

Landscape Politics — Utopia and Reality*

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Abstract: We can read in the First International Conference of Landscape Philosophy announcement, which took place in Lisbon in 2019 that we are now in the emergence of a concept for a new planetary Era, the so-called Anthropocene, which describes the tremendous influence of humankind in the transformation of the Earth. The reflection on this global “anthropocenization” requires a comprehensive way of thinking about landscape through a new human mediation, the rapprochement of politics to the territory and from the society to the landscape in all its dimensions. However, it also requires the fundamental contribution of the Academy to rejoin the totality, providing the theoretical and reflective framework, to relink in a new way what was never really separated — Man and Nature. Also, let us ask the landscape philosophy the understanding of the intersection of needs and demands between transcendence and immanence, as a contribution to opening the Anthropocene to other needs that in the end can transform a catastrophic dynamic into a new dynamic of understanding the Earth. After all, in which Anthropocene landscape will a child born today live, whose life expectancy is the end of the century?

Key words: nature, human action, landscape, politics, justice

1. Introduction

Thinking Landscape in the Anthropocene necessarily means to understand that there is indeed a significant distance between concepts and reality, between academia and administrations, between politics and land, between politicians and voters; and, above all, between a conceptualization of the thought, planned and managed landscape and the reality.

The question is about what reveals today’s landscape as a cultural construction, in a concurrent coexistence of a “rural man” and an “urban being”. There lies a duality between nature and landscape, as a survival code in the sense of habitat to some, and for a [privileged] minority, as an experience of aesthetic living.

A differentiated mediating perception, as a result of the individual and collective contemporary circumstance, has made for some nature and landscape one and the same thing — determinants of survival — or, for others, a [conscious] cultural construction, recognizing, however, different moments in their constructive interrelation.

Even the landscapes that we suppose to be freer of our culture are, on closer examination, their product. The relationship established from natural elements to an artificial process by human intervention, requires understanding of their evolutionary moment, exploiting the reciprocal effects of science and art, and challenging us to claim the essence of their singularity, in a reality in which form no longer follows function and function no longer determines form (Fig. 1).

This duality gains evidence in the science and technique of agricultural landscapes, forestry, parks or public gardens. However, it does not nullify its primary condition of spaces transforming elements and natural forms, but now in a combination of productive needs,

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cycles and rhythms of growth, challenging morphologies, flows and continuities.

It may occur that no longer is understandable that “nature is naturally the order”. Water, soil and nutrients cycles forge the relief forms, the hydrographic network, the horizons, the shapes and textures of the endemic flora or the perception of the rhythm of the seasons. In contrast, the generalization generates the constant availability of a variety of products, such as grocery, which we consume on an undifferentiated calendar.

Even so, strongly artificialized spatiality can lead to fruition. It requires, nevertheless, awareness of the difference resulting from mere visual and aesthetic experience and the mediating perception that translates landscape as a complex system resulting from the

interaction between Man and Nature. Nature is indeed the true framework of Order (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1 Example of forestry where function no longer determines the form, challenging morphology, flows and continuities.

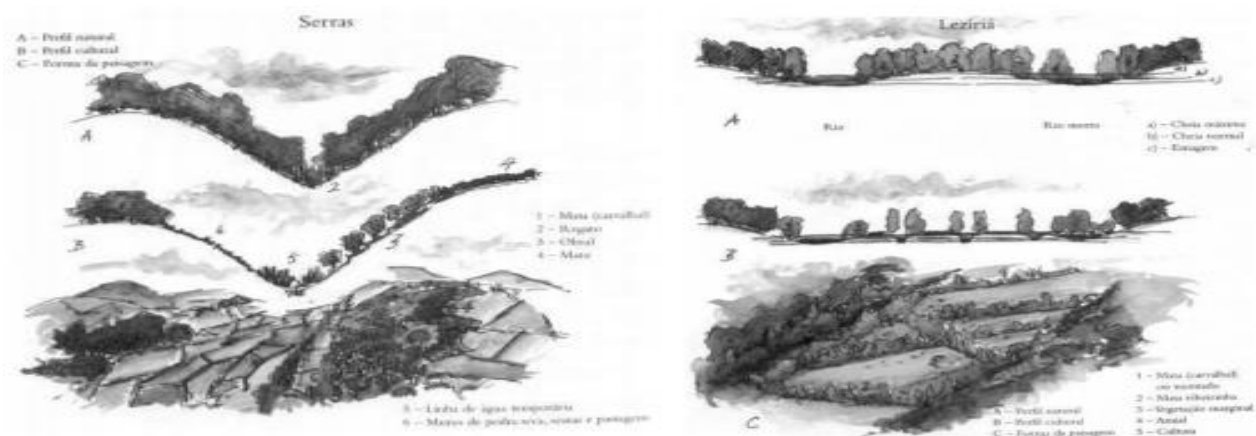


Fig. 2 Cultural profiles resulting from ordering the landscape in different typologies [15].

Thus, nowadays, the reality that translates the conceptualization of landscape is not the *meeting point of man with nature* [13]. It is instead a random and volatile reflection of economic options conditioned by profit as soon as possible, in a speed as fast as possible (production, disposal, processing and marketing) and an uncritical public opinion often shaped by the power of the media.

Only resist those landscapes that uses stand on their own, or those ones to which distance and natural difficulties confer an absence of dynamics, ignored by power.

As experience has shown how far away from reality are the cogitations, or lack thereof, about the

application of concepts that could influence how the daily life of the average citizen is lived, there is actually a space for thought *between the sphere of experience and philosophical categorization* [13].

2. Material and Methods

Political decisions have built over time — chronological and of the dynamics of the interplay of natural elements — the foundations of territorial realities consisting of ecological, social and economic continuities and flows.

Revisiting geography and landscape design, could pose the question whether we would speak today, for example, of coastal/inland or north/south dichotomies,

consolidated over centuries, which generated new geographies, new territorialities and new landscapes.

The Portuguese territory has a significant ecological diversity; however, with mostly adverse conditions to a competitive rural economy, namely regarding soil and water resources. This circumstance determines a relatively unfavorable situation for the average income of the rural population, but also, the continuity of the agro-pastoral systems, which identify the Mediterranean landscape and its natural values. Managing this collective asset should deserve territorial justice in the application of public policies and the present time may be one of the last opportunities to act. Recognizing what represents a Nation as an identity matrix and guaranteeing territorial sustainability in a context of critical changes necessarily means that revitalizing the rural space is firstly changing its subsistence status.

In the current context of speed and magnitude of critical environmental, social, economic and technological changes, we will probably be facing one of the last opportunities to make justice to a substantial part of the area of the national territory — the rural space. In this support, where ecological processes necessary to life occur, the tendencies of generalized ageing and demographic fall are reflected and aggravated by below average incomes, what means rural abandonment, territorial devitalization and, consequently, mischaracterization of the landscape. Only smart combinations of public policies aimed at investments, actors and specific models, can achieve territorial, social, economic and inter-generational justice indebted to the rural space.

As a synthesis of human action on natural support, involving the management of complex and interconnected systems, the landscape constitutes a reference of identity and memory that we usually take for granted.

This living archive of lessons from previous generations that have gradually transformed the territory and the landscape into examples of

proportionality and rationality faces today realities such as globalization, velocities and dynamics never known before in their breadth, magnitude and production of effects. This certainly determines to reconsider, and even reinvent, human/environment interaction now in the light of the opportunity to combine the use of science and memory.

If landscape is, after all, *Man' meeting point with nature* [13], as a meeting point, it also represents a boundary between the balance of order and its disruption. Using legal or administrative abstractions as instruments, politics strongly determines the dynamics of landscape transformation through decisions that establish rules or conditions for interactions with the natural elements. In addition, these legal and/or administrative instruments build territory as an organizing matrix for society.

As politics intervenes in the landscape, it is paradigmatic the allegory of Ambroggio Lorenzetti, in the 14th century, representing good government, in a simplistic duality, that evidences the message about the direct involvement and proximity close to landscape effects (Fig. 3). Here, the city and the countryside balance and complement each other in a social conception that fuses a symmetrical and linear view (typically medieval) and at the same time dramatic of human reality, in opposition to good and bad government.

This reality, to be hold by those who visit the frescoes of Siena's Palace (Italy), has implicitly communicated what characteristics are necessary for good governance, which results in a useful and balanced intervention of Man in Nature — the



Fig. 3 Extract of Allegory of Ambroggio Lorenzetti, Siena's Palace, Italy.

landscape — because it produces food and raw materials, or otherwise being degraded, and without benefit to the population. It represents, after all, the weighted governance, which today will be the perspective of the history of politics in the landscape and the resulting political landscape, as a challenge to the contemporary order.

From science, we can expect research contributions for solutions that use resources more efficiently, namely, with less impact on the natural cycles and better performance in sustainability indicators, or even, the explanation of reality in causal sense, since is supported sometimes only by partial knowledge. From politics, it will be expected quality guidelines, which will implement programs with practical effects and translation both in the planning and application of public policies, as well as in territorial management instruments. In this context, it is also necessary to introduce governance — the way we organize ourselves to resolve the management of the territory and guarantee its cohesion. Governance can give form to the global thinking and strategic vision that allows the resizing and recentralization of the problems, the anticipation of probable effects on the construction of scenarios, and possible minimization measures in a proactive attitude.

It also means looking forward to renewing the traditional links between agriculture and the landscape, as well as integrated policies aimed at territorial entities that synthesize formal structures, functional matrices and social representations.

To rethink the role of rural space is to recognize one of the most striking features of agriculture as a common and structuring denominator in the dynamics of building the Mediterranean landscape-diversity, where the foundation of its identity is berthed, which may be jeopardized by the direct influence of economy and politics.

3. Discussion

The governance level in proximity does not interfere directly and effectively with landscape management, in particular with the structural options relating to agriculture, forests, transport and communication networks or social facilities.

Today, the exercise of power has lost its human scale, its proximity to nature and the citizens it governs.

Can the landscape, in the present context, reflect nature, space, temporality, place, mysticism, climate, communities, culture, techniques and needs and, at the same time, the transformations operated by Man?

Will it be possible to (r)establish the lost links to nature, make decision-makers aware of the effects of their choices, or should we assume that new landscapes will come, as we are today facing those from the *meeting point between man and nature* [13] in various temporalities and circumstances?

In Portugal continental inland, rural space is about 92.3% and this organic and functional territorial “fabric” is mainly marked by low population density.

Various matrices, axes and articulations or networks, in a capillary system of urban centers and activities, which generate and receive flows of resources and services, have their base on prevalent agricultural and forest uses (Fig. 4).

And there also lives the population that maintains this territory. Mostly aged and poorly educated, they feel it like space and nature, depend on it in a “primary” habitat relationship and manage it with mainly empirical knowledge and a true sense of sustainability.

This population does not interfere [nor is it able to influence decisions by their diminishing electoral weight] in the political options that are decisive for the transformation of space and that generate, in a distinctive way, the dynamics of the landscape.

However, no less relevant is that, since 2001, around 44% of the Portuguese population lives in 4% of the territory on a *continuum* from Setúbal to Braga (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4 As in the human circulatory system the territorial capillary system provide flows of resources to urban centers and activities, which generate and receive services.

This population no longer recognizes its mostly rural roots and must avoid seeing the landscape only as a way for aesthetic and recreation purposes, but indeed respecting it as the living and life support that enables the existence of urban space.

What the increasing concentration of population in urban spaces also reveals is the progressive nearing to the intermediate urban centers and, subsequently, to the metropolitan areas.

This issue determines territorial attractiveness as the ability to achieve a combination of elements and, above all, to frame those that, being strategic, serve as the engine for the remaining ones.

It is a matter of giving rationality and coherence to the spatial expression of the diversity and wealth of the national whole, but also, and above all, of doing justice to the fundamental role of territorial support, dignifying it through a compatible status and

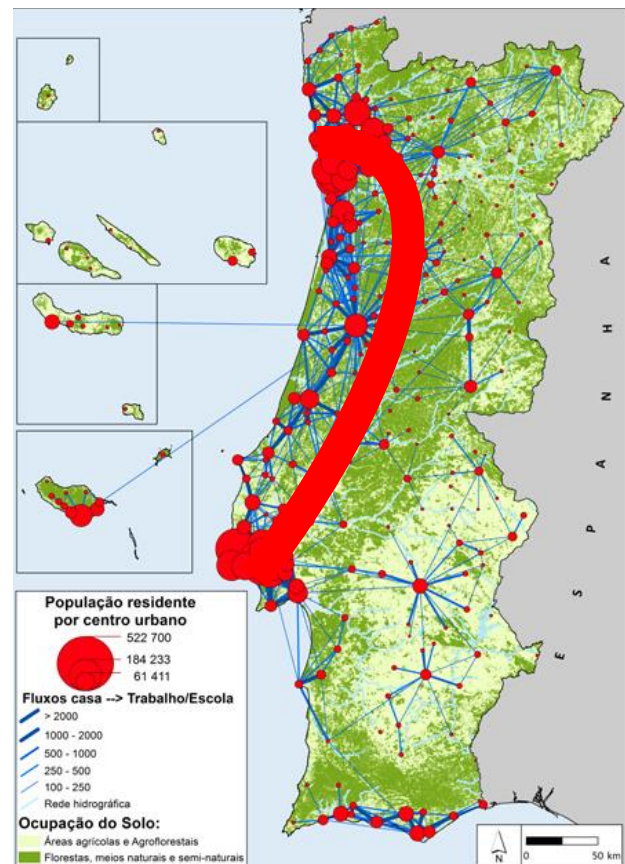


Fig. 5 Urban centers from Setúbal to Braga that concentrate 44% of the population.

conditions with the cohesion and continuity of a common collective identity.

It is always through who we are and what we were that we can reinvent ourselves and with the territory is no different. It is because we know how to do that we can continue to do and innovate. Nothing can be more contemporary than tradition [1].

This is a fundamental recognition of the indispensable role of rural space, which provides livelihood for the *polis* and supports the matrix of the urban system where scientific knowledge, economic and political power are concentrated. Until now, they has not been held responsible by relevant critical mass by not undertake into account the binomial space / nature or introduce it into the weighting political options that mark the territory.

Managing this collective asset should deserve due territorial justice in the application of public policies and the present time may be one of the last

opportunities to act. Recognizing what represents the country as an identity matrix and guaranteeing territorial sustainability in the context of critical changes, necessarily means revitalizing the rural space, by changing its subsistence status whose perpetuity cannot be taken for granted.

4. Conclusion

Landscape and rurality have become two faces of territorial [in]justice, and are also, after all, an equation of territorial cohesion, whose resolution should be seen in a different perspective from the whole territorial diversity. In Portugal namely, the great expression of low population density areas, should weigh heavily in political decisions, with the consequent effects on strategies for territorial, economic and social development that go beyond isolated or individual initiatives. This means combating the paradox of the growing need for more and more investments in areas of large population concentrations and decline in services of general interest in low-density areas, thereby aggravating, in turn, their ability to retain and secure human resources.

Concludes the Cork Declaration (European Union Member States, 2016), as one of the *recommendations for policy makers, that they should stimulate investment in the identity and growth potential of rural communities, making them attractive for people to live and work at different stages of their lives* [2].

As the current reality shows, because of the continuation of a range of policy options, trends of decades have persisted however on the problems of low-density rural areas such as lack of competitiveness, population ageing and depopulation, which have consequently come to mean abandonment and landscape mischaracterization.

The reflection on global “anthropogenization” requires a more and more comprehensive way of thinking about landscape in order to answer to the question posed at the outset — what cultural mediation of nature reveals today the vision and process of

landscape construction. That will require creating a new human mediation and the compromise of politics with the territory and the environment. From society, there must be the acquaintance with the landscape in all its dimensions, as well being fundamental the contribution of academic thinking to rearticulate the *totality*, providing the theoretical framework to relate again what cannot be really separated — Man and Nature.

Let us also ask the landscape philosophy the understanding of the intersection of needs and demands between transcendence and immanence, as a contribution to opening the Anthropocene to other needs that in the end can transform a catastrophic dynamic into a new dynamic of understanding the Earth.

After all, in which Anthropocene landscape will a child born today live, whose life expectancy is the end of the century?

That is why landscape politics must become reality as the fair collective resolution to intergenerational accountability.

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