

3.18. The Committee of the Regions would like to see particular attention drawn to the link between trade and development. The European Union should seek to open up the market further for products from developing countries.

3.19. The EU should also play a major role in future WTO negotiations to ensure that account is taken of the fundamental interests of the least developed countries, in the field of agriculture and associated activities in particular.

The EU must continue to be outspoken in their solidarity with these countries and act to bring about a world of co-operation and shared progress. There can be no doubt that such solidarity is essential in the interests of the whole planet.

3.20. The Committee of the Regions proposes working closely with the Commission to ensure that the distinctive regional features of European agriculture are duly brought to bear in the WTO negotiations.

Brussels, 14 June 2000.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*

Jos CHABERT

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'the Common agricultural policy and the conservation of Europe's cultural landscape'

(2000/C 317/05)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) ⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the Committee of the Regions opinion of 14 January 1999 on Agenda 2000 — the reform of the common agricultural policy (CdR 273/98 fin) ⁽²⁾;

having regard to the Committee of the Regions opinion of 14 January 1999 on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) (CdR 308/98 fin) ⁽³⁾;

having regard to the Cork Declaration of November 1996 on rural development;

having regard to the Committee of the Regions opinion of 16 January 1997 on a rural development policy (CdR 389/96 fin) ⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to the draft European Landscape Convention drawn up by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (Council of Europe);

having regard to the decision of its Bureau on 2 June 1999, under the fifth paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to issue an opinion on the common agricultural policy and the conservation of Europe's cultural landscape and to instruct Commission 2 for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries to undertake the preparatory work;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p. 80.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 9.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 116, 14.4.1997, p. 46.

having regard to the draft opinion (CdR 285/99 rev. 2) adopted by Commission 2 on 24 February 2000 (rapporteur: Mr Endlein, Landrat, Chairman of the German Association of District Councils, Northeim District Council, D/PSE),

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 34th plenary session of 14 and 15 June 2000 (meeting of 14 June).

1. Introduction

1.1. Protecting Europe's cultural landscape is a matter which should be a determining factor in many EU policymaking areas such as cultural policy, spatial planning and structural policy. However, the common agricultural policy (CAP) clearly has a particularly strong impact on the cultural landscape, because most agricultural strategies and measures have a direct effect on the use and appearance of the countryside.

1.2. However, scant attention has been paid to this interaction in the past few decades. Early CAP legislation made no mention of the term 'cultural landscape' and did not regard its preservation as an objective. Not until the CAP was reformed in 1992 and 1999 were the prerequisites established in terms of strategies and funding for the incorporation of non-agricultural objectives in the CAP. Since price and aid instruments can now be applied in tandem in the CAP, the CAP can respond with much greater flexibility to the social and economic issues involved in promoting agriculture and the rural environment and can thus include the conservation of the cultural landscape as an objective.

1.3. The Cork Declaration prepared the ground for broadening the range of objectives to include the protection of the cultural landscape. Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 also makes provision for funding for the period 2000-2006.

1.4. However, it is a fact that the conservation of the cultural landscape — both as an asset in its own right which concerns the whole of society but also as a task for agricultural policy — is still treated very much as a side issue. This opinion therefore seeks to highlight the need for a broadly-based discussion at European level in which regional and local authorities are also involved.

1.5. The opinion is structured as follows:

- It starts by defining the term 'cultural landscape' as an asset which impacts on the European way of life and culture, and sets objectives on the basis of this definition. This reveals the importance of the subject in all its different facets.
- It then tackles the question of to what extent the protection of the cultural landscape is or must be an objective of EU agricultural policy.

- Finally, it sets out conclusions with a view to launching a dialogue on the subject.

1.6. Naturally, the environmental objectives of agricultural policy and the conservation of the cultural landscape are closely interlinked. This opinion addresses the role of the CAP in maintaining the cultural landscape, whereas the environmental aspects are dealt with in the COR opinion on the Commission communication on sustainable agriculture⁽¹⁾. The two opinions complement each other.

2. The cultural landscape as a social, economic and cultural asset

2.1. The transformation of our natural environment into a cultural landscape has taken centuries. The cultural landscape is determined by topography and is extremely variegated because of the differing climatic conditions. One special feature, however, is that because of Europe's high population density, human habitation and agriculture extends over the whole of the continent. This distinguishes Europe from other continents, which are unpopulated or only thinly populated over wide areas.

2.2. Europe's cultural landscape covers a vast area which in the course of time has come to comprise woodland, farmland and areas designated for human habitation, working and recreation. This mix caters for a wide variety of human needs in both rural areas and more predominantly industrial societies. It has a regional, national and international dimension. Even in industrial society, such a mixed landscape caters for human needs better than a distribution pattern consisting of a few urban agglomerations and other areas for which humans have little use.

2.3. For this reason the cultural landscape which has been formed in the course of time in Europe is an extremely important socio-economic asset, allowing mankind to use the whole region for living, working, farming and recreation.

⁽¹⁾ CdR 183/99 fin — OJ C 156, 6.6.2000, p. 40.

2.4. However, the cultural landscape is also a cultural-aesthetic asset with long tradition. The historian Norbert Elias has described in his book on civilisation how European attitudes towards the countryside and its appearance changed with the dawning of the modern era. The more our purely natural environment was transformed into a cultural landscape (Elias uses the term 'man-made landscape'), the more the general public recognised and appreciated the greater variety of its aesthetic charm. The aesthetics of the countryside are based essentially on the topographical layout and the relationship between 'open' spaces (areas used for agriculture and human habitation) and 'closed' spaces (woodland). Italian Renaissance painting was the first to portray aesthetically beautiful and in many cases idealised landscapes. Baroque garden architecture, English landscaped parks and the Romantics' particularly close affinity to nature are the most famous historical embodiments of this change in attitude. Even today, terms such as regional and local identity are largely attributable to cultural landmarks. Landscape protection developed during the industrial era, becoming more and more synonymous with the protection of whole areas instead of individual natural monuments or historical gardens. Concepts such as the English garden cities developed, giving nature a place in the urban environment, too. These examples also show to what extent attitudes towards our surroundings and the countryside have remained constant.

2.5. Industrial society greatly influenced the way the cultural landscape was shaped right into the 19th century, and undoubtedly detracted from its aesthetic value. As a result of population redistribution and concentration in centres of industrial development, the cultural landscape developed as a dual phenomenon with an urban and a rural component. The rural component continues to this day to dominate the cultural landscape as a specific blend of open and closed spaces.

2.6. Assessing our cultural landscape in purely historical terms fails to recognise its full value. It is a part of most Europeans' everyday life and its care and maintenance is a matter of major concern to them. In leisure and recreational terms it benefits society as a whole. Modern forms of transport have brought urban and rural areas closer together again, not only providing an economic and environmental balance but also benefiting housing and recreation and adding to the enjoyment to be had from our cultural landscape and architectural heritage.

2.7. Tourism is an important if not the most important aspect of the local economy in many rural areas. This is the best illustration of the fact that the cultural landscape has a number of facets, embracing aesthetic-cultural values but also being of social, economic and environmental benefit.

2.8. Information about origin, which permits the general public to identify a product with a particular area, is increasing the value of many agricultural products more and more. The cultural landscape is the image which the consumer associates with an area and its products. Preserving and promoting this image and its associations is an excellent way of boosting the objective characteristics of farm and forestry products.

2.9. The conservation of the cultural landscape to satisfy social, economic, environmental and cultural requirements is a major task which affects the whole of society. The main purpose is to maintain traditional land-use levels and ratios in rural areas and to ensure that the landscape does not become monotonous and impoverished. This is a task which is best performed by farmers and forest companies. Assigning this task to others would be much less appropriate and also extremely expensive. This task also embraces the protection of detailed features of the countryside such as hedgerows, forest clearings, coppices, pastureland and wetlands.

2.10. It would be very regrettable if at a time when rural areas are in a better position to develop in their own right, thanks to modern means of transport and the growth in the service sector, the attractiveness of these rural areas were to decline because of the failure to conserve the distinguishing features and aesthetic aspects of the cultural landscape.

3. The CAP and the conservation of the cultural landscape

3.1. Depending on regional specificities, agriculture is the main use or the second main use for land after forestry. All other uses are proportionally much less significant. The interplay between woodland and farmland determines the appearance of the countryside in almost all parts of the EU. For this reason the transformation of agricultural structures and the general thrust of agricultural policy play a decisive role in shaping the cultural landscape.

3.2. The structural upheaval in agriculture (very high rise in productivity coupled with a sharp decline in employment) has so far not led to any fundamental changes in the traditional appearance of the countryside outside the new centres of population created by industry. The proportion of land used for farming in most Member States has remained more or less the same or has fallen only to the extent that the land has been required for other purposes, or in regions where depopulation and the low profitability of traditional agriculture have led to many farms being abandoned.

3.3. Even where farms have ceased production, the land has not been abandoned but has been let or sold for further use. The abandonment of uneconomic farmland is certainly a serious problem in some regions, but so far it is by no means the norm. A comparison of trends in the use made of farmland in three Member States has made this clear, but it also points to the danger of farmland becoming marginalised if there is a deterioration in the general environment created by regional and agricultural policymaking (See: The marginalisation of agricultural land in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, published by the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, The Hague, 1995).

Abandonment of farmland is a serious problem in upland and isolated regions of inland Europe. Factors such as the unprofitability of small farms, difficult terrain, harsh living conditions and the lack of investment in basic infrastructures and services have triggered a progressive withdrawal from farming and depopulation. The loss of the rural heritage has been most acutely felt in these particularly vulnerable areas, but is also becoming perceptible in flat, more economically advantaged regions, because of the growing marginalisation of much land currently in agricultural use as a result of the deteriorating general environment created by regional and agricultural policymaking

3.4. If the abandonment of farmland had been widespread, the cultural landscape would have lost many of its assets. This would have considerably impaired the development prospects for rural areas. There are areas in which abandonment of farmland is very widespread and the cultural landscape has lost many of its assets. This has considerably impaired the development prospects for rural areas. Given the conditions prevailing in Europe, forests are generally planted on abandoned farmland. This results in an impoverishment of the countryside, whose appearance is determined by the blend of open (agricultural) areas and closed wooded areas. A landscape consisting entirely of woodland is just as monotonous as a landscape which is over-farmed. The local population no longer feel at home in its surroundings and the recreational value of the area deteriorates for both locals and visitors.

The cultural landscape in Nordic regions consists mainly of vast expanses of boreal forest. In these regions the forest landscape has a specific value as a cultural landscape which must be taken into account by the CAP in its strategies and measures.

3.5. This does not mean that the purpose of conserving the cultural landscape is to ensure that land continues to be used for the same purpose at all costs. That would be an unrealistic demand. The purpose is rather to conserve the blend of open and closed spaces and to conserve sensitive landscape areas,

especially areas used for agriculture and forestry, which the general public can recognise as vital parts of a region's identity. This also includes biotopes and details which enhance the landscape.

3.6. Consequently, it is necessary to carefully examine which strategies and instruments are applied by the CAP in the pursuit of its objectives and how these relate in practical terms to the cultural landscape objective.

3.7. In the past insufficient account was taken of this aspect of agricultural policy. Until the 1992 reform the CAP was almost exclusively a pricing policy and this meant that farmers had to produce as much as possible to obtain an acceptable income. Seen from the point of view of the cultural landscape, the traditional CAP meant that agricultural land was exploited to the full and that the acreage farmed remained more or less the same, but at the same time product specialisation was stepped up to a point where vast tracts of the cultural landscape became impoverished in environment terms.

3.8. The reformed CAP is based on a combination of price support and direct aid. By varying the aid, incentives can be provided which further the objective of conserving the cultural landscape.

3.9. The positive effects for the cultural landscape are threefold:

- Extensification means that less intensive use is made of the soil, which is thus regenerated.
- Temporary set-aside means that use is still made of all farmland, which serves the objective of keeping the countryside open.
- By graduating the aid paid per hectare it is possible to conserve important areas of cultural landscape, which are often more costly to farm.

4. Conclusions

4.1. The Committee of the Regions notes that the value of (and danger to) Europe's cultural landscape is not fully recognised. This is all the more regrettable because the main argument used to justify and defend the European agricultural and forestry model is that it was needed to cater for a high population density and a highly diverse natural environment. Agriculture in Europe has developed the natural environment, thereby ensuring that a counterbalance is offered to urban areas, that rural populations can earn a living and that the population as a whole can engage in recreational pursuits. The cultural landscape is a social and economic asset but also has a cultural-aesthetic value.

4.2. The Committee thinks that in future the conservation of the cultural landscape must no longer be seen as a secondary objective. It must enjoy the same status as the other objectives of agriculture and agricultural policy. The Cork declaration has broadened the range of objectives. The inclusion of the cultural landscape is another major step on the road to meeting the demand for the integrated promotion of rural areas.

4.3. The bodies responsible for agricultural policy at European, national, regional and local authority level must indicate what agriculture and forestry do for the cultural landscape, pointing out that it is not private interests that are at stake but values which are important for the whole of society. In this respect, experience gained with regional nature parks can serve as an example.

4.4. Environmental protection in the field of agriculture and forestry (soil, water, air, protection of fauna and flora) and protection of the cultural landscape as both a socio-economic and cultural-aesthetic phenomenon are closely interrelated. The main purpose of maintaining the cultural landscape is to secure a regionally-adapted mix between open and closed spaces and protect sensitive areas of landscape. However, the cultural landscape also includes intensively farmed land, and the aim in such cases should be to revert to environmentally-benign farming. The common agricultural policy must therefore ensure that the agricultural sector is market-oriented and competitive and uses sustainable and environmentally-benign farming methods.

4.5. The Committee of the Regions considers that in the coming years it will be necessary to hold a broadly-based discussion about the origin and current state of Europe's cultural landscape and the future outlook (risks). It might be possible, for example, to arrange a follow-up to the Council of Europe's mid-Eighties campaign on the rural environment and the Landscape Convention currently being voted on in the Council of Europe. The results available from agricultural and regional planning studies on cultural landscape conservation and risks must be evaluated and attempts made to assess the scenarios developed in these studies in terms of their effect on the CAP.

4.6. The primary task of agriculture is to produce high-quality food. On top of this, farms provide a varied and ecologically valuable cultural landscape. This additional service must become better known and receive support. This work can only be done if young farmers are trained and provided with assistance. This also means using all available means to ensure that agricultural and forestry activity and the non-food sector survives in upland and other disadvantaged areas by recognising the environmental role of farmers, who are capable of ensuring that the following basic objectives can be attained: protection against fire, avalanches and erosion, management of woodland and water resources, maintenance of biodiversity

and the upkeep and conservation of the cultural landscape in general.

4.7. Regional and local planners and those responsible for implementing their plans can effectively support the conservation of the cultural landscape (by paying attention to balance in the structure of settlements so as to prevent the inappropriate use of land from escalating; by making allowances for the peripheral locations of settlements; by providing the right blend between open spaces and woodland depending on the topography; and by ensuring that important features of a landscape such as upland slopes and water meadows are not encroached on). Highlighting and protecting the traditional features of areas which the public associates with high-quality farm produce demands a particularly high sense of responsibility.

4.8. Grazing land and woodland areas greatly enhance the charm of upland areas and are also important for tourism in such areas. Action should be taken by policymakers to safeguard the presence of grazing cattle in these areas, and the planning of woodlands should also be specifically promoted in numerous regions.

4.9. The experience gained with environmental measures since the 1992 reform must be evaluated. It is also necessary to check to what extent the conservation of the cultural landscape is effectively supported by decentralisation, regional and local planning powers and the raising of public awareness. Local and regional authorities have often launched dynamic policies in this field, in which the EU Structural Funds form an important partner. Such measures support their aim: to encourage newcomers to settle in these rural areas and to boost their attractiveness for tourism, thereby also developing local economic activity.

4.10. If the cultural landscape is to be conserved, a broadly-based structural policy is required for villages and rural communities (also covering action to preserve the charm of villages). In particular, the rules and regulations governing land reform and rural conservation, insofar as they serve the conservation of cultural landscapes, are an effective instrument for maintaining a wide range of landscapes.

4.11. It is necessary to analyse the measures adopted under Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 and Leader II pilot projects in order to improve our understanding of their effect and thus the course being pursued by agricultural policy. Above all, it is necessary to examine the extent to which other CAP support measures conflict with the aim of conserving the cultural landscape. In particular, unproductive land, which forms an important part of the landscape, must be taken into consideration when determining the areas eligible for support.

4.12. The aim of conserving the cultural landscape can only be attained if a joint effort is made by all bodies responsible at EU, national, regional and local level for agricultural policy, nature conservation, environmental protection and spatial planning.

4.13. Practical studies should be carried out to discover the resources already being deployed on this task by the general public, the agricultural sector and regional and local authorities. The work on cultural landscape indicators should be continued and their inclusion in the

system of rural and agricultural indicators should be considered.

4.14. It is important to raise public awareness of these issues in urban and rural areas.

Brussels, 14 June 2000.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Jos CHABERT

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'The accessibility of rural areas'

(2000/C 317/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to its Bureau's decision of 2 June 1999 to draw up an opinion, under Article 265(5) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on The accessibility of rural areas, and to entrust Commission 2 (Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries) with the relevant preparatory work;

having regard to the Committee's opinion of 16 January 1997 on a Rural Development Policy (CdR 389/96 fin)⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the Cork Declaration of November 1996 on rural development;

having regard to the Committee's opinion of 14 January 1999 on Agenda 2000 — Reform of the CAP (CdR 273/98 fin)⁽²⁾;

having regard to the Committee's opinion of 14 January 1999 on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) (CdR 308/98 fin)⁽³⁾;

having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to the contribution to the draft opinion from Commission 5 (Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism), adopted by that commission on 19 October 1999 (CdR 348/99 fin) (rapporteur: Mr Torchio, Mayor of Spineda, I/EPP);

having regard to the draft opinion adopted by Commission 2 on 4 May 2000 (CdR 132/2000 rev.) (rapporteur: Mr van Gelder, Queen's Commissioner in the Province of Zeeland, NL/EPP),

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 116, 14.4.1997, p. 46.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 9.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p. 80.