

The role of design in sustainable regional landscape strategies

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Nowadays, the landscape is often perceived in ways that have little relation to intangible elements, the cultural importance and the social context that come along with our daily lives. Especially in regional strategies, the landscape is often seen as the land where the potential scheme will be developed or as the natural environment that will surround the project. This research argues that this approach is far from what we should aim for in the future. Landscape is not only the physical context of an area, it is the ‘medium’ that could establish a vision for the whole region, create values, share memories of our lives and reveal the landscape potential.

The focus here is to put landscape at the core of development considering major environmental, economic and social challenges and find key quality elements such as low carbon, aesthetics and design that will impact to landscape quality arising aspirations and values for the region.

This proposal is presenting the outcomes of two major pioneer landscape infrastructure projects that use the idea of design aim to offer sustainable approaches in a regional and national scale. Both projects aimed to transform the landscape in a way that will result in a major change to residents’ way of living and understanding of the landscape value. An investigation on climate adaptation issues through the ‘Room for the River’ (the Netherlands) national programme demonstrates the potential and significance of introducing the idea of landscape design, low carbon and aesthetics as vital aspects of urban and regional infrastructure. In addition the HS2/HS2LV (UK) major infrastructure project played a significant role at looking how a sophisticated process in design and effective visuals are able to convey a sustainable vision and the impact that this might have had for the cities and the regions for revealing their real potential.

The case studies have shown that successful delivery requires the development of a vision and the understanding of the low carbon and spatial quality concepts through design in order to be implemented on the infrastructure.

What this research concludes is that not only one action is needed in order to change the way of thinking in regional landscape projects and instil low carbon and spatial quality elements in their design and implementation. The establishment of a solid project framework, supported by policies and legislations will make a real difference in the way professional practice and politics deal with this from now on. Especially when it comes to ‘design’, its establishment at the start of the process is vital for the sufficient development of a landscape vision and a narrative. This proposal suggests that we need to make design secure throughout the landscape process in order to be able to express the significance of a visual in large scale strategic schemes.