



Contribution from PORRUA



The blue gold

Appropriation forms of land, distribution and dynamics of land uses, work organization, techniques, establishment system and really the agrarian system as a whole, are always the dialectic result between rural communities and their environment. This environment is determined by two climatic factors: temperature and rain density. In this sense Spain with its three big scopes: humid Atlantic, dry Mediterranean and semi arid Mediterranean, which form landscapes, agricultures and very diverse ways of life, is a country of big contrasts. Porrúa is located in the north of the Iberian peninsula, in the called green Spain, where high levels of humidity are registered, mild temperatures because of sea proximity and abundance of rains, which make it an appropriate place for agriculture and cattle ranch. Leafy and abundant vegetation, numerous sources, mighty and short rivers of Asturian East can give the idea that it isn't a problematic subject (as seem to think the leaders of the last hydrologic plan when maintaining the peculiar idea that in certain zones water exceeds). But very far of reality because water has been and is vital importance subject for all the human communities and Porrúa could not be less. Its first inhabitants looked for their shepherds community establishment a place rich of water that allowed a suitable development of agriculture, cattle ranch and people supplying. Porrúa is based around five lagoons, a river and a source that supplied population during all the year. The lands where cattle grazed were also abundant in sources and small lagoons.

This interest in water makes, in 1926, a landmark in the history or our council: the creation of the water association. This is an association that regulates the domestic water supplying in the village and its administration. It is formed by an administrative board composed with a president, a vice president, a secretary, an undersecretary, a treasurer and four vowels that renew every two years.

The enormous work that supposed taking water to the houses has been paid by the neighbours and supposed several changes. By a side in the life forms and customs known until the moment: They had no more to bring water home. On the other hand, a physical change of the village since the lagoons were dried, first because of economic problems, they were based on communal lands so they put them to sale to help to finance supplying works as they were no more necessary like they had been for immemorial times. Like witness of the places where these lagoons were based we find now fountains, or sources with names that remind how it was before.

From this moment, from 1926, people of Porrúa manage their own water provision, taking care of the cleaning and repairing of the aqueduct and the spring. This way all the money collected by the water association is used for the provision repair. On the other hand the association has made, in the last years a phreatic level prospect ion to create a water bearing that is put in operation during the summer when the rain index decay and the population increases with the tourists arrival, so that the water association cannot guarantee to its partners a correct supplying.

This way of managing avoids the speculation that in our country, independent communities and city councils make with a fundamental good for life; in Porrúa thanks to the water association the minimum price of consumption is 1.15€ to the month whereas in the rest of the council it is 4.5€ because it has been privatized, and the benefits are divided between a company and the council. Water price does not increase in this case because of the shortage, Llanes is only four kilometres far from Porrúa, and Madrid with an index of population incomparably greater and a little humid climate is single of 1€. Nevertheless the shortage in our council exists and a village as ours cannot give back to this problem that does not affect us directly at the present time, we denounce the thousands of dams that have flooded other valleys which are not ours, more than 500 villages are under water that are not ours, and the lack of effectiveness in the use of water that causes that Spain counts on the greater collection of empty dams of the world.

In Porrúa, we are conscious that who has the control on a limited resource, like water, has the power.

Arrived at this point we think that it is pertinent to ask why an organization of this type is born and stays in a village like Porrúa (and not in others), since many of the implied factors are deeply related to the future development of small rural communities.

The first obvious data is the important **communitarian and civic tradition** on which Porrúa counts. Nowadays, people still have public meetings in the village to discuss their problems, and they still work all together for common tasks. This increases **confidence and reciprocity** in social relationships. By the way, about the civic tradition of Porrúa, we have to emphasize the amount of projects treated by the neighbours in **open councils** from the last quarter of century XIX to the fall of Asturias under pro Franco control in the Spanish civil war, in 1937. These subjects are the public subjects arrangements of the village, the cleaning of the laundry place and the fountains, repairs of buildings like church...on the other hand and already intimately related to the water association is the height of Porrúa associations, cultural and professional, in the first third of the twentieth century. In this period, cattle association, the Casino association, and the water association are created. These two last ones still work today. Several associations and an ethnographic museum are working now, all the village is involved in many activities like the Market of August and of course Cultural village of Europe.

The continued existence in time of institutions and civic-communitarian organizations provides a **control and change** experience on its daily reality to those who participate in them, as a greater or a smaller level according to their reach, and regulates and strengthens social norms of that are deeply overlapping in the suitable development of a community. We are not speaking about casual relations but about what Robert Putnam calls virtuous circles, in which different factors are continuously fed. A greater reciprocity and confidence exist because associations promote them and there are more associations because people are more confident and they trust to generalised forms of reciprocity; and that is the opposite of the virtuous circles in which many of our small villages have fallen: a generalized distrust exists as much social as institutional and this takes to an apathy about public subjects. This apathy prevents collaboration and common work that could promote confidence and reciprocity. All this contributes to an atmosphere, a **civic culture of active participation**, basic to the future of small rural communities, where experiences like the water association are possible, with very positive results economically as socially.