



Looking for indicators to assess the quality of landscapes

A la recherche d'indicateurs pour mesurer la qualité paysagère

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The European Landscape Convention stresses that “the landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields, and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activity”. Among other recommendations, signatory countries are committed to assessing their landscapes, “taking into account the particular values assigned to them by the interested parties and the population concerned” (Council of Europe 2000). However, assessing landscapes out of a specific framework is not easy due to the multiple functions that landscapes perform. Brandt, Tress and Tress (2000) pointed out five essential functions: ecological, economic, sociocultural, historical and aesthetic. Relating to these multiple functions, stakeholders may have different points of view on the quality of the landscape. The paper presents the results of a survey among landscape experts in both countries. Forty-two landscape experts from Wallonia and Romania had to specify their level of agreement on fifty-two Likert items regarding landscape quality indicators. A consensus appears about an idyllic landscape characterised by a small human influence. Experts point unanimously to the absence of pollution, sustainable farming, the awareness of the inhabitants about landscape, and the aesthetic value as necessary characteristics. Even if the consensus is weaker, landscape connectivity and regional heritage seem to be other critical indicators to assess landscape quality. On the opposite end, the species rarity, the hilliness, a mention in tourist guides, or the presence in the art matter little. The survey also stresses that experts’ advice differs concerning biodiversity indicators, economic potential, and the presence of contemporary items in the landscape. Generally, Romanian experts stress the biocentric approach to landscape more, while Walloon experts may assign importance to urban or industrial landscapes. Finally, the paper suggests nine features worth to be considered when assessing landscapes.