

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOWN AND CITY LANDSCAPE CHARACTERIZATION: METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL APPLIED TO CONSTANTINA (SIERRA NORTE MOUNTAINS, SEVILLE PROVINCE)

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The European Landscape Convention's insistence on landscape being a quality of any and every territory, whether an exceptional area or a common or even a degraded area, is a concept that revolutionises areas of landscape interest with major implications for urban and peri-urban landscapes. Before this, the *Conventions on Wildlife and the Natural Habitats*, on *Architectural Heritage and Archaeological Heritage*, which were the immediate precedents of the European Convention, led to assimilation between landscapes and sublime spaces of great naturalistic and/or historical-cultural value. This led to a certain lack of consideration for utilitarian, lived-in and functional landscapes, which includes the majority of urban and peri-urban landscapes that are now attracting a hitherto unknown degree of interest.

The result of these identifications has been that urban landscapes, with no epistemological framework of their own, have not been studied to any great extent. This constitutes an intolerable gap from the current perspective of the landscape, considered as it is by the European Convention as a melding of views and perceptions, a catalyst of quality of life and a basic resource for development.

The aim of this article is to contribute to filling this gap by proposing a methodology for characterising urban landscapes in small and medium-sized towns and cities. For this it is divided into two parts: the first part provides a methodological when studying urban landscapes; the second exemplifies the proposed methodology in a representative area of study (the town of Constantina, in the Sierra Morena Mountains, Seville province, Spain). The working hypothesis is that the internal urban landscapes of small and medium-sized towns and cities are inextricably linked to the lands around them. This requires a multiscale approach that dovetails different landscapes and contributes to an interpretation of the town/city through an analysis of its landscapes.

This hypothesis is supported by the European Convention's systemic consideration of landscapes, which it defines as the formal result in territories of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. This reasoning demands that the components that make up urban landscapes and the processes that explain the way that they work be considered, whilst open systems, structures and functional bases of this type also have to be contextualised in a broader territorial framework. As a result, two aspects take on a special significance in the study of urban landscapes: 1) Determining the scales from which said landscapes are explained and perceived, and 2) Specifying the elements (and attributes) that are significant on each of the scales.

The urban landscape analysis methodology that this article suggests proposes that towns' and cities' internal landscapes be interpreted on three scales of approximation:

1. The territorial scale, which considers the territory as a natural-physical entity in a broad and complex sense, as a relational-geographical space and as a socio-cultural and economic body that sustains the town/city and by which the town/city is explained. Among the basic attributes that are significant on this level are the space's geographical location, its productive functions and its social organisation.

2. The second scale for the study of town/city landscapes is the urban-rural interface, which is conditioned to a great extent by its location. Its essential analytical arguments are the urban boundaries, the areas of landscape interest in the immediate area around the town/city and the routes of access into towns/cities, with special emphasis on the routes from which significant views or all-encompassing views are obtained.

3. The basic scale for analysing town/city landscapes is the urban scale itself, as represented by the compact Mediterranean city and its internal landscape areas. This is in itself a complex scale whose basic infrastructure is the urban network and whose quintessential landscape is formed by the networks of open public spaces.

The second part of the article focuses on applying the proposed methodology to a small town in the Sierra Morena Mountains (Constantina, Seville province), which is located in a prime territorial setting (the Seville Sierra Norte Mountains Natural Park) and whose internal urban landscapes are not explained without the other, more widespread and distant landscapes of its immediate and more remote peripheries. This is also a rather special town in as much as it is not ranked on the urban scale, or at least it has lost this status because of emigration and depopulation, but it nonetheless fulfils typically urban functions and duties that are mirrored in the complexity of its internal landscapes.

Constantina's territorial framework is the Sierra Morena Mountains. These mountains are typically Mediterranean: dry and dull brown in colour, with stark, poor quality soil lying over impermeable materials where water and limestone are the two basic sources of wealth and life. Constantina's urban and peri-urban landscapes reflect this well through the two basic elements that both distinguish them and make them unique: the physical relief and water. From a socio-economic point-of-view, the Sierra Morena is an area of old towns and villages and prosperous traditional economies that have collapsed in the face of massive developmental technocracy, with all the subsequent abandonment, depopulation and deterioration of its heritage and landscapes, later rediscovered by environmentalism and today's leisure society. Some processes, indeed all, are equally reflected in Constantina's internal landscapes, which provide fine examples of the socio-economic boom experienced by the Sierra Morena at the

end of the 19th century with the surge in industry and mining and the railway being routed through the area; of the urban effects of dissolution processes, and, from the mid-20th century on, of the effects of developmental emigration and depopulation, which resulted in both homes and significant and emblematic buildings being abandoned and left to ruin.

The second scale for analysing urban landscapes according to the proposed methodology is the borderland between the town and the countryside. In the case of Constantina, this is connected with the town being located right at the bottom of a valley due to it originally being a defensive position. The morphology of this deep-valley location confers great uniqueness on urban-rural interface landscapes which are unparalleled due to the relief and the course of the river, which determines the layout of the access routes and the main areas of landscape interest around the town: La Yedra and El Robledo. It also determines the places from which single images are obtained, portraying a landscape marked by clarity of light and harmonious compositions of the country-town boundary and adapted to the topography. Meanwhile, the different levels of the land help to increase visibility and, in doing so, the fragility of these landscapes, due to the inclusion of foreign bodies and/or the implementation of unfortunate actions.

The core focus of the town's landscape analysis is the urban landscapes themselves, composed of the various elements of the urban fabric and their respective networks of open public spaces. Location, history and urban morphology combine in Constantina to produce a collage of distinct landscape segments adapted to the land, a result of the intermingling of neighbourhoods built at different times. The internal urban landscape is structured around three units: 1) the landscapes of the old town which sprang up pre-19th century and which coincide in part with the area of the town that has been declared an Asset of Cultural Interest; 2) Post-20th century residential expansion to the south of the town, and 3) An area of public corporation services and facilities, also to the south, which to a great extent serves as the foundation for the intermediary role that Constantina plays today. The old town is where the most emblematic and conspicuous urban scenarios are to be found distributed in three landscape areas: 1) The original parts of the town backing on to the castle in the Las Cuestas-La Morería area, with picturesque streets and squares on different levels and with marked specialist social functions; 2) the central hub characterised by a unique wealth of sequential open public spaces onto which give middle class homes with a certain bearing, and 3) the eastern neighbourhood landscape area, which has some features of both of these.

If landscapes are, above all, images and perceptions, the essential elements of urban landscapes are the networks of open public spaces from which towns/cities are perceived, enjoyed and endured. One of the most distinctive features of Constantina's urban landscape is the diversity, uniqueness and wealth of its open public spaces, particularly in the old town. Those of the central hub stand out, as much for their diversity, accessibility, balanced distribution and the high frequency with which they are visited by citizens, as for their aesthetic qualities. Another group of prominent open public spaces in Constantina is the landscape offered by the Las Cuestas-La Morería area, which stands out for the picturesque character of its narrow, irregular, stepped streets and its tiny plazas, big enough only to serve to bridge the differences in height between the thoroughfares and the houses (and known locally as *citarillas*).

The study of Constantina's landscapes has revealed that in small and medium-sized towns and cities, where the urban-rural symbiosis is age-old and intense, internal urban landscapes cannot be explained without the agro-rural landscapes of the surrounding areas; and that both the one and the other find their *raison-d'être* in the territorial setting within which they are located. These are landscapes of great value and scenic potential on all the scales considered, and, in the case of the internal urban landscapes, they also have a great pedagogical ability to illustrate the historical dynamics of space occupation and the always complex relationships between morphologies and urban landscapes, functional specialisations and social segregations.

Another issue that has become evident is the prospective ability of landscape analysis for anticipating areas of landscape opportunity, both within towns/cities, and the landscape of the urban-rural interface. In the case of Constantina, these are basically linked to a ring road project designed to free up the main thoroughfare, occupied by the A-455 passing through the centre of the town. And, similarly, the crucial role that urban and peri-urban landscapes play as scenarios to be used and enjoyed by people, especially in the cadastral setting of the Sierra Morena Mountains, where great private farms and ranches dominate and the enjoyment of landscapes and visits to the Natural Park are by necessity restricted to the towns and villages and their surroundings. This is the reflection of what urban landscapes have to offer for a general study of the town/city and the potential that they have, as basic heritage resources, for activating the social economy of towns/cities and territories.