

Contemporary Urban Challenges for The Preservation of Values Associated with Settlements in Andalusian Mountainous Areas: The Case of Castaño Del Robledo in the Sierra De Huelva, Spain

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ABSTRACT

The landscapes linked to settlements such as Castaño del Robledo are one of the main elements of heritage interest in the complex and diverse Sierra de Huelva, a border territory between Spain and Portugal in the northwest of Andalusia. They reflect the physical and functional integration between the houses and the environment, where roads, historical infrastructure networks, walls and small buildings are intertwined with the cultivation areas, the embodiment of a very elaborate peasant culture. The aim of this work is to advance in the ways of approaching the knowledge of the singular values and fragility of these landscapes, with the main contribution of integrating a transversal view in their urban-heritage reading. The study starts with a first phase of analysis and diagnosis of the physical environmental support, the territory and the landscapes, and a second phase of evaluation to identify the challenges they currently face.

JOURNAL OF MEDITERRANEAN CITIES (2024), 4(1), 78-95

https://doi.org/10.38027/mediterranean-cities_vol4no1_5

ARTICLE INFO:

Article history:

Received: July 09 2024

Revised: August 09 2024

Accepted: September 11 2024

Available online: Oct. 12 2024

Keywords:

Landscape; Threshold;
Heritage; Territorial and
Urban Planning

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1. Introduction

The qualification and conservation of the landscape has been attracting considerable attention from various fields of thought for several decades, and has gradually become of interest to public administrations, with the aim of preserving the material and immaterial values that landscapes treasure. These have been understood as the interaction of the conditioning factors offered by the biophysical

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How to cite this article:

Coronado-Sánchez, A. (2024). Contemporary urban challenges for the preservation of values associated with settlements in Andalusian mountainous areas: The case of Castaño del Robledo in the Sierra de Huelva, Spain. Journal of Mediterranean Cities, 4(1), 78-95. doi: https://doi.org/10.38027/mediterranean-cities_vol4no1_5

supports of a given territory and the transformation processes that humans have been producing on them (Mata Olmo, 2008).

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention - CELC - (Council of Europe, 2000) has constituted a before and after in the conceptualisation of landscape as an everyday phenomenon, by understanding that not only singular and connoted landscapes but also common and even degraded landscapes are part of it. On the other hand, it has given a very important role to the population in the landscape phenomenon by focusing on the perception that the population has of the territories. As a construct of objective components perceived by different subjectivities, landscapes offer a symbiosis of natural and cultural elements that acquire different connotations for each individual gaze that gradually permeates the collective vision (Ojeda-Rivera, 2003). But the fact of such a transformation has to do with a process of artealisation, that is, a specific and singular view of a specific place resulting from the different creative contemplations that have been produced on it and that have been permeating the collective imaginary (Roger, 1997).

This is why it is often stated that landscape responds to a fact that is complex to define and delimit (Maderuelo, 2005) but, as a cultural construct, which is also related to the level of appreciation of a community with its environment measured through the quality of its landscapes and the level of knowledge and appreciation of them, landscapes could be qualitative indicators of the human development index of a society (Ojeda Rivera, 2003). It is precisely in this sense that the quality of our landscapes is also linked to the quality of life of society (Council of Europe, 2000) and this new view of landscapes is also implying their interest in being considered in heritage protection processes and in spatial and urban planning (Ugalde & Gurrutxaga, 2021).

The conservation of unique aspects associated with the landscapes of small rural settlements modelled by forms of construction and the development of agrosilvopastoral activities linked to vernacular conditioning factors and knowledge is receiving increasing attention, largely due to a combination of factors that negatively transform them, whether due to the decline of traditional activities (Ugalde & Gurrutxaga, 2021), the abandonment of the farmhouse or its inadequate transformation.

The present study focuses on Castaño del Robledo, a mountain settlement in the Sierra de Huelva, located in the central and highest part of its core area. The main hypothesis is that the heritage values respond to the symbiosis between cultural and natural aspects, that is to say, its heritage significance is not related to the monumentality of its buildings but to aspects such as the implantation in the place, the architectural solutions for the management of the topography, the climate and the water or the way of configuring singular farming *ruedos*. All of these are elements that reach their maximum expressiveness in rural urban transitions (Coronado Sánchez, 2020).

However, although the heritage value of the settlement is mainly limited to the urban area, the edges of the settlement and the farming *ruedo* are spaces that allow the heritage of this ensemble to be interpreted in all its depth and complexity. From the point of view of integrity, these spaces are the first elements of visible reference when we approach the settlement and also the most fragile, since, as they form the interface that surrounds the urban nucleus, they are the usual spaces that usually host new uses, extensions and transformations of the architecture, which are not always integrated with the whole (Coronado Sánchez, 2020). Although dimensions such as territory, agricultural space and landscape have, at least theoretically, been gaining ground in the way we look at heritage in general (Capel, 2014) and specifically that associated with historic urban areas (Jordán, Pérez-Eguíluz & De las Rivas, 2020), there is still a lack of instruments and criteria to address the planning and management of small rural historic areas from a holistic perspective that considers both the urban space and its agroforestry environment, so that contributing to this debate is revealed as the main element of interest and contribution of this research.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology is based on several successive phases which are descending in scale and which respond to a sequence that starts with the sequence of understanding the spatial elements, then the historical-territorial and finally the landscape elements.

First, a spatial reading, i.e. of the natural foundations of the space, second, a historical reading and of territorial evolution, and third, the landscape dimension, which takes into account the scenic factors, but also the creative and common perceptions that make these spaces connoted. This methodology is based on the complexity of the landscapes and is therefore approached from a transdisciplinary perspective that makes it possible to synthesise aspects of different natures.

On the other hand, in order to recognise these spaces, we have used land registers and historical topographic maps that have been mapped, but it should be noted that very little initial documentation has been found, so that drawing and specific fieldwork on the study site has been very important.

As a last methodological phase, the research develops the analysis of representative urban images based on the study of their formal components. On the one hand, the homogeneous areas that make up the view, the structuring lines and, finally, the singularities and impacts. This analysis takes as a reference the research carried out by the Centro de Estudios Paisaje y Territorio for the analysis of the overall views of some Andalusian Historic Sites (Venegas Moreno & Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2002).

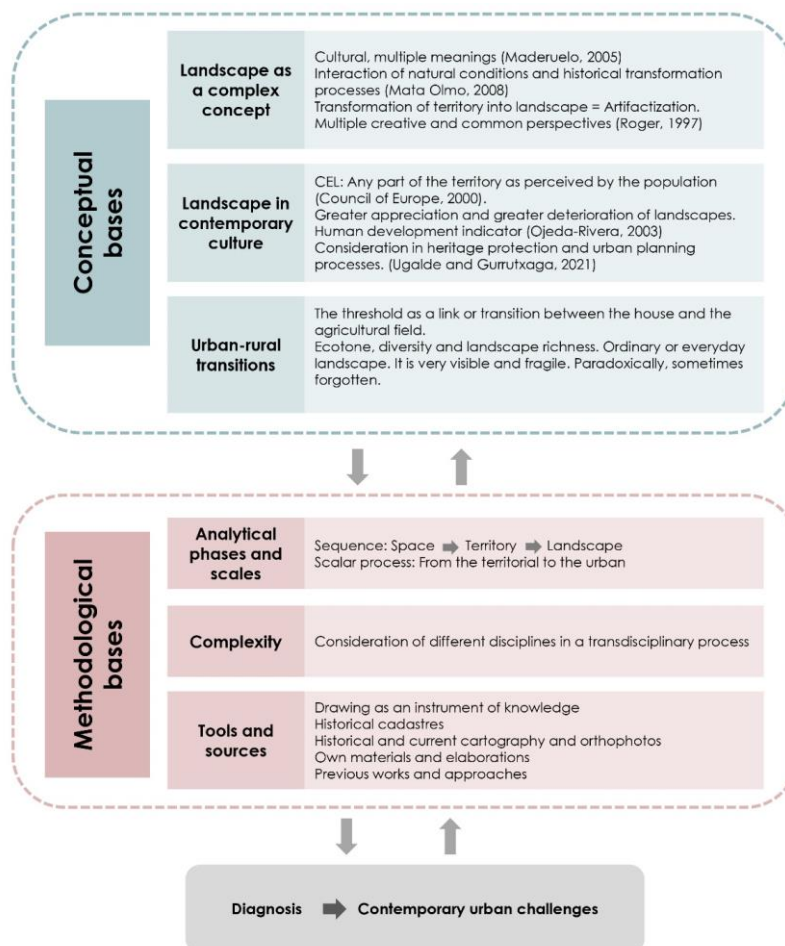


Figure 1. Conceptual and methodological framework

3. Strategies to face the transformation processes in rural areas

3.1. Castaño del Robledo in the context of the Sierra of Huelva

Castaño del Robledo, with 222 inhabitants in 2023 (Population and Housing Census, National Institute of Statistics) is one of the numerous urban centres of the Sierra de Aracena, a territory of the Sierra Morena in the northwest of Andalusia belonging to the vast Mediterranean mountain system in which its various mountain ranges share, as Braudel (1953) enunciated, common habitats, but also marked differences and singularities.

It is a peripheral territory with respect to the countryside and coastal areas and nearby Andalusian cities such as Huelva and Seville, to whose urbanites it offers water, leisure and nature (Ojeda Rivera, 2004). It has a very unique habitat with a high density of small and closely connected nuclei and an important variety of different agricultural areas in each locality, with high socio-ecological values and where the small and the diverse dominate (Rodríguez Álvarez & Rubio Tenor, 2014).

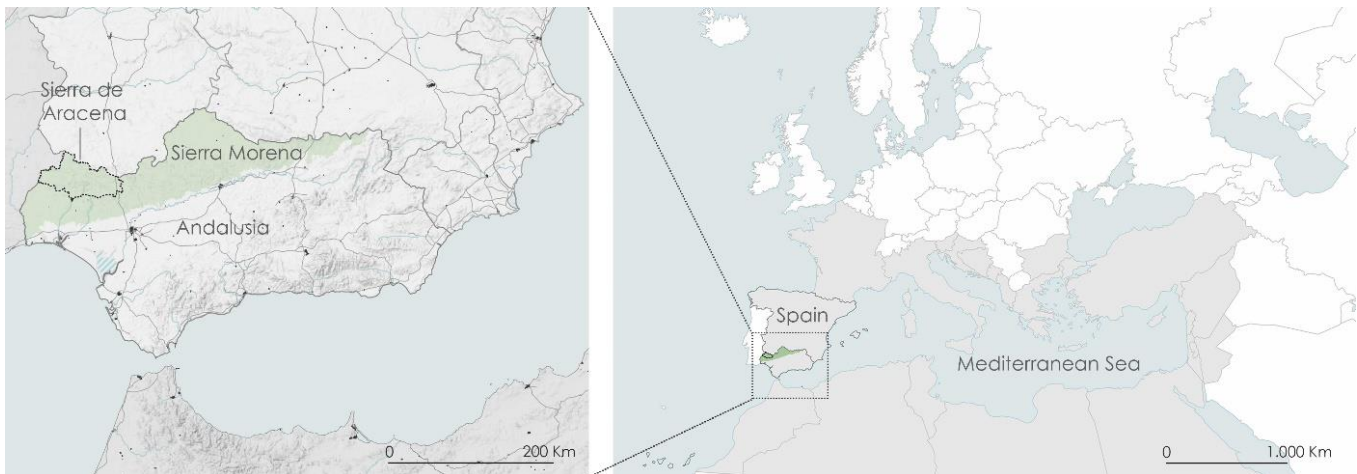


Figure 2. The Sierra de Aracena in the context of the Southwest Mediterranean (Developed by Author)

The main spatial keys to the sierra are that it is a south-facing ridge influenced by the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Its rocky terrain is hard and impermeable, which has made reservoirs possible, with historical mining and the emergence of water through numerous springs and fountains. It has a contrasting relief with a much higher central massif, with an east-west orientation, which is also a watershed. It also has high humidity and abundant rainfall in a region like Andalusia, which is generally hot and dry. All of this creates numerous climatic tesserae depending on the altitude and the degree of sunshine that promotes the biodiversity of the Mediterranean forest and agricultural variety (Ojeda Rivera & Silva Pérez, 2000).

Historically, this territory has been a border area with Portugal and Castile, but also a place of liaison between cultures and a place of refuge. Three stages can be recognised in its formation: The first, between the 13th and 15th centuries, with few nuclei in castles and fortresses and great population instability. The second, between the 14th and 16th centuries, when, once the borders had been pacified, a process of creation of small settlements was generated, which took advantage of the riverbanks and communal woodlands to establish themselves, organising small groups of houses and small associated agricultural spaces (Pérez-Embid, 1999). The third, between the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in which, under the Enlightenment thinking (Albarreal et al., 2008; Cascales, 2017), some of the small settlements grew and a territory of small and medium-sized hamlets and villages was formed together with diversified agricultural areas due to the introduction of new crops and the creation of an important commercial network between the Spanish Meseta (to the north of the area) and the cities of Seville and Cadiz, at the height of trade with America. (Dominguez Ortiz, 2000).

At the end of the 19th century, the population ceiling of the sierra was reached, as can be seen from the population registers in Spain, which are recorded in different historical cadastres (National Institute of Statistics) and from there its progressive decline due to various processes of population exodus, first to the nearby mining emporiums such as Minas de Riotinto and in the middle of the 20th century during the Franco dictatorship, the creation of development poles in Huelva and Seville (Moreno Alonso, 1982).

Since the 80s of the 20th century, in democratic Spain, there has been a rediscovery of the sierra both institutionally, with the declaration of the Sierra as a Natural Park and of numerous settlements as Historic Sites, and also by rural tourism, producing a paradox since, despite the increased interest in the sierra, the rates of inequality for the serranos are still high compared to urban areas (Ojeda Rivera & Silva Pérez, 2000; Ojeda Rivera, 2004).

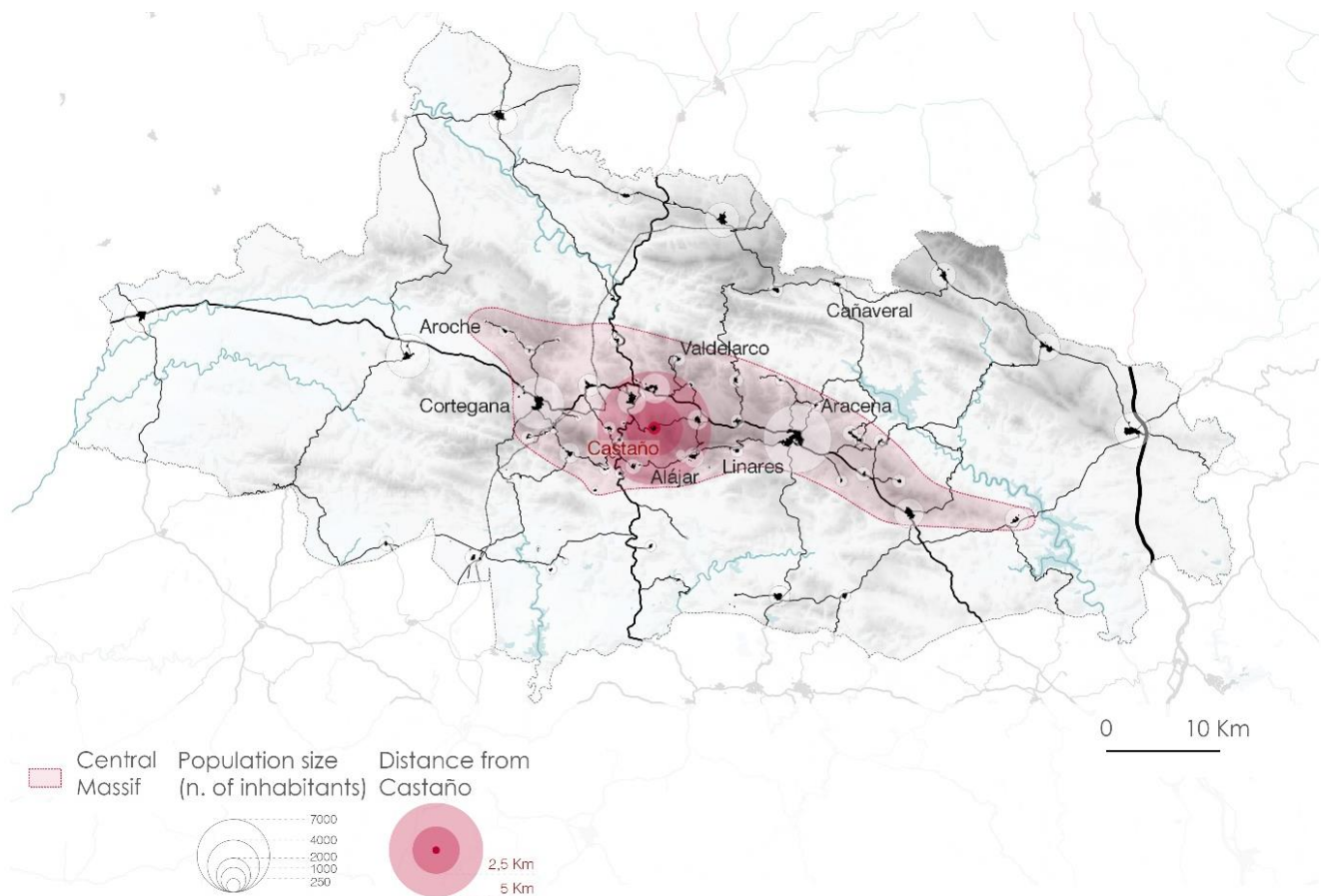


Figure 3. Castaño del Robledo in the context of the Sierra of Huelva (Developed by Author)

Castaño del Robledo constitutes the heart of the central area, at the highest and most central point of the Sierra, situated in a valley that leaves the Sierras del Castaño, the highest point (+961 m) behind it to the northeast. It is in the physical centre of the central area. It was an ancient village that in the 18th century became independent as a town and came to play an important role in the Sierra due to its success in the production of sausages, carpentry and chestnut fruits (Núñez Roldán, 1987). As a result, it maintained strong historical relations with the nearby towns of Santa Ana, Galaroza, Alájar, Jabugo and Fuenteheridos, over which it acted as a territorial hub in the 18th century, until the territorial logics associated with the new transport networks, together with other factors, marginalised the settlement between the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Cascales & Márquez, 2012).

3.2. Configuration of the urban-rural fabric

From a reading of the characteristics of the historical and spatial evolution of their hamlet (Cascales & Márquez, 2012; Cascales, 2017) supported by historical cartographies, it can be deduced that the first houses of humble dwellers that emerged in the settlement were installed on platforms close to springs and streams, which guaranteed fertile land for cultivation that was complemented by the use of the mountains. There is first documentary evidence of the settlement in the 15th century, when they formed the small hamlet of El Robledo, which grouped them together as a single entity (Pérez Embid, 1999). Probably already at this time there was a small hermitage at the midpoint of the different nuclei, which would later give rise to the Church of Santiago, whose construction was promoted by the humanist Arias Montano in the 16th century, who also created the first school in the sierra in this settlement, as can be seen from the general responses of the parish priest in the survey carried out by the royal geographer Tomas López in 1795 (Ruiz González, 1999).

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the first growth, very timid, took place from the initial nuclei towards the church, but the population took off in the 18th century, as shown by the need to build a new church and the recognition of the settlement as a town, continuing this population boom in the 19th century (Pérez-Embid, 1999). According to the characteristics of the architecture, the growth is produced from the initial nuclei to the two churches: the old church (16th century) and the new church (18th century). As a unique case in the sierra, it takes place along a line of maximum slope due to the passage of a stream that crosses the village from the northeast to the southwest. For its part, the settlement basically consists of two nuclei, the largest and that of the Calvario neighbourhood, located to the west.

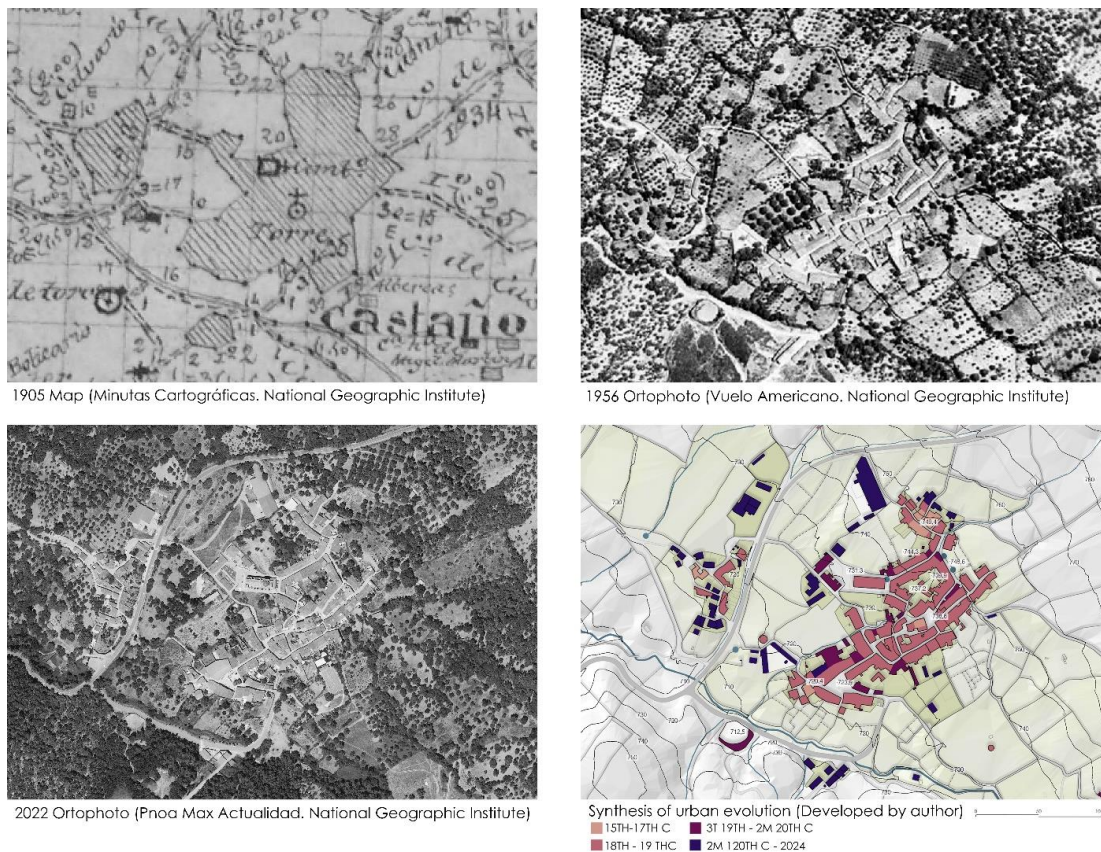


Figure 4. Urban evolution of Castaño del Robledo (Indicated sources)

In addition to the reasons already given, the importance of the 18th century should be stressed, since, following the humanist trail left by figures such as Arias Montano in the 16th century, with scientific contributions in all fields of knowledge, including botany (Vallejo Villalobos et. Al, 2015), Enlightenment thinking was assimilated, generating a new territorial order with the formation of the network of towns and villages in the sierra, but also of the agricultural areas (Pérez-Embid, 1999). As can be seen from the study of plots and uses (Figure 4), the agricultural area has a plot size of less than 3 hectares. Historically, they introduced products that are highly valued today, such as special varieties of potatoes, tomatoes and oranges, irrigation systems and enclosures, as recorded in the Ensenada Cadastre in 1752 (Ministry of Culture, 2024). In a second territorial gradient, between 3 and 10 hectares, the *trasruedos* were created, incorporating intermediate plots of different crops. As already mentioned, chestnut trees in the shady and higher areas and olive groves and holm oaks in the sunny areas. All these forms a large forest that interconnects the different villages of the central massif of the sierra (Coronado Sánchez, 2020).

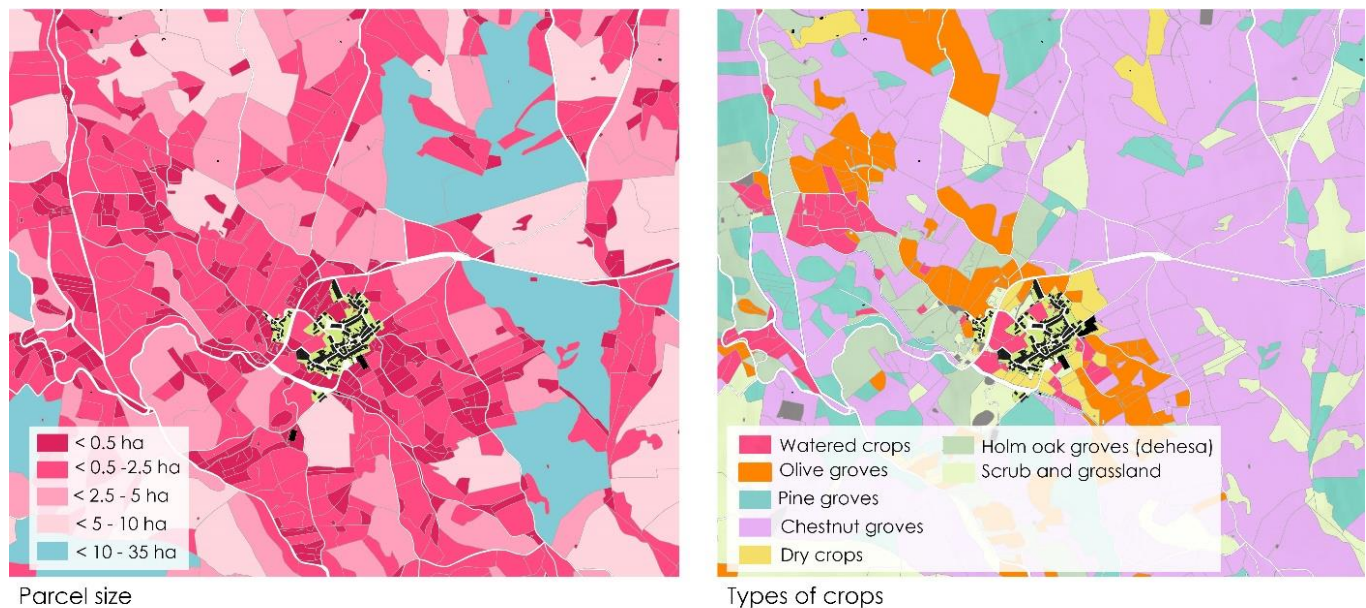


Figure 5. Relationship between the parcel and the types of crops grown in the farming ruedo in Castaño del Robledo. (Developed by Author).

In the mid-19th century, when Castaño del Robledo lost its central role in the manufacture of sausages and wood, the population began to decline (Núñez-Roldán, 1987) and as a result, urban growth between the mid-19th century and the mid-20th century was very small and focused basically on small additions and alignments towards squares and singular streets. From the middle of the 20th century, a road dividing the two nuclei and the farming ruedo was introduced, leading to a progressive deterioration of this space, with the appearance of industrial warehouses on a larger scale than the small hamlet, residential uses, housing extensions or enlargements of inadequate volumes. All of this will lead to the breakdown of the relationship between the settlement and the farming ruedo, all of which can be seen in the different historical cartographies (figure 5).

3.3. The relationship of the settlement with the environment

In addition to the aspects that it shares with most of the mountain nuclei - a special territorial culture of water, orography and climate - the singularity of Castaño is notable not only for being a nucleus with a polynuclear structure due to its origin linked to several settlements and subsequent growth processes

(Feria Toribio et al., 2002) that have generated a special relationship between the houses and the corrals linked to them, which translates, among other aspects, into the integration of the built and the cultivated.

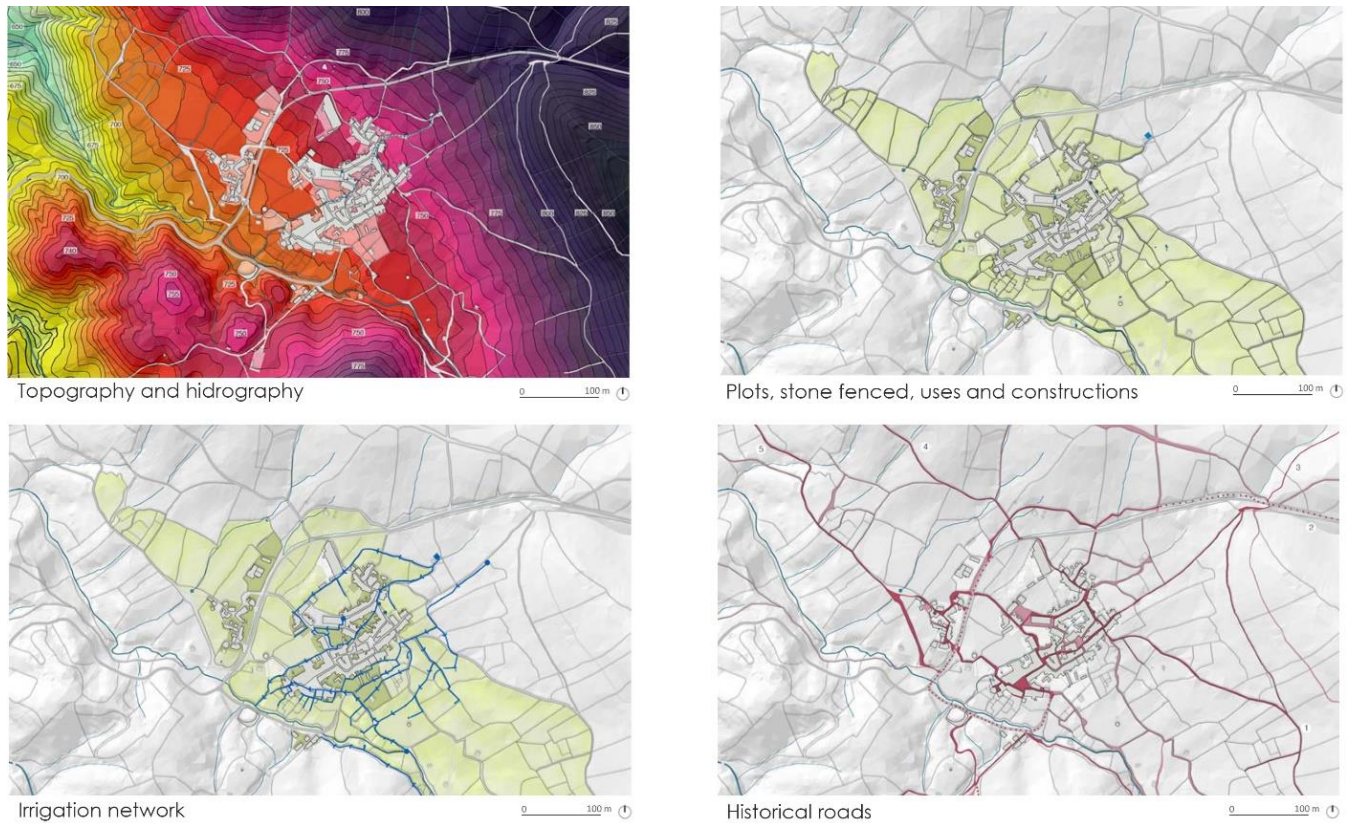


Figure 6. Analysis of the relationship of the settlement with the environment

From the analysis developed, the topography and hydrography form part of an intimate correspondence (Figure 6), which shows how the settlement is located perpendicular to the direction of the valley, which means that there are streets with a significant slope and very long, as opposed to other practically flat transversal streets. Secondly, the plots of land, the stone enclosures, the uses and constructions of the ruedo, form a singular layout. The historical irrigation network, which is organised from the springs following the natural fall of the land and allows for the incorporation of irrigated areas both in the areas of corrals that remain inside the settlement, around the north-western edge. Finally, the dense network of historic roads, which have a complex hierarchy and linked Castaño with other villages. Water establishes a very important order in the urban configuration and there is a complementarity between the management of the land, the network of paths and the plots enclosed by walls which, together with the urban fabric, give unique qualities to the landscapes (Coronado Sánchez, 2020).

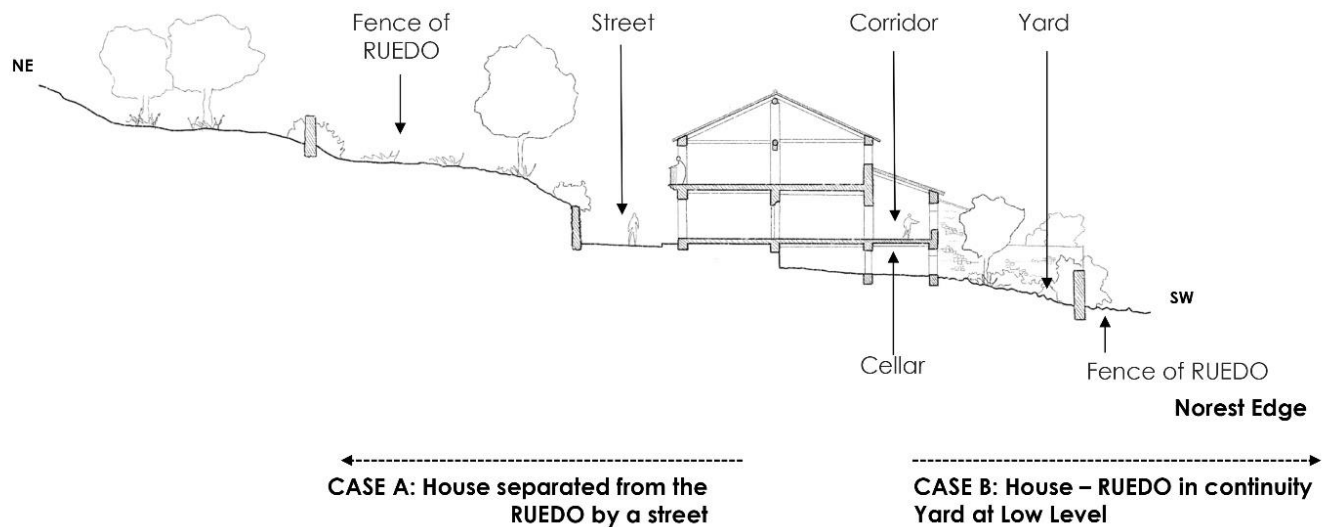


Figure 7. Most representative types of edges in Castaño del Robledo (Developed by Author)

The historical configuration of the settlement has given rise to different types of urban edges (Figure 7), which establish a sequence of several different types of spaces. First, in case A we can see sharp edges where the house is separated from the enclosures of the ruedo by a street. Second, the most representative case in Castaño is the one where there is continuity between the house and the farming ruedo. We can observe, however, two different variants: A sequence between the farmyard and the enclosure of the ruedo, which is situated at a lower level, and a more complex sequence of farmyard, domestic orchard and then the enclosure of the ruedo. Both cases, oriented to the southeast or southwest, have corridors and cellars open to the respective corrals.

This is a very distinctive feature of the transformations of the house in Castaño del Robledo that took place throughout the 18th century, when it was transformed and became larger and more complex. Several levels are incorporated, large roof eaves parallel to the natural slope of the land and types of spaces that mix agricultural and domestic functions (Cascales Barrio, 2017). Corridors and cellars are created, as well as a sequence of outdoor spaces of corrals, courtyards and vegetable garden areas until reaching the enclosures of the farming ruedo, made by means of stone masonry walls, commonly known as "dry stone". The urban fabric of the settlement is also conditioned by aspects related to the paving of the streets and the water networks that interconnect the agricultural area with the interior of the settlement.

The urban fabric and its urban-rural transition spaces favour a very rich visual relationship between the interior of the urban complex and the exterior, through the half-height walls that almost always form part of the near plane and, behind them, an important variability of orchards, pasture areas and chestnut woods as a visual filter and envelope for an equally interesting vernacular architecture.



Figure 8. Views of Castaño del Robledo. View from the air (top) showing the two churches and the corridors of the houses on the edge of the village. Intermediate view (centre), where the corridors of the houses and the corrals and orchards in front of them can be seen. Close-up view (bottom) on a street approaching the main nucleus, where the visual interrelationship with one of the churches can be seen. (Developed by Author)

Likewise, the incidence of these urban-rural transitions in the everyday landscapes of the locality is very important due to the high visual exposure they acquire in the different views, both in the intermediate and close-up planes. In them, the elements analysed are put in relation to each other: adaptation to the topography, the plot of the ruedo and types of crops, water management and the articulation with the network of roads which results in a very singular type of urban fabric.

In the aerial and intermediate views (Figure 8), we can see in the foreground the orchards of the ruedo, the settlement where the two churches stand out against the profile of the settlement and finally, in the background, the chestnut forest that changes throughout the year. The corridors of the houses open to their corrals stand out as a distinctive feature of the architecture, as well as the continuity of the roofs.

In the close-up views approaching the settlement, the "visual windows" appear as they represent the intervisibility that occurs between different parts of the settlement due to its genuine urban structure that incorporates large ruedo spaces interspersed between the houses. In this case, we can see in the foreground the stone walls, the cobbled floors and the historic water conduit. In the background, the church tower appears between the treetops and roofs.

3.4. Diagnosis and contemporary challenges

In the general analysis of the settlement (Figure 9) from the perspective of its visual qualities, it is possible to identify the most recurrent characteristics of the settlement and its surroundings as well as the main singularities and impacts that are present in most of the views:

On the one hand, a set of very clear areas can be distinguished, some of them allude to the urbanised fabric and others refer to surfaces that are linked to the soil and vegetation. In the urbanised space, the different urban nuclei that make up the settlement can be distinguished, surrounded by the farming ruedo as the first space of smaller plots of land and cultivated areas. This space is then enveloped by different areas of wooded land, which correspond to the orographic elements that delimit the site: to the north, the olive groves and chestnut groves (1), to the southwest, the holm oak and cork oak groves (2) and to the southeast, the holm oak, cork oak and chestnut groves (3). Regarding the built fabric, one of the singularities of Castaño lies in the important incidence of the edge space formed by the corrals, which are very abundant, some of them in the interior of large interior blocks.

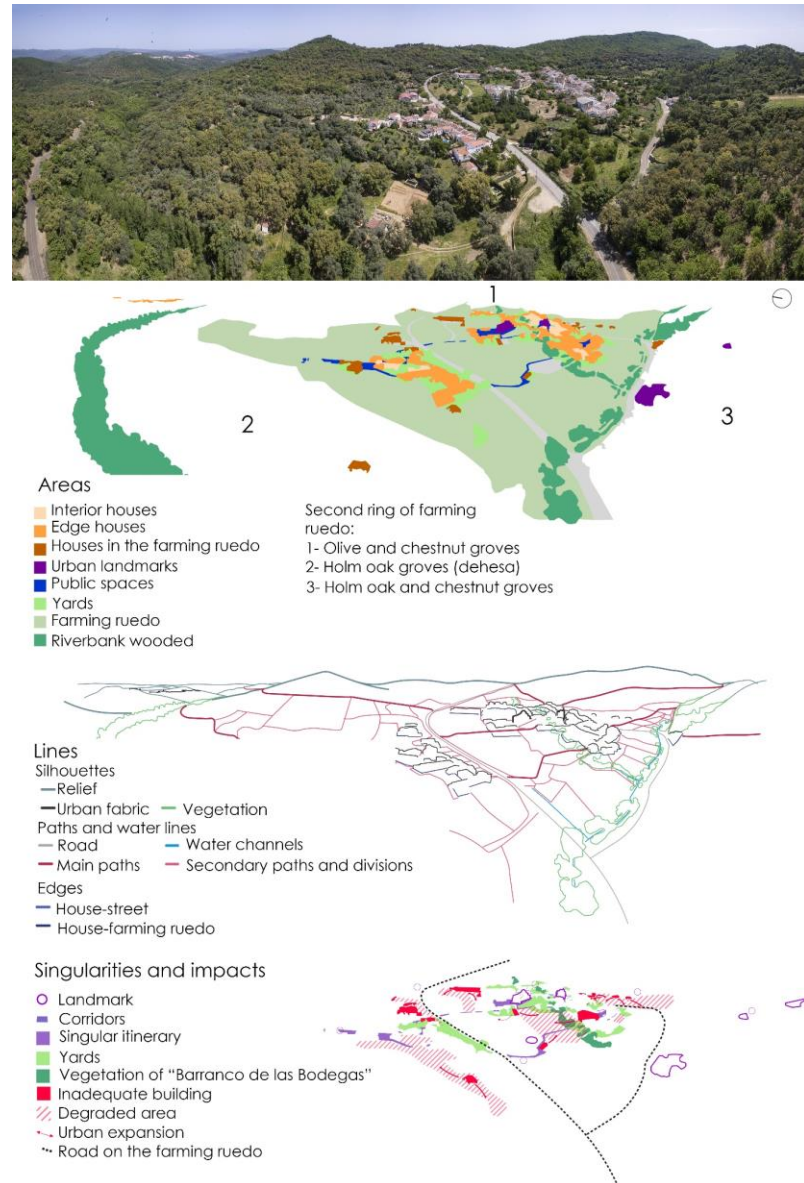


Figure 9. General analysis of urban-rural transitions in Castaño del Robledo (Developed by Author)

As for the structuring lines, the different profiles of the hills and mountain ranges are very present, almost always present when viewed from the south. On the other hand, the gallery forest marks the end of the great platform where the urban nuclei and the ruedo are located, accompanying the riverbed which tends to get lost both to the east and to the west. The organic meshed structure also has an impact: the main paths and crop-organising walls, the watercourses and associated vegetation and the silhouettes of the buildings.

The corrals define an axis on the western edge that runs through the interior of the settlement and seems to branch out transversally at different altitudes and towards the fronts of the houses. Likewise, the singular constructions that often accompany small open spaces tend to form an interconnected circuit that could give rise to an interpretative network associated with a network of urban-rural open spaces.

As singular buildings, the two temples stand out in the ensemble, separated by large corrals and visually intercommunicated by their two podiums - viewpoints that rise above the ensemble and give these buildings greater monumentality. On the southern slope is the bullring and the cemetery, as well as two chapels to the northwest and southeast. The fountains are also important in the urban organisation, distributed throughout the different neighbourhoods and usually accompanied by small or larger open spaces, and elements typical of agricultural activity which, although in a certain state of abandonment, constitute a reference point in the cultural memory of this town.



Figure 10. Main urban impacts in Castaño del Robledo, associated with urban-rural transition spaces. View from the southwest. (Developed by Author)

However, in the last two centuries, according to the historical analysis carried out, the tendency after the construction of the road, already aggressive, has encouraged the construction of buildings outside the logic of the grid and the adaptation to the topography, generating different visual impacts on the most sensitive fronts. On the western edge, warehouses have been built in the main access to the settlement, while the lower part, less dynamic in recent decades, is now in a certain state of deterioration and abandonment after buildings of inadequate volumes fell into disuse in the mid-20th century, such as the slaughterhouse and the feedlot above the farmhouse in the south-western part of the main nucleus. The southeast front has been the site of large facilities that have been damaging it, to which have been added extensions of houses on the corrals, remounts and other constructions and in specific areas to the northwest of the main nucleus and the nucleus of the Calvario neighbourhood, there are dynamics of urbanisation of second homes that also stress these edges.

In summary, we can highlight the characteristic elements of the urban-rural transitions that provide unique qualities to this settlement, expressed in the relationship between the farmhouse and the environment, through the corrals of the houses and the network of paths, fountains, irrigation infrastructures and cultivated enclosures that form an interface with the mountain ranges surrounding the settlement. It is also important to highlight the visual impact of these edge spaces in different views of the settlement, which means that they are very present in the everyday landscapes of the inhabitants but are also fragile to negative transformations. However, there are also numerous problems. The first is the road that was built some decades ago, separating the two nuclei that make up the settlement and crossing the ruedo. This has led to the gradual degradation of this space with the construction of industrial buildings and housing which do not respect the historical territorial order, and which contrast excessively in terms of volume and size. Furthermore, facilities have been built on the

south-eastern edge, which also have a significant impact. Finally, some areas of the ruedo are abandoned and the historical irrigation systems are being lost, which is accompanied by processes of abandonment of the hamlet.

4. Discussion

One of the first elements of debate to be addressed in this work is that despite the social valuation that landscape and vernacular architecture are acquiring, abandonment, changes in use and the urban dynamics of populations have progressively deteriorated this extensive heritage, influenced also by the abandonment of the rural environment. This is an issue that in general in the international context is in full debate on the role that rural territories currently play in an egemonic urban context dominated by the needs of the cities, which contributes to their mythification and in the end to a certain marginalisation (AMO and Koolhaas, 2020), relegated to the role of providers of resources (water, food, nature and leisure) but with high rates of inequality with respect to the more populated and central areas of the system (Ojeda Rivera, 2004).

The second element of debate concerns the place in which the heritage values of small rural mountain settlements are deposited. The analytical process developed allows us to verify the initial hypothesis that these values are linked to aspects that have to do with their location and relationship with the environment, which have been producing complex solutions for overcoming limitations and making the most of the facilities, aspects that are mainly appreciated through the interior and exterior urban landscapes characterised by smallness and detail and not so much by the singularity of monumental elements understood in isolation, since it is precisely in the relationships between material and immaterial, natural and historical that the character of each landscape is configured (Mata Olmo, 2008). It would therefore be desirable that urban planning and heritage management processes pay attention to the importance of the material and immaterial value of aspects such as the urban fabric, the characteristics of vernacular architecture (wide eaves and continuity of roofs, various levels in buildings, corridors, cellars, corrals, systems of openings or corrals) and the farming ruedos and their components (local produce, paths, water conduits, stone enclosures, fountains, etc.).

It has been shown that the real access to these landscapes and their quality depends to a large extent on the way they are treated in urban planning, in the architectural work, in the maintenance of the farming activities of the farming ruedos and in the environmental quality. For this reason, transdisciplinary analysis and diagnosis processes focusing on the landscape, such as those proposed here, not only help knowledge and dissemination but also allow us to identify their essential characteristics as well as degraded or threatened areas to be corrected, integrating the morphological but also the scenic vision (Jordán-Salinas et. al., 2020).

Urban-rural transitions are influenced by all the processes associated with the periphery, which is becoming more complex today as it tends to be a new diffuse fabric that complicates the traditional relationships between settlements and their agricultural or natural environments. A type of phenomenon that breaks the traditional geographical structure referred to by some authors as metastasis (Naredo, 2000) or Postmetropolis (Soja, 2000) and makes our everyday contexts reach a generic character that brings them closer to non-places (Augé, 1993) perceived as third landscape (Clement, 2018) or landscape of the periphery. In this context, agricultural spaces are increasingly marginalised and at high risk of losing their cultural and environmental values, and it is therefore advisable to take different types of actions from spatial and urban planning for their preservation (Hamrita et. Al, 2021).

These landscapes need visions and strategies for action at the territorial scale for the creation of territorial corridors that interconnect and protect the ruedos between localities. Also, strategies for the promotion of proximity agriculture, not only to maintain a tradition with high symbolic and emotional value for the inhabitants of the sierra, but also (García-Martín, 2023) as a resource to strengthen the economy of the sierra.

The second challenge they face concerns the improvement of heritage protection systems. On the one hand, of the elements that distinguish the architecture of the urban hamlet and, on the other, of the elements that make up the agroforestry environment, such as the plot structure, roads, irrigation systems and fountains that stand out in the analysis. On the other hand, a way to combat the abandonment of this heritage, which is difficult to maintain for a rural economy, requires thinking about programmes to support rehabilitation (De las Rivas-Sanz et. Al, 2022) and local crafts and construction systems, linked to specific housing actions combined with multisectoral strategies such as employment, improvement of services and cultural offerings, among others (Donadei, M. et. Al, 2023).

In spite of this, the presence of degraded spaces, which are especially concentrated on the urban edges, allows us to deduce that urban regeneration strategies should lead, in general, to their necessary integral reform both from the point of view of buildings and of the free spaces on plots, as well as configuring criteria and guidelines for the landscape adaptation of new interventions (topography, scale, materials, full and empty spaces, etc.) and rules to protect urban voids of landscape interest. To this end, the first challenge to overcome is the deficit of planning instruments and technical means (De-Santiago-Rodríguez, 2023) which, like Castaño del Robledo, is a generalised situation that these rural settlements suffer from, which generates added difficulties for the management of heritage and for urban adaptation to contemporary needs from the integral logic offered by planning.

From the point of view of the environment and the promotion of the landscape experience, the diversity of heritage elements and the urban and landscape interest would allow the improvement of access systems to the heritage and landscapes, providing an interrelation between the various elements and the system of open spaces with the possibility of configuring itineraries and places to stay. The project would also help to generate an active preservation of the heritage values associated with them through awareness-raising and appreciation of the public.

5. Conclusions

Landscape is a living concept in a constant process of transformation, inseparable from its essential role as an environment in which the lives of the inhabitants develop and as such, a symbiosis between aspects related to the natural foundations, the historical and territorial construction processes that the inhabitants have been developing and the common or creative perceptions that have been shaped on them and for this reason, its incorporation into urban and heritage processes is of increasing interest.

The urban transitions of rural settlements and specifically of the settlement under study harbour interesting values as elements that interrelate the interior of the settlement and the farming *ruedos* of the immediate surroundings, through various urban-rural construction solutions from the house, the corrals and the agricultural enclosures together with a network of elements that correspond to each other (the paths, the types of enclosures, the fountains and irrigation networks and the walls and small agricultural constructions). All these forms a territorial hinterland of great heritage interest and with a high impact on the everyday landscapes of the settlement, although it is in a process of degradation due to processes of abandonment and deterioration and inadequate interventions on these spaces of high visual fragility.

From the research carried out, reflections and transversal analytical mechanisms are provided for understanding the spatial, territorial and landscape keys of these transitions, and some important challenges for their urban and heritage consideration emerge, which can be shared with other rural mountain settlements and which have to do with the territorial dimension, a global and complex conception of urban-rural heritage, urban rehabilitation and regeneration, the development of planning instruments applicable to these rural contexts and the promotion of a landscape experience that responds to the complexity of mountain landscapes.

Acknowledgements

A preliminary version of this paper was presented at 7th International Conference of Contemporary Affairs in Architecture and Urbanism (ICCAUA-2024) in the form of an oral presentation.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Ethics statements

Studies involving animal subjects: No animal studies are presented in this manuscript.

Studies involving human subjects: No human studies are presented in this manuscript.

Inclusion of identifiable human data: No potentially identifiable human images or data is presented in this study.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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