IFLA EUROPE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

# Landscape Governance for a sustainable future

## Landscape Architects' position on European policies

IFLA Europe 2025 Consolidated Policy Brief

Photographer: Raluca Mihai

COLOPHON


Editors

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**IFLA Europe** - the European Region of International Federation of Landscape Architects is a not-for-profit organization that represents, supports and promotes the unique and stand-alone profession of landscape architecture across Europe recognising excellence in educational courses and promoting best practice operations in all member countries.
Formerly established as **EFLA - the European Foundation for Landscape Architecture, founded in April 1989**, IFLA EUROPE is the largest of the five regions that currently comprise the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), a global organization founded in 1946 and recognized by UNESCO as the official body representing and advancing this unique profession.
IFLA Europe has **34 members – National Associations** of Landscape Architecture representing nearly **20.000 landscape architects**. It aims not only at promoting the landscape architecture profession, recognising excellence in educational courses and promoting the best practice operations in all member countries, but also striving to enhance the quality of landscape planning, monitoring and management in collaboration with the European Union, Council of Europe, UN and any other related organisations.

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This work emerged as a necessity to highlight the strong connection between landscape and key environmental and social issues, along with the related to landscape European policies. It aims to present the positions of Landscape Architects and their role in shaping more landscape-related policies, since landscape rarely appears in EU legislation or strategy. It is the result of IFLA Europe's longstanding work on statements, resolutions, and position papers over the years.
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- Education

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- Policy paper on Soil

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Aikaterini Gkoltsiou
IFLA Europe President, IFLA Vice President

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October 2025

## Crescent Park

Harderwijk, Netherlands

Authors: VIC Landscapes

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# FOREWORD

Aikaterini Gkoltsiou
IFLA Europe President,
IFLA Vice President

*Landscape is essential to global quality of life, where people live, work, and connect with nature. It supports food, water, energy, heritage, and identity, linking climate resilience, biodiversity, health, social cohesion, and economic well-being. In the 21rst century, European landscapes are undergoing rapid changes due to urbanization, intensive agriculture, land abandonment, forest expansion, and renewable energy development. These shifts threaten landscape sustainability, impacting the delivery of essential ecosystem services vital for human well-being. Landscape neglect leads to increased costs for society and environment, including soil erosion, biodiversity loss, degraded urban spaces, and weakened cultural identity. The European Landscape Convention, one of the most relevant policy frameworks, strengthens the importance of landscape as a policy area in its own right, despite the fact that in EU policymaking, landscapes remain largely invisible.*

*On the other hand, the European Commission focuses on decarbonizing industry, improving quality of life through secure food supply, and protecting nature to ensure climate and resource security. Climate resilience is among the key priorities, with efforts to assess risks and enhance preparedness for infrastructure, energy, water, food, and land. Strengthening water security is also crucial, as it supports food production, energy, and economic stability, all of which are increasingly threatened by climate change and rising demand. These challenges align with major European initiatives such as the European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus Declaration.*

*Facing these critical challenges in conserving and developing landscapes for climate resilience, Landscape Architects apply aesthetic and scientific principles to design and manage natural, rural, and built environments, enhancing sustainability, preserving heritage, and ensuring territorial justice. With the aim of reinforcing the sector's capacity to address common challenges and promote high-quality Landscape Architecture and the living environment, IFLA Europe gathers the position of Landscape Architects on the aforementioned topics and presents a synopsis of European strategies and policies affecting European landscapes.*

*This syllabus, a collection of policy briefs based on the position papers of IFLA Europe's working groups and individual members, aims to be a valuable toolkit for all those involved in shaping landscapes and the environment. It also aims to raise awareness among public authorities about the need to address landscape issues in every policy, while highlighting the role of Landscape Architects in implementing these policies at a practical level.*

*I would like to acknowledge the collaboration of all delegates and members of IFLA Europe who have contributed valuable materials over the years and thank them for enhancing the position and voice of Landscape Architects in addressing crucial environmental and social challenges.*

# INTRODUCTION



In the 21st century, the profession of landscape architecture faces critical challenges in conserving, developing, and managing landscapes to ensure climate resilience. Landscape architects play a key role in addressing pressing issues, including biodiversity loss, health crises, conflicts over land use, the abandonment of traditional cultivation, and the intensification of agriculture, all of which impact the design, planning, and management of landscapes. These challenges align with major European initiatives such as the European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus Declaration. The European Landscape Convention, one of the most relevant policy frameworks, defines landscape architecture as a profession that integrates aesthetic and scientific principles in the analysis, design, planning, and management of both natural and built environments. It also underscores the importance of landscape policy as a reflection of public authorities' commitment to framing and implementing strategic approaches to landscape governance. Landscape architects, involved in landscape planning, are responsible for formulating strategies, policies, scenarios, and long-term visions to guide the sustainable development of both the urban and rural environment. Unfortunately, a closely related and recurring policy challenge is the limited involvement of landscape architects in governance processes, particularly in policy development, spatial planning, and decision-making at local, regional, national, and European levels. This exclusion results in missed opportunities for integrated landscape approaches that are urgently needed to meet current environmental, social, and economic challenges.

This booklet is the result of IFLA Europe's longstanding work on statements, resolutions, and position papers over the years, and was developed on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Council of Europe's Landscape Convention (Florence Convention), one of the most relevant policy frameworks to landscape.

This work also emerged as a necessity to highlight the strong connection between landscape and key topics such as water, soil, biodiversity, health, cultural heritage, agriculture, tourism, circular economy, and urban development, along with their corresponding European policies. Most importantly, it aims to present the positions of Landscape Architects and their role in shaping more landscape-related policies, since landscape rarely appears in EU legislation or strategy.

## Methodology and Structure

The research process began in early 2025 with the objective of producing a comprehensive policy report, reflecting the position of landscape architects on key issues and aligning these perspectives with European landscape policies. The study began with a compilation of IFLA Europe's position papers, resolutions, and statements, and built upon the policy analysis initiated in earlier IFLA Europe publications, ultimately concluding to the final structure of the booklet. Draft policy briefs were prepared by members of IFLA Europe's working groups and revised to ensure consistency in structure, language, and alignment with the framework.

The booklet is structured in three chapters: the first introduces the Landscape Architecture profession and education; the second provides an overview of European policies affecting European landscapes; and the third presents the policy briefs on selected topics. These topics were chosen based on work previously carried out by IFLA Europe delegates and working members and do not aim to cover all environmental and social challenges. Future updates may expand this work with additional policy briefs. A list of references is provided at the end.

## Conclusion

This work was inspired by IFLA Europe President Aikaterini Gkoltsiou, with the aim of providing a practical tool for all landscape architects who continually advocate for the recognition of the profession and strive to raise awareness about landscape and landscape architecture within their national authorities. It also aspires to serve as a significant document outlining the position of landscape architects in the European context, particularly in relation to the European Commission, the European Parliament, and other relevant European organizations. The final study is scheduled for presentation at the IFLA Europe General Assembly in Brussels in October 2025.

This booklet would not have been possible without the support of the IFLA Europe Executive Council, working groups, and delegates, who have generously volunteered their time, not only for this project, but consistently over the years, to contribute valuable material that strengthens the voice and role of landscape architects in addressing urgent environmental and social challenges.

Aikaterini Gkoltsiou
IFLA Europe President, IFLA Vice President

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# PROFESSION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS



The profession of landscape architecture is multifaceted, encompassing the planning, design, management, and maintenance of both natural and built environments. Landscape architects are uniquely trained to bridge aesthetic, ecological, technical, and social dimensions in their work, delivering solutions that improve quality of life, promote biodiversity, and support sustainable development. This role positions them as essential contributors to major contemporary challenges, including climate change, public health, and urban resilience.

*"Landscape Architects plan, design and manage natural, rural and built environments, applying aesthetic and scientific principles to address the sustainability, quality and health of landscapes, collective memory, heritage and culture, and territorial justice. By leading and coordinating other disciplines, landscape architects deal with the interactions between natural and cultural ecosystems, such as adaptation and mitigation related to climate change and the stability of ecosystems, socio-economic improvements, and community health and welfare to create places that anticipate social and economic well-being" (IFLA, 2020).*

According to the International Labour Organization's classification, landscape architects operate across a wide range of scales and contexts. Their work includes policy development, feasibility studies, strategic and master planning, environmental impact assessments, detailed design, and long-term maintenance. They often consult with governments and stakeholders, prepare planning guidelines, and act as expert witnesses in public consultations. This wide scope highlights their ability to contribute not only to design outcomes but also to strategic decision-making processes.

Among certain disciplines, landscape architecture stands out as particularly economically beneficial. It creates jobs across sectors, from urban planning and horticulture to construction, and boosts local and national economies. A well designed landscape has been shown to raise property values by 5% to 20%, attract tourism, and increase spending in surrounding areas. Cities such as Paris, Amsterdam, and Barcelona demonstrate how attractive landscapes can fuel tourism and economic activity. Landscape architecture promotes sustainable practices that ultimately generate cost savings. By implementing green infrastructure and NbS, such as rain gardens and permeable pavements, landscape architects assist communities in managing stormwater, reducing flooding, and minimising maintenance costs. Implementing sustainable designs has been shown to result in significant energy savings, enhancing resilience and reducing financial burdens on municipalities.

Beyond economic benefits, landscape architects play a key role in improving public health. Their designs promote physical activity, social interaction, and mental well-being by offering accessible green spaces such as parks and trails. These health benefits reduce long-term healthcare costs and strengthen community resilience. In the context of environmental sustainability, landscape architects are central to advancing nature-based solutions (NbS). Their expertise supports the development of green corridors, climate adaptation projects, and the restoration of degraded ecosystems. The European Environment Agency and other bodies recognize that green infrastructure, led by professions like landscape architecture, effectively addresses urban challenges such as heat and flooding, while providing co-benefits to biodiversity and society.

Despite these advantages, the profession faces challenges in recognition and integration into governance structures. While the European Landscape Convention has called for stronger recognition of landscape architects at both national and international levels, the profession remains officially regulated in only 13 out of 34 European countries. Some of their responsibilities are still carried out by other professionals, often without the same level of expertise, leading to suboptimal outcomes.

In response, the International Federation of Landscape Architects – Europe (IFLA Europe) has launched several initiatives. These include a Charter on professional standards, procedures to enable mobility across borders, and ongoing discussions with the European Union and Council of Europe to promote a Common Training Framework. IFLA Europe advocates for the inclusion of landscape architects in all governance levels and their involvement in translating European environmental policies into local actions. IFLA Europe also urges the mandatory integration of biodiversity principles and the expertise of landscape architects in relevant policy areas, including urban development, agriculture, transport, and resource management. It calls for setting measurable targets for biodiversity gain, supporting green-blue corridors, and financing ecological restoration projects. Moreover, it encourages the use of ecosystem service assessments in planning and investment decisions and the establishment of landscape observatories to track landscape conditions and policy implementation.

Another critical concern is the legal dimension of environmental protection. With the adoption of the Council of Europe's 2024–2030 environmental strategy, which frames a healthy environment as a human right, landscape architects are seen as vital allies in protecting wildlife, ecosystems, and cultural landscapes through legal and planning tools. The document stresses that the poor representation of landscape architects in public administration is a significant limitation. Their greater inclusion at the national, regional, and local levels would enhance the quality of planning and design outcomes. Furthermore, their presence can positively influence other professionals, such as architects, engineers, and planners, fostering a more integrated and sustainable approach to development.

As one of the vital professions addressing the interactions between natural and cultural ecosystems, landscape architects are actively responding to the European Green Deal challenges and the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals by seeking new ways to ensure sustainability, providing qualitative and healthy landscapes, preserving collective memory, heritage, and culture, and fostering places that promote social and economic well-being. Therefore, our education and professional development go beyond the traditional core of the profession, and we should work with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in mind while enhancing the integration of the EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure into the professional practice of European landscape architects.

# EDUCATION



Landscape architecture education encompasses more than learning how to design spaces. It is about understanding how people and nature are connected, and how these relationships can be shaped to create healthier, more sustainable, and more meaningful environments.

Our holistic approach is rooted in the way we acquire our skills. The IFLA/UNESCO Charter highlights that this profession requires the acquisition of knowledge across a wide spectrum: the history of cultural form and design as a social art; social, political, economic, and natural systems; natural sciences such as geology, hydrology, and biology; plant material and horticultural applications; site engineering (including materials, methods, technologies, and construction documentation); design, planning, and research methodologies; ecological studies and sustainability principles; information technology; public policy and regulation; communication and facilitation; and professional ethics and values.

This diverse foundation shapes how we perceive and interpret every project. It equips us with a shared language across disciplines, allowing us to fill gaps when a profession is missing and to anticipate when additional expertise is needed. Our landscape perspective enables us to see the bigger picture and understand how different professions contribute, which strengthens our ability to manage projects effectively.

Studying landscape architecture means developing the ability to respond to today's greatest challenges. Possessing technical, analytical, social, and ecological skillsets enables landscape architects to address biodiversity challenges, advance nature-based solutions (NbS), restore degraded ecosystems, and create vital ecological connections. With this expertise, they contribute directly to climate adaptation measures in cities, the creation of green corridors, the development of water-sensitive landscapes, and the design of resilient urban spaces that improve urban climate.

Education provides the tools to: think systemically (connecting ecological, cultural, and social processes); design with responsibility (creating spaces that are functional, resilient, and inspiring); work for society (contributing to healthier cities, stronger communities, and restored ecosystems); collaborate across fields (linking science, technology, policy, and art); shape the future (influencing how landscapes and cities develop at every scale).

Landscape architects, as practitioners of a liberal profession, therefore carry a duty of care not only to their clients but also to their employees and to society at large. Studying landscape architecture means to learn how to care for both people and the planet. It is an education that equips future professionals to create landscapes where nature can thrive, culture is respected, and communities can flourish.

The recognition of the profession begins with education. Strong educational standards, mentorship, and unified training frameworks are essential for ensuring that landscape architects are well-prepared to address the environmental and social challenges of today's labour market. Improving education by expanding knowledge and building capacity beyond the traditional core of the profession is essential, not only to strengthen the discipline but also to support younger generations in becoming active and engaged citizens, capable of shaping a sustainable future.

## Tatoi Club

Athens, Greece

Authors: H.Pangallou Landscape Architects & Associates

# RELEVANT EU POLICIES

As a first step in compiling the policy briefs, a policy analysis was carried out focusing on the most relevant policies for landscape architecture. The list is not exhaustive but reflects a prioritization of key policies. The table on the right consolidates the assessed policies and links each topic to the corresponding regulations. This approach aims both to highlight the wide range of policies that are useful for landscape architects and to clarify which policy addresses which topic.

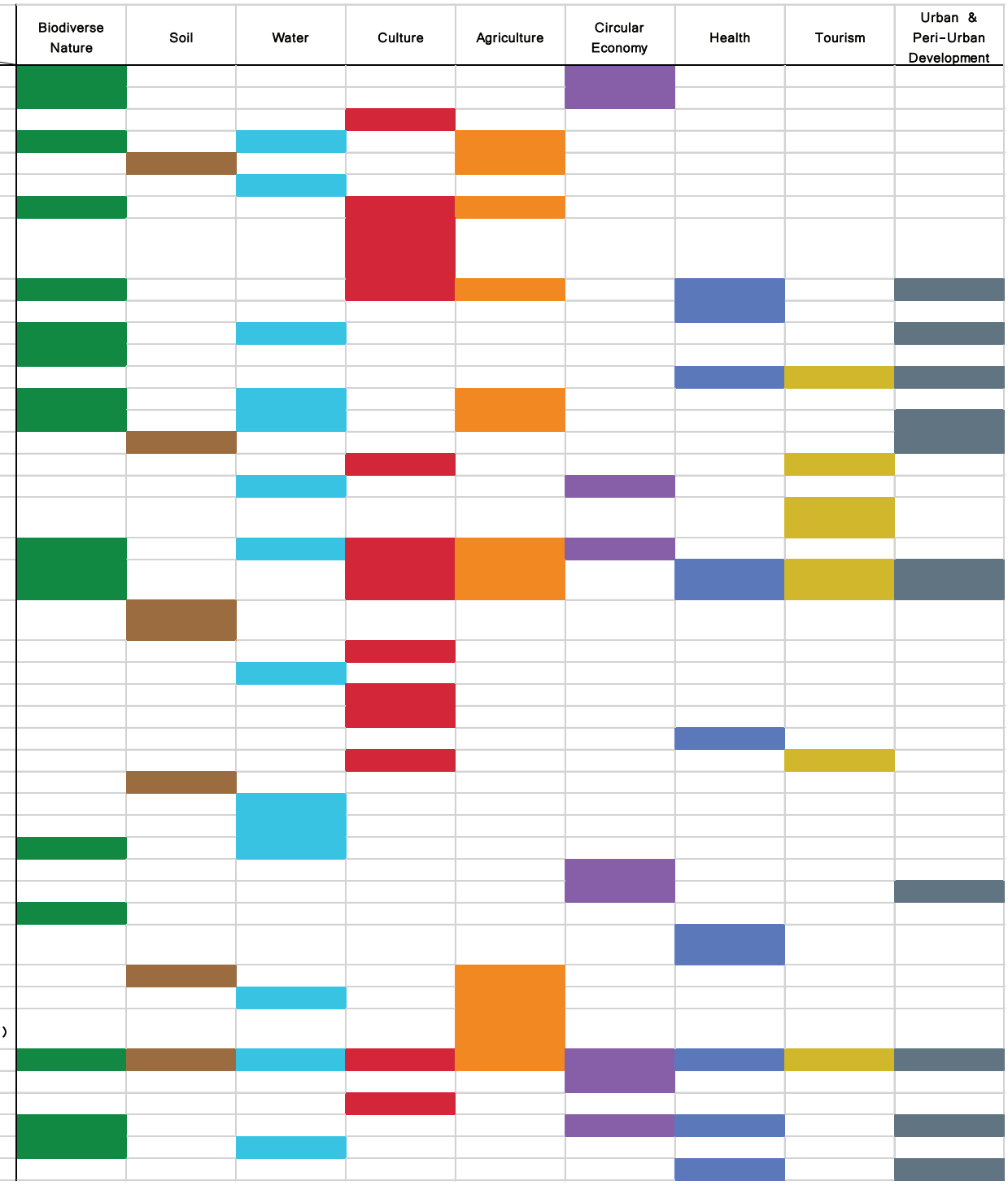
Although the policy analysis highlights that the expertise of landscape architects is crucial for implementing these policies, there remains a significant gap in EU legislation that fully supports the daily practice of landscape architecture. While the identified policies do offer indirect support, the lack of a clear and explicit connection between the profession and the goals of each policy may cause the link to be overlooked.

One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of formal recognition of landscape architecture as a key discipline in operationalising environmental and spatial policies. Despite the clear relevance and value of the profession's expertise, particularly in the context of the climate and biodiversity crises, this contribution often goes unacknowledged in legislative frameworks. Without explicit recognition, the quality of work that landscape architects are able to deliver can be compromised, as policy frameworks often define the standards and limitations within which professionals must operate. A resilient and sustainable environment depends not only on the skills and knowledge that landscape architects develop throughout their careers, but also on the enabling conditions provided by governance systems. When these systems fail to include or empower the profession, they hinder its ability to reach its full potential in designing, implementing, managing, and restoring multifunctional, nature-based, and socially inclusive spaces.

A closely related and recurring policy challenge is the limited involvement of landscape architects in governance processes, particularly in policy development, spatial planning, and decision-making at local, regional, national, and European levels. This exclusion results in missed opportunities for integrated landscape approaches that are urgently needed to meet current environmental, social, and economic challenges.

| Topic / Policy |
|---|
| 8th Environment Action Programme to 2030 |
| Aarhus Convention |
| Bern convention (1981) |
| Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) |
| Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 |
| Common Fisheries Policy |
| Convention on Biological Diversity |
| Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) |
| EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 |
| EU Climate Adaptation Strategy |
| EU Climate Law |
| EU Farm to Fork Strategy |
| EU Green Infrastructure Strategy |
| EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) |
| EU Nature Restoration Law |
| EU Soil Strategy for 2030 |
| EU Strategy for Cultural Heritage (2018) |
| EU Zero Pollution Action Plan |
| European Commission's Strategy for Sustainable Tourism |
| European Green Deal |
| European Landscape Convention (Florence Convention, 2000) |
| FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (2017) |
| Faro convention (2005) |
| Floods Directive |
| Florence Charter on Historic Gardens (1981) |
| Granada convention (1985) |
| Health in All Policies |
| ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Landscapes (1992) |
| ISO 11074 Soil Quality Standards |
| Marine Strategy Framework Directive |
| Maritime Spatial Planning Directive |
| Natura 2000 Network |
| New Circular Economy Action Plan (EC, 2020) |
| New European Bauhaus Initiative |
| Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) |
| Reykjavík Declaration "United around our values" (2023) |
| Soil Monitoring Law (unenacted) |
| Territorial Agenda 2030 |
| UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030 |
| UN Sustainable Development Goals |
| UNEP Circular Economy Strategy |
| UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972) |
| Urban Agenda for the EU |
| Water Framework Directive |
| WHO Healthy Cities Initiative |

Table 1. Relevant policies to each topic



# BIODIVERSE NATURE

*The significant degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity in Europe represent a critical threat to the environment and human well-being.*

*Integrate biodiversity principles and the expertise of landscape architects in all relevant governance strategies and policies.*

*Landscape architects play an essential role in understanding, promoting, and managing biodiversity through their work in the design, planning, and management of natural and built landscapes.*

*At a practical level, landscape architects adopt a holistic approach by utilizing native species, implementing nature-based solutions, and monitoring the impact of projects on natural habitats to ensure a net gain for nature.*

## Problem

Air and water quality, soil pollution, and other anthropogenic effects are major contributors to climate change, negatively impacting nature's biodiversity and ecosystems. These trends have led to a substantial decline and loss of European natural habitats. In urban areas, the shrinking of green spaces due to competition for land reduces the available spaces for nature. In rural areas, the intensification of agriculture and the abandonment of traditional cultivation lead to unsustainable food production.

## Biodiverse Nature in Landscape Architecture

We strive for a restored nature rich in biodiversity, capable of delivering ecosystem services across both natural and built landscapes. We recognize that in most habitats, particularly urban ones, the concept of "pure nature" is no longer feasible. However, nature can still be functional if its ecological connections are restored. Biodiversity is defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity as *"the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems"*.

## Role of Landscape Architects

We are actively involved in all stages of landscape development, from conception and planning to implementation, management, and maintenance. Our unique expertise lies in our ability to integrate aesthetic and scientific principles to create functional, sustainable, and attractive landscapes for both people and nature. We possess technical, analytical, social, and biological skill-sets that enable us to address challenges related to biodiversity, promote NbS, restore degraded ecosystems, and create vital ecological connections. As 'constructors' and 'stewards' of the landscape, we create spaces for natural populations, ensuring the thriving of native species.

**Vuosaari Hill**

Helsinki, Finland

Authors: Landscape architect Taina Tuominen (FCG Finnish Consulting Group Oy); "father" of the whole project is Jukka Toivonen (City of Helsinki/ Construction Service Stara)

## Policy Challenges

- Lack of standardized tools and methodologies for assessing and monitoring the impact of land development projects on nature.
- Need for more effective mechanisms for translating European policies into concrete actions at national and local levels.
- Lack of consistent integration of biodiversity objectives in sectoral policies (e.g., urban planning, agriculture, infrastructure).
- Insufficient recognition and utilization of the role of landscape architects within decision-making processes concerning NbS.
- Inadequate funding for nature restoration projects and the promotion of biodiversity in human-influenced landscapes.
- Need for greater involvement and awareness of the general public regarding the importance of a biodiverse nature and the role of landscape architects in maintaining it.

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Mandatory integration of biodiversity principles and the expertise of landscape architects in all relevant governance strategies and policies, including those concerning urban development, agriculture, transport, and natural resource management.
- Establishment of clear and measurable targets for net biodiversity gain in all land development projects, drawing inspiration from existing examples.
- Development and implementation of dedicated financial mechanisms to support ecological restoration projects and nature-based solutions designed by landscape architects.
- Promotion of the use of ecosystem services assessment as the basis for all design and investment decisions, ensuring adequate compensation for biodiversity losses.
- Encouragement of the adoption of multidisciplinary approaches in landscape planning and design, leveraging the ability of landscape architects to coordinate and communicate between various disciplines.
- Creation and support of landscape observatory networks at national and regional levels, to monitor the state of landscapes, the implementation of policies, and to raise awareness.
- Adopting ambitious EU legislation for mandatory ecosystem restoration with SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) objectives could create significant opportunities for the involvement of landscape architects in restoration projects that enhance biodiversity.
- Accelerating the implementation of key EU legal commitments related to nature, such as the nature directives, the Water Framework Directive, and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, is essential for realizing NbS. Landscape architects should be actively involved in the implementation of these directives at the local and regional levels.

**Olawa River Waterfront**

Wroclaw, Poland

Authors: Vertigo Margareta Jarczewska, a+f projektowanie przestrzeni Angelika Kusmierczyk-Jedrzak

## Our Practical Approach

- Regenerative design, by restoring natural systems, improving soil health, and enhancing ecosystem size, connectivity, and resilience.
- Ecosystem services maximisation, by increasing biodiversity to provide ecological, economic, and social benefits.
- Holistic approach, by considering the entire ecosystem, including biotic and abiotic components, hydrological cycles, and their interactions.
- Native biodiversity prioritization, by using a diverse mix of native plants, from ground cover to canopy, to support local wildlife.
- Land rewilding, by supporting the CoP 15 target of 30% land rewilded by 2030.
- Soil health protection, by conserving and enhancing microbial life in soils to maintain ecosystem functions.
- NbS integration at all stages of a project, by using features like rain gardens and green roofs for stormwater management and habitat creation.
- Habitat connectivity, by designing green corridors to facilitate wildlife movement between habitats.
- Ecological stewardship, by using sustainable management practices that minimise human impact.
- Public awareness, by including educational features like signage and guided tours to enhance biodiversity understanding.
- Cross-disciplinary collaboration, by working with ecologists and scientists to embed biodiversity in designs.
- Sustainable water management, by implementing wetlands, urban water retention strategies, and flood protection measures.
- Universal access to nature, by designing spaces that provide direct access to nature for all age groups.

# SOIL

*Soil health has been severely degraded by intensive agriculture and urban development.*

*Update soil management strategies, recognizing soil as critical infrastructure in land use planning, and phasing out inorganic fertilizers and pesticides.*

*Incentivising restoration measures, such as increasing root diversity and enhancing microbial (especially fungal) health, are key to improving soil fertility, water retention, and carbon storage.*

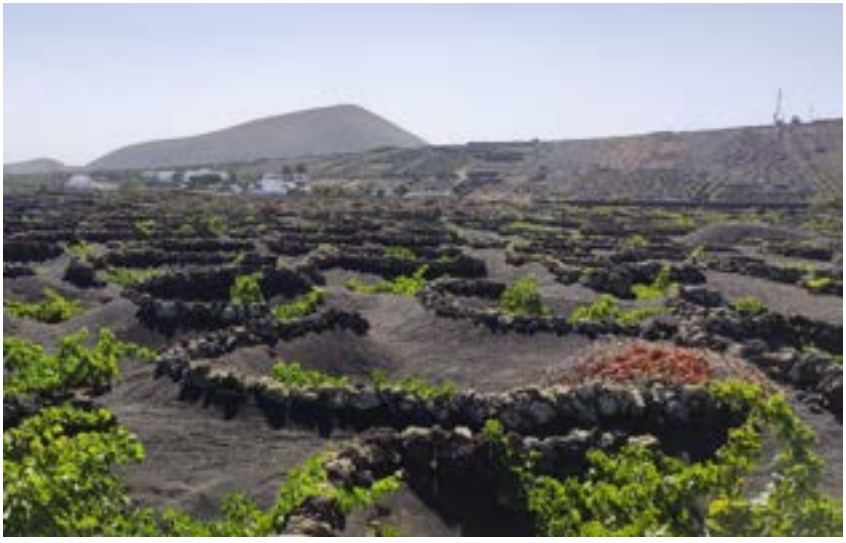
*Landscape Architects play a crucial role in securing multi-functional outcomes from our soils, both in our urban and rural environments.*

## Problem

Across Europe, both urban development and intensive agriculture have significantly degraded soil health. In urban areas, soils are often treated as inert materials, mixed with subsoils, improperly stored, or physically disturbed, leading to long-term damage. As climate change increases the frequency of extreme weather events, healthy urban soils are vital for resilient cities and successful nature restoration. In rural areas, intensive farming tends to view soil as a mere growing medium for monoculture crops, heavily reliant on inorganic fertilizers and pesticides. These practices contribute to water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, undermining sustainable food systems. The true costs of such methods often outweigh the value of the food produced, and they ignore the crucial role of soil biology, particularly microbial health, in restoring ecosystems. Rebuilding soil health is essential not only for producing sufficient food but also for reversing climate change and restoring natural systems in both urban and rural landscapes.

## Soil in Landscape Architecture

Although strongly underrated, soils are the world's most species-rich habitat, harboring over half of all life on Earth, and their benefits to humanity are only beginning to be fully understood. Healthy soils are fundamental to sustainable food production, building resilience to extreme weather events, and providing essential ecosystem services such as carbon storage, water regulation, water purification, and biodiversity support. Recognizing and restoring the living characteristics and microbial health of soils is crucial for the future of our landscapes and societies.



**Vineyards on volcanic ash**

La Geria, Lanzarote, Canary Islands, Spain

Photographer: Iuliana Pavalan

## Role of Landscape Architects

Landscape Architects are vital in restoring soil health and promoting sustainable land use. Combining science and design, we create multifunctional landscapes, manage natural resources, and build resilience tailored to local character. We are skilled to develop Landscape Master Plans, deploying the power of Natural Capital (the elements of life: healthy soils, clean water, clean air, secure ecosystems, micro-climate control etc) to deliver sustainable new development. Delivery includes policy setting, Landscape Planning, Design, Construction and Landscape Management Planning. Our work spans policy, planning, design, and management. Mapping Europe's diverse landscapes can support targeted soil strategies, aligning with the European Landscape Convention. We are equipped to lead these efforts, supporting nature restoration, climate action, sustainable food systems, and improved well-being through landscape-led solutions.

## Policy Challenges

- A long-standing neglect in public perception and national policies across Europe of the essential role of soil health
- Urban-based development approaches viewing soils as inert materials, causing long-term damage rather than conservation.
- Agricultural framing of soil as merely a 'growing medium,' ignoring environmental and biological impacts of intensive practices.
- Absence of comprehensive, modernized policies for soil management and restoration that reflect specific needs, ecosystems, and micro-climates.
- Land use planning policies lacking recognition of soil as vital infrastructure.
- Urban and rural development approaches overlooking the living nature of soils, limiting improvements in soil movement, storage, and land cover.
- Lack of enforced transition away from inorganic nitrogenous fertilizers and pesticides in policy frameworks.

**Farmer in his land**

The West Pomeranian Region, Poland

Photographer: Jozef Cislo

**Flowery**

Veszprém, Hungary

Authors: Báthoryné dr. Nagy Ildikó Réka, Pernesz Kata, Gergely Attila, dr. Sárospataki Miklós, Bálint Krisztina

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Modernize EU and national soil policies to support place-specific management based on local ecosystems and micro-climates.
- Amend land use planning to recognize soil as critical infrastructure.
- Integrate the living nature of soils into all urban and rural development practices.
- Enforce a permanent shift away from inorganic fertilizers and pesticides across all landscapes.
- Introduction of Landscape Character mapping across Europe to create land-based management and business plans to reflect the diversity of soil types
- Align policy with ecosystem services to support public health, climate resilience, and sustainable food systems.

## Our Practical Approach

- Promotion of crop diversity and varied root systems to enhance fertility, water retention, nutrient cycling, carbon storage, and microbial health.
- Prioritization of soil microbial life restoration, especially fungal networks, as a foundation for nature recovery and climate mitigation.
- Harnessing the potential of even degraded soils through microbial health to support food production and ecosystem restoration.
- Landscape Master Plan development, which harnesses Natural Capital（healthy soils, clean water, and ecosystems）to support sustainable development through policy, planning, design, construction, and management.

# WATER

*Water is becoming scarce due to urban growth, agriculture, and climate change, demanding better governance and hydrological understanding.*

*Prioritize green-blue infrastructurel and nature-based solutions over grey infrastructure to build sustainable, adaptive urban water systems.*

*Support collaborative governance frameworks that engage stakeholders across sectors and scales to address complex water management challenges.*

*Landscape architects use green-blue infrastructure and nature-based solutions to enhance biodiversity and improve water quality.*

## Problem

Throughout the 20th century, Europe experienced major societal and economic shifts that placed increasing pressure on water resources and aquatic environments. Demographic growth, industrialization, intensified agriculture, and urbanization have all impacted rivers, lakes, coastal zones, and groundwater systems. Today, water governance and management must respond to complex, interconnected challenges driven by climate change, population growth, land-use changes, and aging infrastructure. Natural ecosystems such as rivers, wetlands, forests, and aquifers face stress from altered hydrological regimes, more frequent droughts and floods, and disrupted seasonal patterns. Land use changes and pollution degrade water quality and reduce ecosystem capacity to filter and store water. Over-extraction threatens the balance of surface and groundwater systems. In urban areas, impermeable surfaces increase runoff and strain storm-water systems, leading to flooding and high economic costs. At the same time, cities face water scarcity and higher demand due to urban heat island effects. Aging infrastructure, designed for outdated conditions, struggles with today's variability. Water governance must now adopt resilient, flexible strategies. Integrating green and blue infrastructure, like wetlands, green roofs, permeable pavements, and restored river corridors, alongside traditional systems offers a way to strengthen water management and ecosystem performance in both natural and urban settings.

## Water in Landscape Architecture

Landscape Architecture and water management involves creating urban green spaces that effectively handle excess water from precipitation and conserve water during dry periods. Reaching such water balance necessitates design approaches that integrate ecological principles and engineering techniques to enhance natural water cycles, mitigate the negative impacts of urbanization (like runoff pollution and heat islands), and improve overall urban resilience and quality of life. It represents a shift from simply draining water away to managing it as a valuable resource.

**The Courtyard of the Future at Straussve**

Copenhagen, Denmark

Photographer: Mikkel Eye-Straussvej

## Role of Landscape Architects

Across Europe, landscape architects are not yet equally recognized as leading experts in water-related challenges driven by climate change and urbanization. Yet through green-blue infrastructure (GBI) within Nature-Based Solutions (NbS), we play a key role in adaptive water management. By designing integrated GBI networks, linking parks, roofs, rivers, wetlands, and coasts, we support climate adaptation, biodiversity, and urban quality of life. These outcomes align with the EU Green Deal and national climate agendas. Landscape architects offer practical, place-based solutions for flood mitigation and regeneration, complementing grey infrastructure. Our integration into policy making is essential for holistic water governance and long-term climate resilience.

## Policy Challenges

- Policies often fail to integrate proactive planning, innovative design, and GBI within NbS in a timely and coordinated way.
- Overreliance on grey infrastructure leads to recurring, costly water management problems.
- Water policies overlook climate change variability and uncertainty in demand forecasting.
- Collaboration, research, and reliable models for urban water needs are insufficiently supported.
- Landscape architects are underrepresented in decision-making despite relevant expertise.
- Spatial and strategic planning complexities are often neglected, limiting GBI and NbS implementation.
- Guidance for NbS and GBI integration in planning and design is unclear.
- Policies rarely address territorial cohesion or transboundary water governance at regional scales.

**Forest Kindergarden**

Bucharest, Romania

Authors: Poteca Studio

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Advocate for policies requiring systemic integration and prioritization of open spaces and GBI in land use planning to ensure intentional landscape-based water management and long-term resilience.
- Support policies promoting education, training, and practical knowledge on sustainable water management to build a more informed and proactive water governance culture.
- Recommend policies that prioritize GBI and NbS as core strategies for sustainable, resilient, and inclusive water management in urban and rural areas.
- Support collaborative governance frameworks that engage stakeholders across sectors and scales to address complex water management challenges.
- Support policies fostering collaboration among scientific, governmental, and professional sectors in planning and implementing GBI and NbS.

## Our Practical Approach

- Strategic and spatial planning, by providing integrated planning and design across scales, using NbS to address climate adaptation, nature restoration, coastal development, and sustainable urban growth.
- Climate-responsive design, by using resilient plant species to mitigate urban heat islands and support adaptive, livable environments.
- Ecosystem restoration & water management, by restoring river systems and water bodies using NbS, enhancing ecological function and integrated water management.
- Marine/maritime solutions, by applying design-thinking to protect biodiversity and restore marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Blue-green infrastructure, by creating GBI networks that support environmental, social, and economic sustainability at local and regional levels.
- Rainwater capture & reuse, by designing systems to collect, store, and reuse rainwater, supporting sustainable water cycles.
- Water-sensitive urban design, with projects including rain gardens, bioswales, detention basins, and permeable surfaces for stormwater management and recharge.
- Climate-adaptive planting, by using drought-tolerant, locally adapted species to reduce water use and boost landscape resilience.
- Soil health, by improving soil function with organic inputs and aeration to enhance infiltration.
- Efficient irrigation, by combining advanced techniques like drip irrigation with traditional local practices for sustainable watering.
- Pollution mitigation, by reducing runoff, erosion, and chemical inputs to ease pressure on infrastructure and improve ecosystem health.

# CULTURE

*Landscapes face growing threats from climate change, urbanisation, and socio-economic shifts, leading to cultural and identity loss.*

*Broaden policy focus to safeguard not only exceptional landscapes, but also everyday landscapes that retain significant cultural value for communities.*

*Promote participatory governance, enabling communities to actively manage and preserve their own landscapes and culture.*

*Landscape architects play a key role in restoring and managing landscapes through sustainable, participatory, and cultural-based approaches.*

## Problem

Changes in landscape have accelerated in the last decades due to the effects of demographic and climate changes, economic globalisation and crises, and social divisions. These factors have disrupted the traditional balance that existed between people and certain places. At present, many landscapes are undergoing a deterioration in both their cultural and environmental processes. This deterioration is having a significant impact on human livelihoods, forcing many communities to change the way they live, work, and socialise. Current approaches to cultural landscape protection emphasise exceptional sites, while everyday landscapes with quieter but meaningful cultural value remain underrepresented in policy-making.

## Culture in Landscape Architecture

Landscapes are at the meeting point of natural and cultural elements, so the term “cultural landscapes” may seem redundant, as even natural ones carry cultural meaning. What distinguishes them is whether human influence or natural features are more dominant. Therefore, cultural landscapes are understood as both cultural and natural constructs, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced areas of distinct character. According to UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention, cultural landscapes are grouped into three main types: those intentionally designed by people (Gardens of Versailles); those that have organically evolved in response to social, economic, administrative, or religious needs (Alto Douro vineyards in Portugal), which are continuing landscapes, or the Rosia Montana in Romania, which is a relict landscape; and associative landscapes (Mount Athos in ), which are valued primarily for their spiritual, artistic, or cultural meanings rather than their physical features. Within cultural landscapes, heritage, both tangible and intangible, serves as the key element to be preserved, managed, and considered in policy-making.

**Traku Voke Manor Park**

Vilnius, Lithuania

Authors: SI Vilniaus planas, Chief Landscape Architect Jurga Silvija Vecerskyte

## Role of Landscape Architects

Landscape architects play a vital role in cultural landscape conservation by managing the identity, dynamics, and integrity of natural and built landscapes. We aim to reconnect people with their environment, enhancing quality of life through planning, design, restoration, management and maintenance of cultural landscapes, sites, parks, and gardens. Recognized by the UN, we promote participatory governance and see landscape as a path to democracy, human rights, and diversity. We integrate tradition with innovation to foster sustainability and resource efficiency, using the natural capital to deliver cultural ecosystem services. Our expertise is essential for shaping a sustainable future and educating the next generation.

## Policy Challenges

- The nature–culture divide persists, as policies often continue to treat cultural and natural aspects separately, hindering integrated landscape management.
- Legal protections tend to favour aesthetically exceptional landscapes, which results in the neglect of everyday or ordinary ones.
- Landscape concerns are fragmented across sectors such as environment, culture, and agriculture, making coordination difficult.
- National laws rarely define the term ‘landscape’ consistently, leading to uneven treatment across sectors and landscape types.
- Minor projects frequently bypass landscape assessments, despite their cumulative effects on unprotected areas.
- Many countries still lack comprehensive inventories of all landscapes, particularly ordinary ones, due to limited resources and insufficient interdisciplinary input.
- Public awareness and participation remain weak, as outreach and engagement efforts are often inadequate despite policy objectives.

**On the Water**

Nova Gorica, Slovenia

Authors: Adrijan Cingerle, Katarina Iskra (KREADOM d.o.o.)

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Broaden policy focus to safeguard not only exceptional landscapes, but also everyday landscapes that retain significant cultural value for communities.
- Promote participatory governance, enabling communities to actively manage and preserve their own landscapes and culture.
- Ensure that human values are put at the centre of the concept of cultural landscape management.
- Integrate a well-informed landscape approach into all aspects of urban planning, design, and management.
- Promote sustainable living by drawing on local traditions to create energy-efficient landscapes that maintain ecological integrity and leverage NbS to mitigate climate change.
- Promote landscape education by strengthening training, professional development, and public awareness initiatives to enhance understanding and appreciation of cultural landscapes.

## Our Practical Approach

- Understanding the place deeply by valuing its cultural and natural significance, researching its history, and recognising its character, evolution, and current management.
- Assessment of multiple, sometimes conflicting, values (evidential, historical, aesthetic, communal, and environmental) in context to support informed decisions.
- Engagement of diverse stakeholders, including experts, communities, and volunteers, to gain insights and promote shared responsibility in favour of cultural landscapes.
- Management of landscapes through an integrated and holistic approach, drawn from local traditions, using innovative solutions.
- Advice provision to public administrations, NGO's and civil society regarding the value of cultural landscapes and how they can be effectively managed.
- Documentation of surveys, decisions, and outcomes to support transparency and future management, especially under climate pressures.
- Adaptation of historic sites for modern needs (where appropriate) in ways that ensure changes are well-designed, low-impact, and ideally reversible.
- Landscape connectivity enhancement to support Green-Blue Infrastructures and strengthen links between people and nature.

# AGRICULTURE

*Europe's food security is increasingly threatened by unsustainable agricultural practices and the strong decline in family farms.*

*Implement Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) models within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to financially recognize and support farmers' contributions to ecosystem services.*

*Develop and implement Whole Farm Plans and landscape-scale management strategies that align with CAP requirements and promote sustainable land use practices.*

*Landscape architects offer holistic, systems-based approaches to land management, integrating ecological restoration, climate resilience, and agricultural productivity.*

## Problem

European agricultural landscapes face serious threats from land abandonment and unsustainable farming. Over 5.6 million hectares are at risk of being deserted by 2030, mainly in regions with difficult conditions and declining rural populations. At the same time, intensive farming practices have caused soil degradation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss. In large parts of Europe the cost of the pollution of drinking water and of the Green House Gas emissions exceed the value of the food being produced. The small and medium sized farms, which maintain the health of our landscapes and support a sustainable land management, are not adequately recognized or compensated for, leading to a major market failure. While the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has introduced sustainability goals, its benefits often miss small and medium farms. The gap between policy and practice continues to grow, leaving ecological and social challenges unresolved.

## Agriculture in Landscape Architecture

Agricultural landscapes are generally structured as a ''mosaic of farmers' fields, semi-natural habitats, human infrastructures (e.g. roads) and occasional natural habitats. '' (Marshall, 2002). At the same time, these landscapes represent multifunctional systems that provide not only food but also ecosystem services such as biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, and water regulation. Agricultural landscapes are rich in cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and practice, while also providing important social benefits. These shared environmental fabrics are dynamic systems that are constantly changing due to agricultural practices, climate change, and socio-economic factors. Moreover, FAO classifies the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) as being outstanding landscapes of aesthetic beauty that combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and a valuable cultural heritage.

Country House Villadorata

Noto (SR), Italy

Authors: Francesca Neonato, PN Studio

## Role of Landscape Architects

While landscape architects are often primarily associated with urban development, our work also plays a crucial role in shaping resilient and sustainable rural and agricultural landscapes. Through our holistic vision, we bring systems thinking to land use, combining ecological knowledge with spatial planning. We adopt a landscape approach that connects healthy food with healthy landscapes, with community-driven processes replicated on a large-scale. Our work includes aligning farming with biodiversity and climate goals, therefore delivering multifunctional outcomes We design and manage these landscapes to balance ecological health, agricultural productivity, and cultural heritage. We help local communities, farmers and institutions to recognize when agricultural landscapes constitute potential GIAHS sites. Moreover, by developing international policy, as well as land management, and community needs, we help make agricultural landscapes multifunctional and future-ready.

## Policy Challenges

- Insufficient financial incentives for farmers providing ecosystem services.
- Limited knowledge among stakeholders regarding the importance of landscape scale.
- Missing platforms where stakeholders could be educated on the value of landscape approach.
- Lack of integration between agricultural policies and landscape planning.
- Inadequate support for small and medium-sized farms practicing sustainable agriculture.
- Limited recognition of the role of landscape architects in agricultural policy frameworks.

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Integrate Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes into the CAP to compensate farmers for environmental stewardship.
- Provide targeted subsidies and technical assistance to small and medium-sized farms adopting sustainable methods.
- Align agricultural policies with landscape planning to promote cohesive land management strategies.
- Formally acknowledge the contributions of landscape architects in shaping and implementing agricultural policies.
- Rebalance public intervention through regulation and investment to secure the future health of the Natural Capital of soils, biodiversity, clean water, and clear air.

**Urban Garden**

Timisoara, Romania

Authors: R. Rusu, A. Ciobota & A. Adascalitei (Studio Peisaj); Alina Negru & Alessandro Serra (Atelier TERRApia); D. Visovan, C. Farcas, D. Perva

## Our Practical Approach

- Long-term engagement with local farmers and other stakeholders to reconnect them with their landscape identity, geographical characteristics, and help them see that they are part of a broader landscape system.
- Landscape Character mapping (recording soil types, water and atmospheric systems, ecosystems, micro-climates, risks from extreme weather events) to guide sustainable land use and management.
- Using visual and spatial tools such as ecological network maps to help stakeholders understand the environmental value of the landscape and plan more effectively.
- Whole Farm Plans development to secure multifunctional outcomes which align with both CAP requirements and the EU Nature Restoration Law. These plans can guide the implementation of buffer zones, hedgerows, wetlands, and ecological corridors not in isolation, but as part of a coherent local ecological network.
- Tailoring CAP compliance strategies to local landscape characteristics to increase the adoption rates of sustainable practices.
- Incorporating cultural and historical landscape elements to improve community buy-in and enrich the ecological value of regenerative agriculture management.
- Landscape Scale Management and ongoing monitoring to guide sustainable land use decisions and adaptive planning in rural and peri-urban areas.

# CIRCULAR ECONOMY

*Landscapes are still being shaped by a linear economy logic (extract, build, discard), leading to inefficient resource use.*

*Landscape architects are uniquely positioned to apply circular principles at different scales.*

*Develop guidance on "circular landscape planning" at EU and national levels, tailored for different scales.*

*Promote reuse of materials, long-term maintenance planning, and participatory design as standard landscape architecture practices.*

## Problem

Our current patterns of resource consumption have already caused irreversible harm to the planet we share, with consequences for both present and future generations. The construction sector plays a major role in this crisis, contributing substantially to global $CO^2$ emissions and generating a significant share of worldwide waste. Across Europe, landscapes are still being shaped by a linear economy logic: extract, build, discard. This leads to loss of topsoil, inefficient resource use, increasing emissions from construction, and short-sighted planning. While regenerative design approaches exist, they remain niche and are not yet integrated into the mainstream planning or procurement frameworks.

## Circular Economy in Landscape Architecture

Circular Economy (CE) is an economic model that decouples growth from resource use by extending the life cycle of materials, spaces, and ecosystems. CE is an economic system in balance with nature, an economy which does not extract or pollute more than systemically sustainable. According to the European Parliament, CE aligns with the Green Deal and climate goals, aiming to shift towards a regenerative model that respects planetary boundaries by reducing consumption and increasing circular material use. The United Nations highlights the importance of creating markets that encourage reuse over disposal, turning waste, like clothes, electronics, and scrap metal, into valuable resources. For landscape architects, these definitions inspire the integration of CE principles into the design, construction, and management of both natural and human-made landscapes.

## Role of Landscape Architects

Landscape architects play a vital role in designing, managing, and revitalizing public spaces using circular principles. Our work spans ecological restoration, water management, material reuse, and community-based design, making sure that the outcome of our projects benefits both the humans and the environment. We are trained to understand both natural processes and human systems, making us effective coordinators of interdisciplinary, climate-resilient solutions. We try to minimise the need for extraction of new, virgin material resources and lower the environmental footprint in general.

**Bridgefoot Street Park**

Dublin, Ireland

Authors: Dermot Foley Landscape Architects

## Policy Challenges

- Circular principles are not mandated in public procurement of landscape or infrastructure projects.
- Funding prioritizes new construction over adaptive reuse and maintenance.
- Few incentives exist for participatory and place-based approaches that enhance circularity.
- Fragmentation between environmental, spatial, and economic policy domains undermines holistic design required to reach a circular economy.
- Educational and professional standards do not systematically include circular economy training.
- Lack of recognition for landscape architects' role in long-term resource management and urban metabolism.

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Mandate the inclusion of circular economy criteria in all EU-funded landscape and infrastructure projects.
- Develop guidance on "circular landscape planning" at EU and national levels, tailored for different scales.
- Provide funding for landscape reuse, soil regeneration, and material recovery projects.
- Support interdisciplinary training for landscape architects, planners, and engineers on circular principles.
- Transfer the policy decision into social, relational, natural, and economic ''value-chains'' that include all stakeholders, ranging from international policies to local regulations.
- Incentivize collaboration between local governments, designers, and material suppliers to close loops.
- Incorporate landscape-based circularity into the European Green Deal, NEB, and CAP frameworks.

## Our Practical Approach

- Material, soil, and construction-part reuse from existing sites to reduce emissions, transport needs, and resource extraction
- Design for Disassembly (DfD) using unbound base layers, mechanical joints, and untreated or thermally modified materials.
- Native and resilient plant selection to reduce maintenance needs and promote ecological regeneration.
- Adaptive design to the existing topography, vegetation, and local materials while retaining project elements already on site (plants, soil, or paved areas)in order to preserve value and minimize intervention
- Community knowledge integration by engaging residents early in participatory design processes, and providing them with the skills of taking over the maintenance process.
- Lifetime prolongation of structures, along with minimizing the resources required for maintenance.

## Towards Horizon

Portecelo, Spain

Authors: María Fandiño Iglesias

# HEALTH

*The triple crisis of pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss negatively affects human health.*

*Incentivise the improvement of landscape quality as a public health measure.*

*Foster synergies and intersectoral collaboration between landscape and health policies and practices, and other relevant domains.*

*Landscape architects play a key role in designing healing landscapes, which ultimately reduce healthcare costs.*

## Problem

Europe is undergoing rapid environmental change, with shifting biogeographical zones, biodiversity loss, desertification, and altered land use. Human activities, such as habitat destruction and overexploitation, accelerate ecosystem decline, leaving landscapes increasingly degraded and threatening both nature and human well-being.Urban green spaces are shrinking due to land competition, while rural areas face the consequences of unsustainable agricultural practices. At the same time, pollution of air, water, and soil compounds the effects of climate change. Together, this triple crisis of pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss leads to landscape degradation, ecological impoverishment, and standardisation, all of which negatively affect human health and well-being.

The scale of these challenges is profound. In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) projected that nearly 500 million people would develop noncommunicable diseases, such as heart disease, obesity, and diabetes, linked to physical inactivity between 2020 and 2030. This highlights the urgent need to protect and restore landscapes as key assets for both planetary and human health.

## Health in Landscape Architecture

From a landscape architecture perspective, health is understood as a holistic state of physical, mental, and social well-being, in line with the WHO definition. Green spaces play a vital role in this, helping to prevent disease, reduce stress and depression, and foster social interaction through spaces for movement and encounter. This view aligns with approaches like One Health and Planetary Health, which highlight the interdependence of human, animal, and ecosystem health. Moreover, the Council of Europe Landscape Convention states that landscape quality directly supports both physical and mental well-being, while health itself is shaped by social, economic, and environmental factors, making interdisciplinary collaboration essential. The relationship is also reciprocal: humans can heal landscapes, and landscapes, in turn, can heal us. Human and landscape health are thus deeply connected, evolving together over time.

**Healing Gardens – Public Hospital "Klinik Floridsdorf"**

Vienna, Austria

Authors: 3:0 Landschaftsarchitektur in association with Martha Schwartz Partners — MSP

## Role of Landscape Architects

Landscape architects play a vital role in addressing today's health challenges by designing and managing resilient, nature-based environments. Through our work, we create healthier urban and rural landscapes that improve well-being, support climate adaptation, and enhance biodiversity. Therapeutic and healing landscapes, especially in medical facilities, spas, or retirement homes, further demonstrate how design can directly support mental and physical health. By protecting and restoring ecosystems and integrating development with natural processes, we strengthen public health, community resilience, and climate readiness. Attractive, high-quality spaces motivate people to leave their homes, interact with others, and engage in healthier lifestyles. The multiple benefits of landscapes, ranging from water purification and food production to recreation and cultural value, show why they are essential for sustainable and prosperous societies. Importantly, investing in green, health-supportive landscapes also reduces healthcare costs, aligning with the WHO's broad understanding of health as more than the absence of disease.

## Policy Challenges

- Limited public awareness and societal understanding of the health benefits of landscapes.
- Lack of professional collaboration and common ground on NbS implementation.
- Deficient administrative and technical infrastructure for coordination of landscape and health policies.
- Absence of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of landscape quality and its impact on public health.
- Fragmented sectoral approaches hindering collaboration between landscape, health, and related fields.
- Little knowledge concerning the economic benefits related to investing in landscape quality for healthcare cost reduction.
- Inequitable access and participation in healthy landscapes among diverse social groups.

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Co-ordinate landscape and environmental policies that will cover the areas "landscape and health" in the public and private sector
- Foster synergies and intersectoral collaboration between landscape and health policies and practices, and other relevant domains.
- Consider landscape quality as a factor that promotes health. Incentivise the improvement of landscape quality as a public health measure.
- Incentivise the development of projects that uphold, sustainably and collaboratively, the cultural integrity, identity and social role of healthy landscapes.
- Raise public awareness and education on the health benefits of qualitative landscapes.
- Measure, monitor and report on the quality and diversity of the landscape, and their effect on people, based on the landscape in which they live, work, play, and travel.

**kbo-Inn-Salzach Hospital and Romed Hospital Wasserburg**

Wasserburg am Inn, Germany

Authors: Wankner und Fischer GmbH

## Our Practical Approach

- Sensory design by using diverse plants, textures, and sounds to stimulate healing experiences, especially when designing hospital landscapes
- Universal accessibility by providing smooth paths, seating, and shaded areas for all users.
- Quiet and safe zones by creating peaceful spaces for rest, reflection, and emotional recovery.
- Movement-friendly layout by integrating walking loops and gentle slopes to encourage physical activity.
- Spaces where social mixing and generations mixing are encouraged.
- Promote cultural integration in landscape design by using local materials and symbols to strengthen identity and belonging, while safeguarding both natural and cultural elements through integrative stewardship
- Co-design with users by involving healthcare professionals, community members, and vulnerable groups in the planning.

# TOURISM

*Tourism and leisure activities heavily influence landscapes, often causing environmental and cultural strain without sustainable planning and management.*

*Mandate the inclusion of landscape assessments and objectives in all tourism and recreational policy frameworks.*

*Promote cross-sectoral collaboration and knowledge exchange between tourism, planning, and landscape professionals.*

*Landscape architects are key actors in creating sustainable tourism strategies by integrating ecological systems, spatial planning, and cultural heritage at all scales.*

## Problem

Leisure and tourism activities exert increasing pressure on all types of landscapes—urban, rural, natural, and hybrid. As traditional tourist destinations saturate, new peripheral and often fragile areas become exploited. The commodification of landscapes for quick economic return has led to biodiversity loss, visual degradation, and cultural homogenization. Mass tourism infrastructures often lack sensitivity to local conditions, disrupting ecosystems and diminishing the long-term value of the places they occupy. The more dominant the consumptive image of landscapes, the more obvious the process of commodification. Many regions attempt to make a profit from leisure and tourism, especially when other economic carriers are failing. With the growing demand for "experiential" landscapes, the tension between conservation and exploitation intensifies across Europe. If mutual profits are better balanced, leisure and tourism can develop a symbiosis with local communities, and landscapes will thrive.

## Tourism in Landscape Architecture

Tourism and leisure activities are among the most powerful forces shaping contemporary landscapes across Europe. As destinations evolve to meet changing demands, landscape architects have a vital role in guiding the development of leisure infrastructure that respects ecological systems, cultural identity, and social well-being. This requires a shift from exploitative to integrative approaches that view landscapes not as passive settings, but as active, living systems central to the leisure experience.

**Westpark Augsburg**

Hannover, Germany

Authors: Lohaus Carl Köhlmos PartGmbB Landschaftsarchitekten Stadtplaner

**Eaux-Vives Beach**

Geneva, Switzerland

Authors: Atelier Descombes Rampini SA

## Role of Landscape Architects

Landscape architects are essential in shaping sustainable leisure and tourism environments. Our expertise spans across developing integrated landscape-inclusive tourism strategies that align ecological, spatial, and cultural priorities. We map and assess landscape character, including ecosystems, micro-climates, and cultural amenities, to guide responsible planning. We design and implement multifunctional landscapes that support both recreation and biodiversity, while also supporting cross-scale planning, from regional to site level, and promoting adaptive management practices. By engaging with tourism entrepreneurs, landscape architects help foster a better understanding of their role within broader landscape systems. Through a holistic design and planning perspective, we contribute to creating inclusive, sustainable, and resilient leisure environments that benefit both people and nature.

## Policy Challenges

- Absence of a unified European tourism policy that explicitly includes landscape as a central component.
- Fragmented governance with tourism primarily managed at national, regional, or local levels, leading to inconsistent implementation.
- Lack of comparable, synchronised data on leisure and recreation landscapes across Europe.
- Limited integration of landscape objectives into tourism development strategies and funding mechanisms.
- Weak monitoring and assessment systems for tourism-related landscape transformations.
- Insufficient inclusion of landscape professionals in tourism planning and decision-making processes.

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Establish a European vision for tourism that embeds sustainability and landscape quality as defining features.
- Mandate the inclusion of landscape assessments and objectives in all tourism and recreational policy frameworks.
- Mandate the inclusion of recreation and tourism in land use planning policies.
- Allocate funding streams for the design and implementation of sustainable leisure infrastructure.
- Develop a European Recreational Landscapes Map to monitor trends and inform planning.
- Require tourism initiatives to include awareness campaigns about the value and role of landscapes.
- Promote cross-sectoral collaboration and knowledge exchange between tourism, planning, and landscape professionals.
- Integrate design and artistic applications into new tourist and recreational infrastructure developments. By ensuring consistent quality across thousands of individual projects, long-term improvements in both sustainability and overall visitor experience can be achieved at scale.

## Our Practical Approach

- Conservation–recreation balance, by designing landscapes that protect ecological functions while allowing for public access and leisure (e.g. floodplain forests with hiking and canoeing trails).
- Sustainable tourism, by restoring landscapes and design biodiversity-friendly (e.g. transforming former industrial or mining sites into natural attractions).
- Preparing Landscape Scale Development, Management and Business Plans on national, regional, and local scale, integrating them into physical planning.
- Educational elements, by integrating interpretive trails, visitor centres, and signage into touristic sites using, to raise awareness about ecological and cultural values
- User experience, by carefully planned trails, panoramic viewpoints, and accessible infrastructure that respects the natural setting.
- Local identity, by incorporating cultural, historical, and ecological narratives. We design bearing in mind the local landscape character and scale.
- Ecotourism, by maintaining or restoring natural processes, like natural flood regimes, that support wildlife observation and low-impact activities.
- Post-industrial areas, by transforming them into attractive, ecologically rich destinations through reclamation and ecological design.

# URBAN AND PERI-URBAN DEVELOPMENT

*Traditional urban development practices have led to fragmentation of natural habitats, loss of biodiversity, and the prioritization of short-term economic gain over long-term ecological and social resilience.*

*Allocate dedicated budgets to develop and maintain green infrastructure as a fundamental part of urban development.*

*Encourage early cooperation between landscape architects, planners, ecologists, engineers, and communities for integrated solutions.*

*Landscape Architects possess the skills and knowledge to be actively involved in all stages of urban and peri-urban development, from strategic planning to conception, design and planning to implementation, management, and maintenance.*

## Problem

As landscape architects, we identify several key issues in current urban and peri-urban development. These include the fragmentation of natural habitats, loss of biodiversity, and the prioritization of short-term economic gain over long-term ecological and social resilience. Urban sprawl often leads to unsustainable land use, increased pollution, and reduced access to green spaces. Additionally, many developments neglect climate adaptation, resulting in vulnerability to heat, flooding, and other hazards. The lack of integrated, interdisciplinary planning further weakens the potential for inclusive and sustainable solutions.

## Urban and Peri-Urban Development in Landscape Architecture

As landscape architects, we view urban development as an opportunity to shape resilient, inclusive, and sustainable environments that balance human needs with ecological integrity. We approach cities as living systems, where green infrastructure, biodiversity, and public space are essential to climate adaptation and quality of life. Our role spans from strategic planning to long-term stewardship, ensuring that urban growth supports environmental health, social equity, and cultural identity. By integrating nature-based solutions and holistic design, we aim to create landscapes that are functional, meaningful, and future-ready.

## Role of Landscape Architects

In urban and peri-urban the role of landscape architects is particularly important in mitigating the effects of climate change and improving the quality of life. Landscape architects possess the skills and knowledge to be actively involved in all stages of urban and peri-urban development, from strategic planning to conception, design and planning to implementation, management, and maintenance. The European Environment Agency (EEA) highlights green infrastructure as effective in managing high temperatures and flooding, noting that NbS offer multiple environmental and societal benefits. Reflecting this, IFLA Europe has co-signed a memorandum of understanding with the Climate Heritage Network, which relates directly to climate heritage and landscape climate, heritage and landscape.

**Greening Urban Areas**

Odense, Denmark

Authors: Arkitema, COWI

## Policy Challenges

- Lack of interdisciplinary integration, with urban planning often overlooking landscape architects' ecological and spatial expertise, leading to fragmented development.
- Lack of legal recognition limits landscape architects' involvement within decision-making processes concerning NbS.
- Short-term policy objectives, which tend to prioritise immediate outcomes over long-term resilience, conflicting with the systemic approach landscape architects apply.
- Underfunding of nature restoration projects, the promotion of biodiversity, the provision of green/blue corridors in urban and peri-urban areas.
- Ineffective mechanisms for translating European policies into concrete actions at national, regional and local level.
- Lack of standardized tools and methodologies hinders effective assessment and monitoring of environmental impacts in strategic planning and development.
- Limited public participation and awareness regarding sustainable urban development, communities being frequently excluded from meaningful engagement, weakening inclusive and context-sensitive design .

**Waterdunen Park**

Breskens, Netherlands

Authors: Ytje Feddes, VSP, Royal HaskoningDHV

Photographer: Niek Hazendonk

**System of river parks: Magliana, Tiberis and Marconi**

Rome, Italy

Authors: M. Cristina Tullio - Studio Paesaggi e PAESAGGI (with S. A. Scuderi, E. Monteduro, M. Polci, M. Proietti Tocca, G. Celestini, S. Polci)

## Our Position on Policy Implications

- Formally recognise landscape architecture in legislation, thus ensuring landscape architects are included in urban planning laws to enhance their influence in decision-making.
- Prioritise policies that support sustainable, ecosystem-based solutions for climate resilience in urban planning.
- Allocate dedicated budgets to develop and maintain green infrastructure as a fundamental part of urban development.
- Encourage early cooperation between landscape architects, planners, ecologists, engineers, and communities for integrated solutions.
- Improve the translation of EU environmental goals into local strategies with landscape architects as key implementers.
- Standardise tools and methodologies for assessing and monitoring the broad and specific environmental impacts of strategic planning proposals and development.
- Require inclusive processes that involve communities in shaping their urban environments.

## Our Practical Approach

- Holistic site analysis, by assessing ecological, social, cultural, and spatial factors to fully understand the site context.
- Integrating NbS, by designing green infrastructure that supports climate adaptation, biodiversity, and human well-being.
- Collaborative planning, by engaging with planners, engineers, ecologists, and communities for interdisciplinary and inclusive outcomes.
- Adaptive and resilient design, by creating flexible spaces that can evolve with environmental and social changes.
- Community engagement, by facilitating meaningful participation to incorporate local needs and knowledge.
- Sustainable materials and practices, by using eco-friendly materials and low-impact construction methods.

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