

Paradise identity, between projection and protection: César Manrique's lessons for current challenges in territorial innovation

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the tendency to provoke negative changes in what used to be the attraction of a place. (Ruiz 2006: 2)

This paper analyzes the validity of design principles seeded by Manrique in Lanzarote Island (1968-1992) to face current challenges in territorial innovation. Such period comprehended a radical shift from subsistence agriculture towards a massive tourism industry, where local resources and collective identity had to be both projected and protected to look appealing for globalized leisure. Roles, methodologies, ecodesign strategies and success indicators are briefly identified to serve as a didactic tool for future designers.

1. Welcome to the Paradise: myth and reality from a 'Cinderella' island

Contemporary Lanzarote Island's identity can't be properly analyzed under a local development approach without considering the decisive influence exerted by artist and designer Cesar Manrique along three decades (1968-1992). This territory has been for long considered the Canary Islands' *Cinderella* due to its historical poorness, probably derived from unfavorable conditions, such as a hot desert climate¹, besides the fact that much of its length is blanketed with volcanic rock resulting from considerable seismic activity in the 18th century.

Nevertheless, landscape and environmental values stand out against the rest of Spanish regions, due to the fact that the Canary Network of Natural Protected Spaces represents the 47% of Archipelago's area, including four National Parks and four islands as Biosphere Reserve –Lanzarote included-, among other interesting protection figures.

Travellers and tourists from everywhere and every time have been captivated by them as we can deduce from the names given to the Canary Islands through History; Atlantis, Hesperia Garden or Fortunate Islands. These myths linked to health, eternal spring, typical, or human-nature harmony still work as brand attractors in advance. But nowadays, the amount of tourists is increasing worryingly, with more than twelve million last 2011. According to Ruiz,

The tourist image of the Canaries is a model of how the most important industry in the world can sell a landscape as a metaphor of Paradise far closer to the advertising concept associated to the destination than to its true reality. [and quoting Baudrillard] This is something that happens to all the tourist industry, which has

¹ It has an area of 846 Km² and a population of just over 140.000 in 2012 (plus an estimation of 50.000 tourists) with maximum temperatures in summer ranging between 22°C and 25°C. Winters are mild, with a minimum temperature of 12°C. Rainfall is scarce, reaching an annual total of 160 litres per m².

From a subsistence agriculture towards a massive tourism industry in a blink

At the end of the fifties, the increasing of the tourism phenomenon comprehended a radical shift from subsistence agriculture towards a massive tourism industry, where local resources and collective identity had to be both projected and protected to look appealing for the emerging globalized leisure. Cesar Manrique took a relevant role in creating a collective imaginary where, until then, there was only desert and scarcity. He worked on the weak and imprecise line that distinguishes the 'disneylandization' simulacrum from endogenous strategies, with the confidence of having an honest true in his hands; that of improving quality of local conditions through the international promotion of Lanzarote's own heritage. He was an interdisciplinary artist who simultaneously painted, sculpted, designed, or created work for public spaces and in natural environments. Born in Lanzarote in 1919, he was early got attracted to the particular nature present in his volcanic island. After studying Fine Arts in Madrid and becoming an international recognized artist -living and working in USA between 1964/66-, he decided to return and settle down permanently in Lanzarote in 1968. For him, this definitive return after accumulating experience in a place as different as New York City brought the rediscovery of some of the island's autochthonous values, such as the landscape and vernacular architecture. In his own words: 'When I returned from New York I was determined to help turning my native island into one of the most beautiful places in the world and enlisted the help of Pepin Ramirez, President of the Island Council, who enthusiastically supported me right from the start' (Gómez Aguilera 2001)

At that time, under the Franquist regime, the Spanish west coast and the bigger islands like Tenerife and Gran Canaria, began to be aggressively urbanized in order to host the incipient mass tourism attracted by 'sun and beach' promises. Local authorities from Lanzarote saw this as an opportunity to reach the so desired welfare state in an island scourged by famine and emigration for centuries, with a subsistence farming and agriculture trying to make their way through a volcanic ground, and a handicraft fishing sector in deep decline. The crucial difference respect to the rest of the Spanish coast, it was the assumption of a model of development with nothing to do with the experiences described above. The Insular Government, commitment to intervention in the territory was guided mainly by ethical and sustainability parameters (which it could sound ingenuous to today's ears) in order to extend welfare conditions to the insular population while safeguarding the natural and cultural herit-

age. Manrique was an active part of this first group as supervisor, elaborating a new aesthetic ideology called 'Art-Environment/Environment-Art' concreted on the singular interventions that took place in different landscapes worthy to be visited, not only to enjoy them but to acquire an environmental consciousness. As we see, Manrique assumes for Art an educational function near to religion, through which it will be possible to restore harmony to the human being.

The Centres for Art, Culture and Tourism. The reinvented heritage as the local economy's main force

Most of these environmental interventions will be shape the 'Centres for Art, Culture and Tourism' (CACT), which together with Cesar Manrique's Foundation are the main reclaims for tourists these days. It's important to highlight here that this model of intervention was a determinant aspect for Lanzarote to be declared Reserve of the Biosphere by UNESCO's Man And Biosphere Program (MAB) in 1993. The island differs from other Biosphere Reserves due to both the strong interaction of its inhabitants with the physical environment and an economy strongly dependent on tourism. Thus, Lanzarote appeared as a place with conflicts of interests, with great beauty and nature richness. For that reason Lanzarote is an experimental territory regarding sustainable tourism to the MAB program. The design principles explored by César Manrique to make nature and art coexist can be experienced in his own home -latter restructured to host his Foundation-, and also in the majority² of the so called CACT. The seven of them are publicly owned, depending upon the Insular Government. They were created to outline and protect the natural and cultural heritage, an endogenous resource both for locals and tourists. In some ways they have inherited the tradition of environmental concern that permeates the culture of this Island. Nowadays, the CACT are the main economic motor of the island, destining a great portion of the benefits to island's social actions. Due to the nature of this paper, we'll limit here to study the samples from these locations.

2. Manrique's Design principles for territorial development

The author's hypothesis considers that Manrique's design principles, implemented mainly through the CACTS between 1968 and 1992, still generates an up to date corpus to learn from, in order to face some current challenges in design for sustainable local development and territorial innovation. He avoided writing manifestoes, but some of his abundant verbal itinerary related to his actions, can be synthesized and retraced here in at least the following 10 points:

1. Interdisciplinary teamwork. Despite his strong artistic personality, most of the solutions provided came from a diverse group, working together to face the complexity of planning the island's development, thus involving stakeholders such as insular presidency, technical and artistic assessors, architects and citizens.

² Except the first of them, *La Cueva de los Verdes*, which dates back to 1964.

2. Art-Nature-Man integration. From a holistic perception, Manrique pretended nature conservation through its cultural valorization. He created respectful meeting spaces, deserving the subsequent aesthetic fruition as a transformational agent in citizens' conduct.
3. Learning from Nature's wisdom. He affirmed that life energy provides us with marvelous design concepts, myriad aesthetic forms, a vast creative intelligence capable of constructing complex yet perfect machines which can design infinite programs to be adopted by human-being.
4. Education and Culture. For him, a nation without neither culture nor tradition was destined to disappear. Education –a country's biggest business- should foster the knowledge of the own heritage as a means to inculcate respect for the environment through aesthetic sensibility. An artist had to be forced to communicate; simply, to teach how to see.
5. Learning from vernacular design. Manrique projected taking into account the functionality and cultural identity from the existing popular typologies or archetypes. He used them as a base to develop innovative proposals but still acceptable by community.
6. Using natural and local resources. The employment of endogenous materials and technologies could empower autonomy, reducing environmental impact and external dependence. Water, plants, soil, rocks, wind, sun and volcanic energy became constructive elements to generate human-harmony settlements, connected to the context.
7. Global-local dialogue. Manrique rehearsed integrating links for different geographies, cultures and aesthetic trends, through architecture, products and graphic, embracing regional and international features. As an assiduous traveller, he was very aware of the need to find common points lying within diversity, but yet understandable and pleasant by everyone.
8. Creativity. He conceived it as the capacity to problem solving in imaginative ways, to adventure and intuit new aesthetic concepts, relational scenarios and ways of perceiving reality. But also creativity understood as a means to fulfill oneself creatively.
9. Process culture, intuition and permanent research. The results from more than 20 years working on the territory evidenced the need to project with solid but flexible principles, avoiding preconceived closed plans and learning from the process. In words of Manrique, 'turning life as an exploratory game in the face of something so unknown and fascinating as our own existence' (Gómez Aguilera 2001: 53). In this sense, intuition was also at the core of his design process, being able to detect new options or assume unexpected de-

cisions straight on the field. A virtue probably extrapolated from his skills as a professional painter.

10. Adopting a permanent social activist position. As citizens, injustices have to be denounced and condemned. For him, the struggle for survival and environmental conservation can't be abandoned, reminding that future can't be taken for granted, but it has to be shaped from the present with our actions.

3. Some ecodesign strategies evidenced from the paradise lab

Manrique extended his principles to a wide range of practices and disciplines. Product design under the current perspective is one of the less researched areas in his vast work. That's why in these pages we'll limit to highlight and illustrate these samples. He was a contemporary pioneer in the application of ecodesign principles and strategies, such as the vision of products as systems, the concept of life cycle, or the integration of all stakeholders. Apart from working in decreasing their impact, he tried to communicate other qualitative features, such as their inner beauty and poetics, thus making a whole capable of arousing environmental concern.

Related to materials and production impacts, we find several examples of reutilization and recycling, such as the wooden beams from telephonic posts, due to the lack of trees in Lanzarote (fig.1a) or that of glass wine bottles to create a lamp (fig.1b), as there wasn't any plant for its treatment in the Island. The Peasant Monument is also made of recycled water tanks from old fishing boats (fig.1c). Dematerialization strategies and use of local available materials, such as the Jameos del Agua Auditorium (Fig.2a), a cultural infrastructure using the existing volcanic tube, thus saving energy and materials transport. Also the Cactus Garden (Fig. 2b) is an excellent example of how to recover a deteriorated space –an old quarry and dump- with minimum intervention.

Besides, he created clean energy devices, like the Timanfaya's oven (fig.3a), where food is cooked by the heat that comes up from the depths of Earth, and the wind-toys sculptures, where the movement is provided by the abundant wind existing in the island.

Low impact in transport and maintenance, long durability and non-problematic end of life strategies can be observed in many



Figure 1. a) Wooden beams. b) lamp using old glass bottles. c) Peasant Monument.



Figure 2. a) Jameos del Agua Auditorium. b) Cactus Garden.

examples of public furniture, like the stone benches in Mirador del Río (fig.4a), able to host life forms such as lichen, and stone tools in Jameos del Agua (fig.4b).



Figure 3. a) Volcanic oven at Timanfaya National Park. b) Wind-toys sculptures.



Figure 4. a) Stone bench in Mirador del Río. b) Stone tools in Jameos del Agua.

4. Preliminary sketches towards design for territorial innovation in the Canary Islands after César

As we've seen, Manrique proposed a pioneer action model for tourism-based regional government, where the Arts had a core role either in projecting and protecting the utopic paradise. Different conclusions can be pointed out to meet our aims.

Some critical considerations

A work and personality as intense as Manrique's, is easy to provoke diverse and opposite reactions on people and critics. On the one hand, according to some authors (Allen 1994), Manrique's interventions are not valid to solve the problems of overpopulated areas, one of the main issues in the Canary Islands nowadays. He recovered pre-industrial and rural ideals to project them against technocracy and city chaos, setting up as

a symbol of a utopian social future, capable of integrating art, space and leisure. This extreme is also reflected on his product design, frequently hand crafted, forming limited series for specific places, closer to Arts & Crafts movement. Besides this, authenticity canons imposed by Manrique in aspects such as vernacular architecture, fit, in some occasions, more with nostalgia and spectacle patterns imposed by tourism industry at a worldwide level, and less with the real contemporary needs for the inhabitants of those places. The results -often perverted by speculators- sometimes bring serial and filed built up houses, maintaining just a surface aesthetics, an empty wrapper, so typical of Postmodernism.

The multiple roles and methods from a total art practitioner

On the other hand, Manrique can be seen as an inflection point, a lighthouse to show that other ways of development are feasible. He was able to make a good use of his chance to convert something which others might see as a barren and worthless piece of land, the result of a volcanic eruption, into something of beauty. Lanzarote landscape was perceived before him as a desolated place, an arid volcanic desert very far from the stereotype of paradise. Education and concern to population took a major relevance in this shift of perception. He was able to communicate and convince through his word, attitude and facts, as far as he maintained an ethical and coherent position that let him to be courageous to denounce injustices against territory and, by extension, the local society. In synthesis, he performed some of the roles required in design for public services, such as facilitator, researcher, co-creator, communicator, strategist, trainer and entrepreneur. Due to his artistic reputation, he also played the role of brand image of the island.

At the methodological level, maybe it's time to claim here for the importance of the creative genius –in the sense of Zambrano's poetic reason-, intuition, surprise and maneuverability on the fly, such as César did. But all this, based on a thorough knowledge of realities to intervene, constraints and possibilities of the environment.

Education and lessons for today's designers

This didactical approach can be seen through the samples presented above; he faced the necessary challenge of adopting an interdisciplinary logic and holistic point of view of the product. As a designer, Manrique acted not only on the nature of the product and materials, but also on its communicative dimension, being able to communicate the ecological nature of products, and doing so, defined an aesthetics to let understand and revalorize humble or discarded objects and materials. This is not an unknown task at all for a region with a rooted handcraft tradition, such as the Canaries.

Moreover, it seems that until recent years, higher design education in the Canary Islands has been looking far beyond its own context. That is, trying to adopt and to teach, blindly, trendy international principles, knowledge and techniques that maybe they

didn't suit enough to local conditions. It's time to re-contextualize the future designers' capabilities to encourage them as positive transformation agents, beginning from their own territories.

Indicators of success in Manrique's territorial interventions

It should be clarified that current sustainability indicators for Lanzarote are far from desirable scenarios. Much remains to be done in all areas. The purpose of this section is just to identify both quantitative and qualitative indicators that allow us to better assess the involvement of Manrique and his team in that region over the years. We have listed here the main international recognitions at a territorial and community level. These included the declaration of Timanfaya National Park in 1974, the Plan of the Insular Territory (PIOT) in 1991 and recognition of Lanzarote in 1993 as a 'Biosphere Reserve' by UNESCO –recently endangered due to corruption cases involving several politicians and businessmen in 2009-.

Weaving organized networks as custodians of the territory

Nowadays Cesar Manrique Foundation is going on in the struggle, becoming one of the main convergence points for civil society, in order to look after the so esteemed achievements, but to watch over the always attempts to speculate with a valuable territory and heritage. This hard and tenacious labour promoting a local-global dialog and education, is called to become a consistent democratic 'foundation' (in the sense of construction), or a fertilized soil on top of which it will be possible to grow the seed of culture, the first and unavoidable step for a worthy design.

As a corollary, the personal terrene utopia cultivated by Manrique, was allowed to be projected as a paradise identity. Then it was shared, shaped and spread enthusiastically. This led to the awareness and protection. And later, often derived in corruption. But as a process approach, it's not an ending project. Efforts should be made on maintenance and keeping hope alive.

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