



*Discovering the Landscapes
of the Americas*

designing, planning, conserving and managing

**CHARTER OF THE LANDSCAPE
OF THE AMERICAS**

PREFACE

During the 47th International Congress of Landscape Architecture of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), which took place in Suzhou, China, in 2010, the member countries of this organization committed themselves to drawing up their national landscape charters, as part of the process of working towards a Global Charter or, at some future date, a World Landscape Convention.

Such a Global Charter or Convention would then be backed by the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN). The overriding objective of such a Charter aims at the right to the landscape as a collective asset. In view of the different meanings of landscape that arise from the great diversity of geographical, historical, social, environmental and cultural features that define us globally, a Global Charter or Convention is, by definition, a complex instrument.

Since the Suzhou meeting, the number of National Landscape Charters has been increasing among the five IFLA regions. In some cases, they have been organized at a regional or continental level. Regarding the Americas, it was Colombia that took on a pioneering leadership role and prompted the founding of a transnational movement called the Latin American Landscape Initiative (LALI), which led to the drafting of the Latin America Landscape Charter. The designated *Charter of the Landscape of the Americas* reflects the evolution towards the understanding of the landscape of the continent as a whole.

Among the aims of the Charter is that of fostering awareness about recovering and giving value to the landscape, and also of creating instruments that encourage the development of a legal framework, based on the present, that takes account of the past to build the future.

Out of the thirty-five countries that make up the continent of the Americas, nineteen have IFLA Americas member national associations. Sixteen of them have formulated their National Charters of the Landscape. Most of these promote protecting, planning and managing landscapes in a sustainable way. Some of these charters have aligned themselves more explicitly with the underpinning principles of the European Landscape Convention and all of them give special attention to recognizing their identities and singularities as values to be safeguarded. A significant number of them emphasize that a defining feature of the Charter of the Landscape of the Americas is: to be a planning and action instrument that guarantees the right to happiness as a collective heritage asset.

The *Charter of the Landscape of the Americas* is based on the quest for our roots and the reason for our existence, founded on the knowledge of who we are and of what we, as inhabitants of the continent of the Americas, should own by right. Such a demand is one of the fundamental reasons motivating the drawing up of the national charters of the landscape. It is also a distinctive feature of the conceptual framework. Therefore, seeking a full understanding of the landscape of the Americas and its unique identity must be derived from a permanent dialog between the diverse manifestations of territory and culture since it is by engaging in this that “Americanity” is revealed. It is in this spirit that we present the *Charter of the Landscape of the Americas*.

PREAMBLE: (RE) DISCOVERING THE LANDSCAPE OF THE AMERICAS

The continent of the Americas which ranks second, in terms of size, with respect to the five continents of the planet consists of thirty-five countries and eighteen dependent territories. It is a landmass of great physiographic diversity that challenges us to look at it as a unit that is an amalgam of pluralities and singularities.

To draw up this Charter, rather than merely describing the landscapes, the strategy that has been adopted is that of deconstructing them by strata in order to reconstruct them thereafter so that they can be better understood as forming the landscape of a single continent with a history that stretches back to the first records of human activities.

There are five strata, these being defined as: Nature, cosmovision, culture, ethics and "Americanity" as identity. These strata enable us to comprehend the process of understanding in which attention is not first and foremost focused on the *Landscapes of America*, but on the *Landscape of the Americas*.

The *first stratum* concerns *Nature*, the primordial nature, understood as the biological heritage which has been woven across the Continent of the Americas. On splaying out and down from north to south, what the geographical design of the Americas makes clear is the exceptional connection of two continents between two terrestrial poles, namely, Alaska and Patagonia, and that the Americas sit between the oceans of the Glacial Arctic, the Glacial Antarctic, the Atlantic and the Pacific. The Americas stretch out from north to south into large territorial masses, into fragmented islands of sharply distinct configurations, and even into narrow strips of territories that let the Pacific and the Atlantic be linked. It is a plural Continent that basks and braces itself in its climatic heterogeneity, the result of the confluence of variation in latitudes and altitudes, and of the influences of its coasts, high mountainous lands and lands that lie at sea-level. These ecological thresholds define the identity that has been and continues to be built from the efforts of the peoples of the Americas to adapt to their surroundings in response to Nature's demands, within the understanding that these thresholds are a living whole.

To recognize the overlay that is being culturally built on untouched Nature constitutes the *second stratum* of the landscape of the Americas. More precisely this is the metaphysical aspect of the landscape, the domain of the *cosmovision* that incorporates spirituality, sacredness, the feelings of the soul and aesthetics filtered by art, the mysticism of the epic and the tragic, of the simple and the sublime associated with the individual and collective imaginary, both of the original and of contemporary peoples.

The diversity of the biological legacy of the Americas demanded, as a condition of survival, different ways to adapt and appropriate Nature as a resource, which created links and interactions with "Mother Earth" - such as the ties people made with trees that have "their own soul" -, based on transcendental spiritual beliefs and values, which regulate the stars and Nature, and have direct consequences for humans' subsistence systems. The Cosmovision is a form of seeing life and understanding Nature, the harvest from the relationship that human beings established with the Earth and with their gods, as in Pre-

Hispanic Mesoamerica. It is this which gives meaning to people's existence, and is expressed in the landscape. This stratum is about cosmogony and not only human beings' place in the universe, but also in the cosmos that they carry within themselves, and posited so as to relate themselves – body and mind – to the cosmic forces that are still preserved in the landscape of the Americas.

The ***third stratum*** of the landscape deals with what overlays space and time, as a ***cultural palimpsest*** of the continent of the Americas: (1) of the original peoples, (2) of the colonizers whose blood became mixed with the native peoples of the lands already conquered, (3) of the "American" people of today and their different landscapes of the north, center and south of the Americas.

The ***first palimpsest*** points out the influences of Nature that defined a more nomadic occupation to the north and south, which contrasts with temperate Mesoamerica, where the vestiges of the landscape are indicated by the architecture of the native peoples, deemed as being Pre-Hispanic.

The ***second palimpsest*** is characterized by the mixture between native peoples and conquerors, who designed extraordinary urban and rural landscapes.

The ***third palimpsest*** defines the contemporary landscape, the product of the industrialization process that reveals similarities between the center and south of Iberian America and differences between Iberian America and Anglo-Saxon America, from an economic, social and cultural point of view. This is the urbanized palimpsest of contemporaneity, in which the majority of the world's population occupies towns and cities, which necessitates special planning conditions.

The ***fourth stratum*** requires a change of paradigm that is a counterpoint to the idea that Nature is inexhaustible and development is unlimited, when the inflection point is in the relationship between ***environmental ethics and aesthetics***, i.e., when Nature is considered, it is attributed to the ethical statute of aesthetics.

If modernity has distanced us from Nature, nevertheless to understand Nature as a landscape, the relationship of interdependence has never been interrupted and requires us to return to Nature, to escape from the uncertainties that arise from the unthinking use of technology, which has adverse environmental, economic and social impacts, thereby causing chasms to open up between well-being and poverty. To think of Nature as a condition of existence moves us away from understanding the landscape only as a panorama, apprehended by a subject who gazes at it, and towards understanding it as that part of Nature on which our existence and spirituality depend. Environmental ethics focuses on considering the natural world as having moral value.

The ***fifth stratum*** is bound up with all the others and their interdependencies, this being understood as the meaning of our ***"Americanity" as identity***. The reasons for this understanding are underpinned by re-constituting each of the five superimposed strata as values, which, when amalgamated, set a new way of looking at what it is to be from the Americas and at what defines our landscape.

The concept of the Americas as a single continent, stitched transversely into the five strata that rediscover the landscape of the Americas, makes it possible to understand "Americanity" as conditional not only on development with quality, but also on the importance that this concept has for conservation, planning, design and management of our past, current and future landscapes, so as to respond satisfactorily to a main objective: to focus on the pursuit, recovery and consolidation of happiness as a right and as a goal to be achieved for everyone from the Americas.

RECITALS

The members of IFLA-Americas and the distinguished signatories who sign this document consider there is:

1. The need to establish a unique way to look at the landscape of the Americas, respecting and giving value to the unity of its diversity and physical-geographical, historical, religious and socio-cultural singularities in order to strengthen the meaning of Americanity among its members. This should be made evident when designing new landscapes, when conserving the cultural and natural heritage, when undertaking planning that involves the past, the present and the future of the landscapes and by conducting management that ensures good stewardship that respects the landscape of the present and future generations;
2. The need to reposition the way of looking at a notion of landscape by those who plan, design, act and decide on the fate of the landscapes of the Americas. This should include the symbiotic character of Nature and culture that involves and requires this understanding, in a continuous process of heritage education on the landscape, which should be considered as a universal asset and right.
3. The paradigms that maintain unsustainability as damaging to the conservation of the biodiversity of the Americas and, consequently, of the planet, associated with an unsustainable development that exploits natural resources as if they are inexhaustible, without considering the necessary balance between the preservation of Nature, the supply of society's needs and economic production;
4. Climate change and global warming, as one of the crucial concerns that affect the conservation of Nature and the landscape, caused by the increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and chlorofluorocarbons), that are emitted because of slash and burn activities and, above all, by the large cities where the pathogenic elements are the protagonists;
5. The need to recognize cities as urban landscapes that require special treatments because they require large flows of energy, they produce and accumulate large amounts of liquid and solid waste, they produce gases that contribute to global warming and because cities are, mainly, the place of residence of the majority of the planet's population and funnel Nature' as landscape, into squares, parks, gardens, urban patches and public spaces;

6. The recognition of the fragility of landscapes as elements of culture and non-renewable heritage, not only of notable examples of architecture, but also of vernacular architecture and landscape, which witness to the ways of community life and the diversity of the cultures of the Americas;
7. The role and responsibility of the Landscape Architect in the preservation, conservation and the production of new landscapes, as the professional who incorporates the hybrid understanding of Nature and culture into different scales of space and time and who can propose projects that may consider the identity, aesthetics and sustainability of places. This therefore moves away from the concept of "tabula rasa" or of the "museification" of places, in order to maintain a respectful and creative commitment in the dialogue with places, namely, with pre-existing landscapes.

PRINCIPLES

Based on the aforementioned considerations, this document sets out as support for this Charter, the following Principles:

1. To be comprehended as part of a living whole, as the first condition that precedes all other Principles, by placing ourselves at the vital and physiological base of our existence since we are constituent parts of Nature. The conservation of life on the planet depends on our awareness of and respect for every living thing. Understanding the living whole is everyone's duty and the living whole as landscape is everyone's right;
2. To recover the cosmovision and the vision of sacredness, as one of the intrinsic characteristics that define the formation of the people of the Americas, the fruit of the relationship that the original peoples established with the Earth and with their gods, thereby giving meaning to their existence. The cosmovision is a way of seeing life that continues to be expressed in the contemporaneity of the landscape of the Americas, which reverberates in traditions, customs and art, where sensitive awareness is not based on concepts, but on experiences, and on the built heritage of the ancestral relationship established between the first Americans and the lands of the Americas.
3. To consider the singularities of the palimpsest of the territory in scales of space and time in order to reduce social inequalities and to maintain the identity of the Americas, which are expressed in three different instances: (1) the palimpsest of the original peoples, most clearly present in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica; (2) the palimpsest resulting from the mixture between colonized and colonizers, which defined the architecture of innumerable towns and landscapes that owe their founding to the exploitation of minerals and agricultural production; (3) the palimpsest of contemporaneity, the essence of which finds itself expressed in large cities, the places on the planet where people and great technological innovations huddle together, and the landscapes of which have been exhibiting rather than a relationship with pre-existing places, a global system that is measured on another scale.
4. To take up again ethics understood in its relationship with aesthetics, as a condition intimately associated with environmental ethics when it is proposed to recover the

ancestral bond between human beings and Nature, in an understanding that goes beyond the anthropocentric parameters, when the landscape, besides its aesthetic qualities with the objectivity and subjectivity of beauty, gains the understanding that the natural world has a moral value.

5. To (re-)discover the roots of Americanness as a condition for the future is the principle that overlays all the others in the rediscovery of the roots that anchor us as beings of the Americas and enables us to continue projecting the future of the landscape, thus consolidating our identity. This future condition is associated with respect for Nature, for culture, for historical and social values, for the singularities of diversity and for the right to the landscape as an asset held in common and a collective heritage, which also incorporates everyone's right to happiness.

OBJECTIVES

Based on the established considerations and principles, this document establishes as objectives of the Charter of the Landscape of the Americas:

1. To be an instrument that can contribute to achieving happiness as a full right of everyone in the Americas;
2. To be an instrument of confluence of thinking from the Americas on Landscape, which from the point of view of their understanding and defining a policy for the protection, management and definition of new landscapes, interconnect the three Americas into a single continent, thereby respecting and valuing the diversity and singularities from which all three are constituted;
3. To establish a legal framework that fosters the rapprochement between Anglo-Saxon America and Iberian America, so as to reduce the historically established economic and social differences between rich and poor, with respect to the physical, historical and cultural singularities that distinguish these territories from each other;
4. To assume the legal role of an Instrument that guides the conservation, planning, design and management of the landscape of the Americas, thereby maintaining coherence with international legislation that is consonant with sustainable development and with giving value to sociocultural diversity and the preservation of the quality of life;
5. To underpin decision-making in planning, in conservation plans, in management programs, and in the blueprints for new landscapes so that all gestures and actions may bring out the potential of the values and characters present in the landscapes of the Americas, whether these are tangible or intangible, so as to reinforce their singularities as intrinsic qualities that define our identity;
6. To encourage the participation of landscape architects in government actions that seek to transform the territory, by emphasizing their way of acting in coordination and public administration posts. This is because a landscape architect is a professional who can

adjust, in an interdisciplinary way and on different scales, variables that involve socio-environmental, cultural, spiritual, ecological, aesthetic, technical and economic concerns;

7. To be an instrument that guides landscape architects so that they, consciously, incorporate the tangible and intangible values of the Americas - including the native vegetation and fauna of each territory-, in their blueprints for future landscapes;
8. To be an instrument that can guide proposals for intervening in landscapes not only those from landscape architects, but from all other professionals, of various areas of knowledge, as well as those from communities that work on management and conservation, which have the landscape as the object and interest of their interventions;
9. To incorporate the landscape, with its due importance, into sectoral public policies (mobility, gray and green infrastructure, production, exploitation of resources, energy renewable forms of energy, health, education, tourism, and housing);
10. To unleash a process of landscape and heritage education so that the understanding of the landscape - as a complex system that relates the biodiversity of nature and cultural values -, be incorporated into public management, while respecting everyone's right to healthy places in receipt of aesthetic and environmental care, whether these be everyday landscapes or of heritage value;
11. To encourage universities and higher education institutions in the Americas to increase undergraduate and graduate courses in the various scales of Landscape Architecture;
12. To promote and incorporate society's participation as a necessary condition for public decisions on planning, conservation, management and design of new landscapes in the Americas, including in the projects and activities of landscape management plans;
13. To emphasize the importance of recognizing in a legal instrument, the unity of our diversity, taking singularities as values that distinguish and identify us as being of the continent of the Americas, both for the landscapes of protected natural areas and for agricultural and urban landscapes by integrating them as landscape assets into urban and regional planning. This should be crystallized in planning instruments for territorial and urban planning;
14. To recognize cities as urban landscapes that require special care and actions so that they can fulfill their social function by welcoming the population with dignity, quality of life and respecting the limits imposed by Nature.
15. To construct the inventory and catalog of the landscapes of the Americas, and to recognize these as being fundamental tools for planning, preservation and management.

16. To foment public policies and to participate in international programs related to knowledge of culture and Nature, and to promote regional cooperation in the area of the safeguarding and construction of landscapes.
17. To recover and to give value to the landscape of the Americas as one of the triggers of the cultural policy of urban requalification and environmental recovery of the countries of the Region of the Americas.
18. To be an instrument that will contribute to the construction of the Global Convention of the Landscape, and thus for the response of the Continent of the Americas to this to be seen as the fifth piece of the planetary “puzzle”.

DEFINITIONS / GLOSSARY

Based on the considerations and principles instituted, this document establishes as definitions of the Charter of the Landscape of the Americas:

1. **Landscape:** portion of a territory apprehended by sensory and intelligible experience of the individual and collective perception that is revealed in a *unicum* and *continuum* of living, natural and cultural systems, as a synthetic and interdependent totality, in space and in time.
2. Landscape conservation: This consists of defining a set of actions and strategies for the purpose of maintaining and transmitting to the future, as much as possible, the traces and characteristic meanings of a landscape, that because of its heritage value can be understood as a document-landscape, considering Nature and human action on the territory.
3. Landscape Planning: This consists of establishing lines of sustainable development of a landscape in relation to the demands and needs of societies, by understanding this landscape as a primary asset. Safeguarding, preservation, defense, re-qualification of the landscape and the recovery or rehabilitation of deteriorated areas should be considered at different levels, including unique or characteristic landscapes that will perform an essential role in the quest for and creation of new aesthetic landscape values. The theoretical foundations of this scale of action are based on true ecological studies with contributions from various disciplines.
4. Landscape Design: This is the art of forecasting, prospectively, the architecture of open spaces for a specific use, with order and quality, taking into account the environmental restrictions and the cultural context of each piece of the urban fabric and/or natural environment, the end objective being to improve, restore and/or create new landscapes as well as to give preference to the management of the native and endemic vegetation of each territory.
5. Landscape Management: This is the set of actions, strategies and methods defined for the purpose of guaranteeing the conservation of a landscape, and for guiding its

transformations, taking into account the dynamics resulting from social, economic and environmental processes, in a perspective of sustainable development, which must include effective participation by civil society.

6. **Landscape Policy:** It falls to public authorities to define a set of general and specific principles, strategies, guidelines and actions that should guide institutional and non-institutional measures, on actions that may interfere with and modify the landscape, with a view to protecting, managing and ordering it.

DECLARATION

We, the signatories of the *Charter of the Landscape of the Americas*, commit ourselves to act, both in the field of our professional activities and in everyday life, in accordance with the considerations set out herein and to respect the values and contents declared, towards institutionalizing our principles and achieving the objectives laid down. Likewise, we declare our adherence to all the Landscape Charters in force in the Americas, to the binding treaties and agreements linked to these that make it possible to put the Charters into practice, and also to international legislation that is consonant with sustainable development, with giving value to sociocultural diversity and to preserving the quality of life as a collective asset and right. We affirm our understanding and responsibility to respond for the Americas and to contribute to the possible drafting and signing of the *Global Convention of the Landscape*.

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IFLA AMERICAS Charter of the Landscape of the Americas

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