

EMBEDDING LANDSCAPE IN THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PLANNERS

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Abstract

Understanding the relationships between a development and its wider setting is not new to planning. This often delicate balance has been contemplated by planners since well before the ground-breaking *European Landscape Convention* emerged in 2000. Nevertheless, and in the sustainable management of change, the ELC and its interpretations in domestic laws serve as conscious reminders of landscape as being more value-laden and complex than mere scenery. They support arguments for why meaningful engagement *must* and *should* be done - arguments that are most compelling during the education of young planners. In a world where rapid environmental change leads to more deadlines for decision-makers, and in which approaches to prescriptive environmental standards can result in mediocre compliance, it might seem idealistic to expect engagement with landscape in this way. Sharing experiences from University College Cork, this paper explores methods for equipping students with the skills necessary to make efficient and objective yet value-sensitive judgements on landscape at strategic and project levels.

Keywords

Landscape, Values, Planning Curriculum, Education, European Landscape Convention

1. Introduction: Embracing the Complexity of Landscape

For more than twenty-five years I have been trying to understand and explain that aspect of the environment that I call the landscape. I have written about it, lectured about it, travelled widely to find out about it; and yet I must admit that the concept continues to elude me. Perhaps one reason for this is that I persist in seeing it not as a scenic or ecological entity but as a political or cultural entity, changing in the course of history.

(Jackson 1979, 153)

At the time of writing this statement, J.B. Jackson was an established writer and in-demand Berkeley and Harvard lecturer on American landscape studies. An influential mentor to, amongst others, architects and planners, he transformed how students and scholars understood their landscapes (Horowitz 2019). His primary influences were driven by a desire to comprehend, what he termed, the 'vernacular' landscape, where people and nature came together, often in the most ordinary of ways (Jackson 1984).

This was not about teaching skills on how to read contours or understand nature, nor was it about teaching geography, landscape architecture, or landscape ecology. While there would inevitably have been some overlap, Jackson's teaching was more of a call to students to 'go out into the world and really *look* at it, learning about the forces at work on the landscape, both historically and today' (Olin 2020, 8). If planning is chiefly concerned with the interminable transformation of all kinds of places at various spatial scales, it makes sense to embed a deep understanding of the everyday landscape into planning education and apply, what Selman (2006) calls, the 'landscape scale' to interpreting such changes.

Along with his peers, who included prolific geographers such as D.W. Meinig, Yi Fu Tuan, and David Lowenthal, Jackson resurrected discussions on the 'cultural landscape' (a term attributed to geographers Otto Schlüter and Carl O' Sauer in the early 20th Century) and brought them into contemporary teaching on analysing and improving places. His fascination with the ordinary, mundane, and repetitive actions of people, the patterns they created on the physical landscape, and how these exposed the intricacy of everyday cultures opened up perspectives that landscape could be as dull and monotonous as it could be rare and sublime. It could also be urban or peri-urban, as these were (and are) the settings where people live out their daily lives, interacting in endless ways with natural and non-natural environments.

Most importantly these landscapes were complex, and neither Jackson, nor his students, shied away from this. It would have been misguided to have young architects and planners equate the ordinary with simplicity. These were not designed landscapes – at least not in a pristine, site-specific landscape-architectural way. At the same time, Jackson rejected the idea that these quotidian processes were random. On the contrary, he saw patterns of repeated history as a revelation of the universal laws of human conduct (Jackson 1979). A meaningful order was manifested as a result of decisions and actions that reflected classicism, traditions, and values; an order shaped by people's not so varied perceptions of their physical environments.

Understanding these landscapes required thorough engagement; not just with physical markings, but with the values shaping them; the priorities, interests, needs, desires, concerns, attitudes and beliefs fuelling forces of change. The opening quote is a testament to this complexity, but Jackson refused to accept an understanding of landscape as anything less.

2. Taking Landscape and Landscape Values Seriously

When the first international treaty devoted to landscape emerged in 2000, it presented a definition that encompassed all of the complexities that Jackson and his peers not only recognised but celebrated. The *European Landscape Convention* (ELC), prepared by the Council of Europe, responded to decades of rich scholarly thinking on landscape that had, until then, largely slipped beneath the radar of official documents serving professional practice. Almost overnight definitions within legislation, policies, and guidance became outdated: where definitions had focused on the visual, the ELC now advocated 'perception'; where they had focused on the scenic,

the ELC advocated the inclusion of the 'everyday' and even the 'degraded'; where they had focused on natural and rural areas, the ELC advocated the inclusion of 'urban' and 'peri-urban'; and where they relied on landform, the ELC advocated an anthropological dimension within which cognitive and emotional connections would be accounted for alongside more substantive aspects.

It is this human perspective that is now widely accepted as determining the very existence of landscape. Newman (2009, 8) explains this using a metaphorical comparison, regarding it as 'the noise of George Berkeley's tree as it falls in the forest'¹. From an Geddesian perspective, planning is concerned with people – or more specifically 'folk' – and how they interact with their surrounding places (Geddes 1949 [original 1915]). Failure to acknowledge this denies the essence of what proper planning is. Selman (2006, 52) identifies that 'many landscape plans ... have been criticised for being "people-less". At the same time, development plans have often been accused of superficiality in relation to landscape issues'. In the years since Selman wrote this statement, the appetite for meaningful landscape policies has increased within planning practice and education, justifying planning as an appropriate home for teasing out landscape issues.

In the years leading up to the ELC, it was becoming very on-trend to interpret landscape in this metaphysical way. Such discourses continue to shape contemporary approaches to landscape research, education and training, and professional practice. They remain seated within a theoretical context of phenomenological justifications for landscape's inherent relationship with people's identity, imagination, and associated memory (a popular theme within writings from Ingold 1993; Newman 2009; Schama 1995; Taylor 2008; Tuan 1998; and Wylie 2007, for instance).

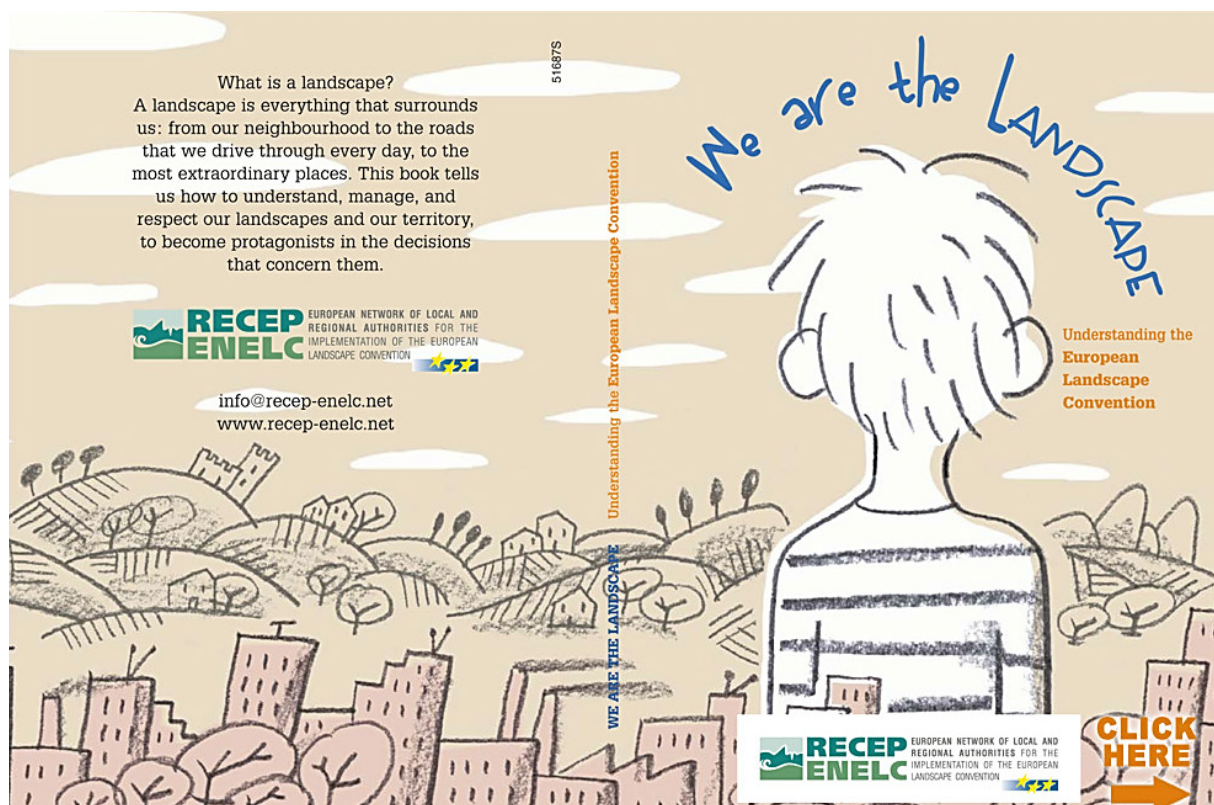


Figure 1: This image presents the cover of the former online handbook to the ELC and the all-encompassing, value-laden messages it adopted, at the centre of which was a deep-rooted human relationship with landscape. This would have originally served as a public engagement document rather than best practice for planners but still raised awareness on just how profound the meaning of landscape could be. Its phenomenological message encapsulated common themes in key literature emerging at the same time
Source: RECEPT-ENELC, 2009.

1 Reference to George Berkeley (1700s), an Irish philosopher and Anglican bishop, to whom is attributed the famous philosophical question, 'If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?'. It is based on a metaphysical philosophy that queries the possibility of unperceived existence.

From a more directly practical perspective, the ELC responded to the growing social demand for better management, protection, and planning of all landscapes in Europe – or more specifically of ‘the entire territory of the Parties’ which ratified the Convention. As outlined in Article 2, this covers ‘natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas’ and includes ‘land, inland water and marine areas’ (Council of Europe 2000, 3) – none of which were immune to accelerating environmental changes. At a higher level, no country was, in itself, immune. The ratification of the Convention by 40 countries (as of April 2020) reflects the shared need for solutions to common problems facing Europe’s landscapes and societies. These problems, largely driven by population growth, global market forces, the exploitation of natural resources, pollutants, and climate change, formed the backdrop to the sense of urgency in strengthening decision-making for landscape – a sense reignited at the time of writing this paper as world leaders gather in Glasgow for COP26 (2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference).

This spatial inclusivity (landscape being *everywhere*) is arguably the most defining characteristic of the ELC’s contribution to managing landscape change. It sets the Convention apart from other international initiatives which had, up until then, only accounted for landscape as it existed within scenic or culturally rich and special areas (most notably the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s call in the 1970s for countries to compile inventories of outstanding landscapes, and the UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Landscape category introduced in 1992). The ELC complements these initiatives through its wider scope. Furthermore, it shares this spatial scope with that of planning and its concerns for sustainable development.

3. Everyday Planning Skills for Effective Landscape Management

3.1. Long Established Skills and ‘Ways of Seeing’

Over 20 years on from the ELC its influence is still evident throughout Europe in legislation, policy, guidance, and best practice. Landscape is now a key concern of planning practice, not merely because planners are well-equipped to deal with landscape change, but because, legally, we are obliged to make it so. Once member states ratified the Convention, it became legally binding, chiefly through the requirement to recognise landscapes in domestic law, and usually through countries’ own systems of spatial planning and land-use management.

This is not to suggest that good decision-making on landscape suddenly arrived on the planning scene - or indeed the planning curriculum - as a result of the ELC. As a discipline, planning possesses a strong history of wrestling with landscape, place, and environmental issues, even if the concept of landscape (especially as presented in the ELC), was often less explicit. It would not do justice to decades of planning practice and skilled practitioners to measure landscape awareness by the presence of the term alone. Engagement with the built and natural environment through holistic perspectives and a dissection of what creates a ‘place’ have long developed as fundamental concerns of modern planning; since at least the early 20th century. Planning, like landscape, ‘has practical and scholarly traditions in the hard sciences, the humanities and the social sciences’ (O’ Sullivan 2016, 260). While geographers and landscape architects accelerated explicit discussions on landscape, globally influential planning writers such as Sir Patrick Geddes, Christopher Alexander, Gordon Cullen, Ian McHarg, and Lewis Mumford developed imaginative ideas on reading the character of places that overlapped with the comprehensive concept of landscape as it is understood today.

Alexander’s (1979) ‘quality without a name’ concept reflects the often intangible and difficult-to-define values that underpin the principles of the ELC. Similarly, his fascination with repetitive patterns that give a place its character (1977; 1979) resonates with Jackson’s work. Geddes’ innovative perspectives on the *regional* landscape, its intricate interconnectivities, and the need to appreciate it holistically, underpin the contemporary rationale for adopting a wider landscape scale in understanding our physical surroundings. McHarg’s breakthrough method of layering transparencies, each with different information about the land and landscape, defined the first anticipation of Geographic Information Systems or GIS. In his landmark text, *Design With Nature*, McHarg (1969) set out the details of this method which exhibited a deep understanding and appreciation of landscape. His exploration of landscape through its physical ‘layers’, followed by a comprehensive evaluation of their interrelationship, has had a profound influence on pedagogical approaches to landscape, and indeed on wider planning education and practice.

One of the most valuable aspects of these combined writings is what they offer for our continually weak or failed attempts to adopt ways of interpreting *urban* landscapes. In spite of the international consensus (driven

by the ELC) that landscape includes the 'urban', general landscape studies, writings, and university planning modules that include a focus on landscape remain excessively rural-based. Similarly, in spite of normative reflections and good intentions, best practice approaches to strategic investigations of landscape character (whether through LCA or as part of Strategic Environmental Assessment) mainly serve the rural landscape.

Cullen's (1961) model for apprehending urban environments through kinaesthetic experiences was the subject of his influential and pocket-sized guide, *The Concise Townscape*. This is a book about the urban landscape – or 'townscape'. Cullen adopted a 'scenery' perspective for towns to aid his observation; even today it is not a term commonly applied to the urban landscape. His 'serial vision' concept (how the townscape visually unfolds or reveals itself to the moving viewer) responds to urban form, composition, landmarks, elements, views and prospects, in a way that resembles the fabricated experience of the designed landscapes of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown – one of history's greatest landscape architects.

Planning students who spend much time acquainting themselves with such universally influential figures can be encouraged to draw on their observations and skill sets to adopt a language that can work for *urban landscape* appraisal – whether at strategic or project level.

Embracing the task of teasing out the deeper *values* of landscape should be well within the comfort zone of contemporary planners who have had the influence of more recent paradigm shifts over the last few decades – namely in relation to normative, communicative, pluralistic, and democratic assertions of what planning ought to be. Again, this influence must first be nurtured during education. The concern grew from the realisation of planning as 'a value-laden activity whose success or failure has consequences for the society encompassing it' (Forester 1993, 15) and how "we have to think more and more deeply about the values that should inform our practices' (Friedmann 2011, 212). The shift was quintessential of a radical postmodern conversion of public policy analysis.

Together these writings reveal how heightened skills of observation, a fluency in the language of design and setting, engaging with complex values, and synthesising competing priorities have long been part of the planner's skills-set. Good planning has long been characterised by a fascination for the composition and quality of natural and built surroundings, making informed judgements on how places should change and grow, environmental awareness, and, above all, knowing instinctively what good planning is regardless of any rules, regulations, or conventions.

3.2. Enhancing Skills in the Context of the European Landscape Convention

Despite the relative independence of good planning, the ELC provided a framework to aid decisions on landscape change. It offered a consistent approach for countries, helped defuse a more political view of landscape as restrictive towards development, and gave a legal standing to objectives within regional and town planning policies. It also gave values a central role. With this recognition that addressing landscape required more structure, depth, and focus, it came as no surprise that the refinement of certain skills would be included in the ELC's objectives.

Along with general measures to be adopted by each member state, specific measures were outlined in relation to training and education, with each Party undertaking to promote:

- a training for specialists in landscape appraisal and operations;
- multidisciplinary training programmes in landscape policy, protection, management and planning, for professionals in the private and public sectors and for associations concerned;
- school and university courses which, in the relevant subject areas, address the values attaching to landscapes and the issues raised by their protection, management and planning.

(Council of Europe 2000, 3)

The final point places particular emphasis on values, and implies the compatibility of the landscape topic with planning. From a pedagogical perspective, those skill sets and 'ways of seeing' that have shaped modern and postmodern planning substantiate the planning curriculum as an ideal vehicle for delivering the ELC's

objectives. Driving this forward, however, requires a committed framework at government level to unlock resources within universities, justify opportunities for landscape-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training as a by-product to the curriculum, and streamline the shared goals among planning courses in relation to how the ELC's objectives are actually met.

When these national frameworks are not in place, or are deprived of the investment required to see them through, there are two main options for planning educators. The first is to pull back on incentives to deliver national responses to the ELC and keep them dormant until such a time arises when they are re-prioritised. This might include halting CPD outputs, side-lining aspects of the curriculum, or reducing study visits. The second option is to continue commitment to delivering the ELC's objectives regardless of national frameworks or policies, and to step up the training with the reminder that good planning can, and should, exist without them. Graduates can emerge from planning degrees with a rich understanding of landscape and the confidence to make firm calls or craft sound planning policies on how a landscape ought to change. In this way good management of landscape change is born out of good planning – and in most cases this is good enough.

This is not to say, however, that such frameworks and guidelines are needless. In reality, they ensure a certain standard, and act as incentives at local and regional levels for both education and practice. But their absence need not mean a death sentence for effective engagement with landscape. The adoption of the ELC's objectives through domestic planning and land-use legislation (which member states have been doing over the last 20 years) has been the most critical move at national level in Ireland. It sustains the legal requirement to formulate effective strategic landscape policies within development plans, even if further national supports are flawed, defunct, or non-existent.

The discussions ahead present an example of where failing national incentives for delivering objectives can be salvaged by the planning system (through firm legislation) and the planning curriculum (through the production of graduates with the necessary skills to make informed and tough decisions on landscape).

4. Delivering ELC Objectives: Ireland's Response

In 2015 a long-awaited document was published in Ireland. *A National Landscape Strategy 2015 - 2025* was to be the country's direct response to the objectives of the ELC. The NLS adopted the ELC's rich definition of landscape as 'an area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (Council of Europe 2000, 2) and set out six core objectives (and associated actions) to ensure compliance, including an emphasis on education. In summary, these objectives are to:

- Recognise landscape in law
- Develop a National Landscape Character Assessment
- Develop landscape policies
- Increase landscape awareness
- Identify education and training needs
- Strengthen public participation

(Government of Ireland 2015)

Central to both documents was the assertion of the role of the planning system in delivering objectives, mainly by means of a continuous emphasis on the need to integrate landscape into regional and town planning policies, and through the primary role of planning authorities in decision-making. From 2000 onwards, Ireland had already begun to explicitly integrate the language of contemporary landscape discourses into its domestic planning law, demonstrating a direct engagement with conversations happening at European level, just as the ELC was emerging. Momentum was building around the realisation that, in a time of accelerating environmental pressures, a focused discussion on developing a robust and consistent approach to managing landscape change was urgently required.

Ireland's primary planning legislation began to adopt explicit requirements for landscape character within strategic plans; Section 10(2)(e) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* requires, with regard to the content of development plans measures for:

the preservation of the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the planning authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest.

(Government of Ireland 2010)

The *Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010* brought further refinement of landscape's position in planning law by expanding the interpretation (originally focusing on views and prospects, amenity, and natural beauty) to that of the ELC's definition. In addition, Section 7(p) of the Amendment Act removed the term 'preservation' as the sole method of enforcement and introduced processes of 'identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes'. This amendment responded to the theoretical consensus of landscape as a rich and spatially inclusive concept and could assist planners in exercising their skills (beyond purely preservative measures), in weighing up judgements on landscape change. It also had strong implications for the education and training of young planners. It was now a legal requirement to engage with landscape in everyday planning processes and formulate tailored policy responses for different landscapes.

The real impact of the ELC was felt at the level of strategic spatial policies – not because of the NLS, but because of this explicit legislation in the Acts requiring development plans to make ELC-styled objectives for landscape. For individual projects, planners continued to decipher potential impacts of change on a receiving environment and place, as they had been comfortable doing. Legally, strict European directives for environmental assessment of individual projects have been in place since the mid-1980s (and since 2001 for strategic plans and programmes) which require landscape (and the visual environment) to be assessed as one of several environmental indicators. However, these prescriptive assessments, while important for ensuring certain standards, are not required for every planning case, and even when they are, planners need to review them with a critical mindset. Furthermore, their scientific and measured format, while appropriate for indicators such as soil and water quality, does not always accommodate the contemporary value-laden understandings of landscape as presented by the Council of Europe (Ray 2013). They can, therefore, result in little more than mediocre compliance with environmental standards.

Unfortunately, Ireland has yet to initiate many of the actions set out in the NLS. With less than three years until the strategy expires (in 2025), there is little expectation that major projects such as the development of a National Landscape Character Assessment or the creation of new national ministerial guidelines for planning authorities will be realised within this time (Ireland's current guidelines for landscape assessment have remained in draft status since 2000).

Even though this strategy helped drive arguments for better engagement, it does not determine it, nor does it determine the quality of graduates emerging from university planning programmes. Just as planning had engaged with landscape well before the ELC, the education and training of planners can continue to progress regardless of any strategy. Again, the most important development in all of this was the Acts' (2000 and 2010 amendment) adoption of landscape legislation. It gives planners support in their commitment to assessing the many layers of landscapes and in the formation of policy responses and recommendations. Planning graduates can continue to embark upon professional careers with a heightened knowledge of how to engage with landscape in all its multi-faceted and value-laden complexity; how to tackle often contentious landscape issues; and make sound judgements on appropriate changes to a landscape's character. While new guidelines and a national Landscape Character Assessment would most certainly assist strategic level plans, programmes, policies and projects (e.g. strategic linear infrastructure), universities can still contribute to the delivery of the ELC's objectives by instilling the necessary skill-sets in students.

The following section continues the discussion on harnessing the potential of the ELC and planning legislation through planning education. In so doing, it draws on lessons from Ireland's newest planning school at University College Cork and its unique positions in fostering a new generation of young planners.

5. Landscape and Planning Education at University College Cork

5.1. Overview of the Cork Planning School and the Landscape Agenda

The Planning School at University College Cork (now known as the UCC Centre for Planning Education and Research [CPER]) was established in 2006, four years after Ireland ratified the ELC, and two years after it came into force. Since then it has accepted a diverse mix of students onto a two-year accredited² Masters in Planning and Sustainable Development (the M.Plan), bringing them face-to-face with planning in all types of environments – urban, peri-urban, rural, coastal – and at all scales of decision-making.

During its comparatively short lifetime, it has established a strong reputation throughout Ireland and the UK for the calibre of its graduates. The school has been in a unique position in this regard, seizing a rare opportunity to redesign the planning curriculum around the needs of contemporary practice worldwide. Practiced-based teaching is its forte, with the primary focus on professional education. With its core team of academic staff drawn from planning practice (both public and private sectors), it has expanded its research profile in a number of practice-related areas including: spatial planning at the metropolitan and regional level; housing policy and community needs; planning for local government reform; land use and employment; the relationship between landscape policy and planning; and an evidence base for sustainable settlement policies in planning (O' Sullivan et al. 2016). The variety of particular specialisms strengthens its teaching catchment, with expertise in areas such as regional planning, urban design, international planning, property and economic planning. Among these, the school is recognised for the emphasis it places on the landscape agenda, drawing on the extensive and specialised expertise of staff (this includes domestic and overseas experience at local authority levels and private consultancy, specialised doctoral research, and additional corporate membership of the Irish Landscape Institute).

Unlike other schools where planning is 'shared' with another discipline (e.g. engineering or environmental science), the CPER is a single discipline school defined by planning in its own right. For a subject like landscape, which is claimed by a multitude of disciplines (including, amongst others, geography, landscape architecture, art history and archaeology), the focus is clear with regard to what it means for planning. At the same time the M.Plan teaching acknowledges the delicate balancing act of looking at how landscape sits within the spaces *between* disciplines, rather than attempting to link them all together and unintentionally diluting the *planning* perspective. The teaching prepares students to engage with landscape as planners in the real world; to 'own' their planning voice in the weighting and interpretation of values and issues while respecting other interests; to recognise the planning tools at their disposal for shaping landscape character; and to realise their potential to predict and manage future change through their specific ways of seeing.

Cork also has a tradition of setting precedents for enhancing decision-making for landscape. Along with the creation of the country's first Landscape Character Assessments for *urban* areas, it has been pivotal in driving initiatives at national and indeed European level, notably through determined calls from Ireland's Landscape Forum, (located in Cork and led by landscape specialist Terry O' Regan of Landscape Alliance Ireland). Since the mid-1990s the forum led the way in calling for a national landscape policy for Ireland and was instrumental in the formation of the ELC itself in Florence in 2000. The planning school has jointly facilitated (with LAI) discussions on strengthening decision-making on landscape through conferences and study visits attracting professionals from across the country and has also actively contributed to conversations, conferences, and publications at European Level (most notably in relation to UNISCAPE – a network of universities committed to landscape research and education and the implementation of the European Landscape Convention).

2 Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and Irish Planning Institute (IPI)

The unique metropolitan region of Cork City, with its varied landscape types (from cityscape areas to coastal rural areas) has also been utilised by O' Regan (2008) as a backdrop to his valuable guidance document for community-led local landscape assessment – a template which is adaptable for all landscape study areas. The influence of this setting on the planning school's teaching is discussed further on.

With regard to actively engaging with ongoing national discourses, the planning school represents the university presence (and indeed a key *planning* presence) within the recently established Landscape Strategy Working Group – a national group comprising a small number of specialists set up in 2021 to target the Irish Government on progressing with the National Landscape Strategy.



Figure 2: M.Plan students and staff (including contributing lecturers from other professions and faculties) on an annual boat trip at the start of term. Students are introduced to a whole range of planning considerations and key developments in the context of the expansive Cork City harbour and estuary.

Photo: Ray, 2019

5.2. Landscape Education in the Cork Planning School

Landscape has always been included as an important component of Cork's M.Plan programme. Its development over the years has been further influenced by the ELC and its impact on planning legislation (and to a degree the NLS). Accreditation reviews by the planning institutes (IPI and RTPI) are a continuing requirement, part of which is an opportunity for students to meet with representatives in the absence of the teaching team. The institutes frequently report how students remark on the complementary relationships between subjects taught, and how landscape, like many cross-cutting themes in planning, emerges in subjects beyond the core module (such as rural housing, infrastructure, built heritage and design). This is also evident in annual module feedback forms disseminated to the classes.



Figure 3: Second year M.Plan students exploring landscape character and issues in a new context in the Spanish Pyrenees. Students wrestle with different land use trends and pressures to those normally found in Ireland. In this image students are examining the sensitivity of the landscape to further changes such as low-volume high-head hydro power (a common energy source in the north of Spain), ski resorts, individual dwellings, small village settlements, and road and avalanche infrastructure.

Photo: Ray, 2019

The landscape topic is also a focus of several local and international study visits (including, Spain, Denmark, England, France and Belgium) during which students can apply learning on the ground and carry out assessments of varied landscapes. Outside of Ireland students apply learning in wholly new contexts where landscape assessment, protection, management and planning might encompass quite different approaches and reveal location-specific issues.

Building on its specialism in landscape, the school has developed a second one-year masters in Landscape, Built Heritage and Design, which has produced two successful cohorts to date.

The core landscape module takes students on a deep exploration of landscape change and resilience, and introduces them to natural and built *physical* layers of landscapes in various contexts: urban; peri-urban; industrial; rural; coastal; remote; typically outstanding; ordinary; and even degraded. While a highly visual module, it also requires students to engage with intangible layers and associations (such as those arising from poetry and literature, art, history, memory, identity, folklore, myth, and religion). It explores real-world cases where seemingly 'soft' values are not only addressed within the statutory planning processes but hold firm within legal and procedural discourses, often in the face of powerful competing interests. Examples include the imaginary and literary values crystallised in light of wind energy proposals in the Yorkshire moors; the profound obtrusion to the character of the Dublin cityscape by the original design for the National Children's Hospital, or the rerouting of part of a major inter-urban motorway in County Clare due to the presence of an unassuming little Irish fairy fort). It explores planning policies in Ireland and abroad where landscape character is protected or managed through considered objectives, and where it is open to misinterpretation or even manipulation by influential players. In this way students not only engage with landscape issues in real-world scenarios but obtain insights on how planning itself actually works.

5.3. Ideals of Planning Underpinning the Teaching

The module continues the understanding of planning as it shapes the M.Plan programme. It celebrates planning as a discipline - not solely as a practice or a theoretical expanse of ideas. It values and nurtures the role of the planner as continually reflective; influenced and challenged by established and contemporary theories, while also having a competency to tackle everyday and exceptional environmental challenges on the ground – and at various spatial scales. Within this pedagogical philosophy, students are encouraged to take risks in

presenting original thought and to maintain normative reflections as they progress to more applied work and study visits. For the landscape module, this rationale is evident in the list of themes in the following section.

The concept of sustainable development is never engaged with as a separate 'lesson', nor is it addressed in a self-conscious or self-contained way. Instead, it underpins everything that the M.Plan teaches, and encourages students to think and act according to what is most sustainable in every decision they consider.

5.4. Key Components of Teaching and Learning

5.4.1. Structure and Themes

The teaching of this topic is based on the overarching themes of landscape character, its wider context (be that spatial/physical, cultural, economic, or political for instance), and the forces of change that may, or may not, affect this character. Underpinning this structure is the objective of helping planning students to develop a holistic understanding of the principles of, and approaches to landscape character assessment, preservation, and management. This is further grounded by the real-world application of these principles and their theoretical foundations to the practice of integrated forward planning and the sustainable management of development.

- The core module is orchestrated around a focussed but comprehensive checklist of sub-themes as listed below:
- Perspectives of landscape in theory and practice;
- Identifying and understanding landscape/place values;
- Tangible and intangible cultural associations;
- Reading physical landscape narratives;
- Conflict and power relations around landscape issues;
- Legislative requirements and best practice for landscape assessment, management, planning and preservation at European and national levels.
- Decision-making for future changes in various landscape types (strategic plan level and project level scenarios);
- Abrupt to incremental: various paces of landscape change;
- Practical tools for assessment, management, planning and preservation;
- Applications in everyday forward planning and development management;
- Sensitivity and capacity evaluation for landscape change;
- Consultative processes in landscape policy making;

5.4.2. Learning Objectives and the Cork Laboratory

The specific learning objectives for the landscape topic encapsulate the overall learning outcomes for the M.Plan programme, albeit at a more nuanced level. On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- Meaningfully 'read' the physical landscape: Identify and articulate different landscape types, character, patterns, features, and elements within urban and rural settings and at different spatial scales;
- Apply effective skills in carrying out a robust Landscape Character Assessment, including collaborative processes and engagement;
- Carefully and respectfully listen to, identify, engage with and weigh people's values associated with a specific landscape;
- Formulate informed judgments about landscape impacts, sensitivity and resilience towards a range of development types and environmental changes;
- Identify and debate core issues and challenges facing contemporary urban and rural landscapes;
- Draft appropriate policy and decision-making responses;
- Engage reflectively and creatively with the varied theories and perceptions of landscape from different disciplines and debate these in the context of best practice.

As students explore landscape changes and sensitivity levels, they are repeatedly asked to identify and *question* the forces which drive them. They are encouraged to delve into each layer, from the structural to the cosmetic, and enquire as to how that landscape is experienced and valued. They are taught to take nothing at face value; to approach each perceived force of change with a critical mind. Examples of the forces of change include:

- hydrological and quaternary processes in carving striking landforms;
- traditional farming practices in the establishment of a hedgerow network;
- local politics in a distinctive pattern of one-off houses or in the building on flood plains;
- market-forces shaping a city skyline through residential/commercial trends;
- private interests in a 'green' energy landscape;
- cultural shifts in the spire-less roofscapes of new towns;
- climate change impacts in altering the urban form of coastal cities;
- scenic appeal in an accumulation of second homes alongside a dynamic coastline;
- powerful players in a controversial development or policy decision where landscape is a concern.

The Cork planning school benefits from having a truly unique setting for its laboratory – one which maximises the scope for exploring an extensive range of landscape types, values, sensitivities, and issues. Being within a non-capital city region, the school draws much of its teaching and learning from a wider metropolitan region, which includes everything from striking glaciated and river valleys, deeply rural areas, farmland and settlements, peri-urban edgelands, an interconnected network of defence heritage sites, a distinctive maritime cityscape, and a vast and busy harbour and estuary where rural areas sit directly alongside intensely urban areas and major industry. This varied setting lends itself to exceptional levels of exploration for landscape; students apply the landscape lens to each of these settings and ultimately formulate tailored policy responses for spatial planning.

The harbour is also a place where a wide range of designations and policies have a direct bearing on its character, from green belt policies to high value landscapes. It also includes traditionally 'ordinary' as well as degraded landscapes (e.g. Seveso sites around former industry) which enrich students' understanding beyond more usual rural studies.

Cork Harbour is the backdrop for heavily politicised and controversial planning cases where local communities and powerful industrial players bring competing interests to the planning process. In a setting where such an extensive range of land-uses have developed alongside one another, their attempts to co-exist in harmony have at times resulted in highly contested issues emerging – issues which are often triggered by discourses around the unique and culturally rich maritime landscape.

5.4.3. A Spatially Inclusive Approach for Landscape

Within this metropolitan laboratory, with its varied landscapes and issues, students are introduced to the spatial inclusivity of landscape, covering all areas, not just those protected by designations. This aligns with the holistic understanding of place-making and environmental considerations that shape urban agendas and sustainable development goals at a European Union level. Students are taught to embrace understandings of landscape that are very much 'lived in', and might be considered to be quite ordinary. Such areas may be deceptively vulnerable, and also possess inconspicuous sensitivities to even cumulatively small and moderate changes. Very often these landscapes are not nearly as resilient as they may at first appear, lacking 'obvious' values – values which generate designations and an awareness of a landscape's sensitivities. A visually striking and popular landscape is unlikely to have its values eroded by poor management of change.

Best intentions frequently fail to progress meaningful decisions for urban landscapes. Adopting a 'landscape' view of cities and other urban settings allows students to foster an all-encompassing awareness of sensitivities – whether these be around issues such as generic building design eroding a place's identity; sterilisation of urban form; the protection of key views and prospects; the attractiveness of a city; the iconography of the skyline; or clashes of values over hard engineering responses to flooding in coastal cities. This urban focus of the landscape lens is a critical component of the teaching and adds to its distinctiveness as an approach within third level planning education.

5.4.4. Preparedness for Pluralistic Realities

Throughout the core landscape module, time is spent on ensuring clarity of purpose and avoiding duplication of other complementary but separate sub-topics (for example biodiversity and built heritage). At the same time the module opens itself to perspectives from a range of stakeholders and members of the public; primarily through its engagement with values, interests, conflict, and power-relations. This approach complements other modules which facilitate perspectives from a range of stakeholders. Students are required to consider all relevant perspectives in a balanced and objective way.

The topic of landscape draws on a multitude of disciplines. Early on, students are introduced to the ways in which these various disciplines engage with landscape. This sets a foundation for later on when students consider how different professions and members of the public engage (or avoid engaging) with landscape issues. What sets this approach apart is how these perspectives are weighed against the planning perspective. This is enhanced by the single-discipline structure of the planning school. While engaging with these perspectives is essential preparation for when they inevitably come together in the planning arena, the planning perspective remains central. It avoids what Frodeman (2014, 3) describes as 'a side-by-side juxtaposition of different types of knowledge'. Ultimately, what it all means for planning considerations is the focus.

In addition, through their training on values and conflict, students familiarise themselves with the typical considerations of local communities and other various stakeholders. Landscape thus becomes a lens through which wider planning processes are scrutinised. Major Irish and British case studies are explored through class discussions which identify key players and their interests, and recognise the pluralistic realities of public and stakeholder engagement. Students are advised to pay particular attention to the language and evidence used in the construction of arguments by different players.



Figure 4: M.Plan students leading an authentic real-world public consultation for a local village as part of a major project that feeds into many strands of learning on the course. This image shows one of several exhibition areas at the venue, with the specific theme here being landscape values and surrounding context

Photo: Egan, 2018

5.5. Exercises and Assessment

5.5.1. Thinking about Landscape Meaning

Alongside unmarked tasks, students carry out assignments that demonstrate their understanding of the topic from theoretical to applied levels. On completion of a scholarly and reflective essay on key philosophies, debates and discourses in literature, students apply their learning through more unique assignments that tie to real-world planning considerations.

5.5.2. Listening to Expressions of Landscape Value

We are diverse people living in complex webs of economic and social relations, within which we develop potentially very varied ways of seeing the world, of identifying our interests and values, of reasoning about them, and of thinking about our relations with others.

(Healy 2003, 239)

The capacity of a landscape to absorb change without adversely affecting its character is measured by visual evidence ever before values are taken on board. However, the resilience of a landscape might very well be determined by imperceptible or intangible values, or those born out of other sensory experiences (such as the olfactory imagery conjured by the brewery industry in Cork City). In a bespoke assignment, students are required to listen to interviews with different people where landscape and place values are expressed in various ways, and sometimes in response to controversial developments.

This audio-based work introduces students to landscape and place values that can be intrinsic to the sustainable future of a given city, town, village, neighbourhood or remote area. It rests on the rationale that change can only be resilient if it resonates with the depth of how people value their surroundings.

Each student is assigned a different 30-40 minute radio podcast in which individuals express their perspectives on landscape/place, often in relation to an emerging or past change. The student adopts the role of a planner listening to these expressions and is tasked with drawing conclusions as to how that given locality might change – without experiencing it directly. It encourages active listening without the intent to reply and gives time and respect to the perspectives of others (e.g. communities, developers, government officials, and experts). It nurtures interdisciplinary, as well as democratic, insight and pluralism as championed within national and European pedagogical planning discourses.

Aside from students genuinely enjoying this assignment and the novelty of its approach, it tends to generate some of their strongest marks. As this assignment occurs in their second year of the M.Plan, the decision of which student receives which podcast is by no means random. At this stage the teaching team knows each student quite well – their opinions, outlooks, biases, strengths. Students are therefore intentionally given podcasts that will challenge their views or harness their potential. The pedagogical rationale behind this approach is relatively simple, but born out of a major planning paradigm shift of the 1980s. This notable shift, as defined by such theorists as Susan Fainstein, Patsy Healy, John Friedmann, and John Forester, championed an openly normative approach to planning, and was 'driven by value propositions ... initially inspired by the Habermasian theory of communicative action' (Friedmann 2011, 208). In recognition of the pluralistic societies within which we live, contemporary planning is now bound to participatory and communicative processes and recognises that our values are not isolated within ourselves – they are, in fact, dialogically constructed. Contemporary planning students must also embrace these realities or face difficult challenges in practice when dealing with competing interests, varied values and powerful interests. As the M.Plan programme is intent on fostering the development of what Schon (1983) famously termed 'reflective practitioners' the approach of this assignment forces students to step back from the action, park biases, and embrace a critical reflection on events, processes, discourses and power relations that may disguise or exaggerate real-world values.

This is where the learning is most valuable, evident in the trend of honest – and at times almost moving – reflections from each student within their reports. Tapping into this Habermasian philosophy, the students who receive the highest marks usually demonstrate an ability to recognise their own biases, strip them back, and

truly engage with the values being expressed; finally emerging with more balanced and richer perspectives on how these values shape their understanding of a given locality.

5.5.3. Looking at and Reading Landscape

The whole landscape a manuscript
We had lost the skill to read,
A part of our past disinherited;

Montague (1972), Extract from *The Rough Field*

Studio sessions begin early in the semester and serve to develop skills for forensically 'reading' the physical landscape in advance of site work. Sessions are highly applied with repetitive tasks of looking (slowly) at different landscapes, describing them in great in details. Within these, students focus on developing a language of observation for professional practice.

Ever before students embark upon ground-level, outdoor validation and assessment, these sessions resurrect the often lost skills of 'reading' cartographic and aerial representations. At this two-dimensional level they decipher terrain and vegetation, types of land use, ordinary and unusual landforms, types of woodland and farmland, archaeological elements, infrastructural networks, drainage, coastal vulnerability, settlement patterns, areas of development pressure, and other patterns and trends that unlock a landscape's past, present and possible future narratives. Only then can they make preliminary but educated calls on character and resilience. They are also more informed on what to look for and identify during fieldwork.

Students benefit from lighter group exercises around 'reading' landscape clues from ground-level images, repetitive tasks describing the elements of what they see, and virtual 'drives' for assessing the visual landscape experience along local, regional and national road networks. Here they learn not only to be conscious of how a landscape unfolds, but more importantly, to be critical of any existing policies or designations that relate to the experience of the landscape from these networks and whether or not such policies are effective or outdated. These sessions prepare students for work during study visits as well as for their final project – a local level Landscape Character Assessment.

The final weeks comprise intensive preparation for a local level LCA of a landscape experienced on one of the study visits (the visits cover city, city edge/peri-urban, rural and coastal landscapes). Students spend several weeks experiencing the landscape from substantive, cognitive, emotional, and sensory perspectives. They are also encouraged to revisit their study areas and apply further survey work a few weeks after their first visit to account for local and seasonal changes.



Figure 5: A view of the dynamic City Edge landscape taken from the top of Cork County Hall during one of the local fieldtrips. Students examine the landscape elements that define these transitional areas, examine specific policies (for example strategic settlement gaps, green belt ridges, city setting) and identify spots of very particular kinds of ongoing pressures that these edgelands face.

Photo: Ray, 2019

LCA has been used in practice since the 1990s, and more so after the ELC came into force. It is, however, more unique as an applied learning tool for planners. Students are required to address scientific and values-based environmental aspects, and to systematically document multidisciplinary evidence to better plan for change. Rather than adopt a generic LCA format, a bespoke template for the course ensures a consistent standard while also being sufficiently flexible to enable students to make the work their own. It combines elements of worldwide best practice and from professional and academic experience. Students drive this further than typical LCAs and include a detailed sensitivity and capacity study before developing a set of firm yet adaptable 'Policy Recommendations' for the sustainable future of their ever-changing chosen landscape.

The types of LCAs produced by the students are those composed by planners for planners, utilising specific planning skills-sets and maintaining control over the information required for effective policy-making. The learning also helps graduates to carry out assessments on the receiving environment for individual projects during their careers. Some graduates have specialised further in these areas due to their competencies on entering the workforce, practicing as planners who can efficiently tackle landscape assessment at various spatial levels.



Figure 6: Students exploring the very different and rare landscape of The Gearagh, County Cork. This post-glacial flooded woodland is one of only four inland deltas in the world. However, beneath the surface (figuratively and literally) are hidden layers of rich narratives and values that tie to a time when the surrounding river valley was intentionally flooded in the 1950s as part of a major hydroelectric power scheme. The students here are positioned on one of the few remaining pathways. The rest, along with old foundations of houses, the remains of heritage structures, and the remnants of an ancient oak and yew woodland are now submerged, giving rise to a unique and memory-laden landscape.

Photo: Ray, 2018

6. Reflections on Teaching Landscape Skills to Young Planners

The pedagogical approaches discussed have been refined over a number of years. Their success in equipping students with valuable skills and insights is evidenced in the coursework produced, and in the reflections voluntarily shared by graduates and employers from both public and private sectors. Different external examiners for the programme have continually commended the approaches, with a 2017 report drawing particular attention to the landscape component of the course.

Another excellent example ... was the landscape character assessment (including the Gearagh and other landscapes) and the values assignment (where students had to discern people's place-values from 'deep-listening' to an archive radio documentary) which were included in module [PD 6120] Landscape Context Character and Change. The staff involved is to be highly

congratulated on this innovative module which could certainly be submitted for competition to an external teaching award (e.g. the annual Association of European Schools of Planning Excellence in Teaching Prize)

The specific landscape module was highly commended for the AESOP Excellence in Teaching Prize in 2020 with the following feedback:

Most universities teach design skills as part of an urban design architecture-centric course. This associates design with the aspects of construction and building something new. By putting the landscape in the centre of the design course, they are able to explore the value of design methods for aspects of preservation, resilience, and maintaining certain qualities. This is a unique twist to design-based education in planning that many universities don't do.

Reflecting back to Jackson's thinking, in an interview with Robert Calo in 1988, Jackson explained his rationale for sharing his views on landscape:

I see things very clearly, and I rely on what I see And I see things that other people don't see, and I call their attention to it.

His advice to young planners and architects to really 'look' at the world around them offers an elegantly simple approach for understanding complicated things. At a time of increased deadlines for reports and decisions tied to rapid environmental change and development pressures, taking the time to 'look' (and in the case of values, to listen) is probably the best advice we can take. Yet this can also only take us so far; in order to really see, we need to know what we are looking at, what we are looking for, and what questions to ask of the narratives shaping landscapes. This is where having a fluency in landscape observation and articulation is key. Such skills are only effective when they become automatic and engrained into the everyday psyche of practitioners, driving firm and bold decisions on landscape change.

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