Human occupation and formation of the cultural landscape in Galicia’s Atlantic Islands National Park

The project we present here studies the processes of formation and transformation of the cultural landscape of the Atlantic Islands National Park in Galicia, Spain.

The project focuses on identifying and studying the socio-cultural and environmental processes, and especially the processes of interaction between society and the environment that have created and continue to transform the landscape of the islands.

These studies are directed by the Institute of Heritage Sciences (Incipit) - CSIC.

The proposal is interdisciplinary and includes a range of scientific contributions from the fields of anthropology, history, archaeology and paleo-environmental studies.

In this way we are able to:

* Characterise the cultural heritage of the islands
* Identify and study the landscape
* Create an inventory of their cultural heritage and study it
* Identify the processes behind how the landscape was created, and how it has changed

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

The archaeological analysis of the landscape included in this study is aimed at documenting the formative process, its chronology and its transformations.

The prospection work carried out has made it possible to identify different types of human occupation in the islands over time.

Signs of occupation have been found that date from at least the Bronze Age until the eighteenth century, and which comprise an artificial space that was constructed over time.

Elements have been documented such as:

* Shallow deposits (islands of Sálvora, Cíes and Ons)
* Redbrack (island of Ons)
* Fortified settlements (islands of Sálvora, Cíes and Ons)
* Coastal settlements (islands of Sálvora, Cíes and Ons)
* Coastal defence and lookout points (islands of Cíes and Ons)
* Footprints of the agrarian landscape (islands of Cíes, Sálvora, Cíes and Ons)

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE

The aim of the ethnographic study is to understand the different types of cultural manifestations associated with the economic, social and symbolic activities that took place in an island environment. Participative observation and ethnographic interviews are allowing us to record the oral memory of the former and present-day inhabitants of the islands, as well as the activities associated with the traditional use of the space, the meanings and representations of these societies.

The islands as a system:

* Transit between the islands and the mainland: obtaining marine resources on the island, such as octopus and goose barnacles, and then selling them on the mainland. In the symbolic imagetum, the procession of the dead comes from the point closest to solid land, crossing over the sea to reach the island, and then finally disappear in it.

* Transit between the islands: the search for resources such as grass for livestock or firewood for cooking, brought from the island of Onza to the island of Ons.

* The cycles of subsistence: the complementarity and rotation of activities associated with the land and the sea represented a self-sufficient way of life and social organisation for the islanders.

* The landscape of abandonment, which can be seen in nearly all of the islands, in which the structures and other elements of the productive landscape, now in ruins, are a reflection of a highly active, diverse past.

CONCLUSIONS

Space, territory, identity

The integral analysis of the archaeological and ethnographic evidence allows us to understand the different occupation flows of the territory, and how the islands have been understood over time.

Insularity and exchange

* The islands are "non-isolated" but instead form a part of systems of exchange between them and the mainland.

* There are natural and artificial markers that indicate the method of maritime transit. These routes have been constantly maintained and renewed, as shown by the recent repaving of the Maritime route of the Way of St. James.

Occupation and territory

* The highest density of occupation identified is in the eastern part of the islands, looking towards the mainland (characterised in this region by the presence of casas).

* Periods of occupation and abandonment occurred constantly from prehistoric times until the 1970s. Only the island of Onza still has a stable population today. The dispersion of the population after the abandonment of Sálvora and Cíes has been currently studied.

Identity, resources and exploitation

* The types of occupations of the islands’ resources and the marine environment reveal a certain degree of uniformity at electronic scale. Traditional fishing, as well as the use of molluscs and areas used to cultivate marine resources today are indicative of this continuity.

* The processes of change in the landscape also serve to structure ways of thinking: since the Park was created, the identity of the landscape has evolved, and continues to do so.

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