

How Important is Social Cohesion to Heritage Landscape Preservation and Interpretation?

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The preservation and interpretation of landscape heritage depends not only on natural and cultural elements, but also on the existence of traditional practices, technical knowledge, ways of understanding nature and social cohesion. Efforts towards landscape maintenance often forget to refer to social cohesion factors. Our scope is to debate ideas comparing two landscapes, which present different social cohesion strengths: the Soajo terraces, in northeast Portugal and Alentejo 'montado', in southern Portugal. The social evolution and ecological dynamics vary significantly in the two. To safeguard heritage, the cultural landscape should be duly interpreted. This means, particularly for educational purposes, that the ecological, social and even economic factors which have conditioned the landscape structures should be fully analyzed and understood.

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of the paper is to analyze how the preservation and interpretation of landscape heritage depends not only on natural and cultural elements, but also on the existence of traditional practices and social cohesion. Usually, heritage landscapes are seen as natural and cultural resources. However, at the base of such landscapes are deeply embedded social practices, an intangible heritage that gives cohesion to the natural and cultural aspects. Our scope is to debate ideas by way of critical comparison. Comparing well-preserved millennium-old Chinese rice heritage landscapes, supported by millenary social and farming practices, and the abandoned European terraces, an essential social-ecological question emerges: the preservation of landscape heritage is supported not only by natural and cultural elements, but also by social practices, technical knowledge and ways of understanding nature. Efforts towards heritage landscape maintenance have often been limited to natural and cultural elements preservation, forgetting to refer to social cohesion factors. Our examples concern two landscapes that seemingly present different social cohesion strengths: Soajo terraces (northeast Portugal) (Callier-Boisvert, 1999) and Alentejo montado (southern Portugal) (Pinto-Correia and Godinho, 2013).

Several values can be conferred to cultural landscapes; its evaluation depends of subjective perspective of involved persons or group of actors. Heritage value is one of such values and that's why the most valued cultural landscapes can be designated as heritage landscapes. Heritage landscapes are cultural landscapes with high heritage value (Aplin, 2007; Capelo, Barata and Mascarenhas, 2011a).

THE TERRACED LANDSCAPES OF SOAJO MOUNTAIN

The traditional land-use and social context of the Soajo mountains before the 1970s can be summarized as following: the agro-pastoral system was characterized by an agriculture on terraces and tilled plains associated with mountain cultivation



FIGURE 1. General view of Soajo mountain (author: José Manuel de Mascarenhas, 2013).



FIGURE 2. Abandoned summer habitat ('branda') and terraces (author: José Manuel de Mascarenhas, 2013)

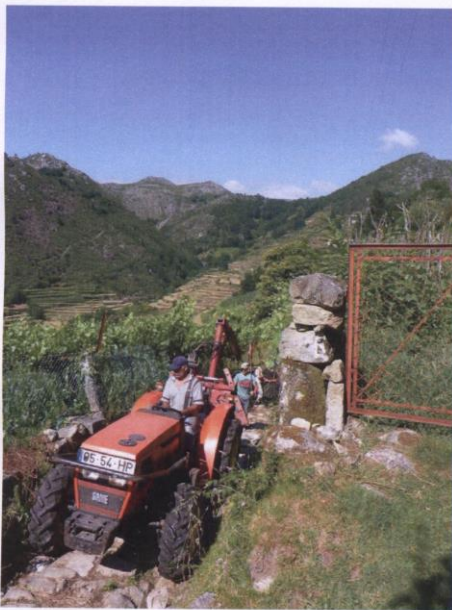


FIGURE 3. Tractor in viticulture, a new activity in Soajo terraces (author: Sofia Capelo, 2010)

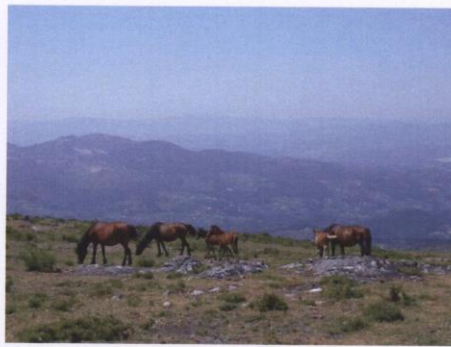


FIGURE 4. Horse breeding, a new activity in Soajo terraces (author: Sofia Capelo, 2010)

and pasturing (communal pastures mostly) (Figure 1). There were two complementary habitats: summer habitats ('brandas') and winter habitats ('inverneiras')(Brito,1953; Callier-Boisvert, 1999). The land properties were small (sometimes very small) and mutual aid and collective management were commonplace, particularly concerning the irrigation system, land activities and public celebrations (displaying strong social cohesion).

Big changes occurred during the sixties and seventies: male emigration was balanced with female solidarity reinforcement (women ran all village activities, particularly agriculture and irrigation). This female role and 'tradition' allowed continuous social cohesion reinforced as well by residents and emigrants binding. The perpetuation of such a society then occurred although some 'brandas' (Figure 2) and 'inverneiras' were no



FIGURE 5. Photography showing black pigs breeding in 'montado' (author: António Mexia de Almeida, ca. 1950)



FIGURE 6. Photography showing many workers in 'montado' activities (author: António Mexia de Almeida, ca. 1950)



FIGURE 7. 'Montado' landscape showing an abandoned house ('monte') due to the decrease in workers (author: José Manuel de Mascarenhas, 2009).



FIGURE 8. 'Montado' landscape showing a barley field, a new activity for beer industry (author: José Manuel de Mascarenhas, 2009).

longer used (Barbosa, 2007). Recently, during the eighties and nineties, the abandonment of rural parishes (mountain ones especially) on behalf of urban centers increased, particularly concerning men, reinforcing the role of women in management activities (Silva and Fragata, 2004). These facts were accompanied by a decline of traditional agriculture (maize, rye and bean), which were in part substituted by vineyards (Figure 3) and temporary grasslands. This agriculture conversion and abandonment threatened some elements of the heritage landscapes and traditional know-how. In this period, tourism emerged as an important complementary activity to agriculture and new activities contributed to restrain the youth evasion as, for example, the increase of horse (Figure 4) and cattle breeding in mountain areas, mainly in communal pastures (Silva and Fragata, 2004). Though this landscape is localized in a national park (P.N.P.G.), its preservation remains nevertheless endangered by socio-economic factors.

'MONTADO' LANDSCAPES OF ÉVORA REGION

The 'montado' is a typical southwestern Iberian peninsula landscape, traditionally related to agro-silvo-pastoral systems. Open formations of pure or mixed cork and holm oaks

(and even other kind of trees) compose the arboreous layer under which a rotation of crops / fallows / pastures is used. Traditionally, pigs (Figure 5), sheep and eventually other livestock, such as bovines and sometimes goats, feed on acorns, shrubs and grasses under the trees, controlling the nutrient cycles (Pinto-Correia and Vos, 2004). This complex land use system has produced 'one of the most aesthetically pleasing and biologically rich landscapes in Europe' (Pinto-Correia and Mascarenhas, 2001: 100). For such reasons, the 'montados' are protected by Portuguese and European Law. Traditionally (before the 1960s) 'montado' systems were related to large farms ('latifundia'), with many permanent and temporary wage-earning workers (Figure 6). Generally, these farms had vast built areas and could be considered hamlets, many of which with a vernacular heritage value. During the sixties and early seventies, great changes occurred in these systems (Pinto-Correia and Mascarenhas, 1999) due to rural abandonment. Landowners had to dismiss employees (Figure 7), thus contributing to a rural exodus. Presently, the 'montado' sustainability is being restored through the following multifunctional activities and tools, counteracting the tendency to rural areas destructuring: rural tourism; interpretation centers or thematic museums; low

impact country activities as horseback rides and hunting; apiculture as a complementary activity; native plants collection for culinary, medicinal and craft purposes; agro-biological activities and selling centers (Figure 8). But one can ask what happened to the social cohesion nowadays? Traditionally, most permanent workers lived on the farms, or in nearby villages, and there was a relative degree of social cohesion. However, this cohesion was not strong due to different factors: work offer; work place / home distance; nature of seasonal activities; etc..The mechanization development, the new contract and social welfare requirements and the rural abandonment have been leading to a drastic reduction in manpower. Consequently, social cohesion has become even weaker, mainly in villages, which are decaying. Nevertheless, the implementation of multifunctional strategies might change the situation and give new sustainability to the villages.

THE LANDSCAPE STRUCTURE - SOCIAL COHESION RELATIONSHIPS

The relation between cultural landscape preservation and social cohesion can be easily understood through several reports, notices and books. The main issue is the incapacity to give an efficient answer to the degradation of the traditional landscapes, especially those depending on community mutual aid. This is the reason why the comparison between the northern hilly landscapes as Soajo and the southern plain landscapes as the 'montado' ones, is interesting. Concerning the latter, their importance arises with cork price consolidation in the world market. The landscape were related to large farms, the center of production activities. The landowner - workers relationship was dependent upon wages and cohesion signs were only detected by workers that had a weak connection with labour distribution and output. In the Soajo mountain, the situation was different since the terrace's maintenance, water access, canal cleaning, and the field labour, implied decisions by the local community. For mountain landscapes, including Soajo, there exists studies showing cultural landscapes changes induced by social dynamics. The main social changes were induced by male emigration, population aging, and females prevailing in labour tasks and in communitarian meetings. Research shows the economic and financial difficulties to maintain such systems due to the weak profitability of traditional production methods, as well as the introduction of 'novelties' changing radically products and processes such as, for example, new cattle breeding technologies, new vineyards plantations out of local practices or the abandonment of traditional agriculture explorations requiring disproportionate physical and economical efforts. In Soajo, the summer habitats ('brandas') related in many cases with rudimentary terraces were abandoned accompanying the transhumance decay (Callier-Boisvert, 1999). To understand better the challenges of such mountain cultural landscapes it is worthwhile an approach at different levels. Firstly, following anthropologist works at least from the sixties, which have characterized these communities, its social structure and communitarian life; secondly, conferring witnesses as a result of the villages surveys. In Soajo case, the Colette Callier-Boisvert's (1999) remarkable work shows strong relationships between terraces and people's ways of life.

Regarding public policies, some researchers characterize a community from the socio-economic point of view and look

for answers in order to maintain some social cohesion and particularly a degree of minimal economic development. Elvira Pereira and Cibele Queiroz, in a 2009 publication concerning Sistelo village, not far from Soajo, analyzed 'sceneries' and revealed varied results, following obstructions identified by anthropologists.

Some institutions also play a non-neglected role with diverse responsibilities. Two examples: municipalities having the responsibility of intervention and support policies; the Nature and Forest Conservation Institute (I.N.C.N.F.) establish the land-use regulation and define regional tourist strategic framing. But it is possible to identify many other intervening agents in the Soajo village and region.

A cultural landscape such as 'montado' based on a low-level social cohesion between land-owners and workers face surely new problems and challenges, but its existence is not called into question. The functions of the farm centre (the 'monte') can be transformed, some activities can be alienated, some cultures can be changed, new activities can be introduced, but the multifunctional integrate system resists despite the dangerous deforestation in some areas and the 'montado' degradation in certain parts.

THE INTERPRETATION OF LANDSCAPE

In this study, the landscape concept is broadened: landscape is considered not only as a heritage question, but also as a real issue of citizenship. The two landscape case studies have a different character since they are in very different physical and human geographical regions. Yet, both landscapes are of high heritage value (Capelo et al., 2011) and have different social evolution and ecological dynamics. To safeguard heritage, cultural landscapes should be duly interpreted, which means the understanding of the ecological, social and even economic functionality of its structures (Selman, 2006). But how important is social cohesion to landscape interpretation? As mentioned earlier, the factors contributing to the landscape dynamics are different in 'montado' and Soajo. In this last case, as a result of emigration and the agro system, changes the landscape is threatened, yet at the same time, there exists a certain social cohesion and new activities appear, such as tourism. In 'montado' landscapes, the conversion of the agro-forestry-pastoral system into a forestry-pastoral system was accompanied by the intensification of mechanization and a sudden fall of workmanship. The improvement of the quality of life, in combination with rural depopulation, caused the disappearance of cheap handwork labourers (Mascarenhas and Rocha, 2010: 170). Nevertheless, despite these changes, and a low social cohesion, the preservation of the 'montado' landscape is not so threatened.

Although there is a contradictory relationship between social cohesion and landscape preservation concerning these two study-cases, it is convenient to consider social cohesion in order to better interpret the viability of landscapes preservation in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that heritage landscape should be duly interpreted in order to be safeguarded. The social cohesion/ landscape preservation links are quite complex: regarding the Soajo mountain, social cohesion is related with the fact that farmers are landowners; they live close to each other and show

solidarity. But despite a still rather strong cohesion, the present socio-economic dynamics seriously affect landscape preservation of the terraced areas, touching community identity. The Alentejo 'montado' context is very different since the social cohesion has never been very strong due to single-owner properties and associated wage-earning workers. The impact of socio-economic changes on cohesion is more relevant in village structures than in 'montado' farms. Nevertheless the 'montado' landscape is preserved through new means of exploitation with less labour. This study also shows that heritage landscapes should be duly interpreted in order to be safeguarded. This means, with regards to educational purposes, that the ecological, social and even economic factors which have conditioned landscape structures should be analyzed and understood (Berté, 2009). So, social cohesion is relevant, but not determinant, for landscape preservation and interpretation.

Concerning this aspect it is important to evaluate the feasibility of various theoretical models in order to define analysis grids, as well as to propose guidelines of landscape preservation politics in development contexts. This point is out of this study but must be considered in future works: models such as those of Selman (2012) and Acket (2011) deserve to be discussed.

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