The overall urban image: a tool for the management of landscape and urban planning*

Santiago Manuel Pardo García, University of Malaga
Jesús Rodríguez Rodríguez, Centro de Estudios Paisaje y Territorio (Sevilla)
Florencio Zoido Naranjo, Centro de Estudios Paisaje y Territorio (Sevilla)

1. Introduction

The notion of landscape now has a greater functional significance, as the Florence Convention (2000) has extended to the whole of the territory its intellectual and scientific prestige. Largely related to outstanding places for their beauty or rural or natural conditions, it has now reached urban areas and even degraded sites1.

This intellectual and semantic progress does not override the dominant social notion of allocation to natural or rural spaces, nor the little scientific development when applied to the city; for this latter purpose it is frequently used as a synonym of urban morphology, or even simply urban space. If the innovative principles and proposals of the European Landscape Convention (hereinafter ELC) wish to be applied to the city, it is necessary to give a more comprehensive, yet precise content to the concept of urban landscape. Broader since it has to include not only the objective fact (formal and functional), but also the perception and appreciation of it. A more precise concept requires, as has been done for rural and natural landscapes, specifying its attributes and methods of analysis and interpretation.

Our proposal, in line with the definition established in the ELC, is understanding urban landscape as "a built-up area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". The development of this way of understanding the urban landscape2 leads inevitably to a typology of different situations (pre- and post-industrial consolidated compact city landscapes, peri-urban landscapes, metropolitan, etc.); in all of them, albeit the different situations, the condition of landscape refers to the "quality of the territory"3 in real or objective spaces in three ways (ecological, functional and scenic), mainly expressed through two parameters:

- the overall urban image,
- free public space4.

* This paper is the result of the research carried out at the Centro de Estudios Paisaje y Territorio in Sevilla, as well as the final masters thesis “References, terminology and procedures regarding the overall urban image” presented by the first of the authors in February 2011.
1 European Landscape Convention. Artículos 1 and 2, definitions and scope.
2 Work which is being carried out in the Centro de Estudios Paisaje y Territorio (Junta de Andalucía–Public Universities of Andalucía).
The overall image is the aspect addressed in the following sections of this paper. Regarding the relationship between “urban landscape” and open spaces it is sufficient to say now, with the sole purpose of enabling the comprehension of our reflection, that the assessment of their quality includes that of the perimeter buildings and their relation with non-built space, as well as the planning, treatment and use of open spaces. To suggest the interest of this approach, it is sufficient to remember the contents of implementation instruments as valuable as the “ordinances of the urban landscape of the city of Barcelona”, or others which have been inspired by them.

2. Representation of the city and overall image

The perception of the city is the result of a complex, collective, multifaceted process. The general views, which gather overall images of towns, are especially attractive to the population. Lynch, referring to the preferences expressed by citizens, says: “a wide view produces an emotional state of delight and this phenomenon has been mentioned repeatedly. [...] A well organized panorama seems to be a fundamental element of enjoyment of the city.”

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5 Ordinances of Barcelona (Ordinance of the uses of landscape in the city of Barcelona BOP 146-19/06/1999) and Toledo (special ordinance regulating the activities and structures installed in the public streets and open spaces of the city of Toledo. 27/06/02).
Throughout history many ways of seeing and representing the city as a whole have been developed. From the earliest engravings published in the fifteenth century to the present day, descriptive images of the city have followed two main types: a view a common observer can obtain from the field, and geometric representations of the city. In this range any “classic” type of urban image from the panoramic views of urban skylines to orthogonal plans, can be associated. This variety can be seen, for example, in the itinerary set by three images of the city of Venice. In 1493, the “Liber Chronicarum” by Anton Koberger reflects the skyline from a slightly elevated point of view, but associated with the views that an observer could have from the waters of the lagoon (Fig. 1). In the “Civitates Orbis Terrarum” by Braun and Hogenberg, dating from 1572, a bird’s eye view is chosen, constituting a more advanced level of abstraction and technical capacity, since the point of view is impossible for a real observer, although managing to convey a deeper understanding of the structure of the city (Fig. 2). Finally, the plan of Stockdale from 1800 declines any landscaping vocation and is a fully geometrically, accurate and with great potential for administrative use representation (Fig. 3).

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7 Richard Kagan suggest in “Urban images of the hispanic world 1493-1780” a possible classification of these representations according to the adopted point of view.

8 The content of this atlas of cities is a good example of simultaneous use of different points of view, associated to the different authors which collaborated in it drafting, the intentions of each one of them and the stucture of the presented cities.
This historic transition will have important consequences, and the perceived "image" of the city as a unitary whole will lose importance in the administrative field, which will opt for plans to establish the processes of urban management and planning. One thing will be the technical representation of the city, which allows physical intervention in it, and another the global contemplation of landscape and its artistic treatment. Even with the current means of modeling and representation, which open new horizons, this division is still dragging in many cases. The problem is that the urban plans represented in maps are complicated to understand for most people, and fail to capture the essence of overall images which are reflected in perspective views. On the other hand, certain changes over the past centuries with regard to the motivations of such depictions can also be observed. The engravings of Anton Van den Wyngaerde are an outstanding example of the purely descriptive use of the drawing of the city, coupled with inventory needs and territorial control of the authoritarian monarchies. This Flemish painter was hired by Philip II to describe cities he dominated, assignment which resulted in a collection of topographical drawings of excellent accuracy.

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9 Arias Sierra suggest that “the end of this line of representation (the urban panoramic view) is that of an idea of the city, something which could be defined as a loss of value of urbanity as such” (Arias Sierra, P. 2003, p. 152).
10 The complete collection of Spanish engravings can be found in “Cities of the Gold century: Spanish views of Anton Van den Wyngaerde”, work directed by R. Kagan.
Over time, this type of representations focused on the description and diffusion assume other values. Javier Maderuelo exposes, as a paradigmatic example of this, the case of Toledo with the views painted by El Greco. In them, you can see how the artist used the panorama of the city with different nuances and intentions, from the descriptive interpretation of the whole ("View and Plan of Toledo, 1608-1610) to its use as a background for biblical or mythological scenes ("St. Joseph with the baby" of 1597, or "Christ crucified with a view of Toledo" from 1605 to 1610). These latest developments suggest the consolidation of the overall image of the city as a source of identity, associated with the "civic pride" of citizens. The Venetian "veduta" is a true development of this approach to create a pictorial genre closely related to this attitude of appreciation for the city.

In many cases, general views of cities have been carried out continuously, shown from a series of widening points of view, but in which certain locations tend to be featured recurrently. Such places of observation, sometimes used by artists of the sixteenth century, are often highly appreciated by the population. During the mid-nineteenth century, Alfred Guesdon would use air-balloons to produce bird's eye view lithographs depicting bourgeois and romantic cities. Romantic travellers will make new graphic interpretations of urban landscapes, accompanied by descriptions and stories.

This continuity in overall views, and the meaning that is popularly attributed to them, should allow overall images of cities (according simultaneously to the dimensions of real view / representation and point of view/object of vision) to be fully considered as heritage. Urban development has historically worked with landscape parameters: it is the case of the axis of perspective and viewpoints or lookouts. Currently, in some cities urban planning reflects these factors, and advocates for the protection of certain views, as in Segovia and Alhama de Granada, Spain.

The study of these sequences of historical images can provide information on changes that have occurred in the consideration of the city, its landmarks and significance. Richard Kagan has analyzed the evolution that the symbolic milestone of Seville's Giralda has followed. The original Muslim minaret became the icon of the Christian city after the conquest in 1248. Later, with the development of the Renaissance top led by Hernán Ruiz II (1566-1568), the tower will complete its symbolic transformation, increasing its Catholic sense. Representations of the painters of the era, such as Murillo, associate the building with a great religious charge. But from the nineteenth century, replicas began to appear all over the world, which use the iconic nature of the tower, detached from those spiritual values: "With these replicas, we see the magic of a tower that was able to be a initially a Muslim symbol, then Christian, after a city's image which is icon of Spanish culture, a symbol of entertainment and pleasure, and image of progress".

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12 Enln the case of Toledo, Maderuelo, relates the representations of El Greco with the transformation process of the imperial medieval city in modern Renance city. Maderuelo, J. 2005.
13 The Spanish engravings of Guesdon can be found in "Las ciudades españolas a mediados del siglo XIX" by Francisco Quirós Linares.
14 Regarding romantic portaits, there is a selection in "Los paisajes andaluces: hitos y miradas en los siglos XIX y XX", catalogue of an exposition of 2007.
15 The town hall of Alhama de Granada has published a work in which two old views of the city are compared: that of Hoefnagel and that of Van den Wyngaerde. It is the publication "Las vistas panorámicas de Alhama de Hoefnagel y Van den Wyngaerde", by Andrés García Maldonado.
In more recent times, this kind of general views have been used as a tourist promotion, ultimately contributing to their popularity. The massive diffusion of urban panoramic postcards from the late nineteenth century is a clear example of this. At the institutional level, for example, the Andalusian regional government released during the decade of 1990 a series of posters representing the provincial capitals in the region, which showed a composition with the major milestones and urban structures of each of them. These processes complete the transition from using the city’s image as a mere descriptive instrument or expression of power of certain minorities, to become a very popular and symbolic dimension of the landscape that encourages public participation and offers vast opportunities to promote it. And which also plays an important role of identity for people, “a clear and integrated physical setting [...] can provide the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication”17.

Figure 4. Constantina (Sevilla): relation between the overall urban image and the urban plan, with the identification of elements and areas with a uniform texture. Observe the relation between the parallels and meridians drawn over the panoramic image with the mesh generated from the point of view.

Historical study of overall images is a useful tool for understanding the evolution of cities and the attitudes of populations; facts that should be used to manage them responsibly today. But in a complementary manner, not only their knowledge and appreciation should be promoted among the population, but also their participation in the assessment and transformation of an urban landscape that is their living framework. It is therefore necessary to develop modes of

description which overcome the aforementioned split between the technical representation of the city and the approach to the landscape through the great overall views.

Such has been the object of a recent study and experience of participation developed by the Centro de Estudios Paisaje y Territorio, in Constantina (Sevilla), where a procedure has been carried out in this sense. The panoramic views of the city are of great value in shaping local identity: they are used in family photographs on special occasions. To study them, we have identified the main issuing points of such images, combining fieldwork and GIS tools. Two have been found, one on each side of the valley where the population is based. On these focal points a more detailed analysis is developed, taking panoramic images with an equi-rectangular projection. Thus, the distortion is uniform across the image, and a grid of parallels and meridians corresponding to squares is obtained. From the point of observation, a polar mesh can be drawn referred to the meridians of the image, establishing a direct relationship between the ground plan and the overall image (Fig. 4).

3. Participation protocol: quality objectives and management areas

In addition to generating this system of representation and encouraging the contribution of the population to the characterization and assessment of their overall images, it is necessary to define how those observations may be transferred to urban planning. It is therefore interesting to use the definition of Quality Objectives proposed by the ELC, "to define landscape quality objectives for the landscapes identified and assessed, after public consultation" (Section 1c). In the studied case, these quality objectives refer to the structure of the overall image as well as the elements and areas that are distinguished in them (both in the panoramic views as in the urban plan). The way to bring these issues to the drafting of urban planning is the establishment of "management areas" which are areas that have a unitary visual response in the configuration of overall views.

In some cases, these pieces take on equal importance as the overall image, establishing themselves as unitary images of a neighbourhood or leading sector of the city. These interior units usually have very recognizable traits associated with particular identities of the urban landscape, such as Albaicín of Granada, the Jewish quarter neighbourhood of Cordoba or the disappeared Coracha neighbourhood in Malaga. This type of unitary images should also be considered in detail in urban planning.

The study of overall images and the implementation of this fragmentation strategy carries, as a result the characterization of the outstanding features in each city, and the possibility of distinguishing different structure types in them. These are elements that can be understood as attributes that are part of the panoramic views, and many times take on a very striking impression.

This is the case landmarks (representative elements of the city), color (managed in recent times through the drafting of "Color Plans Cards") or the textures and volumes. The silhouette (skyline) is one of the most characteristic formal features of many overall images. This is a sensitive element, which building alterations and new construction can change

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18 An example of this methodology can be found in Pardo García, S. (2010).
19 On the other hand, increasing the thoroughness with which the different components of the overall image are defined, can be positive to go forward in the juridical indetermination for landscape that is mentioned by various authors (See Ochoa and Canales: Ver Ochoa y Canales: "La juridificacion del paisaje o de cómo convertir un criterio esencialmente estético en un bien jurídico objetivable").
considerably (such as the controversy surrounding the Cajasol tower, Sevilla), and its treatment requires careful study of the elevation and cross-section.

It is sometimes possible to see urban fronts built by large open spaces, which allows for panoramic views of "urban facades", which acquire an important role in the shaping of the overall image. In this sense, the sea or lagoon fronts should be highlighted (Malaga and Venice, respectively) or those that take place one or both sides of a river element (like the two urban banks of the Guadalquivir River as it passes through Sevilla and Cordoba). Often this type of structures (waterfronts) acquire a great symbolic weight, so that walks and viewpoints appear in order to enjoy the generated landscape. Another very common type fronts are those that arise at the edges of the consolidated city, materializing the boundary between urban and rural and which generally require a special attention and urban and landscape treatment.

Our working protocol aims to develop knowledge regarding overall images and any attributes that can be distinguished in them, and gathering the aspirations of the population establishing quality objectives which will be later developed through management areas. We will continue to view the previous case of Constantina, in which in the overall image an area of elongated land plots with a characteristic texture can be observed from the castle, which is identified both in the panoramic view and in the urban plan. If people value their role as a prominent feature of these overall views, the quality goal of keeping their inner emptiness and the elongated proportion of the plots would be established. These issues would be reflected on a management area which includes in the ground plan the visual area corresponding to these plots, and appropriate conservation conditions which are adequate and consistent with quality objectives would be defined. Finally, these determinations could be transferred to planning through norms, guidelines or recommendations prior to its drafting or developed afterwards, or as a requirement which conditions its approaches. Urban growth areas could even be selected to avoid altering the views, considering the spaces that are visible from every issuing point (Fig. 5).
Figure 5. Constantina (Sevilla): Management areas and elements of the overall image and the General Urban Plan. Future growth can be to the West of the city will affect notably rural areas which are important to the overall image of the city. The different management areas can also be observed as well as relevant punctual elements or which should be transformed.
4. Conclusions

Overall urban images have played a significant role in the construction of the visual and symbolic identity of many European cities. The plastic beauty and iconographic power of these images, widely disseminated through art and culture, have contributed to shaping the landscape character of many historic centers, whose names are clearly related to the formal features, significant landmarks and scenic compositions which are appreciated from certain viewpoints that have been institutionalized through their use and social recognition. Nowadays, many of these overall images begin to be considered as an important resource which should be managed in a specific manner, especially in situations where the intensity and dynamics of urban processes can lead to the concealment or disfigurement of urban views with a high heritage and landscape value.

In practice, this need to reconcile the preservation of images together with the specific logics of urban development faces a double challenge: on the one hand, there is a certain conceptual and methodological failure to carry out a systematic and joint survey of all the elements, characteristics, perceptions and social representations that are united around these urban images, and secondly, it has remarkable difficulties to encode and translate the results of the landscape assessment to the specific parameters and normative terms of planning tools on which the planning and management of urban space ultimately rests.

This paper, which is part of a line of work of great interest for the Centro de Estudios Paisaje y Territorio, offers some of the advances developed in recent years to overcome the above deficiencies and to establish a theoretical and instrumental framework which allows the proper integration of overall images in urban planning. The definition of this general reference framework, based on a consideration of urban views as an important heritage asset for towns and as a resource on which to establish more sustainable development models, is performed through an initial conceptual clarification regarding overall urban images and their basic constituent components (skyline, landmarks, facades, borders...). Similarly, the procedures to transcribe in a more reliable and accurate way the fundamental characteristics of these urban images to the plans and rules governing the urban system have begun to be developed in the areas that give rise to such images.

These scientific and technical contributions, together with public participation processes for recognizing the values and social meanings attributed to overall urban images, provide a solid basis for the treatment of resources and potentials that are derived from the relationships established between the urban centres and their landscape surroundings.
References


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