

KEYS FOR THE COMPHENSION AND INTERPRETATION OF A LANDSCAPE MOSAIC IN THE PROVINCE OF HUELVA

Jesús Monteagudo López-Menchero

Department of History, Geography and Antropology. University of Huelva.
jmonteagudo@uhu.es

I. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Starting from the transdisciplinary nature that the *European Landscape Convention* (2000) gives to the concept of landscape, from the ideas about landscape expressed by a pioneering group of researchers that has been ascribed to this methodological trend¹, we pose a journey through the space and territory of Huelva.

There are numerous authors who, from the basis of a multidisciplinary perspective, have approached to specific, local or regional landscapes of the province of Huelva and to whom we have taken into account. The objectives, the method and the results that we present are close to what J.F. Ojeda (2013 a and b) poses, for whom landscapes are analyzed from four categories: limits, main components, attributes and core of meaning.

We are facing a highly patrimonialized territory, both from international, national and regional institutions, as well as from the feeling of heritage perceived by its inhabitants and manifested in a multitude of patrimonial vectors that, even though they have not received any figure of protection or official nomination, are felt, loved and defended by their people as patrimonial landscapes and elements that must be preserved for future generations (Silva, R., Fernández, V. and Mata, R., 2017).

In this work we intend to present the provincial territory of Huelva as the synthesis of a discontinuous whole, like the pieces of a puzzle. All of them are linked and even superimposed, overlapping, all are essential to complete it, but none is equal to the others. Each of them awakens a different sensation, a different emotion, because each unit has its own personality and each part contributes to enrich the whole.

Our objective is limited to show a synthesis of this landscape puzzle to show the interest of its diversity and richness in order to develop and analyze in depth each of these pieces later.

1 The list would be very long and, as every list, we take the risk of leaving many names behind. However, we must mention some pioneers in this regard, such as F. Zoido; R. Mata; J. Nogué; N. Ortega; E. Martínez de Pisón; J. Tort; R. Silva; J. Rodríguez; F. Molinero; B. Delgado; C. Venegas; A. Berque; J. Maderuelo; F. Pillet; ... (see bibliography).

II. THE SPACE OF HUELVA. COMPREHENSIVE KEYS

Located in the extreme south-west of the Iberian Peninsula, the province of Huelva, with 10,128.5 km², is a space with thresholds in the Sierra Morena and the Atlantic Ocean. A mesopotamian space between the rivers Guadiana and Guadalquivir. These thresholds reinforce their identity, patrimonial, territorial and cultural sense, no matter how weak the neighbouring or border lines are physically.

It is a space both higher and geologically older when farther north. The alpine fold compressed the Precambrian and Palaeozoic lands of the southern edge of the Meseta, Sierra Morena. It produced a strong contact metamorphism, mineralizing the rocks, and it directed the Sierra Morena's part situated in Huelva in a NE-SO direction, descending to San Vicente's Cape, in the Portuguese Algarve. The province descends in altitude and rejuvenates towards the South, especially towards the SE. In this way, the southeast corner, the countryside, comes from a recent sedimentation, being the coast, from the Guadiana to Doñana and the marshes of the Guadalquivir, the best example of unfinished spaces, in continuous formation and transformation.

Lithologically it ranges from igneous and metamorphic rocks in the North, very mineralized in the Andévalo, to limestone in Niebla, marls and clays in the countryside and sands in the coast. Its Appalachian morphology, the Armorican direction of the Hysperic massif, the fractures and faults caused by the alpine folding and the irregularity of its surface cause numerous compartments with a high degree of isolation and singularity.

It is located within the Mediterranean climate, Köppen's Csa, continentalized wet and cool in the North and Mediterranean ocean, tinged by the Atlantic, in the South. The spatial cells compartmentalized by the relief cause numerous microclimates and ecosystems throughout the province.

The predominant vegetation is the Mediterranean, with the climax of holm oaks and cork oaks, enriched with chestnuts and psamophilous and halophytic plants in the coast. Such a variety of biotopes generates a rich diversity of faunal biocenosis in the different ecosystems which are conformed.

III. THE TERRITORY OF HUELVA. INTERPRETATIVE KEYS

Rich historical and cultural past, from the Neolithic until today, passing through the Tartessian, Roman, Visigoth, Muslim and late medieval Christian world. Numerous and important natural, archaeological, monumental and cultural heritage of the different historical periods and clear traces of human occupation throughout the territory. Protection of natural and cultural heritage in areas of singular beauty and natural, historical and anthropological interest. The ecosystemic nature and the derived cultural landscapes are well preserved in the North (Sierra de Aracena y picos de Aroche), South (Marismas del Odiel) and Southeast (Doñana).

At the end of the 15th century, the three ships headed by Christopher Columbus that discovered America, departed from Huelva. The port of Palos de la Frontera, La Rábida and Moguer, will make this territory a world reference since 1492. They are known as *Lugares Colombinos*.

In 1833 Huelva was designated provincial capital. There were hardly internal communications then and Huelva was a port in the central sector of the provincial maritime arch, becoming the central place of a coastal *hinterland* that stretched from Ayamonte to

Sanlúcar de Barrameda, but that extended further towards Portugal, Cadiz and Seville. The sea acquires the relevance that the interior, depopulated and badly communicated, does not have.

In the 1860s, in the colonial period, the Tharsis mines were put into exploitation, and in 1873 the ones in Riotinto. The First Spanish Republic sells in perpetuity, to the foreign mining companies, the subsoil, the ground and the tree. Since then the colonial model was imposed in Huelva: mine-habitat-rail-port. We can single out the traces of this mining exploitation in the deforestation caused by *natural calcination*, the system of *teleras*, the proliferation of *cortas* and *slag heaps*, and by the expansion and multiplication of the settlement in Andévalo and Sierra. The mines were exploited until the late eighties of the twentieth century. Finally, the majority closed at the beginning of the 21st century. With some exceptions, since 2010, in most cases the *cortas* are still closed, with serious environmental problems.

After the Francoist autarchy, the neocolonial model arrived to Huelva based on the Development Planning. Huelva is appointed in 1964 *Polo de Promoción Industrial*. This investment created the infrastructure of this new neocolonialism, alien, on the other hand, to any environmental measure: mines, reservoirs, industrial estates, the Huelva-Seville highway, industrial railroad, industrial port, housing, second residences. The rest of the territory remains invisible and abandoned.

From 1970s to the 1990s, the province of Huelva languished and was depopulated, fundamentally in the Andévalo and the Mountain range. Its resurgence appears when the intensive farming of strawberries in the coast reached dimensions worthwhile, and already at the threshold of the 21st century with the “sun and beach” tourism, creating a great tension in the coast and natural protected areas -especially by the Four limiting factors: water, land, energy and waste. Huelva is the province with the lowest number of inhabitants of Andalusia —517,594 hab. 01/01/2017—. Neither rural tourism nor the reactivation of mining in some areas have saved the critical situation, unemployment, the emigration of highly qualified young people, the ageing and the emptiness of the center-north of the province.

Regarding the connection and articulation of this territory, the only fast moving route of the province is the A-49 / E-01 Seville-Ayamonte highway, letting Huelva-capital at the outside and providing it with a complementary metropolitan network, the H-31, until linking with the A-49. Huelva is not connected by highway neither to the North of its own province, nor to the Ruta de la Plata, Seville-Gijón, nor to Cádiz-Mediterranean Highway. Despite the long railway tradition of Huelva since the nineteenth century and the distance of 640 km to Madrid, there is not still AVE to Seville. Finally, the Spanish-Portuguese border is fluvial, with just a few dozens of meters wide. Until August 1991 there was only the land border crossing by Rosal de la Frontera. All along the fluvial route there was not a single bridge, and at present there are three.

The Huelva's harbour is the main reference of national and international communications in this territory. It is one of the main solid and liquid bulk ports of the State Ports Network. As explained above, its hinterland is very small and barely exceeds the province. Terrestrial communications do not encourage intermodal exchange.

Summarising, a confined territory, border, marginal, *finis terrae* of Spain by the Southwest, bag bottom, badly communicated, almost disjointed. Territory *peninsularized* with the isthmus in Seville, the city where almost everything passes from Huelva and from where almost everything comes to Huelva, whose size and prominence emit a long shadow, a shade to the west that produces a high opacity on Huelva.

IV. THE LANDSCAPES OF HUELVA. SYNTHESIS

As a result, we have a mosaic of landscapes which would be:

1. Dehesa landscapes. The oaks and cork oaks hollowed forest. Humanized and domesticated landscape, a wise way of understanding the nature-society relationship in the Mediterranean world, a true cultural heritage in the Sierra de Huelva. The dehesa is the most extended landscape in Huelva -more than 200,000 Ha-. It is found throughout the north and centre of the province, inside and outside the Sierra de Aracena and Picos de Aroche Natural Park. The concatenation of numerous factors devastated thousands of hectares in the second half of the 20th century, especially in the West-Southwest, being replaced the dehesa by the eucalyptus, an allochthonous repopulation that gives to the landscape of Andévalo a high degree of desertification. In 2016 the population of the Sierra was 39,287 hab. —7.5% pop. Prov— The dehesa is getting depopulated and aged.

2. Chestnut landscapes. In the Sierra, more than 600 m over the sea level, in the most humid zones, the chestnut tree is the symbol of an exterior occupation, the Christian-medieval repopulation with Galician settlers. Chestnut is embedded in the territory of the Sierra, but represents the exogenous, the polychromy. Chestnut it is not very extended in the Sierra, about 5,000 hectares, and it is located in a dozen mountain municipalities. The chestnut and the chestnut tree, either do not retain the mountain population.

3. Landscapes of serrano-andevalaño agriculture. There is also a specific agriculture of fruit and vegetables on the Paleozoic, irrigated by the waters of the Aracena massif and the rivers from the North. It has been disappearing and it is currently residual and symbolic. There are also olive plantations that approach 9,000 hectares.

Traditionally, agriculture in Andévalo was strongly concentrated in some agricultural municipalities, such as Zalamea la Real. Nowadays it is being expanded more and more thanks to modern irrigation technologies and mining abandonment, such as the Rio Tinto Fruit SA, an extension that occupies more than 1,600 hectares with orange and fruit trees over the lands of the Rio Tinto mines, or as in the western Andévalo, where the agriculture of orange trees, olive trees and greenhouses has been extended and has introduced a sense of domestication of a wild land, dreary and indomitable, land of mines and eucalyptus.

4. Water landscapes. Water is the essence of the Sierra. In some places the rain exceeds 1,000 mm. Water in the Aracena massif, filtered throughout the year by the natural springs. The water determines some place names: Cañaverál, Arroyomolinos or Fuenteheridos, and forms gallery forests, showing the vividness and seasonal coloring. The water gives the character to the mountain villages and it is present in a multitude of patrimonial vectors: streams, creeks, gallery forests, springs, mills, fountains, wash rooms, drinking troughs, ferris wheels, orchards, even in dams, such as those of Aracena, Campofrío or Zufre, among others.

The landscape of water in Huelva is also the landscape of its rivers. The rivers adhere to it, irrigate it, give it colour, identity and personality. The province is not only embedded between rivers, but mesopotamias are systematically replicated in its interior, in successive perpendicular to the ocean sections. The landscapes of Huelva would not be understood without the rusty red of the Tinto River and its tributaries. Even Andévalo is the reserve of water for Huelva. The homonymous reservoir has a capacity of 600 Hm³ and everywhere, next to each mine, there is a dam, a “dique”, to wash ore. The aerial image of Andévalo, in this sense, is a

landscape with black spots dotting the territory. Huelva has a reservoir capacity of 1,500 Hm³ distributed throughout the province, especially in the Andévalo and Sierra.

Finally, in the South of Huelva, the water is not only in the Atlantic Ocean, but also in the littoral-continental border. Fluvial runoff water from North to South that ends in the marshes wetlands. Also groundwater from coastal aquifers.

5. Mining landscapes. Together with the water and the dehesa, the mine is the one major signs of patrimonial identity in the landscapes of Huelva. Rome, and before the Mediterranean nations exploited these mines. The rubbish dumps and other vestiges at the time are today emblematic patrimonial elements of the landscape.

In the 19th century, open-pit mining began with cuttings and galleries. The Andévalo, and with a lesser extent the Sierra, are dotted with these tunnels. The current landscape reflects the historical-geographical process of mining configuration in Huelva. Today, often, they are landscapes of abandonment, of loneliness and silence-abandoned cars, sunken buildings, deserted villages, aged and in ruins, abandoned railways. Polychromatic landscapes where the red of the gossan fills the view, but the colours of the rocks and the salts produce the polychromy in which the cuttings, the wells and the tailings are sometimes converted.

6. Landscapes of the countryside. The Campiña-Condado extends to the southeast corner of the province. It is the agricultural field par excellence. The landscapes show the occupation of the “Mediterranean trilogy” associated with other cereals, legumes and sunflower plus the hedges and orchards of the villages. This area presents a highly anthropized territory, open fields, agriculturally used. Along the hedges of these towns, large and white, the traditional orchards, the small irrigated fruit and summer vegetables have been disappearing at the time that their space was being invaded with housing estates, townhouses, industrial estates and communication routes.

With an exceptional protagonism, two landscapes are located: the olive grove and the vineyard. Although Huelva is one of the Andalusian provinces with the smallest area of olive groves, it reaches 20,000 ha. in the Campiña. The vine mainly corresponds to the Zalema variety. The Condado vineyards have become part of the patrimonial and landscape essence of this region. Especially in the Condado, Huelva has 4,000 hectares of vineyards under the DOP Condado de Huelva.

7. Landscapes in tension of the peri-urban area of Huelva. In the peri-urban area of Huelva, they are concentrated in less than 200 km²: a Mesopotamian area: the Tinto and Odiel rivers and the Huelva estuary forming a natural Biosphere Reserve, Marismas del Odiel, and an industrial fluvio-marine port; a city, Huelva, with 145,000 inhabitants; two large industrial chemical polygons located in the South (Punta del Sebo) and Southeast (New Port) of the city; a place and a historical reference convent: La Rábida, declared BIC; an adjoining space dedicated to the intensive agricultural exploitation of strawberries, red fruits and fruit trees under plastic; several peri-urban centres, including two tourist centres: Mazagón and Punta Umbría. In this urban and peri-urban area of Huelva there were 242,552 inhabitants censused in 2016 –almost half of the provincial population–, plus those that accumulate during the summer period as tourists and users of second homes. As a result, a mosaic of unique, tense landscapes is formed.

8. Coastal landscapes. From Ayamonte to Punta de Malandar, the rest of the rivers and landscape units that have already been mentioned as water landscapes are unite to this core group. The Coast is the contact of the province with the Atlantic Ocean and, in addition, there are competing elements and activities:

Wide and sandy beaches with high escarpments and fossil dunes in the West and mobiles in the East, Doñana; mouth of rivers perpendicular to the coast and parallel to each other, forming shoals, arrows and marshes; pine forests, spread throughout the coast and attacked by fires and deforestation for changes in use; intensive agriculture under plastic, from Ayamonte to the very limit of Doñana, with high demand for land, energy, water and waste, the limiting factors; municipalities and population centres that, together with Huelva capital, are the largest in the province, from Ayamonte to Almonte; diffuse urbanizations, with a special function of second residence and tourism, located on the same littoral border and around which turn communication routes and activities that press on the coast and expand its surface at the expense of the coastal ecosystems, causing strong environmental impacts and conforming stressed coastal landscapes.

9. Magical, sacred, historical landscapes, of recollection, isolation, and meditation.

The province of Huelva has been always a magical, sacred and isolated land, from the primitive dolmens to the present day. Landscapes that incorporate the telluric forces of the promontories, the purifying water, the hollows, the forests, the hills, the virgin nature, singularized and secluded, in short, where to merge with the divinity and meditate on the transcendent. Landscapes of Tartessian, Roman, Visigoth, Muslim and Catholic shrines. Landscapes of temples, hermitages and monasteries, of virgins and apparitions, today landscapes of patrons, of fiestas and pilgrimages.

La Rábida and El Rocío stand out, but the list is very long, especially in the Sierra and the Andévalo, whose importance deserves attention and a more detailed study.

10. Emerging landscapes of renewable energies. We conclude this synthesis with landscapes which are increasingly superimposed on several of the ones described here. It is the one that Prados et al. (2012) and Frolova et al. (2014) call *emerging landscapes of renewable energy*. In the Andévalo and the Costa, above all, “solar orchards” are being extended with great profusion, taking advantage of the high insolation. The high hills of the Andévalo appear colonized with wind turbines that are visible from any hillock. They multiply in the Portuguese line and in all the western Andévalo where the west wind and the set of microclimates are constant.

V. CONCLUSION

In brief pages, a mosaic of landscapes of the province of Huelva, from the mountain to the sea, has been exhibited. The data analyzed are only the starting point of monographic works for each of these landscape units. In certain cases some of these landscapes have been studied deeply by other researchers. It was intended as an objective, in this brief work, to show in a synthetic way the variety and landscape richness of the province, doing an enumeration of the main landscapes, highlighting their comprehensive and interpretive spatial and territorial keys. What we present allows us to conclude that we are facing a space and a territory that because of its uniqueness, its confinement, its border character, its geological antiquity/youth contrast and its strong anthropization throughout history, allows us to identify a great wealth of individualized landscape units, but also superimposed and overlapping with each other, in some cases almost as naturo-cultural endemisms due to their isolation. To what is analyzed here we must add the stories that these landscapes generate.