

# THE AGRARIAN HERITAGE: DEFINITION, CHARACTERIZATION AND DEGREE OF REPRESENTATION ON THE UNESCO FRAMEWORK

**José Castillo Ruiz**

**Celia Martínez Yáñez**

Departamento de Historia del Arte. Universidad de Granada

jcastill@ugr.es, celiamarya@ugr.es

The aim of this paper is to offer a comprehensive vision on the emerging international recognition of the heritage properties generated by agrarian activity through history, deepening on the values, types of properties and principles that should guide their protection as a unitary heritage category. To do so, the paper analyses the degree of representation of agrarian heritage properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity from a geographical, typological and thematic perspective. It also delves into the reasons for the study of the Agrarian Heritage as a specific heritage of a truly universal significance (regardless the success of its inscription on both lists), questions several aspects that hinder its identification and protection and sets out the main principles and criteria for improving international awareness and recognition of its values.

The paper also disseminates some of the results of the ongoing I+D+I PAGO Project (*The Agrarian Heritage: The cultural construction of the territory through farming activity*. Ref HAR2010 15809), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy. In it, a broad interdisciplinary team (amongst which Art History, Architecture, Geography, Anthropology and Agricultural Engineering) develops different lines of investigation (<http://www.patrimonioagrario.es/pago/PRESENTACION.html>) on the cultural dimension of heritage properties linked to agricultural and livestock rearing practices with the aim of proposing the recognition of a new heritage category to the international community: Agrarian Heritage.

The paper focuses on the main outcomes of the PAGO Project line of investigation *The Agrarian Heritage in the framework of UNESCO: World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, for which both signing researchers of this article are responsible.

The several protection programs implemented by UNESCO concerning World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Intangible Heritage and Living Treasures are considered today as the

forefront of cultural heritage regarding the definition of new types of properties and their management and protection. We have based on these programs to analyse their assessment and treatment of Agrarian Heritage, in order to obtain some conclusions with regards to, amongst others, the following issues: types of crops and spaces preserved, importance given to the intangible aspects of this heritage, regions and countries outstanding due to their efforts in inscribing and protecting agrarian heritage properties, and implementation of protection policies by developing countries.

To address this analysis we consider necessary a previous reflection on the basic principles of Agrarian Heritage, according to the results of the PAGO Project. These principles provide a theoretical basis to adequately assess the information provided by the analysis of the state of the art of this subject within the UNESCO framework.

## **I. REASONS THAT JUSTIFY THE INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF AGRARIAN HERITAGE AS A UNITARY AND UNIVERSAL HERITAGE CATEGORY**

Identifying the Agrarian Heritage would not only mean including a new value – the agrarian – within the cultural heritage field, but also to launch a new way of identifying and bringing together cultural properties. Now, the gathering of these properties is based on the property value (archaeological, historical, paleontological...) or on its belonging to a unitary and specific area (cultural landscape, cultural route, group of buildings). However, in the case of Agrarian Heritage, the aspect that allows the gathering of its properties is the human activity itself, and specifically, the agricultural, forestry and livestock rearing practices. For this reason we must consider Agrarian Heritage much like Intangible Heritage.

With the recognition of this new heritage category several objectives would be accomplished:

Foremost, the appreciation and respect of the properties generated by farming activity throughout history. These properties, in spite of their obvious high value to people, are hardly socially or institutionally considered. To achieve this credit we must be capable of connecting those concepts of modernity, progress and solidarity that exist in many areas of the agrarian world (feeding as a basic human right, biological and cultural diversity, sustainable development, quality of life, sovereignty and security over food, organic agriculture, etc.) to the agricultural, forestry and livestock rearing practices, and most of all, to farmers and livestock handlers, ending the derogatory concepts associated to them in many countries (underdevelopment, ignorance, low social level, etc.).

This recognition could also be a chance for connecting the valorisation initiatives launched by institutions of different fields related to farming (agriculture, diet, environment, cultural heritage, natural heritage, etc.), bearing in mind that nowadays they are completely isolated amongst them, at least in Spain. In this regard, it is especially important to overcome the current existing division amongst the cultural, productive and biological dimensions of agriculture.

Other essential accomplishment would be achieving a specific treatment of agrarian heritage properties independent from other types of heritage with which have been taken over up to now (mainly rural, vernacular, ethnological and industrial heritage), since this have prompted their misunderstanding and underestimation

## **II. PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEFINITION AND PROTECTION OF AGRARIAN HERITAGE**

Agrarian Heritage can be defined as the group of tangible and intangible natural and cultural properties, generated and used for farming activity throughout history. The number and variety of properties that we can identify as belonging to this heritage is large: Movable properties (growth utensils, transportation devices, storage units and manufacturing of the crops); Immovable properties (built structures singularly considered: country estates, orchards, granaries, paddocks, allotments, etc.); Groups of immovable properties (landscape, irrigating systems, specific agrosystems, etc.); Intangible heritage (beliefs, ritual and festive events, knowledge, gastronomy, craftwork techniques, etc.); Natural heritage (local crops varieties, native animal species, seeds, grounds, vegetation and related wild animals, etc.).

This definition implies the recognition of the following principles:

On the one hand, the cardinal attribute of Agrarian Heritage, the one that represents its heritage essence and allows the gathering of these properties, is farming activity. Therefore, all aspects that guide its protection (definition, types of properties, categories, legal protection policies, management, and dissemination mechanisms) must part from this fundamental principle: the identification, assessment and conservation of farming activities of heritage value.

On the other hand, the heritage recognition of agrarian legacy implies that the main value that must support its characterization and safeguarding is cultural value. This means considering farming activity as a social practice which has made unquestionable and crucial contributions to human civilization. However, the cultural value of these properties must be assessed from a historical perspective, since farming activities to be defended and preserved are specially those based on traditional sustainable management practices which are threatened today, among other causes, by highly intensive and industrial agriculture. Together with the historic value, Agrarian Heritage should assume those values and highest and transcendent meanings that agriculture, forestry livestock rearing practice represent and have represented to people. They include, amongst other, its irreplaceable contribution to the feeding of humanity, its harmonic integration within the territory and its essential role in the preservation of cultural and biological diversity. We therefore propose the recognition of the agrarian value as the general value for the identification of these properties, and agronomist, economic, social, ecological, historical, scenic and technical as its specific attributes.

This means that legal protection of agrarian heritage properties must be done essentially through territorial planning instruments. In the case of Spain, and apart from the most frequently applied in the international context (cultural landscape), the most adequate category is the so called 'Heritage Zone' (Verdugo 2005), contained in the Andalusian legislation. Nevertheless we suggest the category of 'Site of Agrarian Interest', which allows recognizing and stressing the uniqueness of agrarian heritage properties.

## **III. THE PROTECTION OF THE AGRARIAN HERITAGE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF UNESCO**

The emerging international recognition and protection of the Agrarian Heritage has principally occurred in the framework of the GIAHS (Globally important Agricultural Heritage Systems) of the FAO and through the inscription of some of its tangible and intangible properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL), the Representative List of the Intangible

Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

Although all of them contain properties related to agricultural, forestry and livestock rearing practices, the comprehensive analysis of the characterization and international protection of this heritage is very complex.

The main reason for this difficulty lies in the general lack of comprehensive studies on this subject and in the fact that none of these lists allows thematic or typological searches.

The results of our analysis represent therefore the first identification of the agrarian heritage properties that have achieved the World Heritage status, which will be continued in the framework of the I+D+I Project.

According to these results the World Heritage List contains 33 agrarian heritage properties which fall under the following cultural heritage categories: Cultural Landscapes (27 properties), Mixed Sites (3), Cultural Routes (1), Serial Properties (1), Group of Buildings (1).

The intangible values of agrarian heritage have also been recognized through their inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the List of Intangible Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. As of 2011, both lists totaled 259 inscriptions, of which only approximately 23 were directly related to agricultural and livestock rearing practices. They can be classified in the following thematic blocks: Festive events and agricultural rituals (9 elements); Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe (2 elements); Knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts (8 elements); and Gastronomy (4 elements).

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR THE PROTECTION OF AGRARIAN HERITAGE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF UNESCO**

Basing on the principles that characterize Agrarian Heritage and the comparative analysis of its properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, we can obtain several conclusions and trends about the protection of this heritage within the UNESCO framework.

On the one hand, Agrarian Heritage begins to emerge as a subject that could have a significant international presence and valuation in the future. This is evidenced by the continuous increasing of inscriptions, partly due to their belonging to new heritage categories potentially able to rebalance the thematic, regional and typological representativeness of the WHL.

On the other hand, the UNESCO'S protection of this heritage shows several gaps which the PAGO Project aims to help mitigating through the establishment of several principles on its conservation, management and dissemination that have been discussed in this paper.

Regarding the geographical representation of agrarian heritage on the WHL, a large number of inscriptions pertain to developed countries, contrasting with the high degree of industrialization of agriculture in them. Together with the traditional and contested eurocentrism of the WHL, and the achievement of a prestigious international recognition, this is due to the need of preserving agrarian spaces which have maintained their authenticity and integrity. These attributes could be substantially altered or destroyed if they were unprotected. This risky situation is less severe in developing countries, where the negative impacts of the so called Green Revolution are less significant.

Focusing on the agrarian practices protected, three questions must be highlighted:

Firstly, 12 of the 27 inscribed agrarian cultural landscapes are devoted to economic crops (mainly vine, with seven properties, followed by coffee, tobacco, agave and olive). Manufactured products extracted from these landscapes play a very important role in their nomination files, showing a high interest to obtain a renowned international brand to strengthen their marketing. In some cases, the emphasis on these products may cause a decrease in the importance of farming activity for the assessment and management of the site. Besides, the justification of the OUV of these properties shows a predominant aesthetic, environmental and ecological vision in their assessment. This means that in many cases they are regarded as groups of plants or a kind of forest, rather than as landscapes which are the result of a specific form of agrarian management.

Secondly, it is also important to note the growing importance of gastronomy. However, the valorisation of the cultural value of traditional cuisine worldwide is less significant considering that some nominations are simple recognitions or correspond to different countries strategies for achieving a better position in this competitive international market.

Thirdly, we wish to stress the incipient inscription of properties related to livestock rearing practice in both lists. This could be a very positive trend, since their support by UNESCO might help to mitigate the scarce social and cultural recognition of this activity