

RURAL LANDSCAPES IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION. A PROPOSAL FOR THE REGION OF TIERRA DE CAMPOS

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The landscape has been a preferential theme of Geography, specific to this discipline. Thus, the scientific literature on rural landscapes has a long history and is extraordinarily profuse. Rural landscapes are the result of different modes of organization and exploitation that, even in a phase of uniformization, like the current one, it is possible to observe extraordinarily diverse scenery, as a consequence of the interaction among culture, adaptation to the environment and socio-economic conditions of each historical period.

The importance of these spaces is not in line with the poor relevance of their treatment in education, as shown by the limited number of teaching resources available. Our work aims to contribute to give visibility to the rural landscapes among primary education students, through a project that focuses on a field trip to two rural nuclei belonging to the provinces of Valladolid and Palencia.

We reckon that working with the landscape in primary schools makes it possible to evolve from the attainment of basic objectives, such as the perception of significant visual elements and even a first appreciation of the magnitude and morphological structure of the landscape, up to the objective of making schoolchildren capable of identifying, perceiving, describing and assessing what they see, by using a series of tools and methods such as collecting and analyzing data, as well as by establishing relationships and comparisons.

The use of different materials and techniques in the classroom, such as topographic maps, orthophotos, maps of crops and agricultural uses, the Agroclimatic Atlases of Castile and León, Google Earth, images in different periods, etc., allows the student

to notice the changes in the landscape, and to make contact with it through different representation methods (drawings, paintings, literary descriptions, travel guide, etc.).

Observation is essential. It has didactic-formative interest “because it is a basic procedure that precedes to and enables the use of other resources for the observation and knowledge of spatial realities and relationships”. When we perform direct observation (which involves fieldwork outside the classroom, in contact with the visible elements of the landscape, as well as perception through the senses, through which sounds, movement and smells can be appreciated simultaneously), it is possible to establish relationships between the phenomena that originate it or their impact on the landscape. On the other hand, when working through indirect observation, in the classroom itself, we approach landscapes through images, photographs, music, stories, works of art ...

Both ways require prior preparation: direct observation entails a deep knowledge of the space on which the work will be developed, as well as the preparation of the materials to be used in the observation, the selection of cartography and images, the development of the dossier of the trip. On the other hand, indirect observation involves the use of cartography (topographic and thematic maps) as well as viewing and selecting images (photography and video), musical pieces or texts. It requires a didactic treatment, and allows us to show students distant realities and establish relationships between them.

But, retaking the reality of the contents and resources that are related to the treatment of the landscape in primary education, it is necessary to highlight that, if the rural environment commonly represents a very small part of the space in textbooks devoted to landscapes, the rural environment of a region such as Tierra de Campos, despite its extension and marked signs of identity, is ignored. This fact, for a region in deep regression, represents not only a symptom of the detachment and disinterest that the territory provokes, but also the ignorance of its characteristics, its natural and cultural heritage, its values and its inhabitants contribute to deepen the problems of abandonment that it suffers.

The region of Tierra de Campos occupies an area of 5,820 km² that extends over four of the provinces of the Autonomous Community of Castilla and León (León, Palencia, Valladolid and Zamora). Broadly speaking, this region is composed of vast plains and wavy fields, delimited by moors to the north and south. There, few spots of climatic vegetation of holm oaks and gall oaks, and the repopulations with Aleppo pine (with an agrarian use dominated by the crops of barley and wheat mainly of dry land that is organized around small compact nuclei, distant from each other between 5 and 10 km), take refuge.

A traditional architecture, mimicked with the environment, predominates. Mud, wood and Arabic curved tile appear as basic materials. In addition, other singular elements

exist that characterize the architectural landscape of Tierra de Campos and that are part of their identity, such as the pigeon houses, the castles and the religious monumental architecture, with significant examples in most of the villages.

The hydrographic network that drains the region belongs to the Duero basin and is organized around three riverbeds of greater flow such as: Cea (which runs through the provinces of León, Valladolid and Zamora), Carrión as it passes through the province of Palencia and, Pisuerga that crosses Palencia and Valladolid. Nevertheless, there are other smaller, more irregular and seasonal rivers such as Sequillo (tributary of Valderaduey, whose course comes into contact with the four provinces that host Tierra de Campos), Valderaduey (tributary of Duero), Valdeginete, Cueva and Ucieza, among others, as well as an intermittent network of streams.

The wetlands of Tierra de Campos, linked to the fluvial network, gather a network of lagoons and endorheic ponds such as the Lagunas de la Nava, Boada, Villafáfila and de los Oteros. Also Canal de Castilla, whose central stretch and the Ramal de Campos, which ends in Medina de Rioseco, crosses the region leaving on the right bank of the riverbed a rosary of 48 small lagoons, of very high seasonality, caused by the barrier effect exercised by the channel trench, and also included in the Natura 2000 Network.

This rural landscape is affected by the massive outflow of population, which began in 1950 and has continued uninterrupted with few exceptions until today, as a result of the need to attract ample and cheap workforce to cities, and of the Productivist model based on the high mechanization of the works in the countryside, which needs less labor. This fact has driven to a depopulated and aged space, contributing to the disappearance of large population centers.

Of the two municipalities in which this project focuses, Torremormojón is located in the southwest of the province of Palencia. It is a small municipality with a surface of 2,824 Ha and around 50 inhabitants (2 hab / km²). It is located at the foot of the Torozos mountains and, therefore, its municipal area is distributed among the moors located at an altitude of 860 meters above sea level, the slopes and the hills and countryside where the nucleus is located, at a height of 778 meters above the sea level. The streams of Arenales and del Salón, tributaries of the Valdeginete, cross the plain from south to north, more than 500 meters from the hull. Torremormojón is integrated into the Commonwealth of Alcor de Campos, constituted in 1992 by a total of seven municipalities in order to share, among others, services such as garbage collection, purification and water supply to the locality, which allow these municipalities to have provision of services that would not be viable independently.

The urban core has three relevant elements from the point of view of cultural heritage: the church of Santa María del Castillo, erected in the second half of the 12th century

and progressively enlarged until the 18th century, which has been declared a historical and artistic monument; the “pósito”, where the convent of Santa María de la Piedad was first located (in the 17th century) until the nuns moved to the city of Palencia. It housed the municipal granary and now houses the cultural center, after its rehabilitation in 2017. Finally, and despite their abandonment, it is necessary to highlight the 23 pigeon houses inventoried and located both on the edges, as well as in the urban area itself or disseminated in the municipality.

Outside the core, the ruins of the Castle are remarkable. Its original construction dates back to the 12th century, though it was rebuilt at the beginning of the 16th century. It is square-shaped, with large cubes in the corners and a tower protecting the entrance. The entire front is of ashlar masonry, with walls of four meters thick and embrasures for the artillery. The castle had a moat defended through many shooting cameras that were connected by an intramural gallery. This gallery was occupied by an immense pigeon house, currently abandoned, of which only the cavities or sentry boxes are conserved. The Castle was visually connected with the castles of Paradilla del Alcor, Ampudia and Montealegre.

The hill on which the Castle rises, as well as the slopes of the contiguous wasteland, “El Castre”, have been repopulated with Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*). In this latter, a wind farm with the same name has been installed (initially with 16 wind turbines and progressively augmented).

As part of the Plan for the improvement of the environment, developed in parallel to the wind farm, informative panels on flora, fauna, history, etc. have been installed; repopulations have been carried out with autochthonous and ornamental species (almond trees, fragrant broom or gayomba, common cypress, three-spined acacia, tamarisk, giant tuya, red-fronted photinia, tortuous willow, etc.); wooden dams have been built to alleviate runoff and surface erosion, and the access path to the Castle has been improved.

As for the municipality of Villalón de Campos, where the second part of the project is developed, it is located in the north of the province of Valladolid, about 70 kilometers northwest of the provincial capital. The municipality has a surface of 7.033 Ha and its population is close to 1,700 inhabitants. It has a population density of 24 inhabitants / km².

Like Torremormojón, part of its municipal area belongs to the Natura 2000 Network and is integrated in the Special Protection Area for Birds (ZEPA) called La Nava - Campos Norte.

At an altitude between 750 to 800 meters above sea level, its relief is predominantly undulating on clay soils dominated by cereal crops, mostly rainfed, which characterize the entire region. The economy, in addition to the services of a regional center, is based on agriculture and livestock, which includes the presence of a livestock hut, mainly avian, but

where the sheep is the highlight. Although in progressive decline, this latter still maintains a significant number of cattle heads, which has given the municipality of Villalón prominence in the food industry for the production of fresh cheeses “Pata de mulo”.

The market is another key element to understand the importance of this town. It has been held since 1250, when Fernando II granted it to the city. From then on, the fairs have acquired a major role, being one of the markets of Europe during part of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A market destined to the supply and provisioning, as well as to the purchase-sale of cattle, tools, utensils ... becoming the plaza in the neuralgic and business center of the town. This square is characterized by the porticoed arcades that surround it, where the merchants arrived from different Spanish cities and from abroad, used to exhibit their products.

Besides the arcades, the historic center keeps the traditional architecture of a village with concentrated houses, cobbled streets, arcades and houses built with materials from Tierra de Campos, such as adobe and brick, among which the emblazoned houses are noteworthy. The central square is one of the highlights of the village, not only because the aforementioned market or fairs took place there, but also because of the monuments located around it: the Church of San Miguel, Gothic-Mudejar style of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the Jurisdictional Rollo, raised in 1523 and declared a National Monument, in a characteristically isabelino gothic style, about ten meters high and with a high architectural value).

The project presented here has not been put into practice and, therefore, is not and can not be a closed proposal. It is intended to provide teachers with a series of ideas on how to implement a work project focused on a rural landscape in Tierra de Campos, which includes a trip.

This proposal is part of a project that is intentionally differentiated from isolated and decontextualized activities that commonly characterize the trips and activities outside the classroom (whose main interest is the purely ludic component). On the contrary, this project allows the use of different pedagogical methods, enables the implementation of a wide range of activities and introduces a global perspective that reduces the problem of the loss of objectives.

The study of the landscape, as Licerias Ruiz points out, contributes to “improve the cognitive aptitudes of the individual, since it favours autonomous and active learning, the construction of concepts, the acquisition of real knowledge and the orientation of experiences and perceptions that mediate and improve the education of the students”.

The project focuses on a wide rural area in evident demographic decline, which retains a high patrimonial interest with characteristic forms of habitat, and a way of organization and use of the territory that must be protected, because they are part of the

essence of the cultural landscape of the center of the Duero basin. Its aim is to work with all of the constituent and relevant elements of the region and to unveil the most important interrelations that take place between them.

The activity outside the classroom must be planned by the teachers involved, who will be responsible for materializing the proposal in each of the above-mentioned phases (and developed with the group of schoolchildren), concerning both the logistics organization of the activity and the selection of the contents and the visits.

As a guide, we have highlighted those activities that we understand to be more suitable for the work in the (physical) classroom, that involve the use of other sources and tools for the knowledge of these rural landscapes. In the activity outside the classroom that is proposed, the role of the teaching staff is shared with that of the students, who will have previously learnt about different elements of the territory in the classroom.

The main objective is that schoolchildren become familiar with different tools (photography, maps, drawing, field notebook) and procedures (walks, interviews, visits to museums, internet) that will be useful not only to discover the landscape of Tierra de Campos, but also to establish relationships with different rural areas.

In the municipality of Torremormojón we propose to work on the concept of depopulation; the water supply in a region with few river courses, irregular flows and strong drainages; the elements of the landscape, their forms and their functions (the straw and its stacking, the corrals, the dovecotes, the wind generators and the wind farms, the sheep farming and the herds, the land consolidation). We will also deal with architectural heritage: materials and construction methods; changes of use and rehabilitation of historic buildings. The students will take contact with the thematic cartography to find out more about the cultivated land and its relationship with the irrigated land. The visit to the Castle makes it possible to learn more about the constructive techniques of these buildings and the role of the fortresses in the control of the territory. Besides this, the views that are observed from this watchtower enable the development of exercises of orientation and handling of the maps, of morphological structure of the landscape, of analysis and characterization of the natural and social elements, of land uses and of artistic recreation of the landscape and of decision making and intervention in the landscape.

As for Villalón de Campos, the proposal considers it essential for the group of schoolchildren to visit the nucleus and to interact with other schoolchildren, in order to learn about their experiences in the rural environment. In addition, the project considers the historical importance of the Fair of this village and its direct relationship with the arcades as an architectural expression of commercial activity. On the other hand, it deals with a well-liked product in the locality: the “pata de mulo” cheese, and deepens into

the processes of transformation of the milk, by visiting the Cheese Museum. As in the case of Torremormojón, emphasis is placed on traditional architecture, comparing it with contemporary forms of construction. The elements that characterize a regional core are analysed and identified, and a mapping exercise is carried out, drawing some significant elements of the locality.

The synthesis exercises that close the project focus on the comparison between the nuclei to analyse the differences and analogies between the two locations. In addition, these activities show the students alternative ways of discovering the landscape of Tierra de Campos (the pictorial expression) and allow researchers to learn more about the degree of understanding of the elements of the landscape and their interrelations.

In conclusion, in order to improve “landscape culture”, it is necessary to help the students to get in touch with the territory and to understand the shapes and elements that we observe, as well as their multiple interrelations. This is particularly important in rural landscapes, where unskillfulness, detachment and lack of interest is growing rapidly. The proposed rapprochement of schoolchildren to the rural area is aimed at discovering the attractiveness and interest of these landscapes, from which valuable and meaningful knowledge in different areas can also be gained. The environment proposed for the activities has interesting attributes for carrying out a trip that favours a fruitful encounter with the elements, the heritage, the inhabitants and the values of the rural landscape.

