A review on Cultural Landscape approach as a base for Regeneration Strategies on Rural condition. Gran Canaria Island

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Abstract

The rural territory presents nowadays a complex situation with serial difficulties for the development of the traditional activities (agriculture, stockbreeding, etc). This leads to a decline of these environments, with consequences at very diverse levels. But in a particular way it is influencing in the abandonment of the settlements and in the deterioration of its tangible and untangible heritage.

Thus, there is a need for planning tools that promote the sustainable development of the Rural Territory. The aim is to preserve the endogenous potential of these areas providing reactivation strategies that encourage the local development in its physical, social and cultural dimension.

The case of Gran Canaria depicts how the Cultural Routes can configure an efficient tool for this. In this way, the touristic potential of these rural environments is not incompatible with the preservation of their heritage values. And the interpretation of the landscape and its memory can be a clue in this sense.
The rural landscape is rapidly changing

- Weakening of rural societies due to subsistency conditions and migration movements towards the cities
- Endangerement of some communities’ continuity and its heritage.
- Impoverishment of certain landscape logics.
- Need to adapt to new economical activities.
- Tourism and leisure activities become an important mechanism of territory transformation.

What opportunities does the leisure offer for the preservation and improvement of the rural territory in a sustainable way?
Territory transformation in Gran Canaria

- Characteristics
  - Volcanic geography
  - Circular shape
  - Abrupt orography with radial gullies
  - Altitudinal gradient
  - Endemisms
  - Historic and sociocultural heritage...

... a very heterogeneous collage
Rural Territory in Gran Canaria

Plots configuration in rural scattered settlements

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Accelerated transformation process

- The tourism phenomenon has been determinant
- Increasing shift to a tertiary economy
- Crisis in the agricultural and stockbreeding activities
- Decadence of the primary sector

perimetral agricultural areas  coastal agricultural areas  mountain agricultural areas
... the effects in the mountain agricultural areas

Example of a peak settlement suffering depopulation

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Negative circumstances in the insular heritage

The transcendence of primary activities goes beyond the purely socioeconomic or environmental aspects. They are examples of resulting cultural expressions. They contribute to the maintenance of the ethnographic values linked to territory.
The “sun and beach” tourism model in the insular context

- Canary Islands: an excellent touristic spot
  - Magnificent climate, landscape condition, accommodation offer, international flight connexions
  - Tourism is the dominant basic of the Islands’ economy
  - Agriculture, stockbreeding and fishing, activities formerly essential, pushed into the background
- “Sun and beach” model
  - Huge touristic resorts
  - Big consequences in environmental terms
  - A big amount of the territory natural values has dissapeared.
  - Areas meant exclusively to tourism, mainly located in the southern coast of Gran Canaria.

... what you DO know about Gran Canaria...
... and what you DO NOT know about Gran Canaria...

A shepherd jumping with the Canary stick
Lenepro aboriginal cave
Hornos Reservoir

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Critics

The touristic offer does not promote the discovery of the rural territory of the Island.

What is sold are dreams, images and attractions, fit to an standardized visitor’s wishes.

The logic of a destiny for the mass tourism is then far away from the heritage values linked to the rural tradition.

Neither the deterioration of the overexposed zones nor the decline of areas in regression are good for the insular territory.

Need of complex strategies aimed to get a better territorial balance.

Need of rebuilding a tourism model that does not imply the uncontrolled transformation of the landscape nor the loss of the territory heritage values.
Rethinking the tourism model

- Using the tourism as revitalizing activity
  
  _Value of that primary activities that have configure for a long time the landscape transformation

  _The inclusion of new uses without the proper room and time to coexist with the primary activities, comes along the loss of associated heritage

  _Creation of new leisure offers

  _Implementation of Local Development Plans for the recovery of typical economical and social activities.

  _Connect heritage resources by means of routes that benefit from the existing territorial and social structure.
Experiences: reactivation operations in some territorial areas with a significant rural component

Proposal for the Rural Territory Pajottenland, Belgium

Landscape management Parque Agrario in Baix Llobregat Barcelona

“Rutas de los Sabios Intérpretes” (Wise Interpreters’ Routes), Gran Canaria
The debate about the reactivation tools

- The Cultural Routes
  - Organized around a theme that characterized it and give its name to it, offering a sequence of places and leisure activities related to its distinguishing elements.
  - Optimum use of sources
  - To consolidate the productive culture and the regional and local economy
  - To raise awareness of the importance of cultural heritage
  - To incorporate to the main national tracks some other touristic tracks located in marginalized spaces
  - To preserve and publicising lifestyles, working conditions, buildings, archaeological remains, traces from indigenous populations
  - To promote the productive local development by means of an strategic plan for the cultural heritage and its touristic valuation

- Cultural routes allow a region to grow from the tourism perspective, AND from the point of view of the heritage preservation and social awareness about it.

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A route in elaboration process

- **Physical structure**
  - Through the northwestern quadrant area
  - High slopes towards the interior
  - Wide diversity and contrast, with a preeminence of scattered edifications
  - The island’s larger surface or protected natural ground, with a very high rate of endemic flora.
  - Three clearly distinguishable zones

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**COAST**

- Larger amount of settlements and infrastructures
- Nowadays this area depicts the development of a progressively more industrialized agriculture with plots of a certain size and use intensity

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HALF-WAY AREAS

Settlements with rural character
A certain degree of territory transformation
Proliferation of first and second residence edifications, due to the proximity to the capital of Las Palmas

MOUNTAIN AND PEAK AREAS

Zones of high natural value protected by the Unesco and some other entities
Less developed settlements submitted to an ageing process and population decrease
● Social and cultural structure

_Inhabitants have traditionally worked in primary activities: agriculture, stockbreeding and handicrafts

The choice of an **SPECIFIC SUBJECT MATTER** can consider

_the enhancement of agriculture, stockbreeding and handicrafts

_the promoting of some local resources in decline that are interconnected with heritage elements

_The heritage result of the traditional culture represents the experience of a community development in an specific stage. Thought the memory conservation will partly depend on the protagonism of the resident population.

● A place can maintain some inherent characteristics, but its inhabitants play a crucial role in transmission of certain identity features.
- The strategy must be structured in political-administrative terms to promote the involvement and participation in its management by the local inhabitants.

- Creation of gathering places and communication platforms.

- The territorial scale component of a proposal such as this, implies to think beyond the municipality level taking into account the relationships among the different urban sectors and centers.
“La Ruta del Queso” (Cheese Route) as a tour and cultural landscape

- Queso de Flor (Flower Cheese)
  - Traditional process of elaboration, making it distinguishable all over the world.
  - Made with goat and sheep milk, it curdles with a flower (cardoon) instead of with the same milk.
  - Cattle is brought up and guided in the interior of the Island, and the product is nowadays elaborated in Guía, Gáldar and Moya.
  - The elaboration process enhances several sectors as the stockbreeding, the agricultural, the handicraft one, etc. But it also has implications at some other levels that affect both landscape and architecture, and even the culinary art.
  - In World Cheese Awards, first mention of Designation of Origin for the Queso de Flor from Guía.
“Telling the story” of its elaboration

- Build up a route linked to all that interesting features related with this subject matter
- Possibility to interconnect and settle multiple links among places, landscapes, activities and cultural expression forms
Final remarks

- The idea of cultural landscape implies the elaboration of a description of the territory, what requires a geographical representation of the reality. Not just an arrangement of the existing data, but an extraction of the latent meanings.

- What is aimed is an interpretation of reality, where the idea of heritage is linked to a selection of valuation criteria and the settlement of a certain purposeful strategy.

- The idea of heritage can be understood as a social and cultural construction linked to an specific geographical and temporal context.