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Abstract

Title: The Top-Down and Bottom-Up protectionist initiatives for Walloon landscapes

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While the European Landscape Convention mentions that “the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection [...] entail rights and responsibilities for everyone” (Council of Europe 2000), what about the rights and responsibilities of the citizens? Based on analysis of legislative/strategic documents and of citizen initiatives, our communication proposes a critical view on the way the population is integrated into the protectionist policies conducted in Wallonia (Belgium), and on the interests promoted by the citizen protectionist initiatives. Various participatory approaches have been initiated by the political authorities to integrate the population in the decision-making process. For example, the involvement of local volunteers to identify the “Périmètres d’intérêt paysager”, the participation of inhabitants and representatives of the public domain in the elaboration of the “Chartes paysagères des Parcs Naturels”, or the consideration of the citizens as actors of the (landscape) heritage in the “Code Wallon du Patrimoine”. Moreover, various local initiatives are initiated by certain citizens. These initiatives can be limited to protest actions against certain development projects, but they can also lead to the creation of citizen committees sharing common interests and values or to the development of landscape projects such as the creation of the non-institutionalized landscape park of “Ry-Ponet”. Despite the fact that the “democratization” of the landscape is gaining ground in Wallonia, the inhabitants are still ill-equipped to influence decision making. Indeed, the processes of public participation remain limited to the realization of inventories, participation in discussions or listening to what they can and can't do in their landscape. Moreover, the “participatory” protection tools also tend to have a weak real impact on the management of landscape transformations. Despite that the population is increasingly invoking the landscape interest in local initiatives to defend many other interests, these citizen initiatives are often carried by only a few inhabitants or isolated groups. Thus, real rights and responsibilities depend not only on the place they are given in the decision-making process, but also on their interests and attitudes towards the landscape in which they live.

Council of Europe (2000). European Landscape Convention. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/fr/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008062a>.

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