

AGRICULTURE, LANDSCAPE AND TERRITORIAL HERITAGE. AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES SEEN AS HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an approach to agricultural landscapes seen from a heritage perspective. To this end, it studies the social premises and institutional milestones that ratify this patrimonialism, presents a methodological proposal for the analysis, and explores the historical dynamics that underpin landscape configurations and explain the social valuations of landscapes.

Key words: Agriculture, landscapes, heritage, territory.

EXTENSIVE SUMMARY

For some years now, we have been witness both to a growing interest in landscape and to an expansion and diversification of social groups concerned about its care and analysis. From being a scenario valued in aesthetic and creative terms by painters, writers and photographers, as well as for its academic and scientific consideration by geographers, architects, sociologists and other specialists, landscape at the current moment has also become an object of consumption and corporate profits, a component of territorial identity, a catalyst for quality of life and an institutional benchmark for many policies and actions. As a consequence, sensitivity towards the landscape seems to be seeping into the public's view, that while concerned about the aesthetics of the territory, is an impassive witness of the deterioration of many habitats for the sake of a supposed progress being branded as sustainable.

This complex and paradoxical situation is accompanied by an enrichment of the very concept of landscape, which acquires a polyhedral dimension and, at the same time, allows a creative and aesthetic reading, an enjoyment approach, an identity and symbolic consideration, and a heightened historical, heritage and cultural complexión.

Such dimensions are not new to geographical approaches to landscapes, in general, and to agriculture in particular, but they are seen with fresh nuances, especially regarding the latter's heritage consideration.

Throughout history agricultural practices have shaped cultural landscapes of unquestionable heritage value, some of them listed by UNESCO World Heritage List. Moreover, there is an increasingly widespread agreement that agriculture plays an important role in the maintenance of biodiversity and natural heritage, especially in certain areas that enjoy international institutional recognition or integrate national networks of protected natural habitats. There is also some consensus on the idiosyncrasy of recognized and emblematic landscapes such as the «Bocage» in Brittany, the grassland in southern England, the central and southern pastures of peninsular Spain or extensions of olive orchards in the high plains of Andalusia, to cite a few examples, find the *raison d'être* in the succession of current and/or past agricultural practices.

Despite all this, it is unusual that sensitivity towards the landscape be directed to agriculture, and much less that the approaches to landscape be considered as heritage consideration. The inertia to identify the landscape with beautiful, significant and emblematic spaces lies behind the landscape and heritage thoughtlessness of agricultural areas, together with the dual vision ruling in the world of heritage (natural, on the one hand, and cultural, on the other) and the normative bias toward the protection of recognized values. All of these approaches hardly address the heritage consideration of hybrid spaces between culture and nature, usual and still functional as are agricultural landscapes.

In recent years, there has been observed a change in the previous situation promoted by the proposals of the European Landscape Convention which, since its adoption in Florence in the year 2000, has become the major conceptual and institutional framework concerning the matter. In addition to recognizing that landscape is a key component of natural and cultural heritage, as well as an indicator of quality of life and a favorable option to stimulate the economy and job creation, the European Convention considers that any territory projects a landscape, and it covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas (art 2). A statement that seems obvious, but until now it has not been taken into account sufficiently due to the tendency to identify landscape with sublime spaces and not with everyday areas such as agricultural landscapes.

At the same time, there has been operating an extension of what is understood as heritage and a growing environmental and cultural valuation of certain agricultural practices. To this we must add the consideration of agriculture as a multifunctional activity which, besides providing food, supplies society with public goods such as the enjoyment of the landscape. As a result, agriculture begins to be seen as landscape and more and more voices claim its heritage value. It is nevertheless an emerging and little discussed dynamics in need of a significant effort of reflection and systematization.

Given these considerations, this article proposes an approach to agricultural landscapes viewed from a heritage perspective. To this end, it considers the social assumptions and institutional milestones that endorse this patrimonialization, it poses a methodology for the analysis and traces the historical dynamics that underlie the landscape configurations and explain social valuations of landscape. This paper is organized in three sections not

necessarily related to each other so, rather than a complete analysis, it displays a few first notes and reflections that will necessarily have to be clarified and developed in future work.

From the very vagueness of concepts such as heritage and landscape and their interrelationships, and taking into account the close connection between heritage valuation of landscape and its institutional endorsement, this paper begins by exploring the heritage consideration of agricultural landscapes examining the social assumptions and institutional milestones that endorse this patrimonialization.

The development of the landscape heritage dimension requires the confluence of three basic premises: 1) The assumption of the idea of collective ownership implicit in the concept of heritage, 2) the social recognition of the material and cultural values of landscapes and 3) the public concern about preserving and transmitting such values. When such a confluence takes place it is often accompanied by a sense of social appropriation of the landscape, whether ownership is public or private. From an institutional perspective this translates into the design and implementation of policies and rules aimed to preserve socially recognized values.

It can be seen, in conjunction with the above-mentioned, a certain parallelism in the dynamics that lead to the emergence of the first laws governing heritage and landscape, in the double and artificial differentiation between natural and cultural. It is, however, a diachronic parallelism, more matured and early in heritage policies than those on landscape. It might be considered that, unlike other types of heritage in which social demand precedes institutional concretion, in the case of landscape the opposite occurs and social claim for its patrimonialization trails behind normative opinions.

The legal concept of historical heritage emerges in the second half of the nineteenth century with a very different meaning than it now has, having evolved in three directions: chronological, including contemporary elements; thematic, to integrate new ethnographic and immaterial cultural heritage elements; and territorial, incorporating complex territorial areas such as historical areas and landscapes. Although this seems to lead to the heritage consideration of agricultural landscapes, in practice it does not result in such a sense due to the low social recognition of the heritage value of these landscapes.

A parallel journey to the heritage legal framework has been experienced by the institutional consideration of landscape, which is valued primarily from an aesthetic and creative point of view, then it is considered as a historical and cultural exponent of a territory and, in recent years, it is also appreciated in terms of belonging and merger of identities. Such trajectory has been, however, much more belated in the case of the landscape, hence we are dealing with a less mature concept, especially regarding its meaning as heritage. The recognition of heritage value of the landscape has not yet passed the stage of scholarly consideration, which is marked by its consideration in studies, reports, plans and regulations, without parallel progress on its assessment by society, at least in regard to agricultural landscapes.

Unless significant exceptions where civil society has expressed some interest in the preservation of areas of agriculture, it is rare for people to bring in the heritage value of these landscapes and, let alone, to demand their preservation. The developmental assimilation between agriculture and environmental degradation and landscape is still quite widespread and agricultural landscapes are still undervalued by the new naturalistic and aesthetic canons. In this context, it is no wonder the disappearance of very emblematic historical landscapes

of agriculture due to urban development, with the passivity and complicity of society and local administrations. However, the transference of the postulates of the European Landscape Convention to state regulations is causing agricultural landscapes to begin to acquire substantive category for legal purposes and to define a legal framework conducive to their consideration as heritage.

In another vein, the power of landscape impression lies in the apprehension of a territorial reality from the recognition of its complexity, polysemy and dynamism. Landscapes are, in turn, shapes and functions, objects and views, current and historical heritage, nature and culture ... and in all this lies their consideration as heritage. It is for this reason that, in a second step, this paper presents a methodological proposal that allows the apprehension of these dimensions through the dissection of thematic layers which make up the landscape (formal configurations, functional principles, representations ...). Rather than divide the landscape into separate facets, it is an exercise to reconstruct the whole as the most genuine aspect of the landscape and the main exponent of its hybridity, diversity and value.

Agricultural landscapes accumulate many legacies, summarize the present and project into the future. After thriving in the meshes of signifiers and meanings that crisscross the landscape, there is finally an approach to temporary arrays that underpin the historical and cultural meaning of landscapes and reaffirm the heritage consideration. Rather than outlining the history of specific landscapes, the aim is to examine the processes that lie behind the ways of doing, seeing and understanding the landscape by successive generations of farmers and which ultimately explain and reinforce the feelings of attachment between population and territory.

We are, in short, immersed in a highly contradictory and complex socio-cultural scenario that, while interested in the rural area, its environmental features and landscapes and shows great sensitivity towards cultural and heritage aspects of it, is an impassive witness of the disappearance of very emblematic agricultural landscapes such as peri-urban agriculture. In addition, it makes mountain agriculture a common heritage detaching it from its productive quality, which entails the risk of thematization, and applauds the expansion of new crops without measuring their landscape and environmental impacts.

Parallel to this, the concatenation of a series of processes (demand for open spaces such as leisure and recreational facilities, interest in recovering traditional customs and knowledge, recognition of multifunctionality of the sector ...) facilitates the heritage valuation of agricultural landscapes. However, this valuation is based on a sort of territorial Manichaeism focused on two very different models: a) Mountain agricultures threatened by the lack of carers and, at the same time, highly valued in environmental, ethnographic and landscape terms b) Peri-urban agricultures invaded by recent urban sprawl. Meanwhile, fully functional agricultures like those of the countryside, which comprise an equally relevant heritage and whose agriculture is also threatened by crop specialization for surplus production (cereals, oilseeds, industrial farming products), are disregarded from a heritage perspective. In these circumstances, a holistic approach to landscape and heritage value of all forms of agriculture is urgently needed, regardless of their territorial location and/or their historical path, to emphasize the need to reconcile productive and social profitability avoiding thematization.