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The Nordic Landscape: Manifestation of Diversity, Resource for Growth

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The Danish botanist and geographer, Joachim Frederik Schouw was not just a world renowned physical scientist; he was also passionately involved in the Scandinavian movement to bring democracy and development to Norden. In 1844 the organization called the *Scandinavian Society*, which he helped found, published a speech by him called *Scandinavia's Nature and People* in which he said:

“Denmark's nature is ... not Scandinavian in the narrow sense, it is more similar to the German than to the Norwegian or Swedish. But then one should also conclude that the Danish people are more German than Scandinavian? This would be so if it were the case that it were true that a people's character is determined by, or is significantly dependent upon, the nature of that land which the people inhabit... [The character of folk] does not have its foundation in the land's soil or climate, it has its soil, its intellectual soil in *History*, out of which it springs, – has its intellectual climate in *Language*, in which it lives and moves.”

For Schouw, and the movement he helped start, the key to Nordic democratic social and economic growth was the heritage of the landscape understood as a place, or regional arena (e.g. Värmland, Aaland, Jutland, Trondelag, Savolaks), within which the people of the north had historically shaped their polity and its environment according to customary “landscape law” – often as formalized by representative bodies like the *ting*. Thus, even though the raw nature of the Northern peoples differed, they did have a shared cultural heritage that had shaped its peoples and nature as landscape. Today, the Nordic countries have achieved both democracy, socio-economic and urban growth, and Nordic cooperation regularly brings us together. Another reminder of this common landscape heritage is the pan-Nordic common right of access that gives, to varying degrees, the Nordic peoples an internationally unparalleled recreative use right to the land, also in urbanized areas. As a use right, however, it also forms the customary basis for people's identification with, and care for, these landscapes' cultural and natural heritage. Economic growth and urbanism has created new challenges for Nordic cultural and natural heritage policy, at the same time, however, as the heritage of democracy and shared environmental concern, left to us by Nordic pioneers like Schouw, provides a common resource for a future in which Norden has increasingly become a part of a Europe which is larger than the European Union.

The *Council of Europe* has recently promulgated the *European Landscape Convention*. Its definition of landscape, which resonates with the traditional Nordic landscape, is: “an area, as

perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. According to the ELC: “the landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and [...] it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity”. This landscape is, furthermore, “an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas”. Thus, much as the landscape provided a basis for Nordic identity in Schouw’s pre-industrial era, it is likewise providing such a basis for a more urbanized European identity today. The ELC arguably reflects major trends in Europe and the world that affect everything from the consumption of foods and goods to the choice of tourist destination. Our rich heritage in this area should thus be able to give Norden an important leadership strength in developing the natural and cultural heritage of landscape, both for sustainable social development and well-being, and for economic growth in rural, peri-urban and urban areas.