

## THE ROUTE AND ITS SETTING, CHANGING RELATIONS OVER TIME. A CASE STUDY

*Conti Alfredo / Argentina*

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### **Introduction**

Cultural routes constitute a complex system of tangible and intangible heritage components linked by a basic element consisting in a land, water or mixed route. The concept of Cultural Route implies a value as a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts and gives the Route its meaning. The setting of a cultural route includes both natural and cultural landscapes, rural and urban contexts. Taking into account the variety and nature of the heritage components (cultural landscapes, historic towns and villages, historic monuments and ensembles, industrial and rural settlements) included in a cultural route and its territorial scale, it has special ways of evolution and change more evident and quick than other heritage categories. The setting of a cultural route can vary from natural to cultural, from rural to urban, since the territory itself is an organism in permanent state of evolution.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a specific case in Argentina, the old Camino del Sur (South Route) that constitutes a portion of the colonial route system in South America. Even if it a part of a cultural route and its extension is no more than 150 Km, there are numerous heritage components along the route, including diverse heritage categories. The meaning and essence of these components can only be thoroughly understood when linked by the idea of a route as a basic component of the territorial structure, something that allows a new approach to the identification and valorization of cultural heritage.

### **The South Route in the framework of colonial communication system**

The most developed societies in pre-Hispanic present Argentina occupied the North-Western part of the country, the only region where urban civilizations flourished. At the beginning of the 16 century, when the Spaniards entered present Argentina, North and West regions were part of the Inca Empire. Andean civilizations, especially Incas, had developed a network of roads that linked a vast Empire extended from Colombia to Chile and Argentina. Some roads were used by the Spaniards in to explore and occupy

the territory.

The Spaniards entered present Argentine territory by the River Plate and by Pre-Columbian routes coming from Peru. Paraná River was the first communication way from those who entered by the River Plate and Asunción, the capital city of present Paraguay, the first town to be settled in the region (1536). Before the definitive foundation of Buenos Aires, the site was the point of convergence of three main routes, those coming from Paraguay, Peru and Chile. Once founded Buenos Aires in 1580, the town increased its role as the point of departure and arrival of the route system that linked the South section of the Spanish territories in the Americas.

The route to Peru was the longest and communicated Lima with Buenos Aires, linking important towns belonging today to Peru, Bolivia and Argentina. The route to Chile crossed the Andes and linked the cities of Mendoza and San Luis while the one to Paraguay followed the Paraná River and communicated the cities of Santa Fe and Corrientes. South from Buenos Aires, practically no urban settlements were settled up to the 18 century. The boundaries of the territory effectively occupied by Spaniards was the Salado River, some 150 Km from Buenos Aires.

At the time of Spanish occupation, there were some Guaraní settlements along the River Plate, next to the present Buenos Aires City. To the South, one of the most important was known by the name of Tubichamini. When Juan de Garay, founder of Buenos Aires, proceeded to explore the territory, he followed a pathway already existent and used by primitive inhabitants. Rivers and water streams were used to define boundaries among administrative units, known by the name of "pagos". Among the pagos surrounding Buenos Aires, the most extended was Magdalena. The route that took to the pago of Magdalena was known by the name of Camino del Sur, and constitute the last portion of the continental Royal Route. The route followed the traces of an ancient pathway and had been used by the first Spaniards to explore the territory South from Buenos Aires. The existence of a "reduction" and the exploitation of the rural land took to the establishment of permanent population, finally gathered in the village of Magdalena by 1749.

The Reduction consisted in a settlement intended only for

natural population, with local government and one Christian missionary. The Tubichaminí reduction was established in 1615 in the pago of Magdalena. Even if today we do not have information about its exact localization, ancient documents make references to the presence of a river and a route. Another reduction was located in 1666 next to the route, Santa Cruz de los Quilmes, established in order to house a group of Amerindians deported from their original settlement in present Northwest Argentina.

It is difficult today to imagine the original setting of the route, since the natural landscape has completely changed due to human action. The natural landscape consisted in a plain covered with grass and almost completely deprived from trees, except some species of low trees placed along the water courses and principally by the River Plate shore.

The Portuguese foundation of Colonia del Sacramento, 1680, in present Uruguay, took Spanish authorities to protect the shore. In the 18 century, some defensive settlements were established along the River Plate coast. South from Buenos Aires there was a natural harbour known by the name of Ensenada de Barragán. A defensive battery was located there and another one in the site known as Atalaya, next to the Tubichaminí reduction. The existence of a battery and a natural port induced to the formation of a village, officially founded by the Viceroy of the River Plate in 1801, the present city of Ensenada.

After the independence of Argentina in 1816 and over the 19 and early 20 centuries, new changes occurred along the route. The existence of “*estancias*”, vast rural settlements for agriculture production, implied a modification of the natural conditions of the territory. The *estancias* were at the same time production and residence settlements. The constructions of parks surrounding manors and service buildings implied the definition of a new landscape conceived with aesthetic purposes. The owner of an *estancia*, José Iraola, founded the town of Tolosa in 1871, next to the town and harbour of Ensenada. The urban layout of Tolosa recognized the existence of the road that became the entrance and main avenue of the village.

A new stage in the foundation and development of urban settlements along the route is linked to the incorporation of railway and the arrival of immigrants, something that produced a significant augmentation of population. The Buenos Aires & Ensenada railway was inaugurated in 1872, linking the then capital of the province of Buenos Aires with the village and port located some 60 Km South-Est. Some towns were founded along the railway: San Francisco (1876), San Salvador (1888), Ezpeleta (1904) and Villa Dominico (1909). But one of the main changes occurred with the

foundation of the city of La Plata, in 1882, as new capital of the province of Buenos Aires. The site to locate the new town was decided considering the existence of a port and of the route that allowed communication between the now Federal Capital (Buenos Aires) and the new provincial capital.

After 1880 important changes occurred in Argentina. The country entered the international scene as producer of agricultural goods, something that implied an important economic development. At the same time, thousands of European immigrants entered Argentina, most of them populating the rich and practically unpopulated plains. As a result, the city of Buenos Aires underwent a quick and explosive growth that together with neighboring towns formed the Metropolitan Area, concentrating today some 10 million inhabitants, nearly 1/3 of the population of the country.

The evolution of population was relatively slow up to the beginning of the 20 century. From the forties on, as a result of internal migrations, a new physical scene emerged. An explosive growth occurred up to the seventies, something that had a strong impact on the morphological features of the territory. The changes occurred as a result of the interaction among social, economic, politic and technical conditions. The main roads continued their role of basic axis of development and localization of new urban settlements, for the extensions of the already existent and the progressive conurbation among them. Although railway enterprises had developed their lines in all directions, since 1930 the motor transportation system underwent an important augmentation. New roads were projected and opened, sometimes parallel to the railway, favouring links for a huge urban agglomeration. In successive stages, this road system developed progressively to the rest of the province and the country.

Another determinant fact for the formation of a Metropolitan Area was the internal migrations occurred among the forties and the seventies. Plans and strategies concerning territorial organization were defined and implemented after the changes and an uncontrolled modification of the territory began. New settlements appeared especially along routes, and in-between spaces were occupied later. As a result, the setting of the ancient South Road changed completely; a good part of the route is now included in the huge urban agglomeration of the Metropolitan Area, another is included in the urban area of La Plata and outskirts. Only half the original extension continues to develop along a rural setting.

## Heritage components along the

## route

In the framework of the Intercontinental Royal Route project, most cultural heritage components along the old South Road have been identified and registered. The register was undertaken using the forms elaborated and adopted by the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC). Registered heritage components include historic towns, cultural landscapes, fortifications and industrial settlements.

Historic towns are represented by the urban settlements that were located on or next to the route, the main are Avellaneda, Quilmes, Tolosa, La Plata, Ensenada and Magdalena. Cultural landscapes are represented by the Pereyra Iraola Park, part of an “*estancia*”. The park of the estancia of Leonardo Pereyra is considered to be the first to be constructed, from 1857 on. The natural landscape was completely changed through the introduction of exotic species of trees, including the first eucalyptus imported from Australia. The park includes a group of buildings that represent the variety of functions of this type of rural settlements; the cultural landscape includes pathways, blocks of trees and a lake. The route crosses the park of the ancient *estancia*, now partly opened for public use.

Fuerte Barragán, next to the River Plate coast, is an example of fortification. It was erected in 1736 in order to control the illegal commercial activities in the Ensenada natural port. Reconstructed several times, the present remains correspond to the last reconstruction of 1801. The fortification played an important role during colonial times and especially in 1805 and 1806 when the British army tried to take the Vice-kingdom of Río de la Plata. Currently it houses an historic museum.

Among the industrial settlements, it is important La Plata port and surrounding areas. After the foundation of La Plata an artificial port was designed and constructed, because the old natural port of Ensenada was obsolete for new commercial activities and ships. The port includes a main dock and two lateral canals of some 12 Km of extension that arrive up to the city of La Plata. Surrounding the port, urban areas belonging to the cities of Ensenada and Berisso bear testimony of the impact of immigration of early 20 century and of particular construction techniques and define a typical townscape.

## Conclusion. Some ideas for the future

It is evident that important changes occurred over time along the route. The route itself is recognizable although part

of its setting has completely changed its original appearance. Although changes in its role and setting occurred over time, the old route plays still a prominent role in the physical and functional regional structure.

With respect to present state of valorization and protection, several heritage properties along the route are recognized and protected, although there is still a lack of reconnaissance of the ensemble as heritage category. It is evident that the concept of cultural route has not yet been incorporated by official spheres responsible of heritages policies and management. Some principles for the recognition and protection of the ancient route as a heritage whole should include:

- Dissemination of the new concepts on cultural heritage, stressing the idea of Cultural Routes as heritage category. These new concepts should be incorporated in the official spheres responsible for heritage identification and protection.
- Encourage the concern of community in the consideration of the concept of cultural route as a whole that contributes to understand the meaning of the territorial structure and of the heritage tangible components included in the ensemble.
- Encourage the common work of provincial authorities and local governments concerned, since the concept of cultural route implies the definition and implementation of policies and management plans and actions that go beyond the boundaries of the administrative divisions of the territory.

The possibility of implementation of these principles would certainly contribute to a better understanding of our cultural heritage, not considered as single units but as a system of components that can only be properly appraised in the framework of an including heritage conception: cultural route.

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## **Abstract**

As heritage category, cultural routes constitute a complex system of tangible and intangible components linked by a basic element consisting in a land, water or mixed route. The setting of a cultural route results the ensemble of natural or cultural landscapes along the route. In the framework of the Spanish Intercontinental Royal Route project, the aim of this paper is to introduce the colonial routes system corresponding to present Argentine territory and, especially, the last southern part of the land route on the Atlantic side of South America. During Spanish administration period, three major routes converged in the city and harbour of Buenos Aires, coming from Peru, Chile and Paraguay. South from

Buenos Aires, the route continued some 130 Km, up to the boundaries of the effectively occupied territories, linking some villages and rural settlements. The development of the Metropolitan Area took to the complete change of the route setting. Systematic survey and register were undertaken according to the methodology and instruments adopted by the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC). Some principles are proposed in order to contribute to understand the significance of a cultural route in the context of a changing urban and rural setting.

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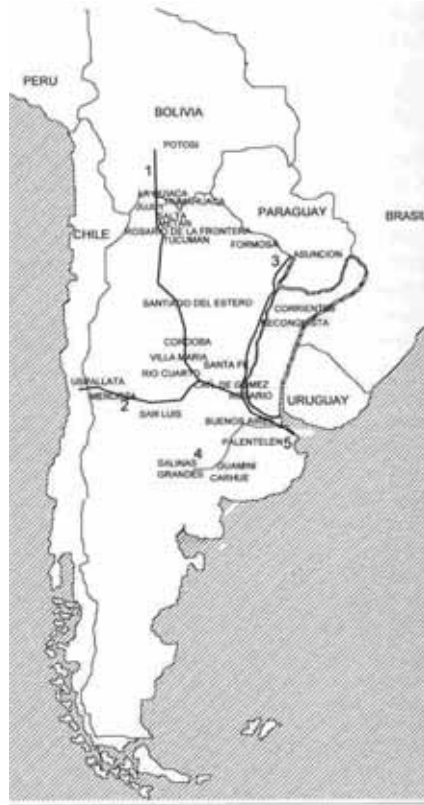


Figure 1: Colonial routes system in present Argentine territory.



Figure 2: Industrial heritage. La Plata Port area.



Figure 3. Historic town. La Plata.



Figure 4: Cultural landscape: Pereyra Iraola Park.