Citizen Participation and Heritage Management in Rural Landscape Contexts

Jose M. Señorán Martín
Independent researcher
email: jose.m.senoran@gmail.com

Abstract

‘The personal is political’ is one of Kate Millet’s most famous phrases. It refers to the mismatches between the needs of the citizenry and practices carried out by those in the political sphere. In our case, we can relate this to integrated heritage management, and more specifically, the policies implemented in recent years in rural contexts in Spain. This paper examines the case of the large number of Heritage Interpretation Centres, restoration of traditional structures, and archaeological excavations which were initiated from the 1990s by rural municipalities, with funding from the European Union (Leader Funds, mainly), but many of which a decade later have failed and been abandoned by public institutions. This paper argues that this was partly due to the lack of public participation in the development of these projects, which were managed vertically and asymmetrically, with the inhabitants of the towns excluded and unable to contribute their own vision. Future heritage management projects should be based on citizen participation and empowerment of the different local agents that are closer to heritage sites. Through a case study in northern Cáceres, a revitalisation of the rural northern Extremadura area is proposed based on sustainable heritage tourism and revolving around three key concepts: cultural landscape, heritage and empowerment. For this to be implemented successfully, we must deal with various characteristics which form the identity of the region, as well as the particular political development within northern Extremadura.

Keywords: Landscape, Citizen Empowerment, Sustainable Tourism, Community Archaeology, Archaeological Heritage.

Introduction

In the context of the structural crisis in which Spanish society – and rural Extremadura in particular – finds itself, initiatives for the improvement of cultural heritage, in the broad sense of the word, have multiplied in recent years. These initiatives have proliferated in rural contexts; many of them have been developed under official administration guidance, others from alternative sources. A world that, since the 1990s, has seen a restructuring of European aid to the Spanish countryside and has seen living standards and purchasing power reduced to the current point of extreme crisis. The withdrawal of aid for livestock and the continued reduction of employment initiatives by city councils have led to a process of economic impoverishment from which it is hard to imagine a recovery. To this context of economic crisis, we must add the situation in which the misnamed “Professional Archaeology” has in recent years been focused on the Spanish property bubble. The Professional Archaeology crisis has grown even greater after the collapse of the economic model that has entered a deep crisis (Moya Maleno, 2010; Parga Dans & Valera Pousa, 2011).

At present, cultural heritage and its management are at a moment of theoretical definition, where European economic aid (such as the Horizon 2020 programmes, http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/) marks the way forward and seems to propose projects for the “development” of heritage policies in the rural landscape. These deceptive policies focus on the development of projects in, for and with rural areas. These are hierarchical (top-down) projects managed from the highest political establishment, disconnected from the circumstances of the small villages
which are, metaphorically speaking, so far from the big towns.

For all these reasons this would appear to be a good time to reflect on which management model we propose, particularly considering that the previous model, managed by academia and government, has proved to be a failure and has created a large gap between rural communities and their heritage. We must decide on what is the role of local communities in this process, not only in the management of heritage as a passive entity, but as an active agent in the management and creation of knowledge. In Spain, in recent years there has been, as previously mentioned, numerous proposals in this direction, illustrating the access of citizens to decisions about heritage management. In this respect, we highlight two key elements. On the one hand, is the publication of the book *Herdeiros pola Forza. Patrimonio cultural, poder e sociedades na Galicia do Séculos XXI* (Ayán & Gago, 2011) where we analyse different models of heritage management in the Galician context with the authors making allegations of citizen participation with the heritage. On the other hand, there is the emergence of SOPA Congress (the acronym for the International Congress on Education and Socialisation of Heritage in Rural Areas, http://sopa14.redsopa.org). At this Congress, the consideration of the model of participative management was established as a priority and where theoretical and methodological alternatives are offered to encourage citizen participation in the management of heritage. This
is something more frequent in other countries such as the UK but is a novelty in Spain.

Management of Archaeological Heritage and Knowledge in Rural Extremadura. A Theoretical Position

Extremadura is a region in western Spain, near the border with Portugal (fig. 1). It is characterised by an agricultural economy and low population levels. Rural landscape prevails with only a few large cities (Caceres being the highlight amongst them). In this area, like in the rest of Spain, from the 1990s, rural municipalities, with aid from the European Union (Leader Funds, mainly) conducted numerous initiatives related to Heritage management, which led to the creation of numerous centres for heritage interpretation, the restoration of traditional structures and archaeological excavations (Señorán Martin, 2014: 145). A decade later, we can see how many of these projects have failed and have been abandoned by public institutions when financial aid ended and sinking them into oblivion (Señorán Martin, 2014).

This may be due, in part, to the low public participation in the development of such projects. These were managed vertically and asymmetrically, where the inhabitants of the villages were excluded and thus unable to bring their particular and unique vision of heritage. Therefore it seems key that the implementation of projects should be based on citizen participation and the empowerment of different local actors over their immediate Landscape Heritage, along with academic institutions, Government and professional archaeologist (fig. 2).

In this context, it would be interesting to develop projects on Public Archaeology and Community Archaeology. We will not enter, at this point, into the discussion of the differences that may exist between these two approaches from a theoretical point of view. In recent years, numerous works that deal with these issues have emerged (Almansa, 2011; Ascherson, 2000; Moshenka, 2009; Schadla-Hall, 1999). Amongst these writings, we
can mention a number of features that have been summarised by X. Ayán (2014: 94):

1) Projects executed by professional archaeologists.
2) Projects managed with complete transparency and which seek to disseminate in real-time, work progress and results.
3) Projects that open archaeological sites to the public during the course of investigations.
4) Projects that stand up for active participation, integration and inclusion of local communities.
5) Projects that support volunteerism in its ranks.
6) Projects seeking a scientific and economic profitability that enable the conversion of the site or archaeological site into a heritage resource.

These models should incorporate and integrate “non-expert valuation” (Criado Boado & Barreiro, 2013: 8) tearing apart the model where the archaeological discourse is created uni-directionally, thereby being not inclusive and where the specialist prepares a message closed to the public (Ayán Vila, González Veiga & Rodríguez Martínez, 2010). In this regard, we note that the discourses are not innocent. As Foucault (2008: 14) pointed out, ‘in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected and redistributed’. The language used is strongly conditioned by the worldview we have and by the dominant ideology, terms that can be natural and obvious (Bourdieu, 2007) are still a result of social production (Shanks & Tilley, 1987b: 14). This knowledge, when related to archaeological discourse, would be determined by the interests, conflicts, concerns and general sensitivity of each time (Hernando, 1999: 19). An interpretation of the past influenced by ideology is therefore not neutral (Shanks & Tilley, 1987a: 28). Taking ownership of the past is a moral and political act (Shanks & Tilley, 1987b). The discourse about Prehistory would be ‘narratives based on discursive strategy which characterise modern western science’ whose main objective would be ‘the construction of the identity of the modern western individual’ (Hernando, 1997: 251). Archaeology constitutes ‘a discourse more directly related to the identity of the social groups that it sustains, and therefore is a discourse more directly involved in the globalisation progress of contemporary capitalist society’ (Hernando, 2006: 222).

The discourse should be adapted and transmitted in a variety of different ways in order to make it accessible to all citizens, regardless of their academic background. Everyone should have access. Also one of its ultimate goals should be the incorporation of “non-academic” discourses in research projects, with different ontologies, different worldviews. In this regard, and based on the principles of Community Archaeology (Atalay, 2012) and multi-vocality, which have been present in numerous projects for more than a decade, the passive role granted to the public as mere recipient of scientific knowledge can be overcome (Ayán Vila, González Veiga & Rodríguez Martínez, 2010) by implementing integrative and inclusive projects (Ruiz Zapatero, 2013). Furthermore, we must create projects that communicate knowledge not only through official channels of the academy. In the Internet era, thanks to new technologies, “democratising” the dissemination of knowledge to broad sectors of society is possible. These new forums for dissemination and discussion are easily accessible and have proliferated in recent years.

Moreover, it seems necessary to empower civil society to actively participate in these projects, not only as volunteers but as full members, with critical and discursive capacity (Marshall, 2002). The archaeologist must change from an upper position to a symmetrical and horizontal situation, being sometimes a technician at the service of citizens who have claim for the revaluation of their heritage. It could be possible that the archaeologist does not come to an agreement with the community, but dialogue is still necessary, rather than ignoring this sector of society (Little, 2002) – something that has been done in almost all archaeological projects.

Therefore, the key concept is “socialisation of the heritage landscape”, based on a holistic concept of Heritage ‘in which the historical and the natural merge, underpinned by the need for coordinated management of all economic resources’ (Criado Boado & González Méndez, 1995: 261). Heritage must be coordinated and managed by the
local community, changing its role from being a passive agent to an active one in the tasks of planning and managing their heritage resources. This shift from passive to active agent must be done through a process of empowerment, understood as the ability of individuals to choose between different options through direct participation in decision-making or through influencing individuals or institutions that have the power to make decisions. The effective rescue of the heritage includes a collective and democratic strategy, creating material and symbolic conditions so that all social classes can share it and find it meaningful. It is understood that if there is no social mobilisation with regards to heritage, it is difficult for government to understand current and everyday needs of the population (García Canclini, 1999: 22).


Montehermoso, located in the north of Cáceres, is a village of about 5800 inhabitants whose economy has traditionally revolved around agriculture and livestock. The identity of local inhabitants has revolved around a series of folkloric elements which for over a century have been incorporated into “the Montehermosena idea” (“montehermosena” refers to anything that originates from Montehermoso). The “montehermosena” costume (traditional costume) has had its main focus in a traditional “hat”. This has eclipsed any other heritage and has left aside the environmental, ethnographic and archaeological heritage of the village which forms the heritage landscape of the area. The use of this traditional costume, regardless of its origin, has become, as mentioned above, a referential and identity-forming element of the village. Furthermore, the traditional costume has been identified as the traditional costume of the whole region, displayed in several exhibitions as the “costume of Extremadura”, establishing the costume and the hat as regional symbols (Valadés Sierra, 1994: 98-99). This clothing has generated an artisan economy which supports part of the larger village economy (fig. 3). One of the objectives of our project is to highlight that there are “other” Cultural Heritages in the locality, such as the heritage situated in the “boyal pasture” or common land. Environmental, ethnographic and archaeological heritage, particularly the megalithic tombs and the ethnographical structures are features of this locality.

We have been working for the creation of a project that revolves around Community Archaeology. In recent years, some projects on Community
Archaeology have been developed in Extremadura, although this type of work remains marginal. Despite this, the efforts made in some of these projects must be commended. They are making significant efforts focussing on the empowerment of the rural communities over its heritage.

Archaeology in Extremadura has traditionally been a bourgeois archaeology. It has been controlled by the clergy and local experts since the nineteenth century (Ortiz Romero, 1986) and by archaeologists who supported fascism during most of the twentieth century. Archaeology was always an activity inaccessible to the subordinated classes. The unique archaeological participation was limited to “forced labour” where the “boss” forced workers into the excavation of archaeological sites. This situation continued into the democratic period. During the 1980s and 1990s, intellectual colonialism was the dominant strategy in archaeological projects in Extremadura. Researchers coming from Madrid, as also happened in the nineteenth century, developed their research projects whilst turning their back on community members. These projects, many financed under European funds, have been a long-term failure. Today, many of them are completely abandoned.

Background: Archaeological and Ethnographic Park in the Dehesa Boyal of Montehermoso

This project could be considered the continuation of a previous project in which we had the opportunity to participate, the Archaeological and Ethnographic Park in the Dehesa Boyal of Montehermoso. This was interesting because it was an integrated project which endeavoured to value the whole of Montehermoso cultural heritage, despite being an initiative with a clear archaeological

Fig. 4. Heritage in a poor state of conservation (photos: author).
One of the objectives of this project was to study the megalithic necropolis. Throughout the duration of the project (two years) three megalithic structures were excavated and restored. These digs integrated the village within the regional scientific landscape focused on the study of megalithic phenomenon. In addition, activities were carried out seeking the participation of the inhabitants of the village, some of these activities included workshops with village children, dissemination of project information via local media and the inclusion of locals in the project through volunteering. This led to the incorporation of non-specialists in the creation of scientific knowledge, as volunteers participated as full members of the project. We were all working in a real Community Archaeology Project, where specialists and non-specialists participated in the creation of knowledge and archaeological discourse.

Politics, Culture, Landscape, Heritage and Empowerment

The personal is political. This phrase is perfectly applicable to our project on the basis that it arises from a mismatch between the policies pursued by local and regional government and a portion of the citizenry that demands a revaluation of its Heritage, whether environmental, archaeological or ethnographic. Our project arises from this premise.

After the change of government in the village of Montehermoso in 2003 the Archaeological and Ethnographic Park was systematically abandoned. In the following years there was a steady deterioration of archaeological sites as well as of the different structures restored. Metaphorically speaking, the deposits have been "buried in oblivion", a
typical *damnatio memoriae*. In addition to this, there were numerous cases of the dumping of pollutants in different streams that cross the meadow, the most severe consequences were the poisoning of animals, both wild and domestic (fig. 4).

The project endeavours to value the meadow of Montehermoso even within this context of abandonment. The project’s key concept will be the socialisation of Heritage, in which scientific institutions (Incipit-CSIC, the Institute of Heritage Sciences of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) and an association (Andares) work together from a symmetrical and horizontal point of view. The work has an integral conception of Heritage. It is coordinated by the local citizenry, which has shifted from being a passive agent to an active agent in the tasks of planning and managing their own heritage resources. This shift from passive to active agent is happening through a process of empowerment, as previously mentioned.

The key objectives of our project are:
1) Revaluation of archaeological, ethnographic and environmental heritage,
2) Empowerment of civil society in Heritage issues,
3) Formation of the different local actors, and
4) Responsible heritage tourism.

Within these programme objectives, activities have been happening over the last few years and have become increasingly successful over time. Some of the highlights worthy of mention are:
1) Development of a heritage inventory. All known archaeological features in the boyal pasture are documented, along with other ethnographic heritage elements such as bridges, kilns, huts, etc. In addition, environmental heritage elements are integrated into these records such as streams, or springs and fountains.
2) Workshops about heritage and environmental awareness among villagers (fig. 5). The workshops have focused on the study of the fauna and flora of the boyal pasture. To this we must add the repopulation of the pasture areas with different species of trees.
3) Workshops about archaeological and ethnographic heritage. These workshops have focused on the creation of interpretive trails. They have re-focussed the importance and value of the various archaeological and ethnographic elements that are located in the boyal pasture.

The results of the workshops have been successful and have had increasing participation. This is thanks to the greater visibility of the Archaeological and Ethnographic Park which now brings bigger audiences, a revival of tourism in the meadow and awareness by local people of the heritage values of the area.

**Conclusions. The Values of Rural Community**

With the withdrawal of European aid to agriculture, rural Spanish areas have been impoverished over recent years. The new European policies revolve around the revitalisation of these areas by improving their Cultural Heritage. These new policies, however, do not take into consideration the role of local communities, exerting an academic and professional colonialism over the people who have the (actual) ability to decide on the management of its resources. Therefore, by implementing these new projects that revolve around the principles of Community Archaeology, where the inhabitants of these villages have an active role, society as well as academics and the authorities will benefit.

In this text, I have tried to show the work that has been developed in the village of Montehermoso in recent years. Its relevance lies in the horizontal collaboration between local associations and scientific institutions. The results are a success. This is because there is no imposition on rural communities that sometimes comes from academics. We understand that the basis of Heritage Management should begin a process of empowering people about their heritage resources, therefore, the work we do is meaningful only within a framework of horizontal collaboration responding to the demands of the citizens.
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