

'The Shape of Place and Place: Undertaking a Landscape Circle Study of your Locality'

Terry O'Regan

Preface

The landscape of Europe is everything you can see throughout and around the continent and its offshore islands. It is not a two-dimensional painting or even a three-dimensional model, it is multi-dimensional, reaching deep into the soil and rocks of the ground, under the water and up into the sky. It embraces all of our shared heritage; the diversity of nature and the diversity of the marks and manifestations of humans. It is experienced through all our senses.

Your piece of the landscape of Europe is not just the land that you may or may not occupy, but the place or places that are important to you, that figure in your memories of the past, your sense of the history of your landscape, your consciousness of well-being and belonging in your present landscape and your vision of the its future. You might say that you own your landscape, but it is deeper than mere ownership – you are part of your landscape and it is part of you – a relationship that is very organic and close – almost bionic.

You can however be torn from your landscape or it can be torn from you. You never entirely lose your landscape, but you can lose a landscape that is rich and rewarding, that is important to you, only to have it replaced with a landscape that is impoverished, dispiriting and alienating.

In the past in Europe as a largely agricultural society we depended on our landscape in obvious ways. Today we still depend on it, but we largely lack the comprehension to see this. The balance has shifted and our landscape is now more dependent on us. If we could understand its language we would hear its call for our help.

Change in our landscape is as inevitable as the seasons (annual cyclical change). It can be naturally slow (the growth of trees and bushes), naturally gradual (changes in agricultural crops and animals). It can also be naturally abrupt (storm damage). Our actions can respond to and contribute to such natural changes (global warming). Man-made landscape change can also be slow (occasional new buildings), gradual (regular new buildings) and abrupt ('overnight' housing developments, wind farms, motorways, shopping malls etc).

In the recent past the ordinary citizen had very little say in landscape interventions by others. Increasingly today legislation at all levels is providing citizens with a democratic role in the process of landscape change and management. This role is perceived by many citizens as being very limited and they often feel powerless. The processes of landscape change are complex and often far from transparent. Playing a constructive, responsible role in these processes requires a structured, informed, strategic response from ordinary citizens.

Whether you are an 'ordinary' citizen, a community group, second or third level students; undertaking a landscape circle study is your opportunity to respond to the call of your landscape. You can make it as simple or as comprehensive as you wish – the choice is yours. You are however guaranteed you that if you undertake a 'Landscape Circle Study' of your landscape you will at the very least enrich the rest of your life and you will be in a more informed and empowered position to become actively involved in the management of your landscape – the choice is yours

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A Guide to Undertaking a 'Landscape Circle' Study (in seven easy steps)

The Landscape Alliance Ireland publication 'A Guide to Undertaking a Landscape Circle Study in Seven Easy Steps' complete with 98 full colour illustrations is now available. It is a 64 page paperback, A5 size, in landscape format.

The book is available for sale from Landscape Alliance Ireland, Old Abbey Gardens, Waterfall, Near Cork City, Ireland at a cost of €10.00, plus €2.00 P&P for delivery in the Republic of Ireland and plus €4.00 P&P for UK and elsewhere in Europe.

Whilst written in an Irish context it should be equally applicable to all the landscapes of Europe and beyond.

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Workshops will be organised later in the year in association with the use of the Guide and the development of the National Landscape Strategy.

The guide is an initiative of Landscape Alliance Ireland in support of the implementation of the European Landscape Convention and is also intended as a bottom-up measure to inform the eagerly awaited Irish National Landscape Strategy that is promised in the government programme. It will assist individuals, local community groups, tidy towns committees, transition year students, 3rd level students and course lecturers and others wishing to carry out a study of their local landscape. It will also be of assistance to those charged with planning policy and control.

The aim of the guide is to equip all citizens with a knowledge and understanding of their landscape and to empower them to engage effectively with and influence developers, officials and experts involved in the processes of change affecting their landscape.

The Author

Terry O' Regan, B. Agr. Sc. (Horticulture), MILI, MIOH, Landscape activist, environmentalist and consultant with 37 years' experience of the landscape industry in Ireland. A life-long member of heritage/environmental organisations; in 1994 was the first to call for a National Landscape Policy in Ireland, founded Landscape Alliance Ireland in 1995, convened the National Landscape Forum series and was founding chairperson of the LA21 body – the Cork Environmental Forum. Has championed the case for landscape policy for 13 years now and actively participated in the development and advancement of the Council of Europe European Landscape Convention. Has written and lectured extensively on all aspects of landscape evolution, quality and management in Ireland and Europe and contributed to and edited the proceedings of the National Landscape Forum and created the web-site 'landscape-forum-ireland.com'

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"Our treatment of our landscape reflects our collective approach to ourselves, to our social organisations, to our place in the land."

Freda Rountree, (1996),
Chairperson of the Heritage Council, Irish Landscape Forum – The Second Landfall