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### **Rural places versus naturalized spaces.**

The logic of knowledge and acknowledgement  
in protected heritage areas.

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**ABSTRACT:**

New policies on nature heritage reorganize and redefine space by introducing new concepts, practices, managers and recipients. The imposition of a neoliberal conservation model generates tensions and resistance in local communities. This process involves appropriations, real and discursive, and reinventions on identity and territory. In this paper, we present the tensions derived from a statutory designation affecting a small town located in the region of Camp de Turia, Valencia (Spain). The town has swiftly gone from an economy based on traditional models for the exploitation of forest and agricultural resources, to a process of natural environment patrimonilization (The Sierra Calderona Nature Park, 2002) that has reshaped the territory. We believe the Natural Areas Protection Act clearly tends towards reductionism. The regulation defines new practices, with prescriptions and prohibitions, and implements a management model where the participation of affected population is more symbolic than real. In this sense, we want to analyse how new conservationist policies, based on the governing principles of the modern constitution, imply a hierarchic practice in which scientific-technical knowledge 'legitimately' displaces the local knowledge. This process involves physical, geographical or administrative changes as a means of transforming the usage and perception of the area.

**KEY WORDS:**

Heritage, Natural Areas, Identity, Appropriation, Reinvention

## Introducción

From the first nature park designations, in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one may trace how institutional biodiversity protection policies have been shaped. Swiftly, with the establishment of the nation state, liberalism, the capitalist approach and the early politicization of nature in the US, came a reaction that reshaped spatial planning and induced a rapid expansion of natural area networks later transferred to the rest of the world (Santamarina, 2009). This formula's success has been such that not only does the official preservation paradigm dominate, but has unfolded as an ostensible and ostentatious accomplishment which is accurately reflected in figures. According to official data, "the global number and extent of nationally designated protected areas has increased dramatically over the past century. By 2008, there were over 120,000 protected areas covering a total of about 21 million square kilometres of land and sea, an area more than twice the size of Canada" (WDPA, 2010).

In the process, protected areas have aroused a bitter debate over the distinct costs and benefits associated with them. This debate has become prominent in different international congresses on protected areas, something which was well exemplified in the IUCN's V<sup>th</sup> World Parks Congress (2003). On the other hand, it has also generated abundant bibliography in different areas of expertise (Igoe 2006; Adams and Hutton, 2007; Coad et al. 2008; Mora and Sale, 2011). Leaving the debate's contents aside<sup>1</sup>, we may now say that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century things have not changed much in regard to protected areas. We believe the nineteenth-century traditional notion still prevails.

Thus, the past considered as pristine nature is, and has been, the motor behind natural heritage strategies framed within a dualistic nature/culture paradigm<sup>2</sup>. Under the *wilderness* philosophy, nature parks were, and are, protected in order to be admired as a form of 'natural' timeless nature as well as for the preservation of the past; a past as much mystified and praised as intervened. The idea was, and is, very attractive and suggestive: to create natural museums *in situ*, within nature itself, as wildlife strongholds (Hutton, Adams y Murombedzi, 2005; Igoe, 2006; Selmi and Hirtze 2007; Descola 2007). Since the first nature parks were created, Western collective imagination has done nothing but nurture this concept (Igoe, 2006). So much so that today 'nature' has become a

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1. To check both opposed approaches regarding natural spaces one may read Brockington, Duffy and Igoe (2008), among others.

2. The nature/culture dichotomy not only determines the conservationist discourse but seems absolutely necessary for its existence. And, consequently, is ever present in Natural Park designations.

brand used to designate spaces, products, communities and peoples; establishing a marketing of the ‘natural’ that is daily becoming stronger in certain contexts (economies traditionally defined as marginal). ‘Wild nature’ –true and original–, that became the main active principle founded on authenticity, still is the best chance to develop areas excluded from the hegemonic market. At least that is the discourse fed by establishing a direct connection between development (economy), so-called sustainable, and conservation (nature). Conservation would be the best ally for the development of marginal areas, ecotourism being their lifeline. The formula is simple: the nature market creates new avenues for economic growth. Moreover, it is a profitable market, which is salutary and deservedly distinguished.

However, it would be interesting to analyse how the conservationist model was founded on contradictions and shifts through expulsion and territorial regulation mechanisms, under one unitary paradigm of interpretation (Stevens, 1997; Dowie, 2005 and 2009; West *et al.* 2006; Selmi and Hirtzel 2007; Adams and Hutton, 2007; Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008; etcétera). Having said that, as to the case we now discuss, we will analyse a specific form of shift to be found in protected areas: that which affects forms of knowledge and practices. In other words, how local forms of knowledge are set aside or adjusted by conservationist hegemonic logics making up new spaces that replace the old ones. Thus, in order to make it plain and simple, hegemony is used in the sense proclaimed by Igoe, Neves and Brockington (2010), that is, in terms of the Gramscian hegemony notion (*the manufacturer of consent*). We define it as Holmes does: “Hegemony is the ability to dominate thinking and practice so that particular ideas or strategies become considered as the only feasible, possible, or conceivable options” (2011: 17).

Here we shall underline the fact that –obviously and as we have repeatedly emphasized– natural heritage procedures are parallel to the treatment of cultural heritage and, thus, legitimize and determine discursive relationships and practices throughout asymmetrical processes characterized by negations, confiscations and conflicts. We mention this for the fact that in heritage production strategies, factual and efficient control of both sensorial and symbolic capital helps and enables the reproduction of remaining capitals. However, the nineteenth-century conservation paradigm, globalized and still in force, generates, not only ‘conservation refugees’, in its most bitter version (Dowie, 2005), but the destruction of a diversity of knowledge (ethno-knowledge) and of local sites (ethno-topographies).

In spite of criticisms questioning the logics promoted by hegemonic conservation<sup>3</sup>, natural heritage procedures are characterized by the same exclusion processes found in any other form of patrimonial activation. Thus, protected areas help us distinguish the relations of domination existing behind their design<sup>4</sup>. These relations become obvious in statutory designations established by the technocratic paradigm based on expert knowledge which ignores local lore and practices. In fact, the notion of natural space itself is founded on the constitution of modern accomplishments such as the scientific/common knowledge distinction and the establishment of technical/scientific knowledge as a creator of ‘truth’ –or, at least, generating the effects of truth– in Foucauldian terms. Both processes, those of depuration included (Latour, 1993), legitimize neoliberal conservation policies. Therefore, the territorial redefinition of space posed by any statutory designation implies the forceful possession not only of property, resources and uses, but of different forms of knowledge, as well.

In this article we focus on a case study, the Nature Park of Sierra Calderona (Valencia), to see how a small location’s (Serra) inhabitants perceive the transformations experienced in their region. In order to do so, the next section will offer a brief contextualization of the village. Later, based on our fieldwork experiences, we will present the practices and relations that once determined and defined the past. Thus, we will describe the changes suffered due to a modernization process which took place during the sixties, as well as the area’s adjustment to new production strategies. Our reconstruction will be based on memory; memory as a fundamental tool in order to understand a region’s perceptions and configurations that, eventually, determine its ultimate representation. In the following section we will analyse the construction of a new territorial definition which is derived from the area’s status as Nature Park (Decree 10/2002 of the Government of Valencia) and other new urban demands. We will continue by analysing how locals view their hometown as a new territory with which it seems hard to identify and where diverse logics determine the representation and construction of space. Finally, we will present some brief conclusions on naturalization processes and their connection to capitalistic or neoliberal conservation strategies.

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3. Current transnational conservation models have been questioned for some time now (Brosius, 2004; Brockington and Igoe, 2006; Brockington, Duffy and Igoe, 2008; Mora and Sales, 2011).

4. It is not rare to see how natural heritage processes have created numerous conflicts worldwide.

Before starting we would like to point out that this article is part of a larger research project in the town of Serra<sup>5</sup>. For almost three years fieldwork was carried out in the mentioned location, using two main strategies: conversation (life histories, biographical interviews and open interviews)<sup>6</sup> and the collection of documents (reading and analysis of primary and secondary sources).

## 2. The context: Valencian Switzerland

The village of Serra is located in the region of Camp del Turia<sup>7</sup> (provincial de Valencia), approximately thirty kilometres away from the city of Valencia. Roughly speaking, it presents three socio-geographic features that are important in order to comprehend the location's history. Firstly, and in spite of its proximity to the sea, the village is situated in Sierra Calderona, founded on a mountainous topography. Though this mountain range is not particularly elevated, under 1,000 meters altitude (except for Montemayor that reaches 1,015m. in its northwest section), it stands out for reaching some of the region's peak altitude (Rebalsadors, Oronet and Garbí). Such a setting provides some unusual geographic and geologic features. On the one hand, the landscape's idiosyncrasy is revealed in the terrain's great changes in relative altitude –the altitude varying between 180 and 800 meters above sea level. On the other hand, narrow cliffs and other geological features, in some areas, create water deposits and produce rich mineral springs (Saez Jarque, 1986). Both features (an abrupt geological landscape plus rich water springs) influence local people's socioeconomic development. Secondly, the town's geographic location has been privileged. The area has become an axis or natural passage connecting the valley of Palancia, to the north, with Valencia's plain, to the south (Cebrián, 1910). Another important aspect is the town's proximity to Valencia and the intense relations both locations have had throughout history. Commercial exchange between both communities has traditionally been constant; an interaction which was already noticed

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5. The present investigation started as a collaboration agreement between the local government and the University of Valencia (2008-2010). Its current extension is part of the *Patrimonialización y redefinición de la ruralidad. Nuevos usos del patrimonio local (Patrimonialization and Redefinition of Rural Reality. New Uses of Local Heritage)* (CSO2011-29413), financed by the Department of Education and Science.

6. In regard to the mentioned life stories (25) and biographical interviews (15) one should be aware that our informants' average age is eighty.

7. It is bordered to the north by Gátova, Segorbe and Torres-Torres; to the south, by the villages of Pobla de Vallbona, Bétera and Nàquera; to the east, by Estivella, Segart and Nàquera; and to the west by Olocau. All of these locations are part of the Valencia province, except Segorbe (Castellón).

by Cavanilles (1795). The arrival of tourism, which sharply increased in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, also implied the creation of summer season colonies for visitors. The arrival of summer vacationers –a phenomenon consolidated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century– and the democratization of tourism in the 1950s and 1960s have greatly affected the community. Hence, the area is commonly known as ‘Valencian Switzerland’<sup>8</sup>.

Bearing in mind the mentioned features and not willing to expand on the community’s history and geography, it is still necessary to further describe our fieldwork study’s context. Serra is a location where human beings have dwelled since prehistory. Serra’s origin can be traced to the first centuries of the Arab-Berber occupation, a period that somehow remains in the form of architectonic heritage (Senis, 1978). The expulsion of the Moorish in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Town Charter (1609) entail the arrival of new Christian dwellers who are the forefathers of today’s residents (Garay, 2001). From then on, the *muntanya* (mountain) and the *terra* (land) –using our informants’ vernacular– have been directly associated with local people’s economic activities. The use of the forest’s supplies as well as agricultural resources, the exploitation of mines and quarries and the commercialization of water, among others, define a series of traditional uses presenting an integrated system of past environmental exploitation. The different ways of working the mountain and the land appear as intertwined practices that, along with other activities derived from the mentioned exploitation, make up a complex amalgam of ‘cultural’ uses<sup>9</sup>. In the past, time and the environment were tightly attached. Both aspects conditioned socio-productive periods, while activities depended on a profound knowledge of the environment and adjustment strategies directly associated with the latter.

The crisis of traditional production systems, during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, procured a change of setting in regard to these activities, passing from a mainly forest and agricultural economy (with the exception, previously pointed out, of summer tourism), to an increasingly outsourcing-oriented economy. Thus, mountain and land are being displaced and reshaped as forms of economic, social and symbolic capital.

In the last few years Serra has undergone a great transformation, which is reflected, as we will later see, both in the increase in population as well as in the boom of the real estate business. This transformation has

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8. The term was originally used by summer vacationers due to the region’s abrupt landscapes.

9. We use the term ‘cultural’ to underline the continuity between the realms of the ‘cultural’ and the ‘natural’, which is to be found in our informants’ discourses and practices. In this regard, it is interesting to review the emergence of new terms to overcome such dichotomy; terms such as Toldeo and Barrera-Bassols’ ‘bioculturality’ (2008).

taken place in many mountain communities throughout the nation which have had to adjust their productive strategies to the needs of a new global market (Frigolé and Roigé, 2006; Vaccaro and Beltran, 2007; Beltran *et al.*, 2008; Roigé and Frigolé, 2010). In most cases, tourism –or so-called ecotourism– has become a solid proposal, which has promoted a diversification in offer, leading to a patrimonialization both of nature and culture. In fact, this is a reaction to the heritage tourist industry, which has created an unprecedented growing demand in heritage consumption. In this context, the Generalitat Valenciana’s Statutory Designation of the Sierra Calderona Nature Park (Act 10/2002, 15<sup>th</sup> of January) is looked upon, from different political instances, as an opportunity both for (ecological) conservation and (sustainable) development. Thus, hegemonic environmental concepts view statutory designations as necessarily entailing conservation effects (in terms of guaranteeing biodiversity) and local development (in terms of assuring economic growth). Profitability seems assured when the blessed and venerated protection of nature creates market opportunities. Note here the importance of the sociological ‘self-evidence’ mechanism (non-explained comprehension) for the elaboration of interpretation and behaviour models.

### 3. Old places

Transformations occurred in the last few decades have greatly modified landscapes (cultunatural). For this reason, descriptions and perceptions of the past have been considerably transfigured. For decades, the perception locals had of their environment was conditioned by traditional exploitation systems that propitiated practices and interactions extremely dissimilar from what we may currently find in the village. Locals’ identification with the environment, and their labour within it, founded their perception of the place. Such vision was defined by the environment’s use throughout space-time coordinates.

At this point, and before going any further, we will remind the reader that we are focusing on memory. We are aware that under these conditions memory is a selective (re)construction of the past in the present, built through different influences that enable the creation of a collective imagery based on fractured glimpses of memory. Thus, we find ourselves in a realm where memory, identity and territory necessarily entail the reinvention of the past by present interpretations. Memory, experience and the spoken word serve to found a variety of meanings. Therefore, that which is transmitted, learnt and experienced, is entangled to evoke an idealized view of the past. However, not only locals participate in the mentioned construction, for different mediations intervene in the process



actively contributing to shape ‘that which was’ and ‘that which is represented’. Foreigners bring and take images and narratives on the location, to which we must add the discourses produced by diverse institutions and agents (political, scholarly, patrimonial, tourist, etcetera). The final result is both a densely condensed group of meanings and a backbone for identity constructions.

Bearing these elements in mind, the inhabited and mentally reconstructed place is an area well defined by traditional and subsistence economy characterized by harsh conditions. In this setting, working the mountain and the land are not only a form of production but also function as essential identity components, creating a collective imagination full of inner connections. Hence, our informants refer to mountain and land as contained within a whole where sundry practices are described.

Thus, a recurrent statement by the area’s dwellers is highly significant: “Ací, tot el mon, tot el món, se cobijaba en la terra i la muntanya” (“Here everyone, everyone found refuge in the land and the mountain”).

Serra’s features, as mentioned before, facilitated different forms of exploitation, among them agricultural work (*la terra*). Traditionally, locals cultivated small vegetable irrigation gardens, near water springs and pools, for the household consumption of family units. In the same vein, people also worked non-irrigation lands, uncultivated areas or plots artificially usurped from the mountain, specializing in growing cherries, almonds, carobs and olives. The soil’s scarce efficiency forced locals to work for large farms in exchange for a salary or piecework. Thus, people worked self-owned plots for certain periods while labouring in large properties during others.

Most locals being associated with agriculture, were also strongly tied to the mountain forest. The sierra was one of the pillars of an economy that, despite being impoverished, kept functioning until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The mountain’s exploitation system was organized through public auctions<sup>10</sup>. Wood, firewood and stumps, pastures or mining, properly exemplify the auction system, where the renter was legally (temporarily) bound to the plantation, while using local workers to carry out the job<sup>11</sup>. The management system was based on a division in plots, with the aim of preserving or regenerating the mountain, assuring future fertility. But

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10. These were announced by the municipal council through disposal cases, which were published in provincial bulletins.

11. The mountain work model was piecework in contrast to the daily wages paid in other agricultural holdings.

the mountain's use was not limited to auctions. Water, a very valuable good for its quality and properties, stimulated relevant commercial activity (Senis, 1978; Garay, 2004). Similarly, other resources were exploited such as figs<sup>12</sup> or a variety of herbs used as spices or remedies with medicinal properties. We may name other animal products such as honey, for example.

Many locals worked the land and exploited the mountain in different periods of their lives, even combining the diverse alternatives they were met with while subjected to a precarious economy<sup>13</sup>. Around the mountain and land economy, multiple crafts developed. Among these, some as meaningful as the *picaapedrer* (stonecutter) or the *aiguader* (water carrier) which became archetypal references in the area. Similarly, intense exchange systems were established. Almost every mountain and land product –except for those used within the household– became part of a ‘foreign market’. Stone and different types of wood, cork, carbon, oil, cherries or water were commercialized by the locals, establishing intense commercial relations with the *Horta Nord* region and the city of Valencia (Garay, 2004).

Slow transformations, produced by the modernization process initiated in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, implied important changes in the production and energy model, what entailed a decrease both in the demand for basic mountain products and in the progressive abandonment of the land due to its scarce profitability. This brought with it further outsourcing in the community and, thus, a change in the way people perceived resources: from dynamic economic motors to scarcely profitable, useless or ‘obsolete’ raw materials.

Different factors explain the mentioned transformation, among them the replacement in energy sources, the low productivity of local agricultural systems, the lack of local industries or the proximity of large industrial cities (Saez Jarque, 1986). The first meaningful transformation was the change in the energy model that replaced carbon and wood energy sources with fossil derivatives and electricity. Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ovens<sup>14</sup> in the near region of *Horta Nord* demanded a great amount of firewood and carbon. In a few years

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12. Figs were sun-dried and the crushed to create a paste, ‘confins’, which were seasoned with almonds. This type of food provided significant amounts of energy and was commercialized especially during the Christmas season, in the city of Valencia (Zurriaga, 2009).

13. To clarify any doubt it is worth noting that the described practices were dynamic and were being constantly redefined. The designed image of the past can in no way generate a static setting. Beyond being perceived as a relic, we would like to underline that these were complex practices that rebuilt, in any case, a map made up of diverse mechanics.

14. Used both to bake bread, pottery, lime or other products.

the energy transformation produced a severe restructuring of the forest's uses. These transformations manifest themselves in the dwindling relevance of the aforementioned auctions, which lose interest until they finally disappear in the seventies (Source: Serra's Municipal Archive). As a consequence of the energy model shift, other uses lost their meaning. For instance, the collecting of esparto or work in so-called *almàsseras* swiftly became changed and doomed. If esparto stopped fulfilling some of its most important functions, as its use for knotting firewood pieces<sup>15</sup>, the *almàsseras* (oil mills) became obsolete with the arrival of hydraulic presses.

A few years after, agriculture suffered the same fate. The low productivity of the land, due to the type of soil, as well as to orographic, climatological and socio-historical factors, induced the abandonment of traditional agricultural forms. To understand the decline we must pay attention to the structure and location of private property<sup>16</sup> in relation to cultivations. In regard to property, as we said, most locals owned (and own) a plot of land, though very small. In quantitative terms, which properly express the mentioned structure, "smaller than 1 hectare are 459 cultivations (55.89% of the total), a whole that only contains a surface of 188.5085 hectares (9.23% of the total). However, there are 304 cultivations (a 36.84%) which are less than 0.5 hectares; which, in total, make up about 76.4446 hectares (3.74% of the total surface)" (Sanz Jarque, 1986: 33). Other data seems relevant: slightly over a third of the mentioned private property, the 36.13%, is shared between 83.29% of the owners. The other side of the coin is defined by large property owners: "only three cultivations have more than 100 hectares each, and the three make up a surface of 548.6507 hectares in total, approximately a fourth of the mentioned total private property" (Sanz Jarque, 1986: 33). We must also add another feature that defines cultivations: all of them are and were very divided up, the total number of plots being 6,626. Also, "almost 25% (23.5%) of the plots are smaller than 500m<sup>2</sup>" (Sanz Jarque, 1986: 42). Finally, regarding the location, it is not accidental for the main properties to be found in Portaceli Mountain. The region's

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15. This phenomenon involving chain effect transformations shows how complex the interaction between different elements belonging to the mountain or land truly is.

16. The realm of the public was almost entirely left aside from agricultural exploitations. In all of Serra's cadastral surface, public property, belonging to the local government and to the state, is two thirds of the total, while private property makes up more than a third (35.95%) (Sanz Jarque, 1986: 30). Public cultivations were destined for use of the forest, except for the breeding of cattle carried out by the local government in some of its properties.

best agricultural soil is located there, specifically in the Lullén Valley<sup>17</sup>. The area is flat and accessible, located beneath the 300m –above sea level– and protected by north and east winds creating a very favourable microclimate for agricultural purposes (Sanz Jarque, 1986). Small properties, instead, are situated above the 300m in the Alt del Pi mountain, and are part of a “remote steep terrain, with a soil lacking depth” (Sanz Jarque, 1986: 27). These features –without taking into account other factors– explain the land’s low productivity, the scarce impact created by the mechanization of agriculture and the lack of competitiveness in a market that is becoming progressively aggressive.

In spite of positive efforts made by the municipal council and individual agriculturalists to find an outlet for agricultural products, the problem was not solved. In fact, in the attempt to find a solution to this issue, the local council in 1985 ordered the *Centro Permanente de Investigación Cooperativa* (Permanent Centre for Cooperative Research), belonging to the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, a survey to find improvements in territorial planning, for the proper exploitation of resources and in the viability of exchanging common forest areas with agricultural land belonging to the state. Also, with the aim of promoting local products, the “Day of the Cherry” was established in 1972, a celebration that wanted to promote both the agricultural industry and tourism. Despite these initiatives, agriculture would never recover; a progressive abandonment of the fields taking place, which is now very visible to the visitor.

Apart from these transformations the community will undergo a decrease in its population. Between 1960 and 1972 there is a notable decrease, the population going from 1412 inhabitants to 1161. And, also, there was a change in the production sector. After the loss of the primary sector as a whole, the construction of residential areas became commonplace, due to a lack of industrial framework in the region. Thus, it is significant that already in 1971 Serra created a “Centre for initiatives and Tourism” to promote tourism. However, this trend was neutralized by the Spanish economic crisis and the international oil crisis in the seventies. This scenario provoked a slow recovery for locals, the village reaching by 1985 the same population it had had in 1960. However, this was not due to an improvement in production conditions but to a lack of opportunity outside the community. The growth of the tertiary sector, initiated in the

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17. According to Ribes, “The name of the Lullén Valley, which was the most primitive name in the area, comes from a Muslim farmhouse existing there during the conquest. In 1343 the Muslims were ejected from the valley and the location changed its name to Santa Margarita or Pobleta de Porta-Coeli” (1998: 17). As Garay points out, the valley offers the best chances for ‘progressive and expanding’ agriculture (2004b: 71).

seventies, consolidated itself throughout the nineteen eighties and nineties and was essentially stimulated by seasonal tourism, the relative rise in local commerce and the progressive trend toward growing population that, though living in the area, worked outside Serra (dormitory community). On top of that, the real estate business boom became one of the economy's main engines.

#### 4. New spaces

Though traditional activities were remodelled during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, not until the century's last decade will the community dramatically mutate. During the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Serra underwent a prominent transformation both in terms of landscape and population, which was translated into a huge growth in people and cement. In the last twenty years, Serra's population has grown exponentially, doubling its inhabitants by far: from 1408 inhabitants to 3224 (IVE, 2011). In order to understand such an extraordinary rise in housing and population, we should at least discuss two intertwined factors. On the one hand, this phenomenon should be placed within the current of events that characterize the country's development in recent years, and especially those associated with the Community of Valencia: the intense growth experienced in the real estate sector (hyper-urbanization or the Valencian urbanizing tsunami) as well as the general and exponential increase in housing prices (Bono and García, 2006; Sorribes, 2006; VVAA, 2007; Gaja, 2006 and 2008; Díaz Orueta and Lourés, 2008; etcetera). On the other hand, and in connection with previously mentioned aspects, this is directly related to the growth experienced by the city of Valencia and the expansion in its metropolitan area, which has induced the migration of part of the population in search of a better quality of life and cheaper housing. Thus, and despite this, we must underline the fact that not every member of the community lives in the village. In fact, until now<sup>18</sup>, in many cases, the sole act of registering as a community member in Serra was part of a (fraudulent) strategy in relation to the Inland Revenue Service<sup>19</sup>.

On top of that it is necessary to bear in mind the community's administrative redesign during this period. In 2002, the Generalitat Valenciana established the Sierra Calderona Nature Park affecting most of Serra's

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18. Since 2011 the tax system for the acquisition of a primary home has changed.

19. The investment in second residence housing did not reduce state and the region's tax deductions per investment in habitual residence, due to which it was a profitable strategy, in the individual income tax return process, to formally establish a second home as the first to obtain tax advantages.

municipal district (93%). This event, in our opinion, is part of the predominant neoliberal conservationism. As previously pointed out, this fits within a currently enforced global and hegemonic logic which promotes the preservation of biodiversity with the establishment of parcelled areas. We shouldn't forget that the IV<sup>th</sup> World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas (Caracas, 1992) advised countries to protect 10% of the territory. On the other hand, it seems like the government of Valencia wants to compensate for its anti-ecological modernization policies<sup>20</sup>. That is, the administration would use the environmental protection of certain areas as a reaction to continuous claims against the government's pillaging of the land (Santamarina, 2008). Since 2002, with the establishment of the Nature Parks of Sierra Calderona, Sierra Mariola and Sierra Irta, a new more protectionist stage begins in the Community of Valencia, while the real estate business also takes off. In roughly five years, from 2002 to 2007, parks and natural areas<sup>21</sup> multiplied by two with a notable increase in the protected surface. For instance, of the 22 Valencian natural parks currently existing 10 were designated as such during that five year period. However, as the creation of the Calderona Park clearly shows, not even those areas managed according to the conservationist logic are free from urban interests and tensions. In other words, these measures do not serve to protect the territory (VVAA, 20097). In fact, in Calderona, in very few years, three PAI (Integral Action Programme) were sanctioned around or within the park, for the creation of five golf courses, hotels, shopping malls and housing projects for more than seven thousand people, which affected five communities (Serra, Náquera, Estivella, Algimia and Torres-Torres)<sup>22</sup>.

Apart from the unsustainable consequences derived from this process due to the pressure and environmental impact they provoke, the Nature Park designation has implied the adoption of new strategies for the communities, above all, regarding tourism. Anyhow, tourism as a phenomenon is nothing new in locations such as Serra. The unfolding of tourism was felt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, though it was mostly associated with the aristocracy and bourgeoisie that searched for beauty and relaxation in 'nature'. Thus, a distinguished colony of

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20. The use of this term is taken from Bono and García (2006).

21. Valencia's protected areas are ruled by the 11/1994 Act, of the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, Espacios Naturales Protegidos de la Comunidad Valenciana (Valencian Community's Protected Natural Areas). Valencia's legislation is made up of seven protectionist figures: Natural parks, Natural locations, Municipal natural locations, Natural reserves, Natural monuments, Sites of interest and Protected landscapes (it has three more figures than the Spanish legislation for it wants to protect the communities as well).

22. Against these policies movements such as Salvem Náquera gained strength.

summer visitors was established in Sierra Calderona thanks to the area's features and for its proximity to Valencia. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the historian and naturalist Ambrosio Cebrián explained this phenomenon in the following manner: "The weather and forest conditions of this municipality make it attractive and adequate for city dwellers, who need to restore their physiological diminished energies, due to sickness or to their sedentary lifestyles derived from their professional occupations, and come to enjoy the pure and vivifying atmosphere of these mountains"<sup>23</sup>. A hundred years later his words still prevail, with slight differences. Now, on top of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's assessment of nature, we must add the consumer and market value, which creates new territories that aspire to be part of heritage and leisure consumer circuits.

Undisputedly, the recognition of an area as natural has become a tactic to reactivate tourism (rural/natural); something that seems obvious in this particular case. According to local political institutions, the region's new status was an opportunity for the development of Serra. As some local political figures told us, the park created opportunities for 'rural tourism', already thriving in the area. In this regard they added the fact that, according to their data –collected in the local tourism office–, the number of visitors had increased once the nature park status was established<sup>24</sup>. Tourism is looked upon as creating opportunity for young people once the growth model based on the real estate business has been exhausted. In any case, it is interesting to point out that local politicians interviewed for our study used the term 'rural' to refer to what is commonly labelled 'sustainable' (for example, they talked of 'rural tourism' or of the 'development of rural tourism' as environmentally friendly). This shift in discourse can be interpreted in several ways, but, in our opinion, it refers to the natural/rural<sup>25</sup> dialectic that by metonymical contagion implies sustainability (natural things are also considered sustainable, therefore, if rural and natural are synonymous, rural also means sustainable).

From another point of view, the new demands, defined within a service oriented economy, have redefined and increased the village's value while promoting new uses in it (leisure, pleasure, contemplation, sports, health, etcetera). Serra is now more 'natural' than ever, thanks to its new designation as park, what has encouraged a change in its land use (legal,

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23. Manuscript kept in Serra's Town Hall by Ambrosio Cebrián (1863-1933), called *Mineralogical and Topographical Notes of the Municipality of Serra*, probably written between 1911 and 1922 (undetermined date).

24. We have no further information on this issue, nor any knowledge on how the data was collected.

25. An association that brings us back to the western design regarding the good or noble savage as ecological in himself.

symbolic, political and economic). Such designation responds to previous notions on what should be preserved; notions that revolve around the representation of the so-called ‘natural world’, a realm associated with purity, carrying all the connotations derived from this concept. Rural reality, of course, is also a part of this conception and is especially associated with mountainous areas.

It is no wonder, then, that forest areas are predominant in national parks (Europarc, 2008) or that, within the network of Valencia’s protected areas, the better protected zones, in terms of numbers and hectares, are the inland and littoral mountain ranges. Both pieces of information specifically refer to what is conceived as natural. Nature is more natural the more abrupt the territory is and the higher above sea level it is to be found. This viewpoint is directly related to each territory’s accessibility and, therefore, to its transformation potential. Thus, if Serra is ‘naturally’ located in the mountains it is ‘natural’. Redundancy, in this case, is not only intentional but is contained in the ideological foundations of our cultural practice (Santamarina, 2009). Far from being a mere game of persuasion, it properly conveys the construction processes which ultimately build up new topographies within age-old places.

This being the case, the christening of locations as natural spaces entails a forced restructuring of territories which is subject to the logic of a commercialized nature. Natural assets are thought of, in global markets, as scarce and valuable as well as competitive. ‘Nature’ –as a reified and objectified reality– within the capitalist economy rationality is looked upon as a very alluring product due to its added conceptual background (aesthetic and health associated values, etcetera). Thus, and once naturalization has been assumed (whether necessarily or by force), it is no surprise that the local government itself adopted the language derived from the community’s potential as a natural park.

Let’s review some illustrative examples of this municipal naturalization. For instance, *rural marketing* was swiftly adopted as a local strategy, creating the slogan *Serra, tot natura* (Serra, all nature) to be found on official documents as well as on advertising posters promoting certain events (sports-related, cultural, etcetera). The ‘all nature’ brand properly illustrates the dominant historic discourse as to statutory designations (referring to a unitary and reified nature). On top of that, it re-christens the community, adopting and assuming the new administrative situation, while taking advantage of it. Thus, the new designation provides a contagious naturalization which is the result of the community’s (undisputable) location in nature. However, let’s bring forth another example of this phenomenon. The local government installed a mural at



the town's entrance which reads as follows: *Benvinguts a Serra en el cor de la Calderona* (Welcome to Serra at the heart of Calderona). The mural is designed as a symbolic entrance (limit) to the town, providing information on the community's identity. When proclaiming that the community is 'at the heart' of the sierra it seems unnecessary to add that foreigners are entering a more natural zone which is the hub of the mountain range (abrupt, precipitous and with vertical drops); the natural par excellence. Finally, the construction of a SPA within the community's grounds is another example of the local government's intentions. This failed project –due to the real estate crisis and the local government's debt levels– intended to reinforce the image of Serra's water as an indisputable natural asset, for its mineral wealth and abundance. Features considered valuable already in the past, when capitalists wanted to commercialize the region's water.

The local political turn towards nature responds to the regulations that redefine age-old territories as new spaces. That is, regulations as well as the institutional discourse on preserved areas are clearly founded on the nature/culture distinction. In the Valencian regulations on protected areas, one can easily notice the separation between nature and culture. Its text explains one of its aims as the "Conservation of ecosystems and environments bearing special significance, both natural and anthropized" (Act 11/1994 of the 27<sup>th</sup> of December. Generalitat Valenciana). This declaration of intent shows how the realms of nature and culture are made separate. Similarly, in the Statutory Designation of the Sierra Calderona Nature Park the location's richness was emphasized as typical of the Mediterranean pre-coastal sierra: "the abrupt orography, together with the variety in topographic orientations and rocky soil, both siliceous and calcareous, promote the existence of a very interesting diversity in vegetation and flora" (Act 10/2002 of the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. Generalitat Valenciana). Also, when reading the Park's Guide, after the technical information one finds the following: "it is one of the Valencian Community's most valuable natural settlements, whose physical-natural characteristics provide it with exceptional environmental interest, as well as in terms of landscape" (Conselleria de Medi Ambient, 2006: 1). In both cases the emphasis is placed on the so-called 'natural space', while the anthropic element is pushed to the discursive background, therefore being subordinate in the hierarchy of values. This chimerical division (natural spaces/anthropized spaces) seems to be recurrent in other regulations, while the IUCN's system of conservation categories supports it. Having said that, what is relevant here are the real implications derived from this naïve distinction for, in itself, it creates prescriptions. We believe

the result is effective: when space is rejected as political, historical and social, both the traditional ownership and knowledge of it are erased.

## 5. New forms of knowledge for new acknowledgements

As mentioned above, statutory designations imply the organization and redefinition of space and its uses. This is captured in the Natural Resource Regulation Plan (PORN) and the Management and Use Plan (PRUG). Both legal tools were considered, in the Natural Spaces and Flora and Fauna Conservation Act (1989), as a form of territorial re-planning of protected areas. In this particular case, PORN (2001) revealed contradicting positions between the autonomous government and the region's locals (municipal administrations, neighbours, etcetera). In total, 420 allegations were presented: 10 by city councils, 396 by citizens, 10 by collectives and 4 more after the established deadline<sup>26</sup>. According to local politicians and interviewed neighbours, these allegations were hardly taken into account. This lack of interest created uneasiness among people, who thought the park was some form of imposition that excluded them (the traditional *top down* management model)<sup>27</sup>. In this regard the indignant report provided by an informant was meaningful, not only had they disregarded his suggestions but had not even considered other impressions provided by the Carthusians themselves<sup>28</sup>. The informant's logic is similar to that applied by the administration (hierarchical order of knowledge): if locals are unable to know the place due to their lack of normative knowledge (rational-scientific), at least the Carthusians, symbolically situated above, can not be denied wisdom (however divine).

The result of this administrative reconfiguration is a form of technical-bureaucratic management that both factually and formally sets aside traditional or local management forms. It is no surprise, thus, to find statements such as “ha sigut una cosa que mos ha caigut com una pedregà” (“this is something that came as a shock to us”); the same thing happens when we merely scan the language used in the PRUG (2006). The plan is written in explicit form with reference to privations. Skimming the text we find the word ‘forbid’ or ‘forbidden’ written down more than a dozen times. Also the adverb ‘no’ is written down more than seventy

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26. Statements provided by the former General Director of Sustainable Development in the Environment Department (El País, 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1998).

27. This model repeats itself in almost all of Spain's natural spaces. See, among others: Pascual and Florido (2005); Vaccaro and Beltran (2007); Beltrán *et al.* (2008); Beltran and Vaccaro (2010); Arrieta (2010); Rodríguez (2011); Vidal (2011); Cortes (2012).

28. The community also contains the Cartuja de Portaceli monastery, which is located on the mountain bearing the same name.

times. The repeated use of negation is symptomatic: ‘it is not admissible’, ‘not allowed’ or ‘it will not be possible’ are the most used formulas. These limitations, together with the mandatory notifications, make up a text where control and vigilance are very present and where management is something to be carried out externally in order to guarantee the territory’s ‘naturalness’; now legally recognized as natural. When describing the new administrative reality with the aid of negations, institutions underline and further increase the seizure of locals’ rights. Moreover, we believe that repeated negation disqualifies the natives to the extent that it fully rejects the former reality.

In this normalized expropriation production process, the restrictions and prohibitions frontally clash with ‘other ways of doing things’ based on practices that are sanctioned by experience or that belong to the region<sup>29</sup>. For the locals, the complaints are incomprehensible, above all, because these question their own principles (as natural as evident, or, in other words, as traditional as authentic). Therefore, we find an opposition to the nature park model, many times open and combative, revolving around at least three fronts.

Firstly, the expropriation of what belongs to oneself is perceived as inadmissible. The ownership and availability of a given territory connected to agricultural work is no matter of discussion; the land, whether cultivated or not, is part of them. Hence, they are the ones who should decide when and how to work it. In this case, numerous informants have referred to the regulation of the park in regard to agricultural practices, and the injustice it poses to deny them from profiting from its assets. Complaints specifically refer to two rulings: agricultural plots that were abandoned when PORN was sanctioned could no longer be cultivated (article 85 of PURG) and, once the land is no longer ploughed and becomes a forest area, it is forbidden to make agricultural use of it (article 88 of PURG). Some informants have discussed the danger of having a sapling in one’s land because the plot’s use could be changed overnight, the space being now considered a forest area. In consequence the owner could lose the property. Let’s discuss some statements on the subject: “ací vingué un home que feia cinc anys que no havia treballat el terreny i va tindre una denúncia per treballar les seues oliveres, i ell pagava del seu terreny i la seua contribució i tot, es que te fan llevar les ganes de portar la agricultura!” (“here came a man who hadn’t worked the land for five years and was sued for working his olive plot, and he paid for his own

29. Valcuende, Quintero and Cortés (2011) consider that the link with the territory is established based on four facts: origin, memory, suffering and work, and emotional ties. We believe that space/time coordinates make up being in memory(ies).

plot, his taxes and everything, they make you want to stop working the land!”<sup>30</sup>. As we see, complaints are also based on traditional activities that are fading away due to lack of support. But, the lament not only refers to the expropriation of land but also to circulation within its limits. It is getting harder and harder to circulate around the community having to daily prove ones ties to the region: ““tres carreteres tallades cap aci, una altra cap allà... i cap a Gátova han tancat també, que no se si és per a repoblació d'ells o lo que siga, o lo que volen fer ( ) Tens que portar un paper com a que el terreno és teu, per a que te deixen passar” (“three blocked roads here, another one there... and in direction to Gátova they have also blocked some. I don't know if it's due to the repopulation thing they're up to or whatever, or what they want to do ( ) You have to carry a paper to prove the land is yours, for them to let you in”). No doubt this is something extravagant, outsiders require the locals to prove they are natives of the land.

Secondly, locals are perplexed by some of the institutional measures taken. In many cases, the ‘old’ practices are suddenly invalidated due to being considered ‘against nature’. Common and normalized uses such as picking up dry firewood are now punished (article 89 of PURG). According to our informants: “per agarrar la llenya seca te denuncien, que deien que estaves fent una imprudència, i estaves fent una cosa bé per a que no hagueren incendis. I per això que agarrava un home i serrava la llenya seca ja el denunciaven, quant la llenya anava a perdre's! Te denunciaven per tallar la llenya seca!” (“for fetching dry firewood you are sued, for being careless, and you were doing something good to avoid a fire. If a man sawed dry firewood he was sued. The firewood was going to be wasted! They sue you for cutting dry firewood”). This seems shocking to them on two levels. Not only a habitual practice is being questioned, but traditional conservation measures are now looked upon as contrary to that end. Not only traditional customs are being questioned but also their legitimacy; a double expropriation being carried out (activity and authority over the territory).

Regarding the latter, the third conflict with the park has to do with the rejection of forms of traditional knowledge. Locals feel perplexed and suspicious when their ‘knowledge’ is ignored as well as penalized by the

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30. The fragments used in this text are taken from fieldwork interviews. All of the informants are males (unless we say otherwise), are from Serra and still keep up with agricultural activities. In no way is agricultural their main activity (in fact, there no one today in the village who is solely a farmworker). We have tried to grasp our informants’ phonetic pronunciation, whether it sounds correct in normalized language (ellipsis between brackets indicate that the quotes have been reduced).

rational and bureaucratic agency supervising the region. What is considered to be knowledge by the locals, a form of self-management throughout the centuries ('we needed no one'), is now rejected as ignorance. With certain sarcasm and irony, as we will later see, externally enforced practices are reduced to saying 'it's under control', which reflects, according to many, a lack of experience and knowledge in regard to the territory. However, it is impossible to confront this issue due to regulated forms of punishment ('they handcuff you and take you away')."<sup>31</sup>

"Fa vint anys arrere ací es pegava foc i no necessitaven a ningú, el poble eixia a apagar-ho. Ara vas a vore i te diuen: 'esta controlado' i dius: 'però com que està controlado si esteu allà baix?' El que 'esta controlado' és el que està en una manguera o exposant-se a apagar-ho, però a dos kilòmetres i mirant el foc, està controlado? 'ja ha passat eixa carretera, pues anem-se'n a l'altra a vore com ve'. Es que és aixina. I els del poble se ficaven ahí i lo millor que n'hi ha per a eixes coses és fer el contrafoc, quan el foc baixa de la muntanya els homes se fiquen en una tinereta gran i li peguen foc ahí i puja i quan arriba fa: 'foc'. I s'apaga. Però, no el fas, perquè te fiquen les esposes i se t'emporten" ("Twenty years ago if there was a fire we didn't need anyone, the people went and extinguished it. Now, you go and check and they tell you: 'it's under control' and you say: 'but, how can it be under control if you're down there?' The fire is under control only when you are up there using a water hose, but two kilometres away, just looking at the fire. It's under control? 'The fire has already crossed that road, let's just see how it approaches'. It's just like that. The villagers used to be up there, and the only way to stop the fire was to create a counter-fire. Once the fire is coming down from the mountain, the people create a long line and burn the area, and when it comes up and gets there it creates: 'fire'. And the fire is extinguished. But, you can't do that because they arrest and take you away")<sup>31</sup>.

To sum up, it is not only a matter of re-managing the past with the establishment of a new production context, but has to do with punishing traditional management forms. This creates a paradoxical situation, to say the least: traditional forms of knowledge are de-legitimized due to experts' lack of 'real' knowledge of the place. This process goes beyond limiting or forbidding local uses and customs, leaving them out of the definition of something they consider theirs: their place (ethno-knowledge and ethno-topographies). The mentioned shift suppresses, violates and forgets, presenting and updating a phony, as well as consumable landscape. If local authorities see the park as a potential economic revitalizer, for the

31. This fragment has been translated literally in order to convey the locals' feelings. However, it expresses the idea of fighting fire with fire.

neighbours this virtue is harder to grasp: “com a parque no n’hi ha benefici per cap puesto” (“as a park we find no benefit whatsoever”).

Naturally, the environmental perspective natives and foreigners have are often opposed. On the one hand, for the locals, mountain and land, as part of themselves and their worldview, have never been managed in such a bad way. Statements such as ‘el monte es menja el monte’ (the mountain eats up the mountain’) or ‘mai ha estat tan lleig’ (‘it never has been so ugly’) sum up their vision. For locals everything is ‘abandonat’ (abandoned), and maybe one of the most repeated demands is that it has to be ‘netejar-ho’ (cleaned up’)<sup>32</sup>. The appreciation of ‘ugliness’ in the environment and the need for cleanliness is associated with the lack of domestication and people’s direct relationship with their surroundings, therefore, locals need and legitimate the maintenance of traditional customs (associated with agriculture and the forest). Someone’s perception of the landscape is a perception of, and within, the place.

For visitors and technicians, perception differs considerably. The more ‘the mountain eats up the mountain’ the more one approaches their ideal scenario. The uglier (dirtier) it is for the locals, the more natural it seems to foreigners and the more beautiful it remains (according to them). In short, the less one notices human activity –although this perception is an intervention in itself– and the more one denies man’s influence, whether by naturalizing traces or despising traditional activities, the more intrinsic beauty is encountered in the form of pristine nature. The perception of landscape is the impression of a past imaginary landscape. These logics and perceptions, far from being contradictory, are complementary, inducing constant interventions that shape new landscapes. In reality, what we find are diverse discourses based on differentiated logics responding to various needs; it is not only a matter of distinguishing between insiders and outsiders. Within this analytic distinction, exist, on the one hand, different positions according to interests, the occupation, the position and the use of space, and, on the other, bidirectional mediations tending to create complexity (ideas and ideals) as to what should be considered natural.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the village of Serra has gone from a traditional economy, based on the exploitation of cultural resources, to a natural heritage model that redefines and reorganizes the

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32. Douglas (1991) points out the fact that dirt entails impurity and disorder, opposed to cleanliness and order. In this regard, “dirt offends order. Its elimination is not a negative move, but a positive effort to organize the environment” (1991: XXVIII).

territory based on a model determined by the value and taxing influence of nature. In less than half a century, Serra's cultural landscape has been considerably transformed. This process implies a logical replacement of perception, representation and meaning in reference to the location. Following that path, the mountain and the land have gone from being 'havens' for the locals to a leisure area for urbanites (spatial relocation), viewed as 'nature' (merchandise). Such mutation shifts the position available for potential relations: from 'being within' to 'consume from without'. That is, from being in (undefined time/place/memory) to discovering/using in (limited time/space/object).

This reason, as much ideological as pragmatic, reflects an expanding model of heritage consumerism (cultural versus natural, natural versus cultural) which replicates urban standards (such as the capitalist excellence paradigm) in a rural environment (such as our capitalist marginality and resistance). Hence, new demands force things, inducing a restructuring of economic activities and commercial strategies in places which were previously ignored, that is, far detached from the dogmatic time/space coordinates typical of free market policies. The sometimes obsessive search and demand for the natural product, located in a conveniently rural heritage environment, implies a naturalization, both of that which is 'natural' and that which is 'cultural'; contagious naturalization of the container and content of a territory. Thus, without wanting to be repetitive, the culturization of nature and the naturalization of culture are two dialectical processes or two sides of the same coin. In this context, *rural marketing* is nothing but the expression of a vigorous trend. A phenomenon we may brand as bipolar due to the diverse features it presents. A manifestation of its bipolar condition is, for instance, the search for 'natural' nature while one demands an urbanization of the landscape and the services (infrastructure) which should enable people's access to it.

Natural spaces become war zones where the tensions and contradictions of neoliberal hegemonic conservation are acted out. In this battle we must transform the dominant logics that reduce technocratic processes to redefining spaces, erasing places and memories while vertically and globally imposing a model both standardized and absurd. Ultimately, with our short approximation to the community of Serra we would like to provide a reflection on the commercialization of the territory, based on exclusion and suppression processes, that reminds us of mechanisms such as Wolf's (1982) 'people without a history' (systematic erasing). We believe that the worldwide network of natural areas is another manifestation of old colonialism or new imperialism, according to taste. In the

context of glocalized patrimonial dialectics, protected areas, with their opportunities and resistances, suggest new open settings for reflection and criticism. Let's work to unmask them while publically committing ourselves to redefine an 'us' along with possible 'others'.

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