

CANARY ISLANDS MANIFESTO FOR THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE PROJECT

1. *Acting on landscape implies putting forward a perceptive, sensorial and existential interpretation of nature to then translate it into a suitably managed project. Acting on landscape is to contrive nature, manipulating it for the purposes of perception or for the habitat, whether the aim is protection, planning or management. Landscape should not be understood as nature but as an active and meaningful “gaze” that eschews a superficial—hence empty or hollow—view of nature, which clouds the true meaning of perception and overlooks basic (biological, emotional, ecosystem) relationships. The term landscape comprehends the concepts of vision and perception. Landscape has no meaning if there is no one to look at it, to contemplate it and, in short, to experience it, to live in it, beyond the flows, connections and interrelations of nature and its conservation and protection scales.*

2. *“Landscape” allows us to go beyond our individuality toward a collective commitment as a priority emergency of society, capable of regenerating economic potential in its development. Enjoying a high quality landscape is a new basic human right.*

Landscape is a resource which can be qualified by adjectives such as natural, tourist, economic, social, cultural, etc. with the subsequent potential for transformation, exploitation and management. And it is precisely in regarding it an asset that the potential to establish an action and management strategy lies, basing it on the need to interpret landscape and to exchange intellectual and daily readings.

3. *LANDSCAPE cannot and should not be mistaken for TERRITORY or ENVIRONMENT, nor can the same operational tools be applied to each of these terms. Territory represents the physical space in which different systems of ecosystems intervene, interact and interrelate. Environment is commonly understood as a system of physical, chemical and biological conditions in which a group of animal and vegetable organisms live. Landscape takes into consideration the bonds of interrelationships, independence and temporary evolution of a system of ecosystems. The territory is in fact covered by mosaics of landscapes.*

4. *Landscape is a primary identity element, essential to a community. The pursuit of this principle of identity is the basic motivation that best explains the concept of landscape. Landscape simultaneously represents a community’s vision, beliefs and character in relation to its past, present and future. This community may be the passive habitual voice, or the active and anticipating voice of a project. Thus every society adopts its own stance as a contemplative or active agent with regard to landscape; a stance which, in any case, changes constantly given its very physiology.*

Landscape should underscore its cultural dimension in the building up of a collective identity, enabling the coexistence of diverse cultures and beliefs inherent to contemporary society. Art, by means of its drive to imitate and represent, has shown us how to look at and value scenes of nature, contributing decisively to shaping our concept of landscape through painting, poetry, gardening, etc.

5. We need to introduce the “intangible” in assessing and managing landscape in order to help define its identity, like cartographies of emotions.

Beyond maps that guide and keep our geographical memory, based on a “strategic function of survival”, we suggest “dignifying” the subjective, existential, symbolic, that is, non-utilitarian, relationships citizens have with their milieu, attuning our sense of place to our own thoughts, memories and emotions. And not only regarding view, but also smell, ear and touch. After all, the landscape only exists through our cultural mediations, which differ in every instance and are therefore unique and non-transferable, but also dynamic and constantly changing, just like landscape itself.

The concepts that even today refer to the beauty of landscape and its intangibility in terms such as undefined, balanced, polite, learned, pleasurable, harmonious... must be reconsidered on the basis of new paradigms and strategies of the landscape project, ecology and the environment. Having acknowledged the environmental crisis, landscaping and other similar professions must gradually shift the focus of their contributions toward the responsibility of tackling citizens’ problems regarding territory and landscape from different points of views, which classical disciplines have been unable to approach.

6. Landscape must reconsider the dimension of public space as it cannot be patrimonialised as an “entity” or as a “place” given that it is not an object or a fragment of territory with set boundaries and markers that limit and fix it.

The places of our civic activities and relationships are always made more complex as a result of the overlaying and sedimentation of both coherent and incoherent activities over time. They are not places where something might happen any time, as such places only occur inasmuch as this “something” actually happens and only at the very moment of its happening. Therefore, this place is not a place, nor is it a non-place either, but a taking place. It is sheer happening. They are sometimes presented as a community’s representative landscapes, sometimes as undefined landscapes to be discovered; settings for a diffuse contemporary society.

7. The concept of contemporary landscape needs to reconsider the “idea of space”, offering a new physical and conceptual dimension of landscape itself, in agreement with our time. It therefore requires new urban, technological, architectural and legal tools capable of renegotiating the idea of space and time, as well as place and site.

This search requires a renegotiation of all codes restraining thought, action, duty or participation and, in turn, reviews the concepts of the representation of reality, paradigm of our turbulent, ephemeral and dynamic times. The territory and city have become copies of their representations, of their maps and guides, and even of their own imagery. Their reality is in cartographic representation as a regulatory legal bond, thus eluding the presence of man.

8. The landscape project acts on complex systems and “modes” of the territory where it is located, with an ongoing work of decomposition and re-aggregation of elements with differing social, economic and cultural qualities.

Carrying out a specific landscape project is actually mistaken for land and city planning. The most common error lies in positing or orienting the project and planning as actions within the same “range” but at different scales, both at detailed and “large scale”, detracting from the intrinsic nature the project must take on. The goal of the Landscape Project must reaffirm, maintain or establish from scratch the strategic “characters” in certain contexts, where the quality we call landscape is exploited, very far removed from the generic urban responses over recent years.

The landscape project must be compatible with sustainable development and ecological soundness, as well as urban quality and biological conservation. Landscape is a product of culture. Landscape is made up of living and, by extension, changing entities, such as vegetation or atmospheric and climate agents. For this reason, landscape is the representation of natural and artificial shapes in the making and in constant flux. Time and mutation are part and parcel of the landscape project which, therefore, envisages growth, seasonal change, deterioration and maintenance as built-in qualities. It translates cultural values into formal and spatial landscape dimensions, thus contributing to its identity and beauty.

9. *Landscape is not homogeneous, establishing relationships between pieces and elements (a system of relationships) capable of tailoring specific actions from an interdisciplinary perspective on the physical environment, on the countryside and on the city, on the sky and on the sea; therefore, the core aspect of the landscape project is the transverse quality of knowledge as opposed to inflexible orthodox disciplinary tools and rules. This process must be undertaken by associating diverse branches of knowledge which are not necessarily related with the science of the territory, such as economics, anthropology, agronomy, ecology, geography, sociology, semiotics, aesthetics..., but also setting up relationships about sciences, using different scales of work and not necessarily pursuing the same goals. In any case, rejecting a possible determinist method going from the general to the specific.*

10. *Landscape must result from the interaction between social mediation and participation and the critical project, providing an answer to the irreplaceable fact that territory must remain and be transformed. This should come about by absorbing and reinstating critical and creative energy. The landscape project is effective in responding in real time to the question of the increasingly fast and shifting transformation of the habitat, because it is not as concerned with the construction of objects as it is with the relationship between them, between systems of elements that may even be heterogeneous, yet constitute a semantic unit when placed in sequence.*

11. *Landscape is a process. The patterns of landscape are based on movement, on the perception of movement. The factors of time and movement are key to understanding and conceiving landscape. A landscape is also changing because it is experienced from within and it is literally shaped by the user's movement, as it happens in many contemporary works of art. We move across landscape, but landscape itself is shifting, changing, growing and modifying. Landscape architecture is subject to temporariness. Therefore, we wish to restore spaces to time, to give time to space, to look for spaces of relationship and relationships between spaces rather than finished spaces to celebrate archaic or modern rituals. Landscape entails the need for the project to be a coherent action and a permanent process. No landscape can exist without a project, whether it is based on an action for bonding or conservation purposes, or whether it gives rise to management or maintenance, or even to explicit innovative assessment or requalification.*

12. *The landscape project is a "device". A mechanism that can work in agreement with the community's landscape, using circuits to reach a compromise between the aspiration for progress and the expression of character and identity. The landscape project should itself be capable of an exact diagnosis, of recognising, in the context where it acts, the specific features that contribute to revealing the quality of the place and its environment, understanding the nature of cultural values and recognising their historical meaning, their laws of evolution and their future projection. This essential perception of our culture is inspired by two apparently opposing mental attitudes: nostalgia and hope. It is between these two dimensions of our thoughts, referring to the past and to the future, where the landscape project acts, stimulating and interpreting the sense the community has of its own landscape with an aesthetic, ethical and intellectual commitment.*