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**PECSRL 2018: EUROPEAN LANDSCAPES FOR QUALITY OF LIFE,  
3-9 SEPTEMBER 2018, CLERMONT-FERRAND AND MENDE, FRANCE**

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# PECSRL 2018: EUROPEAN LANDSCAPES FOR QUALITY OF LIFE, 3-9 SEPTEMBER 2018, CLERMONT-FERRAND AND MENDE, FRANCE

Maria BOSTENARU DAN<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This article presents a review of the 28th session of the biannual conference of the Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape which was organized in cooperation with the COST action TU1401 “Renewable energy and landscape quality”, building the final conference of the later, after a previous cooperation at the 27th session. The conference was held in Clermont-Ferrand and Mende, around the Chaîne des Puys UNESCO landscape. The landscape, although in France, is one of the remote landscapes in Europe, and was explored by means of the study tours which built the transfer between the first part of the conference in Clermont-Ferrand and the second one in Mende. These tours were various, but emphasized a dimension already present in the session, the agricultural landscape as rural landscape. The agricultural landscape stays also in connection with the geo-products of the UNESCO geopark, and contributes to the quality of life. As management committee substitute in the COST action, a networking scheme funded at European level, the author attended the sessions related to the topic of the action and presented a contribution highlighting the romantic of historic renewable energy landscapes. Their perception contributes to the quality of life as well. Other participants from Romania participated to a dedicated session on Eastern Europe.

*Keywords:* rural; landscape; geopark; agriculture; renewable energy.

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## Introduction

COST RELY<sup>1</sup> was a research network of 34 European countries, funded by COST (The European Cooperation in Science and Technology) between 2014 and 2018. A COST action like this do not fund research itself, but only networking between nationally funded projects. Such networking actions include management committee and working group (WG) meetings, but also short term scientific missions (STSM) between participating countries (for which the author applied, but was not awarded), and inclusiveness target country<sup>2</sup> conference (ITC) participations for early career researchers (the author benefitted of one such, for the Energy, resources and environment programme group at the European Geosciences Union (EGU) General Assembly in Vienna, in April 2018). The author was management committee substitute, which means representing Romania at the meetings, but only when one of the two management committee members validated by the COST national office could not participate, as replacement. Each country is represented in a COST action by management committee members, management committee substitutes and WG members. These members get cost reimbursement to the respective meetings. Apart of this, to STSM and training schools, as well as ITC grants, anyone from and to a country which signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) can participate. The MoU is built upon the project submission for a COST action, and adhering as management committee members through the national agency means signing the MoU. Often, the meetings are associated to a conference. Given the involvement of the COST action twice with the PECSRL conference, this paper gives a review of the second involvement, where the action was also co-organiser, and the conference was counted as final conference of the action, a typical networking instrument. Former involvements, including the other PECSRL conference, but not only (another example was European Conference of the Landscape Research Group: “Energy Landscapes” 16-18 Sep 2015, with a special session RELY in Dresden/DE, where the author participated in the management committee meeting but not in the conference), scheduled the meetings in advance of the conference, but participation to the conference itself was not compulsory. Such grouping is also practiced by other COST actions. The focus lays thus on the involvement, this meaning that the accent lays on the COST sessions at the conference, which the author attended. The topic of the conference was relevant because landscape quality, affected by renewable energy installations or not, contributes to “landscapes for quality of life”, in what regards the socioenvironment, and the action dealt with European landscapes. To this contributed also the field trips which will be presented.

## Overview of the conference sessions

The Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape (PECSRL<sup>3</sup>) held its 28<sup>th</sup> session of the biennial conference in two locations in France: Clermont-Ferrand and Mende.

The conference was co-organised as closing conference of the COST action TU1401 RELY “Renewable energy and landscape quality”. As such, both open and closed sessions addressed this topic. The author of this review co-authored with Roxana Triboi a presentation on historical energy landscapes, including all those wind and water mills we see in village museums. Outcomes will be available in the photo database, which will be concluded after the end of the action.

**The closed session** “Renewable energy and landscape quality” took place over four hours on Monday, and two hours on Tuesday at the location in Clermont-Ferrand. An introduction was provided by the chair of the action. Then the presentations followed the contents of the book (Michael Roth, Sebastian Eiter, Sina Röhner, Alexandra Kruse, Serge Schmitz, Bohumil Frantál, Csaba Centeri, Marina Frolova, Matthias Buchecker, Dina Stober, Isidora Karan and Dan van der Horst (eds.): *Renewable Energy and Landscape Quality*, Berlin: Jovis, 2018). As such, the first presentation was on national overviews. The author of this review was co-author at the national overview of Romania. Each country had a few pages with an overview. Then for each of the working groups the chair, seconded by the vice-chair, gave an overview of the achievements over the four years funding period. The four working groups were: WG1 Review-Meta-analysis, WG2 Case studies, WG3 Sociocultural aspects, WG4 Dissemination. In this sense, WG1 presented impact of renewable energies on landscape for hydro-, wind, solar, bio- and geothermal energies, WG2 – international smart practice in crowded landscapes, WG3 – a toolbox for effective planning, WG4 – a common language for more equity.

Other closed sessions regarded: landscape under transition, landscape justice and the quality of life, exploring landscape boundaries and Natura 2000, methodology and conceptual frameworks for territorial inclusive development in highlands. Landscape justice and the quality of life, for example, regarded recreation, but also the right of uncultivated food for food production. Since this was a closed session and many sessions overlapped, it could not be attended.

**The open session** was divided in five parts of two hours each, featuring five presentations each. The first two were on Tuesday afternoon, still in Clermont-Ferrand. In the first session, two papers regarded impact of renewable energy, while the others dealt with the future of planning, including which competences are necessary. While in the first session there were methodologies or cross country overviews, in the second session, specific case studies from Italy and Sweden were considered. A particular accent was on participation, which was also the focus of the case studies in the WG3 questionnaire of the action. Other papers dealt with

eco-design and the role of technology. Then on Wednesday, the field trips were done, and the other took place in Mende, all three on Thursday, one in the morning and two in the afternoon (whole day). The first session dealt only with case studies, out of which four were geographically bound and one typological, about dams, like one of the case studies. In the second session, the author presented the paper, among four other papers all dealing with wind energy. The own paper looked at the romantics of energy in historic wind mills, but also water mills, and also at historic energy landscapes in the closer past, such as solar energy in the IBA Emscher Park, a conversion of an industrial area to high technology in the 1990s. Questions from the public concerned how this high quality of integration could be achieved today. An answer might be given by the Expo 2015 in Milan “Feeding the planet, energy for life”. The third part dealt, again, with a mix of geographic case studies and typology case studies, such as biogas (three presentations), or solar energy. Numerous case studies were from Eastern Europe, showing the involvement of Inclusiveness target countries.

Other open sessions regarded: engaging all five senses with the landscape: exploring sensorial tools for the representation, design, planning and management of rural landscape, the diversity of outland use in past and present. Indistinct traces of diverse practices, “European Landscape transition across Europe. The challenge of Central and Eastern Europe”, “Landscapes of tourism destinations: What quality of life?”, intangible benefits of agricultural landscapes, mapping and tools about landscape change, traditional landscapes: exploring connections between landscape, identity, heritage and change, “a European identity for food sovereignty?”, gaming as a mediation tool. As it can be seen, the issue of food is repeated in the open sessions, and connected in Europe to the Global South, as some of these were related to the closed sessions. Tourism is also seen in close connection to quality of life. The field trips further explored these issues (at least three field trips dealt with geoproducts, as we will mention, connected to food, while the trip the author participated in, dealt with slow tourism, as it will be shown). The colleagues from Romania participating in the conference participated to “European Landscape transition across Europe. The challenge of Central and Eastern Europe”, which took place in Mende on Thursday, in two sessions, simultaneously with the “renewable energy” session. There were nine presentations from Romania, Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, while the last two countries were encompassed in more presentations, and in connection with their neighbouring Finland.

The conference was accompanied by a *poster exhibition* of the COST action comprising eight posters presenting: an overview, the participants, the activities, the main findings of the four working groups (including maps with case studies considered), the winners of the photo competitions. The author won with two photographs different prizes, one general presenting the traditional windmills in Belgium the Netherlands (as in the presentation at the conference) and one on letting the flyer of the action travel, which presented wind mills in the natural park

Donauaue in Vienna. A third competition regarded connection between writing and energy photographs. These were part of WG4, along with a glossary to which she also contributed with translations in national language<sup>4</sup>, although the author was part of WG2, where she contributed several case studies. In the permanent exhibition available on the web site, this last poster was replaced by two posters on the training schools<sup>5</sup>. A working version of the travelling exhibition has been previously itinerated and still can be. An intention is to bring it to the Balkan Geophysics conference in 2021, where Renewable energy is a topic.

It was not the first involvement of COST RELY at a PECSRL conference. At PECSRL 2016 “Mountains, uplands, lowlands – European landscapes from an altitudinal perspective” (5-9 September in Innsbruck and Seefeld, Austriapecsrl2016.com) the COST action had a session on “Renewable energies in mountain landscapes: conflicts and synergies”, and held its management and working group meetings connected to this. Field trips included “Energy landscape of Tyrol”, with an experimental solar energy park at Jenbach, Lake Achensee and its limestone surroundings, Silz hydropower station and the pump storage power plant at Kühtai, so the focus was on hydropower. For the PECSRL conference, the Landscape Research Group was a partner, and as such there was a review in an article<sup>6</sup>.

### **Field trips**

In addition to presentations, excursions were organised between Clermont-Ferrand and Mende, to better know the landscapes of the Massif central area. A small part of this area has been recently awarded UNESCO status as volcanic geopark landscape. But also the rest of the area displays similar characteristics. The city of Clermont-Ferrand itself displays architecture in volcanic stone, with the biggest cathedral of this type (Cathédrale Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption de Clermont-Ferrand, 13<sup>th</sup> century), and different, for example, from the volcanic stone architecture in the Azores, which is rather rural. But once leaving Clermont-Ferrand, the architecture of Massif Central becomes rural as well. Even in Mende, apart of an impressive cathedral, construction is low rise. In Clermont-Ferrand, the conference was held in the architecture school, a former sanatory of Modernism (Sabourin, 1929-34, architect Albéric Aubert), with different approach and materials, compared to the tradition around. The mountain landscape was adequate in that time for this architecture programme. In Mende, the conference location and co-organiser was the University of Perpignan Via Domitia, which is involved in renewable energies, particularly solar power research and teaching. The ENSA (the architecture university) in Clermont-Ferrand, where the part in Clermont-Ferrand was held) and COST RELY were cooperating with the organisers.

The field trips were: “Local governance of landscape linked to agro-ecological transitions along the banks of the Allier River”, “Managing volcanic landscapes

by grazing in a World Heritage context in the Chaîne des Puys – Limagne Fault”, “Around the Puy Mary Mount: Slow tourism as a lever for local development in the Cantal Mountains”, “Aubrac Natural Regional Park, the power of coherent basket of goods (cattle, cheese, knife, gastronomy, local heritage and landscape)”, “Trainscape, travelling into the Massif Central landscapes and discover the associated products at the speed of a mountain train”, “Causses and Gorges du Tarn: heritage, quality products and local development”.

The author of the review opted for Field trip #3, exploring slow tourism. During this trip, a first stop was held at the “Pêcher lake”, then it proceeded with meetings with stakeholders in the Cantal mountains (lodging – a B&B in Fortuniès and gastronomy – Ferme Auberge des Arbres, with local traditional food), finally visiting the Puy Mary “grande site”. To be noted about the trip is that internet and telephone connection was gone after leaving Clermont-Ferrand, and that this landscape (and the others in the trips, ex. Cévennes) are described also by Sylvain Tesson in “Sur les chemins noirs” (2016), where the author is looking in Europe for landscapes where remote places can be found in Western Europe. Slow tourism is an option to protect sites from over tourism, which was the topic of a recent conference of the International Union of Architects in Baku. The visit to Puy Mary revealed how geoparks can be managed, and what landscape interventions can take place, including geotextiles.

## Conclusions

The format of coupling the final conference of a COST action with a conference series was a success. Not only this contributed to the success of this COST action as a whole, presented in the COST Annual Report 2018<sup>7</sup>. The common organisation, coupled with the continuity, as long as the action permitted, led to exchange with other participants. Networking with members was done already before, for example, through a Domus scholarship in Hungary to one of the WG1 members from Hungary, and the meetings in Dresden and in Clermont-Ferrand helped this cooperation with the respective university (formerly Corvinus, now Szent István, where landscape architecture is) to continue, and is further continued in Domus scholarships also after the end of the action, and hopefully also the Erasmus agreement between the two will be used. The quality of life connected to renewable energy was presented, reflected in various perceptions, techniques and public participation for approval and survey of best practices.

Funding schemes such as COST were reviewed by the author at a session on mobility at the EuroScience Open Forum in Copenhagen in 2014 (article in Nature) as “virtual mobility” already, as they require only short time mobility coupled with virtual cooperation (travel is about few days to a month). In the current pandemic situation, the funding schemes of COST actions are not so effective, even if they are more effective than long term mobility, but COST RELY partnered during

its time also with *Le Notre*<sup>8</sup> for online lecture series in landscape. Attila Toth, a member of the network who presented at the conference, is now *Le Notre* chair and hopefully cooperation will continue. The Domus scholarships are a way of virtual mobility, combined with short term visits of a few weeks as well.

In 2020, a next edition of the PECSRL conference was scheduled for PECSRL 2020 21-27 September Jaén and Baeza (Spain) “Living together in European Rural Landscapes”. The conference was not switched to an online version, but instead rescheduled for 27 September – 1 October 2021. Given the weight of the field trips, the online version would have been challenging, but it has been done for the *Le Notre* Landscape Forum, although that one included working with landscapes as well. Again a session is foreseen on “Living together towards sustainable energy transition in European landscapes” by former action members.

The PECSRL 2018 conference in the Chaîne des Puys – Limagne Fault context are not unrelated to the Energy, resources and environment programme group at the European Geosciences Union General Assembly in Vienna, where the COST action funded a conference participation to the author. In 2019, the author participated with a heritage paper on water to the Geodiversity and geoheritage session, which is organised since a few years, and which featured posters on this geopark by one of the organisers and some of the participants, as well as a Splinter meeting with geopark products. Geopark products were also featured at the doctorate defense on pastoral landscapes, also featured at the PECSRL conference, of the co-author from this conference, later on in the year. In 2016 geoparks built also a session at PECSRL. The EGU conference session on geoheritage is subject of a separate review, which is in print for the journal *Geopatterns*.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> COST action TU1401 “Renewable energy and landscape quality”, <http://cost-rely.eu/>.

<sup>2</sup> The COST strategy on geographical spread includes special measures for less research-intensive member countries, including Romania. Available at <https://www.cost.eu/who-we-are/cost-strategy/excellence-and-inclusiveness/>.

<sup>3</sup> Website: <https://pecsrl2018.sciencesconf.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Glossary on Renewable Energy terms and Landscape Quality, Published: *Journal of Landscape Ecology* 2018, Special Issue 2, [http://www.tajokologiailapok.szie.hu/pdf/2018\\_SpecialIssue2/2018specialissue2.pdf](http://www.tajokologiailapok.szie.hu/pdf/2018_SpecialIssue2/2018specialissue2.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> <http://cost-rely.eu/resources/travelling-exhibition>.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Shuttleworth (2017) Fifty years of Landscape Research Group, *Landscape Research*, 42:sup1, S5-S64, DOI: 10.1080/01426397.2017.1399995.

<sup>7</sup> [https://issuu.com/costprogramme/docs/cost\\_ar2018](https://issuu.com/costprogramme/docs/cost_ar2018), p. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> The LE NOTRE Institute (LNI) is associated to ECLAS (The European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools) and performs certain activities.

Annexes



*Figure 1.* Volcanic landscape in Clermont-Ferrand, connected to the UNESCO heritage geopark of volcanoes in the region: Cathédrale Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption de Clermont-Ferrand



*Figure 2.* The conference location in Clermont-Ferrand (Sabourin converted in architecture school)



*Figure 3.* COST RELY Poster exhibition at the conference



*Figure 4.* Lake Pêcher



*Figure 5.* The hamlet – accommodation in the geopark



*Figure 6.* The gastronomy – connected to geoproducts



*Figure 7.* Typical cow breed for the region – one of the sources for geoproducts



*Figure 8.* The grand site: Puy Mary volcano, a similar area to the UNESCO inscribed one



Figure 9. Conference location in Mende



Figure 10. Geopark landscape in Mende



*Figure 11.* Cathedral in Mende (cathédrale Notre-Dame-et-Saint-Privat de Mende, 14<sup>th</sup> century)