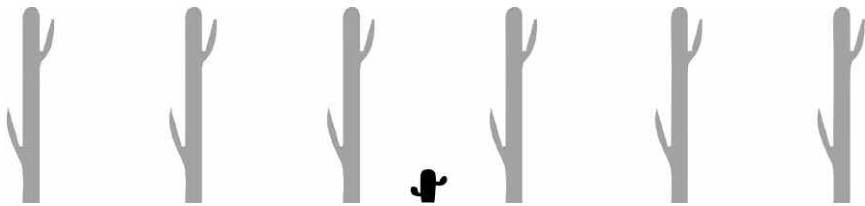


Extended abstract

*Social Discourses on Path and Trails
in Andalusia (Spain).*

*Revaluation of Rural Heritage,
Conflict and Governance*



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Highlights:

1. Road heritage today generates great social and economic interest in rural areas.
2. Its most popular uses are hiking, mountain biking and pilgrimage.
3. This heritage is a source of conflict between rural and urban populations.
4. There is an urgent need to address the crisis of governance of rural heritage resources.

Abstract: The purpose of the article is to analyse a complex social process affecting road heritage in rural Andalusia. The urban population demands the enhancement of this heritage for tourism, sports and recreational use, but part of it has been abandoned or usurped. In order to study this reality, qualitative research has been carried out to elucidate the social positions with respect to this heritage. The results show the social attribution of environmental, cultural and economic value to this heritage, but also numerous conflicts between rural and urban populations. The findings of the project can help to guide public policies and the governance of road heritage.

Keywords: Road heritage; rural development; green economy; cultural change; articulation of interests.

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction and justification

Livestock routes, forest tracks, rural roads, sports and tourist trails, cultural routes, natural itineraries in protected areas and greenways represent Andalusia's rural public path network. Also, the facilitating and complementary buildings and infrastructures (livestock resting areas, interpretation centres, natural viewpoints, recreational areas, etc.) This heritage is an integral part of the public road domain that fulfils communication functions and cultural and ecological ones (Oteros-Rozas et al., 2013). These structures are a resounding expression of the cultural and ecological heritage of the rural environment. Indeed, traditional resource management activities, such as agriculture, livestock, forest management, transhumance or hunting, have traditionally revolved around them (Mastronardi et al., 2021; Vidal & Castán, 2011; Albera & Lebaudy, 2001). In Andalusia, most of this green infrastructure is public and needs to be protected and conserved or rescued and recovered in cases of abandonment and usurpation in order to intervene in its better organization and management so that it fulfils its social, cultural, economic and ecological functions, in order to achieve the sustainable development of rural areas.

2. Objectives, methodology and sources, areas of study

The main objective of this study is to research the function public path network plays in the economy and culture of rural areas, analyzing its potential as a factor in rural development, economic diversification, socio-territorial cohesion and the fight against depopulation, as well as conflicts derived from their diverse uses due to the absence of a governance model around these traditional infrastructures. To do so, we interviewed various social, political and economic agents, which would allow us to qualitatively determine the economic impact, social effects and ecosystem services that can derive from the recovery, enhancement, maintenance and protection of the public path network of rural areas. Also, we wanted to carry out a social mapping of the positions of material and symbolic interest that are articulated around the value

and uses of the public path network of rural areas, determining the common elements and points of conflict between the different social actors.

The sample design incorporates the following profiles: 1) representatives of regional and state public administrations; 2) representatives of local public administrations or entities; 3) representatives of the Professional Sector and the Private Sector, including agricultural professional organizations and rural and active tourism entrepreneurs; 4) representatives of civil society organizations, such as environmental collectives and citizen platforms. A total of 17 interviews were conducted, which involved the participation of 22 people. The interviews were transcribed, and the speeches were analyzed through fragment coding.

3. Results

The study shows a wide heterogeneity of public path network conceptions, values and meanings. Some informants associate it with historical and cultural values, others with economic values -traditional or modern- and some link it with values of strict personal or social enjoyment. In contrast, others relate it to environmental values. Those values are also motivated by the changes produced in the reality of the rural environment and the relationship of the urban population with this environment. New activities have been incorporated into the reality of rural areas, such as the development of tourism, the arrival of new residents, or the new leisure demands of the urban population, profoundly changing the reality of the rural environment.

The diversification of activities in rural areas also reflects a great diversity of functions of rural roads and trails: as a means of communication between population centres, as a form of access to traditional economic activities (agricultural and livestock, but also hunting), as an opportunity to develop rural and sports tourism or for its environmental usefulness, whether as a reservoir of native animal and plant species, for its role in the prevention and extinction of forest fires or for promoting awareness environmental by facilitating access to the natural environment, as well as other social and cultural functions.

Given the volume and variety of the public path network, the heterogeneity of actors that travel through them, the diversity of their interests, and the weak management, if not poor surveillance, of these road infrastructures and the activities that take place on them, it is expected that an important contentiousness emerges

around them, especially around the property and the rights of way. One piece of evidence derived from our research is the existence of a governance problem around the public path network.

In the study, we identified other issues contributing to this public path network governance problem: lack of inventory, maintenance costs, uncontrolled urbanization, the rural-urban disconnection that this entails, or the lack of promotion of tourism and other services.

4. Discussion

The informants agreed that the public path network can guarantee the maintenance of traditional activities, promote the expansion of a "green economy", contribute to socio-territorial cohesion and have a multiplier effect on other economic activities. Furthermore, from an ecological point of view, public path network, especially livestock routes, can also fulfil critical ecological functions. These conclusions coincide with those reported in other works (Campillo, 2001; Monzón, 2017; Autor; Oteros-Rozas, 2013).

On the other hand, the progressive neglect and abandonment of the public path network in Andalusia in the past is associated with a crisis of governance of the natural resources of the rural environment, which is expressed through material and symbolic conflicts between traditional actors linked to the primary sector and new social and economic actors. Our investigation collects evidence of the following circumstances that occur around the public path network:

First, there is a lack of functions on the part of the Public Administrations, particularly the City Councils, in maintenance, surveillance, inventory and sanction of public paths. This situation has favoured privative action by individuals who have fenced, ploughed or diverted them for their own uses and interests. Only when social pressure has been significant enough, thanks to interest in rural tourism, has this situation come to pass the media and the political agenda (Campillo, 2013; Author; Trujillo, 2019 and 2016).

Likewise, it is confirmed that some large landowners, farmers, ranchers and owners of companies and hunting reserves force a model of inaction or deficient governance in the management of this public path network within the public administration. They have sufficient resources to rely on legal advice that hinders lawsuits against this sector for appropriating or closing livestock trails, rural roads or

forest trails. Some previous studies have also reached this conclusion (Campillo, 2013; Torre et al., 2020; Trujillo, 2019).

Finally, small and medium-sized farmers and ranchers, environmental associations, citizen platforms for the defence of public roads, sports cultural and pilgrimage associations, as well as other disseminated collectives defending communal heritage, organize themselves in social demands and political pressure. They do this through rallies in front of City Halls or symbolic places (they have even carried out actions in the European Parliament) and by carrying out massive weekly tours on those public rural roads that have been cut off or usurped by individuals (Campillo, 2013; Trujillo, 2016).

5. Conclusions

Given the changes experienced in the last two decades, the rural world must be rethought. First, from the point of view of governance, analyzing which actors are currently involved in establishing the material and symbolic value around rural resources and how new norms emerge from it. Second, from the socioeconomic value point of view, given that the traditional activities (agriculture, livestock, etc.) are increasingly smaller, while the new activities around the enhancement of endogenous resources are growing.

Our findings can be used to adopt measures for the adequate regulatory regulation of the public path network of rural Andalusia, although they can also serve many other Mediterranean regions. In this regard, we aim to contribute to improving the governance and enhancement of this heritage from the field of public action, providing keys to the situation of these infrastructures. Some of the solutions we identified include the need to carry out a complete inventory of the public path network, the establishment of coordination mechanisms between administrations in order to order compatible uses of these infrastructures to determine how to avoid conflicts, ensure its maintenance through planned roads, and develop a permanent surveillance function to prevent situations outside the law from occurring and finally public actions aimed at the recovery, enhancement, promotion, maintenance and surveillance of rural roads, to favour their impact on the rural population.

6. Next Steps

Among the main limitations of our research is that there is a need to carry out quantitative studies that contribute to expanding information on the economic impact of public paths in rural areas. The second limitation is the difficulty of obtaining collaboration from some administrations since not all of them show a good disposition; in addition, it must be taken into account that Andalusia is one of the largest autonomous communities in Spain. Finally, we consider that, given the social interest aroused by the new uses of public paths, we encourage the scientific community to replicate this study in other territories and from other scientific perspectives.