

The Museum of the Landscape of Catalonia A reflection about the human experience in the landscape

Ester Noguer Juncà
University of Girona
esternoguer@gmail.com

“This landscape that we you die, it also die”
(Joan Salvat-Papasseit, 1922)

As everyone knows, museums are permanent institutions that take care to preserve and show the heritage to the society.

The landscape has a dual nature (natural and cultural) and is one of the most important heritages of the whole society. And important characteristic of the landscape is its mutability: change in a double sense, as hardware and also how to be perceived (Nogué, 2008).

Since 2000, the year when it was approved the European Landscape Convention in Florence, in the Catalan city of Olot, some learned people and the City Council began to project the Museum of the Landscape of Catalonia, understanding the landscape as the central topic of the museum.

The aim of the project is that visitors can link the local and the global scope, putting their personal points of views in a more general context.

THE CURRENT REALITY OF TOURISM AND LANDSCAPE IN CATALONIA

Catalonia is one of the seventeen autonomous communities of the Kingdom of Spain. It borders France and Andorra to the north, Aragon to the west, the Valencian Community to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the east. Catalonia comprises four provinces: Barcelona (7.733 km²), Girona (5.910 km²), Tarragona (6.303 km²) and Lleida (12.150 km²). Its capital is Barcelona, which has an official population of 7.535.251 inhabitants.

Catalonia, which was independent until 1714, is legally recognized as a “nationality” of Spain.

Catalonia is the most important touristic destination in Spain and one of the more important touristic destinations in Europe. Catalonia receives 26 millions of tourists per year and more than a half of them are foreigners. As shows the annual data from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE), in 2010, Catalonia received 13'2 millions of foreigners, which number represents 11% of the Gross Inner Product. The main tourists who arrive in Catalonia come from France, Great Britain, Italy and Deutschland.

The actual reality of cultural tourism in Catalonia:

“Sun and beach” has been for many years the tourist Spanish and Catalan model. The recent changes in the tourist world map (incorporation of new destinations, improvements in transport forms, changes on the demand’s preferences, etc.) clearly show the need to rethink the offer in the coastal zones, as Researching Coastal and Resort Destination Management organized by the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Girona (UdG), in which also take part the European Union of Tourist Officers (EUTO). Concerning this, one of the bets that can give more benefits to the territory (so much from the economic perspective like the social one) is the cultural tourism (see Cultural Tourism and Poverty Alleviation Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development, published by the World Trade Organization).

This “type” of tourism, very recent if we compare with others “facets” of tourism, on the year 1997, the Internacional Council of Museums (ICOM), on the frame of his 12^a assembly, was betting for a tourist model that works in collaboration with museums, so much to maximize the use of these equipments as for his aptitude to educate and make aware the visitors in the respect to the natural, social and patrimonial environment of countries and regions of reception.

In several countries, like Austria and Russia, this collaboration already has been taking place for a few years. On the other hand, in Catalonia this link had not been given even now, though the topic already had been discussed by some authors (Espona, Bellido, etc) and in seminars.

One of the first centres who decided to make in practice this collaboration (museum-professionals of the touristic sector) was the University of Girona, through four students of the Master in Planning and Direction of the Tourism, speciality in Cultural Tourism.

The first step was in 2008, with the signature of the agreement between this faculty and the Art Museum of Girona (Md'A) to write his Plan of Tourist Communication, finished in 2009.

Then, at the beginning of the year 2010, the Maritime Museum of Barcelona Faculty of Tourism of the University of Girona, signs an agreement in order to activating, and in some cases to reactivate, the diffusion, promotion and protection of the maritime heritage of the Catalan coast.

Also, the Museum Picasso, one of the museums most visited of Barcelona (it receives annually more than 650.000 visitors who do not reside in Spain), takes as one of his goals the insertion of the citizens of Barcelona in this cultural equipment, emphasizing his character of cultural learning space. To achieve that goal, the Museum decided to incorporate the area of

Public Management, in order to manage the habitual tourists and, in addition, to find strategies to catch the local visitors.

Following the same line, in May of 2010, the Institute of Culture of Olot (ICCO) and the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Girona signed an educational cooperation agreement with the aim to incorporate a third degree student to take part in the draft of the museographic project of the future Museum of the Landscape of Catalonia (MPC).

As we could have read in the previous lines, we can affirm that museums have realized that tourism is a very attractive market segment from multiple points of view, as public's studies or communication policies. Also, we can see that nowadays Catalonia bets to create a link between museums and universities in order to outline a tourist offer that complements the traditional "sun and beach", adding to the numerous initiatives in cultural tourism that have been developed in the last years, like the Culture Club (a club created and managed by the Catalan Agency of Tourism).

The actual reality of conscience of the landscape in Catalonia:

Landscape represents an important element of heritage for society as a whole and has the dual character of being both natural and cultural. Essentially, landscape has a communicative dimension because it does not exist without the observer. It is therefore a relevant communicative tool for transmitting and evoking emotions and feelings to the target audience.

Tourism is an economic activity that alters all contexts in which it appears (transforming traditional landscapes, determining policies, generating business, restructuring and destructuring social panoramas...). This has two basic effects on landscape: firstly, destinations create landscapes that respond to certain stereotypes, and secondly, landscape is used as a purely commercial product, despite the fact that it is one of society's most fragile heritage elements.

Given this context, landscape (defined by the European Landscape Convention as any part of a region perceived as such by the local population and the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors) is very often used as a promotional image for tourist destinations in guides, pamphlets, posters, etc. Nevertheless, hardly ever in Europe, landscape has been used as a main topic of a museum.

To understand why states and nations bet to promote the conservation and improvement of the rich diversity of European landscapes, is necessary to go back to the European Landscape Convention.

Catalonia was one of the first nations to sign the European Landscape Convention: this international Agreement was approved in the Palazzo Vecchio of Florence on October 2000. Since then, and gradually, it has been approved and ratified by most of the European Council member states.

The Agreement is important because, on the one hand, is the first international agreement that protect specifically the landscape and, on the other hand, it is the first document that consider the landscape as a natural and cultural heritage.

The Spanish governments, unlike many neighbouring countries, it has never understood the landscape as an element that increase remarkably the life quality of the population.

Nevertheless, in Catalonia, this reality changed when the Catalan Parliament -the first Changer of Deputies that signed the European Landscape Convention- approved, on June 2005, the "Law of Protection, Management and Regulation of the Landscape".

Catalonia, with the enactment of this Law, became the first Spanish community to have a specific regulation for the landscape, and at the same time, it was closer to the most conscientious countries in this topic, like France or Holland.

The Law was useful as a ground to begin drawing landscape catalogues and guidelines and to do impact and integration studies of the Catalan landscapes, among other activities.

Olot and its relation with the landscape:

This context, explained in the previous lines, allowed Olot – a little city on the north of Catalonia- to bet to revalue its artistic tradition and relation with the landscape -initiate with Olot School of the Landscape (l'Escola d'Olot del Paisatge)-, to modernize and to update the speech regarding the landscape.

That meant the beginning of two interesting projects. In one hand, the set up of a Landscape Observatory (l'Observatori del Paisatge), with technique headquarter in Olot, that took care and preserved the Catalan landscape values.

In the other hand, to turn the Garrotxa Comarcal Museum (Museu Comarcal de la Garrotxa) into the Landscape Museum of Catalonia (Museu del Paisatge de Catalunya).

Most of us can answer ourself: why the cultural and public administrations plan a national museum in Olot, a little city on the north of Catalonia?

Olot, and La Garrotxa (the administrative region), are, in Catalonia, and also in Spain and in south of France well know by two elements: the art and the landscape. The main raisons of this reality are:

- La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park. This protected zone has more than fourthly volcanoes. The city of Olot, specifically is surrounded by fourth of them: El Montsacopa (the most emblematic because is situated in the middle of the city), Montolivet, La Garrinada and El Bisarques. All these places of natural interest, well watched over public and local private administrations, can conserve (to maintain intact) and preserve a lot of landscapes immortalized by known poets and painters.
- The Olot's School. Ends of the 19th century, thanks to Joaquim Vayreda, the small city became a reference as artistic point and it was easy to see Berga i Boix or Rusiñol painting in the open air. In 1934 it was created the Upper School of Landscape of Olot and since that moment is a referent place of the Catalan artistic production.
- The ancient Olot's Hospice. The Museum will be located in the city centre, in the ancient Hospice (despite the name it has never been used as a hospice), where, actually, we find the Museu Comarcal de la Garrotxa (the regional Museum) and the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia (which creation responds to the need to study the landscape, prepare proposals and sensitise Catalan society to the need for better protection, management and planning of the landscape in the framework of sustainable development). The actual regional museum, which has an outstanding collection of landscape paintings of the Upper School of Landscape, will nourish a part of the future Landscape Museum of Catalonia, while the National Museum of Art of Catalonia (MNAC) will deposit an important part of his collection of landscape paintings.

THE MUSEUM OF THE LANDSCAPE OF CATALONIA

The objective of the Museum:

The objective of that future museum (expected to open in 2012) is to present the landscape as a global matter. Mainstays are artistic paintings but the speech goes beyond that the meaning of each work. Topics are not analysed only from the point of view of art history, but from other disciplines like geography, literature, philosophy, architecture, agricultural history, sociology or environmental sciences. The landscape talks about the exterior world, the society, their looks and their values.

One of the mean characteristics of the landscape is its mutability (its changeable nature). The landscape changes in a double sense: as a physical support/element and also on the way it is perceived.

We are living in an era in continuous movement and completely full with changes. The systematic structure has moved away from our ideals and, as a consequence, we must redefine the concepts that in the past framed the narrative and exhibition speech of a museum.

According to the current cultural demand and to the subject, one cannot plan (and we want not) a museum with a permanent and strict structure, but it has to be dynamic, flexible and adapted to the needs and interests of the contemporary society.

The landscape not only talks about the outside world, but also about humans, their looks, their values... In keeping with this reality, the museum will be an area of analyse and discussion of some complex and changing question about the actual landscape.

The project's speech:

The project of this museum is the result of a team work, the Advice Council, consisted of eleven experts in various disciplines (fine arts, geography, architecture, economy, philosophy, degrees in Catalan, engineering and museum's curators) and of two project's editors. As consequence, this is a subjective project build according to the extensive experience of all team's members.

The Landscape Museum of Catalonia will show, thematically, some concepts that go around the idea of landscape. Also, nevertheless, the most important period explained will be from XIX century to nowadays, the Museum will avoid the chronological speech, if we understand the word as a succession of aesthetics and art's periods.

The exhibition colonna will be the artistic productions, but some subjects will be analyzed from the point of view of geography, philosophy, architecture, literature, economy, sociology... This fact supposes that the backbone and one of the most important characteristics of the museum will be multifaceted discourse.

Different areas and corners of the Catalan territory, that they have been an object of study for artists or they have been pioneers in some subject linked with landscape, will be present in the museum. In spite of the studied territory will be Catalonia, sometimes, in order to place some aspects correctly, the geographic subject's frame will be more extended.

We must know that not only history interpreters had created landscape, but also our contemporary world. As far as possible, we will promote a speech between the ancient and the contemporary work as a reflex of a question in a different time moments. But, is in the lasts exhibition's room where we will present a contemporary reflection. Also, there will be across the "route" various points where visitors will have the opportunity to explain their opinion.

The outlines of the Museum:

The future Museum will explain the landscape using seven areas where visitors can enjoys themselves regarding paintings, looking audiovisuals, listening interviews with professionals (sculptors, architects, writers...), reading articles and book chapters, express and written their opinions and point of view, etc.

The seven areas of the Museum will be:

- The landscape is...

This room will show four open questions which relate the landscape with geography, art, nature and senses. The visitor will find the answer in the exhibition rooms or, perhaps, outside where the main character of the landscape is the observer.

- The landscape as a discover

It is explained, instead of some Dutch paintings and Italian writings from the XV and XVI centuries, the landscape as a space with identity had been making up during XIX century, with the Romanticism.

It will talk about the first landscape painters, the pictorial movement of the Academism, the teaching of Martí Alsina, the Upper School of Landscape of Olot and about the travel as an element to discover the ruins and the naturalistic view.

- The landscape as identity element

The objective of this space is explaining that the landscape discover coincided with the growth of nationalism movements in Europe, and soon the landscape became an identity element of this nationalism movements.

The subjects raised will be the Catalanism and the Catalan School of Picture, the agrarian homogeneity and the most important symbolic elements: the mountain, the city and the rural areas.

- The landscape, a reality of the outside world

During XIX century, the landscape became an element very important for the urban society. Visitors will find information about the summer's resorts and the importance of the communication nets, the plastic exploration of the territory and the importance of personal landscapes.

- The landscape, interaction between nature and culture

That room shows that the landscape is not an object, is an individual perceptive interpretation which explains some phenomena. These phenomena have a physical reality that reflects the human activity. The information will study the landscape as an important element for painters, writers... the landscape regulation, conservation, degradation and protection and the importance of all senses.

- Virtual spaces

The cinema, the television and the new technologies have made possible to show far landscapes and they have created virtual landscapes which have been incorporated in our touristic imaginary, altering radically some of our social and private practices, and also our way to understand the environment.

- Near landscapes

Here will be some interactive computers where visitors can look for, in relation to their time ability and the type of transport used, the current Catalan routes.

Other key elements of the Museum:

In line with the project's definition, the redaction team of the future museum is working in other key elements for this future Museum. The three parallel activities are:

- Sustainability

Two years ago, it was contracted a consultancy firm that had done an investigation about the parameters to take care over to achieve environmental, social and economics sustainable results. Also, last year it was contracted a consultancy firm in order to do an environmental diagnosis of the actual museum (the exhibition rooms of the future Museum of Landscape of Catalonia). This study has permitted to detect the aspects and processes less efficient from the environmental point of view.

- Education

In collaboration with educational organizations which look after the nature environment, it is writing the educational program “My landscape”. This project links knowledge, values, individual and social conscientiousness and community services. The main goal of this educational program is teach civic responsibilities and strengthen communities.

- Participation and spreading

Given that the public participation is one of the most important stakeholders, the work team is preparing the web space of the Museum (which includes the digitalization of the museum collection) in order to speed up the communication between users and Museum.

CONCLUSIONS

The Museum of the Landscape of Catalonia benefits from the bet for cultural tourism of the Catalan public administrations –with numerous initiatives like the Culture Club, a club created and managed by the Catalan Agency of Tourism- and also from the new culture of the society about the importance of the landscape.

That Museum, regarding the topic and the new trends of the European museums, should be dynamic, flexible and capable of been adapted to the changing needs and interests of the current society.

The landscape tells us about the outside world and about people, their looks and values. That is the reason because the future museum is presented as a space of participation and analysis where visitors can do and find answers about the complex and changing issues surrounding landscape. Nevertheless, it is not conceived as an eco-museum.

Notes:

For more information please contact Mrs. Noguer: esternoguer@gmail.com