

FRAY BENTOS DECLARATION– November 2017 ⁱ

The *5th Ibero-American Meeting on Heritage Management*, focusing on the theme "*Cultural landscapes and citizen participation*", was held between November 20 and 23, 2017, in the city of Fray Bentos (Department of Rio Negro, Uruguay). Fray Bentos is a particularly relevant location as it is the site of historical local livestock facilities (first, for meat concentrates, then preserved meat, for frozen meat in the 1920s, in addition to other derivatives). The *Giebert et Compagnie* emerged in 1863 to obtain "meat extract", which then became the *Liebig Extract of Meat Company* and, later, the *Anglo* factory. The latter developed an extensive industrial and urban complex, based on the *company town* model, already tested in Europe. In 2015, the "Fray Bentos Cultural-Industrial Landscape" was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Cultural landscape should be understood as a fragment of a large planetary puzzle, which includes the *Fray Bentos industrial landscape*. But the concept of landscape also refers to fields and farms that supplied the *company town*, i.e. the successive "layers" of the production process –all integrated today-, the port and the river, plus the adjoining city. These productive dynamics brought about a cultural landscape full of memories and stories that became part of its fabric, and they became inseparable from a broader area: that of the Lower Uruguay River. These geographical spheres of work therefore extend beyond administrative limits: they require plurinational readings, such as between Argentina and Uruguay, as in this case.

Holding this *Meeting* against the very backdrop that UNESCO has recently added to the *World Heritage List*, leads to a direct contact with the site, enabling to shed light on its designation category -the *Fray Bentos Cultural-Industrial Landscape*- as well as its relevance. However, this designation needs to be specified and explained further. Thus, an essential objective of the meeting was to build an overall understanding, by integrating the plural elements that justified the value it has been given. We examined how to design effective strategies for citizens to participate in all stages of a patrimonialization process. This process also aims at supporting socially equitable and economically sustainable development; a comprehensive improvement of the living conditions of the communities involved; and a balanced and friendly relationship with the environment and its natural substrate.

In this context, and as a result of the consensus reached -that attempted to integrate a wide range of approaches reflected in the talks- we present the following thoughts based on a review of conclusions. These reflections aim at improving the theoretical framework as well as serving as a "toolbox" to face the challenges of "changing times" based on a renewed vision of heritage management. Our approach is closely linked to

UNESCO's criteria and references, though it has a local focus, based on our concrete circumstances, whether regional, national or Ibero-American.

I.- Landscape understood as a cultural construction

Countryside, country, countryman: this is perhaps the most direct linguistic adaptation of what the human being, in a broad sense, sees, uses and transforms, thus constructing identity and collective memory. Landscape is tectonic. Climate, food and ways of consuming them turn into the raw materials of technologies and architectures. In short, a landscape is a place of reproduction and social life, with the power to form a kaleidoscopic image of belonging and self-esteem, generating a *sense of place identity* and *belonging*: an indispensable cultural reference in today's world of globalizing dynamics. A specific territory gathers a wealth of inherited functions, considered an indivisible whole that shapes the *cultural landscape*. Patrimonial accumulation, layer by layer, century by century, although attributed at times to certain social groups, ultimately represents an entirely collective heritage.

In this sense, referring to landscape as culture and suggesting ways of preserving its value also implies opening up to the dynamics of change and incorporations that add to its territorial legacy. Unfounded ideas and intervention proposals that aim ultimately at fame and short-term enrichment put the value of pre-existing heritage at risk and must be left aside. In this way, efficiently managing heritage comes with huge technical and political challenges, but also social and economic ones that should never be left out of the management process. The concept of managing a cultural landscape brings about this broader and more complex vision. It is necessarily linked to citizen participation in its cultural enrichment as well as its economic use. Indeed, it can be an effective mechanism to support conversions to new productive sectors, improving the living conditions of a society that is the depository of heritage. Building a cultural landscape is an atavistic task that belongs to each local society, and it is each local society's responsibility to manage it correctly, for the benefit of its conservation and own legacy.

II.- The need to change discourse opposing people and Nature

In the last century, the epistemological break between science and humanities created a minefield for managing territories of natural and cultural value. These opposing visions either classify any human action in the environment as "pillage", or on the contrary, applaud interventions for the benefit of the economy, while remaining indifferent to any impact exerted on the area, be it a natural or built ecosystem, and being especially oblivious to pre-existing social structures. This divide in disciplinary discourse led to separating related administrative fields of management: natural aspects became environmental and the cultural side became social. Managers distanced themselves and legislation gained remoteness.

Contemporary philosophical political discourse, which aims at managing a sustainable territory, requires a joint reading of both the meaning of the human being and structures as a single unit. Dissociating these approaches leads to a dead end. A humanized space can only be understood adopting a holistic approach, based on the constant interaction between people and Nature, leading to a new concept of cultural landscape.

This new methodological perspective can be greatly enriched by a critical review of the universalist reading of the Renaissance, or the erudite vision of the poets and scientists of the late nineteenth century, while consciously confronting the widespread nominalist paradigm advocating particular and differentiated approaches.

International structures such as UNESCO can play an important role in promoting these conceptual discussions, by defining a new theoretical and methodological framework. This framework could apprehend all components included in the *cultural landscape* built by human beings, whether agricultural, industrial or tertiary, as a creative and enriching sum of natural assets and human activities in permanent interaction, thus dynamic and changing.

III.- The challenge of complex and transversal thinking in managing landscapes

Thinking about landscape as a frozen space in time is the least realistic management proposal in this heritage category. As for any inheritance, the landscape must be recognized by identifying its constitutive values, of whatever nature they may be (environmental or anthropized). On that basis, we must identify those exceptional attributes, the values that distinguish them, as well as the risks threatening their existence. But at the same time, every landscape affords a space for current life, so management strategies must leave room for new development opportunities, as well as for new interpretations of the inherited landscape, and improvements to quality of life. A geologist's technical perspective is as important as that of a sociologist's complex view, that of an economist's rational approach, a historian's profound vision as well as the idealistic view of an urbanist or the considerations of timeliness and possibility proper to politicians.

In this way, heritage management methods, in addition to being sustainable and participatory, must seek a transversal, multidisciplinary approach using various techniques to ensure proper management of heritage using the *cultural landscape* approach. Plural teams, formed by different technical profiles, are shown to be the most suitable for this kind of management.

At the same time, informed and committed social participation requires sponsorship. This type of action is not possible without collective patrimonial appropriation of the values that are sought to be conserved. Education and communication are key in this process, and should involve new information and communication technologies.

To put it briefly, you could say that "managing is making things possible". Managers need to develop certain competencies enabling them to act as mediators, articulators, and settle conflicts among a wide range of actors that may even have conflicting interests. To make this possible, it is necessary to follow a work methodology that allows defining objectives and indicators by measuring results, analyzing contexts, analyzing strategic alternatives, making decisions and being willing to evaluate those results in a continuous cycle. Otherwise, the process may be reduced to wishful thinking.

IV.- The participation of actors coexisting with the patrimonial landscape

People, the "countrymen", are a substantial part of the landscape. Therefore, interpretations emanating from them of the value of the landscape's components are precious. Their continued presence -the existence of living landscapes- is thus fundamental, both for natural and cultural heritage. When this relationship disappears, whether because of loss of social memory -"*collective Alzheimer's*"- or because of the bedazzlement of dubious short-term opportunities, heritage landscape management is affected. Inhabitants, who coexist on a daily basis with the patrimonial landscape, can, when their initiatives are properly organized, facilitate adopting protective actions and sustainably developing the landscape. They constitute the first line of work, whether they are engaged in conservation, reconstruction, or discovering new connections of belonging, identity and memory in their relation to the landscape and its components. This framework of (active, committed and dynamic) community and participatory action must be clearly reflected in patrimonial legislation supporting the conservation and enhancement of the patrimonial landscape.

Therefore, any scheme aiming at managing cultural landscape should begin by establishing channels for proactive and constant citizen participation, based on smooth transmission of technical knowledge to citizens and the reciprocal reception of public opinion on the matter. Information and communication technologies (ICTs), together with sectoral and collective participation workshops, have proven to represent useful, easily accessible and high-performance processes.

Memory is cumulative, not regressive. Memory helps to recognize one's path, but beyond this, memory helps to know which path to follow. Any previous readings of a landscape are different from that of multiple contemporary visions (of its citizens and foreigners); however, like a woven fabric, a landscape brings together all the threads. A summation of visions should converge in agreements that aim at valuing space as a collective place of life. This appreciation also implies understanding that any process that turns a landscape or its components into heritage will encounter different interest groups. These differences should be faced through negotiations rather than denial. Nonetheless, agreements should ultimately help local people improve their working conditions and their quality of life (housing, services and adequate equipment). Strictly

cultural or tourist patrimonial strongholds benefit only a few and favor processes of social segregation that, in the long run, lead to loss of value as collective reference, legacy and memory.

V.- The site's sustainability: from the ideal to the possible

All process of patrimonialization of a cultural landscape (natural spaces and human actions) requires important contributions from public funds. Complete privatization of patrimonial assets included in a cultural landscape is not the most suitable solution, since it excludes the local population from its use and enjoyment. Privatization can turn heritage into a consumer product and, by doing so, consciousness of the common good and shared memory is lost.

This does not mean, however, that an adequate balance between the public good and its partial private use should be forbidden. We cannot envisage either that invested public resources do not also come with expected economic returns and social impact, in the medium rather than in the long term, enabling to cover the cost of use and sustainable conservation of the site. At the same time, it is desirable that this public investment be transformed into social capital and public site image, while adding value to other associated products and services in the environment. The process will surely be slower than mediating the privatization of its management. Moreover, monetary resources will never be sufficient. This is where creativity and collective actions can help complete the winning side of the process. When developing a cultural landscape, messianic, hyperbolic and short-term ideas must be avoided at all costs. On the contrary, we must bet on the added value of complete actions, based on a variety of proposals, which may be temporary and always reversible, as a more complex process, but at the same time a more desirable one to follow.

Ideally, heritage built by all, over time, should retain its collective and vital essence. Thus, good landscape heritage management should insist on implementing initiatives of local and popular scope. If cultural landscape becomes a consumer product, it will lose its importance.

VI.- Regulatory gaps: a Gordian knot

A Gordian knot is a difficulty that cannot be solved, a difficult obstacle to overcome or a difficult solution or outcome. In the context of *cultural landscape* and its management, nothing could be closer to a Gordian knot than the gaps, if not the contradictions, of the regulations that govern it. In the Ibero-American tradition, laws always fall behind the real dynamics of society. Their adaptations are slow, and legal processes to establish protection measures are complex. They are sometimes affected by intentions that are not entirely aimed at safeguarding them. In all instances, the regulatory framework should be made more agile to meet the needs of managing *cultural landscapes* with due

diligence. Management should not resort to using creative solution shortcuts with little development and legal support. On the contrary, the management of heritage, and in this case, heritage as *cultural landscape*, must be fully included in the processes of legal framework reviews, so that they are recognized as a patrimony the Nation must safeguard.

In today's context of loopholes, the advantage is that current laws can facilitate favorable interpretations of heritage, through little-known paths and rarely used agreements. This can apply to exceptional actions, in the case of urgently required protection of the *cultural landscape*. But such measures should not become the norm, and a regular/ordinary process -not an extraordinary one- should apply to ensure proper management. It is necessary to urge competent authorities to consider agile legal measures for managing heritage and, specifically, for actively supporting *cultural landscapes*.

VII.- The patrimonialization of landscape to build memory, not a stage set

Looking for a balance between living memory and a thematic stage set is one of the most complex challenges in managing cultural landscapes. The tendency to stage redesigns deforms what we imagine should be the ideal appearance of the site. This extended practice is based on the fact that image prevails over discourse in social networks and contemporary media. While this process is unsuitable for any heritage asset, it is unacceptable in the case of cultural landscape. A landscape is a space for collective life, production and social re-production work, for multiple and kaleidoscopic memory. There is always some component undergoing a process of transformation that escapes the Cartesian logic of the established rules. Any attempt to fossilize a cultural landscape, freeze it in a past stage and, therefore, remove it from vital contemporary dynamics must be questionable when managing schemes in this patrimonial category. Constant linkage is what keeps the memory of the site alive, its re-construction as a themed stage set tends to break it. Therefore, conservation strategies for cultural landscapes should bring measures together to keep memory alive among the heirs/depositories of the legacy. Thus, in these cases, designing "memorials" would seem more beneficial than "site museums", although undoubtedly, both have their own advantages.

VIII. Tourism: an opportunity and a challenge

Traditional bipolar approaches in the relationship between heritage and tourism must be overcome. The important role of tourism in generating employment and wealth is undeniable; but so is the heavy impact that its excesses are causing both in protected areas and in urban spaces for collective use. Systemic regulation of tourism imposes itself as a challenge. However, the equation is not easy to solve, especially if we only address tourism's inherent capacity to generate huge economic and social wealth.

Because of this, political control over this activity has been relaxed, while public authorities have in fact sometimes been directly supportive, because of generated *opportunities*. They put off controlling the threats that tourism entails, when left exclusively in the hands of economic capital, to a later date.

It seems that the first people to react to these excesses are local inhabitants themselves, who seem unwilling to "sell their souls to the devil, but maybe to negotiate with him".

According to the World Tourism Organization -WTO-, this issue is already part of existing problems in the sector. For this reason, in 1999, a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism was approved, to be disseminated among the people responsible for heritage, requesting managers to follow the code. In this way, once obvious antagonisms deriving from "bad practices" are overcome, UNWTO itself could be an excellent partner to carry out reliable investigations, design areas of trial and error and disseminate necessary guidelines for managing cultural heritage. Tourism represents a fundamental partner in contemporary proposals for economic sustainability. However, management proposals, committed to the true conservation of heritage and, in this case, to safeguarding the memory of cultural landscape are needed. This challenge and obligation belongs to site managers, who should make proposals and negotiate with players in the tourism sector. They should interact with them as mediators between consumers of the "tourist product" and local society that considers it as "living memory". Management, based on knowledge of patrimonial assets and their value, should generate proposals to direct the good use (as opposed to exploitation) of the cultural landscape. When the tourism business is unrestricted, or is only subject to a handful of "good practice guidelines", it has a worrying and repeated tendency of misuse. "*Tourism yes, but how*" should be the question. The answer to the dilemma should be adapted to each specific case and reality.

IX.- The challenge of integrating and disseminating academic efforts

Despite rapid academic progress in the use of Internet in research and heritage documentation, it seems that efforts made in the Spanish language to create connected networks of strategies, reflections and guidelines for heritage management have not met public requirements yet. Results based on wide and immediate access to studies, files, inventories or image banks are still limited. There are also many papers and other academic texts produced by meetings such as the one held in Fray Bentos.

Conceptual, methodological and technical changes in asset conservation studies happen quickly. However, spaces or processes for networked academic collaboration, as well as for disseminating results, are still anchored in the past century. Although it is laudable and desirable to publish results of research on heritage management in printed

book form or journals, nowadays, access to information in real time through digital text-hypertext is an academic priority.

It is possible and desirable that agreements be generated to build information base networks (restricting some fields when research is still underway). Therefore, direct management and academic reflection should provide as much information as possible to use other intermediaries, such as educators and communicators, for its dissemination. Scholarship behind closed doors and greedy accumulation of information does not help to conserve assets alone. Sponsors need to be found to process digital designs of texts, partial editions and pages open to the public. An open network format would allow academics, technicians, disseminators and final consumers of heritage to share the effort. Academic discourse must be disclosed over networks and be accessible to the whole public. There may be several versions, with more or less complex speeches and references. However, the contemporary world and, with it, the current management of heritage, integrated and committed to society, requires quick, instant and sufficient access to information. This is another great challenge that a modern management of dynamic, changing and fragile cultural landscapes has to face.

The work accomplished in the *Cultural Landscape of Fray Bentos* and its presentations, is essential: it helps to reflect upon and build sustainable cultural landscape management, taking into account broad and fruitful citizen participation.

ⁱ This document was translated by the “Grupo de Investigación en Geografía Humana de la Universidad de Alicante” (Group of Research in Human Geography of the University of Alicante)