

Place names of traditional forest management in seminatural landscapes.

The case of Cameros (La Rioja, Spain)

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Former grazing landscapes shaped through almost ten centuries ago in mountains of La Rioja (Spain) have evolved into a mosaic of forests and shrublands once the outstanding trashumance activities collapsed in the mid-twentieth century due to the decrease of population. Likewise, agricultural lands were abandoned in the same process of the so called “rural exodus” from the countryside to towns within the framework of industrialization and urban sprawl in Spain since the 60s. However, some place names still remain showing references to prior activities, such as the use of fire as a technique for pasture renewal, communal forest thickets (dehesas) temporarily excluded from livestock raising in municipal areas, sustainable management of forests resources (wood, fuel, charcoal), agricultural crops etc. even if nowadays the traditional land uses and covers have changed into recently spread forests. We present a significant selection of examples that showcase the importance of toponymy in conceiving and explaining the cultural heritage of past seminatural landscapes, particularly on those whose historical traits are blurred bringing renewed ones

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where wilderness is nowadays the main aspect in most of their parts.

The past importance of trashumance and grazing in this region is obvious in Toponymy. The mountains of La Rioja were traditionally location for summertime grazing of sheep coming from the southern and southwestern regions of the Iberian Peninsula. For example, a large number of place names derives from *cañada* (pathway for trashumant herds), or *majada* (fold for sheep or a glade within a forest with abundant pasture, among other meanings) and the collective *majadal* may refer to the part of the council lands allocated for each herd, in which there are not rural sheds or barns. Locations of every place names within the map of La Rioja are provided, along with the interpretation of their density in certain areas. Fire has been a relevant factor in landscapes of this territory throughout history, since it induces the structure of communities and ecosystems. The adaptive traits of species and their way of recover after different regimes of intensity and recurrence critically determine the landscape dynamics. Periodic use of scrub and grass burning in order to boost their regrowth and to generate clearings for the extensive livestock is an outstanding modifier of vegetation. In fact, it is one of the main causes of dynamic activation since Neolithic and especially from the Middle Ages to the second half of the 20th century. Removal of forests and tree thickets, along with the decline of their density were common management principles when livestock raising prevailed. 127 place names in the toponymy can be recorded, mostly derived form *quem-* (burn). An etymological root for *trashumance* has been put forward, so as to relate it with *trans + fumo* (= ‘after smoke’); shepherds would manage pastures by means of burning them before starting the livestock transfer towards other areas. Some place names would endorse this hypothesis, although other linguists reckon that it derives directly from humus ‘ground, soil’. Many place names are

related to small buildings and constructions: mills, farms, barns, hay lofts etc. A few toponyms come from basque roots.

Rad (from hispanic-biscayan 'larrá') is a frequent name in La Rioja to design a common, municipal land in which forest thickets are reserved for provide timber used for construction. The name was applied to such pieces of land from the moment of the felling plan to the end of the clear cutting. There are 133 place names of this root; one third of the set still have current correspondence with vegetation (forests and non arboreous communities). *Dehesas* (open woodlands) are enclosed areas for pasture, mainly with scattered tree thickets devoted for shelter and site for summer stays in cattle crazing or for providing sustainable use of timber and fuelwood. Mostly in the central La Rioja this type of vegetal cover structure is practically extinct nowadays as a result of the agriculture extension and urban sprawl, whereas it covers over 200,000 ha in the rest of the region, at least in pieces of land that keep the name.

Timber extraction (trunks, branches, any other kind of wood) are alluded to in several Riojan place names, either in diverse romance lexical roots or in basque-derived toponyms, most of them referring to coppice stands or particular individuals and species used for poles and beams in construction for rural uses. In addition, there is an outstanding set of place names related to fuelwood management, along with charcoal production. All these uses dramatically decreased since the 50s and 60s' decades,

An insightful reflection on the evolution of landscapes as deduced from changes analyses in the structure and composition of some plant covers indicators -as some types of marginal scrubs used for grazing as well-, which depict the general trend of extension of forests, linked with the great decline of human action.

