

## *The cultural landscape*

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Our cultural concerns have a very decisive impact on our landscape designs, where the starting point is agriculture. As is true everywhere, the way of life of our people and the history of their territory go hand in hand. All our cultures are based on our lands, including the things that our ancestors thought and built. Therefore, the landscapes that we create, we cultivate, design or foster are always cultural, rather than pure aesthetics. We do not advocate the landscape as a mere spectacle. The landscape is the organisation of the territory, it is economics, it is urban planning, it is quality of life, it is sustainability, it is communal work, it is politics... The landscape is country.

## *Landscape*

The European Landscape Convention, approved in Florence in 2000, defines landscape as: «An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors».

In other words, the landscape is made up of each of the anthropic, biological and geological sets of features and shapes that can be perceived on the surface of the land. The landscape therefore contains three different aspects:

- A physical aspect: landscape is territory. The land is the result of climate and geological history, as the ever-changing geological and climate conditions impact the earth's surface in such a way that they alter the medium underpinning the landscape. Therefore, any landscape is mobile and changing right from its start, which implies that the set of living beings, the eco-system, to be found in each territory, is also subject to change.
- An anthropic aspect: cultural habits, the economy, the technical development of each people in each period and place, along with the interrelation of such factors with the environment, create the landscape, alter it, transform it and develop it. Thus, human activity has made

the territory and the environment, which are already versatile in themselves, even more changing.

- A subjective aspect: it is what the human being, as a mere spectator, perceives and interprets.

### *Cultural landscape*

The current landscapes of the Basque Country are the result of the combination of, on the one hand, the cultural habits or ways of life of the human beings, and, on the other hand, the ecological processes of the environment. The landscape is defined at each moment of history by the cultural techniques inherent to the usual lifestyle of the period, by the house or own time-space structure, and by the biological wealth and specific properties of the environment.

### *Living or dying*

The essential quality of the landscape and culture is therefore its changeable nature. The physical foundation of nature or landscape is mutant. It changes incessantly, as it searches for an impossible balance. It has no other alternative than to adapt to all the ecological influences, such as climate. It is the fight for life, the harmony of chaos.

Something similar to nature occurs with culture: any culture-bearing community is doomed to adapt to ongoing changing circumstances. Agriculture, stockbreeding, industry, trade, transport, services, tourism, leisure, the media, languages... force us to adopt changes that impact our day-to-day lives. This is the difference between surviving or living.

The landscape is incessantly adapting, on the one hand, to the changes caused by nature and, on the other hand, to the conditions caused by the culture technologies at any point in time. Nature, either changes or dies. Culture, either lasts or lives. The cultural landscape, either lives or dies. Living until dying.

### *Eco-system services*

Throughout history, nature has been seen by each culture, in each period, as a pure source of raw materials to meet their needs. This has led to overexploitation that, were it to continue, may even endanger the future of human beings and their culture. This concern has led to the requirement to work towards sustainability. Maintainable, durable, sustainable... too many names for one, in our opinion, poor definition. The usual definition of sustainability is «to meet the needs of today's population

without compromising the options of future generations». It is a misleading definition, as the needs and options of each one can be interpreted from very different perspectives.

Given the malicious use of the sustainable development concept by multinationals, destructive companies and corrupt politicians, various scientists have proposed that we no longer speak about «sustainable development», but rather of «eco-system services», a term that makes clear the fact that we owe to the ecosystems all that we are and we have.

In our opinion, sustainability implies that everything that a landscape is capable of generating must be used for the natural environment and for the local cultures and populations.

The close link between landscape and culture lies precisely there: only the cultural landscape is sustainable, and sustainability can only occur in cultural landscapes. Sustainability has to be simultaneously ecological, economic and social. The landscape, the cultural landscape, integrates the way of life of the local population with an ecologically sustainable economy. In fact, what is culture? Only traditional music and dance? Or the theatre and the opera? Obviously not. Culture is a society's capacity to look for a solution to its problems. Any landscape reveals the cultures that have lived there.

### *For the asking*

The tendency of each culture to mythicize its territory, for example, the Basque «ama lurra» (mother earth) concept, turns certain landscapes into legend. These myths disfigure the nature of the cultural landscape. The myth extols or rejects the footprint or expression that a specific technology—and, in general, a specific economy—has left on the landscape. The myth of the strong, smiling and happy peasant greatly hinders the understanding of our real cultural landscape and the cultural development reflected there. That pastoral image, so popular with outsiders, greatly hinders building, reinforcing and developing the knowledge linked to our local and real cultural landscape, and orientating it towards an appropriate future.

They are myths that hide the reality, that extol a nature that in reality is not natural. They deny the landscape that our culture has been building for thousands of years, by questioning the very culture and its most sound base. Our beech woods, scythed meadows, mountain pastures, etc. are proof of this.

Another limitation on understanding the importance of the cultural landscape correctly is the city dwellers' fear of everything that is not urban: the place where the wolf lives, the fear of getting lost in the

forest, the stigma of working on the land... Quite to the contrary, the city lovers should be aware that their existence and their way of life is due to the forests and rural areas of the environment, to the services provided by the ecosystem, in the past as well as today and tomorrow.

Certain ways of reading the landscape, far from the service principle of the ecosystem and based on the most short-sighted interpretation of sustainability, idolize unsustainable landscapes. For example, they seek to keep some scythed meadows that are totally unsustainable in today's culture and see their being turned into pastureland as a step backwards. The same thing occurs with pollarded forests, which they seek to preserve even though the skills and trades required have been lost. Keeping such unusual landscapes with no objective is foolish. However much it is not its original objective, some cultural reason needs to be found so that such landscapes can continue with us.

We believe that, instead of converting the cultural landscape into a museum, it needs to be organised and kept as a means to interpret it and its historical development. The interpretation looks at our origins and helps us find an identity that is increasingly more necessary.

The cultural landscape reflects all our heritages, as the footprints, blows with the

hoe and traces of our ancestors. Awareness of it will help us better organise and live our current and future lives, as we will know that the territory is a consubstantial part of them. The city in which we live, and the landscape and territory that allow us to live, are indivisible. The urban, the rural environment, the countryside, the sea... create an identical territory of a way of life, of a culture.

#### *In sub-harmony*

The landscape of the Basque Country has been shaped generation after generation, designed over the centuries according to cultural uses and techniques, always serving industrial, stockbreeding and agricultural development, when all said and done, economic development. In some cases, agriculture and stockbreeding will be more important, industry, or trade, or tourism or forestry in others, but the course of the landscape will be marked by the technological that each of the aforementioned fields develop at any given times.

Certain landscapes of the Basque Country express the harmony that existed between society and the environment in other eras. At a time where the lifestyles and culture of those times are being lost, the landscape

acquires an increasingly greater value, as it reiterates the historical process that occurred. Such a perspective attributes a cultural condition to the territory, by stripping it of its exoticism: it turns it into a cultural benchmark, of a previous way of life.

Nowadays, it is imperative to create new ways of life and cultures founded on a close relationship with the environment. Cultural Landscape is a term that aims to synthesize the nature of current initiatives, which seek to integrate human activities and territory into the landscape, into a cultural landscape.

#### *No choice*

The clear dispute between technophiles and technophobes, the increasingly more deep-rooted trend towards a more ecological way of life, the budding political-economic attitudes towards zero development or negative development, the vigour that cultural identity and the ensuing self-esteem are taking in our societies, etc., are appropriate bases for the cultural landscapes of the future. Cultural landscapes that will always have as boundary the capacity of the ecosystem, and will get as near as possible to the ecological footprint.

#### *We, the people, the landscape*

Each landscape is the result of the impact that human activity has had on the environment of the territory in question. The technologies of agriculture, stockbreeding, construction, etc., imported from other cultures endure in our landscape, in our culture. Any culture, including ours, tends to resist, to last, not to wear out; which is the same as any landscape, including ours. In the same way as elements are integrated into the culture of the Basque people, our landscape is also changing. Our landscapes have accumulated, and continue to do so, the development of our existence, our strengths, our weeping, our concerns, our cries.

We are landscape, the people does not exist without landscape.

#### *One concept, a thousand possibilities*

The commitment to the cultural landscape is the basis for understanding the surrounding landscape, to feel it and learn from it, to design and organise the territory, or to ensure the socio-economic future of a community. Here are an example of cultural landscape, the design of a small vegetable plot, *Antzuolarren mairubaratzea*.

*Antzuola Cromlech:*

Five-storey high mounds on three sides, the main road on the fourth side, and an insignificant square of grass in the middle, open to the sky. Neighbours awaiting a simple and pleasant green area, a plot of land ready to be integrated, traces of a forgotten cultural landscape... and landscape designers willing to face a challenge.

The starting point for designing this garden in the urban centre of Antzuola was its connection with the dwellings of the ancestors of the town's residents. Its design uses the perfect circular shape that the cromlechs (*mairubaratze* in Basque) that link heaven and earth, the sheep shelters, folds or huts (*ola* in Basque, as in Antzuola) have left on the landscape, symbolised by the spiral that immortalises and eternalises the sphere. A cromlech which will witness life: tranquillity, rest, the moment to let your imagination run wild, the pleasure of friendships, the first steps of a child...

From the four sides or edges of the garden, a monticule has been drawn inwards, and in the centre, a large circular area that stretches out in the shape of a spiral has been laid down, as a meeting place for the users. On the slopes of the monticule, six stone sheets rise up and look towards as many other cromlechs

surrounding Antzuola, with the name of each of them written on the stone. Here, the force of those who in the past made Antzuola a town, comes together, is brought together, is joined. A small wood of different trees and bushes on the perimeter monticule shields the garden from the blocks of flats around it, and turns it into a cromlech to welcome its users. Wooden benches and seats, a concrete shelter that symbolises the shapes of a cloud, a lawn to lie on, a shed in the shape of a maternal breast... bring together the current town with the ancient cultural landscape in an eternal spiral.



