



# **Discussion Paper: Global Standards and Certification for Landscape Architects**

Prepared for the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) by:

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## Context

For months if not years there has been discussion throughout the landscape architecture profession and its supporting organizations about the potential opportunities and challenges of a global standard and certification system.

Those who have expressed interest in the concept cite its potential benefits:

- Greater professional recognition and status (several countries lack title/practice acts or do not recognize landscape architecture as an independent profession)
- Expanded body of knowledge as it relates to professional practice
- Increased professionalism
- Enhanced ability to attract the “best and brightest” into the profession
- Greater mobility of talent and expertise to enhance the well-being of people, the environment and the profession
- Increased stature of national associations

The topic was further explored during breakout sessions on professional practice at the 2014 IFLA World Council meeting in Auckland, New Zealand. As follow up IFLA Secretary-General Ilya Mochalev and CLARB Executive Director Joel Albizo and President Stephanie Landregan engaged in a series of conversations and conducted initial research into potential options, benefits, and risks of pursuing global standards and certification.

At the outset, we recognize that pursuit of such a goal is not without risks, challenges, barriers and complexities and we propose that they be addressed in a respectful and straightforward fashion as the benefits are also considered.

This discussion paper is provided to facilitate continued dialogue and decision making and will serve as an input to the conversations of the June 2014 IFLA Professional Practice and Policy Committee and World Council meetings. While not a comprehensive exploration of the topic it offers initial thinking about an approach to achieving a global standard and supporting certification and outlines possible next steps and proposes some key questions for the Committee and Council—as well as other potential partners—to consider.

## A Potential Approach

As a starting point, we believe that there is merit in looking toward the creation of a standard for the practice of landscape architecture that is recognized by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and aligned with the United Nations International Labor profession description.

ISO is arguably the largest, most recognized, and credible group of its kind and attaining such a designation would potentially facilitate broad adoption among IFLA member nations. Further, we understand that many landscape design offices worldwide use **ISO 9001:2008**, a fact that should further enhance its attractiveness.

*ISO is a network of national standards institutes of 157 countries, with one member per country. Based in Geneva, Switzerland, it is a non-governmental organization that occupies a unique position between the public and private sectors: On the one hand, many of its member institutes are part of their country's governmental structure or are mandated by those governments. (Its members are not, as with the United Nations system, delegations of national governments.) On the other hand, other members have roots in the private sector, having been set up by national partnerships of industry associations. For more information visit: [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)*

Currently, there is only one ISO standard related to “landscape”: [ISO 110:1994](#), “Construction drawings – Landscape drawing practice.” It establishes general rules and specifies graphical symbols and simplified representations for landscape drawing which are jointly referred to as conventions. Those that are applicable to landscape drawings are presented in annex A in the above referenced document.

### *The ISO Standard Development Process*

There is a specific process for developing an ISO standard and, while the organization does not accredit or certify individuals, organizations, products or processes, it does publish standards relating to certification. What this means is that an organization would work through established ISO processes to develop the core standard and would use ISO certification standard as a resource, among others, to inform the development of a certification process.

Fortunately there is a substantial body of knowledge available as it relates to ISO standard development and development and implementation of professional certification. Our initial research has focused on ISO standard development and here is a summary of what we've learned:

- The most practical way to develop an ISO standard seems to be to convene an international committee under the auspices of the organization, which would follow its established processes and protocols.
- Once a standard is developed and accepted by ISO it could be adopted by individual nations.
- Underscoring the complexity of the process, initial research with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) suggests that the process can take between three to five years and cost between \$50,000 - \$100,000 per year. Note that this is just one estimate that accounts for the required knowledge and expertise needed for this specific process.
- As a result of the ISO membership structure, policies, processes and resulting imperatives, the committee process is subject to non-technical influences. As such the organization and facilitation of the committee and its ability to manage risk is an important consideration.

## *Certification Basics*

With respect to certification (assuming that there is merit to the having a companion certification process), there are at least three areas that must be addressed:

- Assessment. The vast majority of certification programs require the candidate to demonstrate competence, typically through some form of examination.
- Recognition. Once a candidate is certified there must be a system to enable recognition as a certificate holder.
- Re-certification. Many certifications have these requirements, which are typically driven by organizations that certify the certifier.

The above underscores that, while the potential benefit may be wide and deep, standardization and certification requires a serious commitment of time, attention, and resources over a sustained period of time. With this in mind we suggest that the concept be considered in phases, thereby allowing for sufficient time to gain and sustain needed support while exercising good stewardship with organizational resources. We also propose that the process be guided by the principles and clarity with respect to desired outcomes.

## *Key Principles for Discussion*

- Collaboration. Work constructively toward goals and objectives utilizing the unique strengths of a diverse global community.
- Commitment. Willingness for partners to stay the course, overcome barriers and sustain resources and effort until the goal is realized.
- Breadth of interest. The goal, and pursuit toward it, engenders broad appeal, support, enthusiasm and engagement.
- Common core. The standard focuses on those core elements of professional practice as opposed to a largely aspirational set of competencies.
- Phased approach. In the interest of efficiency and good stewardship the project will be approached in logical phases that allow for opportunities to reassess, refine, or reconsider as more is learned.
- Pragmatic and sustainable. Recognizing that this is a complex and resource intensive undertaking, that the goals are ambitious, and that landscape architecture is an emerging profession worldwide, it is important that approaches emphasize practicality and that the program is designed and managed for long-term relevance.
- Shared risk/return. Those who invest in the enterprise should have the opportunity to recover their costs and earn a reasonable return on their ongoing commitment to the program's continued relevance.

## *Potential Desired Outcomes for Discussion*

- An ISO standard for the practice of landscape architecture is created and widely adopted by IFLA member nations by 2020.
- Landscape architects meeting this standard are widely recognized through a professionally executed, sustainable certification program that creates value for the certificate holder and certification provider and sponsors.
- The certification is considered the pre-eminent global standard for the competent practice of landscape architecture.

## **Initial Thoughts about Phasing and Next Steps**

The logical first step is to discuss with the IFLA Professional Practice and Policy Committee and World Council the concept of developing a global standard and certification system. This can occur in June at the Buenos Aires meeting. From this conversation we can gauge initial interest and degree of consensus on the goals of such an effort.

Assuming there is sufficient interest and support, one possible approach might be to explore this like one would organize a complex project, utilizing project management/ product development principles. This approach may encourage sufficient discipline and rigor while maintaining forward momentum.

If we adopted this approach we would typically begin with a thorough period of assessment where we might seek to accomplish the following objectives:

- Refine understanding of ISO standard setting process
- Understand the role of existing national standards and how they might influence a global standard
- Develop thorough understanding of certification program requirements
- Understand and develop budget of the “business model” for creating and sustaining the system (standard development and certification)
- Identify potential partners and roles based on capacity, strategic positioning, alignment, and critical contributions
- Surface additional questions and informational needs
- Conduct a risk assessment and identify mitigation strategies
- Refine and develop options (advantages and disadvantages) for decision making bodies who have fiduciary responsibilities

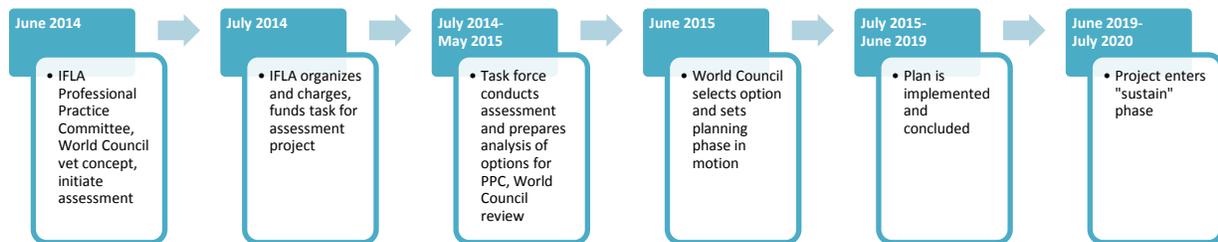
This might be accomplished by a task force (six to eight people) that includes representatives of key stakeholder groups. The group would be charged with performing this assessment and reaching out to and engaging the necessary resources to complete the task. It could meet principally by Skype and email and would be funded by IFLA with a contribution by participants according to ability. CLARB would be honored to be a part of this group and would be willing to contribute time and financial resources toward the accomplishment of this task.

We believe that this could be accomplished for between \$10,000-20,000 U.S. depending on the precise scope of the assessment, expertise required, and meeting and processes.

At the end of this period (six months to one year) the group would report back to IFLA on its findings and present the most viable options for moving forward.

## Potential Timeline

The following is a possible sequencing of activities, which would be revised following the conclusion of the assessment.



## Key Questions to Consider

- How would a global standard benefit IFLA, its members and their members/ stakeholders?
- What is the current level of interest, among IFLA member nations and elected leadership, in pursuing a global standard?
- What is the desired scope of a global standard? A “common core” that is universal or a standard that attempts to encompass the highest defensible standard.
- How important is having a credential that conveys that an individual has met the standard and what is the desired scope of its influence (e.g. regional, national, or international)?
- What don't we know that we wish we did?
- What are we willing to commit to now?
- What are we willing to consider?
- What opportunity can't we miss?
- What risk can't we overlook?
- What's off the table?