

Towards Landscape Justification: Participative Planning for Preserving Landscape Identity in Surčin, Serbia

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Keywords: landscape character, landscape quality objectives, just city, co-design, geodesign, scenario

Abstract Since the adoption of the European Landscape Convention (ELC, 2000) and growing calls for climate justice, landscape has emerged as a crucial dimension in discussions on spatial justice. However, it remains underrepresented in formal planning processes. As an expression of spatial justice, the ELC encourages assessing landscape quality objectives through both scientific and traditional knowledge, involving all stakeholders - officials, experts, and local communities. The Municipality of Surčin, within Belgrade administrative area, is experiencing intense spatial transformation driven by national large-scale infrastructure projects (e.g. EXPO 2027, the National Football Stadium) and investor-driven demand for residential and commercial development. These developments risk undermining the sensitive landscape character which embraces traditional values, social structures, and ecological functions, particularly the floodplain and steppe-like rural mosaics that have historically defined its identity. Current planning practices overlook the diversity, sensitivity, or climate-adaptive potential of such landscapes, while also failing to meaningfully involve/engage local communities in shaping transformation processes and an essential element of procedural justice (Rocco, 2023). This paper advocates for an integrated approach to landscape justification as recognitional and procedural justice in landscape and spatial planning. It aims to develop a framework, based on geodesign methodology (Steinitz, 2012), for preserving and enhancing landscape identity through integrated, collaborative, participative landscape planning. The research is part of the ongoing project "Preservation and Enhancement of Landscape Diversity and Character in the Municipality of Surčin," coordinated by the University of Belgrade Faculty of Forestry. The focus is on building inclusive participation processes and highlighting the need for just planning processes sensitive to landscape capacity and recognised through local knowledge. The research approach is based on landscape character assessment, complemented by stakeholder interviews and active community participation through co-design and scenario planning workshops. Preliminary results suggest that recognition of landscape values and their quality objectives through participation fosters broader public awareness and more democratic decision-making. Local communities, often excluded from formal planning, express strong attachments to landscape features that contribute to place identity and climate resilience, such as forest remnants, agricultural fields, and water bodies. This research contributes to debates on spatial and climate justice by demonstrating how landscape identity, when meaningfully recognised through participative planning processes, can serve as both a functional and cultural basis for equitable urban transitions.