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Speech notes to go with PowerPoint presentation slides

Slide 1 – Map

Ladies and gentlemen,
This presentation focuses on the northwestern and central European mainland, in particular Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, because these countries have a long history of landscape protection.

Slide 2 - Table

The table's columns show, from left to right, the:

- name of the most important tool used in each country to conserve iconic landscapes,
- how many landscape areas have been designated using the tool,
- which % of the country's territory these cover all together.

The last column on the right shows when the first areas were designated or the tool was launched.

Slide 3 - Green houses

Across Europe, landscape protection generally covers several things at once.

The sentences in italics at the bottom of this slide and in the next five slides are the categories listed in the French law on regional landscape parks.

Slide 4 natural heritage

Some of the most spectacular landscapes being protected are dominated by wild nature. But most of Europe, having been so densely settled for so long, is what European academics call a cultural landscape, something shaped and managed by human settlement and human activities.

Slide 5 rural heritage

This cultural landscape, handed down by the ancestors, shapes, even defines, the communities that live there. It's their foundational heritage.

The Germans, Swiss and Austrians use the almost untranslatable term *Heimat* to express this intimacy between the land, the people living there and the community customs and relationships that mediate between land and inhabitants.

Slide 6 social heritage

Until quite recent times, a patchwork quilt of diverse landscapes and of communities adapted to these landscapes, each with its own traditions, skills and products, was a feature of Europe.

These regional differences have been dissolving under the impact of modern technology, communication and economic globalisation.

This surely is one of the reasons why there IS a landscape and heritage conservation movement in Europe – save what can be saved before it's gone.

Slide 7 architectural heritage

Architectural heritage – historic buildings, quaint townscapes, charming cottages – was among the first to get attention – beginning in the 19th century.

But it soon expanded. As long ago as 1904 dozens of local groups pushing for heritage and landscape protection attended a first national German congress. The Netherlands came next, around WW I.

Slide 8 cultural heritage

Pushing back against a perceived loss of local, regional, community identity is definitely a major driver in European landscape and heritage action.

In Germany and Switzerland there are even ministries tasked with looking after 'Heimat' issues. The message is 'your district has its own unique character, which is treasured, and it's your spiritual homeland – this is a public good which we as government must foster'.

Slide 9 The German way - the French way

I distinguish two parallel systems to protect landscapes and the human heritage in them - the so-called German way - protection from a legal base –occurs also in Austria, Hungary, i.e. central Europe.

Whereas the French way – protection is a voluntary act - is also used by Belgium, Luxemburg and Switzerland, in the west.

To keep it simple, there's a third way which supplements both – more about that later.

Slide 10 Landscape Protection Area (blue text)

The last bullet point, at the bottom, "Schutz durch Nutzung" – it rhymes in German, sounds clunky in English = „Protect it by using it”.

But it's essential.

It sums up the legal difference compared to protecting nature and biodiversity in classic nature reserves and national parks, which is usually about banning things.

In landscape protection areas, economic activities, recreation, tourism are encouraged, as long as they fit into the landscape.

Especially activities which keep the landscape iconic – farmers even receive subsidies (paid by the EU Common Agricultural Policy) if they tend hedges and stone walls, keep local varieties of ancient livestock breeds, plough around natural pools and wetlands, and so on.

Slide 11 Landscape Protection Area (blue text)

On the left you can see the great strength of the German system – the most destructive practices are kept in check by legal and administrative means.

But the farm example at the bottom right shows how tricky it can be to define what threatening the ‘characteristic landscape’ means in practice.

For instance, in a landscape protection area which is characterised by pasture, converting a grass paddock to arable or planting it with trees could legally be blocked by the authorities.

But as long as it stays grass, the farmer can spray it, fertilise it, sow it with hybrid grass – even though the resulting pasture wouldn’t look too much like your classic storybook pretty landscape meadow full of flowers and larks.

Slide 12 Protected elements

These two German laws, based on Articles 28 & 29 of the Federal German nature conservation law, strictly protect small-scale objects which enhance landscape - once designated, these can’t be damaged or destroyed.

Even when for instance individual trees in an avenue like the one shown are a safety issue, they may be removed, but must be replaced by new trees.

Slide 13 Landscape Park (blue text)

These parks, first launched in 1956, are the logical next step.

To overcome the problem of fragmented individual landscape protection areas, the idea is to get all the authorities inside a defined area to work together to conserve whole landscapes. And indeed these parks are big – 1000, 1500 km² is quite normal.

Right from the start, a vital role for the landscape park was to be a place where people hard at work in the cities and towns, pumping up the economy, can chill out, get away from the rat race and literally re-create themselves.

Relaxing in lovely landscapes was seen by the government of the day as a good way for workers to spend their growing leisure and disposable income. And, since farming was rapidly becoming mechanised, tourism would bring jobs to depopulating rural areas.

This economic motive surely helped launch the parks. Recreation and tourism have remained leading objectives for German landscape parks ever since.

We’ll discuss later how these parks are organised and what they do.

Slide 14 – car on road heading to the hills

Now let's leave Germany and look at the French way of doing landscape preservation – the parc naturel régional, or regional nature park

Slide 15 – coloured blocks

In the diagram, the blue part is where a number of municipalities in a district, for whatever reason (they may even have been lobbied by NGOs and activists!) decide to set up a regional nature park, a landscape park. No-one can force any municipality to join – it's 100% voluntary and bottom-up

The Charter of the future Park, left bottom, is the key document. It's based on an inventory of heritage and a diagnosis of challenges, threats and opportunities. It sets objectives, and how to get there.

The ochre part is the tricky part – stakeholders may be less than keen, so mayors and councillors will then have their work cut out to try and accommodate them without modifying the Charter to the point it becomes an empty shell.

Look at the green block – one of the advising bodies is the French national federation of landscape parks. This is a good idea – new parks benefit from the experience of their peers. The federation organises annual networking and training rallies for its members.

Finally, the navy blue blocks: A French landscape park can only officially exist if it has been adopted by a national government decree.

Slide 16 – landscape and logo

So, only the competent ministry can grant the regional nature park label and logo – it's trademarked.

(Switzerland has a similar system – landscape parks set up at regional level are, if they pass certain criteria, ruled by the federal Swiss government as being of national importance. This means they receive a quality label AND federal funding for operating the park)

Because of this system of approval at national level, not just anything goes. A proposed park must be a landscape of significant natural and cultural value, which has a minimum coherence (this means it must have its own distinct character and cover enough of the landscape to be worthwhile).

It must be under pressure (environmental threats, land use change, but rural depopulation is also a common threat in France – when the people are gone, a cultural landscape is no longer cultivated).

The Charter must be realistic (no ambitions beyond what municipalities can actually do) and the municipalities must show they are committed to it.

The adoption decree is valid for 15 years. Before time up, the regional park is evaluated. A request for renewal is often used to add or delete municipalities, or add new themes to the charter.

An unusual one trending these days is combating light pollution – the parks are promoting themselves as dark-sky havens for stargazers.

Currently there is also discussion about whether to include seascapes – with growing maritime industries, coastal parks worry about finding their sea filled with aquaculture or wind turbines.

Slide 17 – long and uncertain process

One weakness of the French model is its reliance on consensus. In this particular park in south-east France (the slide shows its typical landscape of bush and gorges), that was rather lacking.

Opposition from local stakeholders crystallised around issues like:

- Will we no longer be able to exploit our forests, leading to less income and jobs, more wildfires and to invasion of pastureland by wilding trees?
- Will hunting be banned?
- Will stricter rules hinder local business and landowners?

Complaints that these objections were dismissed too off-hand led to an organised group, the 'Baronnies Libres', campaigning against the Park. Which made decision-makers in the municipalities nervous, hence the number dropping out.

Slide 18 – orange and black diagram

Another, greater weakness is that a French park is NOT a legal protection statute like a national park, reserve or the German landscape protection area. So it can't stop private owners doing things, and only impacts on land use planning in as far as councils integrate it in their own plans.

Because it's just an agreement between municipalities to work together towards a common aim, a park depends on whether members of its syndicat mixte, the governing consortium, - see bottom left – find actions they agree on.

If they do, these tend to be practical, non-controversial things like promoting the district as a tourism destination, improving visitor infrastructure, restoring historic heritage buildings, trying to shore up traditional local products in decline, and so on.

Slide 19 – blue figures over a field

Governance is very important in all the landscape parks, French or German, or Belgian, or Swiss.

They tend to follow the basic structure shown here.

Involving representatives of local tourism, farming, forestry sectors, of conservation and heritage NGOs, of hunters and anglers, and local industry in the running of the landscape park is obviously wise.

But an important lesson learned from past conflicts is that such stakeholders get very annoyed when park authorities pretend to listen but don't actually hear or want to hear what is being said.

Slide 20 - lakeside village

The slide shows the usual division of labour between a landscape park's territorial authorities on the one hand, and the management team of park employees on the other.

Very important to have a separate park entity with its own legal personality, able to hire and pay staff, or submit projects to funding agencies and receive grants.

All the Landscape Parks in all the countries covered by this presentation have staff. And this is another lesson: without personnel, and the budget to pay them, no way to do landscape management properly!

Slide 21 What do landscape parks do?

There's a wide variety of communication tools. Pretty classic is the info van (shown in the picture) to go and meet citizens out in the field.

A tool which experience shows is highly appreciated by locals, is the 'landscape biography' – a coffee-table book or web equivalent, richly illustrated, mixing geology, ecology, human history, local professions and crafts, biographies or interviews with interesting inhabitants, anecdotes and stories. It's labour-intensive and expensive, but a good investment.

Slide 22 tourism

All landscape parks invest heavily in I-sites, information material for visitors and marketing. They signpost trails for cyclists, ramblers, hikers, riders etc.

They also invest in more complex physical infrastructure, such as boardwalks across wet areas, or platforms and towers to get better views. Here's a particularly elaborate example. You start here, climbing up a raised boardwalk between the tree canopies

Slide 23 'beehive'

Then the boardwalk spirals up to the top of this multi-level viewing platform

Slide 24 river loop

And this is the reward – a view across the landscape

Slide 25 landscape planning

Landscape conservation planning, as opposed to normal land use planning, is particularly well developed in Germany, thanks to the country's specific laws on landscape protection.

The landscape programme at the German regional level, top bullet point, sets the targets, main measures and broad outlines for nature and landscape conservation.

These are worked out in more detail at the district and municipal levels – which landscape must be protected against urban expansion, where is technical intervention needed to improve degraded nature, plans for tourist trails etc.

After public consultation, they become binding on the authorities, who must take them into account and integrate them in their overall land use planning, building codes, consent procedures etc.

Of course, when the landscape plans conflict with another public plan or regulation, the choice what to do is a political decision, but which must be explained by the authority and may be appealed against.

Slide 26 white diagrams over a wetland

In all the countries covered, efforts also go into restoring and improving landscape elements, especially natural features.

Notably the activities on the right are quite large-scale projects, requiring significant budgets and long time scales.

Moreover, there are consent procedures – even if the flooding of a wetland takes place on public land, the higher water levels may affect neighbours, who have a right to object.

And private landowners can't be forced to improve what's on their property – either they give permission voluntarily, or they have to be compensated or agree to sell their land.

Slide 27 - machine

The existing features need to be tended too. Hedges need trimming, willows must be pollarded, species-rich grasslands need mowing against invading shrubs and reeds. The machine in the picture is mowing a peat mire, hence the wide caterpillar treads.

For publicly-owned land this work is usually outsourced to local farmers (a nice sideline for them!).

Germany goes one step further. It has a network of 155 'landscape management associations' which organise this practical management on behalf of the councils. These associations consist, by law, of representatives of the local authority, the local farmers and the natural heritage NGOs.

Slide 28 – Dutch-Belgian way, apricot-coloured text

In the Netherlands and Belgium, for historic reasons private foundations and associations have played a major role next to the state in nature, landscape and heritage conservation since the early 20th century. Rather like the National Trust in UK.

Funds to buy land and heritage buildings at acute risk, and pay for staff, come from membership dues, donations (which can be offset against income tax by the donors), legacies and (in the Netherlands) large annual fixed contributions from the national lottery. For restoration work, they also bid for grants from public programmes.

Their large membership means income but also political lobbying power (“Minister, we represent 700,000 voters”).

These organisations do engage with politicians actively and professionally; the Dutch ones even pool resources for a joint lobbying office a few blocks from the Parliament.

Also, the dense network of local chapters acts as eyes, ears and mouthpiece –

- keeping the hub informed about where action is urgently needed, suggesting practical projects;
- influencing local authorities and communities,
- spreading the word to their friends and neighbours.

Slide 29 – Each chapter looks after landscape

The Dutch-Belgian way is thus where private individuals come together in NGO networks and commit themselves to actively conserve nature, heritage, landscape.

In both countries, the public authorities welcome this parallel, citizen-based effort, and the two sides often work together at regional and local level in a public-private partnership. Even as far as agreements who will buy and restore heritage sites where, so as not to compete against each other.

Slide 30 _ Dutch-Belgian way, apricot-coloured text

Besides looking after their own land and buildings, the local chapters try to build up relationships with local stakeholders and landowners, try to persuade them to do the right thing, and help them when they do.

Both the public-sector regional landscape consortia in Flanders and the private landscape foundations in the Netherlands consider this one of their core tasks.

As one of them phrases it, “managing landscape is all about managing people – the technical work is straightforward, what you need is community support and landowner buy-in”.

One of their lessons learned on how to manage people is “talking together, which means using words which fit the other’s world view and interests” instead of “talking to, which means using jargon, preaching and accusing”.

Slide 31 Pain and gain (windmill)

Who benefits from landscape conservation? Tourism is the winner everywhere, to the point that some landscape areas become overloaded with visitors. See this busy day on a Dutch landscape heritage trail.

Local councils gain indirectly – tax on overnight stays, GST on all the tourist spending etc.

What are the benefits for farmers, foresters? If anything they suffer constraints from landscape conservation. And tourists have a habit of trespassing!

That's why a number of parks are trying to spread benefits more widely, through branding.

Slide 32 Branding and labels (pale green)

The target of these labels is the consumer looking for quality, craft-like niche products with a narrative and green credentials. Millennials should love them!

Tourists in the area are also targeted directly – the Rhön park in central Germany operated a network where local cafés and eateries would highlight dishes made with locally sourced ingredients, telling the customers on the printed menus 'if you like the landscape you came here to see, help preserve it by choosing one of these highlighted dishes'.

Slide 33 Cattle

Or this image from a poster advertising beef from cattle used to graze heathlands (one of the most iconic landscape types in the Low Countries). An NGO and a farmer cooperative are promoting it as natural meat, premium quality marbled beef with a unique flavour thanks to the wild plants on the moor.

Slide 34 landscape an added value?

As far as I'm aware, no thorough research has been done on this topic. If it does turn out that high-grade landscape, especially near urban areas, correlates positively with high-value cutting-edge economic sectors, higher demand for properties and buzzing entrepreneurial activity, that would boost the business case for landscape conservation. But, like any gentrification, it risks pricing locals out of their own district....

Slide 35 – brick building and NatureWork

This Belgian entrepreneur does indeed think that landscape can attract business investment. This 18th century manor farm is being rented out to start-ups as co-working space. Where the surrounding rural, quiet landscape and its dramatic skies – shown below - is an explicit selling point – as the banner says, Nature at Work.

Slide 36 Geo Parks

To finish off, two special cases. The first: Protecting geological heritage for its own sake, not as detail of a landscape park. There is a growing network in Europe of areas, some as large as 1000 km², where geological processes and their outcomes are the focus.

Slide 37 Dinosaur murals

Besides protecting the key sites, much attention in the geo parks goes into informing the public about the geology and using it as an extra draw for visitors and tourists.

This German geo park even asked a gang of local graffiti artists to paint murals depicting local geological history.

Slide 38 Silence zones with map

The other special case: Stiltegebieden, or silence areas, possible under Dutch law since 1979. The map shows which have been designated so far. These are overwhelmingly landscapes where nature dominates.

Noise after dark is particularly frowned upon. Although some areas have wardens patrolling, what usually happens is that police come when someone complains about noise. Because of the designation as a silence area, the police have the legal authority to shut down a noisy party or stop people hooning about.

Slide 39 blue arrows

I'm a member of the International Land Conservation Network of people and organisations interested in promoting the conservation of land and its species and ecosystems by private owners and corporations.

The secretariat is at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Massachusetts.

The network is quite new, but has already organised congresses to exchange experiences from around the world – look at the blue arrow.

From NZ, Farm Environment Trust, QEII Trust and Banks Peninsula Trust have attended.

Next one is next April, in Spain. If you're interested, here's who to contact.

And if you have any questions, or would like more information about Europe, I'll do my best to help you.

Thank you.