

10.3 Part escrita en anglès.

5. THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

“L’home, davant la societat, es pot sentir més potent, però més poc lliure; en canvi, davant la naturalesa passa a l’inrevés.”
Terrades, Ignasi; *El món històric de les masies* (1984, 331).

It is difficult to believe the transformation that rural countryside has suffered if it's seen from a big city standpoint. But there, far away of the constructions, skylines and big asphalted roads, their inhabitants also have adapted landscape to their needs for each age.

Moreover, in the humanized landscape, reflection of their needs, is where denotes the evolution of rural life. Just there, we find new structures and constructions mixed with reminiscences that remind us a life style not too far in the time. So, over the natural landscape frame, almost nonexistent, we found the successive humanized frames overlay that talk about society, resources and economy of each time.

5.1. Rural landscape until the mid-twentieth century

Until the mid-twentieth century, we can consider that the countryside was a harmonious world, in which their people shape their environment for survival.¹ Forests and fields alternated following the ground topography frames.

Lack of fertilizer, that did decrease the performance of land over the years, forced to use other methods to recover their production as the left fallow*.²

Usually, the most flat lands were taken to do fields whereas incline lands were allowed to made forests or vineyards stepped with stone plots.

In addition, in high mountain areas where fields are unviable, the economic system was based on livestock. Whether the main production system or not, almost all properties had one kind of livestock or another.

¹ Boada, a *La vida a pagès. El món perdut de les masies i les possessions de Catalunya i les Balears*, (2010) ens aporta una mirada naturalista a aquesta humanització del paisatge: “La pagesia ha estat determinant en la construcció de paisatges, perquè amb la seva activitat ha modelat i acomodat l’entorn a les necessitats productives, i ho ha fet de manera amable, perquè altrament el seu sistema productiu hauria fracassat.” I afegeix que “El paisatge és l’expressió de la història natural i social d’un territori. Les persones en formen part i l’hem anat transformant contínuament; tal·la de boscos, ramaderia extensiva, camps de conreu, etc.”

² Vendrell, Felip; *Històries del mas pagès* (2000).

This meant having pasture, some watering holes divided around the farmhouse and shaded areas where took shelter from the sun apart of any stable or poultry in the country house.

As a result of this first landscape humanization are in a string of little and medium sized constructions scattered over the territory that, often going unnoticed, helped to characterize each place, town or region.

Cattle-breeding ranch, barns, shelter, waterwheels, channels, wells and the same stone banks commented before which are adapted to the needs of each zone and give the distinct characters.³

The plot was joined by paths and trails. Some of them were made for animals, others for humans and many of them were shared. Forests were connected by fields, houses, natural water sources, etc. But the most important link between this set was just the water. Rivers, streams and ditches communicated all these elements.

Always, nearly to the water points, vegetable gardens were located. The vegetables from those vegetables gardens were usually collected for the family consume over the year.

As the vast majority, rural works were outside. Rural man has distributed some seats sheltered from sun and wind around the country house.

The limits between different terms were identified with some big rocks, lots of stones, stone crosses or limit walls. The volatility and imprecision between these elements often produced discussions and problems among neighbors.

Religion was an important part of everyday life in the rural life. And as such, also was reflected in their landscape. Apart from the stone cross mentioned before, we could also find chapels and hermitage dedicated to a saint or a patron in some places. As a result of the same religion were also found the different blessings for crops located around the country house weather in cross form made with maple in some points of this, or recipients with blessed bread.

Finally, country houses were constructed with extracted surrounding materials, because of the difficulty and cost has led to its removal. The country house, besides being the family home, assumed the neuralgic centre productive system of the country

³ Boix, Pere; "L'artista i el paisatge" publicat al llibre *El territori i la casa*. (2001).

house. In there were found corrals and fences for the traction animals and also for the livestock, barns and granaries, tools, chambers for the animal maintenance, threshing floors with different areas...

Is for that reason that its location in the country house was not in vain. First of all, an approximately flat surface was required for their construction. We also took into account their communication with the rest of the country house (land, forests, etc.) and with the outside, as the proximity to water points and climatologic aspects such as building construction in a sunny area and wind sheltered. Obviously, all of these factors are not found in all farms, because each country house is particular and also concern geographical, economic and other factors, but we can consider that they are priorities are taken into account before house building.⁴

So, we can affirm rural world was submitted to environment; the productive system was adapted to the area, constructions were made with surrounding materials and water points and land topography were conditioned their distribution.

5.2. The present rural landscape

“Vells llauradors de bancalets estrets/ que de les pedres feu parets,
amics treballadors/ que els brancals costeruts/ avui estan perduts.”
Lombarte, Desideri; *Ataüllar el món des del Molinar* (1999).

At the present time, the circumstances of the rural landscape have changed. Nowadays, country man cannot develop a life away from agriculture. Production is not only viable for providing the family's food. Moreover, the technology applied in agriculture and telecommunications has also transformed the land scene.

Narrow field have been left because of the tractors difficulties to acces to them. Now, we can see lots of not grown polecats with stone banks. We can also observe vast areas cultivated in places where many years ago forests were located. Irrigated crops with sprinklers emphasize this new territory distribution. All of these changes involve a significant evolution of rural landscape.

Constructions are another kind of change. Today, it is easier than many years ago to transport building materials from anywhere. So that, constructions with autochton

⁴ Revista 2c: *La construcción de la ciudad*. Núm.17-18 (13) *La masia: historia y tipología de la casa rural catalana* (1981).

materials is now inexistent. The actual solutions are modern but it does not mean they are better.

Roads constructions, farms, electric lines, etc have also caused changes in the rural world appearance. These differences show us the society's evolution.

6. APROXIMATION TO THE *MASIA* (CONTRY HOUSE)

First, and from a traditional *masia* approach, we try to identify the external and internal values of this building. To do it, we base our conclusions on specific bibliography and old photographs.

In this section, we only write about each of the different spaces on a *masia*. We don't write about structures and neither construction. We just discuss textures, atmospheres and life in each room to get information about their different functions.

Our starting point is the farm study. After that, we gradually focus on the *masia* (country house). Finally, we develop the details and characteristics of each of these spaces.

6.1. Outside country house values

THE FARM

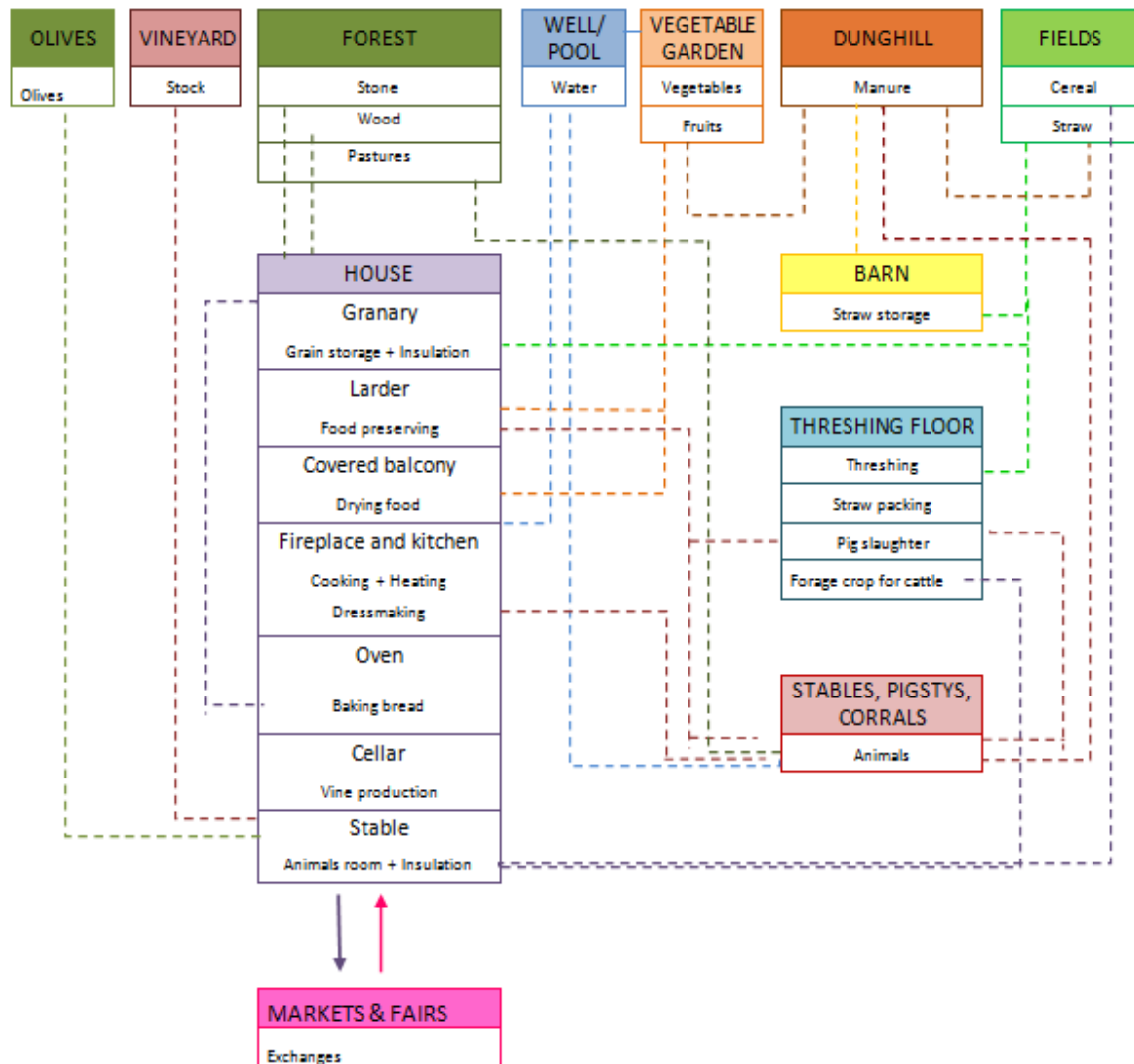
We arrive at the farm but we cannot see the country house yet. However, we can imagine some house characteristics. Beams, handrails or wood objects would be probably made of surrounding forests wood. The house walls would be build from property stone due to the transport difficulties that we mentioned before. Climatology and topography are also important factors to know the country house features as the water collection system.

If we make a comprehensive analysis of the farm, we will discover its productive systems. If there are pastures, we will find corrals or stables near the country house. Their characteristics depend on the kind of bestiary. If there are lots of fields, we will find barns or granaries near the house. We can also locate the granary into the house, at the attic.

We cannot understand the country house without understanding beforehand the farm. the same as Vila I Comaposada (1989) said, “la casa rural és, respecte les terres en explotació, co que una capital és referent al territori sobre el qual exerceix jurisdicció.

Farm and country house inevitably go together. The farm is the economic system of the country house. The country house is the farm governor and the family home. There is a physical and functional connection between those topics. The family lives at the farm and sleeps at the country house; the farm produces food and the country house makes its preserving possible. So, the family feels identified with the country house and also with the farm.

Rural machine wheels



Farm is more than a property as country house is more than a dwelling. Farm products are converted into consume products at country house.

Straw, organic remainders and excrements are used to fertilizer fields. Ashes and animal greasy are used to make laundry detergent. Excess products are sold in market and fairs.

THE COUNTRY HOUSE

Finally, we can see it! Even though it is difficult to distinguish what is the house and what are the other buildings. We only see lots of roofs among the forest and fields like a giant construction. Furthermore, its volume enhances the house prominence.

The country house has changed depending on the family's needs and resources at the different periods of time. We can usually see these additions from outside that differ from original construction. Those changes do not tarnish country house image but contribute to make it a picturesque building.

Its location is usually in a hang land but never at the top of a mountain or polecat. This fact makes it to stand out among rugged landscape. However, earthy colors and rough textures combine construction with landscape. We can find facades covering at richest houses; while at the poor ones we can only see the stones of their walls.

“El mas ha envellit molt més que Bernadette. Quan va marxar-ne encara quedaven fragmens d'arrebossat a la façana, senyal que havia estat construït per una família que, com les altres, tenia vergonya d'haver d'ensenyar pedres soles.”

As the time goes by, the house and the landscape point out their tie. The lichens and the moss help to integrate the building into surroundings. Moreover, fungus, patina and vegetable remains make the facades darker. A new link with nature is created.

In the house surroundings there are trees and other vegetation that make their identification difficult. This vegetation do not act as a vision barrier, it only offers sun protection.

When we get closer to the house, we can see the sharp intelligence of their inhabitants. We can study water collection systems such as pools, wells or channels. We can also discover different aspects about the climatologically knowledge of the rural people through information like the position and aspect of the house respect the sun. This is basic for the house fitting-out.

Northern facades usually have a few openings. It protects from the flow of cold and the wind. We have to remember that thickness wall is the only insulating material. So that, windows dimensions tended to be as smallest as possible. Moreover, they had a wood protection called *porticó*.

Southern facades have got more percentage of openings than the rest. They received more hours of sun and less cold wind. Sometimes, this façade have got a covered balcony called *galeria*; an intermediate space with rood but without external wall. The *galeria* was also used for drying up plants and food. Doorway was also located in the south. It usually had a doorframe. It can be erode due to salpàs. It was a religious tradition that consisted in sprinkling the doors with salted water spread by the priest.

The doorway had to be high enough to make horses pass possible. The house master entered the house by horse, while the rest of the family and guests had to dismount outside. For this reason there was a stone bench near the doorway that helped to mount and dismount from the horse.

Rich country houses usually had an inscription with the construction date or with tools engraved. This was a typical sign of the 18th and 19th century's welfare at country. Also in these centuries lots of farm houses put a sundial at their facades.

VEGETABLE GARDEN

Vegetable gardens and orchards were always in the vicinity of the rivers, pools or a well. It was more important to be near some water points than be near the house. For this reason, vegetable gardens can be a long way from the house. It produced the most family necessary food: vegetables and fruits.

Near the vegetable garden there was a dunghill. Excrements, straw and vegetables all mixed were good fertilizers.

The tradition says that vegetable garden is the housewife mirror. It is because the wife is considered the one who have to take care of it. There are more believes and traditions associated with a good harvest as sowing plants according to the moon phases.

BASTION AND FORTIFIED TOWER

There are some country houses walled by a fortified wall. This is a memory of a violence and destabilization periods of Catalan history. During the end of 16th century and the 17th century lots of country houses had to shelter from the banditry with stone walls around the country house. It had a wood doorway with a tile roof.

Another defensive system was fortifying the towers. This is a typical feature of coastal houses. Fortified towers were built during the Middle Ages to shelter from pirates and bandits.

THRESHING FLOOR

Threshing floor always welcomes us at a country house. It is an elevated area in front of the house. Work and leisure share this space. It has got sun spaces and also shadow spots. *“Generalment, s’hi realitzaven feines eventuais o de curta durada com ara arranjar les eines, ferrar el bestiar de tir*, la matança del porc, fer garberes*, batre*, ensacar o embalar”.*

There are always trees or vegetation that creates shadows to work during the day. It can be also an elm seedbed to make tools handles.

Amades said that planting cypress and laurels had a symbolic and religious meaning.

They usually are a stone bench near the facade and a dog kennel. Having a dog was important for several reasons: it provided good company, it was a good shepherd and a good security alarm too.

Threshing floor had usually a flagstone or stone pave. It was used to be a square or a circular or irregular shape. Sometimes, there was a stone wall around the threshing floor.

ANNEXED BUILDINGS

We cannot forget all the constructions annexed to the house. Some people think that these constructions do not do the house justice, but it is a part of economic system.

The fact that constructions like the stables, the corrals, the pigsties were usually subsequent constructions, it does not mean that were less important for the family. Contrary, these buildings were essential for the country live.

This buildings function depends on the kind of domestic animals or cultivations of the farm:

Pigsties, stables, corrals and fences.

These spaces dimensions are determined by field area. Their situation is usually near the house; surrounding the threshing floor. Horses, donkey works and mules stables were into the house, at ground floor.

Legends, beliefs and traditions determined these buildings construction because animals were the most important thing for country people. The most widespread belief was the *salpàs*. However, their inhabitants also put boar nails, fox ears or blessed rosemary on stables doors to bring good luck.

We are going to define each concept because sometimes they are confusing:

CORRAL. Covered or partially covered space to keep fowls.

CORT. Annexed to house building to keep flocks of pigs, sheeps, goats or cows. A *cort* is also each farm space. Inside the *cort*, there are short feeding troughs.

ESTABLE. Covered room inside the house or near it to keep work animals like mules, donkeys, horses, etc. Stables feeding troughs are higher than corts.

QUADRA. Open air space fenced by wood to keep horses or mules. It makes it possible to graze.

BEAT AND BARN

The beat is usually found close to the threshing floor and played the role of covered barn. In addition to store straw, it was also used to dry the ironworks and sometimes acted covering some field's tools. The building, with an own entity and characteristics, used to have a big aperture in one of their faces- generally the threshing floor face-. Also was the place where merchants, beggars and sporadic house workers stay overnight.

The barn, however, was not used to be so common in country houses because many of them had enough space in the attic to store grain.

In others, beat and barn shared building. Nevertheless, the properties that require it had only one construction for this function.

CHAPEL

And beyond the jobs that supported the family, there is another building, displays of religiosity of that society: the chapel.

Some of them were simply regarded as a chapel to the saint family's patron, but others had the priest benefit that allowed saying Mass. In these, they celebrated baptisms, weddings and sometimes even house relatives' funerals. The chapel can be found as a whole house built as a detached building somewhere in the house or, in the case of the poorest houses, inside the house.