

A new look at the mountain

Elvira Sanz Tolosana

Universidad Pública de Navarra, España / elvirasanztolosana@gmail.com

Abstract: The European rural world has experienced a deep transformation in the last decades, especially montane areas. In this paper we explore the main political and ideological processes that have favored the revaluation of montane areas. First, we analyze the institutional recognition of the key role they play in development of human life and its natural and structural handicaps. Secondly, we study the recent evolution of policies directed towards Spanish mountains, namely the Pyrenees. Finally, we look on the social representations of mountain. In this sense, we emphasize the postmodern gaze that includes the signs of rural imaginary.

Key words: mountain, Pyrenees, revaluation, postmodernism.

Resumen: El mundo rural europeo ha experimentado una transformación profunda en las últimas décadas, en especial las áreas de montaña. En este artículo vamos a explorar los principales procesos de cambio políticos e ideológicos que han impulsado la revalorización de los espacios de montaña. En primer lugar, analizamos el creciente reconocimiento institucional del papel que estas áreas juegan en el desarrollo de la vida humana y de los handicaps naturales y estructurales a los que se enfrentan. Enseguida abordamos desde una perspectiva histórica la evolución reciente de las políticas dirigidas a la montaña ibérica y más concretamente al Pirineo. Finalmente recorremos de forma breve la variedad de representaciones sobre la montaña subrayando especialmente la posmoderna que aglutina los signos del imaginario rural actual. Unos análisis y reflexiones procedentes de mi tesis doctoral "Identidad, montaña y desarrollo: los valles de Roncal, Salazar y Aezkoa".

Palabras clave: montaña, Pirineo, revalorización, posmodernismo.

Mountains represent a fourth part of the surface of our planet. Not only quantitatively important, since they influence life in so many ways; besides their mineral, water, forestal, agricultural and leisure resources, they exercise a noticeable influence on the weather and determine the course of historic and economic processes. We have waited until the end of the XX century however, to witness a growing institutional recognition of their key role in the development of human societies which, together with their revaluing, have restituted the mountain the place it deserves.

Institutional recognition of the mountain

The welcome speeches in most of the conferences and congresses about mountains distinguish their economic, cultural and spiritual meanings for mankind, and also remind the attendees and listeners that the life fabric they support contribute to everyone's wellbeing: highlanders and lowlanders. More than a half of mankind —four billion people— lives on the mountains wherefrom they obtain freshwater to produce food, electricity to run industries and mainly, to obtain potable water. Cordilleras are islands of cultural biodiversity and their fragility is extreme. “Regardless of our place of origin, regardless high or short are the hills and mountains of our countries; we all belong to the mountains. We all depend on them; we are linked to them and their effects echo on us, in ways which perhaps we have not conceived before” (Diouf, 2002).

Mountainous areas cover 24% of the terrestrial surface and hold 12% of the world population; despite their weight, mountainous regions have been characterized by being peripheral, isolated and far from the centers of economic power. Nevertheless, certain occurrences in recent years are trying to invert this tendency. In 1992, the UNCED Rio Summit approved Agenda 21, where in its Chapter 13 recognizes the importance of development in certain areas. A recognition reinforced with the designation of the year 2002 as the International Year of the Mountains by the UN General Assembly; the purpose is to secure the wellbeing of the mountain dwellers, by means of promoting the sustainable development of the montane ecosystems. But there are two necessary conditions for the countries to fulfill this objective: the first one is peace, and the second is alimentary security. It is in these zones where most of the armed conflicts in the world are unfolded, and where

some of the poorest populations and with the least alimentary security live. Without peace it is neither possible to reduce poverty nor hunger, without peace it is not even possible to think of sustainable development.

The mountain zones of the European Union (EU) have a common problem (economic decline, depopulation, marginalization, difficult access, etc.) as a consequence of the geographic, climatic, and infrastructure limitations, which their location carries. The European Parliament (2003) declares that it is necessary that their geophysical, cultural and economic peculiarities, which condition development and influence the ways of life of the inhabitants, are properly taken into account in the cohesion policy, recognizing the characteristics and valuing the specific potentialities. Likewise, it asks for the inclusion of a reference to the mountain regions in the regulations relative to Structural Funds, in the like of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), where said regions are explicitly mentioned (Article 17 of the regulation of EAGGF¹) for they are disfavored zones in the framework of agricultural activities. The European Parliament distinguishes that the principle of solidarity, fundament of community policy of cohesion, must be applied in a particular manner to the regions with evident geographic and structural disadvantages (insular, montane and sparsely populated regions), which can only be compensated with a horizontal structural policy. In this same sense, the European Commission has recognized the existence of regions in our case mountains), whose permanent natural handicaps limit their potential for development: slope, altitude, extreme temperatures. An added factor is that very often they are in the national and regional peripheries; largely, these areas are located at the margins of the national economies and political systems aside from the European markets, which has posed an additional obstacle in the Europe of the Nation-States where the border zones were the periphery and their development did not mean the main concern of their governors. The European Parliament considers it fundamental that the problems of these zones are dealt with in the framework of a transnational-transborder cooperation strategy able to overcome the inevitable fragmentation and the consequential inefficacy of a geographically limited approach. A final

¹ EAGGF (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund).

institutional recognition of the communitarian Europe is included in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.² To sum up, Europe requires an economic and demographic structure on the basis of a balanced use of its spaces; European montane regions, apart from the climate, geographic variety and the reclaim of their use as healing, resting and solacing places, show socioeconomic structures similar to one another, because of this they represent a unifying element inside the EU. Beyond the challenges faced at regional level, these zones have common perspectives to solve their problems.

The mountains in Europe are utterly important for the population in different aspects, being defined as the “undervalued ecological backbone of Europe”. In the first place, they are the main water suppliers of the continent, especially in summer (water towers) and with a special relevance in the Mediterranean and Balkan area; consequently, they are the source for the hydroelectric energy which is basically consumed far from these areas. Nonetheless, in spite the production costs are relatively low the environmental costs are frequently high. In the second place, the mountains are centers of biologic and cultural diversity that the shelter of most of the endangered species and home to numerous ethnic minorities; however, external influences and depopulation, in particular lack of young people, are undermining this millenary cultural diversity. Not only does this process affect local identities, but also the humanized landscapes, the crops cultivated or the food produced; in this sense, we currently witness an increasing valuing of products from the mountain, those which can only be produced in specific environments, both grown or not (herbs, wild mushrooms...), in what is considered a fundamental pillar for the future of these communities. Cultural heritage, high-quality products and landscapes are a growing attention pole for tourism. All in all, we witness the increasing recognition of the European

² Article III-220: in views of promoting the harmonious development of the Union, it will unfold and continue its action headed to reinforce its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union will try to reduce the difference between the development levels of the different regions and the delay of the least favored regions. Among the affected regions the rural ones will be given special attention, as well as the zones affected by industrial transition and which suffer grave and permanent natural or demographic disadvantages, such as northern regions with low population density and islands, trans-border and montane areas.

institutions and UN of the transcendental importance of preserving and developing mountains for and in the name of everyone's benefit.

The European mountain: natural and structural handicaps

In the European Union, mountain zones spread across a third part of the territory where more than 40 million people live; despite its reduced size, compared to other continents, Europe presents numerous widely spread cordilleras, because of this most countries have said mountain ranges, from the Scandinavian Peninsula to Balearic Islands or Cyprus, and from Portugal or Ireland to the Ural Mountains. In a space so vast, the climatic variations which range from oceanic to continental, in addition to localization factors, altitude, slope and orientation, create several microclimates. An extensive spectrum of physical combinations that presents us with a noticeable diversity of ecosystems and traditional agricultural uses; what is more, they are usually isolated and especially fragile zones as for their natural reserve and the richness of their biodiversity. These regions are a patrimony of Europe whose loss would cause great harm to the European society. The territories are rich, yet overly delicate; this is their specific character; rich because of their natural resources, the beauty of their landscapes, their varied floras and faunas, their unique ecosystems, their famous nature reserves, vital water, air, mineral resources, etcetera; rich because of their history and culture. Nevertheless any excess from excessive exploitation or abandonment from human activity can disturb the balance of the natural environment; any direct competence with more productive zones, any maladjustment of policies compromises their development; this plurality of environments, however, does not hide the specific and common issue of these European areas: geographic (difficult access, peripheral situation, etc.), demographic (depopulation, aging...) and economic difficulties (lack of infrastructure, very limited diversification potential, etc.); a set of interrelated elements that lead to proper and common characteristics of these zones and, at the time, to a multiplicity of situations.

Mountain zones are fundamentally differenced by their geophysical characteristics: altitude and slope. Because of their so stressed geographic conditions, montane regions have to face economic disadvantages in numerous activity fields; in this sense, the European Commission (2000,

2003) has recognized the existence of these natural handicaps that limit their development potential in a determinate way. Hence, it is considered that the impact of both orography and weather is decisive; the economic activity is restricted where terrain is really complicated and slopes steep; in agriculture, for instance, it is indisputable that the productivity of labor will always be lower than on a plain if motorized agricultural systems are utilized. There are also additional costs in other economy sectors related to isolation, lack of infrastructure or public services; the accessibility of terrain means that the cost of building and maintaining the infrastructure of transport is significantly higher than on a plain, and costs are frequently increased by the need to supply it with protections against outdoor conditions such as avalanches or landslides. In such a sense, accessibility to valleys is in general deficient; communication between them is worse, so it is easier to move toward the plain and from there to the adjacent valley. The lack of an easy physical access is due to the fact that populations are small and scattered across vast lands; thereby, the local population necessarily has to displace to obtain services, especially those of high level (hospitals or universities).

A key challenge for the population who lives in these areas is the comparative disadvantage in relation to all manner of infrastructures and services. This difficulty includes two aspects: being peripheral and restriction of access to services inside the montane region. Most of the montane regions are part of the national peripheries; they often are national or regional boundaries. Traditionally, the border region is where the road ends; this is to say, mountains are marginalized in the national economic and political systems. Being a periphery is not only no-accessibility, it also implies farness from the centers of political power or the economic capitals where the policies aimed at these zones are planned. In certain regions said marginality is or might be balanced or compensated by a strong regional government with certain autonomy (Bavaria, Scotland, Navarra...). Likewise, the development of bases or infrastructures that would allow or facilitate diversification is more expensive. Transport networks are essential to decrease the effects of being peripheral, facilitate the growing demographic flows and as well for the development of tourism as an important economic component.

Exploring this issue cannot obviate the contribution from the delimitation of mountain and the identification of massifs, including the definition of transition areas. The spatial-temporary functional bonds between both are a relevant factor; the high population within these transition areas reflects their role of service provision both for the plain and the mountain; the access to leisure opportunities, natural resources and energy sources from the montane area; access to markets which have favored the settling of many industries; the potential as residence localities, etc; a central role that is not exclusive to our times, but a historic characteristic (Munich in Bavaria, Milan and Turin in northern Italy...). The transition areas have crucial roles in providing access to services, frequently compensating for their lack in said areas; the size and function of settlements determine the urban network, and on its possibilities will heavily depend the future of massifs. The lack of cities in a determinate territory with capacity to organize the space, offer services and create dynamism leads to the unavoidability of depopulation processes; the spaces are socially, economically and culturally linked to a series of centers with which they establish numerous interrelations, attaining a higher or lower articulation of the territory in relation to the organizing nucleus. The influence area is conditioned, mainly, by distance accessibility; in this sense, the analysis of human settlements states the need to surpass the municipal and county limits in order to study a series of functional relations, socioeconomic structures, etc., which explain the functioning of the massif (Laborie, 1989). The design of a development program for these regions needs to acknowledge the town-valley, valley-region complementariness, and of these with the cities that organize the economic fabric, in addition to consider a regional space broader than the very cordillera.

Carrying on with the structural *handicaps*, these zones have the demographic structure of an inverted pyramid; save some very dynamic nucleus, fundamentally touristic. Aging, masculinization, and juvenile emigration are the demographic triangle which characterizes these zones. Aging, due to the settling of retirees, longer life expectancy and mainly the abandonment of youths, especially women, produces low population density with a highly vulnerable structure. They are populations whose capacity to regenerate is diminished, and where the influence of previous processes and dynamics is noticeable, which partly hide the renewal of local

populations with the arrival of new residents. Depopulation is not only the result of the decline of the economic activities or the loss of job posts, but also of bad life conditions that have an important role for rural women and young couples. Frequently, the households have fewer services (heating, internet, mobile phone service, etc.) or are older and inefficacious; to sum up, mountain populations suffer a comparative grievance as for services, infrastructures, economic flows and opportunities.

The Iberian mountain in recent history; from inhospitable place to space of desire

The mountain as a remote, marginalized and inhospitable place

Along the two last centuries the perception of mountains has varied considerably from some historic moments to other, and consequently, the policy directed at these zones. The image of an isolated and inhospitable space only usable to acquire cheap and abundant natural resources prevailed until the second half of the XX century. Inhospitableness founded on the extreme weather features (snow, very low temperatures, etc.) and the difficulties from steep slopes; not only is isolation physical, but also a historic product, fruit from the marginal role assigned in territorial policies, being the object of attention only as exceptional sources of resources at a bargain price. In spite of said isolation and the physical conditions, these communities developed some sorts of exploitation and use of the environment extremely respectful to nature, producing an organizational system which only made sense if men worked on it; an ecological balance object of admiration nowadays. Hence, the recent abandonment of the traditional activities (in some cases total demographic desertion) has put all the conservationist practices aside, accelerating thus the erosion process; all in all, the mountain needs a minimal exploitation level (García Ruiz, 1988; Balcells *et al.*, 1980).

Together with subsistence agriculture and ranching, the mount appears as the third large element of the agricultural space in the context of autarchic economy; forestal exploitation prominently arose in the XVIII century, given the great demand brought about by the construction of the Imperial Channel of Aragón and the Armanda shipyards, and continued with mining or rail ends. The deforestation pace was alarming with the excuse of national

interest, whose effects are nowadays still perceivable on many mounts denude of any sort vegetation. The XIX-century confiscation intensifies the overexploitation pace, as extensive latifundia were acquired by foreign people who devoted them to agriculture; moreover, they deprive the local communities from these “reserves”, traditionally utilized as pantries for moments of need (a considerable increase in population or bad harvests), introducing high social security.

The *Plan of Public Works* (1923-1930 Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship) was the first the Spanish State had before 1950 and with which more than 5000 km of roads and other 9000 km of dirt roads were constructed, among which most of the roads that access the towns in the Pyrenees are to be found; these were not thought to articulate the population centers however, but for the exploitation of natural resources in favor of ironworks and cement. The construction of roads in the Pyrenees responded to two concrete interests; one, forestal exploitation, obtaining wood for construction, sleepers for railroads, posts for the plan of rural electrification, etc; and two, the construction of embankments, not for watering but for hydroelectricity. Together with these objectives which respond to interests external to the massif, the valleys were favored by the arrival of public transport and electricity; communication decisively influenced on the disappearance of the traditional exploitation system; the access to market and the arrival of new products to the valleys were both made easy, many of these products at prices below the production costs in the mountains. Consequently, self-supply is replaced by the market system; donkeys and almadías³ would make room for buses and trains, and rivers and dirt roads for roads and railroads.

The mountain: a spoiled space

By the mid XX century, the traditional society model prevailing in the mountain falls; a social crumbling circumscribed to the crisis of the rural system and that extends to the productive system, the disappearance of ancestral techniques and knowledge and the loss of forms of organization proper to the terrain. Subsistence agriculture, incapable of competing

³ Rafts to transport logs along the rivers, in order to displace toward localities in the south and be able to commerce with them; a necessary transport to extract the forestal richness from the Pyrenees forests.

with products from the plain, is marginalized in the new market; identical mercantile reasons, in addition to the rejection of the youths for the profession of herdsman (given the hard conditions) and the severe reduction of grassing zones, ruin them and foster emigration. And finally, neither is logging industry capable of retaining the local population: significant reduction of job posts, progressive mechanization, labor hardness, etc. Hence, the mountain becomes the main labor force supplier for the process of industrialization and urbanization of the country; this is to say, an inexhaustible reservoir of natural and human resources. The traditional mountain system cracks.

The main problem the Pyrenees have suffered is a multiple continual and voracious aggression from public and private hard exogenous actuations, always at a large scale; the amount and frequency of them is overwhelming, a reflection of the Pyrenees as a territory to be exploited. The developmentalist model of large scale exploitation over unpopulated areas is on the rise, in correlation to the abandonment of the conservative local exploitation practices. The hard exogenous actuations in the Pyrenees are characterized, in the first place, by the search of vulnerable places (territorially unarticulated and depopulated) in combination with the minimization of information, since a correct valuing of the damage might render operation unprofitable; an epoch when in the name of the national public interest the territory of the Pyrenees was indiscriminately violated. The second point refers to the exiguous control in the execution of the works: there is no interest in reducing them, despite they only suppose a minimal complementary investment, being distinguishable the breaking of the landscape even at high altitudes, the scant limitation of the use of explosives and in the multiplication of provisional accesses to the works or the throwing of large amounts of rubble, disregarding the the damage to local resources, not only ecological but also economic (MOPU, 1986). The Population from the Pyrenees sees its territory expropriated, not only in the material sense of agricultural lands occupied by waters of expropriated, but of its resources (water), and with them its future; the existence of an economic system that expropriates the population from its land is brutally verified. As the demographic emptying advanced, the area lost its personality,

its defense possibilities and is there for the effects of those who want its resources. The construction of dams, embankments and hydroelectric plants, highways that favor forestal exploitation, skiing resorts, natural parks, gas natural exploration concessions and other extractive efforts are clear examples of it.

In these years, the policy directed at the mountain is articulated around two large axes: forestal repopulation and the construction of wide embankments; the image of this space as resource pantry is thus reinforced. The idea is not only to obtain said resources rapidly and abundantly, but also to establish storage and management schemas for future needs; and nonetheless, not a single cubic meter of this used on or for the advantage of the development or needs of the region. Traditionally water resources are and have been a relevant factor for development, both endogenous and exogenous; the XX century is the one of production, industrialization and conversion of water into merchandise.⁴ The Spanish Law of Waters considers this liquid of public usefulness and grants the State the power to define its use, i.e., the State removes the property of water from that on whom it rains. In this sense, it should be the object of regional, democratic and popular control; on the contrary, the supposedly liberal State takes the water from peasants to give it to electricity-producing companies by means of ridiculous canons (Gaviria, 1976).

The territorial damage to the Pyrenees exceeds by far the inundation of the best lands; aspects such as the systematic destruction of the intra-Pyrenees relations, sustained along history, and their rarefaction with the plain, especially the Central Pyrenees and the Ebro Depression, are good instances of this. The territorial effects of expropriation such as the destabilization of the real estate market, the privatization of immense plots or the extension of the affected surface (not only the flooded part) have not been valued in their right dimension.

The construction of energy, telephone and rail lines generate the need to obtain more forestal resources; the policy of reforestation started in the south slope of the Pyrenees in the 1940's and 1950's decades was devastating

⁴ It is said that in a visit to Barcelona, F Pearson climbed Tibidabo and as he watched the snowed peaks exclaimed: "there it is the white coal", i.e., the energy that will move the hydroelectric plants.

for grazing in the zone. The positive effects, such as a larger number of hectares repopulated with pines, the creation of job posts or the construction of access roads do not hide the caused territorial cracking. The demographic emptying is intimately accompanied by mass purchases of large surfaces by the Nature Conservation Institute (ICONA), mounts, including towns and cultivations, which at the time supposes a new depopulating factor, by a heavier external dependency and by the extension of the logic of the most profitability without the least feedback from the zone. ICONA and the Hydrographic Confederation of the Ebro have been some of the main agents of depopulation, de-articulation of the territory and the change of property in the southern Pyrenees. The construction of roads corresponds to the will to evacuate the town, which enables the global acquisition of communal territories and upon these the projection of large systems of forestal repopulation.

The revalued image of the mountain

The characteristics proper to the mountain, product of its isolation, formerly associated to delay and commonness, are nowadays socially revalued as we have already mentioned. The rural scenery (recovered largely because of tourism), customs and the expansion of the *chlorophyll ideology* (Gaviria, 1971) provoke the rediscovery of this territory as a touristic place. An authentically identity place and to encounter nature and oneself; the change of social and cultural values carries a progressive evolution of the economic-productive profile of the montane territories towards a growing, and in some cases, marked tertiarization, which has supposed a new form of employment creation and revenue generation, and fundamentally has contributed to revalue the image of the mountain.

As from the 1980's and because of the first "Law of Mountain Agriculture", the law 25/1982 of June 30th (even if there were attempts to establish it in the 1970's), the Spanish agrarian policy "discovers" the montane territories, admitting their specificity and establishing formulae for their socioeconomic relaunching (Gómez *et al.*, 1987). The establishment of this law was hosted by the adaptation process of the Spanish ordering to the communitarian one; however, the expected deep change did

not occur. Only the compensatory payments functioned regularly. The entrance of Spain into the European Economic Community, EEC, in 1986 introduces a substantial improvement: indirect aids for the titleholders of the exploitations together with other bonuses and an improvement in the prices of multiple agricultural supplies thus become the best brake to depopulation. The Euro-communitarian context has been a key factor to boost the changes of image and dynamic of the mountains, via the different structural funds and their programs (ERDF⁵ and EAGGF, mainly), directives and orientations (changes in PAC, promotion of economic diversification, boost to new programs and measures and innovation, etcetera). Among them, LEADER initiative is distinguishable, which tries to use in the most efficacious manner the territorial potentialities and the productive singularities which so far had remained hidden by the prior economic model that placed them at the background because of their lack of competitiveness. A communitarian norm reinforced by the construction of new rural infrastructures; LEADER is in its third generation; LEADER I marked the beginning of a new approach (in 1991) of the policy of rural development based on the territory integrated and participative. LEADER II (as of 1994) propitiated a broader use than the previous one, emphasizing the innovative aspects of the projects; and LEADER + active in the 2000-2006 period carries on with its role as a laboratory for new and emerging approaches for an integrated and sustainable development. INTERREG program is relevant for these European zones, given the border character of many of them; it is an instrument that favors trans-border cooperation permitting the beginning or the reinforcement of many cooperation programs, such as the case of Euromontana; these programs are important for they seek to foster industrial development or the touristic sector. Nevertheless, these projects are more focused on their rurality or peripheral aspects than on the ones proper to these zones. The most positive impacts are summarized on the growing appreciation of the mountain values for the urban and global society, and also for the governmental agencies, as well as in the diminution at a regional level of the barrier effects, however, there is still a long way to go; on the down side, the fact where PAC has favored orthodox agriculture

⁵ European Regional Development Fund

models is distinguishable, which has brought along the loss of small farms, know-how and high unemployment rates in some zones.

The socioeconomic relaunching of mountain zones has been based upon two large axes or strategies: touristic development and quality production; the arrival of romanticism leaves behind the image of it as a hostile, shy, dangerous space, home to all sort of beasts and delinquents. A new, beautiful, pure, authentic space arises, where one can find oneself.⁶ Romanticism drives the first tourists to the Alps in the mid XIX century, and as of then they become a touristic destination and object of consumption. The revaluing of the mountain as a leisure space and space to escape from the urban stress consolidates the touristic attraction which brings a socioeconomic relaunching toward these zones, generates job posts and revenues, and also a progressive and marked tertiarization.

Whilst the current globalization conveys regional specializations and sectorial developments, these territories have been able, by and large, to preserve their diversity, multifunctional character and local identities. The European mountain is an actual reserve of the diversity of environments and cultures; they are zones with numerous productions of small volumes, reflection of typical production modes and which are specific besides. This *know-how* is their potential in the face of the current standardization and uniformity. In this sense, the promotion of products, services and territories of “choice” is the stake of the policy fostered by the European Commission; as well as the recognition of positive externalities of mountain agriculture (maintenance of landscapes, services, touristic attractions, etc.). A policy based on the aids to transform and commercialize the products; an agriculture with quality and identity is demanded, where the preservation of the landscapes and the environment are championed as priorities, not only as isolated elements but as fundamental parts or a business card for the territory and their regional products.

Although it is a common problem, there is not in EU a specific policy for the mountain (Sanz, 2005); the actions on these territories are framed in the generalist policies. The need for a specific policy different from

⁶ “Nature is magnificent; wild as dreamers need it”. “In the mountain the soul rises, the heart cleanses; thoughts participate in this profound peace” (Victor Hugo, 2000).

others is not unequivocal; it is justified by the wide variety and complexity of the situations, the subsidiarity principle and the fact that most of the regions are inside areas where the EU agricultural and structural policies are applied, and that frequently they compete for the scarce resources with other disfavored regions. To sum up, future mountain policies will have to face the three main challenges for these areas.

- The tendency to turn them into open museums or solace or protected areas for industrialized societies.
- The tendency to see them as regions to be economically exploited or even overexploited.
- The tendency to abandon them.

Mythology of the mountain and other representations

The variety of the social imaginary and the representations on the mountain and its different landscapes cannot be comprehended in a work like this; nonetheless, a brief exploration will help us, undoubtedly, to understand the relevance they acquire as objects of consumption in our times.

The mountain as a sacred space

Mountains have been object of cultural and social signification in all of the societies and along history; they are the terrestrial objects closer to heaven and most of the cultures establishes in this place the link between the sacred and the profane, or in words by Eliade (1999) they are “pillars of the heaven” or “nails of the earth”. The summit represents the approaching to spirituality, where the terrestrial and the mundane disappear. Their majesty, inaccessibility and height favor the assignation of magical attributes and, at the same time, they generate fears. From the viewpoint of symbolism, mountains because of their height and verticality evoke an idea of spiritual elevation, becoming an allegoric image of the supreme celestial divinity. In a universal manner, they hold a central and strategic place in the extensive plurality of cosmologies. For the Greek mythology, Mount Parnassus represents the navel of the world; for Hindus and Jain the center of the universe is in Mount Meru, where the heaven of Brahma is supported, or the tree of the world in Norse mythology (Yggdrasil). As a stairway to heaven

we find them in Ziggurat (Mesopotamia) and in the pyramids in Egypt and Central America, where the terrestrial, telluric and celestial merge. They are also considered home to divinities (Mount Fuji in Japan). Virtually any region has one or several sacred mountains (Machu Picchu, the five hieratic peaks of Confucianism in China, Kilimanjaro for Maasai people, the sacred mountains of Hinduism, etcetera).

The mountain is also a space possessed by the gods and powers malefic for the inhabitants of the plains (frequent toponyms referred to the devil and hell). A inaccessible and uncharted space, conceptualized as shelter for thieves, mythological beings (Basajaun, Lamiak, Yeti), witches, wolves, bears. The mythology and superstition which surrounded these zones were increased with the general ignorance on them; the first death certificates of legends were probably, according to geographers, the ascension in 1518 of Mount Pilatus by a rector of the University of Vienna and the certification in 1585 by the abbot of Lucerne that the spirit of Pontius Pilate did not wander there. For centuries the mountain belongs more to fable than reality, an influence from which literature neither escapes; until Romanticism these appear as a dangerous, unknown, hostile, cold places. Jovellanos will be in charge of changing this perception in Castilian literature introducing an illustrated vision where the mountain is identified as the ideal place to interiorize and find oneself. Authors such as Bécquer, Juan Ramón Jiménez or Hemingway represent it as nature in a pure state, the new social and natural paradise; the rural idyll discovers the pleasure provided by unspoiled places and the (presumable) innocence of their inhabitants.

Frequently there are mountains that are object of veneration for different religions, such as the case of Mount Sinai, protagonist of the Hebrew, Christian and Rastafarian (Zion) cosmogony; these however, are not icons exclusive to religions. In this sense, we find them as a political emblem (Mount Montejurra for Carlism) and with the new post-materialistic values, upon which the ecologist or environmental discourses are built, which at the time, influence on the policies directed to them. Nowadays, the sacralization of nature and in special of the mountain concurs with religious meanings and representations which are often in conflict (Blatt, 2005). On occasions, sharing the experience of the sacred character of the mountains has solved the crisis; an illustrative instance of this situation is to be found in the polemic

after the presentation of the project of the mountaineer J. Martínez Novás to climb Mount Kailash⁷ as an action in favor of peace and to denounce the environmental deterioration of the planet; an intention qualified as blasphemous by religious leaders which compare it to climb Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome or the Wailing Wall. Different interests fight for the use of the space; around it, mountaineers and climbers mix with devotees of different religions (Buddhists, Jain, Bon Pö or Hindus) in a pilgrimage that crystallizes millenary beliefs and other more recent. Far from diffusing these dogmas, the mythology on the mountains is constantly renewed through its commodification. The popularization of a formerly sacred space and its negative impact favors a debate on its protection; summarizing, the mountain is a privileged recipient of numerous and varied affective factors which are constantly elaborated and renewed by men.

The mountain as a shelter and a battlefield

In most of the States, the mountain a space dominated late and not always used, it is the last to fall (Pyrenees, Peaks of Europe, Kingdom of Navarra, Amaiur, etc.). The Romans never occupy the Vascon territory; the Carolingians cannot cross the Pyrenees, such as the Muslims; the Christians in their running from Muslim conquests take shelter in the cordillera, the "ghost army" of Zumalacárregui, the Maquis, Lacandona, Sierra Maestra, etc. The mountain becomes the scenario of battles where its orography is its the best defensive wall and attack strategy. They are dominating watchtowers for the military (Lindux, Urkulu), reason why, for the armies it always had strategic importance to occupy the highlands. The steep terrain not only offers military advantage, but it can also cover the opposition movements which withdraw from the lowlands; the dwellers are usually the impotent hosts of these "refugees". In 1999, 23 of the main armed conflicts in the world were fought in mountain zones; from, Afghanistan to the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Andes, parts of the Middle East and Africa are points of conflict, the reasons are varied and complex (fight against drugs, control of

⁷Mount Kailash is one of the most powerful places of the Himalayas cultural areas and the neuralgic center of a sacred geography that summons antique devotions. The summit is the essence of the universe, and as such it inspires pilgrimages which from immemorial time set off from distant places in Asia to prostrate before its imponent and solemn aspect. It is considered home to divinity and the place where the spirits commit their best intentions.

natural resources, etc.), nevertheless, the consequences for their inhabitants are universally devastating. On the other side, the mountain appears represented as an ethnic (languages, folklore, crafts, etc.) and ecologic shelter (endangered species, floral richness).

The mountain as a communal space

One of the most singular and inherent characteristics of mountain societies is the social management of their resources; in the Pyrenees, the valley is an articulating axis that is a geographic, economic and political unit. A unit composed of different subsystems such as the known socio-familiar institution of the household and primogeniture. These societies were organized in such manner that the population accessed services hardly reachable by means of individualized systems. The access to communal resources through the household provided the neighbors with wood, grass and wild fruits. In this sense, the existence and management of these resources has founded communalism (Gaviria, 1981) or the community myth; an idealized past represented by social equality and homogeneity, sovereign and in control of their destiny; an orientation that enhances their collectivist and participative features, as well as vicinal solidarity. Gaviria (1981) denounces the theft of sovereignty from the mountain dwellers on their natural and spatial resources (water, snow, grasses, wood), through the declaration of national or natural parks, large ski resorts, law of mountains, waters, mines, etcetera: “if the mountain is nowadays a source of poverty, it is because it has been deprived from its wealth beforehand”.

The mountain as a border space

Mountain ranges have been used to establish limits between States all over the world (Pyrenees, Alps, Urals, Himalaya, etc.); historically the Pyrenees have been conceptualized as a border by the different empires and neighboring peoples, as observed by Seneca, the Pyrenees were never a barrier, their inhabitants on both slopes, however, were more closely related to one another than with those of the plains. In this sense, we can speak of a natural and cultural homogeneous region (Caro Baroja, 1988; Barrera González, 1990; Viers, 1973; Barandiaran, 1972; Mur, 2003; Comas d'Argemir, 1995; Gorriá, 1995, etcetera).

In practice this space functioned almost as a State (with borders, public law, adversaries, but with neither government nor army), on the basis of a complex system of arrangements which have reached our days under the name of Treaties of Alliance and Peace or simply *facerías*. The Pyrenees acted as a geographic, political and economic analogous territory where the valley was the articulating axis and subject to right; the conception of the Pyrenees as a border is based on two fundamental facts: the instauration of the modern central States in the XVII century and the signing of the limit treaties in the XIX century. Vast lands secularly sisters of both slopes are divided: the Basque Country, some valleys in the Aragon Pyrenees, Cerdanya and Empordà, among other. The transfer of customs to the Pyrenees in the early XIX century deeply moved border regions that witnessed severe damage to their economies as they lost the relative freedom to trade which they enjoyed, with the exception of war times; a fact that did not prevented trade from occurring, although from there in an illegal manner, as contraband. All manner of materials, weapons, household utensils, and mainly animals were traded; as a matter of fact, the creation of large fortunes is due to a large extent to this commercial activity, wealth and demographic density which were not registered in those non-border mountain regions (Iberian System, Baetic Cordillera, Central System). The Spanish Civil War had a tight border control which destroyed the contraband as a commercial and economic system, bringing along a stressed crisis and emigration. During WWII the Pyrenees cordillera was a dual protagonist. On the one side, it became the crossing territory for both sides of the border: toward the French slope for those running from Franco's repression, and toward Spain for numerous Jews, rebels or allied aviators who fell on the French side.⁸ As a matter of fact,

⁸ Indeed, for fears of the probable Nazi bombing over Paris, Walter Benjamin (sociologist from the Frankfurt School) firstly shelters in Meaux (one of the few places in France really affected during the first years of the WWII), to later cross in September 1940 the border between France and Spain with the intention to reach Lisbon and take a ship to the U.S. That very same day, Spain decides to close the border and send the refugees from France back, among them Benjamin and the group which accompanied him. While he waited for the transport in a small hotel in Portbou, Benjamin decided to commit suicide. In his last message he says: "In a dead-end situation, I have no other choice but to put an end here. My life is going to end in a small town of the Pyrenees where no one knows me". The Pyrenees are also the eternal resting place for Antonio Machado; as his brother,

the first contribution of the Spanish to the French resistance against Nazis was the establishment of crossing networks. On the other side, the Pyrenees on the French slope became the first nucleus of organized resistance of the Spanish against German domination; once France was freed, the Spanish guerrillas grouped along the border in views of liberating their land from the dictatorship. The phenomenon of the Maqui began.

Simultaneously to the Treaty of Limits, the French State promotes the creation of development poles in the heads so as to foster relations between them (Mauléon, Oloron, Lourdes, Tarbes, Foix) and the valleys. Consequently, the towns on the French Pyrenees move to them, stressing the border effect and increasing the differences between both sides. Nonetheless, the subsistence economy with lengthy inactive periods in winter, prevailing in the valleys along the XIX century and the early XX, pushes dozens of women from Roncal and Ansó, etc. to work in Mauléon into *espadrilles*, a phenomenon known as “the swallows”, as they migrated in winter and returned in spring. Migratory interchanges on both sides of the massif have been a historic constant. Secularly, the mountain has not been a barrier, on the contrary local populations were meeting points which led to the need of negotiation between valleys, as for the use of grazing lands and animal shepherding, and nowadays the touristic flows.

The mountain as accumulation of local knowledge

We have previously stated how the model of traditional management of the mountain has implied a successful symbiosis between the different economic activities and the preservation of nature. Societies that have efficaciously created institutional structures capable to articulate the territory and reach long-lasting agreements with the mountain neighbors for the shared use

José Machado, said: “he really came deadly wounded from the fatal exodus”. In this war context, the Pyrenees became the mountains of fear and hope for numerous fugitives. Many died by accident, others from the cold, and others assassinated by their guides when they believed they were safe. “Some small local fortunes have their origins in the baggage of these desperate people” (Pallaruelo, 1990: 218); some runaway paths are reconstructed as touristic and interpretative paths. As an instance, the Cometè evasion network (destined to protect allied aviators) is nowadays a Basque path which goes from Urrugne to the Navarre Peak Mandale.

of strategic resources in their adjoining spaces. The traditional practices of space collective management are currently challenged by the broadening of functions vested in them and which are related to the new demands to protect and make a patrimony of the resources. This local knowledge is required to participate in the lasting management of the territory, to elaborate new collective practices which respond to the new criteria and demands from local development.

Separately, the mountain has been the place of external knowledge and place for meditation; the search for isolation from the laic world makes the Pyrenees the objective of the monasteries of Cistercians. The monasteries act as political coils moved by the will of monarchy; they became defensive-border enclosures and repopulating enclaves, working also as transmitting vessels of beliefs and cultural innovations.

The exterior representation of the mountain as home to evil beings, bandits and dangerous place favors the long wait for Illustration and Romanticism so that the desire to learn and explore is granted. Currently, the mountain itself is considered an exceptional “laboratory”, which helps us better understand the processes, tendencies and new significations. It is object of numerous theses, journals, research institutes, object of attention of diverse sciences (sociology, geography, economy, biology, etc.); this it to say, it has become a scientific field of first importance, and the Pyrenees, in particular, cradle of illustrious contemporary sociologists (Bernard Kayser, Pierre Bourdieu, René Lourau or Henri Lefebvre).

The mountain: agglutination of signs of rural imaginary

The transformation underwent by the societies of the late century have opened the rural world to tendencies, relations, opportunities and uncertainties unforeseeable some decades ago. In the first place, the large processes of rural metamorphosis transform the traditional society creating the modern agrarian rurality, and in a second phase, they restructure it once again generating the current ex-agrarian rurality. The new disperse organization patterns, new migratory and residential patterns, lifestyles and modes of consumption, public policies (European Commission, 1989, 1994) are produced in a context of symbolic reformulation which significantly

transforms the representations on the rural. This is, the new image of rurality is the result from a dual process: the adoption of a new economic model or stage known as post-Fordism or disorganized capitalism (Lash and Urry, 1994) and the emergence of a new ideological or cultural configuration (post-modernity). Thus, the modernist representation of the rural as something negligible, archaic or delayed currently leads to its identification with quality of life, health, patrimony or identity, an exceptional qualitative transformation where endless constructed and reconstructed images are produced in function of multiple interests and cultural values.

The previous journey along the different representations and policies of the montane zone has revealed the deep transformation of the image of these areas and its social and economic consequences. The ideological changes produced in the last decades of the XX century and which extend to the present can be summarized on two axes (Moyano, 2000): the valuing of the rural as quality of life and the revaluation of the rural as identity process. In this sense, montane zones condensate the main signs or elements of the rural imaginary; a space represented as wild, intact, pure nature. A landscape dominated by extensive forests, waterfalls and gorges, inhabited by Bambi and Yogi Bear, where one breaths pure air; it is the ideal place for sports: mountaineering, hiking, climbing, ski, rappelling, canyoneering, rafting, etc; a wide variety of sports along the four seasons. The marginality and forgetting of the prior large directives and development projects and the consequential scarce of null acting in these zones, which were left on their own, have reinforced the image of authenticity. A place which has “escaped” from the developmentalist logic (large industries, urbanization, highways, noise, pollution, etc.) and it has managed to preserve its cultural and identity essence. It is the ideal place to admire and be in touch with Mother Nature, and in said peace and harmony find oneself. It is a space of leisure, solace and reflection; it is the place where one finds bathing-places, yoga and reiki centers, monasteries, child camps, nudist towns, etcetera.

On the other side, the mountain appears as a privileged place of socio-cultural identification, therefore as a paradigmatic space for the study of this process. As pointed out by Sthal (1998), we are talking of societies

which have important similarities all across Europe, communities which still retain archaic ways of social life. “The mountain keeps fragments of a social life from the past, a life linked to certain forms of land tenancy, certain political organizations of the communities that disappeared from the plains or reduced to modest dimensions” (Sthal, 1998).

The antechamber for this revaluing is marked by the break of the socioeconomic structure and the decline of secular practices and customs. The city which took in the rural population now invades these spaces with its nonproductive logics and a new physiognomy and landscape appear. The uses and activities are different from those of old and reveal new significations; from a space to exploit, it changes to a place to frolic and relax. A revaluation that attracts a floating population which abides in the city and turns to the town to search for nature, community and identity: its non-economic dependence on the territory favors ecologic and identity perceptions. We verify a process of recovery and reconstruction of myths and ways of social relations that long for the integrative aspects of the past and which value the communal spaces and times.

The privileged spaces of the past will not be completely lost nevertheless. At the level of celebrations and social representation, the new rural populations are going to reencounter the privileged role that the household or hometown represented in the past, with the community meaning of vicinity and with the mountain as a privileged place of cultural re-identification. This is the authentic triumph of the montane spaces before a society which, as modernizes itself, has bereft them of their productive functions (Martínez Montoya, 2002: 37).

It is an attempt to recompose the communitarian in a territory which has ceased being a common space for daily coexistence and work. Concurrently, the identity in danger because of the abandonment is recovered and reconstructed, by means of the proliferation of rites, celebrations, and the valuing of the patrimony. The processes of group identification and spatial practices are identity markers, differentiating features of the group I before the other, creators of belonging and differentiability.

These ideological changes deeply echo on the rural sphere; tourism needs a cultural and symbolic elaborations already created with the new ideological configuration. The urban scenery modifies in the search for authenticity and rusticity, to satisfy both the stereotyped look of the tourist and that of the local. Hence, stone and wooden cover facades; the gates exhibit disused farm implements. A stage complemented with museums where the local patrimony is displayed, interpretations centers which try to educate not only the taste and perception of the tourist, but also the very native, and the propagation of cultural acts on the local idiosyncrasy. It is the so-called reinvented authenticity (Harvey, 1989); this tendency toward nature, rusticity and archaism becomes the so called urban neo-archaism (Morin, 1994), which spreads in numerous directions that decisively condition montane areas. The cult to natural elements (air, sun, the green, water etc.); the cult to physical body (sport, diets, aesthetics); the boom of natural cuisine and local gastronomy in respect to industrialized food; the success of rustic decoration (fireplaces, visible wooden joists, rustic furniture, antiquities...); the authenticity of artisanal work before the standardized product, etc. The identification of the singular character of the territory, the values of the attributes of the local naturalness and rusticity are transferred into the different mountain products, assigning them a differential character in the market. A space loaded with meanings and values that make it unique. The identification between the products and the territory is crystal clear.

This valuing of montane zones turns them into an appetizing object of desire for multiple interests; some will prioritize the natural, landscape and biological values, and will defend conservationist or ecologic-like policies; others will seek in it the identity of a highly mobilized society. And for others, social and communal life will be the objective. Montane areas have become scenarios of residential, migratory, environmental, productive and touristic concurrences, where multiple actors and interests struggle to materially and symbolically seize it, and where the struggle amply surpasses the local sphere. Such processes increasingly press for the regulation of the mountain; spaces that, definitely, have left forgetting and abandonment behind.

Conclusions

We need the mountains and they need us; this is the message from UN and from the European nations. Because of this, it is necessary to recognize and identify the natural and structural handicaps which characterize these areas and which make their development difficult. The social representation of being a remote, far and inhospitable place was left behind to make room for the image of the mountain as place of identity, idleness and desire. As we have seen, the mountain is object of many affective values which are constantly elaborated and renewed by men; all in all, a transcendental ideological change based on two main axes: the valuation of the mountain as quality of life and as an identity referent.

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Elvira Sanz Tolosana. Doctor in Sociology from Universidad Pública de Navarra. In 2008 she obtained the Award Realidad Social Vasca, from Basque Governemtn. She currently works as a researcher in “Cambios Sociales” team, in the Department of Sociology of Universidad Pública de Navarra. Research lines: social changes, rural, urban and health sociology. Recent publications: “Tendencias of mountain European policies: new issues and challenges” (Tendencias de las políticas de montaña europeas: nuevos retos y desafíos), in *Inguruak*, num. 41 (2005); “The mountain agriculture: sowing a development with future” (La agricultura de montaña: sembrando un desarrollo con futuro), in *Anuario de la agricultura en España* (2008); *Mountain identity and development: the valleys of Roncal, Salazar and Aezkoia*, Gobierno Vasco (2008).

Sent to dictum: August 21st, 2008

Aprobación: October 23rd, 2008