

CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE TO THE “*VERA DE LA SIERRA*”. THE TERRITORIAL CONSTRUCTION OF “*SEGOVIAN GUADARRAMA*”

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I. APPROACH TO WORK

“*Segovian Guadarrama*” territory, which is the focus of this research, is organized today from a historical or traditional setting. This structure is generated in the Late Middle Ages and begins to break down in the second third of the 19th century, like other rural areas of the country. The dismantling is complete with the modernizing processes of “Developmentalism”, in the second half of the 20th century. However, this is a predominantly rural space, distinguished yet of more intense processes of exogenous transformation that have occurred in nearby mountainous areas. The breakdown of the historical space is patent, and has taken place, on the one hand, by the demographic loss and the abandonment of traditional uses and activities, and, on the other hand, by the functional modernization which affects this territory. However, we can still observe some representative elements of the traditional space organization.

Mountain landscapes correspond to a heritage of traditional culture; they are images that are legacies of a more or less perceptible and a more or less distant past, and now we see them through the filter of cultural enhancement. Ultimately, it is a representation of a heritage landscape.

II. THE “*SIERRA*” OF SEGOVIA, THE “*SEGOVIAN GUADARRAMA*”: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TERRITORY

The study area is located in the northern face, or Segovian slope, of Guadarrama. Consequently, this is the geographic area of reference. We use this nomenclature to define the whole of the Sierra, although Guadarrama (name of a town, a river and a mountain pass

homonyms) and an important part of the Madrid side of this “*Sierra*” historically belonged to the *Community of City and Land of Segovia*. Therefore, it is also correct to use the term “*Sierra de Segovia*” to designate a significant portion of the analyzed area.

Within the “*Segovian Guadarrama*”, we have selected the less transformed area of “*Sierra*”. This area is opposed to other areas where foreign influence is most evident. The analysis area includes the current municipalities of Casla, Pradena, Arcones, Matabuena, Gallegos, Aldealengua de Pedraza, Navafría, Torre Val de San Pedro, Santiuste de Pedraza, Collado Hermoso, Sotosalbos, Santo Domingo de Pirón and Basardilla.

All these municipalities have traditionally organized its productive areas, which are shared by one or more local entities, between the mountain massifs and the foothills on which they are located. This is the sector of the “*Sierra*” where the vestiges, the inherited territorial elements and the traces of the traditional culture and society are better preserved. The marks show the historical construction of a singular territory that was known traditionally as “*Vera de la Sierra*”; this area had a strong symbolic significance.

The abandonment of some spaces, the loss of traditional forms of environment exploitation, or the degradation of some uses are seen in the current organization of land use, in addition to changes in the structure of land ownership, in the size of farms or in the productive specialization.

Even so, some historical constants of the construction of this territory are still observed in the *Sierra*: a spatial organization based on cattle farming and forestry, in which the altitudinal succession of resources was the key to articulate the basic units of territorial organization and management.

These units, which were important and still remain, are towns and villages, with their areas, which are gradually organizing to full adaptation to the “modern” municipality. We found some spaces delimited between the foothills and the mountain passes of the “*Sierra*”, where the settlement was located, like the cattle tracks, which are elements of relationship, and the productive spaces: the arable lands and the grazing areas in its various manifestations and stages of evolution. We find grasslands (usually mixed with shrublands) and forests, in a broad sense, which is identified with the pine grove on many occasions.

III. THE MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPES: HISTORIC PRODUCT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The “*Segovian Guadarrama*” is a territorial construction in which the landscape has acquired a leading role. It is the result of the combination of social processes and practices that have historically occurred. These changes have taken place as much spontaneously, a few times, as in a targeted manner, more or less clearly. Landscapes are a set of images of traditional culture: more livestock or more forest representations, with more traces of the past or with more signs of abandonment or transformation. The images also show more or less artificial elements in symbiosis with the mountain. We can see the “*Sierra*” and its natural values in the form of “staggering” and combined roughness.

The base step of the mountain range constitutes what is called “piedmont” in geomorphological language: the foothills of Pedraza and Segovia. Above them, the villages are located, with a double typology established since “*Madoz Dictionary*”. The dictionary distinguishes between “*Lugares*” (Places), which are the original and greater nuclei (now they

coincide with the municipality capitals), and "Barrios" (Neighborhoods), ie, the minor local entities emerged in historical periods of population growth. Overall, these nuclei show a typical model of concentrated rural settlement of plurinuclear character. Its location always obeys the same measurement base of the natural elements: the proximity to areas with higher humidity.

Around the urban settlement, the spatial organization maintains a traditional stamp. "Enclosed fields" continue representing the most characteristic of the landscape in these areas of greater natural humidity. Extensive areas of fenced meadows are scattered in a first ring, sometimes very dilated and disseminated from the population centers. However, these "fenced fields", well preserved in the municipalities of Arcones, Prádena, Matabuena, Navafría or Sotosalbos, are being transformed into an open pastoral environment, which is the expression of the abandonment and degradation of livestock culture today. Opposite the "enclosed fields", open pastures are a sign of the growing expansion of wastelands, thickets and stubbles. It is the most unequivocal trace of the decline of an historical activity.

From the 1,200 meters at the highest ramps, in contact with the lower parts of mountainsides, we are entering the predominant area of the Oak Grove. The Pyrenean Oak ("Rebollo" or *Quercus pyrenaica Willd.*) is the most characteristic tree of the foothills of the Sierra, which extends, or could be extended, without interruption. The most common appearance of the mountain oaks is the shrub layer or something more developed. This aspect is the result of the traditional use of these "Matas" from the late Middle Ages for firewood, charcoal and grass.

In the theoretical altitudinal scale, pines follow to oak from the middle parts of the slopes (around the threshold of 1,600 meters above sea level), in a strip of ecological transition in which tend to mix both species depending on the environmental conditions. This species can sometimes reach the mountain peaks, although they tend to be solitary individuals with very devitalized aspects.

But the cultural order, i.e., the management made by human labour, is which has impacted more on the current distribution of the pine forest. Logging, burning, the "rozas", the "rompimientos", etc., have led to opening the plains on the holm-oak, the Pyrenean-oak and, to a lesser extent, the pine forests. These works have significantly reduced the forest area. However, pine forests have historically considered strategic resources. Therefore, pine plantations for timber exploitation have been frequent since the Middle Ages in the best mountain locations.

Finally, the stage of "the top of the mountain range" follows the steps of the foothills and slopes. It is a "countertop" of flattened peaks and low hills that rarely comes down from the 1,800 meters. Above it, the different farmyards, which were essential for the traditional organization of mountain passes, constituted the basic units of landscape. These landscapes were arranged according to the different pasture environments.

IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The mountain landscape is the image of the components of nature intertwined with the cultural 'order', i.e. to the social construction of the territory. Societies have transformed nature and have shaped it throughout history.

Economic, social and cultural construction of territory over time is superimposed on the landforms, the rocky places, the climate, the vegetation, etc.: the settlement, the network of paths and road infrastructures, forest management and parcel, ownership structures, the distribution of land uses...

The landscape is the image of the territory, i.e., it is the product of deep intervention that has undergone the mountainous nature through social use of its resources for centuries. Therefore, the observation of mountain landscapes must focus both its natural components and its cultural elements. These elements are manifestations derived from social transformation on the physical space of the “*Vera de la Sierra*”. The landscape of “*Segovian Guadarrama*” is in the end the legacy of a cultural evolution, and becomes a territorial resource of first level, from its emerging patrimonialization.