Landscape and national identity in Catalonia

Joan Nogue*, Joan Vicente

Department of Geography. University of Girona, Plaça Ferrater Mora, 1, 17071-Girona, Spain

Abstract

Landscape is the result of a collective transformation of nature. It is the cultural translation of a society on a particular portion of nature, and this translation is not only material, but also spiritual, ideological and symbolic. In this sense, landscape acts as a centre of meaning and symbolism, and creates a sense of belonging and a territorial identity that is particularly strong in some nations. This paper analyses the relevant role of landscape in the creation of national identity in Catalonia, from a historical and contemporary perspective. The historical perspective analyses this role at the dawn of Catalan nationalism in the late 19th century, and, in this context, stresses the importance of mountainous landscapes in the process of forming the Catalan nation. The contemporary perspective centres on the existence of two current “discourses” linked to the territory and the landscape, the legacy of the two main cultural discourses in nineteenth century Catalonia: the romantic “Modernista” movement and the more realistic, pragmatic “Noucentista” movement. These two discourses enjoyed a peaceful coexistence up until recently, but now, after two decades of nationalist government over a period of great economic development, the inherent contradictions are beginning to emerge and give rise to unprecedented territorial conflicts.

This paper sets out to show how landscape, seen as the cultural projection of a society on a certain space, becomes a fundamental element in the creation process of a national identity, in this case the Catalan identity, both in its late 19th century origins and in its present form. In this context, we would like to stress the importance of mountainous landscapes in the formative process of the Catalan nation. Like other nations that began to structure their identity discourse in political and cultural terms at that time, the interpretation and use of the landscape in Catalonia are rooted in readings and meanings of “Modernista” romanticism. However, the equally rhetorical but much more useful “Noucentista” vision soon appeared as a justification for the transformation of the territory. The article charts the course of these two discourses and their singular interaction in Catalonia. The first section shows how the subject of nationalism is approached through political geography and the second section gives an overview of the relationship between landscape and identity. Finally, the epilogue proposes a reading of the contemporary territorial and landscape conflicts in

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34-972-418200; fax: +34-972-418230.
E-mail address: joan.noguel@udg.es (J. Nogué).
Catalonia that have emerged now that the “Modernista” and “Noucentista” visions have outrun their course of peaceful coexistence.
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Political geography and the study of nationalism

The study of nationalism has rarely encountered such an appropriate moment as the present day. For the last several years, we have been somewhat astounded to witness a true resurgence of nationalist ideologies, notwithstanding the traumatic experience of the first half of the 20th century. Parallel to this resurgence, undoubtedly linked to a re-composition of the world system, there has also been a revival of political geography as a tool with which to interpret the aforementioned system.

Until recently, political geography focused almost exclusively on the figure of the nation-state, a long-standing tradition that was initiated in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Ratzel. In his *Political Geography*, Ratzel (1897) identifies political geography with the study of the territorial structure of the state. From that time on, and almost up to the present day, the state has been the main object of study for political geographers. In fact, this approach has still not run its course and there is much literature being written on political geography, including some quite innovative works, which are focused directly or indirectly on the state (Anderson, 1986; Bidart, 1991; Hoerner, 1996; Nogue & Vicente, 2001; Williams, 1993; Wilson & Donnan, 1998). The state is undeniably one of the most interesting and influential politically organised spaces in the last two centuries, although it is neither the only one, nor the only territorial expression of political phenomena.

Aware of this situation, political geography has widened its range of action in recent years, by showing interest not only in the state, but also in any organisation endowed with political power that can be inscribed in space. In short, we have arrived at a political geography conceived as a geography of power, of an economic, ideological and political power capable of organising and transforming the territory, at every level, following specific interests and action strategies that are often hard to discern. As Norberto Bobbio (1987) reminds us, all political theory is directly or indirectly based on an analysis of the phenomenon of power, and any true political geography must take this phenomenon into due consideration. If political theory can be considered as part of the theory of power, political geography can therefore be integrated into a wider geography of power.

It must not be forgotten, however, that this renovation is due to the integration of most of the conceptual and methodological innovations in geography over the last decades. The political geography of the nineteen eighties and nineties incorporated the rich debate on the reconsideration of the role of culture (Mitchell, 2000) and on the renewed interest in a regional geography capable of linking the particular to the general (Cooke, 1990; Taylor, 1988). On the other hand, we have now entered an interesting process of reconsideration and reassessment of the role of

In this sense, we are witnessing the configuration of a political geography based on a different conception of the notion of political space. This space is henceforth understood as a collective action situated in a specific place, as a set of relationships between individuals, family groups and institutions that constitute a true political interaction. This political space is conceived as a dynamic set of relationships based on distant affinities and translated into short-term interactions. In short, this is an attempt to draw up a political map of the world that is not focused exclusively on nation-states as if they were the only possible political units. The new world map is conceived as a wide range of political spaces, ranging from stateless nations to more diffuse spaces of a religious, tribal or ethnic nature, including city districts, large metropolitan spaces and regional entities of a supra-state nature.

The current interest in the nationalist phenomenon, somewhat ignored until recent years by political geographers, with a few notable exceptions (Knight, 1971), must be placed within this framework of thematic, theoretical and methodological renovation. Fortunately, the subject of nationalism is now being studied from different geographical points of view. These include the national construction of the social space (Agnew, 1984; Blaut, 1986; Hooson, 1994; Johnston, Knight, & Kofman, 1988; Knight, 1982, 1984), the role and power of place (Agnew, 1987; Young & Light, 2001), the local/global dialectic (Cox, 1997; Folch-Serra & Nogue, 2001), the territorial and local impact of globalisation (Amin & Thrift, 1994; Anderson, Brook, & Cochrane, 1995; McNeill, 2000; Mlinar, 1992), nationalism and unequal development with regard to natural resources and environmental problems (Nogu & Vicente, 2001), geopolitical location with regard to other territories and states (Boal & Douglas, 1982; Dijkink, 1996; Williams, 1982), the study of the culture/nation/territory trilogy (Bureau, 1984; Escobar, 2001; Girodano, 2000; Zelinsky, 1984, 1988) and, in short, everything that is implied by the consideration of territory as the basis and the political resource for the national construction process in a world made up of states. Contemporary political geography is therefore starting to offer interesting readings on the nationalist phenomenon. All these works tend to emphasise the territorial perspective, hitherto largely overlooked in analyses carried out by other disciplines.

It is from this new theoretical and methodological context that this paper defends the idea that nationalisms are largely a territorial form of ideology, or rather, a territorial ideology. From our point of view, the nations claimed by nationalists are not only “located” in space and, like any social organisation, influenced by the geographical situation, but, unlike other social phenomena, nationalisms claim specific territories as part of their own identity by emphasising their so-called particular, exceptional and historic nature. One of the most characteristic features of the nationalist ideology and movement is its ability to redefine and politicise space, by considering it as a distinctive, historical territory. The nationalist
movements interpret and appropriate space, place and time and from there proceed to construct an alternative history and geography. In this sense, the notion of “national territory” is found at the base of every nationalist ideology. Even the self-denomination of many nationalist movements is implicitly laden with territorial ideology. Nationalist movements express their claims in territorial terms, including in the case of anti-colonial nationalism, one of the main forms of nationalism, at least with regard to the huge impact that they have had on drawing up the contemporary political map.

As territorial ideologies, nationalisms have an internally unifying nature insofar as they define and classify people according to whether they belong or do not belong to a territory, a culture (“nation”), rather than in terms of social class or status. The strategy, or skill, of nationalist movements in gathering people of opposing class interests under the same umbrella is largely a geographical strategy: a simple basic, crystal clear but still fundamentally geographical strategy. The assumption is that people who share the same territory must necessarily share some common interest, simply on the basis of spatial proximity. The degree of communion may well be quite weak and partial in actual fact, but can easily be exaggerated by the groups in power in order to obscure and conceal other conflicts of interests.

It follows therefore that the geographical perspective is of great interest for understanding nationalisms, because these ideologies are structured according to context, milieu and place. The wide categories of gender, class and age materialise in a specific “place”, where social interactions occur in response to this social phenomenon. The role played by place is essential for the structuring of nationalist expression, because as a form of political practice, the strength and the draw of nationalism vary precisely according to its ability to respond to the needs of a particular place. In this sense, nationalisms could even be interpreted as a political response determined by the local environment, in which landscape plays a determining role as the expression of collective identities, as will now be seen in the following analysis of the role of landscape in the formation of national identity.

Landscape and national identity

Landscape, a concept with a long tradition in geography, (Cosgrove, 1985; Olwig, 1996), could be defined simply as the visible aspect of space. However, considering that we live in an extremely humanised world, landscape should be more specifically defined as the final, perceptive result of the dynamic combination of abiotic (geological substrata), biotic (flora and fauna) and anthropic (human intervention) elements, which convert the whole into a unique entity in continuous evolution. In our part of the world, landscape is really the result of a collective transformation of nature. Our landscape is largely a cultural landscape, a social product, the cultural projection of a society on a specific space.

This definition does not only refer to the material dimension of landscape, but also to the spiritual, ideological and symbolic dimensions (Turri, 1998). The culture
of each human society transforms the original natural landscape into a cultural landscape, characterised not only in material terms (types of construction, varieties of crops), but also by the values and sentiments that the society transfers onto its own landscape. In this respect, the experience and aspirations of a people are embodied in many different places within the landscape. These places become centres of meaning, symbols that express different thoughts, ideas and emotions. A landscape does not only show us the world as it is, but it is also a construction, a composition of our world, a way of perceiving the world. Landscapes evoke a clear sense of belonging to a specific group, on which they confer a sign of identity (Clifford & King, 1993; Häkli, 1999; Williams, 1999). Landscapes do not create territorial identity out of nothing, but out of the special significance conferred on them by our culture (Agnew, 1998).

Landscapes imbue the territory with identity, but landscapes are not territory. Territory is a different concept, closely linked to the phenomenon of territoriality. In fact, human territoriality is a form of spatial behaviour, a deliberate act, a strategy devised to affect, influence and control the people and the resources of a specific parcel of geographical space, which we call “territory” when it is the object of this very strategy (Sack, 1986). Territoriality may or may not be used as a strategy; that is to say, a parcel of geographical space may become territory at a given point in time and stop being territory at another point in time. It is therefore of interest to discover why and under which conditions this strategy is used and to find out who wields this territorial control, over what and over whom, and in which geographical and historical context. Human territoriality can thus be seen as the geographical expression of power, on both a social and individual scale. The national territory is, therefore, the geographical space occupied by a nation onto which a relationship of territoriality is established, while the national landscape can be defined as the landscape or set of landscapes that represent and identify the values and essence of the nation in the collective imagination. In this sense, the landscape constitutes the soul of the territory.

In short, landscape is a concept that is hugely impregnated with cultural and, above all, ideological connotations (Peet, 1996). The landscape can be interpreted as a dynamic code of symbols that speak of the culture of the past, present and maybe also the future (Cosgrove, 1989; McDowell, 1994). The semiotic legibility of a landscape or the ease with which its symbols can be decoded, can be complex to a greater or lesser degree, but is always linked to the culture that produces the symbols (Duncan & Duncan, 1988; Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988).

Nationalist ideologies use a great number of symbols, including landscape and landscape symbols, which tend to tighten the national ties by which the population can identify itself as a “people” or as a community. Nationalist mythology has created a whole string of places of collective identification, in which “place” is understood as a limited area, a specific portion of space laden with symbols and acting as a transmission centre for cultural messages. We can indeed speak in terms of a symbolic nationalist landscape (Gruffudd, 1995). These landscapes, these places of collective nationalist identification are neither immanent nor immutable. They come and go, like nations and nationalisms, varying in time and space (Hobsbawn
& Ranger, 1983). By way of illustration, let us now consider mountains, a hugely interesting landscape-symbol to which we will return when we discuss the case of Catalan nationalism.

Mountains have always been a fundamental feature of the landscape. Mountains delimit hydrographic basins, create valleys, generate microclimates and outline our horizons. Depending on their orientation and elevation, mountains contain successive strata of vegetation. Mountains have always played a significant role in a myriad of different geopolitical strategies. Ever since Richelieu’s 17th century doctrine of the *limites naturelles de la France*, kingdoms, nations and states have used mountains and other “natural” frontiers to fix the boundaries of their territories. It should be pointed out, by the way, that in the geopolitical acceptation of the expression, there is no such thing as a natural boundary.

Mountains are all this and much more besides. As we have seen, mountains have wide and varied material dimensions, but they are also endowed with a spiritual and symbolic dimension. Societies that have grown up in the vicinity of a mountain, observing it over the centuries, have generated a whole universe of myths, legends, fables and symbols comparable only in richness and diversity to those surrounding the sea and the desert, two other exceptional geographical areas. These types of landscape become true centres of significance and meaning, symbols that express different thoughts, ideas and emotions.

The image of the mountain as the meeting point between heaven and earth is repeatedly found in different mythologies and cosmologies. Examples of this are Mount Olympus, the sacred mountain of classical Greece, Mount Tabor in Palestine, where Christian tradition situates the transfiguration of Christ, and Montserrat in Catalonia. This is the mountain of initiation, the place to which prophets, messiahs and heroes retreat in order to meditate and from where they return with a message of renovation or revolution. This is also the “virgin” or “untouched” space in which the origins of a nation are sought.

In the Europe of the western world, appreciation of hostile, rough and rugged landscapes, such as mountains or marshlands, is relatively recent. Mountains were feared and avoided until the 18th century and only became fashionable with the 19th century aesthetic of the grandiose and the sublime (e.g. the rise of mountain-eering at this time), or even the terrifying (e.g. the Romantics’ delight in wooded landscapes that were misty, nocturnal or lugubrious).

The end of the 18th century witnessed the publication of illustrated books on excursions to the mountains, pioneered by Horace-Bénédict de Saussure’s book on the Alps. It is a curious fact that Mont-Blanc, hitherto popularly known as the “accursed mountain”, acquired its modern name at about this time. In 1792, Ramon de Carbonnières published the first travel monograph on the Pyrenees, considered by experts to be the first tourist guidebook on the central Pyrenees and to a large extent one of the first modern geography books on this mountain range. Carbonnières was an assiduous reader of Rousseau and held the firm belief that mountain life is good for the physical and mental health of human beings, seeing in the mountain dweller the incarnation of man untainted by civilisation. Carbonnières inspired great scientific interest in the Pyrenees, at a time when the area was
also used as a place for new cultural and social practices, such as hydrotherapy and hygienics, actively partaken of by many great intellectuals of the period, including Victor Hugo. Painters, writers, literati and guidebook authors also generated new images while popularising and highlighting certain places to the detriment of others (Berdoulay, 1995).

Thus, certain landscapes, or parts of them, become true symbols of a nationalist ideology that evokes a national past of different degrees of remoteness. Indeed, nationalist sentiment is often expressed as veneration for the past, a past that is naturally embodied in landscape. For nationalism, more than for any other social phenomenon, the landscape is indeed the present day receptacle that contains the national past (Jenkins & Sofos, 1996; Heffernan, 1995; Nogue, 1998). This feature, inherent in all nationalist ideologies, is perceived even more keenly in places like England (Matless, 1998). Lowenthal and Prince (1965) go so far as to describe a characteristic aspect of English culture consisting of the ability to regard the landscape through its associations with the past and to rate places by virtue of their historical connections.

Thus, the national landscape becomes unique, distinctive, with an identity linked to the collective memory, which is embedded in the soil. History nationalises a tract of land and imbues its most characteristic geographical features with mythical content and a feeling of the sacred (Branch, 1999). Landscape thus becomes the receptacle of a collectively shared consciousness. It is the expression of the homeland, the tierra-madre, the heimat. The homeland is venerated and honoured above all the other symbols in the nationalist hierarchy as the symbol par excellence of collective identity and national identification. It refers to a limited geographical area, which is knowable through direct experience. This is similar to the German concept of heimat, of which Leonard Doob (1952) gives an interesting definition taken from a Tyrolean almanac:

Heimat is first of all the mother earth who has given birth to our folk and race, who is the holy soil...Heimat is landscape. Heimat is the landscape we have experienced...However, more than all this, our heimat is the land which has become fruitful through the sweat of our ancestors. For this heimat our ancestors have fought and suffered, for this heimat our fathers have died (Doob, 1952:156).

In 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies, one of the 19th century thinkers that had the greatest influence on the shaping of a nationalism perceived as an immanent force springing from atavistic roots, repeatedly uses the concept of heimat to give a base and coherence to his arguments:

...The community of blood unites with the community of the homeland (heimat), which has a special influence on the minds and hearts of men... (pp. 250–251). The colonised, occupied zone becomes our common heritage, the land of our forefathers, with regard to which all men feel and act like descendants and blood brothers. In this respect, the heimat can be considered a living substance that, with its spiritual and psychological values, persists in the never-ending flux
of its elements, that is, human beings. The native soil, the incarnation of our dearest memories, upholds the heart of man, who goes away with a heavy heart and looks back from other lands with nostalgia and longing. As the place where our forbears lived and died, where their spirits remain and govern the souls of the living, the heimat attains a sublime, valuable significance for simple, pious souls and hearts (p. 251). In village and city, the closest links and bonds are formed from the real, physical earth, the permanent presence, the visible land (p. 283). (Tönnies, 1887).

This is an extrapolation of the sentimental attachment to a micro geographical area known by direct experience (homeland or heimat) onto a macro geographical area (the whole national territory) known in ways other than by direct experience.

We have been looking up to now at the importance of landscape in the process of constructing national identity. We have also seen how a certain type of mountainous landscape is especially relevant in this process on account of the enormous symbolic content with which it is endowed. After a brief introduction to Catalonia and Catalan nationalism, we shall now see how all this applies to the Catalan case.

**Catalonia and Catalan nationalism**

Catalonia is a stateless nation situated in the north-eastern corner of Spain. The distinct Catalan personality, based on its own language, culture, history and territory, was explicitly recognised by the Spanish state in the 1978 Constitution. Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country were considered as “historical nationalities”, and Statutes of Autonomy were later passed by referendum on a majority vote from the respective populations. We should note that the Spanish Constitution reserves the term “nation” for the whole of Spain and uses the euphemism “nationalities” for the national characters of Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country, with a subtle sleight of hand that glosses over what is common knowledge in these three Autonomous Communities.

The integration of Catalonia into what would later become the present-day Spanish state goes back to the 15th century. The marriage in 1469 of Ferdinand of the Kingdom of Aragon (the formal name for the Kingdom of Catalonia and Aragon) and Isabel of Castile led to the unification of the two kingdoms into what would now be called a confederate state. Thus, despite the dynastic union, Catalonia did not lose its political, administrative, judicial and fiscal institutions until the middle of the 17th century as a result of the assimilation and centralisation policy brought in by the Conde-Duque de Olivares, chief minister of King Felipe IV. This policy was met by direct opposition from the population and inevitably led to a war against the monarchy (1640–1659). The war ended with the Spanish Crown accepting the rights and institutions of Catalonia but the Catalan territory suffered the loss of Roussillon (and its capital city Perpignan) and half the Pyrenean county of Cerdagne, which have belonged to France ever since. The Catalan language, however, is still spoken in the area.
In 1703, another armed conflict broke out over the succession to the Spanish crown between the Habsburg dynasty in power and the Bourbons. In 1714, the Bourbon troops of King Felipe V entered the city of Barcelona and broke down the resistance of the Catalans, aligned with the Habsburgs who had respected their rights. With the 1716 Nueva Planta Decree, the centralist Bourbon régime, modelled on the French absolute monarchy, abolished all the Catalan political institutions (Corts, Generalitat, Consell de Cent) and imposed Spanish as the official language.

Despite the curtailment of its political liberties, Catalonia experienced exceptional demographic and economic growth throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The period witnessed the emergence of a dynamic, enterprising, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie that was open to contemporary European artistic and philosophical trends. This differentiating process between an industrial, expansive Catalonia and a stagnant, agrarian Spain with its empire in decline contributed towards the resurgence of Catalan nationalist sentiment in the last third of the 19th century, fuelled naturally by similar processes in other European territories. Against this nationalist background, and after the Spanish crisis over the definitive loss of its overseas colonies, the self-government Mancomunitat institution was constituted in 1913 to co-ordinate the territorial action of the four Catalan provinces. However, in 1923, the Primo de Rivera dictatorship put an end to this experience of relative political autonomy and signalled a return to the model of the repressive, centralist state. The period spanning the last decade of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century was of great significance for Catalonia, as it witnessed the foundation of Catalan nationalist thought and praxis, which to a certain extent still prevail today.

Catalonia did not regain any real political autonomy from 1923 until the Second Republic (1931–1939), a brief democratic experience in contemporary Spanish history, terminated after the 1936–1939 Civil War by the Franco dictatorship (1939–1977). The Franco regime foiled any further attempt to restore political and national liberties in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain. The next forty years were characterised initially by an absolute repression of Catalan culture and later by an increasing Catalan nationalist cultural and political resistance.

From 6th December 1978, when the current Spanish Constitution was passed by Parliament, the self-governing Generalitat of Catalonia has had political autonomy to manage many aspects affecting the daily life of its six million inhabitants. The population of Catalonia is very unevenly distributed over a territory of 32,049 km² comprising the four provinces of Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida and Girona. Seventy per cent of the total population of Catalonia is concentrated in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, an area covering less than ten per cent of the whole territory, thus evidencing the urban nature of contemporary Catalan society.

Catalan and Spanish are the co-official languages of Catalonia. The Catalan language is used everywhere by the indigenous inhabitants but is spoken to a somewhat lesser extent by immigrants from other regions of the Spanish state who mostly arrived in Catalonia from the nineteen fifties onwards and now make up about forty per cent of the population. Catalan is also spoken in a dialectal form
in the Valencian Country and the Balearic Islands, autonomous communities that maintain close historical and cultural links with Catalonia. The Catalan language is undoubtedly a fundamental unifying force behind Catalan national identity.

The political map of Catalonia reflects the complexity of this country. Since 1980, Convergència i Unió, a nationalist, centre coalition originally founded by opponents of the Franco regime has held power in the Generalitat government. Nevertheless, in both the Spanish general elections and in the local elections, the Socialist Party of Catalonia won the majority vote, whereas the Catalan independence parties obtained only about fifteen per cent. Another feature of the political map is the identification with Catalan nationalist principles by the majority of political parties, except the Partido Popular, which holds the majority vote in the Spanish central government but only obtains fifteen per cent of the vote in Catalonia. Above and beyond their differences in other fields, Catalan language issues and claims for self-government enjoy a wide consensus among all the other parties.

**Catalan landscape and national identity**

As mentioned previously, the foundations for contemporary Catalan nationalist thought were laid towards the end of the 19th century with the Renaixença, a cultural movement promoted in the last quarter of the 19th century by the influential Catalan bourgeoisie of the period. Later, during the first third of the 20th century, the two somewhat divergent branches of Modernisme and Noucentisme grew out from this common Renaixença trunk. The former movement corresponds to the canons of Germanic-inspired romantic nationalism and the latter to a more pragmatic and civic-minded nationalism that was studded with references to classical Mediterranean culture. Both movements had considerable following and influence, especially with regard to territory and landscape, both at the beginning of the 20th century and later on.

Indeed, the landscape was to play an important role in the construction of Catalan nationalist ideology. At the height of the nationalist Renaixença, Catalonia was sensitive to the new aesthetic and symbolic appreciation of landscape, especially mountainous landscape, that was sweeping the rest of Europe. The mountain thus became a key figure among Catalan nationalist symbols, part of the “essential landscape” (Marfany, 1993) which confers meaning on the whole territory. In this context, mountains were invested with a mythical, regenerative, almost initiatory character. The mountain was a symbol of purity and virginity. The origins of the nation were therefore to be sought in the Pyrenees. Montserrat, another mountain situated to the south-west of Barcelona, was later to become the symbol par excellence of the Catalan homeland. Allusions to Montserrat, Montseny, Canigó and the Pyrenees abound in the works of the great Catalan writers and poets of the period (ranging from Aribau and Piferrer to Joan Maragall, Jacint Verdaguer and Jaume Bofill i Mates), and eventually became part of popular culture, transmitted to children at home and in school. For these writers, the mountain is a pure, virgin, sacred space, an untouched stronghold of the moral values that imprint ident-
ity and character on the Catalan people. Possibly the best-known example is the hymn written by Verdaguer to the Dark Virgin of Montserrat, the patron saint of Catalonia whose name echoes that of the mythical mountain range:

O, rose of April,
Dark Virgin of the mountains,
Star of Montserrat,
Shed thy light on Catalan land
And lead us towards heaven.

*Romantic origins of the Catalan nationalist discourse and landscape. The Modernista movement*

The *Renaixença*, therefore, had wide repercussions and led to a period of cultural, ideological and, by extension, political construction that characterised the passage from the 19th to the 20th century. By extension, *Modernisme* (linked in its artistic manifestations with Art Nouveau and the Secessionist Movement) was the inspiration behind the first movements and parties that brought together many Catalan intellectuals and members of the bourgeoisie. Inspired by their mythical and mystical vision of the landscape, political Catalanists founded societies to foster the scientific and cultural knowledge of the mountains of Catalonia. Hiking and hill-walking were paramount activities that acquired a role of “inner exploration” or rediscovery, which on occasion led to significant events, such as the protection of the rich Romanesque architectural heritage of the Pyrenees, which was discovered to be suffering from pillage and grave deterioration. A visit to the Cloisters Museum in New York, where part of this cultural heritage can be admired, will illustrate this statement. In 1904, Joan Maragall, Catalan national poet *par excellence* and member of the Hiking Centre of Catalonia, neatly summed up the spirit of Catalan hill-walking as follows:

Our hiking activities are undertaken neither for sport, nor for pleasure, nor for work: they are an act of love. And this love is not an abstract love of nature per se, but a love of our own nature... it is hard to love the whole earth if we do not start by loving the place where we were brought up. Our love for the homeland contains our living love for the whole world and he who renounces the former in the name of the latter loves neither one nor the other. Our love of nature lives within our love for Catalan nature. Catalonia is our compendium of the world... This is why we can proudly say that the soul of our walking trips is our love for Catalonia (*Maragall, 1960: p. 860*).

However, the *Modernista* interpretation of nature and the landscape did not only give rise to the important cultural and political role of hiking but also coloured other aspects of the arts and sciences, notably architecture and geopolitics. During this period, as so often happens, architecture assumed a major symbolic role, exemplified by the “Ruskinian” reconstruction of the Romanesque monastery in Ripoll, a Pyrenean town considered as the romantic cradle of the Catalan nation.
In the bourgeois houses of Barcelona, we find reproductions of medieval castles with dragon motifs and on Gaudí’s Sagrada Familia temple, the knobbly spires refer us back, once again, to the rugged peaks of Montserrat. Likewise, the interesting field of geopolitics was greatly influenced by this identity perspective of landscape and territory. Priest/scientist Norbert Font i Saguè was the principal exponent and researcher in favour of “natural” county boundaries to replace the territorial division of provinces, associated with a political centralism designed in Madrid.

In short, the assertive Modernista movement had a great influence on all scientific, artistic, intellectual and also political fields. Furthermore, it caused a predicament among a population already under the strain of industrialisation and, as mentioned above, the definitive collapse of the Spanish Empire with the loss of the last overseas colonies in 1898. However, at the start of the new century, the Modernista model came up against opposition from a new and different movement.

“Classical” landscape and the construction of the national territory. The Noucentista movement

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Noucentista movement was questioning this romantic view of the mountains and the whole idea of a “natural” landscape. This new intellectual trend with close European links (Peran, Suárez, & Vidal, 1994; Vallcorba, 1993) advocated another “mythology” on which to base the national identity: the classical Mediterranean model. In the words of Jaume Bofill i Matas:

If a social and political organisation can reflect the spirit of a race and a land, then the Catalan social and political organisation should be eminently classical, Mediterranean. (Bofill i Matas, 1983, original publication 1908: p. 7).

This change of direction obviously had important implications at every level, from the arts to politics. The Modernista hymn to the irrational and to the violent, unknown elements in an untamed nature gave way to a song of praise for a harmonious, humanised landscape bearing the imprint of man and transmitting a sense of tranquillity and peaceful co-existence. This was a fitting dream for a bourgeoisie desirous of hegemony and stability for Catalan society at a time of violent social upheavals of their industrialised society, and strong anarchist influences. In 1901, the bourgeoisie won the municipal elections in Barcelona and in 1913 gained control of the new Mancomunitat of Catalonia. This political hegemony enabled them to begin the construction, in theory and to some extent in practice, of the country, uniting the idealism of the nationalist rank and file with the pragmatism that often characterises the bourgeoisie. The renovating Noucentista discourse provided the cohesive force needed for effectively forging an ideal Catalonia, integrated into modern life, a Catalonia that was cultivated, civil, beautiful, peace-loving...and Catalan (Roca, 1979).
In short, the new concept of landscape enabled the values of nature and of essential national identity to be integrated with those of human transformation:

(... ) the citizen approaches Nature with a view to choosing its most appropriate aspect, one in which an idyllic rural life unfolds to reveal an ideal tradition. In other words, the Mediterranean, Latin landscape with its soft, gentle contours, humanised by an apology for work that is not so much effort as strategy for achieving full harmony between man and nature. (Peran, Suárez & Vidal, 1994, p. 14).

The first and main ideologue of Noucentisme was the writer Eugeni d’Ors, (d’Ors, 1982) privy counsellor to the dominant industrial bourgeoisie and an outstanding intellectual of the period. D’Ors put forward peerless arguments in favour of the Catalan nationalist project in a Mediterranean setting of cultivated ability to transform and construct the landscape. In a text written in 1906 and appropriately titled “Remodelling the mountains”, he speaks of “architecting the mountains” and “filling the mountains with paths”. However, d’Ors introduces another important aspect in the construction of a geographical imagery for the Catalan national project. Catalonia could not be conceived as a mere rural, mountainous country, the city also had its place in the scheme of things. Mediterranean classicism was again taken as the ideal model:

But here amidst the sons and daughters of the Latin sea, on our verdant land, art springs from the people, blossoms on the village square in the open air under the blue sky, among political discussions and philosophical digressions. The artist mingles with the multitude, in the manner of the ancient poets, forefathers of our civilisation, who frequented the amphitheatre and the forum. (Pijoan, 1994, original publication 1898: p. 96).

With this option, baptised as Catalunya–ciutat (city–Catalonia), as the cornerstone of the politically hegemonic Regionalist League, the Mancomunitat of Catalonia drew up a political programme between 1913 and 1923 that combined the ideals of Modernisme, still present among the population, with the pragmatism of Noucentisme. The middle path was not always smooth, but managed to bring together the bourgeoisie and the land-owning classes, the forward-looking and the conservative sectors of society, the city and the mountains.

City-Catalonia as a model for country and landscape

The concept of city-Catalonia required a subtle re-reading of nature, landscape and the role of the rural world in terms of national identity. In other words, “the Noucentista idea of the City had to be merged with a revision of the rural world, the true reserve of the least adulterated essence of the nation” (Peran, Suárez & Vidal, 1994, p: 14).

The answer was to be found in a political discourse and practice that exalted the national myths and essential landscapes but also deployed modern equipment and infrastructures (roads, railways, schools, museums etc.) designed to articulate the
whole country and create the necessary machinery for an industrialised society (Roca, 1979). City-Catalonia has since been outlined as a sort of everlasting “autochthonous utopia”, a model of an ideal but feasible country, materialised in its city/civitas without losing sight of its mountain landscapes.

The young Catalonia, having regained its spirit in our rough mountain valleys, saw the imminent emergence of a new citizen, leading inevitably to the hegemony of the whole race: the social citizen of the large manufacturing, merchant cities. (Pijoan, 1990, original publication 1905: p. 66).

During the nineteen twenties and thirties this model was the guideline for Catalan nationalist territorial debate and political action. Based on a somewhat rhetorical definition, City-Catalonia was materialised on different occasions, notably with the 1932 Rural Planning Scheme presented by the brothers Santiago and Nicolau Rubió i Tudurí. They proposed a general planning scheme for the whole country that included, among many other things, the protection of spaces considered emblematic on account of their natural or historical value.

The role of the big city, Barcelona, was another outstanding aspect of this Regional Planning Scheme that redounds to this country-city relationship that had been emerging as an essential factor in the theoretical and practical discourse on Catalan territory and landscape. The Regional Planning Scheme clearly envisages Barcelona as “just another district of City-Catalonia” (Roca, 1979), a declaration of principles in response to the patriotic, territorial fear of a country denaturalised by its capital city in terms of its landscape and its culture.

Is the curtailment of our spiritual aspirations the price we have to pay for the size and greatness of Barcelona? (Iglésies, 1995: p. 57)

In the first half of the nineteen thirties it seemed that many of the aspirations of geographers, architects and town planners would indeed come true. They were years that witnessed great controversies and grand proposals. The Regional Planning Scheme had its repercussions, as did the Le Corbusier-inspired Macià plan for Barcelona city, a scheme to divide the territory into counties, various infrastructure projects, heritage protection projects and so on. However, the breakout of the Civil War, the triumph of Franco in 1939, and the death and exile of politicians and intellectuals all left very little space for Catalanism and its reflections on territory and landscape.

When the dictatorship was consolidated, the territorial debate and its derivations were just some of the many aspects that continued to be discussed in clandestine or under cover of cultural and sporting activities, with hiking once more used as the main means of expression (Lluch & Nel-lo, 1984). Nevertheless, the forty-year dictatorship period did not contribute any new ideas to the nation-landscape relationship, and the concepts, models and aspirations forged in the first two decades of the twentieth century remained in force along with their inherent balances and paradoxes.
Epilogue. Landscape, nation and politics in contemporary Catalonia

However, the early 20th century “nature versus civilisation” ambivalence in Catalan nationalism with regard to the landscape is still a useful tool for obtaining majority consensus among the population, even in today’s democracy. Perhaps the reason for the efficiency of this paradoxical vision (both romantic and classical, both idealistic and pragmatic) of Catalan history and territory lies in the words written after the civil war by historian Jaume Vicens Vives in his celebrated Notícia de Catalunya:

The Catalan mentality was forged in the mountains. We cannot overlook the fact that the human and spiritual resources of this country were to be found in mountainous areas up until the 13th century and that the creators of the historical Catalan personality were all mountain men. The very mention of Abbot Oliba of Vic immediately brings to mind La Seu, Vic, Ripoll, Cuixà and Girona. At that time, mountains were paramount: places of refuge from the Moors, lively valleys containing churches, monasteries, cities and towns... Over three centuries the mountains forged in us the best (of our Catalan personality): our industriousness, our sensibleness, our sense of continuity, our family tradition and our social responsibility...

Contact with the Mediterranean...has lent a different character to coastal Catalonia. Coastal dwellers are open-minded, novelty-seeking, sharp-witted, astute people. They are sentimental with a love of freedom and a dislike for discipline. Catalonia owes a lot to merchant designs, high political constructions, intellectual development, the imperialist projection...

To sum up, historical facts clearly prove that the great energies of this country were born and developed over time in the mountains... Later on, spread over coast and plain, they crystallised into their final shape. (Vicens Vives, 1954: p. 29–30).

This paradox is reflected in all the stereotyped definitions of Catalan society, characterised by the twin values of seny and rauxa, prudence and impulsiveness, serenity and disturbance, pact-making and revolutionary outbursts that have succeeded or collided with each other throughout the history of Catalonia.

And the paradox continues today, at least in terms of territory and the landscape, although by now the paradox is turning into more of a simple contradiction. The 1977 recuperation of the Catalan political institutions and the triumph of the nationalist parties, did not bring about a renewal of the ideological discourse on identity but a revival of old concepts, with the added value of legitimacy and consensus acquired during the opposition to the Franco regime.

However, the passing of time and, above all, the appearance of contradictions between idealism and pragmatism have currently given rise to an almost unprecedented tension surrounding the debate over landscape and territory in Catalonia. After twenty years of nationalist government, the contradictions are now being
variously expressed in speeches, laws, projects and so on. We will now attempt to give a brief explanation of the origins, strategies, objects and agents involved in this debate.

In the first place, the continued discourse on mythical, mainly mountainous, landscapes in Catalonia focused public attention when the unquestionably natural open spaces of Aigüestortes, Núria, Montserrat and Montseny were declared protected sites, to great popular acclaim and deep patriotic satisfaction. The demand for protection of these sites, the building works, improvements, management (despite a few notorious setbacks such as the 1986 forest fire on Montserrat) and the subsequent media publicity were used by the Catalan government to gain environmentalist points for many years. The downside of this policy, as witnessed by the different planning laws, is that many other spaces of great natural and even historic (but not “essential”) value have been eclipsed in the process, left without government protection and consequently exposed to all kinds of environmental onslaught and negligence.

This mythicisation of the landscape has also had geopolitical effects by establishing a landscape value scale. It underestimated the areas of Catalonia with no patriotic associations, the Catalonia that could boast neither heroic mediaeval deeds nor mythical epics, the dry-farmed Catalonia, the southern territories that had remained under Moorish domination for almost five centuries. The southern areas, devoid of identity “value”, are the site of the only nuclear power stations in Catalonia and of the largest petrochemical plant in the region. The area suffers from drought although the Ebro, the largest river in Spain, flows through it. Planning exists for eighty per cent of all wind power stations to be placed in the area, with the corresponding environmental impact. The romantic interpretation of the landscape may be an efficient means of fleshing out an environmental policy with ideological overtones, but on the other hand, this policy has neglected a large section of the country.

This neglect created the necessary space within which the pragmatic, “other” mainstay of Catalan identity could take the stage openly and without remorse. Pragmatism provided the arguments and consensus for intense, accelerated urban development schemes that, while avoiding the national identity spaces, have transformed many of the customs and manners of the Catalan territory, from the coastlines to the mountains. We could even say that the Noucentista exhortation of Eugeni d’Ors to “fill the mountain with paths” has been literally and enthusiastically put into practice, heedless of the original platonic connotations of the author.

However, this double discourse implemented over a long period of notable economic growth has shown up the contradictions inherent in the territorial model and has given rise to an unprecedented number of territorial and landscape disputes with the Generalitat government. By way of illustration, there have been massive mobilisations against the National Hydrological Plan and the Wind Power Plan, against the creation of golf courses, marinas, building estates, power lines, aerodromes, ski resorts and so on. This degree of unrest had not been seen since the mid nineteen seventies when the weakness of the Franco regime created a favourable atmosphere for a general protest against the degradation of the territory, as
one more aspect of the struggle for political democracy (Lluch & Nel·lo, 1984). Over this last decade, the tension between a strongly landscape-oriented ideology and a praxis that largely ignored these antecedents may have reached its highest point. Even the time-honoured compromise policy between selective protection and general exploitation of the landscape has given way to the latter encroaching on the former.

Although very different in nature, scope and expression, these conflicts share enough common factors to permit structural analysis, over and beyond the specific casuistry of each situation.

1. The first factor is the scant importance given to the great, classic ideological principles when local environmental issues are at stake, compared to the weightier arguments wielded by the Generalitat. People defend their immediate surroundings, their local issues, their own native landscape beset by the relentless spread of building and public works. In fact, many of these protests and demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people have come from the southern territories of Catalonia, as we have pointed out, the territories furthest away from the “essential” Catalan landscape. Moreover, the last few months have witnessed the appearance of the hitherto unheard of denominations “Southern lands”, “people from the South”, “Ebro people” and so on, which make explicit use of a territory-bound identity.

2. This first aspect has given rise to the second with the aforesaid protests moving away from traditional language and political structures (Nel·lo, 2003). The mobilisations were organised by civic platform groups that unite people from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds in common defence of a particular place. The political parties have been outplayed to the extent that they are all now seen as part and parcel of an aggressive territorial development policy and accomplices in the national landscape policy of “deceit”.

3. In third place, these mobilisations clearly point to the existence of a “landscape crisis” in Catalonia. The widespread humanising of the territory has submitted the whole landscape to the dynamics of equalisation and commercialisation. Any part of the country can now come under pressure to provide the space needed for a new leisure centre, a rubbish tip or a communications junction point. As we have said before, even spaces that have hitherto been protected by virtue of their national identity value are now trivialised, besieged by sightseers and eventually bereft of their original symbolic significance.

For all these reasons the long-established debate on the landscape associated with Catalan nationalism is being questioned from its very roots. Conversely, the Catalan nationalism that relies on landscape as its ideological cornerstone has also suffered damage. Insofar as this ideology implies the projection of a territorial and landscape imagery, it stands to reason that the imagery will now have to be reconstructed. A return to romantic or classicist ideals is difficult, but it will also be hard to overcome the “not in my backyard” stance adopted by the population. We may
have now reached the stage predicted in 1926 by landscape architect Nicolau Maria Rubió i Tuduri:

“The day will come when foreigners visiting our country will be horrified to encounter an inextricable tangle of factories, pine trees, roads, mine shafts, vegetable gardens, houses, electricity lines, cemeteries and so on, without an inch of clean ground between them. Catalonia will then no longer be a fair land, nor will it ever be fair again.”

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References


