

Wageningen,
Gaia
04.11.2009
12:15:36 h

66

‘Brussels cares very little about the landscape’

Bas Pedrolí, European landscape expert

23.05.

08 On 23 May 2008, a seminar laid the foundations for a network of landscape researchers.

Made by Alterra, 2000-2010

67

It was not hard for Bas Pedrolí to decide what was the most memorable day of the last ten years for him. He immediately mentioned 23 May 2008, the day when he, Dirk Wascher and Marion Bogers jointly organised a seminar entitled Blueprint for Euroscape 2020, on behalf of the LANDSCAPE EUROPE network.

by Martin Woestenburg

‘The seminar was an event we had been preparing for years. We were in a late nineteenth-century hotel on the shore of Lago Maggiore in Northern Italy, with a distinguished group of people, including the director-general of a Dutch ministry, the director of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, the minister for spatial planning and the environment of the Italian Piedmonte Region, and numerous scientists and policymakers from all over Europe. All of them high-level people professionally involved in landscape studies or policies, who had now gathered in a private capacity to discuss the European landscape.

‘With hindsight you could say that it was this seminar that caused us to be taken seriously in various research and policymaking bodies. One of the questions we asked our guests was: what is your own personal relationship with the landscape? This yielded highly spontaneous responses, even from the seasoned politicians. People recounted how

they used to play in the area where they grew up, and how the landscape that was so dear to them had changed. The event was a great encouragement for the LANDSCAPE EUROPE network, which intends to provide an interactive platform for landscape researchers and policymakers. The company got on well together, despite their different backgrounds. That seminar resulted in contacts I’m still using today. I think it created a solid basis for coordinating collaborative European landscape research. And I find we’re able to point out the main policy problems.

‘LANDSCAPE EUROPE, and the new Euroscape 2020, are concerned with a paradox: although the European Union is not responsible for landscape policy, EU policies on agriculture, transport, climate and soil – all sectoral policy areas – directly impact on the landscape. The fact that policymakers in Brussels are not interested in this is a shortcoming. They tend to focus on individual sectors.

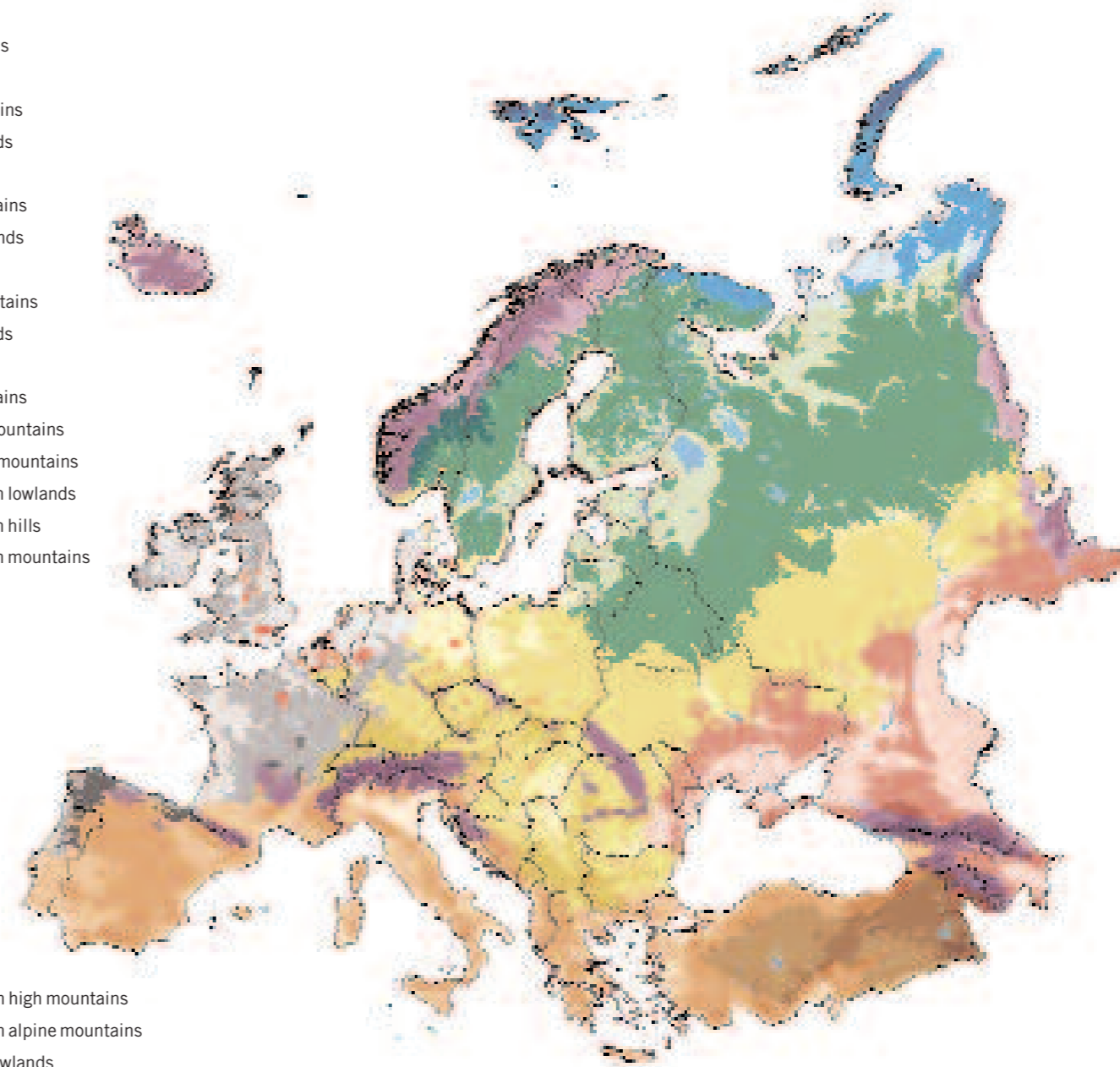
‘The landscape in Europe is under threat. The coastal areas are overrun by tourists, while the original functions of the landscape are no longer available. Why grow olives if tourism is more profitable? And there are similar problems in the Alps. Whereas the problems of Eastern Europe are very different: landscapes are being abandoned as farming them is no longer profitable. And then there’s the problematic relationship between town and countryside. Europe





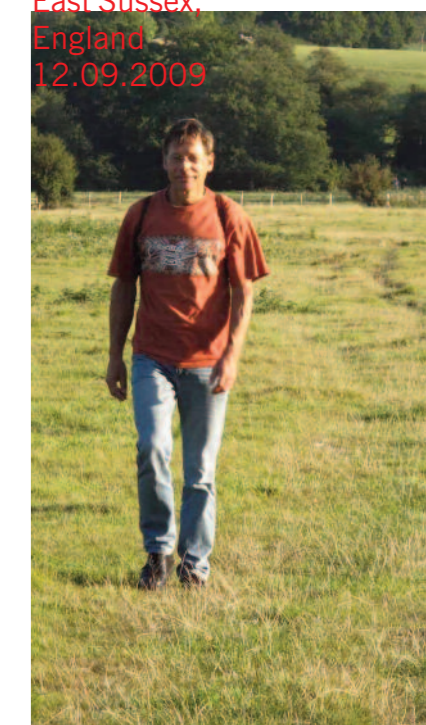
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- Atlantic lowlands
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- Alpine lowlands
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- Alpine mountains
- Alpine high mountains
- Alpine alpine mountains
- Mediterranean lowlands
- Mediterranean hills
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- Mediterranean high mountains
- Mediterranean alpine mountains
- Continental lowlands
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- Continental high mountains
- Anatolian lowlands
- Anatolian hills
- Anatolian high mountains
- Anatolian alpine mountains
- Steppic lowlands
- Steppic hills
- Steppic mountains
- Steppic high mountains
- Urban
- Flats
- Water bodies



Although a landscape typology covering the whole of Europe could never do justice to the huge variety of landscapes, it can provide a basis for a general typology (as provided in this map, taken from the European Landscape Classification LANMAP by Sander Mûcher, Jan Klijjn, Dirk Wascher and Joop Schaminée) which could be used as a starting point for a further characterisation of one's own regions in terms of recognisable landscapes. Such landscapes nearly always have a specific name, such as Betuwe, Vorarlberg or Alentejo; they are associated with typical local products, and people identify with them. The challenge is to find ways for EU policies to take more explicit account of the characteristics that make a landscape unique.

Forest Row
East Sussex,
England
12.09.2009



Lago Maggiore
Italy
23.05.2009



The landscape setting for the seminar on the shore of Lago Maggiore was chosen deliberately. The sense of the evident importance of the landscape was reinforced by the ambience and a meal featuring excellent local products.

70

has become an urbanised society, and even farmers are nowadays a kind of townspeople on tractors. But what happens if they disappear? Dutch people who own a second home in Southern France usually do not feel responsible for landscape maintenance. Such a landscape can be lost within a generation.

‘European policies impact on this, and it’s a challenge for us scientists to describe this as clearly as possible. It must be obvious to anyone that arrangements to support mountain farmers and to restructure olive plantations have huge consequences for the landscape. But it’s not easy to distinguish between cause and effect, or to assess landscape quality. What is clear is that the EU has instruments that might provide incentives for landscape quality improvement.

‘Take the Common Agricultural Policy. The first pillar of this policy, direct payments for agricultural production, is why farmers in Poland and Bulgaria want to join in. Their current farm size is often eight to nine hectares, and they’d

like to grow. But what does that mean for the landscape? The increased scale of farming operations in the Netherlands, resulting from intensified farming practices, has led to higher incomes for the remaining farmers, through land consolidation schemes. But it also led to impoverished rural populations. The EU’s common agricultural policy will be reformed in 2013, and it would be interesting to know what consequences this will have for the landscape. That it will have consequences is beyond doubt.

‘I think European policymakers need to learn from the mistakes made at national level. It would be wrong to start land consolidation schemes in Poland when the Dutch experience has shown us the unfavourable long-term consequences they’ve had on the landscape, and hence on agriculture and wildlife. The European landscape is highly diverse, which is what makes it so special. Part of this diversity is caused by the fact that the landscapes have often been shaped by humans, reflecting local culture.

This is what draws all those American and Japanese tourists, this diversity of cultures and landscapes. Although Europe is only one fifth the size of North America, the European landscape is much more varied.

‘We are researchers, not policymakers or politicians, and we shouldn’t try to do their job. But those people often have no clear idea of the landscape as such, since they look at it from a sectoral point of view. The question is how to use research at a European scale to show policymakers where the landscape is vulnerable. Landscape researchers can draw up criteria that policymakers can use to predict the consequences of agricultural or transport policies. Different European countries tend to characterise their landscape in different terms, which is not surprising, as a country like Greece has a very different landscape culture from that of Finland, for instance. Finns live in a level country with vast forests and mires, with a cold climate. They tend to spend more time indoors and experience the landscape in a very different way from the Greeks, who live outdoors most of the time, and whose land produces wonderful crops. And the Dutch view is different again, as we live in a dynamic landscape that has been changing for ages under human influence.

‘Our talks on the shore of that Italian lake signalled the start of the process of creating Euroscape 2020. The goal of this new collaborative network is to create an organisation of researchers and policymakers who have to improve the visibility of landscape research for Brussels officials. It is the logical follow-up to LANDSCAPE EUROPE, which has been mostly concerned with mapping the European landscape values and establishing the first contacts between researchers and policymakers. In 2007, we published a book called Europe’s Living Landscapes, providing descriptions of 21 regional landscapes. It gives a good idea of the huge variety of landscapes in Europe; from the terraced lands in Malta, the *dehesa* – combining farming with oak forests – in southern and western Spain and the ‘cheese-making landscape’ in Saint Nectaire in France, to the Flevo Polders in the Netherlands and the Východné Karpaty area in Slovakia.

‘We don’t intend to let Euroscape 2020 grow into a huge, unwieldy network, as that would mean spending all our time managing it. Our main aim is to strengthen the influence of science on policymaking. What we’re hoping for is to be inundated with phone calls from Brussels. The project has enabled us to create a clear international profile for Alterra as regards landscape research and landscape policy. Before, landscape research in Europe was mostly ad

Bas Pedroli, European landscape expert

hoc work. Now, we base our research on an integrated approach, not just from the perspective of landscape architecture or landscape ecology.

‘Alterra itself has become more European, more international, than ten years ago. Although I’ve always had a more European outlook, I now notice that it’s not unusual to find a desk empty because a colleague is on a field trip to China or the Ukraine. I’ve always felt that Europe is our domestic market. The Netherlands is too small for Alterra. But this implies that Alterra has to seek European partners to collaborate with.

‘The Euroscape 2020 network will first concentrate on our core business, which is supplying scientific evidence to help answer the question what the European landscape might look like in 2020. In fact, we ought to work our way backwards. What is our vision of the landscape in 2020, and what should we do to achieve this? In addition, we’re going to talk to people like the directors-general in Brussels about the questions they are currently asking and that we hope to be able to answer. Ultimately, we would like to create a taskforce to study the question how landscape value and landscape identity can be safeguarded within the European system, and how the paradox can be reshaped to offer new opportunities.

‘Europe’s landscape variety and the associated cultural diversity are among the most important assets that distinguish it from the rest of the world. The problem is that although everyone agrees that we ought to take good care of this, no one has the instruments to make effective policies. Who is actually responsible for the landscape? Policymaking is becoming more and more decentralised in all countries, making it ever more difficult to safeguard the local qualities that stand out at European level. We need to find clever solutions to this problem.’

71

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