

## Chapter 2

# Nature Conservation and Landscapes: An Introduction to the Issues

Adrian Phillips

**Abstract** The dialogue between landscape protection and nature conservation is often hampered by conceptual difficulties, but recent developments in our understanding of landscape, as in the European Landscape Convention, have shown how nature, in all its forms, is a key element in landscape. Similarly, recent developments in nature conservation show how landscapes can be made more resilient. Nature conservation and landscape protection converge around the idea of working at the scale of distinctive landscape units. This convergence is explored first through the example of IUCN's Category V "protected areas" (Protected Landscapes/seascapes), which have been shown to be effective instruments for nature conservation and for the protection of agro-biodiversity. Three complementary national programmes in the UK are then described: National Character Areas which identify 159 areas of England which are distinguished by their nature conservation, landscape and other factors; Nature Improvement Areas which are designed to create, improve, extend and connect nature areas across broad tracts of England; and the Landscape Partnerships programme by which lottery funding is made available throughout the UK to support such large-scale initiatives. In all cases nature conservation is helped by being addressed through a landscape context.

**Keywords** Landscape protection • Nature conservation • European landscape convention • Resilience • Large scale • Distinctive landscape areas • Category V protected areas • IUCN • National character areas • Natural England • Nature improvement areas • Landscape partnerships • Heritage lottery fund

It can be difficult to reconcile nature conservation and landscape protection. Too often those who espouse one of these causes have negative views about the other; indeed there is still a conceptual gulf between many devoted nature conservationists and those who have a passion for landscape protection. But this need not be so.

The first part of this short chapter shows that there is in fact much synergy between the conservation of nature and protection of landscape. That relationship is

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A. Phillips (✉)  
30 Painswick Road, Cheltenham GL50 2HA, UK  
e-mail: [adrian.phillips@gmx.com](mailto:adrian.phillips@gmx.com)

examined through various perspectives, by looking at the different ways in which the word ‘landscape’ is used, investigating the idea of a resilient landscape that is good for nature conservation and examining the landscape as a forum where conflicts that affect nature can be resolved. The second part of the chapter will look at several ways in which nature conservation and landscape protection have been brought together in practice, globally and nationally.

## 2.1 Looking at Landscape Through Various Perspectives

‘Landscape’ is a slippery notion and can be linguistically confusing. It does not translate easily. For example, neither the French word *paysage*, with its rural overtones (Giot 1999), nor the German one *landschaft*, with its territorial ones (Cosgrove 2004), are exact translations. It also means different things in different areas of policy: notably it is used by conservation biologists as a scalar adjective, meaning a larger area than a site (as in ‘landscape scale conservation’), but by some geographers and others in a more comprehensive and integrated way. This latter meaning has found its way into the world’s first international treaty on landscape: the European Landscape Convention (ELC) which defines landscape thus:

An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors (Article 1a).

The ELC view of landscape is therefore all-embracing. Nature, in all its forms, is part of it, but so too are people; landscape contains all of the evidence of the past that remains and of the present; and it is rich in social, cultural, economic and environmental values. In this sense landscape extends beyond aesthetics, scenery and geography to include ecological processes and human well-being (Selman 2012). So landscape is a holistic concept; and *a* landscape is a distinctive geographic expression of that concept. Though nothing will stop debate about the meaning of landscape, the existence of this internationally agreed definition provides a reference point, and the ELC definition is used here in discussing how landscape protection relates to nature conservation. Since nature is an essential element within landscape thus defined, the conservation of nature becomes one way in which landscapes can be protected.

Landscapes are not just the passive outcome of people’s impact upon the environment: they also do something *for* people (Selman 2012), because they have functions, structure and meaning. The functions of landscape are associated with biophysical processes that it contains and the way that human use it; the structure is represented by natural components (mountains, rivers, forests, the sea, etc.), and land uses and buildings created by people, all of which are visible elements in landscape; meaning is about the various values that we attach to landscapes (Piorr 2003). Landscapes are always subject to change, but the pace of change over the past hundred or more years is without historical precedent. Where rapid change takes place, often driven by global forces, the biophysical functions of

landscapes are undermined, natural and historic components are damaged or destroyed, and the meaning that the landscape can convey is lost. As this happens, landscapes lose their distinctive character and their diversity; a nice French word for this process, where everywhere tends towards looking the same, is “banalisation”.

Can landscapes be made resilient in the face of change so that their nature conservation and other values are sustained, so that they remain diverse and distinctive? Resilience implies an ability to recover from perturbations, even evolve and thereby retain or recover lost qualities. It is interesting that theories about resilience use the same terminology as we apply to landscapes (Edwards 2009):

Resilience is the capacity of an individual, society or system to adapt in order to maintain an acceptable level of function, structure and identity.

At least as far as nature conservation is concerned, there is now broad agreement about how to make a landscape resilient. In response to the fragmentation of habitats, the loss of species and a range of threats, notably that from climate change, conservation strategies should seek to protect areas with high natural values, buffer and extend them, link them up (improving connectivity) and restore areas that have become degraded. Initiatives of this kind have been taken in many countries, encouraged by recommendations from the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)<sup>1</sup>; a recent project in England is described below.

If we are to manage change so that landscape values continue to thrive, we need not only to understand ecological history and the interaction of “culture” and “nature” but also to engage in the diverse governance and management arrangements by which conflicts can be resolved. This is often best done within distinctive landscape units; such a strategy might be called the “landscape approach” (Brown et al. 2005; Phillips and Borrini-Feyerabend 2009). In some countries, formal structures exist which are focused on certain landscape areas, most obviously where these are of special heritage landscape quality and may be recognised as IUCN Category V protected areas (see below). However, other landscape areas may also be identified for concerted action – such as degraded areas around cities, areas of economic decline chosen for environmentally based regeneration or areas which have distinctive character worthy of protection and management but no formal recognition as a protected area. These all provide the political context within which policies of nature protection can be applied. Examples of the various kinds of areas where landscape and nature conservation issues can be resolved are explored below.

From this discussion, four broad principles emerge:

- Though landscape protection and nature conservation are rooted in different disciplines and use different language, they converge around the idea of working at large scale and across disciplinary boundaries.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Target 11 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 (COP 10 Decision X/2).

- The broad concept of landscape (e.g. as defined by the ELC) embraces the natural elements; and landscape protection, management and planning must therefore contain a strong nature conservation element.
- An important aspect of a resilient landscape is that nature is able to adapt to change.
- By focusing on distinctive landscape areas, it is possible to reconcile the objectives of landscape protection and nature conservation.

The second part of this chapter explores how these principles play out in practice through one international mechanism and three national ones. They all show how nature conservation and landscape protection can be brought together.

IUCN's system of categorising protected areas by their management objectives is now widely known (Dudley 2008; Bishop et al. 2004). The system's purposes are to facilitate the planning and management of protected areas, improve information about their management and help regulate activities in protected areas. By providing international standards for protected areas management, the system acts as a global framework, recognised by the CBD, for classifying the variety of protected area types around the world.

At the core of the category system is the definition of a "protected area":

A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

IUCN explains that the definition should be applied in the context of certain principles. In the context of the relationship between nature and landscape the most important is (Dudley 2008):

For IUCN, only those areas where the main objective is conserving nature can be considered protected areas; this can include many areas with other goals as well, at the same level, but in the case of conflict, nature conservation will be the priority.

If the definition is met, then a protected area can be assigned one of six management categories as follows:

- Category Ia: Strict nature reserve; Category Ib: Wilderness area
- Category II: National park
- Category III: Natural monument or feature
- Category IV: Habitats/species management area
- Category V: Protected landscape/seascape
- Category VI: Protected Area with sustainable use of natural resources

One of these categories is specifically focused on landscape: Category V or Protected Landscapes/Seascapes, for which the detailed definition is:

A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value; and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.

So looking just at these two definitions, it is clear that Protected Landscapes provide the conditions for reconciling nature conservation and landscape protection. They cannot be recognised as protected areas in the first place unless priority is given to nature conservation, but, at the same time, this kind of protected area allows for the protection of a range of values that goes way beyond nature conservation.

A recent IUCN study that has looked of the part played by Category V protected areas in conserving wild biodiversity (Dudley and Stolton 2012) tends to support this theoretical analysis. The authors examined Category V case studies from around the world, asking the question “how valuable are such areas for nature conservation?” Whilst the conclusions were not always clear cut, many examples were found where protected landscape managers had used the approach to increase the protection given to nature and to do so within a context of also supporting local communities and economies, and taking into account the full range of landscape values. Because nature conservation in a protected landscape is often about working through and with local communities, and acknowledging their aspirations for change, “management, including management for biodiversity, is seldom simply about keeping things as they are” (ibid. p. 100). Management for change is indeed the unique challenge of nature conservation in the context of landscape protection.

Another study in the same series looked at the role that protected landscapes play in safeguarding the rare varieties of domesticated crops, livestock, etc. that can often be found in such areas (Amend et al. 2008). This review of agro-biodiversity values showed the importance of these resources within many protected landscapes and the dependence of local communities (and their landscapes) upon their survival. This finding has since been reinforced by work undertaken as part of the Satoyama Initiative (<http://satoyama-initiative.org/en>). Whilst the protection of agro-biodiversity is not regarded by some as nature conservation (Locke and Dearden 2005), in fact, safeguarding such forms of biodiversity is an important component of the CBD. Protecting agro-biodiversity within Category V protected areas can help sustain the community, the economy and the landscape itself – and maintain a genetic storehouse for future generations of humankind.

Three national examples from the UK also show how protected areas, landscape protection and nature conservation can be approached in an integrated way.

England is a relatively small country with a diverse landscape that reflects both its complex geology and long history of human occupation. Historical geographers and others have attempted to capture the character of its landscape in a range of studies (Dower 1945; Hawkes 1951; Hoskins 1955), some of which were used in designating Protected Landscapes. Similar studies were made of ecological values (Tansley 1945; Huxley 1947) as a basis for nature conservation policies. However, for over 50 years, the two strands – landscape protection and nature conservation – developed separately with separate legislation, institutions and designations. Towards the end of the last century, these movements came together, a process that was given official recognition when the government decided that England should follow Wales and Scotland in merging its previously separate landscape and nature conservation bodies to create Natural England (NE). NE was given a

range of responsibilities for nature conservation, landscape protection and public enjoyment of nature and the countryside. As well as bringing together nature and landscape, NE also embraced the idea of a holistic approach to the entire environment, urban as well as rural, marine as well as terrestrial. It took on board the message of the ELC that “all landscapes matter” (not just the “best”) and also recognised the value of the ecosystem services that nature provides. One result of this process of consolidation and integration is the 159 National Character Areas (NCAs), which together provide a comprehensive analysis of the English landscape character. Each area is a distinct natural unit, “defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity”. Since their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape, not administrative ones, they are a good decision-making framework for the natural environment. NCAs are being promoted for use in land use planning and land management (see <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/default.aspx>).

The second example from within England emerged from a major government-sponsored study, which examined the threats to wildlife which have caused species to be lost and habitats to be degraded (Lawton et al. 2010). In response to these trends, the Lawton report called for a national ecological network made up of more, bigger, better and more joined up natural areas, set within a wider landscape where nature is managed sympathetically. This strategy has been adopted by the government which has encouraged the development of so-called Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) to provide large-scale connectivity across the countryside. Each NIA aims to create more and better-connected habitats at a landscape scale, providing space for wildlife to thrive and adapt to climate change. Twelve NIAs were approved in 2011 with a modest initial funding of £7.5 m, but well over five times as much match funding has already been secured for implementation. The NCAs provide a framework within which NIAs and similar projects can be implemented (see <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/default.aspx>).

Funding for schemes for nature conservation and for landscape protection, management and planning is always in short supply, and budgets for this kind of work in most European countries are being cut. However, within the UK National Lottery, funding for heritage work of all kinds is bearing up well. These funds are disbursed by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). HLF funds a Landscape Partnership (LP) programme with about £30 m annually. Each LP is led by a partnership of local, regional and national interests with the aim of conserving areas of distinctive landscape character. In practice, this is done through a package of integrated projects designed to protect and restore natural and historic heritage features within the landscape, engage communities and encourage volunteering, increase public access to the natural and historic heritage and improve the skills needed for landscape management. HLF funding for LPs is made available for up to 5 years. The areas that are chosen for LP schemes are usually in the range from 20 to 200 km<sup>2</sup>. Some are within Protected Landscapes; some will coincide with NIAs; all must take account of the NCA guidance. The LP programme has been very successful, both in terms of conserving heritage assets and engaging communities

and volunteers. It offers a practical way to achieve nature conservation, historic building conservation and landscape protection with strong community support (see also <http://www.hlf.org.uk>).

This short review shows that conceptually nature conservation and landscape protection are entirely compatible and indeed mutually reinforcing. Whilst there may be a few cases where a trade-off will need to be made between the conservation of natural habitats and some historic feature in the landscape, the landscape protection and the nature conservation communities have nothing to fear from working more closely together – and potentially a lot to gain.

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