

Preface

The European Landscape Convention was adopted on 20 October 2000 in Florence (Italy) and came into force on 1 March 2004 at European level and on 1 July 2006 in France. It provides a framework for discussion and reflection to promote the protection, management and planning of European landscapes, in their every dimension. Pursuant to the terms of the Convention, landscapes must be identified and assessed. It is therefore vital that we turn our attentions today to the concept of **underwater seascape** or underwater landscape: the epistemological and scientific issues are extremely important, particularly because, if we want to take this notion into account, it will combine various disciplines, involve widely accepted concepts (ecosystem, habitat, biocoenosis, biotope, facies, population) and open up new avenues to be explored with new currents of thought and topics of research or work (photographic observatories of underwater seascapes for example).

Reference to the “underwater seascape” dates back at least to the nineteenth century. It swiftly became a term used by deep-sea divers in the 1940s–1950s and has been employed increasingly by French scientists since the 1990s. Branching back to a process of territorialisation and individuation of the underwater littoral fringe, it is gradually gaining ground through portrayal by image, film and photography, but also by new three-dimensional mapping technologies. Such representations offer continuous overviews of an area to which we often take a fragmented approach. The sea is no longer represented like a completely isotropic area; it is discovered, in every sense of the word, revealing a mosaic of habitats, shapes and reliefs and their related wildlife components, figured and figurative objects in interaction with environmental, social and economic issues and in need of management and protection.

The concept of underwater seascape or landscape is a growing subject of study, as scientific literature attests. Publications on the topic have multiplied in recent years, addressing both the question of scalar levels and interaction with key ecological concepts, as well as connectivity within landscape ecology. The appeal of underwater landscapes and the soar in leisure and tourist activities also raise issues of social representation, access and value. The challenges in terms of research are therefore real and important. Similarly, we can question the way public policies on environmental and landscape protection take underwater seascapes into account. At the bridge between materiality and immateriality, between nature and culture, marine

areas call for a pluridimensional approach wherein every element must be appropriately protected and managed. Landscaping and territorialisation can undoubtedly contribute to the obligation to protect biodiversity and ecosystems, and will furnish a vital corpus for the development of collective empathy for the sea and the seabed.

In France, the *Agence des aires marines protégées* (Marine Protected Areas Agency) is a public undertaking established by law in 2007, placed under the governance of the French Ministry of Ecology. Its main role involves supporting public policy for marine protected area establishment and management. As such, we felt impelled to address this topic and explore its many conceptual, legal and technical facets, in the light of the protection, management, knowledge and mediation issues surrounding coastal and marine areas. To do so, the Agency established a steering committee which greatly insisted on the need to develop and drive a cross-cutting approach. During this seminar held in Brest (29–31 March 2011), thanks to multi-disciplinary expertise and through extensive debate, we identified various leads to support and structure the emergence of the underwater landscape. The following pages aim to reflect the full wealth of the discussions held.

Lastly, we must add that the seminar initially took place in French only, since French research into the topic of landscapes boasts an abundance of literature. It has been marked by intensive periods of debate, punctuated with sacralisation and dismissal: this is such a specific subject in the history of science and ideas that an independent analysis, disconnected from foreign currents of thought, is possible. Organising reflection on underwater seascapes exclusively in the French language was in line with that tradition. When Springer suggested publishing the proceedings in English, the question of the title obviously arose. While the term “*paysage*” used in French is polysemous and devoted to interdisciplinary reflection, in English, application of the word “landscape” to the marine and submarine world gives rise to an array of possible terms which do not necessarily cover the same object: possible variations include *seascape*, *marine landscape*, *underwater landscape*, *submarine landscape*, and *submarine scenery*. Although Underwater Seascape was selected, several authors of chapters have nonetheless preferred to use Underwater Landscape. The matter was in fact never completely settled, but the seminar left no doubt that this work should pave the way to broader reflection at European and international levels, or provide guidance for more specific topics of research. These proceedings therefore also seek to initiate future cross-disciplinary debate on an essentially polysemous subject.

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Olivier Musard
Olivier Laroussinie, Director of the Agence
des aires marines protégées

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Musard, O.; Le Dû-Blayo, L.; Francour, P.; Beurier, J.-P.;

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