

## LOOKING AHEAD. THE OLIVE GROVE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

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### **Abstract. Looking ahead. The olive grove cultural landscape**

The landscape of the olive grove is a paradigmatic cultural landscape, which perfectly integrates the tangible and intangible. It is an outstanding witness of a form of exploitation that goes back millennia on the calendar of humanity. Is inextricably linked to the Greco-Roman culture that was born around the Mediterranean and keeps some traditional forms of habitat and monumental ensembles. Olive cultivation also remains active today in many regions with the same techniques and traditions and simultaneously is a thriving industry where new technologies and knowledge are applied.

It is one of the major crops that still needs to be registered on the World Heritage List, where agricultural landscapes are unequally represented. This landscape covers huge surfaces all around the Mediterranean basin. In Andalusia, the largest area of "humanized forest" in Europe, the olive trees combing the hills have become a landscape at the confluence of the four main lines of Unesco: Cultural and Natural Heritage (inscriptions on the List: monumental renaissance ensembles of Ubeda and Baeza), Intangible Heritage (inscribed: the Mediterranean diet and flamenco), Cultural Diversity (inherited from Roman, Arab and Christian kingdoms) and Biodiversity (live olive groves and holm oak ecosystem, forming typical Mediterranean forest). In this area new exemplary lines for ecotourism, cultural tourism and economic development have been developed based on the olive heritage.

### **1. Introduction. The cultural landscape of the olive tree and its heritage values**

The landscape of the olive grove is a paradigmatic cultural landscape, which perfectly integrates the tangible and intangible. It is an outstanding witness of a form of exploitation that goes back millennia on the calendar of humanity. Is inextricably linked to the Greco-Roman culture that was born around the Mediterranean, in fact it is its most important identity sign. It has served as a bridge and link between different countries, where they have exchanged their harvest products and also the skills and knowledge about the olive tree that has been, since Athena introduced it in Attica, a symbol of civilization, peace and reconciliation, as it was between in the beginning for the peoples of the Middle East and as still reflected in the logo of the UNO, "the world between the branches of olive tree of peace." But besides all its symbolism that carries an important intangible heritage, the olive has been a source of wealth, trade, and exchange. Oil, liquid gold, has been and remains the basis of a powerful industry that in the past lit up the streets and homes of many European cities, it has fed generations and is the fundamental element

of the Mediterranean diet and it was also used, and still is, in many cosmetic products. In addition it also promoted growing techniques, harvesting, extraction and refining of oil, and has currently become a brand new source of renewable energy.

The olive tree has generated a prototypical landscape, the "sea of olives" whose lines extend to infinity and an impressive architectural, artistic, historical, ethnographic, archaeological and industrial heritage. It is one of the major crops that still needs to be registered on the World Heritage List, where agricultural landscapes are unequally represented. This landscape covers huge surfaces all around the Mediterranean basin. In Andalusia, the largest area of "humanized forest" in Europe, the olive trees combing the hills have become a landscape at the confluence of the four main lines of Unesco: Cultural and Natural Heritage (inscriptions on the List: monumental renaissance ensembles of Ubeda and Baeza), Intangible Heritage (inscribed: the Mediterranean diet and flamenco), Cultural Diversity (inherited from Roman, Arab and Christian kingdoms) and Biodiversity (live olive groves and holm oak ecosystem, forming the characteristic Mediterranean forest).

In short, the olive tree and its landscape are an engine

of wealth creation and local development, which has a significant cultural heritage linked to a major economic sector that includes both tourism enterprises as well as companies involved in energy derived from the production of oil and olive, with involvement of universities and other research institutions, is past and present in many regions around the Mediterranean, where some of the tourism initiatives carried out in Andalusia can serve as an example.

## 2. Landscape as identity

A cultural landscape is the memory and identity of the men who created it, is an evolutionary continuum which houses the various tracks of each period to keep the memory of history. Landscape is a living and dynamic entity that is in the basis of the identity of a society. One of the most urgent needs of human beings is their sense of identity, of belonging to a place, their "roots" (using a natural metaphor) and a key element of this feeling is the landscape. "In general, people feel part of a landscape, which provides multiple and deep complicity. This feeling is legitimate, ancient and universal." (Nogué, 2010:125). The scenery is the spatial translation of social organizations, lifestyles, beliefs, knowledge and representations of various cultures past and present. In rural areas this linkage is closer, with traditional societies where the interaction between reality, the tangible and intangible aspects are more easily observed. Members of a community share values and organizational forms that differ from other communities and become a resource development as they become interesting for other populations, for its specificity, while becoming a source of satisfaction for themselves.

## 3. Rural landscapes and cultural values

Rural landscapes are rich in cultural significance, as defined in the *Charter for the Conservation of Cultural Sites of Significance* (Burra Charter, Australia ICOMOS, 1999), understanding the cultural significance as an aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value that is embodied in the site, fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. "Sites of cultural significance enrich the lives of people, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences. They are historical records, that are important as tangible expressions of (the population) identity and experience. Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and the past that has formed us and the landscape. They are irreplaceable and precious." As such, rural landscapes must be conserved and their authenticity preserved.

The diversity of rural landscapes is a complex research field with cross connections between culture, physical environment, ecological systems, etc. Their study includes a variety of fields such as topography, geology, vegetation and ecological characteristics, but also factors and values of human action over that area and such tangible elements and components as land patterns, forms of traditional products, the persistence of traditional production tools, transportation, storage, domestic sets, industrial, energy or hydraulic systems and other intangible factors such as beliefs, rituals, traditional rites associated, languages and dialects or economic and social activities. The analysis of some of the physical components of the rural landscape has become an important chapter to the study of the general history of culture.

Rural landscapes are well represented (though unequally) in the World Heritage List but have also been recognised as carrying a huge intangible heritage *The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* adopted by UNESCO in 2003. In Article 2 this intangible cultural heritage is defined as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity." The intangible meaning is especially represented in the rural landscape, is a meaning that only recently has acquired all their importance, given its fundamental importance not only to preserve the authenticity and integrity of this heritage in itself, but also to protect identity and cultural diversity.

In 2010 ICOMOS chose the theme *The heritage of Agriculture* for the International Day for Monuments and Sites, as an answer to the demand of preserving the significant natural and cultural heritage properties generated by agrarian activity. There is a need for the recognition of agricultural heritage, "as a multidimensional heritage which embraces different types of tangible and intangible, cultural and natural properties" and recognised that "agricultural landscapes, where such values are still alive, therefore represent a link between the past, the present and the future, and particularly reflect ongoing trends in the development of heritage theory. As stated in Annex 3 (paragraph 9) of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*: "Cultural landscapes often

reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature. Protection of cultural landscapes can contribute to modern techniques of sustainable land-use and can maintain or enhance natural values in the landscape." Rural landscapes must be considered as including key cultural values that should be regarded as outstanding factors for future and sustainable development, and they have been the basis for the creation of many programmes and initiatives such as the Eucaland Project that deals with the Agricultural Landscapes of Europe for promoting their consideration and use among their people and for preserving their cultural heritage, identifying their characteristic components, highlighting the cultural, social and psychological benefits for the well-being of the citizens and trends for future developments.

#### 4. Landscape, Development and tourism

Thus admitting the outstanding heritage value of the landscape as recipient of the identity of a community and therefore, the cornerstone of a sustainable development process in which tourism plays an important role, it should be noted that prior to the development process a thorough analysis of natural and cultural resources must be carried out. This may influence the local development and thus carry out projects that benefit the community, maintaining the upkeep and maintenance of the authenticity and integrity of its heritage, landscape and associated values. Therefore the development model "is built from the territory and it is the role of its population to establish its characteristics, noting as limits the system's sustainability (economic, social and cultural) and environmental and human rights". (Fernández Salinas, 2003). We must always consider that sustainable tourism in rural areas should always aim to "minimise environmental and cultural damage, optimise visitor satisfaction, and maximise long-term economic growth for the region", and should focus on several main points:

- " - Sustain the culture and character of host communities.
- Sustain landscape and habitats
- Sustain the rural economy.
- Sustain a tourism industry which will be viable in the long term — and this in turn means the promotion of successful and satisfying holiday experiences.
- Develop sufficient understanding, leadership and vision amongst the decision-makers in an area that they realise the dangers of too much reliance on tourism, and continue to work towards a balanced and

diversified rural economy." (Lane, 2005) .

All strategies must be based on the identification of the territory from a heritage point of view, on the definition of touristic products. The identity signs of a territory and a society are essential when planning the raising of financial resources for rural development and there is a necessity to intervene on cultural heritage as a reaffirmation and recovery of this territorial identity that is useful to unite the population in a collective project. "Heritage is a territorial resource that generates identity" (Fernández Salinas, Romero Moragas, 2008).

#### 5. "Olive Routes" First Initiatives

Assuming that the landscape of the olive grove was a prime resource for sustainable tourism development, in 2003 UNESCO launched the project "Routes of the Olive: Itinerary of culture and sustainable development, dialogue and peace among peoples of the Mediterranean", which housed more than 20 Mediterranean countries and consisting of a long-term cultural cooperation, trade and tourism among the Mediterranean peoples, whose objectives were:

- " (a) to highlight the shared material and spiritual heritage that has linked the peoples of the Mediterranean since prehistoric times, centred on the olive tree and its many uses;
- (b) to support efforts to ensure that traditional knowledge is respected and protected and that the environment and natural resources are wisely managed;
- (c) to guarantee the protection of renewable ecosystems with a view to their sustainable exploitation, this being an essential requirement for the full physical, economic and cultural development of the peoples concerned;
- (d) to explore the cultural and symbolic use of the olive tree both within and outside these areas of exploitation."

These objectives are examined within the framework of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the Declaration and the Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) and the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations Cultural and Development (2002), etc. The Introduction of the document states:

- "1. The olive — one of the wonders of nature, a mythical tree sacred for the three monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean, a material and spiritual reference point for human beings and a universal symbol of peace and

reconciliation—is central to daily life in many countries, shaping a wide variety of natural landscapes and living cultures.

2. The importance of this project rests on the idea that cultural landscapes, seen as “bearing witness to humanity’s creative genius, technical, economic and social development, imagination and spiritual vitality”, have had a direct or indirect link with olive cultivation in the Mediterranean basin from antiquity to the present day.”

The itineraries, that were promoted firstly by Greece, by the Cultural Foundation of the Routes of the Olive Tree and the Chamber of Commerce of Messenia, wish to create "interactive synergies" between conservation, tourism and development by: favouring dialogue between the regions concerned, between developed areas and those in difficulty, between urban and rural spaces; encouraging thematic tourism and sustainable development through setting up exemplary initiatives in oil-producing regions; carrying out an inventory of the material and immaterial heritage of the olive tree, and increasing its value; contributing to public awareness and educating young people; leading specialized, multidisciplinary research on the widened theme of the olive tree. Events along the "olive and olive oil routes" are organised every year by various bodies — such as chambers of trade, local councils and agricultural associations — following an itinerary which starts in Greece, passes along the Turkish coast and through the countries of the Middle East and North Africa and returns via Spain, Portugal, France and Italy to the Peloponnese. Along this route there are cultural activities and demonstrations focused around the theme of olives. The *Olive Tree Routes*, were elected the "2nd World Cultural Itinerary" by UNESCO in 2003 and formally awarded the title of "Major European Cultural Route" on 4th March 2005.

The 1st cultural itinerary of The Routes of the Olive Tree was inaugurated in 1999 in the ancient town of Pylos, where tablets of linear B writing were discovered with the ideogram of the Olive tree. 16 000 kilometres and 40 days of motorbike circuits, realized from Greece to France, passing through Cyprus, Israel, Egypt and Italy. These routes, which take place once a year, are made up of a course of relays across all of the olive-growing Mediterranean countries with the participation of “Friends of the Olive Tree” and the motorcycle clubs of the IFM. The journey is divided into several stages and continues towards several destinations, from a predetermined town to another town of arrival, where all the participants meet. The meeting of the “Olive Tree Messengers” is celebrated through several events, organised in cooperation with local organisations.

## 6. Initiatives in Spain

Spain has about 2,500 thousand hectares and over 300 million olive trees. Olive culture has made, and continues to lead the lifestyle of a large part of rural Andalusia in the south of the country, from folk customs to the eating habits, architecture, urban planning, arts and crafts, and of course, the landscape, especially in regions such as Jaen, defined by the cultivation of olive trees. “The Andalusia region is the main olive production area worldwide with a total land of 1.5 million of hectares (30% of the agricultural land of Andalusia, 59% of the total olive grove land in Spain, 30% of the total olive grove land in the EU and 19% worldwide). The olive grove production is one of the sectors with more job creations per hectare so it is sometimes called a "social crop". The olive sector creates 32% of the total employment in the Andalusian agriculture (91,327 direct jobs) even more than in other dynamic agricultural subsectors such as horticulture. In sum, the olive grove production means the main activity in more than 300 towns in Andalusia particularly in those where the olive grove is single-crop farming (Common Agricultural Policy, 2008). Finally it is worth highlighting the environmental relevance of the olive grove. Traditionally the olive grove in Andalusia was associated with a high biodiversity being an example of a "natural high-value agricultural system"...In summary, the olive systems provide a set of goods and services to the society in Andalusia.” (Gómez Limón and Riesgo, 2010).

In the last years, specifically since the the Spanish accession to the European Union, there was a growth in the cultivation of olives that implied some sustainability problems such as soil erosion or overexploitation of water resources, but with the birth of the Rural Development Programme and the work methodology Leader, the diversification of the rural economy has been promoted, by means of the implementation of innovative projects disengaged from the strictly agricultural production. The Leader Initiative and the PRODER program have chosen to use cultural heritage as a key element for progress in rural areas based on different enhancement actions and use, and specially for strategies related to culture and tourism. The Andalusian Government has promoted specifically some of the initiatives, among which are the museums, which include both the customs related to the crop, and the process of oil production, to packaging, together with the conservation of a major ethnographic heritage. In Andalusia there are up to 23 oil-related museums, some with significant technological innovations, others have even accommodation, exhibitions of tools and machinery, some are historical and archaeological museums, and others ethnographic museums, as well



as a museum of arts and customs. These museums are often located in old olive mills and farms, so they also show its urban and architectural heritage, in addition with breathtaking natural scenic sites that contextualize the content. Many of them are included in specialised tours.

Other tourist routes offers were presented officially in Fitur International Tourism Fair in 2008, with the slogan "The Olive Routes", which offer tourists the chance to visit a mill and are also associated with a tasting of oil, so that tourists know the phases of the process, the steps followed for the development of oil and evolution over the history of these processes, the history of olives in Andalusia, and associated traditions, all within a landscape with cities and monuments of a very high value, with a significant and growing demand. The oil tourism is offering us new experiences in which the visitor enjoys nature, gastronomy and cultural heritage at the same time. Olives and olive oil are a landscape and a product and the hallmark of many Spanish territories and especially in Andalucía. Many olive routes offer visits to the olive groves, sometimes coinciding with the olive harvest and visits to the old

mills, where oil is extracted. The routes are completed with tastings to allow the visitor to compare between the most common olive varieties and taste the local cuisine, always with olive oil as the protagonist.

There are also interesting initiatives such as the Via Verde Aceite (Olive Oil Greenway), a disused Spanish railway line that once transported Andalucía's mountains of olives to the coast and is now a walking trail through the endless groves. It was built between 1882 and 1893 with the help of Gustav Eiffel's French Engineers and was known as Tren del Aceite – the olive oil train. Commercial reasons saw its use decline and in 1985 the line closed completely and began to be dismantled. The route covers 55km between Jaén and the small town of Alcaudete to the west, along part of the old rural railway line, originally used for transporting olive oil to the coastal towns of Málaga and Algeciras. This new attraction can be done walking or cycling with a 55 km. vehicle-free path. The line crosses rivers, 19th century metal viaducts and streams in the heart of the countryside with spectacular views and at the site of the old stations there is parking available and picnic zones.



fig. 1 The "sea of olives". Jaén, Spain



Fig. 2 Collecting olives. Italy



Fig. 3 UNO logo, the world between the branches of the olive tree of peace.





Fig. 4 Touristic brochure for the Andalusian Routes of the Olive Tree.

## 7. Conclusions

Being aware of cultural heritage values of the landscape of olive groves, which was previously only seen from a point of view of farming, it results in a series of cultural tourism projects that have developed new lines of exemplary cultural tourism, ecotourism and economic development based on olive heritage, which includes

a rich natural heritage, architectural, archaeological, ethnological, industrial, scientific, anthropological heritage, while promoting and raising awareness in the local population about the cultural values of this cultural landscape.

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