

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES OF LANDSCAPE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PRESTIGIOUS TOURIST IMAGE: THE COAST OF LLANES (EAST OF ASTURIAS, SPAIN)

Juan Sevilla Álvarez,
Carmen Rodríguez Pérez
Universidad de Oviedo
sevillajuan@uniovi.es, crperez@uniovi.es

1. INTRODUCTION

Landscape has become an object of outstanding attention in our society during the contemporary period. It has been revalued as a source of sociocultural learning, reflecting collective practices and territorial identities, as well as an element for sensory enjoyment. It constitutes a fundamental resource for territories that find an option for development in the revaluation of their territorial features. In addition, taking into account the repercussions and potential conflicts generated by this phenomenon, landscape begins to be contemplated in management actions. The rhythms of its integration in the political-administrative practice is very different depending on the territories and institutional approaches (Hernández Hernández, 2009).

By carrying a set of values, landscape is a factor for development, being at the base of the supply and demand of tourism activity. It participates in the construction of the tourist image of a place. However, it is necessary to take into account those types of actions that may arise when there are agents interested in making it profitable as a source of wealth (Laguna Marín-Yaseli and Nogués Bravo, 2001, Aledo Tur, 2008, Hernández Hernández, 2009). In this sense, landscape must also be considered as a good to be managed and preserved. And tourism must be among the sectors that protect it. The capacity to attract tourists and potential risks must be analyzed for integrated decision-making in planning and territorial management (Salinas Chávez and Mateo Rodríguez, 1993, Cánova et al., 2002).

This article studies the municipality of Llanes, in eastern Asturias, flanked by the Cantabrian Sea and the voluminous Sierra del Cuera. Protection through official figures at different scales (*Paisajes Protegidos*, *Monumentos Naturales*, *Bienes de Interés Cultural*, *Conjuntos Históricos*, SACs) has not stopped the impact of increasing tourist pressure. In this way, the objective is to analyze the role of landscape in tourism development, but also the possibility that tourism itself modifies landscape qualities.

2. LANDSCAPE TRAITS

Landscape in this coast results from the combination of varied physical factors (relief, climatic conditions, vegetation) and the actions carried out by humans over time. These actions have resulted in a significant change of its components, especially with regard to the replacement of climactic plant formations. Precisely, the importance that secular human action has had on nature implies that the use of the term “natural landscape” is somewhat inappropriate to refer to such an intensely humanized environment. Although this does not contradict the fact that the physical framework, and especially the organization of relief, continues to transcend substantially in its appearance: a natural support that has oriented, based on its unique topographic and lithological features, both traditional land uses and the distribution of settlement and infrastructures.

A typical bocage landscape is modeled in this space. The intercalation of small plots with different productive vocation (meadows, apple tree plantations, small holm oaks, rests of leafy forests, ...), separated by vegetable hedges (*sebes*), make up an image with undoubted tourist attraction.

However, this inherited landscape has undergone a radical change in recent decades due to the growing pressure of the tourist function and its associated urbanization process. It has also been modified due to the expansion of a forest exploitation system based on the use of fast-growing allochthonous plant species (*Pinus pinaster* and *Eucalyptus globulus*)

3. FROM THE ORIGIN OF LANDSCAPE PROMOTION TO THE CHALLENGE OF RECENT CONSERVATION

We find very appreciated components in relief forms, especially in those resulting from the karstic modeling, alternated with those of the flat quartzite mountains, as well in the plant formations: acebuche above the cliffs, holm oaks in rocky ridges and beech forests in the high stripes of Cuera. However, the valuation integrates another set of qualities, somehow linked to those already mentioned, since nature is the framework that enhances the attractiveness of prehistoric vestiges and outstanding examples of the architecture from very different periods, among other elements.

The study and promotion of the natural and cultural landscape have spread since individual and collective initiatives by chroniclers, writers, scientists and artists contributed to the dissemination of its knowledge, especially since the nineteenth century. It has led to the consolidation of a heritage making process in one of the most frequented and appreciated coastal areas of Atlantic Spain. The institutional attention in different aspects, both tourism promotion and heritage protection, together with the individual, associative and business initiative, give rise to a convergence of interests and very varied uses. And it draws a scenario of conflicts and opportunities in relation to the landscape defense.

The values and qualities that make up the tourist image of Llanes have attracted the attention of the Administration regarding its official protection. The regional *Plan de Ordenación de los Recursos Naturales de Asturias (PORN)*, approved in 1994, proposes the declaration of some *Monumentos Naturales* for their uniqueness, rarity and beauty: *bufones*, beaches and caves. The protection of historical and artistic elements is also

important and older, but also with limited spatial implantation. Numerous elements have been declared as *Bien de Interés Cultural*; for example, parietal paintings and engravings, towers, palaces, houses and religious buildings. We should also add the goods included in the *Inventario del Patrimonio Cultural de Asturias* (mainly archaeological, architectural and infrastructural) or others included in the *Catálogos Urbanísticos de Protección*.

But actions with zonal implementation have been scarce. In relation to the historical and artistic heritage, we can mention the distinction of the old town of Llanes as a historical site in 1971. The coastal branch of Camino de Santiago has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2015. On the other hand, the delimitation of SAC Río Purón, SAC Ría de Ribadesella-Ría de Tinamayor, SAC Río Las Cabras-Bedón and SAC Sierra Plana de la Borbolla in the European Natura 2000 network is noteworthy.

Since the *Paisajes Protegidos* remain without effective declaration, the urban pressure and the loss of landscape quality have increased in recent times, especially near the coastline. Only some determinations taken in regional spatial planning have stopped this tendency, being essential the elaboration of the *Plan Territorial Especial de Ordenación del Litoral Asturiano (POLA)* and the application of a new land category: *Suelo No Urbanizable de Costas*.

Among the actions of regional spatial planning, another instrument with a vocation to protect the coastline emerged in September 2016: *Plan Territorial Especial del Suelo No Urbanizable de Costas (PESC)*. This document seeks to safeguard and consolidate an image of excellence without diminishing the development of economic activity. To achieve this purpose, a zoning is undertaken within the stripe of *Suelo No Urbanizable de Costas*. It identifies lands that, due to their characteristics, are subject to specific consideration. Thus, regulations and adapted protection measures can be established, depending on whether they have geological, zoological, botanical and ethnographical interest, or they are particularly suitable for agricultural activity, etc.

However, efficient coordination between regional determinations and those taken by local planning is necessary, often being the latter contrary to the principles of territorial balance and sustainability. In response to this kind of problems, the work of local collectives for the protection of heritage and the defense of neighborhood interests in urban, environmental, cultural aspects, etc., is interesting (*Agrupación de Vecinos y Amigos de Llanes*). These are movements based on the consideration of landscape as a reflection of ways of life and memory; a good to safeguard from transformations driven by external wills and responding to economic dynamics that are not very sensitive to the characteristics of the area, often leading to homogenization or landscape trivialization (Hernández Hernández, 2009).

4. CONCLUSION

Economic processes and territorial changes put at risk the conservation of the original values that build the reputation of Llanes coast. Therefore, it seems appropriate to lean towards a rational tourist vocation, which puts quality before quantity in key aspects such as exploitation of resources, design and supply of products, or profile of visitors.

The official actions launched under regional protection figures require a permanent evaluation. In large part, these are figures for specific places that do receive institutional protection for the safeguarding of ecological, aesthetic, historical values, etc. But they do not cover all the area that deserves attention. The figure that seems to be conceived more specifically for the care of landscape in large areas (*Paisajes Protegidos*) has not been made effective nor seems designed to sufficiently preserve against the processes that generate risks. For this reason, regional instruments for integral territorial management, such as the *POLA* and the *PESC*, are necessary as a complement. Furthermore, the complex coordination with local planning is essential, taking into account that municipal urban planning often develops solutions and measures that contrast with those of other administrative scales.

An approach inspired by the principles of the European Landscape Convention, approved in 2000, would be appropriate for the development of tourist activity on the eastern coast of Asturias. It would involve coordinating the actions of all the institutions and groups concerned in territorial, environmental, cultural, economic and social policies (Panadero Moya, García González and Panadero Alarcón, 2011). This official European document contains a perspective that can guide the link between actions by Administration and the economic and social agents. If landscape constitutes a public good to be conserved, tourist initiatives designed for a public that prefers authenticity, originality and learning experience should be prioritized.