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Extreme viticulture:
from a cultural landscape to an economic
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The "Ruta del vino de Gran Canaria"

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Abstract. Here we present the "Ruta del vino de Gran Canaria" as a cultural project that aims to: a) make perceivable the work of the winegrowers; b) exploit the value of the wine produced on the island, and c) preserve the island's wine cultural heritage and make it profitable. The process to realize the "Ruta" is based on two pillars already presented by the authors at previous CERVIM conferences: the first is Landscapital i.e. the landscape as a means of production; the second is the mapping of the productive viticultural landscape of Gran Canaria with heroic viticultural practices. The project started in 2017 promoted by the Council of the Primary Sector and Food Sovereignty of the *Cabildo de Gran Canaria* and its process is developed to 2019 from 2020 thanks to LEADER funding. The "Ruta" has been certified in 2021 and now involves 72 partners related to the wine culture and promotion for a total vine-growing area of 210 hectares scattered all over the island. These numbers provide an agile measure of the landscape fragmentation and reflect the "structural" difficulty to cultivate. To overcome such difficulties, the vine growers developed inventive agronomic practices that integrated into the cultural heritage of the island. These characteristics are reflected in its unique viticultural landscape illustrated by the vine-growers and the wine-makers of the "Ruta". And, to make this link between culture, landscape, and wine even more significant, the motto "Hacemos vinos y embotellamos paisajes" (We produce wines and we put the landscape in the bottle) was coined. To conclude, we believe that the theoretical foundations found in the "Ruta del Vino de Gran Canaria" can be profitably used to enhance wine production, preserve the traditional viticultural landscape and raise awareness of the high-quality products of the island's primary sector.

Introduction

During the 5th CERVIM conference, we proposed the landscape as a "tool" to exploit the values of the productions in "structurally difficult" territories such as - for example - the terraced vineyards. We have shown that the landscape is comparable to a means of production: we coined the term "Landscapital" to explain the practical value of the landscape - the result of the tireless work of vine growers shaping a territory - to obtain positive economic margins for producers in the face of terrific higher costs of production (Zottele *et al.*, 2107). The aim was to identify the elements that could elicit a "resistance" to abandonment by the locals due to a) the forcing of the post-globalized economy and b) the massive obliteration of the traditional viticultural landscape (to introduce

mechanization) due to a renewed interest in steep slope and high-altitude vineyards.

Far from being a complete economic theory, the Landscapital has been developed in the Alps, in the Pyrenees, and in the Canary Islands: it represents a conceptual framework that aims to make evident those cultural and social elements and allow for an "equity" between productive territories, often adjoining and in more or less latent competition. Moreover, similar studies reinforced our work about Landscapital (Fedato *et al.*, 2017; Strub *et al.*, 2017, Galetto *et al.*, 2017). Starting from the work of González Santana *et al.* (2017), in 2018, we injected into the Landscapital the concept of "artealization" (Roger, 2007), so transforming the Landscapital into a methodological tool for interpreting the structure and dynamics of the viticultural landscape through the analysis of the effects of economic, social, and environmental forcing and the related counteractions put in place by the society, by the communities and, in this case, by vine

growers at three different scales: structural, relational and ergonomic (Zottele *et al.*, 2021). We, therefore, decided to bend the theoretical method to the realization of the “Ruta del Vino de Gran Canaria” (RVGC) to enhance not only the wine production but the culture of the wine strongly influenced by the cultural landscape of the island. To realize this vision, we considered how the RVGC, as a new “relational system” can be rooted in the structural, economic forcing (one of them is the prevailing business/touristic model) up to the effects on the working methods, and therefore on the “ergonomic scale”, of all those involved (vine-growers, winemakers, tour guides, distributors ...)

Theoretical framework and operational concepts

The Landscapital is a tool to understand the values perceived by the locals, the ones shaping the landscape of their territory, to make these values emerge so as to match the perceived values of the visitors by identifying identitarian *landmarker* for the Gran Canarian viticulture and wine-making.

At the present day, the D.O. “Vinos de Gran Canaria” insists on the whole island: we can find the geographical delimitation and the territorial scope both in the Specification (ICCA, 2009) and in the Regulation (ICCA, 2014). Moreover, in both official documents, a special mention is made of the “Monte Lentiscal” for its historical values, the ethnographic heritage, the wine tradition, the quality of grape production, and the specific characteristics of the wines. All these characteristics represent those values (the intrinsic component of the Landscapital) that should meet the values of the visitors (the intrinsic component of the Landscapital).

A detailed description of the iconic value of the traditional viticultural landscape and the culture of wine-making in Monte Lentiscal can be found in the work of Gonzalez Santana (2018). The exotic landscape of volcanoes, vineyards and wines have been described, painted and pictured by scientists (geologists and botanists) visiting the isle in the end of the XIX century. In addition, in the 40s the “Bodega San Juan” pioneered the enotourism in the island followed by many wineries that offered accommodations to the english tourists. This touristic offer fell into crisis in the 60s with the advent of mass tourism and, despite the sporadic re-proposals, did not have the hoped-for success. So, in 2017, in the whole Gran Canaria only 7 wineries were oriented to enotourism, but only 5 met the national standard. The other wineries had no spaces dedicated to tourists or had no interest in enotourism (SpeGC, 2017).

Now, Monte Lentiscal suffers for those “structural difficulties” that could be tackled using the Landscapital to enhance that “territorial equity” in respect to neighboring wine-growing areas where high yields and lower production costs can be sought. For example, not all the viticultural production of the island is reclaimed as D.O. “Vinos de Gran Canaria”. Some

productions, mainly of international variety, adhere to a broader D.O. “Islas Canarias”. Instead, the aim of the insular D.O. is to enhance the wine-making from local varieties, for example *Listán negro* and *Listán blanco*, because the wines can reflect the heterogeneity of the pedoclimatic conditions of each Canary islands and can therefore rely on strong identitarian *landmarker* at ergonomic scale.

So, what are these *landmarker* that will promote the exploitation of the landscape as an added value for the wine price? The first thing to note is that the viticulture of Gran Canaria is not immediately perceptible to a visitor. Yet the first evidence of local viticulture and its wines can be traced back to centuries ago and this heritage, as written before, has been already used by the winery to meet some touristic demands. One of the most visible and peculiar elements on an ergonomic scale are the “lagares” strong symbols of preindustrial wine-making. This system, shown in Figure 1, has been used for both private or participatory grape pressing (so, is an emerging value on the relational scale) and can be found in several places on the island. In Monte Lentiscal the wineries are built with the characteristic blue stones excavated in the cave of Arucas and the *lagares* are made of “tea”, the duramen of *Pinus canariensis* (Solís Robaina, 2012). In the Landscapital conceptual framework these tools and places should not be considered relics from the past, but living elements of the identity of the culture of wine and products of the island.

Starting from this iconic element it is possible to go further up - through the relational scale - among each pressing center and the network of connected vineyards which remain largely linked to the historical vocation for vine growing and wine making. In these places we have to deal with a multifaceted viticulture, with both traditional (prostrate) and modern (espalier) forms of cultivation and in the same vineyard more varieties can coexist. 24 out of 33 autochthonous cultivars present in all the Canary Islands are cultivated in Gran Canaria and some of them are in threatened with extinction. Therefore this is the first “intrinsic” element on the ergonomic scale and a tangible *artefact* *in situ* by the vine growers as a “neatly disordered multi-cultivar viticulture”, so distant from the classic images of the European viticulture. This *landmarker* is strongly associated with another element, this time perceivable on the structural scale, which is *volcanism*. This element, which is traditionally found in viticulture in soils of volcanic origin, in Gran Canaria presents itself as the “presence of the volcanoes”, both as calderas and in the subsidence of the soil, such as for example in the caldera de Bandama (which also assumes other historical-cultural values for the island besides viticulture). Opposed to the “fire” of the volcanoes, *water* is a structural value to be promoted is water in her manifold manifestations: as *mar de nubes* which fosters the privileged climatic conditions for viticulture and - going back down to the level of the relational scale - in the irrigation transport and management system, *heredad de agua*, which has fundamentally

modeled the spatial distribution of agriculture and island farming through the construction of a immense network of canals and brilliant and creative “ergonic-scaled” water supply systems.

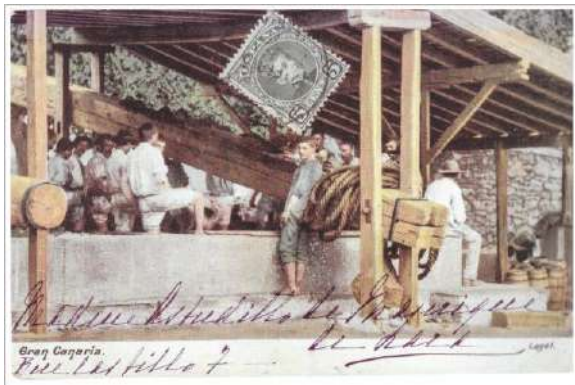


Figure 1. The collective grape pressing system in the *lagar* in a postcard, so an example of *artearialization in visu*. Printed by Künzli Hermanos, Barcelona, 1903

A further element of the structural scale are the *barrancos*: the deep incisions of the volcanic flanks by the erosive processes of the wind and water and these protected areas are suitable for cultivation. In the context of the viticultural landscape, these elements also represent the natural texture of the living, work and transport spaces of the island community becoming a strong ergonic landmarker on a relational scale. In this case the *artearialization in visu* exploits the historical element of the journey, with paths that winds along the *barrancos*: the tourists, like the first scientists who went to discover the island, are guided by information that they resume the style of the notebooks of the original travel notes (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The logo of RVGC is visible at the centre of the image (point E). The specimen of the reproduction of the historical notebooks of the travelers is shown at point F and G.

Lastly, *Roque nublo* is, par excellence, the landmarker on the structural scale: the symbolic association with local products is the pivot of the *artearialization in visu* for the RVGC (Figure 3).



Figure 3. *The Roque nublo* on the background, the pivotal landmarker at structural scale from which the *barrancos*, and so the agricultural landscape, irradiate. In the foreground, a vineyard is visible during the harvest

Evidently, the set of *landmarker* that can convey to the visitor the intrinsic values of the viticulture of Gran Canaria differ dramatically from those that can be used for most of the continental viticulture and this is a tempting opportunity for the construction of identity. So, among all *artearialization in visu*, the most synthetical is clearly the RVGC logo: the image resembles both the movement of the wine in the glass and the shape of the island, with shapes reminiscent of a volcano, a sun, the movement of the lava, the waves of the ocean (Figure 2).

The Ruta del Vino de Gran Canaria: the present

According to the World Tourism Organization, enotourism stems from "gastronomic tourism" combining the services to the tourists with the promotion and the sale of the local goods from the primary sector (the wine). The *Asociación Española de Ciudades del Vino* (ACEVIN) and its brand, the *Ruta del Vino de España* (RVE), collects regions that aim to promote the territories of wine productions as tourist destinations.

According to ACEVIN, a successful "Ruta del Vino" is an ordered set of interconnected elements (a system) in which the relationships and the commitments between the elements (wineries, restaurants, hotels, museums, companies...) guarantee the functioning and archiving of some common goals. This whole relationships network represents the intrinsic component of the Landscapital at the structural scale. The wine tourism destination (the final goal) is defined once five subsystems have been created and each subsystem evolves into three phases: 1) the creation and launch of the product, 2) the development, and 3) the consolidation as a product. Each phase lasts two years and is certified by ACEVIN.

The RVGC is now in its second phase: it has a legal entity as a non-profit association and its members (wineries, shops, hotels...) follow the guidelines drawn by the Directorate of ACEVIN. The Operating Group (GO) of the LEADER project has become now the Board of Directors. Two additional members of the Board represent the local guides and tour operators, and the other represents the restaurants and the specialized shops. Lastly, there are two "protector members" for the project, the *Consejería de Sector*

Primario y Soberanía Alimentaria and the *Sociedad de Promoción Económica de Gran Canaria* (SPEGC): this category includes those who, bringing economic resources and projects, will guarantee the life of the RVGC also after the conclusion of the LEADER project. To maintain the focus of this project on the preservation of the traditional viticultural landscape and the enhancement of the quality of the insular wines, the president and vice-presidency of the Board represent the D.O. Vinos de Gran Canaria and the *Federación Insular del Sector Vitivinícola de Gran Canaria* (VINIGRAN).

Obviously, the guidelines drawn by ACEVIN must be adapted to regional, insular and local regulations with a particular sensibility to preserve the identity of the spaces and the quality of the services that should reflect the insular cultural traits: we used the existing peninsular routes as a reference but using the Landscapital to identify those material and immaterial landmarker that suits for Gran Canaria at every three scales encompassed by the Landscapital tool.

In fact, the five purposes of the association act at different scales: a) promote coordinated enotourism policies in the Gran Canaria area (structural scale); b) coordinate the tourist partners and wine producers of Gran Canaria to establish a policy of cooperation and promotion of synergies in all actions, making all agents aware of the development of wine tourism (relational scale); c) participate in the promotion and revitalization of wine culture at the island, regional, national and international level (from ergonomic to structural scale); d) promote and manage the development and implementation of established management requirements, to configure a quality product and destination in this wine region (ergonic scale); and e) obtain as many distinctions to give prestige to the territory of the D.O. Vinos de Gran Canaria (ergonic scale).

We expect that the touristic and enology sub-sectors will be the most dynamic: their role is to be visitable resources showing the natural and cultural heritage of Gran Canaria. Beside the regulations that adhere to RVE, a management system is needed that has the maximum representativeness and authority among the partners: each founding and protective partner have their elected representative in the managing authority. The managing authority, sanctioning the rules and applying them, determines the evolution of the strategies at the insular scale, shaping the cultural and viticultural landscape with the same magnitude of the natural forcing or the urban planning. Due to this role, the managing authority shapes the Landscapital at the structural scale, while the partners of the wine subsystem will decline this forcing by organizing themselves on a relational scale and each one on an ergonic scale.

Again, from the point of view of the Landscapital, the three subgroups depending from the managing authority (planning, destination and marketing) play an important role as they realize the *artrealization in visu*: they must find the proper way to transform the intrinsic values of the Landscapital into extrinsic

values for the visitors. Aside the main mission of training for the improvement of the RVE product, designing and proposing new experiences for the consumer, the quality control of the shops and the brand image...) there is the promotion of the intrinsic Landscapital component linked to "transversal themes" such as environmental sustainability and conservation of the local cultural heritage. This is a crucial point for two aspects: the first is that these subsystems bear the burden of choosing some of these values and how and therefore the activity must be supported by a team of multidisciplinary professionals - coordinated by the Management Department who will choose which are the competitive values and which will be the awareness raising actions with the locals (intrinsic component of the Landscapital). The second aspect concerns the RVGC as a product: the Ruta is in competition with other destinations both nationally and internationally and therefore must find in the cultural peculiarity of the island those elements of distinction that make it attractive compared to other RVs, also keeping I realize that the D.O. Vinos Gran Canaria is a production area limited in terms of surfaces and volumes and much "younger" than other peninsular D.O.s.

At the moment of writing, RGCV counts 73 members. 49 partners are physical places that can be visited by locals and tourists. 11 are service-oriented activities (mainly in the touristic sector) that help in raising the visibility of RGCV.

8 partners are foundations, associations, public bodies, and organizations that actively contribute to the project. In particular, the wine subsystem consists of 11 wineries, 2 *bochinches* (a traditional cooking space in the cellar), an interpretation center, and an open vineyard with a wine shop. 5 wineries are listed as aspiring partners, awaiting to be compliant with the Route recommendations.

Among all the partners, the wineries are those that have undergone the most significant changes switching their focus from being oriented to the primary sector to including services for the visitors: both vineyards and cellars are now reception spaces, integrated into the viticultural landscape, often open directly to the vineyards, and in open-spaces. These spaces aim to connect directly the visitors to the productive spaces as the result of the daily work of wine-growers and the tirelessly choices that shaped their vineyards (*artrealization in situ*). Is precisely at this level that the intrinsic values of the Landscapital at the ergonic scale will mutate to extrinsic values by using *artrealization in visu*. And being all the wineries somewhat different, all together are concurring to shape the identitarian viticultural landscape of the island.

Moreover, the cellars have become direct sales points for wines and products from the primary sector. Each winemaker exhibits its wine and must expose information about the price and characteristics of the wine and the productive landscape in at least one foreign language. A similar strategy involving wineries

represents the shaping of a tangible component of the Landscapital at the relational scale.

In July, 2021 the Ruta del vino de Gran Canaria (RVGC) has completed its first phase (the creation) and has been promoted to be the 33th "Rutas del Vino de España" (RVE) and the first certified by ACEVIN outside the continent.

So, with the starting of the enotouristic activities, other partners linked to ACEVIN asked to rely on the created infrastructure to promote both the culture of the wine and other products of the primary sector (at the time of writing, cheese and honey) by making available physical spaces (traditional local markets, cultural ateliers, information points and interpretation centers for tourists...) to promote the RVGC brand. This strengthens our idea that the Landscapital is a flexible tool to apply to the products of the primary sector, when selecting a proper set of shared landmarker (mainly at the structural scale) and building distinctive descriptors at the ergonomic scale. In addition, RVGC is a partner of a new LEADER project, *Gran Canaria Sostenible II: ahorro energético y de agua*, focusing on water saving: another time, like we underlined in our works, the strategy for the use of water as a shared resource between various economic sectors becomes a very powerful landmarker on a relational scale, this time with a modern declination (Zottele *et al.*, 2021).

The Ruta del Vino de Gran Canaria: the future

"Hacemos vinos y embotellamos paisajes" (We make wine and we put the landscape in the bottle) is the motto of the RVGC. It effectively summarizes the Landscapital approach that, firstly, has proven effective to unite the intentions of numerous partners of the insular primary sector. Not only, the conceptual framework of the Landscapital made possible to conceive initiatives that are not directly attributable to those of the original LEADER project: the ergonomic landmarkers linked to the wide ampelographic spectrum of the island and to the different forms of vine cultivation has allowed to propose educational activities aimed at to people with special needs, transforming an element of the landscape into not only an economic value for the primary sector, but into a social value.

In addition to being the first RVE outside the European continent, in July, 2021 the RVGC has been prized to be the best cooperative project for the touristic innovation by the Network of Centers for Innovation and Enterprise Devolvement of Gran Canaria (CIDE).

The COVID-19 pandemic, if on the one hand has negatively affected the tourist flow and therefore the possibility of massively test the effectiveness of the *artealization in visu* of the intrinsic values of the Gran Canaria viticultural landscape, on the other hand gave us enough time to strengthen the alliances and the network of relationships necessary to make the RVGC solid beyond the co-financing by EU. This has led to an enlargement of the scope of the RVGC that has

taken on a cultural dimension and has gone beyond the scope of wine promotion aiming to: a) make the winegrower work in the vineyards a perceivable marker of the landscape b) exploit the value of the wines produced in the island, and c) preserve the island's wine cultural heritage and make it profitable. However, already in the third quarter of 2021, with the partial resumption of tourist routes on Gran Canaria, RVGC proved to be a competitive destination compared to the other wine tourism destinations of the archipelago. At this stage we are collecting data to better frame the strengths and weaknesses of our implementation and to quantify the added value (in economic terms) of the RVGC for the wineries and the bonus price that the tourist is willing to pay, if any.

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