

# **ECOVAST Landscape Identification**

**A guide  
to good practice**

September 2006



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
for the  
VILLAGE AND SMALL TOWN**

# ECOVAST

# Landscape

# Identification

## A guide to good practice

Updated at September 2006

The purpose of this guide is to help the citizens of Europe to understand, to celebrate and to protect the landscape in which they live; and to assist governments in their work to implement the European Landscape Convention.

What we call "Countryside Character" is an expression of the way the natural and cultural elements of landscape combine to make areas different from each other, giving them a unique "sense of place".

"Countryside Newsletter", Spring 1999  
(Countryside Commission, England)

"Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

The European Landscape Convention



This project is cofinanced by the European Union,  
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

and the Province of Lower Austria,  
Department of Spatial Planning and Regional Policy,  
Department of Culture and Science, Department of Nature Protection



# Landscape, a common interest

## The landscape is all around us

The land surface of Europe is rich in vegetation, in wildlife, and in the buildings and other features created by people over hundreds and even thousands of years. When we look at this land, all around us – in town or countryside or seaside – what we see is the **landscape**.

## The landscape matters to us

This landscape matters to us because it is the setting of our daily lives. If it is ugly, we suffer. If it is beautiful, our spirits are raised.

Moreover, the landscape contains the evidence of how our fathers and grandfathers, and generations before them, used the land. It is full of human history, and of nature.

## There is rising public and political interest in the landscapes of Europe

In recent years, people and governments have recognised that the landscape is a major element of their national and European heritage. They see that the landscape embraces both natural and cultural features, in an integrated way.

But they also recognise that many of Europe's landscapes have been gravely damaged in recent years by ugly built developments, by loss of natural features, by neglect, erosion and other factors.

So, there is a new determination to protect and enhance landscapes, rather than allow them to be further spoiled.

## This interest is crystallised in the European Landscape Convention

This determination is expressed in the European Landscape Convention, which was initiated by the Council of Europe, and formally opened for signature by governments in October 2000. The Convention came into force in March 2004.

**The aim of this Convention is to encourage peoples and governments throughout Europe to care for all the landscapes of the continent, through processes of identification, assessment, protection, management and planning.**

The convention is intended to apply to **all landscapes**, not only to landscapes of special quality such as National Parks or UNESCO World Heritage Landscapes. The Council of Europe recognises that **all landscapes have character and quality, and that each landscape matters to those who live and work in it.**

**We therefore ask the governments of Europe to ratify and implement the Convention.**

So far (September 2006), 33 countries have signed the European Landscape Convention; and 24 of those countries – Armenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Macedonia (FYROM), Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine – have ratified the Convention, that is they have committed themselves formally to implement it.

Those who have signed but not yet ratified the Convention are Azerbaijan, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom

The following 13 countries have not yet signed the Convention – Albania, Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Russia, and Serbia.

**If you care about the landscape around you, you may wish to press your own government to ratify the Convention. Where your government has already ratified it, you may wish to press for the effective implementation of the Convention.**

### Citizens can take the initiative

Action does not lie with governments alone. **We all have a stake in the landscape.**

Our own actions can change the landscape, for good or ill – by planting, or by cutting down, a tree; by painting, or neglecting, our houses; by taking an active interest in proposed changes to the landscape, such as the building of a new road or the design of a new housing estate.

### ECOVAST, the European Council for the Village and Small Town

ECOVAST, the European Council for the Village and Small Town, was set up in 1984 to further the well-being of rural communities, and the safeguarding of the rural heritage, throughout Europe. It has over 500 members in 20 European countries. It has national sections in Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia (FYROM), Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom: these provide a focus for exchange and activity in each country, to benefit its rural communities and rural heritage.

ECOVAST's policy approach for rural Europe is set out in our "Strategy for Rural Europe". We have published a number of other policy and technical documents. This "Guide to Good Practice in Landscape Identification" was produced by ECOVAST's Working Group on Landscape, as a sequel to our active participation in the Council of Europe's consultation on the draft European Landscape Convention.

Contact addresses appear at page 18. Website: [www.ecovast.org](http://www.ecovast.org).

# Landscape identification

## Looking, Thinking and Feeling

The first step is to identify the character of the landscape

How can we ensure that the quality of our local landscape is enhanced rather than diminished? The first step must be to understand what that quality is.

**Every landscape in Europe is unique. Each landscape has a distinct character.**

This character comes from the form of the land, the quality of the soil and the vegetation, the way the land is used, the pattern of human settlement and so on. This distinct character is what makes the place feel like home for those who live there : it may be the chief attraction for those who wish to visit the area. It creates a **sense of place**.

It would be a deadly mistake to lose this special character, so that everywhere became the same.

**So, the first step in caring for the landscape is to understand, or identify, its character.**

This can be done by the citizens themselves

In some countries – Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, for example – this process of identifying the character of landscapes has been done by experts, at a high cost to the government.

Where governments decide to afford it, that is a good approach – provided that the people who live in each landscape are consulted and involved.

**But the job can be done by the citizens themselves. The purpose of this guide is to help them if they wish to do so.**

The process is not too complicated

Through the Working Group on Landscape, ECOVAST has pioneered and tested a method of assessing landscapes, and identifying landscape units, that can be used by individual citizens (who do not have to be experts on this subject) or preferably by small teams of people. Through the work of a few days, such a team can identify and describe a landscape unit, in a way which provides a starting-point for the understanding of this landscape and the detailed care that it deserves.

The focus is on a 'landscape unit'

There are parts of the world – such as the Sahara Desert, the Canadian Rockies, or the wide continental plains – where the same type of landscape appears to stretch for hundreds of kilometres.

Europe is not like that, apart from some areas to the North and East. As you travel across it, you may notice significant (though sometimes subtle) changes in the landscape – for example where hills rise from the plain, where underlying chalk is replaced by sand thus causing a change of soil and vegetation, or where the typical form of villages or the shapes of farmhouses are replaced by others.

Changes of this sort may be seen as providing a boundary between one "landscape unit" and the other.

It may seem wrong to speak of "landscape units", because landscapes, as defined by the Council of Europe, are units in themselves ("Landscape means a given piece of territory as perceived by man ..."). But to make it absolutely clear that landscapes are units, which differ in their character from adjoining or other such units, we use this term of "landscape units". This term is useful because it allows each local community to focus on its own place, on what is distinctive about that place, on what is constituting its character.

There is no standard size for a "landscape unit". It is, simply, that area which (when studied) is seen to have a character different in some significant way from the next landscape. But it may help to say that, in the countries that have developed the technique, the landscape units tend to be between perhaps a hundred and several hundred square kilometres in size. The examples given in this Guide will help to illustrate this.

## Looking, thinking and feeling: that is how to appreciate the character of a landscape

A landscape has been defined as 'an area of land as perceived by people'.

We perceive it mainly by seeing it. But our mind and our emotions need to be 'in gear', as well as our eyes. We must look and think and feel!

The reason for this is that each landscape has been made by a combination of nature and human action and their mutual interaction. The eye alone will neither pick up how people and nature have reacted to each other nor other things concealed beyond the visible surface of reality. You understand a landscape better if you know, for example, that the wild flowers that you see are there because the soil is acid, and the soil is acid because the underlying rocks are volcanic in origin; or if you know that the traces of old walls on a hillside mark the upper limit of cultivation during past times of war or famine.

Moreover, care for a landscape is best stimulated by affection for it, or for things, events and people who are associated with it. You perceive a landscape through eye or ear (the gushing water of a mountain river, or the murmur of the wind in the leaves) or physical feeling (rain or sunlight on the skin) – but also through emotion.

Many emotional and spiritual elements in the landscape can not be adequately described by words, but you feel and you know very clearly if you experience a landscape of great spirituality, such as the Meteora monasteries, or of natural majesty such as some arctic fjords.

## Each landscape may be seen as an overlay of natural and human factors

The most obvious elements in a landscape may be the buildings, the trees and the vegetation. But underlying these are the soil, the rocks and the form of the land. In turn, overlaid on the buildings and the land cover – and at the same time part of them – are the light and colour of the scene, and the overall feeling that the landscape brings. All these layers contribute to the character of a landscape.

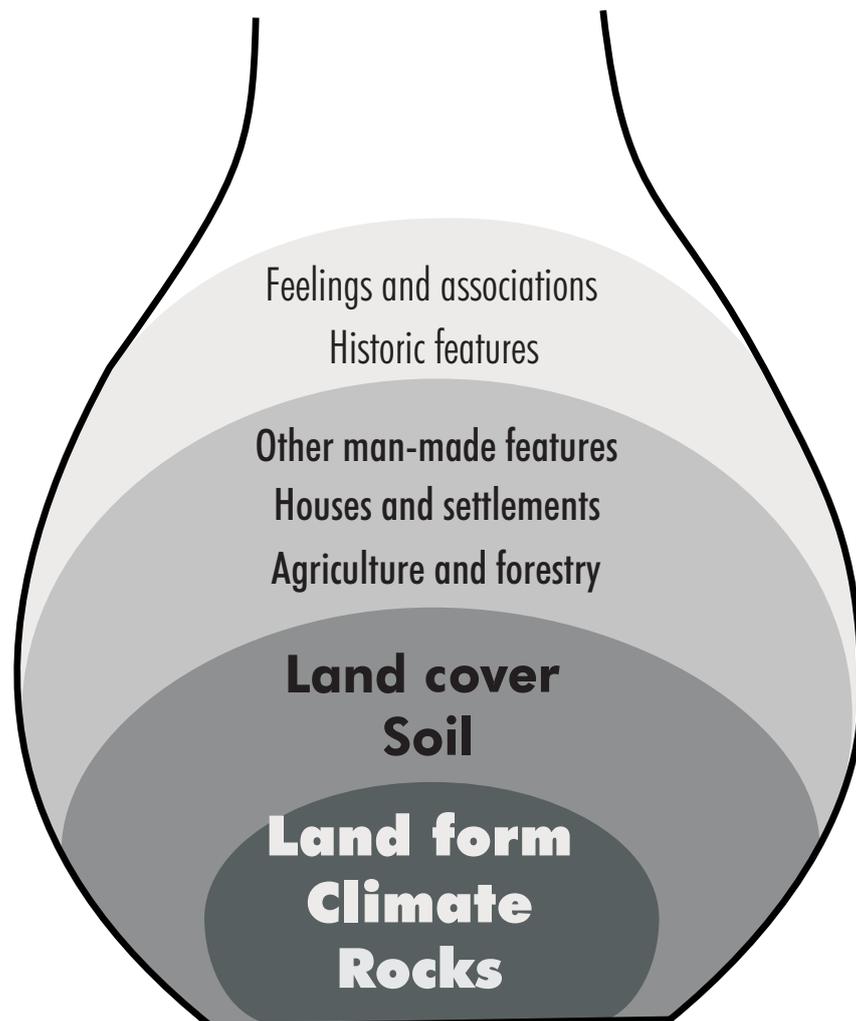
## Character can be assessed through use of a simple matrix, or check list

The layers described above provide the clue to the assessment of a landscape unit. The method developed by ECOVAST is based on a simple matrix, which starts with rock, climate, land form and soil; moves on to embrace land cover, which includes the vegetation and the natural habitats; proceeds to pick up the varied human features and activities on the land; and focuses finally on the emotional aspects.

So, the matrix has 10 layers, rising from the rocks at the bottom followed by the climate and landform, embracing human factors such as the form of houses and settlements, going on to the historic features and arriving at the tenth layer of spirituality and associated feelings imparted by the landscape. The matrix also enables you to record the relative importance of each aspect to be assessed.

## The amphora of landscape

The figure below shows the "amphora of landscape", which summarises the idea of a linked set of layers that combine to form landscapes.



# Landscape matrix

On page 12 is a blank check list, the landscape matrix, which you can photocopy and use to assist your own analysis of the landscape. It shows the 10 main elements of landscape character. It enables you to note those features (within each heading) which are clearly visible within the landscape and contribute to its character; and the relative strength of those features.

The Landscape Matrix also provides space for you to add:

- o a short description of the landscape, summarising its character
- o additional comments
- o pictures (two pages with illustrations of the dominating characteristics and an aerial photographic map of the area/landscape described).

## The 10 layers of the main landscape features

It may be helpful to comment briefly on the ten layers of the matrix. Please be well aware that in every landscape these ten layers are mutually related to each other!

### 1. Rocks (surface geology)

In a mountain landscape, or on a sea coast, it is often possible to see the rocks exposed: they are visible elements in the landscape. Elsewhere, the rocks may be invisible under a mantle of vegetation. You should focus on what is visible : but you may also note that the underlying rock – what is technically called the 'surface geology' – can have a profound effect upon the nature and quality of the soil and (through the soil) upon the vegetation, the crops and the woodlands. Moreover, rocks have been used in many areas as a prime building material, and are thus reflected in the visible structures such as the smooth masonry of houses and churches, walls of flint or rammed earth, or bricks whose distinctive colour comes from the local clay.

Before you go out to look at your landscape, you may like to study a map showing the surface geology of the area.

### 2. Climate

It may seem odd to suggest that you record the climate, as part of the landscape : you cannot see the wind ! But the climate has a profound effect upon the features in, and the appearance of, the landscape. Rainfall, frost, sun and wind may determine the abundance or shortage of vegetation and the shapes or movement in the landscape. On the western shores of Europe, the Atlantic winds cause the trees to bend permanently eastwards: in the flat lands of the Netherlands, wind and water combine to produce vivid movement and reflections in many landscapes : in the Alps, the cold air in the mountains sets a line above which trees are not found (the so-called 'timber line').

An understanding of your local climate will help you to interpret what you see in the landscape. A most essential part of climate is water in any state (vaporous, liquid or solid as ice) : you may see or sense its presence or absence directly (e.g. through heat, frost, dryness, humidity, sunshine, wind). Indirectly also, you may "see" the climate through its effect upon landform – as in deserts, steppes, swamps, lakes or glaciers – and upon the typical vegetation.

### 3. Land form (Geomorphology)

In many landscapes, the strongest visible shapes come from the form of the land – the mountains, the hills, the gentle curves of a rolling landscape, the horizontal lines of a flat plain, the dip of a river valley, or the curve of a lake shore. Europe is richly varied in land form, both across its broad land mass and on its complex edges. No other continent has so broken a coast-line, including almost separated oceans such as the Baltic, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

Careful reading of a physical map, with its clear contours, may tell you what to expect in terms of land form: but a keen eye needs to be applied in the field in order to judge how the shape of the land is expressed in what you see, and how it relates to 'imposed' features such as trees and buildings. For example, sometimes a castle gives dramatic emphasis to a hill-top, or a line of trees marks the path of a river.

### 4. Soil

In some landscapes, the soil is scarcely visible, because it is covered throughout the year by woods, heath or pastures. Elsewhere, the soil may be exposed by seasonal cultivation, by erosion or by wind. But everywhere the soil is a major factor in the landscape: its thickness, fertility and level of acidity determine the plants, the trees, the crops and the farm animals that will flourish there. Its colour may 'paint' the landscape, as shown in the description of the 'gouache' landscape of the Weinviertel. So, you can understand a landscape better if you know something about the soil.

### 5. Land cover

In many rural landscapes, vegetation is the most obvious visible feature in the landscape. Even in some villages and towns, trees and other greenery may provide a 'cloak' within which the buildings sit. So, you should look closely at how the land is covered, the broad pattern of vegetation, the division between woodlands and fields, the network of hedges or other field boundaries, the avenues or single trees, the areas of water and the rivers and streams – because these are the landscape elements in which landscapes may differ from each other.

This land cover produces a visual pattern: it also offers varying habitats for wildlife, which further enrich the landscape. Wild flowers, so easily visible, and birds, wild animals but also the herds of cattle and other domesticated animals contribute to the special character of each landscape.

As with the land form, the main pattern of land cover will show up on a physical map: but you need to look keenly in the field to see the detail and the impact of this pattern. You should also note changes which appear to be taking place, for example the growth of scrub in places which were previously kept open by grazing.

### 6. Agriculture and forestry

Almost 90% of the land area of Europe is used for either farming or forestry. The regime that is observed by the farmers and foresters has a strong effect on the **shape** of rural landscapes and upon the seasonal changes in the **appearance** of the landscape.

Ploughing, sowing, harvesting of crops; the cutting of hay or gathering of silage; the movement of herds or flocks within or across the land; the planting, thinning and felling of forest trees – these bring change, colour, pattern and movement to the landscape, often in ways (such as the colour of the cows) that are special to a particular place.

The way in which farmers maintain their land has a decisive influence on the ecology as well as the view of a landscape. The roots of our "cultural landscapes" stretch back to the time when mankind changed its habit from hunters to farmers!

So, keep a keen eye on how the farmers and the foresters are using the land, and on the buildings and other features – barns, silos, walls, hedges, machinery – which they have brought into the landscape. Also, look for the changes which are occurring, such as planting of trees instead of farm crops, the construction of new farm buildings, or the abandonment of fields.

## 7. Houses and settlements

During thousands of years, people have settled throughout Europe. They sought sheltered places, where water was available, where they could make a living. They built their houses of local materials – stone, wood, clay, flint, thatch, lime. They created villages, towns and cities. From this process, each area has inherited a pattern of houses and settlements which are characteristic of that place; which (to greater or lesser degree) reflect or harmonise with the underlying rocks, the climate and the land form; and which may bring dramatic punctuation to the landscape, as with the towers and spires of churches or the compact form of a village street.

Of recent years, the advent of long-distance transport and mass-produced building materials has prompted a fall in the use of local materials: building styles have become more uniform across wide regions. But this process has not destroyed the variation in local building traditions and in settlement patterns, which remain strong elements in many landscapes. You may wish to study these traditions and patterns, to note how far they still exist, but also what changes are taking place in the pattern and design of buildings and settlements.

## 8. Other man-made features

The landscape is a stage on which appear many actors. You may expect the farmer, the forester, the householder or the priest. But what about the miner, the quarryman, the soldier, the electricity engineer, the road-builder? The features that they have created – roads, railways, cement works, factories, quarries, military camps, power stations – may provide strong elements in the landscape. These – and the changes in them – need to be recorded.

## 9. Historic features

Europe as a whole is special among continents in being so long and so densely settled. The settlement pattern and the land uses of today are overlaid on those of past generations. Sometimes, the historic features are highly visible, and may set the special character of the place – the hill towns of Croatia, castles in many regions, the windmills of Holland or of Crete. Elsewhere, the historic pattern may be partly obscured, and it takes a keen eye to pick out what we inherit from the past – the curve of ridges in a field where oxen used to pull the plough, the line of the channel which used to bring water to the mill, the great ditches which mark the boundaries of a hill fort.

The landscape contains the evidence of history. So, an understanding of local history can help you to interpret what you see in the landscape.

## 10. Feelings and associations

Identifying a landscape is not a 'cold' process, undertaken like a scientist dissecting a dead animal. It is a 'warm' process, concerned with a living entity, a place which lives and changes, which has a past and a future, which is imbued with the

emotions of people. So, you may be alert to these emotions, the feelings that the landscape brings to people, the ideas that they associate with that landscape.

These feelings may be expressed in music, painting and poetry; in the names that are applied to a landscape by the people; in the associations with past events or famous people; or in the feeling that some landscapes are sacred..

You should be alert also to your own emotional reaction to the landscape. This will help you in writing the description, and in making the 'assessment' which is provided for on the form.

## Matrix for landscape identification

### List of determining character elements

- 10 Feelings and associations
- 9 Historic features (e.g. castles, monasteries, archaeological sites)
- 8 Other man-made features (e.g. industry, tourism, infrastructure)
- 7 Characteristic features of houses and settlements
- 6 Characteristic features and patterns of agriculture and forestry
- 5 Land cover (vegetation, wildlife, habitats)
- 4 Soil
- 3 Land form (geomorphology)
- 2 Climate (hydrology, rivers, lakes, glaciers)
- 1 Rocks (surface geology)

Name of the Landscape unit:				
Relative strength of the features (graduation 1-4):				
	dominating	strong	moderate	low
10				
9				
8				
7				
6				
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
(outstanding characteristics written <b>bold</b> )				

### Short description

(at least of the dominating characteristics and the total/holistic impression of the landscape):

### Assessment

(your first evaluation of the importance of the landscape):

**Additional comments** (e.g. reference to regulations due to conservation orders or requirements):

# Practical steps

To study a landscape unit, and prepare a description like those illustrated above, is a fairly straightforward process.

It is a task that may be tackled by one person, or ideally by a small team.

It involves four short phases :

- o some preparatory 'homework'
- o time spent looking at the landscape
- o the writing up
- o the team work

## Preparatory homework

Studying a landscape is like an exercise in applied geography

So, it is very useful to have a **map**, preferably at a scale (perhaps 1 : 100,000 or 1 : 50,000) which allows you to see the whole of the possible landscape unit (or even several units) on one sheet. To choose this map, you need to have some idea in advance of which landscape unit(s) you are thinking about, even if you do not know where their edges are. The map may then be the means by which you provisionally identify where these edges are – as shown, for example, by a sharp change in the pattern of contour lines or of woodlands or of towns and villages. For this, you need what is usually called a 'physical' map, that is one which shows the main features which are visible in the landscape.

It can then be very useful to do a bit of **reading** about the area, in order to find out something about the surface geology, the quality of the soil, the climate, and the history of how the land in the area has been used (e.g for farming, forestry, mining, quarrying, human settlement etc). This will help you to understand what you are seeing when you go out to look at the landscape. This additional information can be very useful even if you tackle a landscape which is well known to you. It will help you to look at a seemingly familiar landscape with new eyes, and to make "unconscious knowledge conscious", thus gaining a better understanding of the landscape as a whole and its character.

## Looking at the landscape

The main work is done on the ground, in the field. The ideal way is to find viewpoints from which broad views over or through the landscape can be gained; and then to travel through the landscape, gaining further impressions.

On the way, you can keep a record of what you see, using the 10 steps in the matrix as a check list. Your focus should be on the visible elements in the landscape, and on the **emotions** which you feel when passing through it.

We advise that you should record on the matrix only the landscape elements that you see. All the other knowledge, which helps you to understand the landscape but which in fact you do not see, should be explained outside the matrix and in the text of the illustrations.

**Your aim is to gain a general impression of the whole landscape (unit);** and also to be clear, on the ground, where the **edges** of the landscape unit are i.e. where it gives way (either abruptly or gradually) to another landscape with a significantly dif-

ferent character. This is not an exercise in detailed recording of all features (as you can see by comparing the matrices on the following pages – pages 20, 23, 26).

Take your **camera** with you and record those broad views or characteristic features which strike you.

## Writing up

The final stage in the process is the writing up. This may best be done when your photographs have been developed, and you can recollect in tranquillity the experience of seeing the landscape, with help from your field notes and from these photographs.

Now you can complete the matrix, starting with the rocks, climate and soils (steps 1, 2 and 3) and progressing upwards through all the steps to the emotional and spiritual reactions (step 10). The emphasis, in completing the matrix, should be on the visible elements in the landscape. If there are no significant features on any one step of the matrix, you do not need to complete it. You should give a weight to the features, by reference to the four columns which show whether each feature is 'dominating', 'strong', 'moderate' or 'low' in its contribution to the character of that landscape unit.

The ideas in the matrix can then be used as the basis for writing the 'short description' of the landscape unit.

You may then wish to use the photographs to illustrate the main characteristic features of that landscape unit, with short texts to match, in the manner of the three examples shown later. Note that this part of the record allows you to say something about how the landscape elements were created or how they relate to modern life : this is where your mind as well as your eye can contribute so much.

Finally, the form provides a space for you to express a personal view about the value of the landscape. This is particularly useful where you have identified and studied a number of different landscape units, and you wish to make a judgement about their relative importance. **But do not forget that every landscape matters to those who live in it.**

## Teamwork

The process described above can be done by one person. But it will be a richer experience, and may produce better results, if done by a small team – for example, of interested citizens or pupils of advanced school classes – who can share both the work and their ideas and impressions. Ideally the team should be guided by someone who has some practical experience with this method.

Based on the experience in the three landscapes described later, we suggest a team might tackle the phase of 'Looking at the landscape' through a procedure of five steps, as follows:

### Step 1:

Move through the landscape, discuss, write down what you see and feel (sensual perception of landscape). Collect your impressions when returning home. Mark the places on a map where you think the landscape character changes (for instance when steeper slopes arise, the hills become higher, lowland or plains begin, the form of mountains change, the lighter colours of limestone appear in the rocks or the pattern of open land and forest or the forms of rural buildings are changing).

## Step 2:

Write down the terms that to your opinion represent the most characteristic elements and/or features of the landscape you have visited. Read the terms aloud to each other and delete doubles. After dismissing multiple entries, every one will still have a bigger or smaller collection of character-terms. Try hard to use only one word or at least a very short expression. Write these terms on stickers, each term on a single sticker.

## Step 3:

Onto an enlarged or hand written check list on a wall (or big flip chart) you now apply your stickers, in accordance with the categories of the ten layers. This procedure will probably cause some very valuable discussion resulting in a condensation of the process so far.

## Step 4:

Now follows the most important and finalising event – the weighting. Each person in the team is given 8 sticky coloured dots that he or she is free to apply to the items that, in his/her opinion, contribute most to the character of that landscape. Each person may choose whether to use all 8 dots for one dominating feature or to mark several different items. The items that "win" the most dots are the strongest contributors to the landscape character.

The four steps of graduation in the checklist: “dominant (1), strong (2), moderate (3) and weak (4)” should be defined, so that differences in evaluation carried out by different groups of persons are kept as low as possible.

### **Dominant (1):**

Existing in all parts of the landscape unit; visible from most viewpoints; and contributing greatly to the character of the whole landscape unit.

### **Strong (2):**

Contributing greatly to the character of part of the landscape unit, but not found in other parts of that unit.

*or* Found throughout the landscape unit, but not a dominant element in its character.

### **Moderate (3):**

Found in most parts of the landscape unit, but not a dominant element in its character.

### **Low (4):**

Found occasionally, but contributing to the character of the area. (This category is worth noting where this element is not found in the neighbouring landscape units and therefore contributes to the difference between units).

This final task will result in a completed matrix, showing the main characteristic features of the landscape in question (see the three examples on pages 20, 23 and 26).

In carrying out this procedure, and throughout the unavoidable but very valuable discussions, always keep in mind that the whole work is a first and rather rough step to identify landscape units in a country that has not yet done this task. All details and deeper insights can follow later if need be (indeed there may later be money to carry out a complex landscape assessment). The last comments especially refer to finding the border lines – a better phrase may be border zones – between landscapes: to find the precise borders is not the purpose of this initial study.

### Step 5 :

Examine the photos you took when moving through the landscape and select those that best represent the most important features and elements of landscape character. (In many countries there exist well-illustrated books on landscapes that might supply you with good additional pictures of the character features of your landscape although they have not been taken to serve this purpose). The chosen photographs can form the basis for illustrating features of the landscape, as shown on pages 21 and 22, 24 and 25 and 27 and 28.

# What next?

To identify, and to understand, a landscape is a rewarding experience in itself. It is like studying a great work of art (which in fact many landscapes are!), reading a fine book, listening to music and chatting to one's friends – all in one experience. It enhances one's life.

But it can also be the start of a process of caring for the landscape.

The European Landscape Convention encourages peoples and governments to **'identify, assess, protect, manage and plan'** their landscapes.

This guide is about the first of these five verbs. The point of the other four verbs is this ... the landscapes of Europe, in all their variety and beauty, have been created by the actions of people over thousands of years. They are a major part of our living heritage, the setting of our daily lives, the magnet for our recreation and our tourism. They have changed, and will continue to change. Our need, and our duty, is to ensure that this change is good. Our aim should be to ensure that the quality and the special character of each landscape are enhanced, rather than diminished, by each necessary change.

That is why it is crucial first to understand the character of each landscape, and the ways in which it appears to be changing. It then becomes possible to take the further steps :

- o to **assess**, or evaluate, the landscape, in the sense that one can consider what features in it merit special protection, what blemishes might usefully be removed or screened, what processes of change should be promoted or discouraged : the checklist provides a space for you to put down your first ideas for this assessment.
- o to **state objectives** for the desired future quality of the landscape
- o to **protect** the landscape, or those features within it that are precious;
- o to **manage** the landscape, recognising that much of its character and beauty has arisen because of human activity and will only be sustained if that activity continues, for example grazing by farm animals or maintenance of hedges and walls;
- o to **plan** the landscape, where large-scale change is needed for economic or environmental reasons : this may apply for example, where coal-mining ceases and the spoil-heaps can be reclaimed, or where land must be flooded to create a reservoir.

**Action of this sort can and should be initiated by government, at national or local level. But citizens can take the initiative, building on the first step of identifying the landscape.**

# Conclusion

ECOVAST invites you to take part in the process, which is both as wide as Europe and as intimately valuable as your own locality, of identifying and understanding the landscape. You will find this stimulating and rewarding. You will be helping to protect and celebrate the character of your own place, and the heritage and future wellbeing of Europe.

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The text of the European Landscape Convention can be found on the Council of Europe website – [www.coe.int/europeanlandscapeconvention](http://www.coe.int/europeanlandscapeconvention)

# Examples

To see how the landscape matrix may be used, you may like to look at the three examples which are given on the next ten pages. They relate to three landscapes, in Austria and Slovakia, which adjoin each other but which are very different from each other. You will see that, in addition to the check list, there is for each landscape unit a series of photographs with captions which illustrate some of the main features.

The second example, Zahorje, provides a neat example of a cross-border landscape. Landscape units very often run across administrative boundaries within countries, and (as in this example) even across national boundaries. The European Landscape Convention calls upon governments to cooperate in the protection, management and planning of landscapes which have this cross-boarder character.

## Matrix for landscape identification

### List of determining character elements

- 10 Feelings and associations
- 9 Historic features (e.g. castles, monasteries, archaeological sites)
- 8 Other man-made features (e.g. industry, tourism, infrastructure)
- 7 Characteristic features of houses and settlements
- 6 Characteristic features and patterns of agriculture and forestry
- 5 Land cover (vegetation, wildlife, habitats)
- 4 Soil
- 3 Land form (geomorphology)
- 2 Climate (hydrology, rivers, lakes, glaciers)
- 1 Rocks (surface geology)

Name of the Landscape unit: <b>Weinviertel (the Wine Quarter, Austria)</b>				
Relative strength of the features (graduation 1-4):				
	dominating	strong	moderate	low
10				"Gouache Landscape" harmonious, well maintained
9				
8	<b>Avenues of cherry trees</b>			
	<b>Settlement structure "Villages in line"</b> ("Straßendörfer")			
7	<b>Rows of wine cellars</b> ("Kellergassen")			
6		<b>Windbreaks</b> <b>Vineyards</b>		
5		<b>"Field edge vegetation"</b> (Ackerrandvegetation)	Pseudo Accacia (Robinia)	
4			Bare soil on Loess	
3	<b>Gentle curved landscape</b> (Dellentäler)			
2		<b>Pannonic climate</b>		
1			Loess	
(outstanding characteristics written <b>bold</b> )				

**Short description** (characteristics, total impression, spirituality of landscape):

Gentle, curved landscape of low hills. "Gouache Landscape", harmonious, well maintained, ubiquitous farmland. Rare windbreakers, rare forests. Characteristic features and structures of houses and settlements; one storied farmhouses, "Street villages" in compact arrangement; wooden "backside-barns". "Kellergassen" (lanes of wine cellars), vineyards, though not ubiquitous. The characteristic loess is perceptible throughout the whole Weinviertel and causes the impression of a "gouache landscape".

**Assessment** (your first evaluation of the importance of the landscape):

The Weinviertel is one of the western most landscapes characteristic for the "pannonian climate" (hot and dry summers, cold, dry and windy winters). The central part is occupied by a line of a little higher hills, so called "Cliff Zone" (Lime stone cliffs), some carrying castles or ruins (like Staatz and Falkenstein). Landscape of national value.

**Additional comments** (e.g. reference to regulations due to conservation orders or requirements):

Recent changes of the landscape due to the cultivation of "alternative plants" and crops.

## Weinviertel



Cherry tree avenues still exist in the Wine Quarter, indeed are being replanted along main and side roads. When main roads are widened, one line of trees is often cut down, leaving semi-avenues.

Cherries are a regional speciality. People may pick up the fruit by permission of the local authorities. Many families from Vienna take the opportunity to gather their rural fruit in this way.

Lines of wine cellars are a lively tradition in this region and form a strong characteristic of the landscape, though not as ubiquitous as the vineyards. They can be found in four main regions around the rim of the Wine Quarter. But every village has at least one lane or line of cellars, sometimes separate from the main settlement in a cellar hamlet ("Kellerdorf"). Almost every group of wine cellars has its own wine festival. Throughout the year everyone is welcome to taste and buy the wine at the cellar.



Participants in the Stupava workshop, particularly those from outside Austria, saw this as a "landscape of gentle curves". This impression comes not only from the form of land, with flowing hills and shallow valleys ("Dellentäler" – a fossil landform from the last iceage), but also from the swinging border lines of the farmer's fields. Some also described it as a "gouache" landscape, with the underlying whiteness showing through all the colours.

The line of the blue hills at the horizon are the Small Carpathians



Many of the Wine Quarter villages are linear in form, with houses (mainly single storey) facing each other across the street or across a central common. The villages are usually compact; and they huddle in valleys or hollows, to escape the icy northern winds during the pannonic and continental winters.

Through "village renewal" schemes, many buildings have been recently repainted, which reinforces the feeling of a "gouache" landscape.

In this dry area village streams often lack water for weeks in the summer.

Wind breaks, forming prominent features in the landscape, are found in parts of the Wine Quarter only. They were planted more recently than those in the adjoining Marchfeld and do not offer perfect protection against soil erosion by the frosty winter winds.



Vineyards do not need protection against the wind. Where the vines are planted in rows running up the slopes, they expose the soil to erosion by summer thunderstorms. The rich eroded soil is collected in "retention basins" and then carried back up the vineyards by tractors, rather than in backpacks as in former times.

The colourful wild vegetation on the edge of fields is not only an aesthetic delight but also of high ecological value.

The same is true of some alternative crops which are increasingly grown. The impression of a "gouache" landscape can be gained throughout the year – in summer from the ripening corn and the stubble after harvest, in other seasons from the bare areable soil with the characteristic color of the "Löss" (the aeolic deposition of the iceage).



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- 1 Rocks (surface geology)

Name of the Landscape unit: <b>Zahorie (Slovakia, Austria)</b>			
Relative strength of the features (graduation 1-4):			
	dominating	strong	moderate
10			
9			
8			Highway extending from South to North
7		"Carpathian House" particularly along the footline of the Small Carpathians	
6			
5		<b>Pinewoods</b> in the central part <b>Wetwoods along the Morava river</b>	
4		Fluvio-aeolic sands in the central part	
3		<b>Plains and undistinctly shaped low hills; dunes!</b>	"Fans of debris" at the footline of the Small Carpathians
2			
1			
(outstanding characteristics written <b>bold</b> )			

### Short description (characteristics, total impression, spirituality of landscape):

The landscape of Zahorie is much more manifold than it seems to be at first sight. Zahorie consists of four sub-landscapes: The Pre-Carpathian "Debris Fans" (to the East), followed by a shallow humid depression; the Moravian Plain (to the South – comparable to the Austrian "Marchfeld"); the Central Hills (rising from the South to a max. elevation of 288 m with partly even active dunes (!)); the Moravian Lowland with remnants of river rine forests in the West; the border to the North is constituted by the valley of the river Myjava. Zahorie shows a remarkable diversity of great dry and wet habitats.

The landscape unit is much better determined through its outer borders than its "inner homogeneity".

### Assessment (your first evaluation of the importance of the landscape):

Landscape of regional importance.

### Additional comments (e.g. reference to regulations due to conservation orders or requirements):

Military training area (NATO) in the central region of the pine forests.

## Zahorie

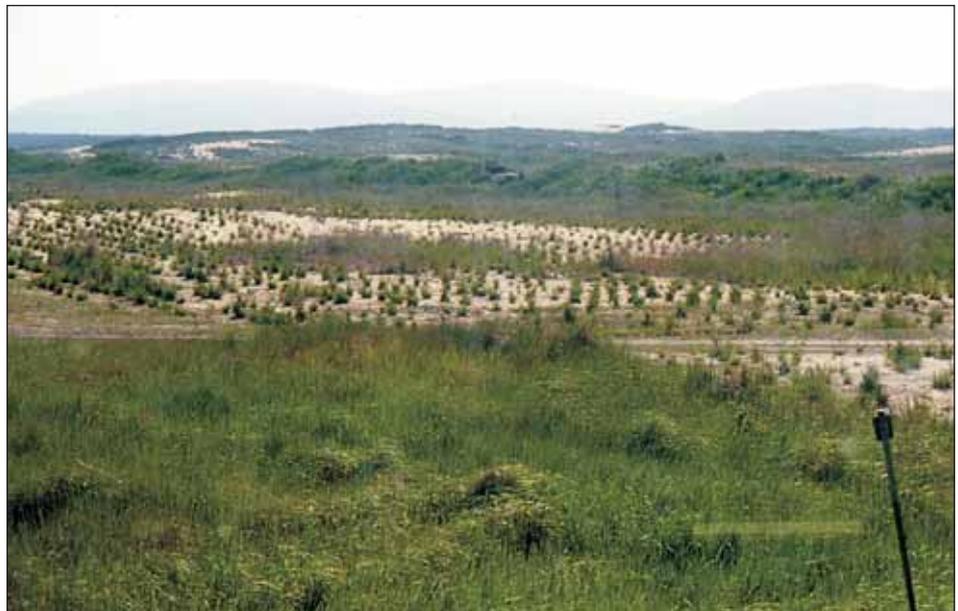


The landscape of Zahorie seen from one of the characteristic low debris fans on the edge of the Small Carpathians, showing the shallow humid depression to the west. The humidity has checked the forward movement of the aeolic sands from the west where they caused dunes in the area of the belt of pine trees, visible in the background in a blue winter haze.

The central part of Zahorie is marked by some sand dunes — a remarkable feature, far from any sea — with irregular dips and mounds.

Unwise use of the land has stripped the vegetation in places: this is now being made good by planting of conifers.

In the background can be seen the mountain range of the Small Carpathians.



The southern end of Zahorie has a landform similar to that of the "Marchfeld" (in Austria). It is the "land behind of the hills" for the citizens of Bratislava, but is now being conquered by the suburbs of that capital city.

This view is taken from the hill called "Sandberg", which lies in front of the Small Carpathians and is well known to geologists.

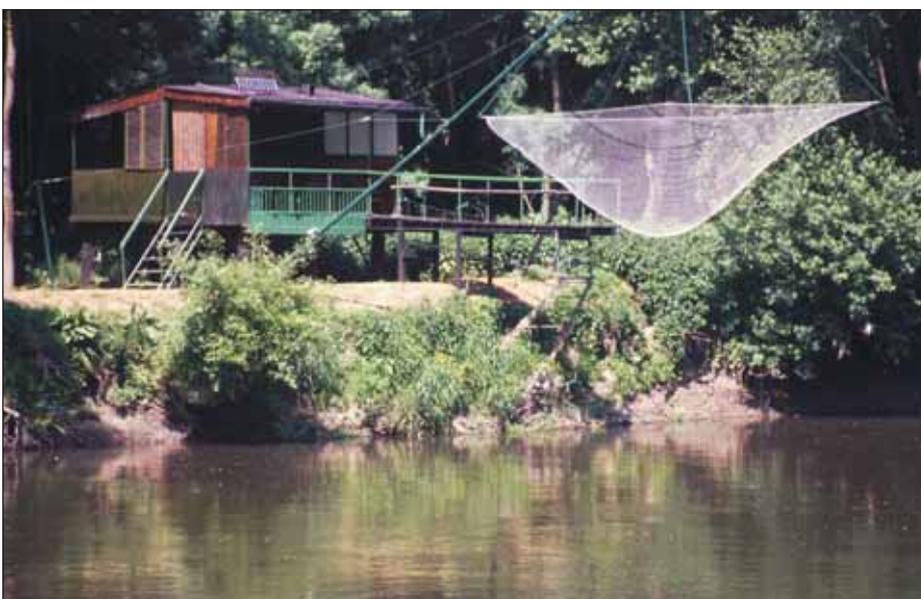
## Zahorie



The "Carpathian House" with its strong regional character can still dominate the view of a village in the Zahorie (as here in Pernek). Its characteristic feature is the "Podlomenica", a roof-shaped ledge forming the bottom line of the gable. The houses present their gables to the street and leave room between them for a yard which gives access to the gardens behind. These villages are built on the debris fans at the foot of the Small Carpathians.

Active sand dunes in the center of Middle Europe!

They were created by drift depositions blown by the wind from riverbeds and gravel plains in the ice age. Even today the wind may create new dunes where the vegetation is broken. Much of the duneland is covered however by pine forests planted by the late Austrian Empress Maria Theresia



The lowest part of Zahorie is taken up by the river Morava, with its riverine forests and water meadows.

Although the river forms a national border, the landscape character in fact runs through to the foothills of the "Weinviertel" (Wine Quarter) and the terraces of the "Marchfeld".

A speciality of the region is the so called "Daubelfishing" (see illustration).

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- 1 Rocks (surface geology)

Name of the Landscape unit: <b>Small Carpathians (Slovakia)</b>				
Relative strength of the features (graduation 1-4):				
	dominating	strong	moderate	low
10				
9				
8				
7		<b>Strikingly few settlements in the hills</b>		
		<b>"Carpathian house" (Podlomenica)</b>		
6				
5		<b>Seemingly unbroken canopy of woods in the southern parts</b>		
4				
3		<b>Small but very distinct mountain range</b>		
2		<b>Pannonic climate</b>		
1			Crystalline rocks with some limestone (caves)	
(outstanding characteristics written <b>bold</b> )				

**Short description** (characteristics, total impression, spirituality of landscape):

**Small but very well modelled mountain chain (max. elevation 758 m) with clear borders, seemingly unbroken canopy of woods especially to the southeast; vegetation corresponding with the pannonic climate. Vineyards to the South and East on the lower part of the slopes. The Small Carpathians are strikingly bare of settlements (due to the lack of broader valleys or bassins and to the narrowness of the mountain range). Villages and Small Towns (the latter along the east foot line) are situated like a necklace around the Small Carpathians.**

**Assessment** (your first evaluation of the importance of the landscape):

**Landscape of regional importance. The Small Carpathians are extending to the South (on to Austrian territory) towards the Alps – but are not quite bridging the gap ...**

**Additional comments** (e.g. reference to regulations due to conservation orders or requirements):

## Small Carpathians



The southern part of the Small Carpathian mountains extend into Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. The top of the mountain range forms an ancient plateau into which valleys are carved in a radial pattern. The largest of them, the Valley of the Mills ("Mlinska Dolina") is a much-loved hiking area. In former times it had 9 working mills driven by water from four pounds. one mill only now remains, converted into a restaurant.

Evening light shows the impressive silhouette of this small mountain range, with its high point of "Zaruby" at 767 metres.

The irregularity of the ridge confirms the astonishing variety of forms within the range, with plateaux, ridges, basins and cliffs.



Vineyards are found only on the eastern slopes of the range. They lie mainly in terraces, many of which have been abandoned because of the poor quality of the wine.

From the surrounding plain fields and meadows extend up the lower slopes. The mountain range is only some 400 metres from foothills to the highest peak.

## Small Carpathians

