



The Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia

César Augusto Velandia Silva¹

(1) University of Ibagué, Architecture Program, Carrera 22 Calle 67 Barrio Ambalá; 730002 Ibagué, Tolima, Colombia; +57 (8)2709400, +57 3153353542, cesar.velandia@unibague.edu.co

■ Abstract

The Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia (CCLC), inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2011, is the largest productive designated cultural landscape in Latin America. The CCLC is a complex territory where cultural, social and productive institutions encounter rich biodiversity, granting the area a national policy for its preservation. The CCLC encompasses six farming landscapes, equating in 340,000 hectares of surface, in a unique, sustainable, and productive landscape that represents the Colombian coffee tradition. The physiography of valleys and steep slopes, with glaciers and volcanoes on the tops of ridges and native forests and biological corridors, are strategic for the conservation of its biodiversity. Nature-culture linkages are represented in a tradition lasting over 100 years and illustrated through the adaptation of small cultivation plots, the smart use of water sources, the development of building materials, the symbolic understanding of the landscape, and coexistence with disasters risks.

KEY WORDS: coffee cultural landscape, World Heritage List, UNESCO

■ 1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the heritage site

The Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia (CCLC) is a unique, sustainable, and productive landscape that represents the Colombian coffee tradition. The exceptional combination of the urban and rural landscapes reflects a centennial tradition of coffee growing on small farms following innovative natural resource management practices challenging geographical conditions. The high biodiversity of the CCLC is the result of the physiography of valleys and steep slopes, with glaciers and volcanoes on the tops of ridges, native forests and biological corridors, which are strategic for its conservation.

Coffee represents a cultural tradition in Colombia. More than 100 years ago it was introduced to the country and the crops were adapted to an environment surrounded by three cordilleras of the Andes. The volcanic soils, altitude, and the temperature of the equatorial zone provided an appropriate environment for the development of coffee

production across its territory. This generated a cultural identity related to its cultivation which was sustained by the hard work of Colombian farmers.

1.2 Brief description of the agricultural landscape

For more than a hundred years, Colombian families, surrounded by harsh environmental conditions, have accumulated knowledge to adapt their coffee crops by cultivating them in small plots. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the tradition expanded to other regions of Colombia, across the area formerly known as the Old Caldas. Coffee farmers have developed models of collective action through time, forging social, cultural, and productive institutions, and generating an innovative natural resource management system.

■ 2. Significance of the heritage place including natural and cultural values

On June 25, 2011, the UNESCO World Heritage

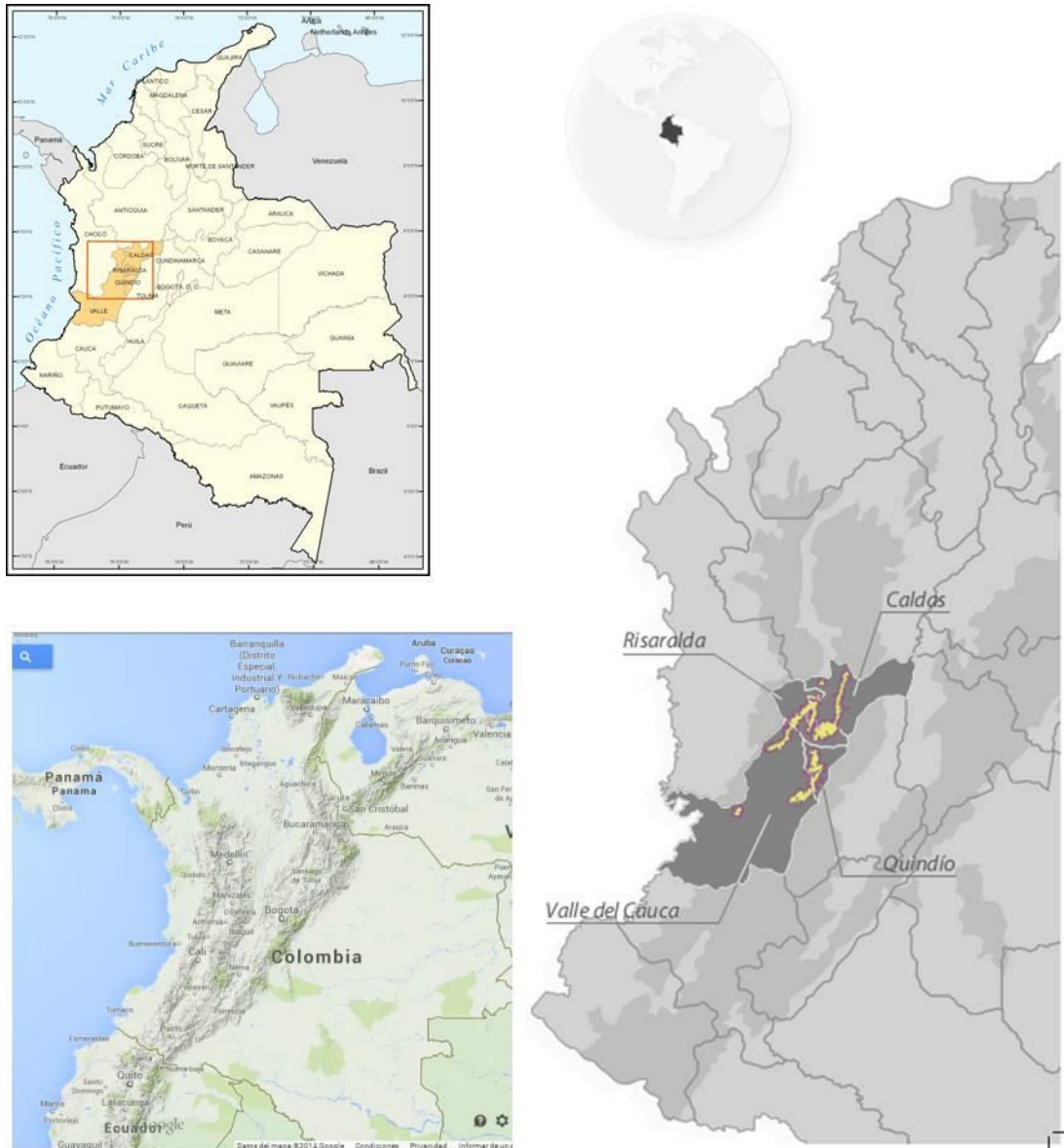


Figure 1. Location of the CCLC. Source: Google maps, 2015. National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia 2016

Committee, in its 35th session inscribed the CCLC in the World Heritage List based on criteria (v) and (vi). The CCLC was inscribed because of its continuing land-use where farmers generated innovative natural resource management practices producing tangible and intangible cultural manifestations characterizing the region.

Furthermore, the statement of significance defines its integrity and authenticity values on the one hand, based on the singularity and high cohesion level of the social adaptation elements of cultural and social traditions according to a sustainable human development; and on the other hand, represented by the rich tangible and intangible

cultural features, and “harmonious integration of the production process and social organization and the coffee farms typology.” (UNESCO 2011).

3. Current management arrangements

After being included on the World Heritage List, on August 13, 2011, the Presidential Agreement for Prosperity No. 43 mandated the development of the CONPES¹ document, the inclusion of the CCLC in the Land Management Plans², the definition of the zones of mining exclusion and the CCLC’s national decree. On October 7, 2011, Resolution 2079, from the Ministry of Culture of Colombia, recognized the

1 The National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) of the CCLC was signed by the Minister Council on February, 13th, 2014.

2 The Land Use Management Plan is a technical and policy planning instrument of long-term management. It is a set of actions and policies regarding administrative and physical planning, which will guide the development of municipal areas, occupation and transformation of urban and rural physical space. The 1998 Law of Land Management requires mayors to update local plans, and the National Planning Department launched a program on technical guiding: <http://kiterritorial.co/>

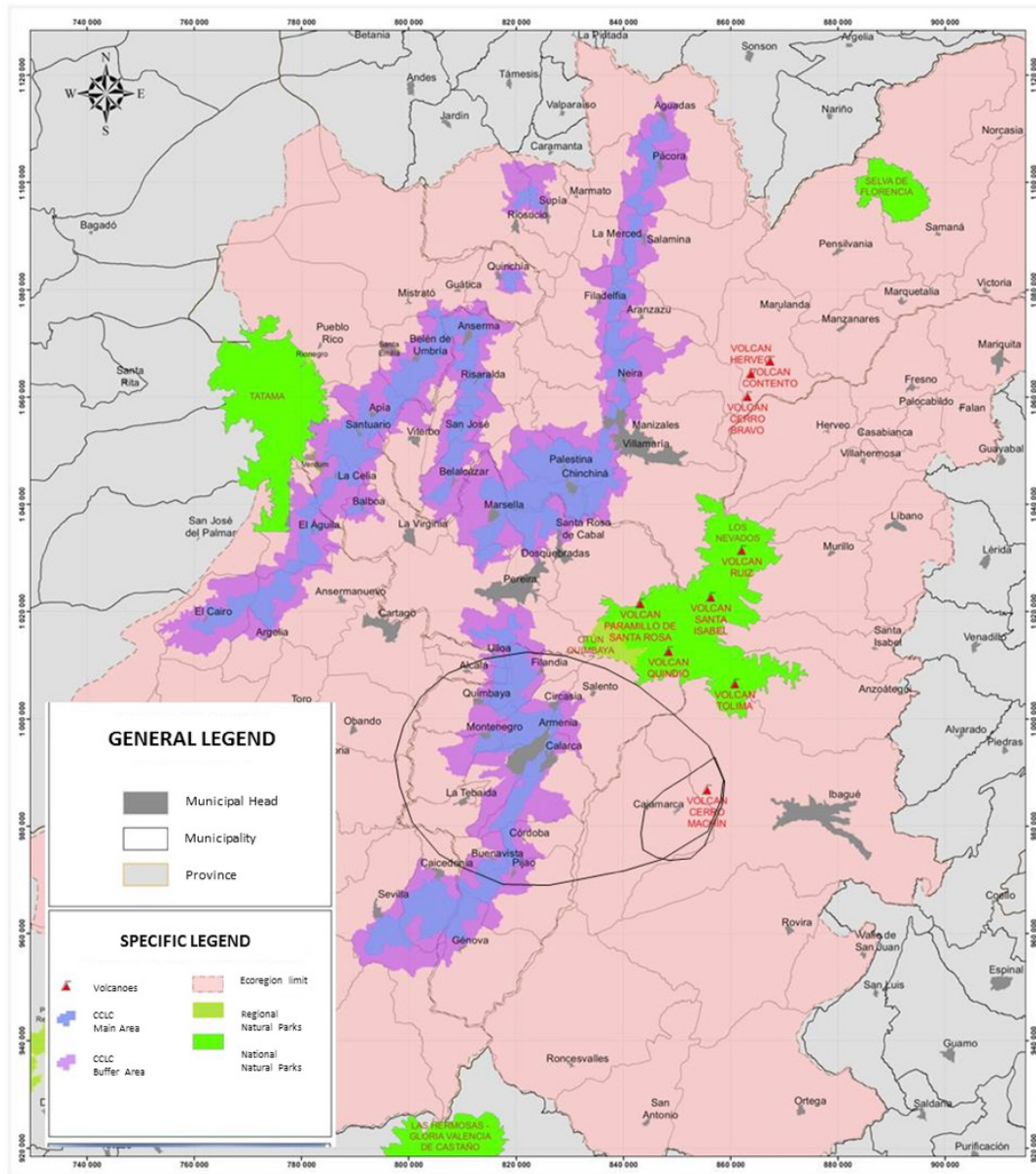


Figure 2. Area of CCLC and buffer zone with superposed threat area of Cerro Machin Volcano. Drawing: Luis Manuel Reales Maestre (Ministry of Culture of Colombia, 2015)

CCLC as Cultural Heritage of the Nation and as a property inscribed in the World Heritage List of UNESCO, consisting of a territory composed of areas of special archaeological, historical, and cultural interest.

3.1 The CONPES document

According to the “Policy for the Preservation of the Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia” (National Planning Department 2014), the factors threatening the nature-culture linkages of the CCLC are: a low resilience to the effects of climate change and environmental pollution, vulnerability to extractive activities and large infrastructure projects, and the negative effects and losses due to risk and disaster threats. To address the above, the CONPES aims at formulating a policy specific to the CCLC in order to ensure the preservation of its Outstanding Universal Value and improve conditions for the environmental, cultural, and

social sustainability, and the economy of the territory. It defines strategies, programs, actions, and the funding required to ensure the sustainability of the landscape as a commitment of the Colombian government. Specific objectives of the policy to strengthen conservation are: first, to design and implement the necessary mechanisms to develop risk management plans so that threats, vulnerabilities, and risks are recognized. Second, to include a strategy for the management of mining activities and third, to strengthen the sustainability action program for coffee production (National Planning Department 2014:48).

Another serious problem in the CCLC is generational change. Coffee farmers, averaging 55 years old, are affected by the influence of modernization and poor local competitiveness of the coffee business in the global market, as the youth does not want to work as coffee farmers.

3.2 Guidelines for Land Management Plans

According to the “Guide to Enactment of the CCLC in the review and adjustment of Land Management Plans” (Ministry of Culture-National Federation of Coffee Growers 2014), environmental and cultural factors need to be included in the municipalities’ land use plans, coordinating with the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory, MASD, and the Ministry of Culture. The guide was developed simultaneously with the obligatory process of review and adjustment of 51 municipality land management plans. The development of the guide involved the GIS mapping of land use, preserved areas and infrastructures, and the verification of urban-territorial implications of cultural attributes related to land management. Technical and policy-mapping were required, translating them into landscape standard controls for its conservation, especially in areas experiencing urban development pressure, land use changes, the impact of tourism, and mining activities.³

3.3 Guidelines for mining activities

Through coordinated work with the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME), the National Mining Agency (NMA), MASD, and the local environmental authorities in the region, an action plan was undertaken to identify existing mining areas in the CCLC, identify existing mining titles,⁴ characterize the type of mining

activities, establish criteria to evaluate new projects, and support the authorization or disallowing of projects.

Resolution 2963 enacted on December 22, 2012, amending Resolution 2079. It delimited, with precision, the CCLC main area and buffer zone (Figure 2). When the area was determined, and declared as restricted by mining cadastre in 2013, the MME concluded that 65% of the mining activity in the CCLC is related to the exploitation of stone used for the production of building materials and roads and the remaining 35% are precious minerals. Currently, a process is being developed to determine the feasibility of issuing new mining titles in the CCLC. It is taking into account the need to review the titles issued before the inscription on the World Heritage List (not included in UNESCO’s nomination file) and to evaluate the complex matter of improving mining with respect to the landscape and its values. The World Heritage Committee, in its 35th session in 2011, recommended that Colombia “not authorize any mining activity within the property and its immediate surroundings” (UNESCO 2011).

4. Current State of Conservation and Challenges for Continuity

Despite the CCLC’s progressing state of conservation, the challenges for its future are many. The CCLC’s sustainable practices of coffee cultivation are being applied to mitigate the effects of climate change, such as wastewater



Figure 3. Coffee farm. © National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia

3 CONPES document diagnosed some of these impacts. on the impact of mining activities, see Velandia (2015).

4 The mining title granted the right to explore and exploit the soil and subsoil. The Mining Law of Colombia allows the cultural authority to evaluate, authorize or disavow mining projects in restricted areas.



Figure 4. Coffee landscape © National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia

management, crop renovation, and more controlled planting to capture more sunlight without losing plant density. That is because the National Coffee Growers of Colombia are applying the “Sustainability matters” program⁵ with the principles, guidelines, and indicators of the Global Reporting Initiative. The actions of the program are aimed at the renovation of competitiveness by granting credits and financial services, improving environmental management between producers and environmental authorities, strengthening coffee growing through international sustainability protocols, and maintaining connectivity and technology with coffee farmers.

The CCLC was affected by the Armero disaster in 1985 and by the earthquake that originated in the city of Armenia in 1999; these events left deep social and cultural problems. Despite this, the imminent risk of Cerro Machin volcano (VCM) is virtually unknown. Due to its characteristics, the VCM has the potential effect of an explosive building; its map of threats and risks extends to the pyroclastic tide westwards, hypothetically, rampaging the Coffee Cultural Landscape of Quindio and Valle del Cauca provinces completely. INGEOMINAS (2003) forecasted hemispheric, regional, and local impacts of the VCM’s imminent eruption and compare them to the 1993 events of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines.

In order to address the problem of the change of agricultural land use in the CCLC, the conservation of agriculture is being promoted as a national food security policy linked to the CONPES policy. Also, there is a defined capacity of territory for cropping and food security that is improving the articulation

with land management. Likewise, tourism activities are being directed to ecotourism, agro-tourism, ethno-tourism practices, and the certification of high-quality services in a quest for the sustainable use of the potential of the natural and cultural landscapes. Despite the strong generational change, early childhood and youth education is promoting awareness about the CCLC values. Moreover, financial and technical training is being directed to young coffee growers in order to attract them to stay on the coffee farms. It has been necessary to diversify economic practices by participating in the production of specialty coffees and promoting coffee with a designation of origin.

Finally, one of the characteristics of the CCLC is the application of advanced scientific research to obtain coffee varieties that are more resistant to diseases and to the humidity generated by climatic variability. Necessarily, the deep scientific study of natural values will contribute to the cultural value also to remain for future generations, like deciphering the coffee genome by Cenicafé⁶ (National Centre for Coffee Research), or obtaining varieties of Colombian coffee better adapted for altitudinal adaptation to climatic variability.

■ 5. Recommendations

There is a need to strengthen the CONPES policy within the National Development Plan and achieve a comprehensive link with the peace agreement.⁷ Also, it is needed:

- To strengthen preservation in the National Land Use Policy and to continue CCLC

5 <https://www.federaciondecafeteros.org/static/files/sostenibilidad-2012-eng.pdf>

6 <http://www.cenicafe.org/>

7 With the signing of the Peace Agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016, one of the main points were the Agreement on “Comprehensive Agricultural Development Policy Towards a New Colombian Field: Integral Rural Reform (RRI)”. This agreement establishes the bases for the transformation of the countryside and creates the conditions of well-being and good living for the rural population. It seeks to eradicate extreme rural poverty and reduce rural poverty by 50% over a period of 10 years, promoting equality, closing the gap between the countryside and the city, reactivating the countryside and in particular the development of peasant, family and community agriculture. (<http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/Documents/informes-especiales/abc-del-proceso-de-paz/index.html>)

harmonization in the land use - adjustment of Land Management Plans⁸ at municipal (POT) and regional (POD) levels;

- To set risk and disaster management municipal and regional plans;
- To improve control and supervision of infrastructure projects;
- To continue work controlling extractive activities;
- To continue with the strategic tourism plan; and overall
- To strengthen the leadership of the Ministry of Culture due to the commitments made to UNESCO, supported by the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia⁹ improved by an associative mechanism of collective participation of the representatives and stakeholders of the region.

for their preservation through time. This is very significant of the agricultural landscape: for an effective integration of heritage and sustainable development, it is necessary to systematically explore nature-culture complexity features to establish a creative dialogue between the past, the present and the future.

The strategies and objectives of landscape management instruments (land management and mining guidelines, the management plan of the property, and CONPES national policy) are very relevant, because they are an example of 'maintaining living models of sustainable land use and natural resources.' (Rössler, 2003). Based on sustained work in committees at local level, there is a progressive valuation of the dynamic layers of the landscape as a 'living' model.

This refers to the understanding of the CCLC management as a living expression that must remain exposed for social apprehension and development of the actions

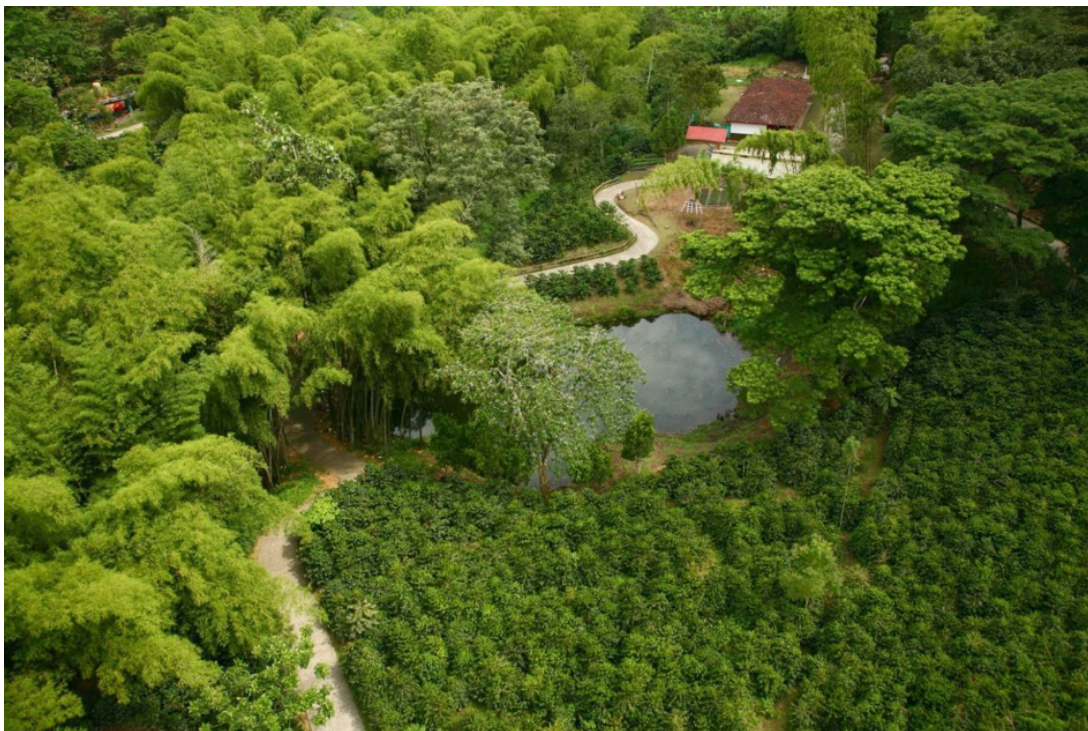


Figure 5. Coffee crops and Guadua woods © National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia

⁸ Called "Modern POD-POT Program".
https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Vivienda%20Agua%20y%20Desarrollo%20Urbano/Presentaciones/01-Colombia_planeacion_territorios_modernos.pdf

⁹ <https://www.federaciondecafeteros.org/particulares/en/>

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