

## **The River Duero in Soria or the literary construction of a heritage landscape**

Begoña Bernal  
Universidad de Burgos  
C/ Villadiego s/n  
09001 Burgos  
ESPAÑA  
[bbernal@ubu.es](mailto:bbernal@ubu.es)

**Abstract:** “Where the Duero River twists to form its crossbow curve along Soria” (Spain), there is a landscape shaped by cultural heritage sites from diverse ages, similar in typology and contradictory in their heritage making process. Today, from the viewing point of Cuatro Vientos and the viewing point of Soria Castle we may relish a landscape rich in heroic memories, literary evocation and legends. Added to the memory of this heroism (Numancia) or of artistic expressions is the transformational gaze of writers that were transcendental in Spanish culture. Bécquer, Machado and Gerardo Diego gave literary wording to their nostalgia and experience. Thus, at the same location, the heritage value springs from human activity in the past and also from the cultural projection of feelings onto the surrounding reality. The strength of the poetic word, recited and commented on in the classroom, has transformed the River Duero into a heritage landscape.

### **Introduction**

In the city of Soria, on the river Duero, a series of projects have been proposed for the economic development of the area, such as the unfortunately named *Ciudad del Medio Ambiente* [Environmental City] or the SORIA II Industrial Polygon, which are an affront to the natural and cultural landscape. The irrationality of both projects implies the destruction of the cultural landscape of Soria threatening an irremediable loss of authenticity for the heritage sites of the city of Soria.

The proposals for the Environmental City, as well as the industrialization of a part of the landscape around Soria of great heritage value, have provoked immense concern in the international scientific community, because it is an attack on culture, and the cultural landscape, and because those promoting it are precisely the very local and regional public authorities that are entrusted with the responsibility and the powers to conserve our heritage.

Today, the public have accepted the concepts of landscape, environment, and setting, which are already well defined in different disciplines, amongst which geography. The same is true for the categories of natural heritage and cultural heritage or landscape heritage, defined by UNESCO in order to catalogue the heritage listed in the World Heritage List. There are legal texts, charters, conventions, and directives of international scope that define the landscape, that recognise its leading role as a key component of the territory and a watermark of the natural and cultural heritage of a place, and that set out ways of promoting and securing satisfactory protection. So, now that the regulatory dimension on the environment, on landscape protection and on heritage conservation is very clear, political and economic authorities are acting as if the law did not exist, stressing indeterminate or contingent features of these regulations.

A controversial project plan backed by the public authorities in a unique area of the city of Soria has focused our attention on the design plans to build the SORIA II Industrial Polygon. We have seen how this polemical issue referred to as “the new siege of Numancia”, has in turn led the scientific community, at first alarmed by the disastrous consequences for the archaeological site, to set its sights on the existing elements that make up that space, to recognize the heritage values that constitute that space, and to delve into the causes and the consequences of heritage making in a geographic area which come together in the creation and identification of a cultural landscape.

We have also noted that any real protection of the landscape in Spain is immensely fragile. The blurred confusion of the public authorities, as it is a matter of a landscape, provokes exasperation among intellectuals that express concern for heritage. The pathological behaviour of the authorities leads them to affirm that the SORIA II Industrial Polygon planned for El Cabezo will affect neither the archaeological site of Numancia nor the city of Soria.

They deliberately forget that “Where the Duero River twists to form its crossbow curve along Soria” a landscape stretches out that is shaped by cultural heritage sites of various ages, of a similar typology and contradictory in their heritage-making process. Added to the memory of this heroism (Numancia) and artistic expression (San Juan de Duero) is the transformational gaze of literary evocation and legend, of transcendental writers in the Spanish culture: Bécquer, Machado and Gerardo Diego. Thus, at the same location, the heritage value springs from human activity in the past and also from the cultural projection of sentiment onto the surrounding reality. The

strength of the poetic word has turned the River Duero into a heritage landscape.

The public company Gesturcal S.A. (belonging to the regional government of Castile and Leon, the *Junta de Castilla y León*), in collaboration with Soria town council intends to develop an industrial polygon, called SORIA II, in a zone situated at beauty spots such as El Cabezo, La Colorada and Los Pajarejos, to the south-east of Numancia and to the north-east of the city of Soria, on the right bank of the river Duero. The chosen space is an extension of common agricultural land, on which clumps of holm oak combine with uncultivated fields and scrub land, limestone outcrops, crooked shaped cereal fields, slopes with bushy vegetation and low hills, plantations of pine trees, in brief, a landscape in harmony with the image that the area around the city of Soria has traditionally transmitted, a landscape that has served as a necessary and acceptable channel through which the most celebrated and well-known of Spain's poets have expressed their feelings and emotions in verse read thousands of times, recited and studied in the classroom: "*Aquellos diminutos pegujales / de tierra dura y fría, / donde apuntan centenos y trigales / que el pan moreno nos darán un día! [...] Y otra vez roca y roca, pedregales / desnudos y pelados serrijones, / la tierra de las águilas caudales, / malezas y jarales, / hierbas monteses, zarzas y cambrones. [...] Entre cerros de plomo y de ceniza / manchados de roídos encinares, / y entre calvas roquedas de caliza, / iba a embestir los ocho tajamares / del puente el padre río, / que surca de Castilla el yermo frío*" (ANTONIO MACHADO).

The land chosen to develop the Industrial Polygon SORIA II is in contact with, surrounded by and related to various Assets of Cultural Interest and other architectural monuments singled out for special protection. That space, that stretches undulating between the plain and the escarpments on the left bank of the river Duero (between the mound of Numancia and the remains of the encircling Roman encampments, to the north, and the Monte de las Ánimas, San Juan de Duero and the river, to the south) constitute a natural and cultural landscape of exceptional value. Hence, the planned urban development of SORIA II, in the opinion of many people, presents very alarming aspects for the conservation of heritage that is highly infused with cultural and natural value, which make it, on the one hand, irreplaceable and, on the other, highly fragile. It demonstrates the ambiguity of the public authorities in their concern for the integrity of a group of heritage assets (natural and cultural) that might be affected by the project.

The Resolution of the General Secretariat of the Environmental Department of the regional Government of Castile and Leon (2007) denies that the planned Industrial Polygon will impact on the surrounding Assets of Cultural Interest, despite including a statement that, inexplicably, bears no consequences for the possible impact on the “environment” or setting in which the plots of land are situated: ”The visual fragility [of the project area] may be considered high due to the proximity of the capital Soria, as there is high ground in the surrounding area from which the zone is discernable (Numancia, Ermita del Mirón, Cerro del Castillo, Monte de las Ánimas)”.

This sentence reflects a pathological paradox as, without wishing to, it is referring to the landscape of Soria, given that it is talking about a landscape (that of Soria) that bestows meaning on the viewing points at *Los Cuatro Vientos* next to the *Ermita del Mirón* and on the *Cerro del Castillo*. And it is Numancia that looks over to Soria across that country landscape that they intend to turn into an industrial one. This is a good example of the deterioration affecting the premises and foundations upon which our knowledge of the concepts of landscape, environment, and setting is based, because the Regional Government departs from all logic when it speaks of visual fragility and fails to conclude that there is a need to preserve “the views” from such attractive high ground.

Art. 42 of the *Ley de Patrimonio Cultural de Castilla y León* (2002) states that: “the conservation of historic complexes entails the maintenance of the urban and architectural structure and of the silhouette of the landscape, as well as the general characteristics of its environment”. The construction of an industrial polygon on the agricultural land situated between Numancia and the Roman siege forts of Garray, the left bank of the river Duero and the historic city centre of Soria would seriously alter the silhouette of the landscape and the general characteristics of the very environment of such Assets of Cultural Interest, because, in reality, it is the same silhouette of the landscape that stands before us, the same landscape, whatever the legal status accorded to each of its important constituent parts. Because the whole is much more than the sum of the parts; what defines the whole is the interactions between the parts.

## **2. Meaning of “landscape”, “environment” and “setting” in international and national doctrine.**

The European Landscape Convention (Florence 2000), ratified by Spain on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007 affirms that “the landscape has an

important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields, and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activity and whose protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation;”.

It also acknowledges that “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas;”.

The landscape is “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors;”

It is defined in the same way in (art. 3.26) of *la Ley del Patrimonio Natural y de la Biodiversidad* (2007). This Law points to the “the predominance of environmental protection over urban and territorial planning” (art. 2. f).

Many years ago now, ICOMOS grappled with the relations between historic urban areas in the *International Charter for the conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas* “This charter concerns historic urban areas, large and small, including cities, towns and historic centres or quarters, together with their natural and man-made environments. (Charter of Washington, 1987).

As an objective, it points to the values to be conserved, “the historic character of the town or urban area and all those material and spiritual elements that express this character, especially: [...] relationships between buildings and green and open spaces; [...] the relationship between the town or urban area and its surrounding setting, both natural and manmade; [...] Any threat to these qualities would compromise the authenticity of the historic town or urban area.”

The landscape that surrounds the city of Soria –“*¡Colinas plateadas, / grises alcores, cárdenas roquedas! / por donde traza el Duero / su curva de ballesta/ en torno a Soria, oscuros encinares, / ariscos pedregales, calvas sierras, / caminos blancos y álamos del río...*” (Antonio Machado)- with the development of the Industrial Polygon SORIA II, its image will undergo a serious alteration, a loss for the historic city of Soria and an irreparable loss of authenticity.

In the Declaration of Xi’an (2005), on the conservation of the setting of heritage structures, sites and areas, ICOMOS acknowledged the contribution of the setting to the meaning of heritage monuments, sites and areas. “Beyond the physical and visual aspects, the setting includes interaction with the natural environment; past or present

social or spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, use or activities and other forms of intangible cultural heritage aspects that created and form the space as well as the current and dynamic cultural, social and economic context.” (point 1). Further on it says: “Heritage structures, sites or areas of various scales, including individual buildings or designed spaces, historic cities or urban landscapes, landscapes, seascapes, cultural routes and archaeological sites, derive their significance and distinctive character from their perceived social and spiritual, historic, artistic, aesthetic, natural, scientific, or other cultural values. They also derive their significance and distinctive character from their meaningful relationships with their physical, visual, spiritual and other cultural context and settings. These relationships can be the result of a conscious and planned creative act, spiritual belief, historical events, use or a cumulative and organic process over time through cultural traditions.” (point 2).

In other words, the heritage value not only arises from the prior “objective” characteristics of the asset, but of the transmission and perception of that asset by the public. An act of cultural communication is established between the “reality” of the people that know, use and feel that reality. Furthermore, in that communication between the generations, the shining examples of history, the magical and the mythical, and the aesthetics of thought and feeling expressed in words are no longer the setting of a site, the invisible shroud of a site, but become integrated within it so as to turn it into a (‘one single’) heritage asset. There are numerous examples of literary creation that combine historic references and symbolic values: “*Numancia del silencio y de la ruina, / alma de libertad, trono del viento...*” (GERARDO DIEGO), “*¡Gentes del alto llano numantino / que a Dios guardáis como cristianas viejas, / que el sol de España os llene/ de alegría, de luz y de riqueza!*” (ANTONIO MACHADO); or within history, the suggestive images and feelings woven into the landscape: “*¡Oh, en el azul, vosotras, viajeras golondrinas / que vais al joven Duero, zagales y merinos, / con rumbo hacia las altas praderas numantinas, / por las cañadas hondas y al sol de los caminos;/ hayedos y pinares que cruza el ágil ciervo;/ montañas, serrijones, lomazos, parameras [...] ¡Adiós, tierra de Soria; adiós el alto llano/ cercado de colinas y crestas militares,/ alcores y roquedas del yermo castellano,/ fantasmas de robledos y sombras de encinares!*” (ANTONIO MACHADO).

This is why the so-called setting assumes capital importance in the evaluation, protection and transmission of a heritage asset, and if the setting is destroyed, so too is the asset. In consequence, if the

landscape to the north-east of the city of Soria is destroyed when constructing the Industrial Polygon SORIA II, the meaning and the distinctive character of the historic city of Soria are destroyed.

“The definition of setting requires an understanding of the history, evolution and character of the surrounds of the heritage resource. Defining the setting is a process of considering multiple factors to include the character of the arrival experience and the heritage resource itself.” (Declaration of Xi’an, point 3). It is a process that must take multiple factors into account that have to include the experience of approaching the site and the heritage asset itself. Given that the setting constitutes a multi-faceted entity, is composed of very similar elements in their quality and from very diverse ages, then: “Understanding the setting in an inclusive way requires a multi-disciplinary approach and the use of diverse information sources. Sources include formal records and archives, artistic and scientific descriptions, oral history and traditional knowledge, the perspectives of local and associated communities as well as the analysis of views and vistas. Cultural traditions, rituals, spiritual practices and concepts as well as history, topography, natural environment values, use and other factors contribute to create the full range of a setting’s tangible and intangible values and dimensions. The definition of settings should carefully articulate the character and values of the setting and its relationship to the heritage resource.”(Declaration of Xi’an, point 4). Thus, in studies on the possible impacts of an urban project on a heritage asset, reports from various disciplines should necessarily be included, and should not be limited solely to an archaeological report. Perhaps there is a need for interventions with multidisciplinary teams in Spain that contribute geographic and interpretive knowledge without which the legal protection of the cultural landscape is left without protection.

### **3. Soria on the banks of the river Duero offers a natural and cultural landscape that is both tangible and intangible, archaeological and literary.**

The old city centre of Soria is an historic complex of relevant heritage value that stands in the Duero valley and is reflected in the waters of a river that runs towards the sea of “Castilla”. But, where the Duero River twists to form its crossbow curve, an irreplaceable and repeated landscape reveals itself in which are scattered close by to each other, various patrimonial assets. The Ruins of Numancia and San Juan de Duero are the memory of an ancient and exemplary heroism and are

an exceptional artistic statement from the past.

To this backdrop of heritage from the north and the east of the river Duero, we may add the ongoing transformational gaze of writers of unquestionable transcendence in Spanish literature and culture. Bécquer, Machado and Gerardo Diego gave literary wording to their experiences and nostalgia gazing over and feeling the landscape of Soria around the Duero. Thus, not so long ago, in 2006, the force of the poetic word, oft-repeated and commented on in the classroom, has turned the left bank of the river Duero into an Asset of Cultural Interest, classified as a Historic Complex and composed of natural values, environmental values, intangible cultural values (literary) and of historic cultural and artistic values.

In addition, the view that extends from the Sierra de Santa Ana, with San Polo and San Saturio reflected in the river, going on to San Juan de Duero at the foot of the Monte de las Ánimas, and on up to the heroic plains of Numancia, must necessarily pass over without losing continuity and following the colours, the contours and the natural elements, across the hilltops and riverbeds that constitute El Cabezo, La Colorada and Los Pajarejos, the chosen countryside upon which to violently and inappropriately “graft” the Industrial Polygon SORIA II. It is evident that this project will break up the continuum of the landscape –all of which is of a patrimonial nature- which is seen from Soria when looking out to the north and to the east.

This landscape -‘part of the territory whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors as perceived by the population ’ (*Ley del Patrimonio Natural y de la Biodiversidad*, art. 3.26)- has been perceived by the population of Soria and others not from Soria, in a positive way for many years. This explains the indispensable and multitudinous contemplation of this area from el Mirón and from the Castle.

If these two viewing points have any sense, not only is it because, looking out from them, Antonio Machado suffered alongside Leonor and her illness and because the views, in his memory, caused him intense and painful days, but also because these viewing points in the city of Soria lend coherence to a landscape rich in heroic memory, natural elements and literary evocation and legend. Thus, in the same northeastern sector of the area of Soria, the heritage value arises many times from the physical realities of human activity in the past, but in others, from the cultural projection of certain feelings onto the surrounding reality, which has given birth to a landscape with a strong feeling of heritage. That is why the landscape, so pregnant with cultural and natural value, so full of archaeological remains and



literary associations, overflowing with values that are cherished and transmitted from generation to generation in Soria, will be irremediably altered and destroyed by the installation on that coherent horizon of an industrial polygon.

The Cultural Heritage of Soria is, among many other things, its landscape: seen from the city and seen from its surrounding area. It is a landscape because nature and history have decided as much and it is a landscape of the soul, of feeling and of intelligence, because illustrious and celebrated poets wished it to be so and inhabitants of Soria and its visitors have perceived it so: "Soria, citadel of past events, the land written over with the pens of Bécquer, Machado, Gerardo Diego and Unamuno, authors on a literary map that words and people travel across on a multifarious route. Thus poetic heritage becomes the landscape here. The space made lyrical memory, reveals the traveller born to rhymes and legends. It is the reiterated verse, unique and diverse, written without respite on the skin of this province, overlapping in its universe new itineraries on which to add to the reading of its prodigious poetry." This text is taken from the official website of Soria Town Council on the "La Ciudad" page, which reminds us once again of a sort of bipolar disorder of the public authorities. There appears to be a clear awareness and consciousness faced with the cultural values that infuse the landscape of the city of Soria and which confer a greater sense of heritage upon it. The Town Council of Soria acknowledged as much in March 2006, when it approved the *Plan General de Ordenación Urbana* [General Plan for Urban Planning], whose primary objective is "the defence of cultural heritage and the natural environment and landscape of the City". However, the projects that it has set in motion demonstrate quite the opposite.

The cultural landscape of the Duero constitutes the image that Soria presents to the world and that is recognised by visitors and scholars and is an unquestionable asset to be protected, above and beyond utopian or "gilt" industrial dreams in an age of unmerciful delocalization without scruples. An intelligent city should be aware of the singular and exceptional nature of its cultural patrimony, combined with natural, historical, magical and literary elements and should accept it as one of the principal riches of the city of Soria.

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