

THE CAMINO DE LA COSTA (COASTAL ROUTE) IN THE EASTERN BORDER OF THE RÍO DE LA PLATA: A CULTURAL LINK

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The purpose of this work is to continue and extend previous studies done as part of the CIIC Scientific Committee's activities. We have analysed before, in other academic meetings¹, the way that cultural itineraries are related to significant qualitative changes in the vision of heritage conservation. It is well known the gradual expansion that the notion of "monument" has gone through along the 20th century. In fact, the original vision of an isolated artifact has evolved with the recognition of the historic site where it is located, considering also historic ensembles, historic centres and finally historic towns and cultural landscapes as well.

Besides monuments started to be considered because of their variety and complexity. At first monuments were relevant and unique products representative of refined cultures, but gradually another manifestations of culture started to be included, such as anonymous architecture or those related to the industrial field or those that were not meant to last forever, or even examples of so considered marginal cultures.

In fact, we believe that the notion of cultural routes can provide conservation politics with an ample territorial perspective and a seldom achieved cultural integration. This adds a new conceptual dimension that opens a new path based in a more extensive and inclusive notion about cultural heritage and introduces a different scale that conservation should take account of in the future. Beyond the hard and restrictive heritage considerations about historic centres, territorial consideration is a priority after the unexpected theoretical expansion of the notion that can be found in the Washington Charter.

Once you can see beyond restrictive local values in order to consider other's cultures values, cultural routes can be as a possibility of integration that reflect the rich diversity of tangible or intangible cultural heritage as well as a more

accurate vision of geography and history. There are cultural routes such as the Camino Real (Royal Route) of the Spanish colonial empire whose trails and signs have endured all world long. The fact that we should identify its articulations, generalisations and singularities, its local and global dimensions, resets an unusual tension upon heritage conservation.

It is well known the relevant contribution made by the idea of cultural landscape to these thoughts. We know, of course, that limits between cultural routes and cultural landscapes may be somehow diffuse, but once you define them accurately they do not overlap. Cultural routes provide a complementary and wider vision and a new scientific perspective. As a matter of fact, most of them include different landscapes, each of them showing different values and structures, into a road sustained in time and treasured by memory. The most relevant about this notion is the capability to connect different natural and cultural landscapes, traces, cultural expressions and even architectures and so, the ability to give them a new meaning as part of a larger structure.

Moreover, itineraries bring along the dynamic idea of motion. This can be understood in different ways. Some authors have seen mobility as a possible way of resisting the establishment², and even show the differences about nomads and migrants. According to Deleuze and Guattari: "*Nomads should not be taken for migrants, since migrants go basically from one place to the other, even if that other place is doubtful, unexpected or badly located. But nomads just go from one place to the other as a consequence and material necessity: since the beginning, places are considered by them as stages in their way*"³

They identify nomadism as a sort of war machine, stating a basic difference in spatial structure: "*sedentary's space is striped by means of walls, boundaries and roads between*

¹ Cf. García Miranda, Ruben. "Inventories of cultural itineraries in times of globalisation" Published in "El patrimonio intangible y otros aspectos relativos culturales", ICOMOS, Gobierno de Navarra, Departamento de Educación y Cultura, Pamplona, 2002.

² Cf. Deleuze, G.; Guattari, F.: "Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia". Chapter "Tratado de nomadología: la máquina de guerra". Valencia, Pre - textos, 1988. Translation of the authors.

³ Ibidem , p.385.

boundaries, meanwhile nomad's space is smooth, its only marks are tracks that erase and move forth along the road"⁴

It is comprehensible, therefore, that a cultural route is related to an established road and to a striped space, as Deleuze says; it lays on tracks that, besides their specific physical substratum, have lasted along time and history. It seems quite accurate to think that our case study, the official colonial empire routes, the meaning seems to have an opposite meaning and have been the basis of an uneven interchange of goods. But anyway this mobility has sustained the enrichment of all cultures along human history.

In the case study of the coastal section of the Camino Real there is not a paved or predetermined road but there are certain geographic points and constructions that are the tangible elements that support it related to its functionality as a historic route. All of them are connected to the cultural, defensive and economic motivations of the route in the frontier of the Spanish territory.

We should finally enquire in times of globalisation about the significance of the study of cultural routes. García Canclini states that one of the consequences of contemporary global culture is *"the need of minding both about globalisation and cultural intercourse"*⁵. He goes on: *"Those who talk about the way our time globalises tell us about fluid and homogeneous processes, nations opening their frontiers and people communicating with each other. Their arguments are sustained by statistics about the increasing number of transactions and quickness they are done by now: quantity and speed. In the meanwhile, studies about migrations, transculturation and other kinds of cultural intercourse experiences are full of stories about parting away or conflicts, frontiers that stay and wishes of restoring lost national, ethnical or family unity: intensity and memory"*⁶

In times of articulation between simultaneity and cross cultural intercourse, cultural routes reaffirm our links with cultural memory in an attitude that deals both with regional reactions and a world wide recognition of cultural expressions that enrich the sense of identity.

The routes of colonial strategy

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ García Canclini, Néstor. "La globalización imaginada". Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2000, p. 34. Translation of the authors.

⁶ Ibidem

The importance of scale in this kind of itinerary allows to define and stimulate a cultural link between continents, regions, towns and peoples. Such is the case study of the Royal Route that endures along the times and goes beyond the frontiers of the countries in the region. On studying the section of the route called the Coastal Route in the eastern border of the Río de la Plata we can see the strategies of the occupation of the territory in a zone of continuous conflict in between of two powerful colonial empires in America: Spain and Portugal.

We should start by telling that historic studies seem not to mention this route since the territory located at the eastern side of the Río de la Plata was considered at first marginal and unimportant in the Spanish colonies in America. Even if the route starts when Buenos Aires was founded, the construction of forts and towns took place much later.

The Spanish colonial project for the overseas territories in America tell about a strategic continental domination based in the control of the towns founded and the routes that connected them. The "mundus novus" had amazed the European conquerors with its unexpected and unknown cultural and territorial dimensions that would definitely change the humanistic vision of the world.

As a matter of fact, America is an unknown but imagined land in which Europe can confirm her legends and make her dreams of a new order come true, it is the "merveille unie a verité"⁷. The chronicles about the Occidental Indias, starting with Columbus's letters, show them as a charming and exotic land, plenty of richness, a tropical world with abundant vegetation where native people live in a state of innocence an eternal golden age. Gold appears from the very beginning of the conquest related to the promises of that "extremely happy land" as Fray Bartolomé de las Casas wrote. Gold, about which Europe had dreamed of. Gold is also the reason of so many expeditions to reach the kingdom of El Dorado (the Golden Land) of the American legends.

The search for precious metals determined the first routes of the conquest, which will become the Royal Route between the two continents. This explains the monopolist organisation of the commerce between Spain and its colonies. The institution created to hold on this organisation was the Casa de la Contratación in Seville, in charge of the control of the navigation and traffic to and from America. At Seville starts the Carrera de Indias and the organised float

⁷ Archaic french expression meaning "wonder united to truth" used by Mellin de Saint-Gellais and quoted by Pedro Enríquez Ureña in "Las corrientes literarias en la América Hispánica", México, 1968, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica

that brought products from Spain and went back with sometimes a little gold and mostly big loads of silver.

The Spanish project for the colonies in America has continental extension. In it, the Royal Route traces the roads for conquest and human settings according to two main directions: one of them starting at the Caribbean Sea which goes to Peru from where there are two branches, one going to Bolivia and the other one to Chile and the other one starting at the Río de la Plata and going up north to the Sierra de la Plata in Bolivia.

The strategic colonial project allowed to dominate a very large and full of geographic and ethnical particularities territory by the means of establishing towns in order to be able to control it and get as many mineral resources as conquerors could. Towns were constructed with a pre-established function: they could be devoted to administration, defence, control, commerce or mining by means of a foundation act. An exceptionally important number of towns and villages were created in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The region of the Río de la Plata is quite particular. Discovered in 1516, it did not possess mineral resources that could attract the conqueror. Nevertheless, the western side of the river allowed a possible way to the silver mines up north, so Buenos Aires was founded as the capital of the Government and was the main harbour in this side of the continent.

The so called Banda Oriental (Eastern stripe) does not seem attractive at all. It did not have precious minerals and natives were hostile so the first villages founded (San Juan in 1522 and San Salvador in 1573) had a short existence. At the beginning of 17th century, while exploring the territory, Hernandarias reprises the idea of establishing villages at the harbours of the river coast so they could control the entrance to the river and protect Buenos Aires. Even if actions are not carried along, the cattle he introduced into the region will consolidate a different kind of attraction, define a new prairie landscape and become the main reason to start setting villages. Some years later the Governor of the Río de la Plata Francisco de Céspedes will undertake the idea of setting villages in charge of religious orders, mainly the jesuits.

In fact, cattle spreading on the eastern margin becomes a real economic attraction, different to the attraction of precious metals, but it was not really necessary to establish villages to exploit it. This territory becomes the Vaquería del Mar, that is to say the place by the sea where cattle was caught and leather was taken off to trade with. Groups of

people came from Buenos Aires by boats that crossed the river to do this job. However, this was an attraction for Portuguese too, and stimulated them to go on trying to expand their possessions to our country, where they should arrive by land or water.

The coastal corridor was the most important of the Spanish kingdom routes in the eastern territory. Spanish troops coming from Buenos Aires had to work hard in order to patrol it and control hostile and nomad natives, smugglers trying to steal cattle and Portuguese who were constantly invading this territory. The route existed, therefore, before forts, villages or towns were constructed. It had to go through geographical accidents and possible attacks from the enemies in a wild and hostile land.

The coastal corridor was at first a land of conflicts, but also a land of reciprocal exchanges and integration, as it is nowadays. This seems to be the most outstanding characteristic of this route through all our history and that is why it has a relevant role in any time form our existence as a Spanish colony and after our independence, in modern or contemporary times. The coastal route is still a very important one and has a unique profile that has conditioned our development and destiny as a nation.

The defence of the frontier

As we said before the eastern coast is not only a place that announces other fantastic ones, the key to the land plenty of precious minerals, but it was also a frontier. The frontier between two powerful colonial empires: the Spanish and the Portuguese. We already told that urbanisation did not begin until Portuguese started to be a real menace on the Spanish territory and founded Colonia del Sacramento at the entrance of the Río de la Plata, in front of Buenos Aires. As a matter of fact, as Hugo Achugar says, being a frontier sets the basis of our personality from the very beginning: *“We truly started to make any sense when we became a limit, a territory that was in dispute between two cultures and two empires (...) From the very beginning we were the battle field of European and American, Spaniards and Portuguese, Argentines and Brazilians”*⁸

The real limit between the two kingdoms is practically undefined. The Tordesillas Treat (1494) locates it at a virtual line 370 leguas east of Azores Islands and Portugal tried to interpret it in order to include the Río de la Plata region in his territories. To do so the king of Portugal would have

⁸ Achugar, Hugo. “La balsa de la Medusa”, Montevideo 1992. Ed. Trilce. Translation by the authors.

special navigation charts drawn with different scales and Portuguese construct the Colonia del Sacramento strategically placed in front of Buenos Aires. By these means they confirm the permanent interest in conquering the southern part of their land as they had shown since Manuel de Lobo was in charge of the government of Rio de Janeiro. It is the time of decay of their oriental colonial empire, proved by the loss of Tanager and Bombay. The foundation of the Nova Colonia del Santissimo Sacramento in 1680 takes place at the end of an expedition that had started the year before and it is the beginning of a conflict which will endure over a century. We can appreciate how important this settlement was in the Spanish defensive and strategic systems by the fact that Spain negotiated its possession in the Madrid Treat in 1750 by means of giving Portugal the rich territories of the missions up north. A year after the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata was created (1776), Spain recovers Colonia del Sacramento definitely.

In that context, to which we must add the continuous advances of contraband carried on by pirates and privateers, Spain must establish a continuous monitoring of the border to protect its territories. In order to do so, military expeditions of monitoring and defence begin to be made towards the end of 17th century, starting at from Buenos Aires and entering the Eastern Band at Colonia del Sacramento, when it was in Spanish hands, or, in the opposite case at the Real de San Carlos, a Spanish military camp located up north of Colonia. These expeditions by the coast or the land borders determine the first colonial routes in Uruguay, those that at first do not define plans in the territory but which mark directions with some fixed points like the ports of entrance, the crossing sites of river and streams and, later on, the populations that are risen.

There were three colonial routes so defined: the Camino del Litoral (Riverside Route), the oldest one which ran parallel to Uruguay River up to Yapeyú; the Camino del Centro (Center Route), that went from Montevideo up to the missions and the Camino de la Costa (Coastal Route) from Real de San Carlos in Colonia to San Pedro de Río Grande, territory which belongs to Brazil nowadays. As time went on Spaniards started constructing military guards, forts or towns along these routes.

The study of the Camino de la Costa (Coastal Route) presents an additional difficulty, since there is not a paved plan as fixed road infrastructure. At colonial times the communication by land is done by means of horses or carts of wood and leather thrown by oxen, often organised in form of caravans, that will be in the middle of 19th century replaced by the diligences thrown by horses. The lack of road infrastructure together with the administrative legal

disposition that establishes the free transit of the territory, causes that the open field route depends on the figure of the "baqueano", connoisseur of the land by experience. The fixed points will be indicated by geographic particularities like the cross points of the rivers. The route is also used for the merchandise transport and for the transfer of cattle towards the salting factories of Río Grande.

The Camino de la Costa is the most important one because of its fundamental defensive role. To reaffirm this defensive character, planned towns started to be founded at strategic points of the road. San Felipe y Santiago de Montevideo (1724 – 1726), meant to be a large fortress, was the first one, followed by San Fernando de Maldonado (1757) and San Carlos (1763). All three of them completed the defensive system of the bastioned fortifications on the Atlantic coast.

Those defensive constructions provoke important transformations on the prairie landscape and show the military purpose of the route. From fortifications in Colonia del Sacramento to the bastioned fortifications Santa Teresa and San Miguel, natural landscape starts to change. The presence of fortifications was characteristic in Montevideo and Colonia del Sacramento. Built on a peninsula, Colonia had a square fortress built according to Vauban's rules.

Montevideo is a real fortress, perhaps the most important one after the Callao which the Spaniards on the Pacific coast in South America and the defensive functions are reflected with clarity in its profile, form where only the church excels up the courtyard wall. Also located in a peninsula, it counts with a solid fortress inspired in Vauban's designs, called the Ciudadela, that protects it of the attacks on the land side. It has a square shape containing a large patio or seat of arms and has a bastion in each angle. It is surrounded by a granite wall of six meters of thickness and a pit. This construction was completed with a triangular bastion separated of the main body. Towards the end of 18th century a sentry post with a light is constructed up in the Hill of Montevideo, dominating its bay. It will be protected later on with a thick stone wall. To a lesser extent, Maldonado counts with three land batteries, as well as important fortification works in the Gorriti island, protecting a possible entrance point to its port.

The bastioned fortifications of Santa Teresa and San Miguel break in the singularity of the particular Atlantic coast landscape. Santa Teresa is constructed in between the marshes and the ocean in a place occupied by the Portuguese until Spaniards settled down there. It has an irregular pentagonal form, layout according to an accurate calculation of fires, has a bastion in each angle, and its seat of arms organises numerous constructions. San Miguel, of smaller

size, shows a rhomboid form and four bastions.

Although paradoxically the fortifications that represent Spanish conquerors have been the first constructions declared national historical monument towards the end of the decade of 1930, it seems interesting nowadays value them not like isolated monuments but being part of a continental defensive system, which increases their significance.

The Camino de la Costa (Coastal Route): a look on colonial urban practice

The cities founded on the colonial period allow to analyse the Hispanic and Portuguese city-planning practice in relation to the effective ideas and models in each case. In that sense, it seems to be a catalogue throughout the Camino de la Costa that summarizes different interpretations of the urban regulations and models. The route begins in the Colonia del Sacramento, an exceptional case of Portuguese foundation in Hispanic territory and, for that reason, it is part nowadays of the World Heritage List.

Located in a peninsula bathed by the river in three sides and with a high central spine, Colonia displays an atypical morphology within the Hispanic territory, because of its plan, that adapts to the relief as much as to the coast and the fortifications, now destroyed. Its plan is completely different form towns designed according to the Indian legislation and the Spanish city-planning practice. The Plaza Mayor (Main Square) oblong and with unusual proportions and the lines of vision in perspective from the access streets to a great extent retakes the conceptions of the urbanism of Portuguese urbanism, as also do the widening of the streets that define the other public spaces as secondary seats. Drawn up on the basis of streets with different widths that do not cut in right angle, the urban atmosphere it is characterized by the variety of images and a particular atmosphere that is created with basis on the diversity of spatial and visual situations.

San Felipe and Santiago of Montevideo is conceived, in spite of its geographic conditions, like an interland town devoted to the defence of Buenos Aires. Consequently the Plaza Mayor (Main Square) occupies a central place. Streets are designed like a chess board and the plaza has a square shape and equal dimensions to those of the blocks, with the town hall and the church facing each other in a clear transgression the regulations provided by the Indian Legislation.

San Fernando de Maldonado and San Carlos are examples of foundations that, although they were built after the

codification of norms in the Compilation of Laws of the Kingdoms of Indians, still are referred the model derived from the colonial city-planning practice, a square checkerboard with a central plaza that occupies the place of one of the blocks and the church located on one of the sides of the plaza.

Solís discovered the bay of Maldonado in 1516, but it was not until 1717 that it was occupied by French buccaneers lead by Captain Esteban Moreau, whom equipped it with artillery redoubt constructs and is expelled by the Spanish forces. In 1757 Field marshal Jose Joaquin de Viana makes the assignement of lands for the definitive installation of the families brought from Montevideo and in 1787 the legal foundation takes place. Historically it stands out for being the head of a territory at the oceanic coast, with strategic importance because it dominates a regional port.

San Carlos was founded as a village in 1763 by the General and Spanish Governor Don Pedro de Cevallos. Since it was a Royal Village it only depended on the King and the Virrey and not on the Montevideo or Maldonado town halls. It displays two particularities: it is the first populated nucleus exclusively civil, and its population were "ysleños" from the Azores Islands, coming from San Pedro de Río Grande. They established in the region between streams Maldonado Grande and Maldonado Chico, and practised agricultural works. In that particular geographic location it controls the movement of the coastal section of the Camino Real coming from Santa Teresa. Its plan is a checkerboard with square blocks and central plaza as large as a block.

According to Bourbons policy and after the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata the consolidation of those towns is completed with new foundations to strengthen the coastal front, taking advantage of in some precarious cases rural establishments under it is continued under the direction of the Virrey Vértiz. In the section between Colonia del Sacramento and Montevideo the villages of Guadalupe (Canelones) in 1783), San Juan Bautista (Santa Lucia) in 1781 and San Jose in 1783 were raised. Towards the east of Montevideo appeared the villages of Pando in 1788, in the place of the old guard of Pando, Concepcion de las Minas de San Francisco (Minas) in 1782 and Nuestra Señora de los Remedios de Rocha in 1802. The change of mentality is sure the cause of the setting of consolidated populations complementing the old defensive systems.

In these cases, although the observance of the Indian norm for the layout is not strict, it seems to have a greater approach to the theoretical model provides by it, except for the shape of the Plaza, that continues to be square. In the

cases of San Jose, Santa Lucia Rocha and Minas, the layout respects the streets at the midpoints of the sides of the plaza.

Strangely enough, the Camino de la Costa that starts in our territory in that particular case of Portuguese foundation in Spanish territory that is the Colonia del Sacramento, has another exceptional case within colonial urbanism, in this case of Hispanic planning the village of Minas, since, except for the square form of the plaza, it shows the most faithful respect for the Indian legislation. In addition to the layout of the medium streets of the plaza, the church is located according to the norm, in the centre of the Southeastern medium street, a block away from the plaza. It is so that travelling along the route proves to be an occasion to get in touch with a diversity of towns designed by colonial urbanism.

The Camino de la Costa as a cultural route

Certainly the vital importance of the Camino de la Costa lays on the fact that it shows as a cultural itinerary criteria of physical global planning of a large territorial space in several scales, whose use extends the colonial time widely. Even more, its relevance as a spatial structure device extends to the present time in our territory, in which the coastal corridor is the most consolidated cross-section road in our country, in spite of the other ones proposed later on that lack of its conceptual sustenance that grants him being part of a system and not only a simple possible road connections.

From its defensive strategic function, sustained by fortifications and towns that allowed to safeguard the Spanish territory, to its importance in the regional territorial structure after independence, to the discussion of its present role in the tourist developments in our country, it maintains its importance in a characterised territory with different urban, architectonic, landscape and ecological components.

Beyond its heritage values that the different components may have separately, the Camino de la Costa, conceived as a cultural itinerary, allows to include in its comprehension the context in which it appeared and its function in a system, which qualifies to understand its real historical and cultural meaning. It is necessary it to surpass the present geopolitical conditions and to reconstruct a cultural space integrated by the Spanish and Portuguese defensive and strategic systems that structure the continental territory at the colonial time.

The definition of the Camino de la Costa as a cultural itinerary, part of the cultural route of the intercontinental Royal Route, must, consequently, surpass the extremely simplified visions of heritage as isolated cultural objects and integrate these objects into a dynamic and interactive

process in which none of them could be completely understood outside the system that links them in space and time.

Thus, defined in an international and transcontinental context, cultural routes, as the case study we present, should develop cooperation activities within the specific needs of settings, as many of the activities undertaken by the Scientific Committee. It also implies a change of category, a change of status in the scientific approach, making necessary a comprehension of the circumstances, the atmosphere and the territorial dimension. This is the reason why cultural routes reveal a heritage macrostructure that extends the national boundaries, the reason why it is transformed into a strong and everlasting cultural bond between nations.

Abstract

The purpose of this work is to continue and extend the

previous study done as part of the CIIC activities. We have already stated that cultural itineraries are related to significant changes in conservation concepts. In fact, we believe that they provide conservation politics an ample territorial perspective and a seldom achieved cultural integration.

This variation of the scale of the approach encourages a cultural link between continents, regions, towns and people. It happens so in this case study of part of the “Camino Real” in Uruguay as a bond between countries that endures beyond time and political frontiers. This section of the cultural route that connected Buenos Aires, capital of the viceroyalty, with Rio Grande, can provide us information about the territorial strategies in the conflictive frontier of two powerful colonial empires in South America: Spain and Portugal.

This overland route along the privileged natural landscape of the Atlantic coast is representative of conflicts in the administration of the colonial overseas territory whose main material signs are a defence system with important fortifications and strategically placed towns such as Colonia del Sacramento (World Heritage), Montevideo and Maldonado, but it has also a relevant role in the new continental macrostructure after independence and a sustained importance in cultural tourism development in our country nowadays.

Finally we would like to declare that the identification and study of cultural itineraries is meant to construct a space of encounters and provide an interesting alternative to globalisation by promoting regional identities.