between the citizens, territorial agents and town councils of La Cerdanya. In fact, this is precisely one of the map's main values: it is the outcome of face-to-face working sessions with the 39 municipalities of La Cerdanya, on both sides of the border, and consultations with citizens and 20 local agents on the perception of the landscape of La Cerdanya, in addition to the prioritisation of landscape quality objectives.

This experiment is also constantly raising new questions: how can social players and economic sectors be involved in managing and improving a landscape that is divided by a national border?

3.4 The Landscape Management System of El Priorat: A Roadmap Build from the Community

Up until a few years ago, the El Priorat region was suffering from depopulation and impoverishment. However, in 2005, after seeing one of its most symbolic and emblematic landscapes threatened by wind turbines (el Montsant), it started down the road to rediscovering and redefining itself, both as a society and as a landscape. Since then it has been immersed in a process of utmost importance, which will undoubtedly mark its future, and some of whose aspects should be briefly highlighted.

Firstly, there is the collective enormous effort that has been made to bring out the values of the El Priorat landscape. It is a generally well-preserved landscape, located just a few kilometres from the Tarragona coast. It is a clear, harmonious landscape, easily interpreted

⁶ *Pla de paisatge transfronterer de la Cerdanya*, <http://paisatgecerdanya.parc-pyrenees-catalanes.fr/ca/>.



Figure 4 Cross-border landscape of La Cerdanya.
Arxiu d'Imatges de l'Observatori del Paisatge (Photo © Jordi Bas)

ed, with no discordant elements. Another of its outstanding assets is its very diverse, small-scale agricultural mosaic, based on dryland polyculture (vineyard, olive, etc.), which is part of a very unique tangible and intangible heritage, and which is the basis for the development of this territory [fig. 5].

Secondly, this Mediterranean landscape of agricultural mosaics has been placed at the centre of the development model as a driving force for the region's future. As an example, the vineyard and olive sectors are well aware of the importance of landscape as an intrinsic part of winemaking. Some of them have shifted their mindset from quantity to quality production, emphasising the emotional values of landscape in their products. This means that any initiative arising from El Priorat is based on the need to preserve and promote its values.

Finally, all of this is the result of work from the bottom up, over a number of years, first to recognise the landscape, and then to think and rethink how to manage it. A myriad of seminars, formal and informal meetings, forums, festivals, educational projects and collaborations with several Catalan universities has been organised to address this challenge. This collective work (priority society - economic sector - administrations) has resulted in a development model, a ter-



Figure 5 The diverse, small-scale agricultural mosaic based on dryland polyculture is part of a very unique tangible and intangible heritage. Arxiu d'imatges de l'Observatori del Paisatge (Photo © Julia Viejobueno)

ritorial project and a management system (which aspires to be recognised in the future by UNESCO) that lay out the future of the region and which are committed to the landscape's values and to the people who ensure they are preserved.

In this regard, this bottom-up process has proven to be a useful strategy for raising awareness of landscape among the public. It is particularly helpful in motivating economic and cultural actors who were not necessarily aware of the landscape but have a real or potential capacity to affect it, in generating positive attitudes towards people's relationship with landscape, and in adopting responsible practices in actions and decisions that affect the landscape.

It is not easy to find territories with all these characteristics (small-scale agricultural mosaic, centre of the development model, and collective work from the bottom up). The current situation forces us to open our eyes to these new forms of territorial and landscape management and governance, because they open up new paths for the future with an interest that goes far beyond this region.

This is another relevant example of the way the Landscape Observatory accompanies those communities that become aware of their landscapes' values and potential.

3.5 From Society to the National Government: The National Landscape Strategy of Andorra

The new National landscape strategy of Andorra is still in the development stages. The new strategy will update the current one, in force since 2011, and will take the form of a strategic map integrating the landscape quality objectives and actions planned for the coming years. The Landscape Observatory is collaborating with the Government of Andorra in defining the strategy, particularly the map. The most innovative feature of the process is the collective effort being made on the part of the Andorran Government, the municipalities and the social agents to create this map. This participatory approach encourages a greater recognition of the values and dynamics of Andorran landscapes and increases co-responsibility among all the agents involved in their protection, management and planning.

3.6 Collaborative Landscape Management as a Common Good: *Wikipedra*

Wikipedra⁷ is a collaborative database of dry-stone constructions and a magnificent example of collaborative local landscape management that contributes to raising awareness of such landscapes. Wikipedra is open to anyone looking to consult the relevant information it contains about dry-stone constructions, provided by more than 450 volunteers. In its ten-year history, Wikipedra has created an inventory of over 28,000 constructions. Government of Catalonia institutions such as the Ministries of land and sustainability, culture, and agriculture have started using the platform's invaluable information.

Wikipedra is, therefore, a knowledge creation and awareness-raising project based on local knowledge exchange, involving trust, proximity, reciprocity and cooperation between people with a common interest in dry-stone landscapes.

Wikipedra is particularly interesting as both the initiative and its daily management are carried out exclusively by civil society (specifically the *Drac Verd*, or Green Dragon organisation, who are experts in dry-stone heritage and validate all of the information provided). It is important to stress that the Landscape Observatory is merely the institutional umbrella promoting this project. In other words, civic organisations and citizens are responsible for expanding the information, which is especially useful for landscape, spatial planning and heritage policies [fig. 6].

⁷ Wikipedra, <http://wikipedra.catpaisatge.net>.



Figure 6 Collaborators of *Wikipedra* Portal. Arxiu d'Imatges de l'Observatori del Paisatge (Grup Drac Rend)

4 Looking Ahead

Now, sixteen years after the approval of the Catalan Landscape Act, is a good time to take stock. The landscape policies of Catalonia were drawn up and took their first steps in a context of an economic boom which drove great, although not entirely well accepted, dynamism that substantially impoverished the landscape in many parts of the territory. Now that the 134 landscapes of Catalonia have been identified and defined, that the main instruments of the Landscape Act have been rolled-out and that the Landscape Observatory is a consolidated body supporting public administrations and raising public awareness; now that new bridges have been built between the landscape and land planning policies; and now that the importance of the landscape and the work of the Observatory has gradually been internalized by the administrations, organisations and economic and social agents of Catalonia, it is time to make a leap forward in landscape policy to make it more transversal, pragmatic and designed

for action in order to reinforce public-private partnerships and cooperation and ensure that we are better oriented towards our current challenges and today's areas of great landscape debate.

Some of these challenges and areas are: landscape contribution to well-being, equality, health, social cohesion and quality of life; the growing role of landscape as an indicator of, and now as a response to, climate change in a situation of global climate emergency; major dialectics: local-global, rural-urban, authenticity *versus* artificialisation or transformation *versus* destruction; the question of identities in a globalised and hyper-mobile context; the creation of new benchmark landscapes; ordinary landscapes and their patrimonialisation; the relationship between landscape and new tourism; the common good; city limits; participatory democracy; virtual landscapes.

Finally, these challenges show us that landscape policies must be cross-cutting, interdepartmental and participatory, which is never very easy to achieve. At a time of global challenges and social uncertainty, there is an increasing need for in-depth discussion on the role of landscape in contemporary societies.

The function of the Landscape Observatory in the initiatives described and in others is to act as a meeting point between all those institutions, entities and people who, in Catalonia and outside Catalonia, are concerned and interested in the subject of landscape, both from the Administration, as from the professional, educational and research fields. With its simultaneous work of generating knowledge and planning the territory from the landscape and with the community, it tries to help establish new forms of participatory democracy in everything related to the government and management of the territory.

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