

The Agrarian Buildings in Suburban Areas as a Territorial Heritage

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The Sevillian *hacienda* —traditional farmhouse for olive oil production— is one of the most representative architectural type of the whole Andalusian rural landscape. It comprises a main building combining residential and processing functions, located in the middle of their corresponding farm property, which is predominantly planted with olive orchards. Precedents of this architectural model can be regarded in the Roman *villae* and the Moorish *alqueria*, although the present physiognomy derives from the 18th century, once the urban bourgeois from the city of Seville translate their styles and preferences to the rural farmhouse.

For these reasons, the *hacienda* is considered an important heritage asset and one of the most representative elements of the Sevillian rural landscape (as understood by the Landscape Character Assessment). Thus, many of these buildings are protected under the regional heritage protection policy (as well as the urban planning), according to their local distinctiveness and cultural meanings.

However, most of these farm buildings have lost their original function as “agro-factories”, as places for processing the olive crop into olive oil. Recent trends such as urbanization growth and modernization of agricultural techniques have put pressure on this architectural heritage. Many of the best conserved *haciendas* have been reconverted to host other non-agricultural uses, such as institutional facilities (town halls, public libraries...) or private activities linked to leisure and events. In the latter case, celebrating a wedding party in a *hacienda* has become a very popular custom all around Seville.

In this paper, we identify two ways by which society give a particular value to a specific heritage element —process so called *patrimonialization*—. At first, the institutional patrimonialization operates by means of legal instruments and other kind of proceeds related to the official heritage policy. These processes seem to have a top-down direction. On the other hand, local communities, through social behaviours and



practices, recognise symbolic values in a specific element, whether this one is officially protected or not. These processes, on the contrary, show a bottom-up direction.

This double process is even more significant in territories of deep urban transformations. Here, physical and perceptual changes disrupt the system of landmarks and symbolic elements inherent to any community. This has happened in the Aljarafe region, the western sector of the Seville urban region, which is the study framework of our research. This region has experimented so intense environmental and demographic changes in the last half-century, that their “young” and rising dwellers had no time to develop a true sense of place and belonging. In this context, the *hacienda* adopts a very relevant role, since this heritage asset reinforces and strengthens the cultural link between a land (history, landscape, memory, identity...) and an emerging society looking for it. After all, the patrimonialization is nothing else than a process to legitimate a community in “their own” place.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to approach the current state of the *haciendas* in the Aljarafe region. We take as a starting point the early work of Ronquillo (1981) to recognize a total amount of 93 *haciendas*. The novelty in this case lies in the proposed method: along with the documentary, different fieldwork sessions have allowed us to analyze on site the features that characterize every building. These attributes are listed below:

- By the *Environment* the current land uses around the *hacienda* are observed (urban fabric, peri-urban, agricultural or wild areas).
- The *Permanence* weights the grade of integrity of the building (wholeness, partial presence or disappeared).
- By the *Conservation* attribute the perceived state of preservation of the building is noticed (well preserved, damaged or ruined).
- The current *Use* of the building is also identified (residential, agricultural, mixed, public administration, venues, others)
- The *Institutional Recognition* weights the incorporation of the *hacienda* in official inventories of heritage protection.
- By the *Academic Attention*, the inclusion of the building in old cartography, scientific research, institutional or promotional catalogues is analyzed.
- The *Social Esteem* weights the role of the *hacienda* in the local culture and immaterial heritage (symbol of the town, meeting place, sites for venues, pilgrimage route, appearance on paintings or song lyrics...)

Once applied the previous methodology some results might be highlighted:

a) A uniform distribution of the 93 *haciendas* throughout the study area has been observed, although they are lightly shifted to the western half of the Aljarafe region.



b) Over half of the extant *haciendas* are well preserved. However, others have partially or totally disappeared in the last decades due to the loss of the rural activity in the area, the demographic growth and the urbanization processes.

c) The *hacienda* has gradually lost its agrarian role as place of both live and work. In many cases its residential function has been maintained. Among the new activities hosted by these buildings, institutional uses stand out (offices of the local administration such as city hall, library, civic center or minor courts). Some of the *haciendas* that retain private ownership have reoriented their functions in line with the new urban society, particularly the celebration of private events linked to leisure (Figure 1).

Figure 1. New uses in Hacienda Belén (offices and equipments) and Torrequemada (wedding receptions).



d) There is a lack of institutional recognition in the most part of these buildings, with a scarce presence on the official Heritage List in Andalusia, the CHPHA (*Catálogo General del Patrimonio Histórico Andaluz*). On the other hand, other minor non-official inventories (as well as academic research) do identify many of these buildings, due to its architectural and/or ethnological values (Figure 2).

e) In general, the *hacienda* in the Aljarafe region has a high social esteem. While some are unnoticed by locals, some others focus a strong link with the civil society. The integration of these buildings in the popular asset has been possible thanks to bottom-up actions, either from local traditions and a customary use, or from organized civil groups with a common interest. Some facts might prove this idea: the presence of the *hacienda* in the folklore and the popular songbook (*sevillanas*), its use as local administration headquarters (e.g. in the town of Gines up to 4 public equipments have been located in former *haciendas*), its iconic value in the local promotion, or the fact that they have become emblematic places for wedding feasts in the whole metropolitan area of Seville.

Figure 2. Haciendas La Peregrina and Tablante. Despite the value of both, only the first one is included in the CGPHA.



As conclusion, the institutional recognition of the haciendas (top-down process) has less importance compared to its social and popular status (bottom-up process). In both cases discontinuities are observed, which explains that well preserved *haciendas* with an important social projection coexist with others that have been abandoned, forgotten or are simply unknown.

This paper, therefore, opens the door toward future research perspectives. A seeking for a general pattern on the recognition of rural heritage linked to the industry of leisure and celebrations could be studied. Likewise, a specific analysis of certain similar areas with an important vernacular architecture such as *Vega de Granada* (Granadian floodplains), *Huerta de Valencia* (Valencian orchards) or *Sierra de Madrid* (Madrid mountain ranges) could be investigated.