

The National Plan for Traditional Architecture as a safeguarding tool. Action programmes and projects

María Pía Timón Tiemblo¹, Elena Agromayor Navarrete²

¹Institute of Cultural Heritage of Spain, timonmaripia@gmail.com; ²Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain, elena.agromayor@cultura.gob.es

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Abstract

The National Plan for Traditional Architecture is presented as a safeguarding tool shared by the Spanish National Government, the Autonomous Communities, and local and documentation bodies at the service of society. This presentation details the concepts and elements which define and characterize traditional architecture by establishing a correlation in the spheres where it is found in Spain. Equally, it identifies the current risks and threats to this heritage, which has deteriorated rapidly since the last third of the 20th century and is facing a wide range of factors threatening its survival. Finally, the four lines of action established in the Plan are presented, emphasizing the criteria and methodologies in place which can be used as points of reference by specialists, academics and society in general, and showcasing some pilot projects carried out within this framework.

Keywords: management; vernacular architecture; popular architecture; action criteria; methodology.

1. Introduction

National Plans are tools for management and coordination which are shared between the Spanish National Government, Autonomous Communities and other public and private bodies. From a multidisciplinary perspective they establish the criteria, methodologies and lines of action needed to safeguard the different forms of cultural heritage. These plans are therefore considered collaborative instruments promoting protection in the widest possible sense through the knowledge, legal protection, conservation and dissemination of all the tangible and intangible cultural assets which make up our cultural heritage, allowing part of society to access and enjoy it.

The legal basis of the National Plans can be found in *Law 16/1985, of 25 June, on Spanish Historical Heritage* and *Royal Decree 565 of 24*

April 1985 establishing the basic organic structure of the Ministry for Culture and its autonomous bodies, which set up the Institute for the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Assets, now the Cultural Heritage Institute of Spain (hereafter IPCE). These plans are the product of combining the National Information Plans stipulated in the law and the Conservation and Restoration Plans set out in the Royal Decree.

They can be set up at the request of any Autonomous Community and are managed by the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage and Fine Arts of the Ministry for Culture and Sports through the IPCE. To date, the Heritage Council has passed 14 National Plans, each of which provides a response to the needs arising in the different spheres or areas of specialization of heritage under threat at any given point. Although traditional architecture has proven to be one of the most diverse fields of heritage, strongly linked to

identity, it has been under severe threat since the last third of the 20th century. This is due, among other reasons, to the transformation of ways of life, the lack of appreciation and awareness of the traditional context, the homogenization of construction systems and materials, and the lack of established suitable intervention criteria and methodologies. This last aspect is closely linked to the disappearance of traditional trades, bringing about the staggering loss and degradation of a large part of the tangible and intangible assets which make up traditional heritage.

In fact, this fragile situation has brought about an increasing valorization of this heritage, which has gone from being internationally considered “the picturesque view of monuments” (Sociedade das Nações, 1931) to become the “expression of cultural diversity of the world” in the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (ICOMOS, 1999). The delicate situation affecting Spanish traditional architecture led a group of experts, headed by Félix Benito Martín and María Pía Timón in the IPCE, to draw up the National Plan for Traditional Architecture, hereafter PNAT, passed by the Heritage Council in 2014.

2. Basic aspects of the PNAT

One of the main motivations for the PNAT was the need to develop a tool which structured the participation and development of the actions promoted by different administrations and bodies. It also aims to halt the risks threatening the integrity of this architecture, including the establishment of globalizing regulations; the loss of specificity resulting from globalization processes; the fossilization, museumization and dramatization of iconic complexes; risks generated by local groups or agents with different or opposing interests to those of the community; offensive or demeaning uses; difficulties in perpetuation and transmission; social, territorial, urban and constructive decontextualization; and the lack of awareness and appreciation.

The criteria and methodologies applied to all these factors are adapted to the specific nature of this architecture, its surrounding landscapes, the

activities which shape it, and associated intangible cultural manifestations. Safeguarding actions and strategies are proposed, encouraging access to these to be enjoyed and to increase the feeling of belonging within the community. The PNAT is also set up as a collaborative tool which civil society can take part in, either protagonists acting as informants, or through civil associations. The Plan follows a different perspective to generate a series of documents which can be consulted for reference. It serves as a guide for society, for researchers, specialists and local administrations, and it can also be used as a professional support tool and used by associations and the actual communities.

2.1. Definition and characterization

The National Plan defines traditional architecture as “the range of constructions derived from the rooting of a community within its territory, revealing in its diversity and evolution a process of ecological adaptation both to natural resources and factors and to the historical processes and socio-economic models which have developed in each location” (Ministerio de Educación Cultural y Deporte, 2014), forming a heritage of great importance for our culture.

This architecture characteristically represents an account of unique ways of life in the community from which it originated, generating architectural models characteristic to each place, with unique personalities, awarding them a high sense of identity and of belonging to a territory and community.

It is dynamic and linked to the socio-economic processes of the community which gave it life, sustainably expanding and shaping the landscape according to needs and resources.

It generally has no specific architect or author, and does not follow the architectural trends of the time, although it can occasionally incorporate some unique elements of refined architecture into its creations. Among other characteristics, it is linked to the natural conditioning factors of the territory and responds to a specific climate,

sustainably using and even reusing the material available in its surroundings, and adapting to the morphology of the place depending on the factors which have conditioned its use.

2.2. Areas of development

Traditional architecture covers a vast wealth of terms, which led the Drafting Commission of the Plan to establish a grouping system for the different typologies depending on their use. Three major flexible blocks were established: residential, architecture for work and venues for socializing and collective use.

a. Residential architecture: its main use is housing, although it can be combined with other uses, albeit secondary ones. This category includes fishermen's housing, *pasiegos*, *masías*, etc.

b. Architecture for work: although there can be associated living spaces, it is conceived as an architecture of production. It covers infrastructures (banking, pathways, canalizations, fences, wharfs, drinking troughs, laundries, fountains, etc.); constructions associated with primary activities, either livestock farming (beehives, temporary shelters, farmhouses, drying facilities, pigsties, goat sheds, etc.), or mining activities (lime kilns, gypsum quarries, salt flats, etc.); constructions linked to transformation activities of food (oil presses, flour mills, refrigerating chambers, wine presses); fabrics (fulling mills, tanneries); woodwork (carpentry workshops, riverside carpentry workshops, sawmills, barrel workshops); and metals (blacksmith's workshops, forges, foundries, etc), among others. The fourth group within the category of architecture for work is that of buildings devoted to distribution and services (markets, shops, pharmacies), as well as those providing hospitality services (thermal baths, inns, hostels, etc.).

c. Venues for socializing and collective use: this third sector covers all the spaces used for gathering or coexistence actions within the community, or those which reflect its collective beliefs or values. Based on these guidelines this

category also includes squares, cemeteries, *rollos* or administrative columns, bowling alleys, pelota courts, etc.

3. General criteria

Criteria can be grouped according to two major principles. The first refers to guaranteeing a central role to the user community in all processes as these people have created this architecture, live with it and transmit it. Documents of reference for this principle worth mentioning are the "Istanbul Declaration" (UNESCO, 2002), the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" (UNESCO, 2003), and the regional laws of Galicia and Balears (Law 5/2016, of 4 May, on cultural heritage in Galicia and Law 18/2019, of 8 April, on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the Illes Balears), as well as Law 10/2015, of 26 May, for the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The second principle examines the need to respect all its cultural values and guarantee its recognition at all levels, from local individuals to professionals, new inhabitants and authorities, ensuring that the population does not feel out of place or marginalized in an abandoned setting or alienated by new activities imposed.

a. Identity value: this is an extremely diverse architecture with a unique character swiftly identified as belonging to a given territory or community. This is the case of the earthen architecture in Tierra de Campos, Segovian tiles, and buildings such as *hórreos*, *barracas*, *masías* and *corrijos*. Therefore, safeguarding strategies must aim to protect the identity of the population, increasing and reinforcing these values, helping to make the community more dynamic by including the active participation of the user community.

b. Intangible value: intangible and symbolic values linked to traditional architecture are essential, both in terms of the functions and symbolisms of individual spaces within the dwelling and in terms of the urban spaces linked to social activity, religious practices and other intangible

manifestations. The spatial framework is essential when maintaining itineraries or their associated symbolism.

c. Scientific value: traditional architecture is a scientific repository of knowledge on the specific qualities and benefits of the local traditional materials and techniques subsequently verified in scientific studies. Its application is not limited solely to the restoration of traditional architecture but also covers monumental restoration and new architecture. This gives rise to a wide field of research on the application of these techniques to the design of contemporary architecture.

d. Territorial and landscape value: traditional architecture is perfectly inserted within the landscape thanks to the use of local materials of the territory, and to its scale, made to measure by humans to suit their needs. However, it also interacts with its environment, for example as a way to conserve biodiversity, to combat erosion, and to regenerate the soil through traditional farming activities such as transhumance or extensive stockbreeding. This balance must be one of the objectives of sustainable development to ensure that current society is better adapted to the surrounding territory.

e. Ecological value: traditional architecture becomes an example of ecological and bioclimatic solutions. In terms of environmental sustainability, the material and human resources of the region are managed responsibly, ensuring a low-emission ecological proximity architecture. Furthermore, passive energy solutions are proposed which are based on orientation, location, cross-ventilation, solar exposure or the thermal inertia of its walls. However, its sustainability also stems from its durability and it is easily maintained thanks to the simplicity of its constructive systems, as well as the reuse of materials and underutilized constructions. All this allows us to relearn in a moment defined by the fight against climate change, and the ecological values of this heritage are presented as necessary tools to minimize the consequences, reducing the impact of the environmental footprint in construction.

f. Assessment, recording and application of traditional constructive techniques: knowledge and traditional trades must be safeguarded. This will allow us to record and protect them, above all guaranteeing their continued existence and transmission to younger generations, preventing their disappearance, maintaining artisanal activities and favouring the professional development of young entrepreneurs.

4. Programmes and lines of action

Given the vulnerability of this fragile heritage it becomes essential to establish safeguarding mechanisms to actively guarantee its continuity. To do this it is necessary to assume a holistic interpretation of the values which are part of it and which affect it. That is to say, it must address cultural aspects (jointly integrating tangible and intangible dimensions), territorial aspects (in terms of the articulation of territory and landscape), and socio-economic aspects (paying attention to the needs and sustainable development of local communities). Therefore, it must accommodate the multiple inherent elements which define and characterize it, paying special attention to those transmitting wisdom and knowledge, the population which lives with this Cultural Heritage and the traditional activities it has been used for. At the same time, the physical, formal and aesthetic features of the materials used, and the architectural, symbolic and environmental characteristics of the landscapes it has created, should also be remembered. This should be combined with a multidisciplinary vision with the collaboration of specialists from different disciplines involved, including the user community, who should ultimately accept any initiative, inevitably becoming indisputable central figures as the people who have created, conserved and lived in this heritage. Public administrations play a key role in the management of these strategies and take on a true effective commitment, establishing priorities, supporting, promoting, subsidizing, recognizing and awarding any initiatives favouring its safeguarding.

Thus, the PNAT proposes a multidisciplinary methodology based on four lines of action: documentation and research; protection; intervention; and finally, training, dissemination and socializing.

4.1. Documentation and research

Based on the premise that it is impossible to protect, restore or valorize anything which is unknown it is clear that knowledge must play an initial key role in any action. The main reason for this is that it is a tool of prior knowledge which makes it possible to make more informed decisions. However, the documentation process provides an account of ways of life that are part of our culture, so that and we are therefore transmitting the legacy received from our ancestors to future generations. Furthermore, the completion of these actions requires recognition from institutions and the community coexisting with this architecture, forming the first phase of its assessment and protection. This documentation process must incorporate new technologies as a medium for research and documentation in order to increase efficiency, benefiting from the use of new techniques for representation and incorporating the results obtained into the digital cataloguing or geographical information databases. It is important to fill any existing gaps, as well as to use a suitable methodology which allows information to be homogenized and facilitates its complete upload to accessible databases.

In this regard, the PNAT was used to develop a study on *Documentación e investigación para conocer la situación actual de los sistemas de inventario y protección de la arquitectura tradicional en España* [Documentation and research to identify the current situation of systems for the inventory and protection of traditional architecture in Spain], which listed the main inventories and catalogues of traditional built heritage on a national scale, while also establishing a documentation methodology and a unified model for an exhaustive Inventory Fiche. In order to test the viability of this fiche it was implemented in two

very different pilot case studies: in the region of Los Pedroches (Córdoba) and the underground dwellings of Caravaca de la Cruz (Murcia).

The Plan also establishes the chief line of action for research to build on knowledge for the development of research work expanding on that compiled since the early 20th century. Each author, depending on their profession or socioeconomic context, provides nuances and meanings which enrich and promote the heritage value of this type of architecture. It was therefore deemed necessary for the Plan to include a bibliographical or historiographic study, collecting this wealth of research and compiling the work of the most renowned authors in the field in a reference document. Following on with this work the PNAT recommends carrying out specific studies, avoiding fragmenting information and focusing on certain typologies that are considered iconic. It encourages research in less widely studied fields, including management, the conservation of traditional structures, new compatible uses, etc. An example of this is *Estudio y documentación sobre las arquitecturas y paisajes del arroz en España* [Study and documentation of rice architectures and landscapes in Spain], which includes the characteristic constructive elements of the rice-growing territory from a landscape perspective. Another notable example is *Estudio del yeso tradicional en España: yacimientos, canteras, hornos y la arquitectura tradicional, su estado de conservación y propuestas de itinerarios visitables para su revalorización y difusión* [Study of traditional gypsum in Spain: sites, quarries, kilns and traditional architecture, its state of conservation and visitable itinerary proposals for revalorization and dissemination]. Finally, *Estudio del uso de la caña en la arquitectura tradicional y de su recuperación para la construcción contemporánea* [Study on the use of reed in traditional architecture and its recovery for contemporary construction] has provided a detailed list and analysis of raw materials, and the different traditional constructive techniques using reeds in Spanish traditional architecture, as well as those which can be applied to new constructions.

4.2. Protection

Recognized as an asset, the Plan proposes a second programme dedicated to the protection of this architecture from different angles, making it necessary to provide legal protection to constructions and spaces identified as traditional architecture in order to guarantee its conservation, taking formal and aesthetic values as well as spatial, constructive and intangible values, into consideration. The challenge also lies in ensuring its coherent and flexible application, protecting cultural diversity and allowing it to adapt to the new ways of life and current comfort conditions, preventing it from fossilizing and promoting the revitalization of traditional urban centres and planning resources to add dynamism to heritage, ensuring that the economic wealth of a locality is proportional to the conservation of its heritage.

This protection must incorporate a territorial approach in the framework of truly effective cooperation between the different stakeholders involved. The point is to combine different legislations to agree on policies rather than to develop parallel protection policies. Thus, legal protection must be provided in the framework of heritage regulations (in natural and cultural terms), ensuring the use of specific legislations which employ different degrees of protection to safeguard the representative heritage, as well as more monumental and unique examples of heritage; of territorial planning, both on a territorial and local planning scale, but incorporating the development of long-term strategic plans that can predict and adapt to the social, cultural, economic and environmental needs of the local population; of the protection of traditional activities which have brought about these architectures and landscapes, promoting the sustainable development of the farming, food or artisanal sectors as profitable activities which generate wealth and employment while maintaining our traditional landscapes; and of protection in tourist development policies, which must respect the harmony and identity of the towns, of their capabilities and interests, preventing scenarios which do not consider the population and ensuring that benefits

are felt in the local community, improving both the economy and the quality of life. This second Protection programme incorporates several notable projects which fall within the framework of the Plan. One of these, *Estado actual de los sistemas de protección en España [Current condition of protection systems in Spain]*, has shown the evolution of the different values of this type of architecture and how these are incorporated into our legal system. Another project, *Análisis sobre los principios de ordenación y los instrumentos urbanísticos para la protección de la arquitectura tradicional en pequeños municipios de España [Analysis of the principles of planning and urbanistic tools for the protection of traditional architecture in small municipalities in Spain]*, examined how urbanistic regulations affect traditional architecture. This was carried out through the analysis of 16 municipalities from scattered mountain locations and livestock villages in the foothills as well as agricultural municipalities where the population concentrates in cereal-growing plains or areas with rural farming economies.

The following study, *Plan de Gestión para el desarrollo de estrategias de actuación para compatibilizar el impacto del turismo con la arquitectura tradicional a través de un estudio piloto en la isla de Formentera, (Illes Balears) [Management Plan for the development of action strategies for the compatible impact of tourism and traditional architecture through a pilot study on the island of Formentera, (Balearic Islands)]*, identified the weaknesses, strengths and opportunities for safeguarding traditional architecture with the synergy resulting from controlled tourist activity.

Finally, a project was carried out on the *Estudio de viabilidad para hacer visitables las “corralas” de ganado porcino y su paisaje cultural en la dehesa boyal de Torquemada (Caceres) [Feasibility study to the make the “corralas” of pig cattle and the cultural landscape in the Dehesa Boyal in Torquemada (Caceres) visitable]*, as this type of landscape is considered a driving force for rural development.

4.3. Intervention and recovery of traditional construction systems

The Plan includes a series of specific intervention criteria to be taken into account:

- a. Conservation of the material nature and significance: the material form must be conserved as much as possible, although it is understood that materials are perishable and can be replaced by other similar ones which respect their constructive significance, while leaving documented evidence of the replacement of elements.
- b. Ensuring the use of compatible constructive and structural materials and systems: this means excluding any materials which might negatively affect the salubrity of the existing materials and do not follow their constructive or structural principles. An example of this is avoiding the use of cement due to its rigidity, salt attraction and poor breathability.
- c. Seeking uses that are compatible with values and adapting architectures to the current ways of life, preventing excessive museumization which makes them lifeless stage settings.
- d. Maintaining symbiosis with the landscape where it is found, integrating volume, colour and texture.
- e. Taking into consideration aspects of sustainability, economy and development, using and managing the material, technical and human resources of the region.
- f. Prioritizing preventive conservation actions. Although they require a regular effort from users, carrying out maintenance tasks at a low cost allows us to prevent health or safety issues which could lead to more costly restoration work, while also revalorizing the heritage, first among users and later in the community. These minor maintenance tasks could be promoted by the town councils, highlighting the importance and benefits they provide and setting a priority scale for

tasks such as maintenance actions, occasional repairs, restoration work, rehabilitation work, and finally, museumization.

Based on this it was felt that it was firstly necessary to carry out the *Estudio de buenas prácticas en las intervenciones de arquitectura tradicional Española [Study on good practices in interventions in Spanish traditional architecture]*. This study reflected the different constructive typologies and techniques, the pathological processes, and examples of interventions requiring assessment.

The recovery of traditional trades also depends on the population who hold the shared knowledge, on the processes for the extraction, production and distribution of materials, on the constructive techniques and their use, as well as on the characteristics of materials. For this reason, the work mentioned above was completed with a study on the *Documentación e investigación para conocimiento de la situación de los sistemas tradicionales de construcción, así como de la extracción, utilización y puesta en obra de los materiales tradicionales en España [Documentation and research to learn about the situation of traditional construction systems, as well as the extraction, use and execution of traditional materials in Spain]*, including technical fiches and mappings on the process and use of materials and techniques with a record of companies and bodies involved in this¹.

4.4. Dissemination, awareness and cooperation

Finally, the Programme for dissemination, awareness and cooperation must act transversally in all phases to ensure that awareness is raised of the heritage value of this architecture in society, subsequently developing coherent safeguarding strategies.

¹ The list of professionals was updated and revised by INTBAU in the National Network of Traditional Building Masters available online.

Dissemination. It is necessary to find mechanisms for the more effective collective dissemination and construction of knowledge to transmit the knowledge generated to society in an ordered way adapted to the different audiences, making use of new information and communication technologies to be heard in a modern society which wants to participate and be valued. Society must take on a major role in dissemination and successful safeguarding. The communities themselves have created this heritage, providing a medium for it and keeping it alive. Therefore, they should play a key part in its recovery, as they are in the best possible position to protect it. But there are also people who - although they are not users - identify with this architecture, understanding and supporting it, or simply act as observers, playing a key role in its conservation.

Transmission. Traditional architecture is a scientific repository of knowledge about the specific qualities and benefits of local traditional materials and techniques, as shown in subsequent scientific studies. Its application is not limited to the restoration of traditional architecture, but is also used in the restoration of monuments and new architecture, giving rise to a wide field of research on the application of these techniques to contemporary architectural design. It is therefore necessary to safeguard traditional knowledge and trades, allowing us to record and protect them, and guaranteeing their continuity and transmission to future generations.

Awareness. We must not forget that a large part of traditional heritage, for which there is still a complete lack of regard, is privately owned. Therefore it is essential to raise awareness to ensure that these actions come from the population itself. To do so we must rely on education, incorporating this subject at all levels, from schools to professional and university training. For this an *educational kit* was designed for children aged 8 to 10 to learn about typological characteristics, materials and techniques of construction and the values of

traditional architecture in Spain. Work is also carried out continuously on specialist training through practical courses and workshops.

Cooperation. We should not forget the support and establishment of common policies between neighbouring regions in order to share enriching experiences by developing inter-regional and cross-border plans which enable closer cooperation.

5. Conclusions

There is still much to be done, but with the correct tools, this heritage can become a sustainable cultural, social and economic resource, especially now that the health, climate and socio-economic crisis we are experiencing is driving us to seek a more sustainable development model by involving society in the recovery, rehabilitation and regeneration of our towns. The PN will work on all these aspects to ensure it is included effectively, safeguarding it to recover knowledge, techniques and materials which are disappearing, to relearn from ecological and bioclimatic solutions, and to readapt to current ways of life improving the quality of life of inhabitants while preserving cultural heritage.

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