

Embracing the desert. A landscape design approach to resilient agriculture and biodiversity in the Simeto River Basin, Sicily

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# agriCULTURAL landscapes

30 years of landscape  
architecture education  
in Nitra

# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

# ECLAS NITRA 2025

06--11-09-2025



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30 years of landscape  
architecture education  
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# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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ECLAS CONFERENCE NITRA  
06--11-09-2025

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Rediscovering Agriculture by Landscape Architecture

ANJA BRÜLL

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Challenges and opportunities in the Three-Countries Park

ALENA SALAŠOVÁ

Rural Landscape Restoration versus Innovation:

Inspiring approaches to the planning and restoration of agricultural

landscapes in the past, present, and future

LIONEL FANSHAWE

Delivering Multi-Functional Outcomes from Rural Landscapes:

Lessons from Hampshire Farming Test and Trials project for the

UK Environmental Land Management Agenda

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## ABOUT ECLAS

THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
SCHOOLS

The European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools exists to foster and develop scholarship in landscape architecture throughout Europe by strengthening contacts and enriching the dialogue between members of Europe's landscape academic community and by representing the interests of this community within the wider European social and institutional context. In pursuit of this goal the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools seeks to build upon the Continent's rich landscape heritage and intellectual traditions.

The first pan-European meeting of landscape schools was convened by Berlin Technical University in 1989 under the title Europäische Hochschulkonferenz Landschaft. This was followed by a second meeting in Vienna in 1990. The European Conference of Landscape Architecture Schools was formed as a result of the

success of the Berlin and Vienna meetings and met first in Wageningen in the Netherlands in 1991. This meeting was followed by a series of further annual conferences. At the 2000 Conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia, a decision was taken to expand the activities of ECLAS beyond the annual conferences and to symbolise this by changing the name of the organisation to the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools. In 2006 ECLAS was incorporated as a not-for-profit member organisation under Dutch Law, with a formal set of statutes and standing orders. A new logo and corporate identity weredesigned at the same time.

<https://www.eclas.org/>

# ABOUT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

## LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN THE ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Landscape architecture is the discipline concerned with mankind's conscious shaping of his external environment. It involves planning, design and management of the landscape to create, maintain, protect and enhance places so as to be both functional, beautiful and sustainable (in every sense of the word), and appropriate to diverse human and ecological needs. The exceptionally wide-ranging nature of the landscape means that the subject area is one of unusual breadth, drawing on and integrating not just material from the two sides of the traditional divide between the creative arts and the natural sciences, but incorporating many aspects of the humanities and technology as well.

This complexity is closely reflected by the diversity of approaches to the discipline which can be found throughout Europe, a diversity which is clearly illustrated by the range of dif-

ferent types of higher education institutions across Europe in which landscape architecture teaching has been established. These range from universities specialising in the fine arts to those dedicated to agriculture and forestry, and encompass technical universities as well as the more broadly-based 'general' universities.

<https://www.eclas.org/about-eclas/landscape-architecture-the-european-dimension/>

# EUROPEAN FRAMEWORKS FOR LANDSCAPE AND DESIGN

COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANDSCAPE  
CONVENTION AND  
THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

In 2025, we celebrate 25 years since the Landscape Convention has been opened for signature in Florence. The aim of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention, ratified to date by 40 member States, is the protection, management and planning of the landscape, with reference to the entire territory of the States parties, promoting public awareness and participation. ECLAS is one of the recognized NGOs monitoring and supporting the implementation of the Landscape Convention.

ECLAS is a member of the New European Bauhaus. The New European Bauhaus is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative that connects the European Green Deal to our living spaces and experiences. This conference aims at supporting networking and knowledge creation for the New European Bauhaus. It unites experts to shape sustainable and inclusive environments.

The New European Bauhaus (NEB), launched by the European Commission in 2020, is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative that connects the European Green Deal to our living spaces and experiences. It envisions making the green transition not only sustainable but also beautiful and inclusive. By promoting solutions that combine *sustainability*, *aesthetics*, and *inclusion*, NEB encourages diverse stakeholders to co-design, experiment, and implement projects that enhance both the environment and everyday living. This conference aims to support networking and knowledge creation for the New European Bauhaus. It unites experts to shape sustainable and inclusive environments.

[https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en)

ATTILA TÓTH, Assoc. Prof. Dr.  
ECLAS 2025 Conference Chair

# AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES

30 YEARS OF LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION  
IN NITRA

WHY IN NITRA? 30 years ago, the Faculty of Horticulture and Landscape Engineering was established at the Slovak University of Agriculture (SUA) in Nitra. This occasion marked the beginning of landscape architecture education in Slovakia, building upon the tradition of the Lednice landscape school in Czechoslovakia.

WHY AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES? Nitra is often referred to as the capital of agriculture in Slovakia. It is situated in the fertile Danube Lowland and agriculture has played a central role here for centuries. Moreover, Nitra has been the hub of the most important national institutions for agricultural research, innovation, education, and exhibition. SUA Nitra is the only agricultural university in the country and currently the only university providing landscape architecture education.

With this year's ECLAS conference, we want to celebrate three decades of landscape architecture education in the agricultural capital, at the only agricultural university in one of the most important agricultural regions of Slovakia. Thus, the theme agriCULTURAL landscapes.

The challenge of ensuring food production and biodiversity conservation on the same land, while enabling mitigation of and adaptation to changing climate presents significant challenges for agriculturally shaped landscapes. How can agriCULTURAL landscapes become more multifunctional, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable? How can they be socially acceptable, ecologically ambitious, and economically viable? What is the role of current and future landscape architects in planning and designing sustainable agriCULTURAL landscapes?

Agriculture has long shaped our landscapes, creating a dynamic relationship between food production and the natural environment. Over centuries, agricultural practices have not only provided the basis for human survival, but also given rise to diverse cultural landscapes, traditional knowledge systems, and regionally specific patterns of land use. Fields, pastures, orchards, and irrigation networks have become integral elements of the rural identity, connecting communities to their environment and contributing to heritage values that persist to this day.

Today, these agriculturally shaped landscapes face growing and often conflicting challenges: ensuring reliable food production and biodiversity conservation on the same land, while also enabling climate protection and adaptation. At the same time, they play a crucial role in the global food chain, which is under increasing pressure to meet rising demands for both quantity and quality of food, while maintaining environmental sustainability and social equity.

Climate change, soil degradation, water scarcity, and urban expansion further disrupt this delicate balance, threatening both productivity and ecological systems. Agricultural intensification risks eroding biodiversity and depleting natural resources, while abandonment of marginal farmland can lead to loss of cultural landscapes and traditional practices. In parallel, consumer expectations, policy frameworks, and technological innovation are reshaping the ways in which landscapes are managed, creating both opportunities and tensions between local needs and global pressures.

How can we perceive, plan, and design agriCULTURAL landscapes? By reimagining agricultural landscapes as multifunctional spaces, we can align food production with biodiversity conservation, soil health, and climate resilience. This approach not only supports local landscapes, but also strengthens the global food chain, ensuring its sustainability, equity, and capacity to feed future generations. Innovative solutions and collaborative efforts across sectors are essential to create systems that are productive, resilient, and beneficial for both people and nature on a global scale.

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**EMBRACING THE DESERT.****A LANDSCAPE DESIGN APPROACH****TO RESILIENT AGRICULTURE****AND BIODIVERSITY****IN THE SIMETO RIVER BASIN, SICILY**

This contribution addresses the pressing challenges facing agricultural landscapes, specifically focusing on desertification processes in the Simeto River Basin, Sicily. Characterized by diverse morphologies and intensive agricultural practices, the Simeto basin is experiencing increasing environmental degradation due to climate change, unsustainable land use, and water scarcity. Rather than resisting this transition, the research project explores adaptation strategies that embrace the emerging desert landscape as a new ecological reality. The objective is to govern the inevitable transformation of the environment and extract potential benefits in terms of agricultural sustainability and enhanced biodiversity within a system currently dominated by monoculture.

Desertification, affecting over 30% of the Earth's surface, is a key concern. This study moves beyond conventional mitigation strategies by proposing a design framework that integrates desert-adapted solutions into the existing agricultural matrix. The approach acknowledges the "intrinsic fragility" of ecosystems altered by urbanization and pollution and emphasizes the need for adaptation rather than outright prevention.

Through a comprehensive environmental analysis, the study identifies three key macro-areas within the Simeto basin: the Next Desert Area, the Arid Crops Area, and the Oasis Area. The Next Desert Area includes regions with high susceptibility to desertification and hilly morphology. Here, interventions focus on water retention through weir systems that encourage spontaneous vegetation growth, alongside experimental agricultural practices to identify drought-resistant crops. The Arid Crops Area consists of fertile flatlands currently subjected to intensive monoculture. To improve resilience, the study promotes crop diversification by introducing species such as prickly pear, which require less water, along with the implementation of underground basins for rainwa-

ter harvesting. The Oasis Area corresponds to ecologically valuable environments along seasonal watercourses, which require protection and enhancement. In this case, interventions prioritize the removal of agricultural activity to foster native vegetation, creating riparian woodlands and wetlands that contribute to increased biodiversity.

A central element of the project is the establishment of ecological connections between these macro-areas, fostering a resilient landscape capable of adapting to increasing aridity. The proposal also integrates flood management strategies, viewing flood events as opportunities for ecological growth through controlled inundation and nutrient redistribution.

Additionally, the study advances three key objectives. First, it promotes biodiversity by encouraging the use of native and drought-resistant species, creating a more sustainable ecosystem. Second, it respects the cultural significance of existing agricultural heritage, ensuring traditional practices are integrated into sustainable methods. Finally, it enhances community well-being by improving long-term food security and economic resilience through diversified agriculture.

The study adopts a scenario-based approach, projecting the landscape evolution to 2050 under both current trends and the proposed interventions. Without intervention, projections indicate a 24.4% increase in desertified areas within the Simeto basin. However, the implementation of the proposed strategies aims to reduce this increase to 14%, while simultaneously mitigating the exposure of agricultural and oasis areas through a more biodiverse and structurally resilient landscape. By embracing the concept of "arid cultural landscapes" and integrating them into a functional and sustainable ecosystem, this project provides a replicable model for regions facing similar environmental challenges.

