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ParticiPat: Exploring the Impact of Participatory Governance in the Heritage Field

This Directions piece presents the project ParticiPat: Patrimonio y participación social: propuesta metodológica y revisión crítica (ParticiPat: Heritage and Social Participation: Methodological Proposal and Critical Review). ParticiPat is a multidisciplinary and multisituated research project involving fourteen researchers from different disciplines and institutions that aims to analyze critically the ubiquitous buzzwords and practices of participation—as well as its key institutions and actors—affecting heritage management in Spain, Portugal, or Mexico. This article advances preliminary results derived from the authors' case study of a natural park and biosphere reserve in Spain. In doing so, it contributes to the anthropological examination of what has recently been described by different authors as the emergence of a new form of governance based on discourses and practices of *participation*. [ethnography, anthropology of policy, natural and cultural heritage, participation]

This Directions piece presents the project ParticiPat: Patrimonio y participación social: propuesta metodológica y revisión crítica (ParticiPat: Heritage and Social Participation: Methodological Proposal and Critical Review),¹ and advances preliminary results derived from our particular case study of a natural park and its biosphere reserve in Spain. ParticiPat is a multidisciplinary and multisituated research project involving fourteen researchers from different disciplines and institutions studying heritage management in Spain, Portugal, or Mexico. The project aims to analyze critically how ubiquitous buzzwords and practices of participation, as well as its key institutions and actors, affect heritage management. In doing so, it contributes to the anthropological examination of what Kelty (2017) has recently described as the "grammar of participation" that results in creating "too much democracy in all the wrong places" while constantly shifting "from a language of normative enthusiasm to one of critiques of co-optation and bureaucratization" (S77).

Official discourses usually portray participation as a number of sociopolitical practices that allow citizens to influence, monitor, or engage in decision making on public affairs (Parés 2009). If understood as a cultural form, however, participation can also be seen as a state attempt to engender legal regulation, normalize citizenship, and diffuse power and governance throughout extended networks (Shore and Wright 1997). We aim to explore how this emerging governmentality technique affects the field of heritage and how, in turn, this shift reorganizes the bureaucratic and political spectrum as a whole. Following critical heritage scholarship, we understand heritage as a machine or regime of domination intrinsically linked to capitalist and state efforts to control the past and create prospects

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for the future (Alonso González 2015, 2017; Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann 2012; Cortés-Vázquez, Jiménez-Esquinas, and Sánchez-Carretero 2017). Based on this understanding, ParticiPat aims to "unpack" participation (Cornwall 2008) and explore how it operates in officially sanctioned heritage locations, from UNESCO World Heritage sites to national parks and to archaeological sites.

Importantly, however, participation should not be seen as a blanket term because of its intrinsic relation to the power logics of decision making and neoliberal governance. It is necessary to interrogate not only the different levels of meaningful participation but also to develop "a more refined vocabulary that allows us to better distinguish between different models of participation and to evaluate where and how power shifts may be taking place" (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 5). As disaffection and skepticism grow throughout advanced liberal democracies, participation has been flagged as a potential solution for the faults of representative democracy. This is particularly true in crisis-ridden countries, which is the main empirical focus of ParticiPat. We approach participation and heritage as global phenomena or "global forms" (Collier and Lakoff 2005), making Spain a fascinating case study due to its multiple governance levels. These include the European, national, regional, provincial, and municipal levels, as well as the recent emergence of social movements and political parties reclaiming "real democracy" and direct citizen participation from different ideological stances. Along with Spain, the project contains case studies from Portugal and Mexico, which serves to initiate dialogue with other traditions and contexts in which heritage and participation converge, thereby allowing us to question and improve our approach.

Taking these case studies as starting points, ParticiPat explores the ways in which participation works as an instrument of governance, how is it appropriated or rejected by different actors, and why it sometimes fails to bring the expected results. What particular symbols, metaphors, and practices are mobilized to make participation real, authoritative, and useful? How is participation entrenched in local political dynamics and governance logics? Does it expand democratic engagement, or does it instead reproduce current power relations? Last, but certainly not least, how does participation transform the practice and concept of heritage?

By focusing on participation and heritage, ParticiPat engages with previous anthropological debates on bureaucracies (Bernstein and Mertz 2011; Hoag 2011), and contributes to the literature on the anthropology of the government and the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Marcus 2008; Schumann 2009). More specifically, it builds on the anthropology of policy (Shore and Wright 1997) to offer a critical take on the legal and political approaches pervading heritage studies that remain generally tied to traditional and normative views on legislation (Carman 1995; Lixinski 2015; Soderland 2009). In doing so, ParticiPat questions the extent to which participation has been incorporated into what Smith (2006) defines as the authorized heritage discourse, a "hegemonic, self-referential discourse favoring monumentality, scientific objectivity, aesthetic judgment and nation building" (3) that is sanctioned in charts and regulations promoted by global heritage institutions such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) (ICOMOS 1990, 1996; UNESCO 2003).

Our particular trajectory in ParticiPat engages with our previous research in northwestern Spain that addressed peasant communities, natural and cultural landscapes, and the changing forms of governance triggered by European Union rural development funds and agencies such as *Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale* (Links between actions for the development of the rural economy, LEADER) (Alonso González and Macías Vázquez 2014; González-Álvarez 2018). Our previous studies built on the anthropology of corruption (Torsello and Venard 2016) and notions of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 2005), and served to develop the concept of neoliberal corporatism, which describes the specific character of Spanish governmentality. We now aim to test how participation affects this specific kind of governmentality through a case study focusing on the Asturian municipalities of Cangas de Narcea, Degaña, and Ibias. Here, the *Parque Natural de las Fuentes del Narcea, Degaña e Ibias* (Natural Park of Fuentes del Narcea, Degaña e Ibias) and, within it, the Muniellos biosphere reserve, are at the forefront of a conflict involving different civil society actors, local and regional public institutions, and European Union rural development agencies.

Our preliminary results point to the emergence of what we define as the participatory heritage regime, or a "new tyranny" (Cooke and Kothari 2007) and top-down imposition that forces the inclusion of participation in heritage management following UNESCO's, ICOMOS's, and EU's discursive and technical requirements. Our research shows how participatory heritage practices can lead to unjust, depoliticizing, and illegitimate exercises of power that contribute to the reproduction of preexistent power relations and assuage the demands for an open democracy by social movements. Such movements include the *Indignados* (Outraged) in Spain, whose motto was *Democracia Real Ya!* (Real Democracy Now!), and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. Our research also shows how participation can lead to transformative processes when technocratic approaches are avoided (Hickey and Mohan 2013), and when alternative expressions such as "self-management" or "citizen empowerment" are used (Kelty 2017).

Participation as Governance: Impacts in the Heritage Field

The relevance of the project lies in the ubiquity of participatory discourse globally, in Europe, and more recently in Spain. This transformation in cultural policy, in turn, represents one particular instantiation of a general shift toward participation across various fields in recent decades. Starting with the seminal work of Arnstein (1969), participation expanded in the 1970s as discourse and practice pervaded most disciplines and policy fields, from environmental (Bulkeley and Mol 2003), to urban planning (Hillier 2008), to architecture (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu, and Till 2013), and to sustainable development (Botchway 2001; Michener 1998). The participatory assemblage networks a number of closely related concepts such as empowerment, ownership, engagement, cooperation, collaboration, involvement, or democratization (Stage and Ingerslev 2016). All them are vague notions stemming from imagined or desired results of administration and governance (Hertz 2015, 25–26).

In ParticiPat, we start from the premise that the ideological bases of participation are connected to core categories of modern Western liberalism such as "democracy," "citizenship," or "republicanism," which have colonized much of the social field and created, as Marx and Engels (1972) pointed out long ago, the illusion of their own coherence. Indeed, participation traverses the twofold-structure of capitalist states described by Marx: on the one hand, the illusion of representative democracy portraying citizens as equals despite overriding socioeconomic inequalities; on the other hand, the existence of a bureaucracy enforcing a hierarchy of knowledge (Artous et al. 2015). Participation is presented as an innovative form of political management that overcomes the conflict between both structures of the state; and it materializes from the idea of universal democracy inspired by liberal ideas, Enlightenment epistemology, and bourgeois reformism. Participatory processes would become one of the manifestations or floating signifiers of a diffused theoretical trend in a postpolitical context, understood as a new conjuncture in which the proper antagonistic and properly political dimensions of politics have been foreclosed and replaced by moral and ethical concerns (Mouffe 2005). Following Delgado (2016), this trend can be defined as republicanism or citizenism; the latter being an expression of the ethics of advanced liberal democracies that reconciles in complex ways radical democratic ideologies with neoliberal logics. While the democratic paradigm aspires to the realization of Kantian abstract morals, neoliberalism advocates ending with state bureaucracies and leaving public administration in the hands of citizens.

In order to empirically examine these premises and evaluate our own approach, we inquire into participation as an "epochalism" (Geertz 1973); that is, a seemingly self-explanatory and self-evident notion that escapes political disputes. Epochalism turns participation into an active political and rhetorical resource used by actors from different ideological ranks and local contexts. This means that, as a "global form" (Collier and Ong 2005), participation takes hold differently depending on the local setting. Participation has entered the Spanish political-administrative arena via two main avenues. The first avenue includes the multiple EU regulations that enforce participation in most funding programs and agencies, from rural development and agricultural subsidies, to heritage and natural resource management. The comments by Burns et al. (2000) on a white paper by the European Commission's (2001) white paper on governance evinces this shift. It talks of a more open, accountable, and participatory European Union in an era characterized by the "diffusion of authority and decision-making into specialized policy sectors," and by a "dispersed sovereignty" that is evermore "layered, segmented, diffused, and increasingly non-territorial" (3). These are paralleled by a growing technocratic approach underpinned by the "scientification of politics" (2).

The second avenue includes social movements' demands for transparency and democratization, which have converged in the seizure of power in the city councils of Madrid, Barcelona, and other capital cities. The groups include *Ahora Madrid* (Madrid Now), *Barcelona en Comú* (Barcelona in Common), and other local parties, or so-called municipalist coalitions, which are similar to *Podemos* (We Can) and the *Indignados* (Outraged or 15-March movement) social movements. Certainly, participation was previously present in local administrations, but these coalitions have pushed for more of it in various ways, including participatory budgets or in the creation of Councils of Citizens Participation. Our research explores how the implementation of participation in quotidian government practice faces the co-optation or outright opposition of traditional forms of public administration, political parties, and some institutions. As explained by a high-ranking member of a rural development group (RDG): "Europe wants neither public authorities nor any specific group interest to represent more than 50 percent [of decision making]. Then the public sector must have less weight than the private. And that has been imposed top-down and this is something that elected politicians do not understand."²

In many cases this has led to the disempowerment of public workers because of externalization and "agencification" of services in the name of efficiency. A director of the natural park that we examined in our case study complained: "It is very disjointed, much dismembered, I do not find meaning, coherence; it is very discouraging. As public employees, we end up being attracted by business organizations capitalist style. ... You understand that there is coherence in decision making out there."

Different actors in these realms connect newer demands for participation with the previously prevailing sociopolitical networks, creating something halfway between traditional corporatism and cronyism and liberal democracies infused with free market ideologies. Anthropologists Alonso González and Macías Vázquez (2014) define this reality as neoliberal corporatism, or a "hybrid phenomenon that we criticize but ignore, through which communities of complicity redistribute public resources without being accountable to citizens, who partially ignore, tolerate and participate—actively or passively—in the process" (224, translated by authors).

Tensions between neoliberal corporatism and new forms of governance can be grasped in the rapid proliferation of participation demands that partially replace and partially overlap technical-bureaucratic procedures of conservation that fall under the authorized heritage discourse (Smith 2006). Participation has become an inescapable step for crisis-ridden public administrations and private companies in the heritage sector that must raise EU and international funds, redistribute these resources, and reproduce their clientele networks or staffs.

This state of affairs was preceded by the European Union's turn toward a neoliberal and technocratic management of culture (Shore 2005). This is the case specifically regarding heritage, as reflected mainly in two reports: *Council Conclusions on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage* (European Union Council 2014) and *Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe* (European Parliament 2015). The latter includes:

To strengthen Europe's position in the field of cultural heritage preservation, restoration and valorization, there is a need to \ldots continue developing more participative interpretation and governance models that are better suited to contemporary Europe, through greater involvement of the private sector and civil society. (6–7)

These reports are filled with rhetoric and define heritage for European sustainability, ultimately considering it a commodity. In parallel to this, however, these reports reiterate the need to create synergies between different civic society actors and emphasize the importance of participation and transparency in heritage governance.

In response to the growing funding devoted to heritage by EU institutions, researchers in the humanities and social sciences have adapted to public demands while challenging former authorized heritage discourses and technical approaches in the process. This adaptation is connected to the emergence of "community heritage" (Waterton and Watson 2010), "participatory museums" (Simon 2010), "participative mapping" (Risler and Ares 2013), "public archaeology" (Schadla-Hall 2006), "public history" (Ashton and Kean 2014), "communitarian archaeology" (Merriman 2004), or "public folklore" (Baron and Spitzer 2008). The so-called critical heritage studies have in turn identified the fractures derived from systems of heritage management, which often lead to patronizing attitudes that divide communities, scholars, technicians, and heritage institutions (Alonso González 2014; Sánchez-Carretero 2013). Instead of leading to the desired outcomes imagined in EU reports, heritage management frequently reproduces social divisions and exclusions, and experts often find themselves needing to "educate" people in heritage values and to initiate them in the "heritage crusade" (Lowenthal 1996).

In theory, participation amends this state of affairs. However, the theoretical baggage and practical toolkits of participation tend to project an ethics of social and civic responsibility, and assume that people are generally interested in participating and that it is in their best interest to do so (Cleaver 1999). The lack of participation is thus seen as disinterest, or even irresponsibility, toward democratic duties. ParticiPat research starts from a different premise: nonparticipation may be the result of sociopolitical and economic structures that create barriers and asymmetries that can lead to disempowerment and a sense of social and/or individual exclusion from heritage. Indeed, we explore the political connotations of participation, which can promote and articulate the depolitization of the social sphere (Clausen 2017), as well as the reproduction of the roles of hegemonic actors in the "heritage

machine" (Alonso González 2015). This is a new hegemonic structure of governance, whereby heritage management is aligned with the neoliberal order and the individualization of identity characteristic of our postpolitical times.

Our Case Study of Participation and Heritage Management

ParticiPat has a three-fold aim to explore: the role of participatory techniques in heritage policies, the relationships between public participation and heritage-making processes, and the link between participation and heritage management institutions. To this end, ParticiPat has brought together a team of multidisciplinary researchers-anthropologists, geographers, historians, and archaeologists—who are investigating nine case studies. The case studies share an interest in participatory processes in heritage contexts, but they address different regions and types of heritage. Two cases explore intangible heritage in Portugal (the courtyards of Córdoba and the Mértola Islamic festival); two study protected areas in Spain (the natural parks in Cabo de Gata-Nijar in Almería, and in Fuentes del Narcea, Degaña, and Ibias in Asturias); one focuses on conflicts surrounding monument restorations in Spain (the church of Santa Maria das Areas in Coruña); one investigates cultural itineraries in Spain (associations of the World Heritage site Camino de Santiago); two address archaeological sites (alternative models of archaeological financing and participation in the Costa dos Castros project [Galicia, Spain] and community management of World Heritage archaeological sites [in Mexico]). The ninth study reviews alternative heritage management formulas (the house-palace of the *Pumarejo* in Seville, Spain; see Sánchez Carretero and Jiménez Esquinas 2016, 195–96).

Methodologically, the investigations examine how "power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions and discourses across time and space" (Shore and Wright 1997, 14). They analyze both ends of the policy chain: the implementers, experts, and bureaucrats on one end, and the recipients of participation policies on the other end. Despite concentrating in bounded geographical areas, ParticiPat's ethnographic approach to policy and power allows for a reconceptualization of the field, understood as a transversal sociopolitical space articulated by participation as a system of governance. Following earlier methodological approaches (Hickey and Mohan 2013; Stage and Ingerslev 2016), participation is explored through a number of qualitative research strategies. Participant observation allows a fine-grained analysis of situated meanings of heritage in different contexts, including parliaments, protected areas, celebrations, association meetings, and so on. Legal and official policy discourses are analyzed as cultural texts and narratives that classify and normalize but also, rhetorically, empower some actors and processes even while concealing others. Individual and group interviews are studied together, along with the sources generated by these actors: videos, leaflets, photographs, seminars, websites, statistics, and so on. Digital ethnography is used to follow-up with key actors and track relevant processes.

ParticiPat also aims to generate conceptual and methodological uniformity to preserve the specificity of each case study while also ensuring dialogue, interoperability, and a platform for common discussion. This will be achieved through pooling all main categories of observation and analysis, which were created as part of our participatory action research (PAR) strategy (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991). This methodology allowed us to develop a shared field guide that provides a common structure to compare our nine ethnographies (Roura-Expósito et al. 2018). The use of PAR in the creation of the field guide served to create more equal and balanced power relations within the research processes and researchers with different ranks, and to highlight the governance practices that any participatory praxis entails. Beyond assessing the specific ontological and epistemological differences of each case study, ParticiPat seeks to establish a comparative framework that allows some abstraction, generalization, and theorization about the forms of participatory governance in any given sociopolitical context. Indeed, in the neoliberal context, participation cannot be isolated from a continuum of norms incorporated into the administrative, political, and legal apparatuses meant to regulate social life and behavior (Rose and Valverde 1998).

This thematic approach and methodological orientation surfaces in our case study in Asturias. Our investigation analyzes the municipalities of Cangas del Narcea, Degaña, and Ibias, which host the Natural Park Fuentes del Narcea Degaña e Ibias, and Muniellos, a biosphere reserve inside the park. These are at the center of a long-standing conflict involving multiple actors and levels of governance, ranging from the European Union to local parishes. The conflict has recently escalated and led to suspension of special spatial planning regulations, in part for "lack of participation" in the implementation of management guidelines. Key actors are the public workers at the regional administration's Department of Natural Heritage Conservation, the RDG (funded by EU LEADER program), and a number of associations and stakeholders that both oppose and support the natural park and biosphere reserve. These include ecologists, cattle and land proprietary groups, tourism entrepreneurs, lawyers, local politicians, agrarian unions, and political parties at local and regional levels.

Our ethnography maps the different demands for participation of this wide array of actors, and focuses on two official policies that affect everyone involved: the process of updating the RDG management plan, which includes participatory policies, and the remaking of the natural park's and biosphere reserve's guidelines (known as Instruments of Integrated Management), also with updated participation requirements and protocols.² Ethnography is performed in various sites; at regional parliament hearings; at local city councils, institutional bureaucratic spaces, and rural association meetings; and with recipients of participation.

Our preliminary results point to the real limits of participatory processes and how participatory strategies prevent citizens from actually expressing their opinions, visions, and desires. There are no less than three limits on participation, which are interconnected. The first is caused by the lack of a participatory culture, as traditional forms of governance in rural Asturias are associated with cronyism and clientelism. "Participation" functions as a smoke screen for the restructuring of traditional political affinities in local contexts, using what we have termed *phantom associations*. These are civil society organizations created ad hoc and promoted by political parties or local institutions only to fulfill official EU requirements for participation. Thus, participation in governance produces the objects of its own rhetoric: citizen-participants, an epistemology (participation discourse and knowledge), and new practices (participatory techniques and skills), along with specialized private companies, institutions, and, ultimately, subjects (Foucault 2007).

The second limit to participation is the mechanisms employed by the RDG and the natural park in selecting the delegates to integrate into these (supposedly representative) ad hoc civil society organizations. Certainly, regulations state that different social actors and public interests are to be represented in these organizations, and their specific powers are clearly defined. However, local political parties and the staff of the RDG and the park actually decide in a top-down fashion who will take part in "participative" processes. Preexisting power relations and the political establishment play central roles in the selection of delegates to these associations. In addition, these associations usually lack democratic mechanisms and are far from representing broad social or productive sectors. The delegates of the phantom associations are assigned only if it is known that they will comply with the legal requirements of participatory policies.

The third participatory problem stems from the above: the practical limits imposed on these phantom associations. Governance structures more adapted to participation, such as the RDG, are capable of learning participatory techniques and methods and triggering participatory processes. However, even these organizations eventually face restrictions from the public administration at the regional level, which is more interested in party interests than actual implementation of regulations in the field. In the words of one key actor in the RDG group:

The issue of participation is very complicated. We should have tools, analysis skills, and culture of negotiation ... Here we had to implement participation in a month. ... There are budgetary limitations, there are guidelines made by others and ... logically, the administration is a bureaucratic machine and always wants a top-down approach to budget management. Thus [participation] is a very pretty fairytale, but in the end the prince turns once again into a frog. There is a ceiling. And this ceiling is the *Consejería* [the regional Council of Rural affairs]. The Consejería acts as a brake, wielding technical arguments that emanate from regulations. ... So I think that we lack a culture of participation because neither citizens, politicians, nor technicians believe on it.

All actors interviewed convey the sense that participation is foreign to them. Their responses show how citizen participation has not opened democratizing channels. Rather, it serves to reproduce existing interests while providing the necessary legitimacy to justify budget expenditures. Participation in our case study is neoliberal governance that alleviates financial scarcity and provides a democratic aura to traditional corporatist or sociopolitical networks. Participation becomes what Arnstein (1969) defined as *tokenism*; that is, the practice of making only a symbolic effort to be inclusive of different social groups and communities in order to give the appearance of inclusivity and equality without actually empowering them. Indeed, for many of our interviewees, participation was just one more box to fill in on a form in order to comply with technocratic procedures, similar to environmental impact or preventive archeology reports. The consequences of tokenism in the practice of community archaeology or anthropology have led to a twofold problem: the demonization of the "expert" and the glorification of the "native" (whose ominous consequences are described in González-Ruibal 2015).

Conclusions

These results reveal the key role ParticiPat is playing in shedding light on a field largely unexplored by critical heritage studies; namely, the consequences of participation for heritage management. More broadly, it sheds light on a governance shift that involves a more diffuse and technocratic approach in the relationship between citizens and institutions. Ahead of this project's deepened and nuanced understandings that will occur through the case studies, our research to date shows that, despite decentralizing rhetoric, most participatory processes have recentralizing effects (Cooke and Kothari 2007). They involve a transfer of powers upwards, as well as more intricate strategies of political co-optation based on cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 2005). The materialization of the "participatory heritage regime" reinforces the technical and bureaucratic traits of heritage management while paving the way for privatization via externalization. With the inability of public workers and institutions to overcome participatory studies, methods, and practices, which only add financial burdens to crisis-ridden public administrations, as in Spain. This shows

that neoliberal governance is in no contradiction with participation and democratic rhetoric but rather go hand in hand (Rose 1996). Indeed, participation is one more manifestation of underlying citizenism and is a "perverse confluence" between destructuring the public sector and requiring citizens to become responsible and autonomous subjects (Dagnino 2004).

Far from bridging the gap between citizens and institutions, participation can become a cosmetic device entrenched in renewed techno-bureaucratic procedures. Socially, it can function as an apparatus of control that readapts traditional corporatist strategies to the new times. Indeed, our ongoing fieldwork reveals the prevalence of tokenist practices among most institutions implementing participation, including considering "proper subjects" of participation only those willing to support their agendas. This process generates a new terrain of dissonance between state attempts at instrumentalization and social movements' demands for inclusion. The seizure of power by political parties born out of these movements in various Spanish cities will affect participation, but how this occurs remains to be tracked. Additional research is also needed to trace the participatory heritage regime and the fractures it creates between the discursive rhetoric and the political arena, which is dominated by existent actors and power networks that are traditionally resilient to cosmetic fashions in terms of governance. Anthropology has a key role to play here in providing fine-grained ethnographic details of how participation affects the heritage-making processes, creates new political subjects and governance structures, and transforms the meaning of democracy itself. This will spark debates that will help develop an improved analytic vocabulary to dissect participation and its deeper "grammar," past and present (Kelty 2017).

Notes

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- 1. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and have been translated into English by the authors.
- Public Participation in the Elaboration of the Instrument of Integrated Management, issued by the regional government of Asturias, can be found at http:// www.altonarceamuniellos.org/imagenes/Documentos/194_igi_fuentesdelnarcea.pdf.

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