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Swedish Landscapes

Ms Eva Salevid, Project Leader, LEADER+Sommenbygd, Sweden

If one wants to talk about the landscape of Sweden, it is always a good idea to start with the *Nordic Landscape*. This is the title of a preparatory study on the implementation of the *European Landscape Convention*, published in February 2003. The study is the result of meetings of a committee of the Nordic Council of Ministers - representing all of the Nordic countries – and then written by the two Norwegians Even GAUKSTAD and Gaute SØNSTEBO. From the beginning to the end, what is emphasized here is the physical unity of the Nordic landscapes. The Atlantic and the North Sea follow the coastline for some 24 000 km, thus isolating them (with the exception of Denmark) from the continent. These countries thus naturally form a European region of their own. And if by “landscape” we mean “nature”, landscape is certainly present everywhere in this region. In the past, too. Life and activity have always been related to those territories, and perceptions, art and culture have always reflected the people who had their living there, although, of course, they were also themselves shaped by it – sometimes for the good, sometimes for the bad... There is a common Nordic identity. The Old Norse, that gave present-day’s Nordic languages (except for Finnish) had a word for it – *landskap* – which meant a certain territory, or its form and *view*. So the idea of landscape as something where man is central exists from the very beginning. Now, if you see something and, on top of that are *conscious* about it, you also find yourself in something other than nature.

Our countries and landscapes have very few inhabitants compared to the European continent. Although urbanisation accelerates, as everywhere in Europe, only a few per cents of the territory are really concerned (apart, probably, from Denmark). These few facts: nature and landscape that are largely unexploited, in the north: one of the last wild life territories of the whole continent, plus a great variation of agriculture with highly visible effects on the landscape, all make up for a vast and resourceful region. For my part I have lots of gratitude towards the Council of Europe and through it the Nordic Council – the first for the *European Landscape Convention*, the second for the *Nordic Landscape Study*, because they both give us an impetus to find a more functional place, together, in a “Europe of Regions”.

It is also the first report among the countries having signed the Convention to draw up some big lines of a work in common between five countries, in order to carry out the implementation successfully. For me as a Swedish woman this is important. Why? Because there is generally very little debate on the landscape theme today – neither political nor among the public, and most definitely: not in Sweden! “Landscape” is almost totally absent in the Swedish legislation in its own right; up to now one has preferred neutral an intolerably delimitating terms, such as *living environments*, *natural environment*, *cultural environment*, and today increasingly

health environment. Thus, it is of crucial importance in our work to come to pass “the landscape message”. And this, as is clearly pointed out in the *Nordic Landscape Study*, both to focus on “the totality of the land” and to increase the general understanding and interest for “spatial planning” and the “knowledge, engagement and participation of the public.”

And Sweden? Well, if we don't often talk about landscape matters – perhaps the latest avatar of the good old Nordic laconism – we are in fact very rhetorical on something similar, and this in a language in fact is so flourishing that it tends to hide any salutary debate on landscape *per se*... Paradoxically, this is related to the fact that we have since 1999 a new Bill on the Environment. This Bill is conceived on the notion of sustainable development that the Brundtland Commission set forth already in 1987 and has in a global ecological approach the ambition to reach, all the goals of Agenda 21 and Natura 2000. Here are gathered together different laws, which before this date were included in several separate ones. The Bill lists 15 extremely advanced “Environmental Quality Goals”: protected ozone layer, natural acidification, flowering marshes and sustainable forests: all is there, and, thus, the “landscape” is integrated as just one goal among the others: mainly no 13 – “*a varied agricultural landscape*.” In the sense that it's always hard to integrate new values into an already well-established concept afterwards – ecological sustainable development – this is a pity.

As we all know from the Convention, landscape has a manifold influence on development as a whole, not least in the social and economic fields... Of course one is now getting more and more aware of this dilemma in administrative reports – but so far, what we see first, are just new reports, trying to explain it all...

Here is the Leader+Sommenbygd Logo. I show to you this constructed landscape - partly real, partly dreamed, as only image here of a landscape that I happen to know quite well and for the development of which I have spent some time... It covers two administrative counties and, apart from its most cherished object, the beautiful lake Sommen, also one of the best located and culturally best known lakes of all Sweden, Vättern. Not to talk about all the other lakes - sometimes hidden behind thick curtains of leafs – slopes and forests, generally recognised for their natural beauty. The long distances are a crucial problem, though – for instance, in my community, Kinda, you have to drive 50-90 km to reach the nearest town.

This is one of twelve Leader Plus Regions in Sweden: the rural development initiative of the European Union that favours partnerships between private and public sectors and the non-profit-making associations, in a multisectoral and *Bottom up Perspective*. LEADER+ Hurray...! For Sweden in general has little more than 20 inhabitants/km² and the rural communities included in the Leader+Sommenbygd project, each have something like 10...

But why these decreasing figures, although this is actually in the central and southern and parts of the country? I see two main reasons: first the big emigration of many young people to North America in the middle and late 19th century, that emptied a region already known for many stone remnants from the inland ice period. (Now a local museum in Kisa is putting light on this part of our history through an EU-supported project documenting the region's emigration process.) The other reason is

more subtle and shows the importance of staying in close contact with other Regions – may they be far off – when working here for The Landscape Convention: the incorporation during the sixties – I’m still referring to the community of Kinda – of four old communities into one “big community”. This led to the successive disappearance of old communal structures, and with them, indeed, some civil ones as well – and the movement towards the towns

However I would prefer to talk here about some much more positive aspects of the Sommenbygd. The Sommenbygd has indeed many trumps to play: old agricultural and forest landscapes still partly cultivated, pure water, a protected fauna and flora (let me mention especially the unique and solitary cry of the diver a peaceful summer night by the lake...). Also the Leader Plus Programme has already encouraged many projects in favour of an ecologically sustainable tourism (The Bill on the Environment obliges...). There is a peaceful striving in order to invest some of these small villages, close to administrative borders and far from towns, with new functions. However, once again: these strivings could have been even more fruitful, remunerative and – fun – wouldn’t it have been for the tendency of sometimes more often seeing problems than solutions, for instance when making people believe that there should be big barriers between ecological, social and economic development. So this is another reason why the European Landscape Convention brings such hope to my own country.

For a landscape developed to its maximum, as has been stated by the Council of Europe Expert Michel PRIEUR, obviously contains so much more. The integration of a landscape should be fully *visible*. This, again, concerns the key factor of *man* as I said in the beginning, his or her role in the politics of spatial planning, agriculture, forestry and fishing, town planning and infrastructure, culture and environment. Last but not least: all those who are concerned by a landscape X should have the feeling not only of being listened at, but also, if possible, of being themselves engaged in its development. Perhaps it is even in this enormous capacity of landscape to serve as a social vector - “ the territorial dimension of Human Rights”, as the Convention puts it – that landscape has its greatest interest for most of us...

What problems are there then for the Swedish landscapes today – and the ones in Sommenbygd among those – in relation to spatial planning more precisely? Although we worship in Sweden nature when arrive the first sunbeams of spring, I believe we should all readapt ourselves much more to the idea of landscape. We haven’t got - or have we lost? - this relation to “space” that is so widely spread in central European culture and training. As the Swedish Professor of Spatial (or “Regional”, as we say in Sweden) Planning at the Technical High School of Helsinki, Christer BENGSSON, has observed, “‘space’ reached us through Brussels”... In Sweden we are just not accustomed, historically, at seeing our dear “nature” in such a way. At seeing it, for instance, as a *principle* according to which nature is conceived as a space with three dimensions that one can fill with a variety of objects, the positions of which can be indicated by coordinates... Surely I wouldn’t have seen it that way, myself, hadn’t chance brought me to Alsace, on the European continent, where I worked for a long time. However, this little region by the Rhine, with a past, sometimes under German, sometimes under French, rule, taught me quite a lot about this “Sesame”, that in fact influences all European States, since 1999, and that is called ESDP: *European*

Spatial Development Perspective. So I discovered “space” as a tourist in the valleys of the Vosges Mountains.

Oh, marvellous, blossoming fruit trees that I saw there in the month of March! As a regular traveller in the area one is bound, sooner or later, to reflect upon how the intimate beauty of this mini-mountain chain can possibly have been maintained? In ones head, all the landscapes that one has ever seen start to over-lap... How is it that one landscape so obviously differs from another? Through some kind of mental process one ends up with an idea of the landscape *per se*. All this apparent beauty cannot be only given by nature - it must also be the result of some long, methodical work... So, apple and cherry trees blossom every year in the Alsatian valleys. But what I suddenly realised was that without a great deal of thinking, on the ground – perhaps related to that old agricultural and industrial economies had come to an end and had had to be replaced - those trees might very well have disappeared, or have been degraded. But people got aware of the threat in time. Thanks to meetings with local politicians and project leaders of the Regional Nature Park of the *Ballons des Vosges* I finally understood – a Swedish woman from the countryside, you may say – what rich things are possible to “put into a space” when *a priori* it’s empty: town plans and landscape plans, mountain plans - and even plans to approach those mountains of eastern France to *The Black Forest*, on the other side of the Rhine, because here, more than many other places, it is the very cohesion of the European space, that is seen to be shaped...

We, in the Nordic countries should work for bigger cohesion on the ground, too. At a national level one could – and here I still follow Christer BENGSSON in the *Journal of Nordregio*, (Nordic Centre for Spatial Planning) and the two authors of *Nordic Landscape* - encourage a way of working, where professional groups (architects of buildings or landscapes, town planners, civil servants...) in lack of directives do not spend all their time quarrelling with each others about what methods to use – at the expense of landscape. The Danes seem to have understood this quite well, whereas I have seen a new Swedish manual of some 50 pages that without a doubt as to the utility presented some 16 methods of landscape analysis according to some 7 different parameters.... I cite from the *Nordic Landscapes Study*: “A coordinated and over-all listing of all types of landscapes and regions, should be carried out, using professional criteria. This list should be linked also to regional and local levels.”

Besides, the state is not always as neutral as we tend to believe. In Sweden discussions are now opening up towards a secret: The Ministry of Agriculture, just as the Ministry of Environment, are not always practising that *Bottom Up Perspective* that they like to preach to others... I'll just give you one example that I know of because it has a direct influence on our landscape of the Sommenbygd: EU has initiated *The Rural Development Plan*, running up to 2006. However some Swedish agricultural experts have confirmed that agriculture – although it is getting more *ecologically sustainable* – still receives too much money. At the same time other sectors receive too little, sectors that are absolutely vital, however, for a rural development striving to be “sustainable”: more support for infrastructure in various forms (so important in our outstretched country), more support for small scale enterprising, etc. Nobody in the Sommenbygd today yet dares to reclaim a good motorway, relying for instance the area’s biggest towns... Why? So I pass the question over to you. What is best for the landscape: Does a big road harm the

countryside and the landscape(s)? Or shall we praise ourselves lucky not to be bothered with a motorway that sometimes does indeed devastate the landscape picture?

Regionalisation now goes on throughout Europe. Generally speaking this seems a very good thing for spatial planning, although in my country we are not yet entrusted with direct elections (*Bottom down* or *Bottom Up?*). Still: as in Sweden “regionalisation” is introduced as an option in certain test regions (about ten to this date) new problems seem to be occurring for all those landscapes that nobody generally talks about... Since the state has handed over much responsibility for the regionalisation to these frail and rolling ships, the regions, these, today, must not only strive to stand up-right; they must also handle the new markets! In Sommenbygd, for instance, we are now endowed with those highly visible “3G-mats” springing up 40-90 meters from the ground (like some really strange fruit trees...). Now, we avidly need those “trees”, of course, because of the vital communication town – countryside they provide us. However, the question is now debated all over the country: Whose interests are really the most important: private house-owners and/or concerned neighbours - or private tele-operators? Whose interests should have the last word if the question is brought to court? The issue is first of all the feared risks for people’s health – but more and more also “the deterioration of the environments of living and the image of the landscape”... So far the formal verdict has not yet been pronounced, but because of the fact that “we don’t have a designated rural policy in Sweden” everybody is certain (and most of us are quite happy) that the 3G-mats will continue to spread - as tele-operators wish... But once again I believe that *Nordic Landscape* (and the Convention) gives us the best advice for what should be needed in the future: *“The good development of landscapes requires clear political goals and priorities, at national, regional and local levels, and a political will must be required at all levels to establish the landscape in concrete actions.”*

Happily, there is no danger concerning the political will, at local level – is there?! In those nine years that Sweden has so far been a part of the European Union, our reputation as “democratic” has surrounded us and has probably even been strengthened. And why shouldn’t it, founded as it is on a long tradition of national independence? A local politician like myself is however sometimes a little bit surprised to find how in daily life my co-citizens are often confident that all decisions voted with majority are good decisions – for how could the majority ever make a mistake? *Bottom Up!* The biggest organisation working on the field today, perhaps not for the landscapes *per se* - since “landscape” does not yet exist politically - so at least for the countryside, *bygden*, an organisation also associated with the Sommenbygd, and sharing its interest in Leader Plus, has a long and funny name: *The Council of the Popular Movements: All of Sweden shall live!* Sweden like all Scandinavian countries has a long history of popular movements – movements that ever since the 19th century have marked our history: Lutheran and working class, temperance and ecology.

As a matter of fact, this organisation is the most efficient one, working for the countryside and the rural villages in the whole country, today, and also at international level. Its history is linked to the so-called Rural Delegation that sprung out of the 80s, this having today developed into the *Swedish National Rural Development Agency*. The organisation presents some really amazing facts for our

conditions: more than 4000 “development groups” (or “rural villages”) all over Sweden that are engaged in local work, more or less independently under its umbrella, close cooperation not only with LEADER+ but also with *The Agricultural University of Sweden*, etc. Since networking today is such a huge trump, also at international level (Ecovast, Prepare, Outdoor), it seems as though “*All of Sweden shall live!*” is, in fact, the best organisation on the ground representing “*the public*” - this vital word in the text of the Convention.

If this organisation, however, also wants “more of Europe” I cannot tell you. It wants to be more effective in using existing European programmes. And with their Bottom Up they have the keys for much of Swedish rural development today. The organisation has the ambition to create partnerships with communities, regions and the state. It works to strengthen the collaborations between country and town. Since it isn't particularly engaged in Swedish landscapes, yet, I stick to this citation from the *Nordic Landscape Study*, intended for whom it may concern: “*The Nordic countries should collaborate so as to identify important values and directives related to landscape, and also actors, in the dynamic zones between town and countryside, in order to find out how best to develop the landscape theme in these areas that continuously touch more and more important segments of the Nordic population.*”

I have tried in this brief speech to tell you what I have encountered on the ground concerning Swedish landscape, in the sense that it is given by the European Landscape Convention. Although lots of movements are going on everywhere, the most important break-through to be seen for all Nordic countries, clearly is the one initiated by the duo GAUKSTAD – SØNSTEBO, and The Nordic Council of Ministers. Perhaps their Study could ensure that the Nordic landscape would emerge from its traditional silence into something that approaches it, a little bit more, to continental Europe... The vast natural region of the Nordic landscapes should no longer be viewed only within national borderlines. In the EU, definitions are constantly being advanced that seem truly revolutionary to many people in the North: “polycentric urban networks”, “partnerships towns-countryside” (in this order!), “integrated transports- and communications systems”... To make new spatial visions comprehensible and acceptable, the Nordic countries probably need to co-operate more closely on the landscape by developing, for instance, a more common terminology and methodology, which should be more firmly rooted in territorial realities, and those of the citizens.

I would like to finish by pronouncing a wish for common future projects with our Romanian hosts these days. We should work together! In Sweden we developed a national discourse – I told you – that was based on some slogans that seemed very important to us indeed when entering the EU, together with Finland and Austria, in 1995, and those slogans have since become important in other countries as well: *environment, gender equality, democracy*. Today, ten new states have just entered and other countries, like Romania, are preparing themselves to do so. It has been said and demonstrated these few days: new slogans will presumably take on in years to come: Which ones? *Freedom? Or Sovereignty? Or Independence?*

I would be very happy to participate in the years before 2007 – when Romania is supposed to enter the European Union – in an interregional project between

Romania and Sweden (together with the Nordic Council), where, among many other objectives, all these slogans would be revised together.

So, to launch the debate, here are my proposals:

- Would it be possible to meet the unique, transfrontier initiative of the five Nordic countries of preparing, **together**, the entry into force of the Convention in the Nordic region, by elaborating a partnership with them and an “observer country” – **Romania?** – A new **referential project** with support from the Council of Europe (cp “The CEMAT Model Regions” The Pioneering project Kras – Exploring new ways of development)?
- Since there is a general interest in reinforcing new recognized **democratic** incentives in an enlarged Europe, and as in the Nordic countries, we work on landscape matters rather “on virgin soil” – is it possible to imagine such a referential project in the sphere of **public participation in implementing the Convention in the Nordic region?** Such collaboration could be associated with **Roumania** – a country otherwise “tested” by History on open and hidden threats to democracy...
- Following the advanced proposals of the preparatory study of *Nordic Landscape*, discuss whether it is possible to set up a shared development project concerning national / natural and regional parks between Sweden and Denmark, patronized by the *Nordic Council / Council of Europe*...