

## Cultural landscapes boosting disadvantaged mountain areas: a rural turn in arts-led vitalisation

**Field of Study :** Arts and Culture

### SUPERVISORS

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### KEYWORDS

Art, activism, museums, nature, villages

### ABSTRACT

Are cultural landscapes helping to alleviate the challenges socio-economic decline in mountain regions? This doctoral dissertation will look for answers, based on a historical introduction and a series of case studies in a comparative analysis crowned by conclusions and recommendations for the sustainable upkeep of this type of heritage ensembles in the future. While regularly based in Saragossa University, the PhD candidate will carry out research stays in villages signified by a strong arts profile in the Pyrenees (Hecho), Picos de Europa (Cerezales del Condado), the Iberian System (Vilafamés), Central System (Olmeda de las Fuentes), Serranía de Ronda (Genalguacil), to conduct interviews, consult local archives or experience in person these realities.

Comparable spots in the Alps and/or the Apennines will be the locations of the study-cases during the second year, when he/she will be based in Turin. The candidate will study examples of patrimonialization in the Alpes (Museo diffuso del Cuneese), Serra di Vrea (Maglione), Monte Roccatonda (Gibellina) and then investigate the National Database for further examples that may match the Spanish ones.

Similar examples in further countries will be visited and studied during the required research stages in other UNITA universities: for instance in French Pyrenees (Céret) and Alps (St Paul de Vence). Meanwhile, the doctoral student will disseminate his/her findings in international conferences and journals, especially in the third year of the contract.

## Research aims and methodology

The aim of this research is to study the creation, conservation, management and social returns of cultural landscapes revitalising mountain areas in demographic crisis. After a broad international survey, based on previous research, some examples in Italy, Spain and other countries will be specifically analysed as study cases, then the conceptual and methodological results will be considered in other areas, and on this basis, collaboration will be carried out with international groups. The final goal is to produce a directory and a map of cultural landscapes boosting disadvantaged mountain areas, together with a historical account surveying, with critical analysis, international influential models.

The PhD candidate will prepare a doctoral dissertation, combining readings of primary or secondary sources with fieldwork and research stays to conduct interviews, consulting local archives or experience local circumstances in situ. His/her thesis will review, based on a historical introduction, relevant case-studies in a comparative analysis crowned by conclusions and recommendations for the future curatorial strategies regarding such cultural settings. Previous research by both supervisors has studied specific precedents and general trends. Each supervisor will provide guidance from different disciplinary areas, recommending bibliography and methodologies specific to their respective cultural field; but the resulting thesis will offer a more global perspective, with conclusions on the conceptualisation of cultural landscapes and recommendations for effective management at a European scale, towards sustainable and more culturally sensitive practices, promoting local development.

## Relevance and added-value of the proposed research in relation to the current state of knowledge

Cultural heritage from rural areas was traditionally enshrined in ethnographic collections and open-air museums, however this implied massive transfers from their original settings, until the 1970s, when the Nouvelle Muséologie invented the ecomuseum, a new typology that championed in-situ musealisation. Since then, the idea of 'site museums' has prevailed also for archaeological sites, but influenced art circles as well. Sculptors and other artists would arrange in the 1980s Summer symposia in remote villages, which sometimes resulted in a collection called 'museum'. Sometimes, the name Museo di Arte Contemporanea all'Aperto became quite common in some Italian towns (Costanzo, 2007), including, in addition to sculptures, other forms of public art, especially painted murals, as in Luicciana (Prato) since 1984, or in the collection of sculptures and paintings on the streets of Maglione (Turin) since 1985, or in the Museo Diffuso in Ulassai (Sardinia) since 1987 (Lorente, 2018: 177-178). More broadly, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee adopted in 1992 specific categories of 'cultural landscapes' for the upkeep of world heritage combining nature and culture, but not only in towns and cities, where the boosting role of museums and the arts was epitomised under the label 'Bilbao effect'. Then, a rural turn marked in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the notion of 'extended museum' gaining strength among museologists, especially in Italy, where the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage in the territory inspired the so-called *museo diffuso* (Cataldo & Paramenti, 2011), whose derivation was the term 'extended museum', coined at the 31<sup>st</sup> General Conference of ICOM held in Milan in 2016. The concept was conceived for any kind of museum expanded into the territory, according to the architect and museographer Fredi Drugman (in Basso Peressut and Ricci, 2016); but this typology became particularly popular in rural areas such as the Museo Diffuso di Borgo Terra in Muro Leccese (Lecce), one of the best examples of a recent museological trend towards *distretti culturali evoluti* encouraging interactions with the geographical and social environment (Pireddu, 2017).

Thus, the study of arts in natural environments, from gardens and parks to Land Art, has recently developed more complex forms of heritage encompassing a whole range of cultural and natural values. The 2000 European Landscape Convention in Florence explicitly formulated a strategic alliance

between landscape, cultural heritage and territorial boosting. The Convention identified landscape as the foundation of the identity of communities and, based on this, argued that they should see themselves reflected. Cultural landmarks, artworks, museums and creative people can be enticements bringing new life to forsaken territories while projecting memory and the sense of belonging into the future. Learning from such precedents, Europe would encourage modern views and approaches and uses for its cultural heritage: this justifies the relevance of the proposed doctoral dissertation, in the framework of the European Union's Horizon 2022 research and innovation Program. An added value for this research will be to produce critical maps and hypotheses together with recommendations for future investments in cultural landscapes boosting disadvantaged mountain areas.

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### Interdisciplinary nature of the research together with the alignment with the CHORAL programme and complementarity expertise of the teams

At the University of Saragossa Prof. J. Pedro Lorente leads the research group Observatorio Aragonés de Arte en la Esfera Pública (OAAEP), an interdisciplinary combination of art historians, artists, architects, musicologists and museum curators specialising in the Contemporary Age (19th, 20th and 21st centuries). In the broader scenario of the Iberus cluster, they are part of a the scientific group called Arte/Patrimonio y desarrollo Social/Territorial (A/P+S/T), also headed by Prof. Lorente, with the participation of geographers from University of Lleida, historians from University of La Rioja, and pedagogues from the Public University of Navarre, in association with a team from the University of Ibagué, studying the biocultural and archaeological geoheritage park of Alto de Toche in Tolima (Colombia). In the UNITA alliance, they have established collaborations with University of Beira Interior, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, Università di Torino and University of West Timisoara. Prof. Silvia Pireddu works on museum communication techniques and the development and evaluation of innovative strategies to enhance visitor engagement and interpretive practices within museum settings. As member of the research group Anhlistica at the University of Turin, her research investigates the effectiveness of communication strategies in conveying complex information and fostering deeper connections between the public and cultural heritage. This is a key aspect in successfully connect rural and marginal areas to a large audience. Previous works published by the supervisors and their respective research groups have shown that, both in Spain and in Italy, some successful examples in rural areas have a decisive influence as further models. In other words, cultural landscapes, rather than reflecting urban models in a smaller scale, are regulated according to specific regimes of global-local influence.

### Output plan including publication and dissemination activities

The main output will be a doctoral dissertation including not only a historical account but also a cartography and a directory of cultural landscapes boosting disadvantaged mountain areas. Her/his thesis will offer, based on a historical introduction, a series of case studies in a comparative analysis crowned by conclusions and recommendations for the future upkeep of this type of heritage complex.

A transfer of results from the local to the international level is envisaged. The contributions and results will be made known through all sorts of publications, conferences, seminars, etc. Most specific collaboration in the discussion and dissemination of results will be sought at the University of Saragossa in the Instituto de Patrimonio y Humanidades, the cátedra Gonzalo Borrás, and the Centro de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo de Áreas Rurales, with their respective scientific seminars, public conferences, websites and financial help for publications, as the eventual culmination will be the publication of a book in the prestigious collection DE ARTE of Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza. Similarly, at the University of Turin and in every other UNITA campus where the doctoral

student will spend some months in research stages. Besides, every case study will be featured in papers presented at scientific fora, or articles produced for academic journals such as *Artigrama*, *Ager*, *Revista PH*, *Ciudad y Territorio*, *Revista electrónica de Patrimonio Histórico*, *HerMus : Heritage and Museography*, *MIDAS*, *Culture et Musées*, *Museums and Society Journal*, *Landscape Research*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* or *Journal of Cultural Heritage*. It is hoped that such scientific networking will open collaborations with colleagues in other Universities or at the Instituto de Patrimonio Cultural de España, the Observatorio Español del Convenio Europeo del Paisaje, the Observatori del Paisatge de Catalunya, the Laboratorio de Paisajes Culturales del Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico, the European Academy for Landscape Culture (PETRARCA), or scientific international networks such as the European Pathways to Cultural Landscapes (EPCL), the European Landscape Network, or Sustainable Futures for Europe's Heritage in Cultural Landscapes (HERCULES). Finally, the doctoral dissertation foresees results with social and political impact by contributing significantly to the implementation of the European Landscape Convention and specific aspects of SDG 11 (4, 7, a), Sustainable cities and communities, and specifically SDG 13.3 and 15.9, of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

### Estimated schedule

#### Year 1: Research Foundation and Initial Fieldwork

- Primary Location: University of Saragossa
- Activities:
  - Literature review and theoretical framework development.
  - Coursework and seminars on research methodologies and cultural heritage studies, in the framework of the Doctoral Program in Heritage, Societies and Border Spaces <https://estudios.unizar.es/estudio/verdoct?id=7108>
  - Initial fieldwork in the Pyrenees (Hecho), Picos de Europa (Cereales del Condado), the Iberian System (Vilafamés), Central System (Olmeda de las Fuentes), and Serranía de Ronda (Genalguacil):
  - Conduct interviews with local stakeholders.
  - Consult local archives.
  - Observe and document local art and cultural practices.
- Monthly progress meetings with academic supervisors.

#### Year 2: Expanded Fieldwork and Comparative Studies

- Primary Location: University of Turin
- Activities:
  - Coursework and seminars on research methodologies and cultural heritage studies, in the framework of the Doctoral Program in Cultural Heritage and Historical-Artistic, Audiovisual and Multimedia Production <https://www.phdculturalheritage.unito.it/do/home.pl>
  - Fieldwork in the Alps:
    - Study patrimonialization processes at Museo Diffuso del Cuneese, Maglione and Gibellina.
    - Comparative analysis of cultural heritage management between Spanish and Italian sites.
  - Mid-year review and presentation of preliminary findings to the academic committee.

#### Year 3: International Case Studies and Dissemination

- Primary Locations: Partner UNITA Universities
- Activities:



- Conduct research stays in selected international sites with strong cultural heritage profiles.
- Gather data and case studies from additional countries for comparative analysis.
- Finalize data analysis and complete dissertation writing.
- Begin drafting dissertation chapters based on fieldwork and analysis.
- Present research findings at international conferences.
- Submit articles to peer-reviewed journals.
- Submit the completed dissertation for review.
- Prepare for and complete the oral defense of the dissertation.

#### Ongoing Activities Throughout the Program

- Regular communication with academic supervisors and research collaborators.
- Participation in departmental seminars and workshops.
- Contribution to academic publications and conference proceedings.
- Engagement in professional development activities, including teaching assistance and academic networking.

This schedule provides a structured framework for the PhD candidate, ensuring a balanced approach to coursework, fieldwork, analysis, and dissemination throughout the duration of the program.