

EU RESEARCH PROJECT 'HERCULES'

Steven Shuttleworth and Laurence le Dû-Blayo

Landscape Research Group is one of the partners in a major new EU-funded research project – Project HERCULES.

The purpose of the project is to advise the EU on how best to develop “Sustainable futures for Europe's **HER**itage in **CUL**tural landscap**ES**: Tools for understanding, managing, and protecting landscape functions and values”.

The project commenced on 1 December 2013 for a 36 month period. The EU funding for the project is nearly 3 million Euros, of which LRG will receive 48,410 Euros to undertake its role in the project.

The partners in the project are:

- Humboldt Universitat zu Berlin [Germany] [the 'lead partner']
- Kobenhavns Universitet [Denmark]
- Conseil Innovation Management [France]
- European Landowners Organisation [Belgium]
- Forest Communication Network Ltd [UK]
- Landscape Research Group Ltd [UK]
- Sinergise Laboratorij Za Geografske Informacijske Sisteme Doo [Slovenia]
- Stichting Vu-Vumc / VU University Amsterdam [Netherlands]
- Eidgenoessische Forschungsanstalt Wsl / Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research [Switzerland]
- Tallinn University [Estonia]
- Albert-Ludwigs-Universitaet Freiburg [Germany]
- University .of the Aegean Research Unit [Greece]
- Uppsala Universitet [Sweden]

The Project Director is Dr Tobias Pleininger [at the time the project proposal was submitted of Humboldt University, but now with the University of Copenhagen]. LRG will formally be represented at the key project meetings by Laurence le Dû-Blayo [International Officer] who is leading our 'scientific' involvement in the project, and Steven Shuttleworth [Company Secretary and Treasurer].

The project will be undertaken as a series of work programmes, to which the different partners will contribute in varying proportions according to their expertise. The project summary / abstract is:

European cultural landscapes are valued as everyday living environment, countryside, heritage, scenery with aesthetic and recreational qualities and unique biodiversity, and as a source of ecosystem services that they provide to society. Cultural landscapes, however, are undergoing rapid and fundamental transformations across Europe, mainly as a result of an on-going polarization of land use, with abandonment and rural exodus on the one hand, and intensification and (peri-) urbanisation on the other. So far, substantial challenges have inhibited the design of effective responses to safeguard cultural landscape values. The proposed HERCULES project strives for the empowerment of public and private actors to protect, manage, and plan for sustainable landscapes of significant cultural, historical, and archaeological value at local, national, and pan-European scales. By applying and developing innovative technologies and tools for assessing and mapping cultural landscapes, the project will (a) synthesise existing knowledge on drivers, patterns, and outcomes of persistence and change in Europe's cultural landscapes; (b) perform targeted case studies to develop in-depth insights on dynamics and values of cultural landscapes; (c) develop a typology of cultural landscapes and scale-up case study insights using observations and landscape modelling; (d) develop visions for re-coupling social and ecological components in cultural landscapes and translate them into policy and management options; and (e) design and implement a community-based Knowledge Hub for

Good Landscape Practice and demonstrate it with land users, agencies, SMEs, and citizen associations. HERCULES comprises European universities, SMEs, NGOs, and a research institute that are leaders in landscape science and practice. The project follows the European Landscape Convention's call for transdisciplinary research and involves all actors with stakes in cultural landscapes of historical and archaeological value.

To achieve this objective, the Hercules project brings together European universities, SMEs, NGOs, and research institutes, who together represent a wide range of relevant disciplines. The combination of researchers, entrepreneurs, and activists is intended to bring diverse stakeholder perspectives into HERCULES and to ensure successful involvement of landscape practitioners as well as academics. The project will focus on cultural landscapes in rural areas – including the periurban fringe – aiming to understand the drivers that have shaped these landscapes (both long-term and short-term histories), the culture- and ecosystem-based landscape services produced by these landscapes, and test the impact of the wide range of policies and strategies that now shape landscapes. Climate change is one of the main driving forces that lead to the central question: how do we ensure resilience of cultural landscapes? The results from the research phase of the project are intended to inform the refinement of such policies, including the European Landscape Convention. The insight, technologies, and strategies developed in HERCULES will be tested and applied in five to six regional case studies, purposefully selected to span major environmental and land use history gradients throughout Europe, with a number of supplementary case studies where required to ensure the broad range of cultural landscape types is fully considered.

Landscape Research Group's contribution is formally part of "Work Package 9: Design of recommendations for landscape policy and practice, communication, and dissemination". This comprises activities related to awareness, stakeholder dialogue, dissemination of results, and relevant communication with external stakeholders. The publicity and dissemination activities reflect the needs and characteristics of HERCULES and will include examples of good landscape practices and relevant policy recommendations, as well as the need to address post-project implementation and sustainability plans.

The Work Package has the following aims:

- to set up a stakeholder engagement strategy and organise stakeholder meetings at EU level;
- to elaborate a communication strategy to disseminate findings in a concise and reader-friendly way;
- to create ad hoc communication tools (website, social networking tools) around the Knowledge Hub for Good Landscape Practice;
- to design recommendations for landscape policy and practice at EU level; and
- to organise a Final Conference in Brussels.

These different elements require LRG input at the start (setting up the stakeholder process), middle (reporting on stakeholder workshops and elaborate a communication strategy), and end (organising the final conference) of the project. In addition to Laurence le Dû-Blayo and Steven Shuttleworth, the LRG personnel formally named in the project proposal to contribute to this work are Paul Tabbush, Peter Howard and Gareth Roberts. However, we hope to be able to involve the wider membership in various ways as the work develops, especially to disseminate findings in a concise and reader-friendly way.

In the program, the deliverables will mostly be reviewed internally by HERCULES members who are not directly linked to the various Work Packages. So, in addition to its formal role in WP9, LRG will also make a wider contribution by acting in a 'critical friend' role in relation to the emerging findings of other Work Packages. A small number of individuals additional to the five named above may therefore be asked to assist with this critical friend role, although it will be crucial that anybody involved in this work recognises the need to maintain confidentiality during the project.

A research project such as HERCULES will also clearly lead to a number of academic papers. It is hoped these will be published in *Landscape Research* in due course – obviously subject to the usual editorial approval processes required for a peer-reviewed journal.

LRG's key charitable purpose is "to advance education and research, encourage interest and exchange information for the public benefit in the field of landscape and any related fields". We do this in many ways, not least through publishing the findings of research in *Landscape Research* and by organising and participating in conferences and other research-related events. But it is many years since LRG has been able to be directly involved in undertaking or commissioning research – the last time we have done so in any substantive way was promoting and managing the 'Nature-Experience Research Program' in 1984-88.

Involvement in Project HERCULES therefore represents an important step for LRG in getting more proactively involved in shaping the future landscape research agenda, which will complement our substantial involvement in a range of international research and policy networks. The next important step will be to agree a strategy which will give specific direction to LRG's activities intended to advance research for the public benefit. The Board, led by Chris Dalglish, is now working on this, and it is intended to be able to report progress and seek member views later this year.