

COULD ‘STANDARD PROTECTION’ BECOME A PROBLEM IN ITSELF? SAFEGUARDING HISTORIC AREAS IN A CONTEXT OF ECONOMICALLY LIMITED RESOURCES.

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The presence of architectural ensembles of recognized patrimonial value in scarcely populated areas is a situation growing steadily more frequent in many European rural areas. This situation presents a challenge of the first order, one that until now has rarely been acknowledged. It is, without a doubt, a complex question with no easy resolution. Dealing with this demands a deep consideration about the instituted mechanisms for urban heritage protection, which are essentially directed towards controlling the interventions on buildings as a result of possible social and urbanistic pressures. Consequently, when confronted with the absence of economic and demographic dynamism the matter resides not only on the lack of investment capacity to face the conservation of patrimonial elements; but also on Moreover, outlining strategies of urban and territorial revitalization, in spite of the limits imposed by context.

On top of this other needs, maybe less evident but certainly not less important, should be addressed. One of our goals would be, for example, the increase of sensitivity of professionals and institutions bound to the heritage, even if they appear to be separated from the great theoretic proposals. Another goal in relation with the former would be reconsidering the usual mechanisms of protection, in a way that the preservation policies play a positive role in the inhabitants’ day-to-day lives and do not become an added problem to their normal development.

It would be advisable, in that sense, to recover the spirit of the 46th article of the Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, also known as Nairobi Recommendation (November, 1976). This article says: “it is most important that safeguarding measures should not lead to a break in the social fabric”. Even if it refers to the subjects of gentrifi-

cation, that is in itself a different and much better known question that the one which will be explored in this text, it is interesting to take into account the same idea in relation to heritage protection steps. Without abandoning their calling towards preservation, they must also be a tool for the development of the traditional inhabitants' lives.

On the other hand, here becomes particularly relevant the application of more novel concepts on heritage; primarily, we could mention the incorporation of a landscape perspective to that urban heritage, sanctioned by the Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation approved by UNESCO in November, 2011. Nonetheless, and at least until present times, this approximation has not been adequately developed since it requires a throughout knowledge of the complex concept that is the landscape. Instead it is often poorly understood and the idea of landscape is simplified to a mere visual concern; as if it were only a snapshot out of time, overall picturesque and vaguely associated with "Nature" –usually taking the form of open spaces, whether natural ones or as humanized as the agricultural ones-, excluding the social or territorial concerns.

Yet the notion of landscape implies considering , the relationships amongst the different aspects that define our existence as an inseparable whole, understood as a product in permanent construction of dynamic processes. The visual elements are the physical manifestation of not only these processes, but also of the associated -immaterial- principles and meanings. In this way it should be understood the relevancy on using this approximation when it comes to urban heritage. It is something especially relevant when it relates to small population centres situated in a rural context, where it is easier to establish the connection between nature and society, and the rhythm of changes is usually slower.

In this communication we present a work, still in its development stages, officially put in motion by means of an agreement between a small township in inner Spain (Grajal de Campos, in the province of León) and two academic institutions belonging to diverse universities and disciplines: the *Instituto Universitario de Humanismo y Tradición Clásica*, of the University of León, and the *Instituto Universitario de Urbanística*, of the University of Valladolid.

The case of Grajal de Campos

In Spain, even if there is a national law since 1985, the legislative competences in matters of urbanism and heritage fall back into the autonomous communities, which have developed their own laws and regulations. The highest category of protection specified on those laws is named: *Bien de Interés Cultural* (Asset of Cultural Interest).

The Autonomous Community of Castilla y León presents over two and a half million inhabitants spread over a territory of 94,226 km² as of 2013. Nowadays it contains 120 townships including urban ensembles declared Assets of Cultural Interest, a third of which have less than 500 residents. In this group we find the township of Grajal de Campos that according to the latest official information has a population of 249 residents where half of them are over 60 years-old.

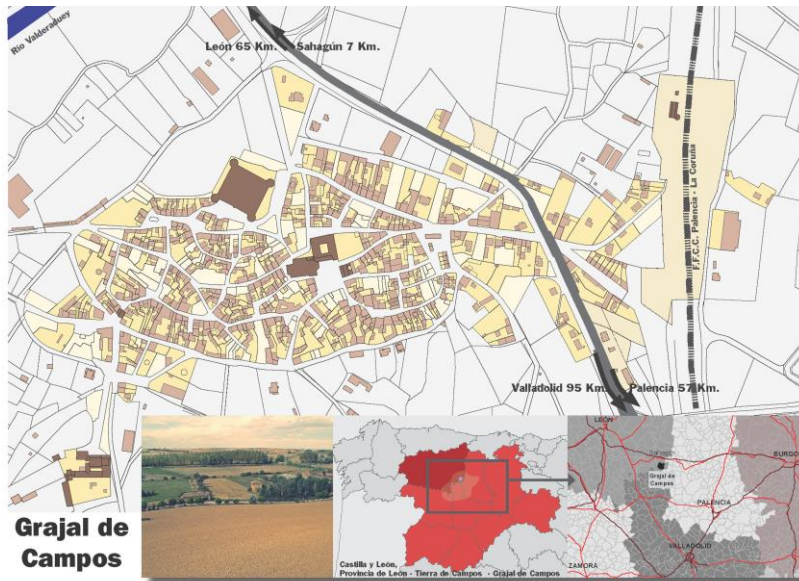


IMAGE 1: TERRITORIAL SITUATION AND URBAN MAP

Grajal de Campos is situated in the province of León, forming part of the region known as “*Tierra de Campos*”. This region is defined by a homogeneous relief gently undulated, with slight elevations and valleys barely noticeable on the land. The millenary commitment to the cereal crops and the dry and extreme nature of its climate have conformed a landscape of great agricultural plots, reducing the presence of trees to lineal stripes following the water courses.

This landscape became the prototypical image of Castilla, and thanks to the literature of the XIX century, also the material metaphor of its character, of its past glories... Now it is also part of its present and future challenges, with an ambivalent vision: sometimes hopeless, the symbol of a history capable of stifling all chance of a future, and sometimes stimulating, demanding the recovery of its land’s and its people’s dignity.

Tierra de Campos conforms, in short, a cultural landscape where the intense relationship between nature and human activity has taken place over the course of the centuries. It represents the dilated presence of the remains of the past and the track of the changes in that human-nature connection that have been absorbed into new realities; and it also contains the symbolic value of the material configuration of its elements which is not only expressed on the vast, unpopulated agrarian spaces, but also in its urban centres, where the population has traditionally gathered. “*En Castilla se habita en la villa y se va al campo a trabajar bajo el sol, bajo el hielo, para arrancar a la gleba áspera un poco de pan. Hecha la dura faena, el hombre huye del campo y se recoge en la ciudad. De esta manera se engendran las soledades castellanas, donde el campo se ha quedado solo, sin una habitación o humano perfil durante leguas y leguas*” (Ortega y Gasset 1921: 254).

The village of Grajal de Campos contains three elements declared Assets of Cultural Interest. Two of them, the castle and the palace, were declared historic-artistic monuments at the early date of 1931; the third is the historical urban ensemble, declared on 2008, that includes the entirety of the populated centre.

Though Grajal de Campos was an important medieval settlement, both the historic ensemble and the more emblematic buildings –the military castle and the stately palace– are the result of a single project. This intervention was developed over the course of little more than a few decades on the second half of the XVI century following the Renaissance model, that is, by judgments imported from the outside and, as a result, bringing an innovative foreign character to its historical and territorial context. Therefore, in a land of castles and monasteries, and with the vicinity of the town of Sahagún and the Route to Santiago de Compostela, oftentimes its character has not been understood outside of the scholar culture.

In a work from 1895, *Los antiguos Campos Góticos, excursiones histórico-artísticas a la Tierra de Campos*, Francisco Simón y Nieto wrote: “*Ningún recuerdo queda en estos pueblos de aquella época remota, ni nada tampoco en Grajal (Graliari), el más importante de todos en los siglos IX y X. Restan, sí, construcciones religiosas, pero de un período harto posterior, del XIV en adelante [...] En Grajal puede verse: el palacio plateresco y la muralla de un castillo tardíamente levantado y que no llegó á terminarse, construidos ambos en el siglo XVI por Juan Vega, señor de la villa y famoso capitán en Italia [...] Pero lo que busca el viajero en estos lugares son construcciones románicas y recuerdos de los reyes leoneses, de los monjes de Cluni, de los condes y los pueblos del siglo XI, y no los encuentra. Han pasado ocho centurias, y las villas han perdido hasta el concepto de su antigua importancia y de su remota existencia.*” (Simón y Nieto 1895: 139-142).

It is therefore essential to delve into the knowledge of the village and its monuments. It also important to remember that they have arrived to the present, over four centuries later, not only integrated in an environment alongside a “minor architecture” more or less valuable, but indissolubly linked to an urban ensemble, a land and its inhabitants’ lives. Preserving the heritage cannot consist in simply preserving the relevant buildings’ physical continuity, if such a thing was at all possible, excluding the urban life for which they were designed and of which they have always formed a part. But above all, it consists on trying to maintain that same urban life, something that requires expanding the perspective until it includes the territory and the concept of landscape. In cases like this one there is no particular distinction between the cultural landscape or the historic-urban one.

A small rural centre in Tierra de Campos.

The township of Grajal, following the usual pattern of its territorial context, is configured in only one population centre, where the people reside. The second graphic included in this communication shows a concise image of some basic demographic information, and the results of a developed fieldwork about the building’s state of conservation.

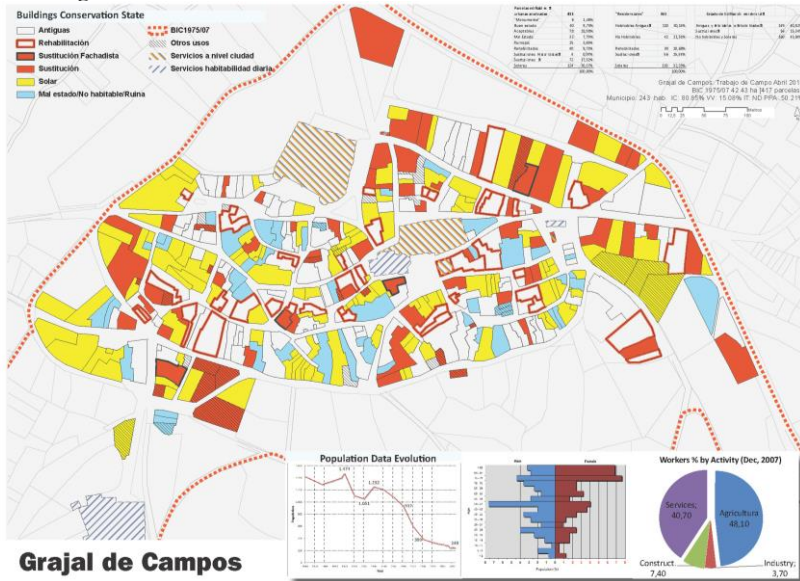


IMAGE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND BUILDINGS CONSERVATION STATE WHERE YELLOW MEANS EMPTY PLOTS, AND BLUE IS FOR DAMAGED BUILDINGS.

The evolution of the population since 1860 until present times allows us to confirm the intensity and persistence of the process of population loss. The town reached its maximum number of residents on the Population Census of 1900. From that moment on the continuing trend, with a small interval during the period of 1930-1940, has been characterized by the emigration. It actually stabilizes in the 1990s, though always with a regressive trend, now fundamentally due to the natural vegetative growth, that corresponds with a very aged population.

The population pyramid belonging to the year 2013 confirms not only the elevated percentage of aged population, over 40%, but also the regressive trend, since the steps for young and child population are barely developed.

As an approximation to the economic base of the municipal life, the information on the percentage of workers by branch of activity corresponding to the year 2007, shows the overwhelming prevalence of the agricultural activity, amounting to practically half of the total workers. It also shows the almost absolute absence of the industrial and construction's activities. This data has to be seen without forgetting its characteristic very low percentage of active population, and represents a situation prior to the manifestation of the present economic crisis.

Thus, the traditional agricultural orientation on this region's economic life, based on a continental agriculture oriented towards rain-fed cereal crops, continues to be absolutely present. That same activity has given it importance since the times of the Roman Empire, and it is the same that has been the base of the population loss as it began losing weight in the national and continental economy. On the other hand, it is an activity that can hardly be reoriented towards other production types, both due to its economic context and the natural environment determinants –the climate being especially relevant-.

The result over the built fabric isn't other than this demographic and economic representation. In the framework of the project I+D+i *Políticas urbanas aplicadas a los conjuntos históricos* (2011-2013) of the *Instituto Universitario de Urbanística de Valladolid*, the synthesis map about the buildings' state of conservation, presents an overwhelming presence of yellow and light blue tones, that correspond respectively with non-constructed plots and ruined or poorly maintained buildings. In line with the demographic and economic information, what this shows is a clear global trend towards abandon.

It is not, however, a lack of sensitization from the local population towards their heritage, as it has been amply proved from a long time ago with diverse initiatives. Thus, the question is what can we do in the situation exposed above.

Regulations and protection of the heritage.

On the first place, it is necessary to consider the orientation of the regulative mechanisms on preservation of heritage. And in that sense, the absence of international documents is extremely indicative, especially if we consider the fact that we are talking about a field that promotes a multitude of reunions, congresses, declarations and publications each year, from very diverse academic disciplines, private associations and world-wide institutions.

To search an international document that brings up the question we are facing in terms of problems in need of resolution, is a nigh impossible task. In fact, only Bruges Resolutions of smaller historic towns (ICOMOS, 1975) and the Taormina Declaration (Europa Nostra, 2009) approach the matter, even if both cases work on different aspects of it. Nonetheless, they are thought for small cities and revolve around the protection against property speculation and the landscape, which they understand as the urban centre's surrounding area, and only from a visual perspective, instead of a comprehensive consideration derived from the concept of historic urban landscape that in any case, as it has already been said, has not been explicitly studied by UNESCO (Lalana Soto 2011, 2014).

On Spanish heritage regulations, as it occurs with the majority of the regulations around the globe, there exists a category known as 'urban ensemble'. This category encompasses very varied urban conditions, from the traditional city fragments of greater population towns to smaller populations without recent urban development. On top of that, it is advisable to remember the small cities that nonetheless hold a role on the provision of services in the territory, which lays out specific problems. These intermediate cases can suffer processes of urbanistic pressure –as centres that attract population from its adjoining surroundings- as well as process of abandon, and even a succession of both, in regards to the global territorial dynamics (Lalana Soto y Pérez-Eguíluz, 2011).

In general, it is possible to affirm that the criteria on the protection of urban heritage have been directed almost exclusively towards regulating the intervention on buildings; but it is necessary to understand that this is the activity that may jeopardize the patrimonial preservation; supposing that it refers to an urban environment with a certain degree of economic dynamism. To that end the regulations impose, more or less clearly, the obligatory nature of redacting and managing tools for heritage protection.

The problem is that the same lack of economic and human resources that affects the conservation of the heritage also harms the ability to elaborate and

manage these tools. It reaches the paradoxical extent in which the administrative recognition of an urban ensemble's patrimonial value can become an added problem. In the case of the region of Castilla y León, only 38 of the townships with a declared historic urban ensemble have a special protection plan, and even if we recognize the possibility and even the convenience in most cases, for general urban planning to assume these roles, it is enough to consider that 22 of these townships do not even have any kind of general urban plan. In this situation the minor townships that are more affected by the drift and lack of resources do not possess enough economic or administrative capacities to do so, even if they try to undertake the conservation of its heritage and comply with the legal demands.

To conclude, and knowing that it addresses a complex issue, this problem would require a much more throughout development than what we can achieve in these pages. It is enough to point out how the lack of specific planning for the protection of the heritage on an historic ensemble declared Asset of Cultural Interest, can result in an increase of the difficulties for the daily life: even small conservation works must be subjected to a rigorous legal procedure on the Heritage Commissions, or it may result on hindering the municipal access to programs of economic help for the property's rehabilitation and conservation.

In this context, the possibilities for the preservation of the heritage must depend on a comprehensive vision of it, in regards to the urban life as well as its incorporation in the territory. The viable alternatives, if they exist, cannot be expressed solely in urban terms; they depend on the adoption of long-term strategies, in ample special fields, identifying the available resources and integrating them in an action program. In addition, this program should be coordinated towards developing synergies and with the primordial goal of the socio-economic dynamisation, without incurring on patrimonial loss and all that it represents.

The role of research and the University in the formation of the agents involved.

Though there is still a long way to go and it is impossible to predict the final results, a research of this nature has, from diverse perspectives, many positive consequences.

First of all the reflection on these matters, as well as their adaptation towards the usual reality on many European rural centres, is also a very good opportunity for the development of other important aspects; such as the multi-

disciplinary approach, favouring the collaboration among disciplines and various institutions that share the focus of research, with different but often complementary methodologies and viewpoints.

In that sense this work is also an educational support, both to in still this multifaceted view on future professionals as well as the teaching advantages proportioned by working on a real case.

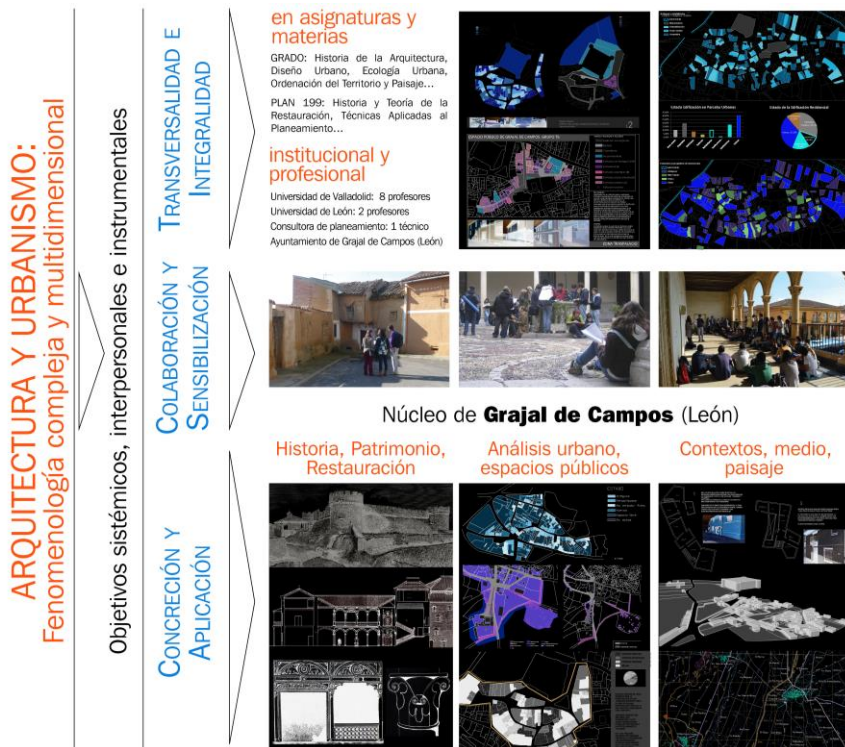


IMAGE 3: FRAGMENT OF A POSTER PRESENTED IN 2013 TO AN EDUCATIVE INNOVATION PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VALLADOLID. The goal of this initiative is to coordinate different subjects as History, Heritage, Urban Analysis or Landscape. It also integrates the professional and the institutional views of planning teams, municipalities and academic institutions; working transversally together, procuring a sensitization of both population and future professionals.

The practical orientation serves also the purpose of establishing communication channels between academic or politic institutions, professionals and citizens, surpassing the old dichotomy between the grand theoretic principles and the practical problems of management and the residents’ perception, that are, ultimately, the main holders and guarantors of the heritage.

This investigative project, on top of being related with the research lines of the involved academic institutions, has also been the support for an educational innovation project, as it is shown on the adjacent graphic. In addition, it serves as a base for the elaboration of various research projects with the goal of characterizing the intervening factors on the conservation of heritage which have to open the way for its preservation politics.

If we do not act that way, at the same that we are sacralising the concept of heritage we would be emptying it of content, simplifying it over and over to a word without any real meaning.

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