

Signalling as a tool for landscape understanding and tourism development. The case of Catalonia.

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Abstract

The Catalan government, thanks to the launch of its *Observatori del Paisatge* (Landscape Observatory), as advisory body of the Catalan administration, has developed several instruments under its legislation to implement landscape policies. This comprehensive cataloguing work has resulted in 135 landscape units with their corresponding fact sheets and mapping. A detailed description of their values, not only aesthetic but also natural, ecological, historical, symbolic or religious, has been included, as well as motorized and non-motorized trails and main viewpoints. Nevertheless, this ambitious and extensive work has not been transferred to the territory through a systemized signalling scheme. In this paper we propose its development to disseminate local landscape knowledge and understanding and to improve the tourist experience.

Keywords: *signalling, landscape, Catalonia, catalogues, landscape values*

Introduction

The European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe, adopted on 20 October 2000 in Florence (Italy), meant a turning point in the implementation of specific landscape policies at European level. The subsequent accession to the Convention of various European territories has led to the adoption of specific legislation related to the protection, management and planning of European landscapes. In many countries and regions, the development of specific instruments has followed the legislation with the aim of introducing the landscape objectives in the territorial planning and the sectoral policies, thus adopting the principles and the action strategies of the Convention.

Catalonia, pioneer region in the accession to the Convention, has developed in recent years, thanks to the launch of its *Observatori del Paisatge* (Landscape Observatory) as advisory body of the Catalan administration, several instruments under its legislation to implement landscape policies. Among others, the landscape directives, the landscape charters, and especially the landscape catalogues, as tools of knowledge of the Catalan territory and its values, as well as its evolution.

This comprehensive cataloguing work has resulted in 135 landscape units with their corresponding fact sheets and mapping. This information includes the values of each landscape, specifically their natural, ecological, cultural, aesthetic, historical, symbolic or religious ones. The main motorized and non-motorized itineraries have also been described, as well as the main viewpoints.

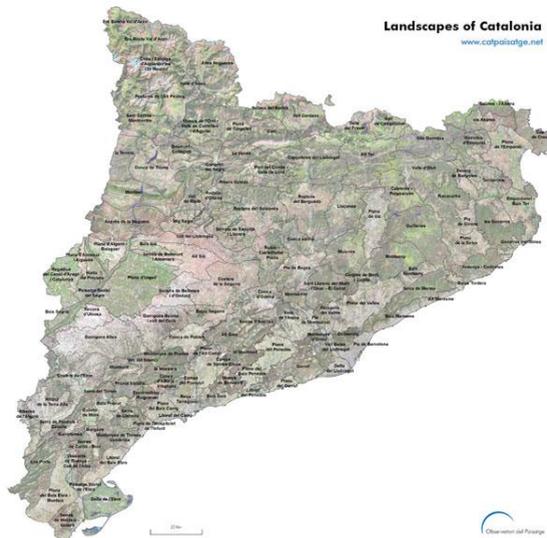


Figure 1: Landscapes of Catalonia. Observatori del Paisatge

Nevertheless, all this work has not been properly transferred to the territory for an optimal performance and diffusion for tourism consumption. Among the multiple possible communication channels, the *in situ* signalling systems stand as great potential tools that allow the transmission of the contributions made in the mentioned cataloguing works with faithful accuracy. In this sense, *ad hoc* signalling for this purpose practically doesn't exist in Catalonia. Just some viewpoint indicators with the well-known pictogram of a camera and, in some locations, maps or pictures with the corresponding toponymy can be found.

This paper aims to set the potential capabilities of using theme signage as a way to coherently transfer the landscape variety and its values to an interested audience; linking the information with the necessities of visitors, to dispose of a tourist information system that improves the knowledge and the valorisation of landscapes.

With it, the diffusion of the huge work developed in this matter by the Catalan administration would be achieved. Thus, making it available to the public with informative and tourist purposes, contributing to communicate the important landscape heritage, its complex values and the possibilities of visiting and enjoying it.

The Landscape Catalogues

Following the Act 8/2005 of 8th June for the protection, management and planning of the landscape in Catalonia, Landscape Catalogues have been developed, as a new instrument for the introduction of landscape objectives into spatial planning and sectoral policies in Catalonia, adopting the principles and action strategies established in the European Landscape Convention promoted by the Council of Europe.

These documents provide the Catalan administration and other stakeholders involved in landscape management with information of great interest about the values of its landscapes, the factors which explain why a certain type of landscape exists and not a different one, and finally, how the landscape changes together with the social and economic dynamics of the territory.

The landscape catalogues incorporate public consultation as a tool for the involvement and co-responsibility of society in landscape management and planning, allowing the identity-based and intangible factors of landscape to be detected, factors which are difficult to identify exclusively from the work of specialised experts.

The territorial reach of each catalogue corresponds to each of the regions of application of the Partial Territorial Plans, so they can be really useful for the planning and management of the landscape from the spatial planning point of view.

Following this structure, seven catalogues have already been developed comprising the entire Catalan territory. The process started in 2005, leading to the approval of the first one by 2008, and ended just a few months ago with the initial approval of the last catalogue on January 2016.

The criteria followed in the elaboration of the catalogues were: the accordance with international documents, the integrated and qualitative methodological approach to the landscape, the multiplicity of its values and its applicability. Everything done within a

framework of public participation and cooperation of the different stakeholders involved, from the scientific to the local ones.

According to the Catalan legislation on the subject, the minimum contents to be incorporated into the landscape catalogues are:

- An inventory of the landscape values present in the area comprised within its limits.
- A list of the activities and processes affecting or which have most affected the configuration of the present landscape.
- Signalling of the main routes and spots from which the landscape can be observed.
- Definition of areas of landscape units, understood as structurally, functionally and/or visually coherent areas, which may be subject to a differentiated regime of protection, management or planning.
- Definition of landscape quality objectives for each landscape unit. These objectives must express the aspirations of the community with regard to the landscape characteristics of their land.
- Proposed measures and actions needed to achieve the landscape quality objectives.

The catalogues have as a final result several documents where all the collected information can be found and openly consulted. There is a central technical report, photographic and mapping archives and a list of stakeholders involved in landscape protection or management.

One of the functions assigned to the catalogues is to act as basic reference documents for awareness campaigns on the diversity of landscapes in Catalonia and their environmental, cultural and aesthetic values. This function has not been yet properly developed and requires, from our point of view, a proposal that we want to raise with this communication.

Spreading awareness of the important values that landscapes treasure is an important step for landscapes protection and valorisation and can be done through leisure and tourism consumption, but it needs the adequate instruments among which signalling can be extremely convenient and useful.

As mentioned above, an inventory of landscape values is present in each and every one of the seven catalogues of each territory in which Catalonia has been divided.

The identified values are.

- Natural and ecological, referred to the factors and elements that determine the quality of the natural environment.
- Aesthetic, related to the capacity of a landscape to transmit a certain sense of beauty.

- Historical, corresponding to the more relevant footprints left by the human beings throughout history.
- Of social use, related to the use that an individual or a particular group make of a landscape.
- Productive, referred to the capacity of a landscape to provide economic benefits, turning its elements into resources.
- Symbolic and spiritual, corresponding to the identification that a certain group feels towards a landscape related to their beliefs.

The identification of these values, being either tangible or intangible, has interest in the design of tourism strategies and educational initiatives. Therefore, transferring this information to signposts and making it accessible to those coming over the territory becomes an outstanding service for visitors, letting them know more about the visited land and giving the option of experiencing the region in a richer and deeper way.

The use of signalling as a tool to spread the landscape values

The most appropriate context to transmit this message properly is the moment when the visitor is just located in the spot of contemplation and observation of the landscape. In this sense, the tourist space should be provided conveniently with accessible, universal and effective communication elements, adapted and themed for a public potentially susceptible to show interest in the mentioned values.

From today's tourism communication and attention perspective, we can affirm that developing and implementing *in situ* attention and information tools and systems, guarantees a better understanding from the visitor of the destination and its resources. Among the different existing communication systems present along the tourist territory, we consider that the opportunities given by the use of thematic territorial signalling becomes the most suitable one to achieve this goal.

The characteristics associated to this tool go beyond mere informative functions, as they allow a correct orientation of the visitor through directional elements, helping to promote secondary nodes to redistribute flows to other spaces and alternative or complementary tourist resources. It can also describe widely and in detail the immediate environment.

More recently, progresses made in mediation and heritage didactics have also allowed creating more interactivity for this tool. Thus, adjusting and adapting the content of the message and giving more ease of intervention and implication to the users, thanks in part, to the integration of new technologies that have allowed improving the dissemination of the included information even more.

Wearable interactive elements, encrypted codes and other resources have approached the territory to the observer to unattainable levels a few years before. The paradigm of information has also suffered changes lately, becoming versatile and dynamic and adaptable to all publics, where the interests are increasingly disparate and specific depending on facts like age or condition.

The key to an effective signalling system is in finding an accurate balance between its own theme contents and its design. The latter, based on a proper implementation of aspects like typography, colour or semiotics among other ways of capturing the attention of visitors. This fact is exemplified by the use of graphic elements like pictograms or understandable elements that help to enhance and evocate the intended message. Because of those capabilities, signalling is agile and fast as an instrument to transmit and interpret information. Those are basic aspects nowadays in tourism information for those destinations searching for competitiveness. Schematically, the objectives of implementing a good signalling system in a destination are:

- To value the tourism resources present in the territory
- To satisfy the needs of information and orientation of the visitors
- To allow the localization and identification of the elements of touristic interest in the territory
- To ensure territorial mobility and accessibility
- To maximize economic activity in the destination
- To contribute to an image of quality of the destination
- To disseminate knowledge about the natural and cultural values of the signalled space

Due to it, many tourism managers have focused their efforts to foster their use. Because a correct implementation of the tourist landscape signalling allows at the same time an optimal planning and management of the tourist activity in the destination. So much so, that lately, the use of those tools has increased markedly in many tourism spaces. This has resulted in the need to create documents regulating the procedures about how to structure and correctly implement tourist thematic signalling.

This is where the so-called signalling handbooks come from, and where each institution or responsible organism establishes and explains the different criteria to be used for the signage of the different spaces. Patterns, models and recommendations are to be taken into account depending on different important aspects as the scope, the theme or the kind of described space.

Therefore, the landscape is not something out of reach of signposting, as long as certain criteria are followed according to the characteristics of the site, like the respect for the environment where it has to be integrated and the respect to the legal regulations.

The signalling of a landscape unit in Catalonia

As mentioned before, despite the effort carried out by the Catalan Landscape Observatory to establish directives oriented to protect, manage and plan its landscapes, it remains pendent the step of transferring all this information to the territory. Although there is a clear desire to do so, a proper signalling development of the landscape values and attributes has not yet been materialized in order to inform a visitor interested in these matters.

On this basis, from the materials published by the Landscape Observatory, the authors aim to find out which elements could be compatible with the dissemination of tourism contents along the territory. Among the different documents, the files corresponding to each unit of landscape have been selected, together with their respective cartographic base. The content of these sheets presents a detailed description and distribution in items directly linked to the described landscape, so it can be correctly understood. This includes a general contextualization, historical evolution, association of the above mentioned values and graphic and cartographic contributions, among other elements.

For obvious reasons of space and tourist interest, not everything described in the files can be included in theme signposting. Therefore, considering that the chosen contents will be addressed to visitors, the proposal makes special emphasis in the definition of which of these elements would be the ones that fit better and best suit this support.

In the present paper, as other contents are regularly included in signposts, we will focus on landscape values that have not been included until now as part of regular signalling. It should be noted that no direct reference will be made to the design or formal criteria. Conversely, the present proposal is a selection and adaptation of those contents already developed by the Observatory that can be used as a base for the creation of a handbook of landscape tourism signalling in Catalonia, taking as a script the task done in form of files for each landscape unit.

In the opinion of the authors, values are the element included in the files that becomes more relevant to be present in the proposed signal system, together with the elements commonly included (toponymy, cartography, images, etc.). For its own contribution, these contents acquire a higher importance if they reach the visitors in the same moment of consumption.

Ecological, historical, aesthetic, social, production, spiritual or symbolic values, are not sufficiently transmitted nowadays in signalling and are surely suggestive enough to add value to the visit. They could help understanding why landscapes are like they are at present and the importance of the economical, social and environmental aspects that have configured them.

For a better understanding of these variables, we remark that the message used must be focused and addressed to the target audience, synthesising the information and making it entertaining and easy to understand. We must remember that tourists are enjoying their leisure time, and sometimes, the contents, written in a too academic way, are not properly adapted to them.

In Table 1, some example of information regarding different kind of values that could be added to signposts to enrich the information at the visitor's disposal and give an answer to all the questions those visitors could wonder regarding the landscape and its configuration.

Table 1: Values and examples

Values	Examples
Historical values	<p>Landscape: In the file of the landscape unit of “Aliplà de la Terra Alta” we can read how the effects of the Spanish Civil War have left a footprint still clearly visible nowadays in its landscape and the appearance of this piece of land. We can find abandoned villages destroyed by bombing, commemorative symbols, combat structures and remains (trenches, bunkers), among other prominent visual features.</p> <p>Keywords of the information to be transmitted: II Republic, Spanish Civil War, Ebro Battle, Franco.</p>
Natural and ecological	<p>Landscape: Using the example of the file corresponding to “Delta de l’Ebre”, the proposed signalling should show the ecological potential of this singular deltaic area in the Mediterranean. Its natural values (more than 40% of its surface is included in a protection framework) are characterized by its flat relief, combining lagoons, rice fields and the existence of traditional buildings associated to these agricultural tasks.</p> <p>Keywords of the information to be transmitted: Deltaic areas recession, Mediterranean, bird migrations, dunes, invasive species.</p>
Aesthetic	<p>Landscape: La landscape described in the unit file “Baix Priorat” stands out greatly for its aesthetic values focused on its vineyards and rainfed agriculture distributed in terraces mostly formed by the disintegration of the slate, which is called <i>llicorella</i>. Worldwide recognized for its wine production, this agricultural landscape has recently presented its candidacy to be elected as UNESCO World Heritage. The gentle and wavy relief of el Priorat, combining vineyards and olive tree fields, creates an astonishing and unique of colours and contrasts.</p> <p>Keywords of the information to be transmitted: terraces, seasonal chromatism, mosaic landscapes, flowering.</p>

<p>Social use</p>	<p>Landscape: According to our approach and taking the case of the landscape unit file “Litoral del Penedès” as an example, the landscape modifications arisen due to human action are quite obvious. The transformations caused by the abusive and disordered construction of second residences during the second half of the 20th century have strongly modified the suburbial areas. Other elements associated to the economical use of the landscape can be identified from the layout of major communication roads and railways in a corridor parallel to the Mediterranean, constantly used since the time of the Romans.</p> <p>Keywords of the information to be transmitted: urbanization, “desarrollismo”¹, lack of planning, transport networks.</p>
<p>Production</p>	<p>Landscape: To exemplify the production values of the landscape, we go to the industrial vestiges of the beginning of the 20th century in some spots of the Catalan Pyrenees. The development of the hydropower industry involved a great transformation of tare comprised in the unit “Pastures de l’Alt Pirineu”. The distinctive features of this hilly landscape with endless prairie grass sprinkled with small villages show a big contrast with the remains of the disused facilities built to produce the first electric energy in Catalonia.</p> <p>Keywords of the information to be transmitted: energy in the 20th century, hydropower, mountain rivers, industrial tourism, Frederick Stark Pearson².</p>
<p>Symbolic, religious or spiritual</p>	<p>Landscape: Both for its unmistakable shape and its central situation in Catalonia, the mountain of Montserrat is easy to identify from any high point of the country. Internationally recognized for its singular geology, it is known for being an abrupt landscape with needle-shaped tops. Its monastery has also a strong symbolic signification, both religious and for the Catalan identity. Due to all these reasons, this landscape unit is a good example to identify those values that can be signalled for pilgrims, hikers or other visitors of the mountain.</p> <p>Keywords of the information to be transmitted: Catholicism, Marian sanctuaries, Catalan history</p>

1 Development policies during Franco’s rule

2 American engineer, he formed the Barcelona Traction company responsible of the hydro project in the Pyrenees

Thanks to the expansion of wearable devices like the smartphones, the interaction with the users becomes bigger and bigger. The most commonly used systems nowadays are those that encrypt information. For example, the well known QR codes, that allow to link external web sites which enlarge and update the information in the signposts. Moreover, as it has been said, the possibilities of interaction with visitors are a growing trend. Playing with the contents depending on the customization and the interests of the users, digitizing the information and providing it with educational and interpretational patterns has to be a way of planning future signalling.

In any case, altogether cannot be articulated without the existence of a handbook properly made where the way of developing it is regulated, a document where all these observations are referred in a homogeneous and standardized form. Considering, besides what has been stated in previous lines, formal and design criteria that fit with the environment, thus, using integrated and durable materials. In conclusion, allowing the potential for tourism that landscape values have to be known and understood both by residents and visitors. The more they know them the more they will respect and take care of them, as they will realise of the legacy they represent for all humanity as they show the evolution of mankind and represent a heritage that must be protected for future generations.

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