

Article

Evaluation of Landscape Quality in Valencia's Agricultural Gardens—A Method Adapted to Multifunctional, Territorialized Agrifood Systems (MTAS)

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Abstract: Multifunctional agrifood systems with noteworthy roots in a territory are the result of a historical yet dynamic specialization. They are present in the place's knowledge, social connections, collective action, the organization of institutions, innovation and capital. These systems are seen in the landscape, which becomes a resource as well as cultural and environmental heritage. In this regard, it is necessary to study the significance of the many aspects of heritage and landscape in agrifood systems to suitably manage and appreciate them as a territorial resource. This study develops and applies a quantitative method with various criteria to enable the landscape values of multifunctional, territorialized agrifood systems (MTAS in Spanish) to be evaluated, paying attention to essential matters such as the process of heritage recognition and the quality of their landscapes. To do so, a method designed by the authors for evaluating landscapes has been adapted to the peculiarities that define such systems, made up of criteria such as representativeness, authenticity, ecological integrity, vulnerability, accessibility and historical, social and symbolic values. The method has been applied to an exemplary Mediterranean landscape, the agricultural gardens of Valencia, which combine features of MTAS in metropolitan and coastal flatland contexts.

Keywords: agrifood system landscape; evaluation of landscape heritage; Huerta de Valencia; agricultural gardens; evaluation method; heritage management



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1. Introduction and Contextualization

Cultural heritage is taking on increasingly clear importance in societies as a result of its multiple values and uses. Its significance is characteristic for its complexity, structural diversity and many sides and meanings [1]. It is an open, constantly evolving concept subject to continual modifications throughout its history. Indeed, its definition has been affected by the criteria, approaches and values assumed in every period and context, as well as by the relations it has maintained with memory and history [2]. Hence, the notion of cultural heritage has progressively broadened its content over the centuries [3].

During the 20th century, the concept of cultural heritage went from a perspective linked to historical and artistic aspects of the heritage elements towards a more open, everyday conception of the assets [4]. In this period, the term has evolved from a particularist approach linked to aesthetic and monumental values towards a diffusion of the assets as elements of collective identity, emphasizing the idea of social construction [5,6]. It is community property, the common inheritance of a culture [7]. Today, the notion of cultural heritage is continuing its expansion, and a great variety of elements, manifestations and typologies are contemplated that point us towards our identity.

The inclusion of landscape in the sphere of heritage is a result of this process of semantic expansion occurring throughout the 20th century [8]. Although until now cultural assets were treated individually and sometimes out of context, today it is not conceivable

to isolate assets from their geographic context. Hence, the terms *landscape*, *place* or *site* appear as notions inherent in the concept of cultural heritage. Territory is part of the basis of culture and heritage, shaping the so-called cultural or heritage landscapes [9].

Landscape, understood as a manifestation of the link identifying each society with the space where it evolves, brings us closer to the territory with a broad view that goes beyond its purely formal dimension and considers its nature as a collective space for cultural expression [10]. The European Landscape Convention (ELC), approved in 2000, bolsters the territorial sense of landscape [11] and considers the links that bind inhabitants to their territory, representing an essential component in considering landscape as heritage [12]. Furthermore, in recent decades the importance of a territory's cultural value has become clear [13].

The first international institution to recognize the heritage value of cultural landscapes by means of a legal instrument was UNESCO's World Heritage Committee [14]. In this sense, in 1992 cultural landscapes were considered for the first time as elements susceptible to becoming part of the World Heritage List [15]. Their inclusion has enabled landscapes of agricultural heritage to be recognized as world heritage since it is considered that the environmental assets, cultural landscapes and cultural heritage of agriculture are created and maintained through active agricultural work [16]. Furthermore, similarly to cultural and natural heritage sites, agricultural heritage systems also possess "Exceptional Universal Values" (EUV), though these have their own connotations [17].

Agricultural landscapes occupy approximately 10% of the world's land area, meaning about 1.5 billion hectares [18]. They are productive spaces created, molded and sustained by local communities that interact with their natural environment. Given that their different natural or cultural values are interrelated, such landscapes contribute to the debate about conservation of biodiversity and agrobiodiversity, as well as on how to preserve the associated communities' vitality and way of life [19]. The practices and techniques implemented have shaped stable, resilient systems that have brought food security for their communities [20]. In addition to producing food, these landscapes boast extraordinary ecological, economic, aesthetic, cultural, tourist and recreational values, and help to shape and structure the ground, the fertility of the soil and the supply of water [21]. Suitably managed agricultural systems help mitigate climate change and provide services related to flood control, waste management and carbon sequestration. Furthermore, they can help achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as regards food security and sovereignty, and in achieving a more sustainable kind of agriculture [22].

The rise of globalization has generated relevant socio-economic transformations in recent decades, which has brought about drastic changes in food and subsistence systems [23]. There are currently different initiatives being carried out aimed at recognizing and preserving the values of agricultural heritage landscapes, generally by means of a process of inventory and designation [19].

Internationally, the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) scheme, launched in 2002 by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), stands out [24]. This initiative has been applied to traditional agrarian systems threatened by globalization of the economy and the cultural homogenization associated with it [25]. The recognition of GIAHSs shows the relevance of these systems in which agriculture and the means of life, biodiversity, social organizations, landscapes and innovation all work together to create sustainable human activities [26].

UNESCO's international Man and the Biosphere program (MAB) recognizes functioning agricultural and forestry landscapes, developing a worldwide network of Biosphere Reserves with the aim of integrating environmental and cultural aspects present in the territory. Such Biosphere Reserves have been fundamentally designated as such for being spaces characteristic for their natural values, but it is also true that certain cases have been awarded the distinction for being hybrid spaces combining nature and culture, such as those typical in agriculture.

In addition to the international initiatives, there are regional and nationwide programs. Specifically, Europe is recognized for its rural development policies that emphasize the community's well-being, economic vitality and equality [27]. There is also the ELC, which bolsters a territorial sense of the landscape and the simultaneous confluence of natural and cultural processes [11]. The agreement has notable legal repercussions for agrarian spaces since it integrates landscapes and considers their identity and heritage aspects.

Recent years have seen a growing interest in appreciating the heritage of agrarian activity in its different manifestations. The studies by Mata (2004) and Molinero, Baraja and Silva (2013) look in detail at the different factors implied by this recent consideration [11,28].

As opposed to the predominance of a kind of global agriculture and food supply that tends to shed its territorial peculiarities, other types of local or alternative agrifood systems show intense interconnections with the territory and a spatial uniqueness [29].

Multifunctional, territorialized agrifood systems in Spain, known as MTAS, are sustainable systems, since they manage resources responsibly and intelligently, and enable a living heritage to be conserved and conveyed. These agrarian systems are seen in the landscape, which becomes a resource as well as cultural and environmental heritage. To learn about Spanish agrarian landscapes and their process of heritage recognition as cultural landscapes, it is essential to delve into the multiple aspects in their field of study.

In this context, it is necessary to study the significance of heritage and landscape in agrifood systems, and to analyze their many components, to suitably manage and recognize their value as a territorial resource. Recent decades have seen gradual development in landscape policy in Europe, especially as a result of the approval of the ELC. The document fosters knowledge, evaluation, policies and planning of landscape. It is, therefore, crucial to have indicators geared towards evaluating and monitoring the effects of plans and policies on landscape. However, studies on landscape indicators are scarce and recent [30]. Even so, as a result of the growing interest in protecting and managing heritage, in recent decades there has been gradual development in systems for evaluating heritage for different typologies and modalities. Identification, characterization and evaluation of heritage assets are fundamental activities to propose projects and action aimed at conserving them and highlighting their importance [31].

Based on these reflections and precedents, this study aims to put forward an effective method to enable MTAS values to be calculated, paying attention to landscape quality and recognition of heritage. The system developed is quantitative and multicriteria. It was designed based on a method defined by the authors for landscape evaluation adapted to the peculiarities that define such systems. To verify its applicability and efficacy, the method has been implemented in an exemplary Mediterranean landscape, Valencia's agricultural gardens, registered as a GIAHS in 2019. They combine features of MTAS in metropolitan and coastal flatland contexts. The method proposed makes it possible to design coherent measures for conservation, management and appreciation of agrifood systems. Thus, the method is intended to act as an instrument recognized and used by institutions and public authorities to take decisions and manage heritage.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Area of Study

Valencia's agricultural gardens are one of the most relevant agrarian spaces in the Mediterranean sphere. There is a millenary landscape of exceptional value, since it contains environmental, cultural, historical, economic and social qualities of the highest order [32]. It is one of the few areas of historical metropolitan market gardens that still exist in Spain, and one of the symbols of the city of Valencia and the towns around it, able to generate a territorial identity and social cohesion.

The Valencian county of L'Horta is today a complex metropolitan space made up of three sub-counties (L'Horta Nord, L'Horta Oest and L'Horta Sud) and the municipality of Valencia. The territory covers 44 municipalities. However, the area strictly known as the historical agricultural gardens of Valencia, or L'Horta, is made up of agricultural

territory irrigated by the seven canals of the Water Tribunal of the Plain of Valencia, La Real Acequia de Moncada (Royal Irrigation Canal of Moncada), La Acequia Real del Júcar (Royal Irrigation Canal of the Júcar [River]) and various historical springs and wells [33]. It is a traditionally agricultural area that acted as an economic motor for the city of Valencia and neighboring towns from medieval times up to the first third of the 20th century, but its size has decreased as a result of urban development in recent decades [34]. This irrigated area stretches along the coastal flatland from the central Valencian depression between the south-eastern end of the Iberian System and the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 1).

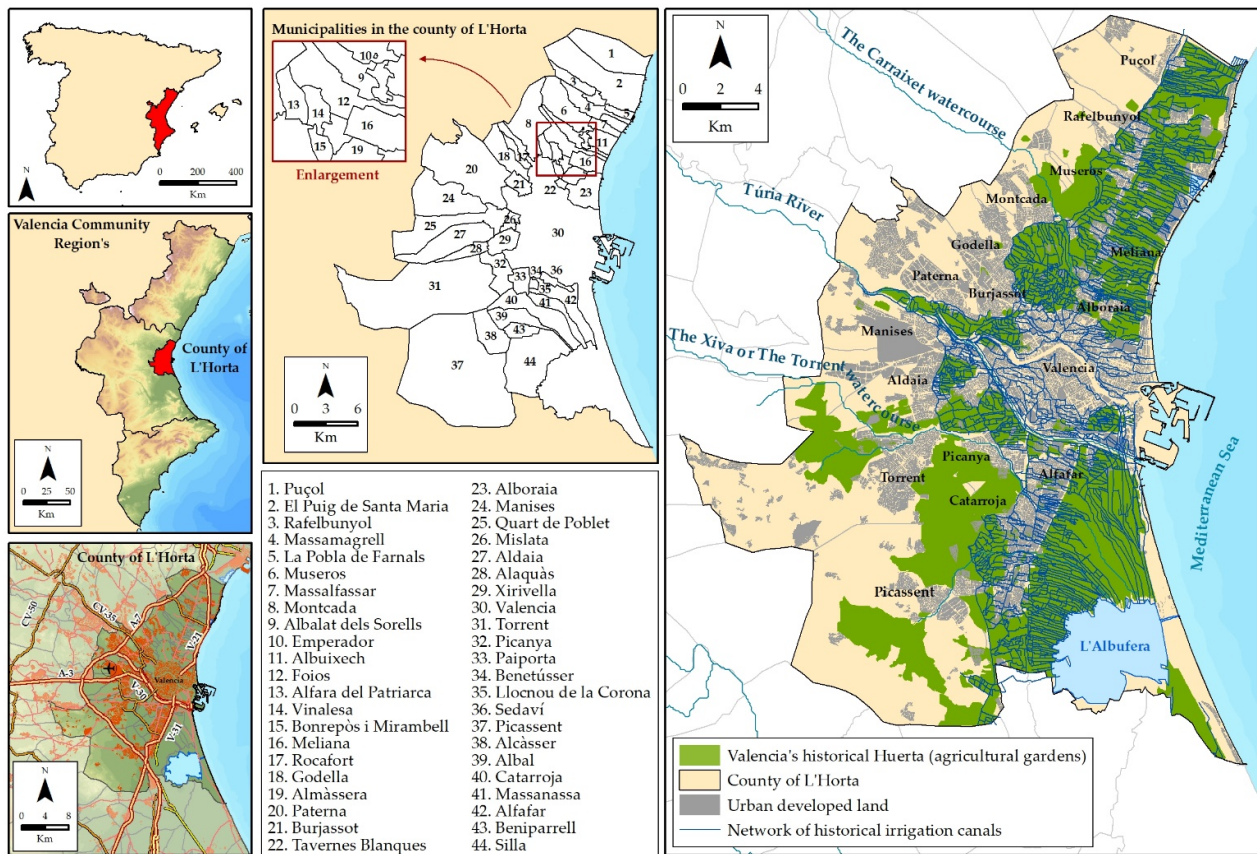


Figure 1. Area of study: Valencia's agricultural gardens.

Valencia's agricultural gardens or Huerta area is one of the six millenary ones that still exist in Europe, as explained in the Dobris Assessment by the European Environment Agency [35]. Moreover, in 2019 it was included in the registry as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS), managed by the FAO [36].

Irrigation is the defining element that structures the landscape of Valencia's agricultural gardens, which originated just as they are perceived today in the medieval Islamic period [37]. The irrigation system is the foundation upon which the agricultural garden area has been designed and organized territorially, since the structure of the canals influenced the layout of populations and roads, as well as the plots of cultivated land [38,39]. In this sense, the Huerta of Valencia is a magnificent landscape of irrigation dependent on a complex hydraulic architecture based on a recurring system of weirs located in the last stretch of the River Túrria, master irrigation canals and secondary networks [40]. There are also other components relevant to the articulation of the landscape of Valencia's agricultural gardens, such as the structural division of agriculture into plots, the road network made up of a multitude of historical paths, and the constructions and kinds of architecture combining concentrated and disperse habitats [41]. In addition to the traditional irrigation systems and other material assets of a rural and agrarian nature, in Valencia's Huerta there

are significant intangible manifestations, notably the millenary judicial institution of the Water Court (Tribunal de las Aguas), registered in 2009 UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The landscape of Valencia's agricultural gardens has undergone constant evolution throughout history as a result of socio-economic changes, with the continual introduction, transformation and disappearance of structural elements: crops, irrigation systems, methods of agricultural work, types of population hub and the conception of uses for the land [42]. For centuries, cereals were grown along with vines. Later, rice was introduced with floodable areas, and as of the 16th century other products from the Americas were grown. The mulberry tree proliferated as a consequence of the rise in silkworm cultivation, and in the 19th century vegetables and rice became popular. Today the predominant crops are vegetables, citrus, ornamental plants and rice. There are a great deal of smallholdings and a significant decrease in agrarian area as a result of the metropolis' urban expansion. In fact, the current horticultural area comes to 5200 hectares, a third of what existed in the mid-20th century [43].

The landscape of the agricultural gardens is not only agrarian, but is made up of a mosaic of uses in which the cultivated fields and traditional irrigation systems co-exist with urban and industrial areas, infrastructures and roads. The socio-economic transformations and metropolitan dynamics have brought about serious territorial and scenic impacts in recent decades [44]. In that time, the processes leading to social devaluation of this landscape have deepened, caused partly by the general crisis in the agrarian sector and the peri-urban nature of Valencia's agricultural gardens. The great pressure from urbanization, the economy shifting into the tertiary sector, the spread of activities and infrastructures to the detriment of agrarian areas, political permissiveness and the scarcity of suitable educational material have led to a gradual distancing between the horticultural gardens and urban culture [37].

However, in recent years there has been an increase in initiatives and activity aimed at preserving the landscape of Valencia's agricultural gardens and improving citizens' knowledge and appreciation of it. Indeed, numerous cultural routes and sustainable tourist products have been developed, educational materials have been created with a view to spreading knowledge about the landscape, and informative measures have been designed such as workshops, seminars and exhibitions. Furthermore, there is greater implication from public administrations and neighborhood movements and associations protesting for the agricultural gardens' values. Collective interest in the landscape was also strengthened as of 2000 with the ELC. The treaty places landscape among public policies with territorial effects, and acts as an invitation to foster awareness of the landscape among civil society, public administrations and private entities. Moreover, to halt degradation of the agricultural gardens and foster their protection and revitalization, Law 5/2018 of 6 March on Valencia's Agricultural Gardens came into force. This regulation includes the implementation of a territorial plan of action (PAT) approved in 2018 to legally arrange and stimulate Valencia's agricultural gardens, and the creation of a Council for Valencia's Agricultural Gardens, a management body entrusted with drawing up an Agrarian Development Plan to stimulate agrarian activity and preserve this space.

To sum up, Valencia's agricultural gardens deserve to be known as heritage landscape, referring to landscapes subject to recognition and governmental guardianship, thanks to their unique values. The heritage nature of these landscapes is based on their main heritage arguments, the so-called heritage recognition vectors and on the social and institutional attribution of values via the processes for recognition of heritage [45]. Specifically, recognition of the heritage of Valencia's agricultural gardens and their values comes from civil society, channeled through citizens' organizations and movements, as well as from institutions and public administrations by implementing laws and regulations, in addition to carrying out academic and scientific studies.

2.2. Method for Evaluating MTASs

This study's main scientific contribution is to propose an evaluation method of a significantly innovative nature. It is a quantitative, multicriteria system made up of objective, practical parameters that enable MTASs' heritage value to be known. To design it, the basis for the method to evaluate landscape drawn up in the studies by Mayordomo and Hermosilla (2020) [46] and Mayordomo, Hermosilla and Antequera (2021) [47] has been used, which is included in a general method of evaluating cultural heritage applied to different agrarian landscapes with satisfactory results. Both studies justify the selection of criteria making up the system, chosen based on an exhaustive review of the bibliography on heritage evaluation methods, as well as a series of meetings with specialists in cultural heritage. In addition, their applicability in different territories has been confirmed.

The aforementioned general method is also based on a water heritage evaluation system developed and applied in various agrarian areas of the Valencia region, Spain and Tunisia [48–51]. The work by Hermosilla (2010) [48] explains the choice of indicators that make up the system, based mainly on the ones used in the National Industrial Heritage Plan from the Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute [52]. The structure of the water heritage method has also been optimized in the publications by Hermosilla and Mayordomo (2016, 2017) [53,54], in which they analyze and verify the improvements made based on studying 50 or so publications linked to heritage evaluation and on consulting experts in traditional irrigation.

The method used in this study is based on the structures of the aforementioned systems (general and water-based methods), but adapted to the particularities of systems that define agrifood systems. To adapt their indicators to the specifics of MTASs, different studies concerning the evaluation of landscapes were consulted [18,30,55–62], and specifically those linked to the values of agrarian and agrifood systems [11,29,63–66]. UNESCO criteria for inclusion in the World Heritage List were also analyzed [67], as well as those considered by the FAO to select the GIAHSs [68].

The proposed method has a hierarchical structure with three levels of indicators: categories, criteria and variables. There are three categories, and they refer to "intrinsic values", "heritage values" and "potential and viability values". These sets of values are used in different plans by the Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute [52,69,70], and have been used as the basis with some adaptation in other methods of landscape evaluation such as the ones by García-Cortés and Carcavilla (2013) [71], González (2007) [72], Hermosilla and Mayordomo (2017) [54] and Medina (2015) [73]. These three categories are made up of 15 criteria, each which is broken down in turn into three specific variables, so that there are 45 attributes that make up the system. To sum up, the method has a hierarchical structure of indicators ranging from general to specific, by means of three levels that allow the MTASs to be evaluated: categories, criteria and variables. The system's structure can be seen in Table 1. Each one of the proposed indicators is defined further below. Subsequently, the scoring system is explained.

Table 1. Method for evaluating MTASs' landscape and heritage quality.

Categories	Criteria	Variables
Intrinsic values	1. Representativeness	1.1. Typological representativeness
		1.2. Representativeness in the territory
		1.3. Representativeness of the crops
	2. Authenticity	2.1. Morphology and traditional image
		2.2. Continuity of the practices and traditional ways of production
		2.3. Measures to manage and recuperate landscape
	3. Ecological integrity	3.1. Agrobiodiversity or agricultural biodiversity
		3.2. Ecological agriculture
		3.3. State of environmental conservation
	4. Visibility and visual quality	4.1. Diversity and harmony
		4.2. Presence of vegetation cover and/or non-productive species
		4.3. Breadth of views or panoramics
Heritage values	5. Historic	5.1. Link with personalities, civilizations, events and institutions of a historical kind
		5.2. Testimonies or vestiges of a long agrarian tradition and specialization
		5.3. Presence of historical human settlements and archaeological sites
	6. Social	6.1. Expression of a living, cohesive and dynamic landscape
		6.2. Culture, social organizations and ways of habitation
		6.3. Knowledge and systems of local and traditional knowledge
	7. Symbolic/Identity	7.1. Folklore representations
		7.2. Feeling of identity and belonging to a group or community. The landscape is in the collective imagination
		7.3. Organization of events, activities and alliances aimed at creating a feeling of identity
	8. Artistic	8.1. Presence of artistic expressions associated with the landscape
		8.2. Picturesque or traditional scenery
		8.3. Aesthetic values
	9. Informative/Scientific	9.1. Presence of inventoried, catalogued or protected cultural assets
		9.2. Presence of bibliographical references and documentary works of a scientific nature
		9.3. Presence of collectives concerned about safeguarding the landscape
10. Food production, security and quality	10.1. Food security for the local community	
	10.2. Proximity in food production	
	10.3. Quality of agricultural and food products	
11. Awareness among social stakeholders	11.1. Legal situation and institutional recognition of the landscape	
	11.2. Investment and action by public administrations and other collectives	
	11.3. Strategies and materials for dissemination, teaching and communication	
12. Participation and integration of local communities	12.1. Participation in management of the landscape	
	12.2. Participation in processes of documentation, research and interpretation	
	12.3. Participative and territorial governance	
13. Socio-economic profitability	13.1. Organization of agrifood chains into networks	
	13.2. Sustainable production models	
	13.3. Capacity of the landscape itself to develop sustainable economic activities	
14. Vulnerability	14.1. No situation of abandonment	
	14.2. No threats linked to unplanned massive tourism or pressure from urban development	
	14.3. No threats linked to lack of knowledge or disinterest by part or some sectors of the community regarding the landscape or traditional agrarian practices	
15. Accessibility	15.1. Connection between agrarian elements and accessibility to plots and smallholdings	
	15.2. Presence of historical roads, cultural itineraries or routes and approved or educational footpaths	
	15.3. Road access	

2.2.1. Intrinsic Values

This category refers to the excellence of a MTAS according to the elements in its structure [57] and shows its level of attractiveness or essence due to its own or inherent characteristics. Furthermore, it considers the values assigned to the landscape according to the perception or impression it has on the observer by itself [74].

1. Representativeness

This criterion evaluates the MTAS's representativeness, in other words, its capacity for being the agrarian landscape characteristic of its type or in the territory being considered. The representativeness of the dominant crop in the landscape unit is also considered in the territory in which it is located.

1.1. Typological representativeness

The landscape unit is an archetypal agrarian space that is representative of its type.

1.2. Representativeness in the territory

The MTAS is the type of agrarian landscape characteristic of the territory under consideration, which identifies it and differentiates it from other zones [59].

1.3. Representativeness of the crops

The predominant crop(s) in the MTAS is representative in the territorial area where it is found.

2. Authenticity

The authenticity of an agrarian landscape places value on the ongoing, secular maintenance of its productive function, respecting tradition in its spatial layout and its ways of production, without alterations or creating false historical aspects [63]. Nevertheless, authenticity does not imply being subject to tradition or fossilization, since landscape is a living space that evolves, so it is worth considering its dynamics and processes [75].

2.1. Morphology and traditional image

This evaluates the level of faithfulness the MTAS maintains regarding its traditional image. Value is also placed on the original morphology of a landscape not contaminated by contemporary dissonances or stridencies such as unrelated elements that affect the agrarian space, infrastructures that degrade the image, or replacement of crops. However, landscape constantly evolves, so it is possible to modify the scenery if the elements or changes introduced are in concordance with the surroundings and do not detract from their essence.

2.2. Continuity of the practices and traditional ways of production

This values the MTAS's functionality and activity without halting its evolution and continuity or secular maintenance of traditional production practices that have shaped the original landscape. It should be taken into account that ancestral techniques are not always suited to current socio-economic requirements, so some agrarian landscapes have changed or modernized their ways of production. Nevertheless, this will be valued positively if the contemporary techniques have been introduced gradually, with no interruptions due to production being abandoned, and they imply continuity as regards traditional patterns [76].

2.3. Measures to manage and recuperate landscape

This considers the application of steps aimed at recovering the MTAS's values when dissonances in the landscape are identified, or trends towards degradation or transformations leading to a loss of the original essence of the landscape unit. In this vein, value is placed on the implementation of activities and measures aimed at improving management and recovery of the landscape and traditional agricultural landscapes.

3. Ecological integrity

This considers the MTAS's agricultural biodiversity and the environmental state of conservation of the species, ecosystems, populations and any other element that determines the landscape unit's agrobiodiversity. It values the maintenance of evolutionary and ecological processes, and the preservation of species.

3.1. Agrobiodiversity or agricultural biodiversity

Agricultural biodiversity or agrobiodiversity refers to the variety and wealth of species of vegetation, animals and micro-organisms used in the food and agriculture in terms of ecosystems, species and genes. It considers the varieties of autochthonous species grown or improved, as well as wild species related to the crops, pollinators and the fauna associated with the agricultural system and its landscape.

3.2. Ecological agriculture

This considers the presence of ecological agricultural products and species in the agrarian system by means of biological and mechanical methods of cultivation, without using compounds that are damaging to the environment. Hence, the implementation of ecological agriculture is valued positively in the MTAS.

3.3. State of environmental conservation

This evaluates the MTAS's state of environmental conservation. The degradation of the surroundings and deterioration of habitats and natural and plant resources, for example due to water pollution or abusive use of pesticides or certain types of fertilizer, are scored negatively.

4. Visibility and visual quality

This criterion considers the breadth of the visible territory, visual connectivity with other spaces and visual reach. These parameters help characterize the landscape in scenic terms [57]. Landscape units of high visual quality are valued.

4.1. Diversity and harmony

This evaluates landscape units with respect to the combination of different elements that make up the scenery and how different relationships are produced. Relationships are valued that are organized and lead to the observer's well-being such that they produce harmony. Hence, this quality refers to the level of coherence and balance between the unit's components [57] and implies greater visual quality. For example, the integration of traditional agrarian elements in the scenery is valued, or the presence of components that are representative of agrarian activity such as stone terraces, roads or walls [55].

4.2. Presence of vegetation cover and/or non-productive species

The use of vegetation cover in agrarian landscapes affects the scenic quality perceived by the observer, providing them with greater visual attractiveness. Moreover, the presence of non-productive species of vegetation together with the crops, for example treelines or hedges on the borders or roadsides, is valued positively from the point of view of visual quality. Likewise, the existence of different cultivated species, or polyculture, has a positive effect on the observer's evaluation, whereas fields without crops or lying fallow have lower visual quality [55].

4.3. Breadth of views or panoramics

This considers the MTAS's level of openness or visibility. It refers to the breadth or extent of territory that can be observed from different points or specific places. Extensive views or panoramics are valued, since the greater the breadth of visual sweep, the greater its scenic quality.

2.2.2. Heritage Values

Heritage values correspond to a descriptive analysis of the MTAS [69]. They take into account cultural and environmental attributes that influence and enrich the landscape's intrinsic characteristics and peculiarities. They refer to the influence of the socio-cultural environs on a specific landscape unit.

5. Historic

This criterion acts as testimony to the history and ways of life that have taken place in the MTAS. It provides and values cultural, social and economic evidence of the periods and societies that have lived in the territory under consideration. The components evaluated are linked to relevant historic personalities, events or civilizations, the presence of testimonies or vestiges of a long agrarian tradition, and the existence of historic human settlements or archaeological sites.

5.1. Link with personalities, civilizations, events and institutions of a historical kind

The MTAS is associated with relevant historical personalities or civilizations, events, facts or periods of interest, or with institutions of a historical nature. In this sense, the landscape is notable for its capacity to explain, reminisce and provide testimony to the life of a historical person, an ethnic group or local community, a period or a historically relevant institution.

5.2. Testimonies or vestiges of a long agrarian tradition and specialization

The MTAS is a historical agrarian space that has conserved its activity until today and provides testimony to a long agrarian tradition and specialization. Hence, the landscape has testimonial vestiges linked to agrarian activity, such as the existence of historical elements or infrastructure (farmhouses, irrigation canals, wine cellars, etc.), consolidated systems of smallholdings, terraces in mountainous areas, schemes for appropriating and possessing the land, ways of organizing the land and distributing the water, etc.

5.3. Presence of historical human settlements and archaeological sites

This values the presence of means of habitation with traditional or vernacular architecture, as well as the existence of cultural milestones and testimony associated with historical settlements [57]. It considers the existence of architecture representative of specific historical periods and archaeological sites.

6. Social

This criterion values the use or current social function of the landscape and its cohesive, dynamic nature. Furthermore, the cultural values and collective ways of social organization are taken into account, as well as the maintenance of knowledge, practices and systems of local and traditional knowledge transmitted from generation to generation.

6.1. Expression of a living, cohesive and dynamic landscape

The MTAS conserves its functionality without halting its evolution or losing the essences of the traditional way of life that has brought about the layout of the primal landscape. Hence, it is a living and lived-in landscape with an active social purpose that takes place in harmony and consonance with the original essences [63]. Thus, the agrarian space is conceived as an element of quality of life [11], a space for citizens' enjoyment and leisure where social cohesion is fostered.

6.2. Culture, social organizations and ways of habitation

The agrarian landscape has an influence on the local culture and is regulated by collective means of social organization, where traditional institutions are included to deal with archaeology, regulatory systems to access resources and distribute the benefits, systems of values, rituals, etc. [68]. In addition, value is placed on the presence of architecture connected to the place's agrarian organization that represent a way of life or a characteristic way of inhabiting the landscape under consideration. Thus, the means of human habitation

built are valued, such as Mediterranean agricultural towns, or the plural panorama of ways of habitation scattered among traditional agricultural gardens, in large private lands with farmhouses, in wine-producing areas or mountainous zones [11].

6.3. Knowledge and systems of local and traditional knowledge

This values maintenance of the agrarian landscape through traditional knowledge and practices carried out by generations of agricultural farmers. In this vein, the MTAS bears testimony to ancestral cultural practices typical of agricultural communities that hold knowledge and traditions transmitted through generations. In this way, local and traditional knowledge has been transferred from generation to generation and is necessary to maintain the landscape.

7. Symbolic/Identity

This is related to the emotional bonds and perceptions of the local communities as regards the landscape. It takes into account sentimental, spiritual or religious ties with the territory, and symbolic, patriotic or other types of values in emotional or identity perceptions.

7.1. Folklore representations

This values the presence of folklore representations and activities in a landscape unit. They are linked to customs, artisan crafts, dances, songs and other activities of a traditional, popular nature that take place. Moreover, activities are considered in which the agrarian landscape is associated with the territory's own heritage, gastronomy, traditions and culture.

7.2. Feeling of identity and belonging to a group or community. The landscape is in the collective imagination

This refers to the landscape unit's capacity to generate a feeling of identity and collective belonging. It means the emotional bond attributed to the territory's population, which forms a feeling of affection among the community. The contexts with significant cultural capital are usually made up of landscapes that are exemplary for their inhabitants and infuse visitors with a special significance [59].

7.3. Organization of events, activities and alliances aimed at creating a feeling of identity

In the landscape's territorial area, different types of activity are carried out (educational, scientific, artistic, sporting, social, etc.) and alliances are established among local companies, associations and other collectives aimed at creating and fostering identity and a feeling of belonging to the MTAS.

8. Artistic

This considers the presence of artistic expressions linked to the landscape. Artists feel encouraged to reproduce and represent the landscape through different languages and means. The landscape unit's capacity to generate a picturesque or traditional scene is also valued, as well as its aesthetic values.

8.1. Presence of artistic expressions associated with the landscape

This refers to the presence of pictorial representations, literary texts, photos or other types of artistic expression associated with the landscape unit. Thus, value is placed on views, descriptions, images and other representations of the landscape through painting, sculpture, pottery, literature, cinema, photography or any other artistic discipline.

8.2. Picturesque or traditional scenery

This values the MTAS's capacity to generate a picturesque or traditional scene in keeping with the organization and structure of the agrarian cultural elements. For example, value is placed on a combination of vernacular agricultural and livestock farming practices with traditional paths and roads, or drystone constructions with historical population

settlements and emblematic agrarian products, etc. [57]. Hence, the components and agrarian structure of the landscape unit form a coherent whole adapted to the natural environment. The orderly layout of features built (terraces, walls, etc.) generates landscapes of relevant aesthetic quality. On the other hand, in certain agrarian areas, the evolution of crop production has brought about the disappearance of the landscape's traditional character.

8.3. Aesthetic values

This places value on the tangible value and role played by the crop considered and its associated elements. Hence, it values the density, specialization and predominance of the crop and assets associated with it over others. Thus, the legacy of the agrarian practices linked to the crop is present in the territory and functionally intertwined, creating relevant aesthetic and artistic scenery.

9. Informative/Scientific

This values the landscape's scientific qualities associated with knowledge creation in any discipline or sphere. In this sense, value is placed on the presence of the MTAS in bibliographic references and other studies or scientific documents. In addition, inventoried, catalogued or protected cultural assets appearing in the landscape unit, as well as collectives concerned about safeguarding the landscape, are also contemplated.

9.1. Presence of inventoried, catalogued or protected cultural assets

This takes into account the presence of cultural elements that lend the landscape a value of its own. It refers to the existence of assets that have been declared, catalogued or protected by official bodies in the landscape unit. Mainly, assets linked to local agrarian techniques or the production of crops (mills, waterwheels, weirs, irrigation canals, farmhouses, etc.) are taken into account.

9.2. Presence of bibliographical references and documentary works of a scientific nature

This values bibliographic references and other scientific studies, documents or publications that expressly mention the landscape unit. It includes any kind of reference, be it via bibliographic consultation (e.g., monographs, scientific articles, doctoral theses), planimetrics (e.g., cartography, topographic profiles), etc. The landscape unit's contribution to the development of any discipline or subject is valued.

9.3. Presence of collectives concerned about safeguarding the landscape

This refers to organized collectives and associations in favor of safeguarding the landscape under consideration and fostering its appreciation.

2.2.3. Potential and Viability Values

These determine the potential value of the landscape unit and refer to its future perspectives. They consider aspects such as food production, the implication and awareness of social stakeholders, the participation and integration of local communities, and the landscape's socio-economic benefits, vulnerability and accessibility.

10. Food production, security and quality

This criterion considers different aspects linked to the agrarian system's capacity for contributing to food security and the local community, with proximity production of food from different perspectives, as well as the quality of agricultural and food products.

10.1. Food security for the local community

The agrarian system contributes to food security and sustenance of the local community [68], considering the production of food by traditional means and its sustainable consumption. Value is placed on the system being self-sufficient and respecting the environs. The food produced should therefore be available in sufficient but not excessive amounts, and for households' own consumption as well as sale in local markets.

10.2. Proximity in food production

Food production from the landscape is characterized by a three-fold proximity: (a) proximity and coherence with the ecosphere, where agricultural production is resistant to climate change and agricultural companies are multi-purpose in the sense of the ecosystem (supply, regulation and leisure activities); (b) proximity between agriculture and food industries, by means of supplying primary agricultural materials to the region's processing units and mobilization of innovative and sustainable biotechnology; (c) proximity by gearing the food supply towards a more varied and abundant local supply of a more easily verifiable quality and with complete, reliable information about the components in the products.

10.3. Quality of agricultural and food products

This places value on the agricultural or food product(s) using systems to distinguish their quality. For example, the European Union sets out different quality schemes such as the Geographical Indications and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) [77]. The Geographical Indications establish intellectual property rights for certain products whose specific qualities are linked to the zone where they are produced: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and Geographical Indication (GI). This system of indications protects the names of products that come from specific regions and have specific qualities or enjoy a reputation linked to the territory where they are produced. The TSGs highlight a product's traditional aspects such as the way they are produced or their composition, without being linked to a specific geographic zone. There are also voluntary schemes for national certification or ones managed by private operators.

11. Awareness among Social Stakeholders

This values the involvement, commitment and awareness of social stakeholders regarding protection, conservation and appreciation of the landscape unit. Such participation can occur in different ways: by means of a suitable legal situation and institutional recognition of the landscape; investment and work by public administrations and other collectives aimed at the agrarian space's preservation and viability; and strategies and materials for information, raising awareness and communicating.

11.1. Legal situation and institutional recognition of the landscape

This refers to the legal and institutional framework of the landscape unit. It considers the presence of legal instruments and parties aimed at protecting, preserving, arranging and managing the territory. Hence, it is related to the existence of mechanisms for territorial and environmental planning, and institutional or heritage recognition of the landscape. Value is placed on the landscape units that are in UNESCO's World Heritage Sites List, or agricultural systems included in protected spaces such as the Natura 2000 network, Biosphere Reserves, Agrarian Systems of Great Natural Value, GIAHSs, etc. Likewise, plans and programs for use, legal arrangement, management (PORN, PRUG, special plans, etc.) are contemplated.

11.2. Investment and action by public administrations and other collectives

This considers involvement and investment from public administrations, public and private entities, associations or the community itself, aimed at the landscape's protection, preservation and viability. Local involvement is essential, particularly from agricultural farmers, government and society. In this sense, it is crucial for the agricultural system not to be neglected by local communities, since that could lead to its gradual abandonment and deterioration.

11.3. Strategies and materials for dissemination, teaching and communication

This considers the existence of informative and educational media such as information panels, signage, guides, leaflets, pamphlets and other material of a documentary, graphic or audiovisual kind related to the landscape unit. Such instruments help spread

knowledge about the landscape and explain its values and most suitable uses. Inclusion of the agricultural system in the education system is also considered, whether in formal or informal education, as well as museums or cultural associations engaged in transmitting the agricultural knowledge and traditions linked to the landscape.

12. Participation and integration of local communities

This considers active participation from local communities in the policies and work to preserve the landscape. Hence, it places value on the territory's stakeholders participating in managing the landscape, as well as in documentary, research and informative work. It also refers to aspects linked to participatory and territorial governance, with interaction and synergy being developed among local stakeholders.

12.1. Participation in management of the landscape

This values the local community's participation in managing the ecosystem. Landscapes where the local population is not very involved often lose their functional nature and drift into abandon due to a lack of management, which can harm their possibilities for survival [63]. That is why it is preferable for the local community, and particularly agricultural farmers, to become involved and participate in managing the landscape unit. It is particularly useful for irrigation communities and other water management bodies to become involved with the irrigation MTASs.

12.2. Participation in documentation, research and interpretation

This refers to the local community's participation in research, documentation and local knowledge of the landscape by explaining the heritage resources and participating in educational content, dissemination and activities. The level of involvement from local public authorities via awards, studies and information materials is noted.

12.3. Participative and territorial governance

This considers participatory governance with a concern for equality. In the context of territorial food systems, value is placed on governance related to their management based on associationism, which helps foster means of social, solidarity-based economics, particularly cooperatives and associations. Furthermore, territorial governance implies developing collective organization in a network, with interaction between local stakeholders such as companies and institutions [66]. In this vein, consideration is given to agrarian producers, service companies, distributors and institutions that generate synergies resulting from their geographic and organizational proximity [65]. The local stakeholders include entities that manage and participate in protected areas; boards and institutions that manage territorial brands; agrarian associations; local development groups; agrifood bodies; consumer networks, etc. Agrarian or agro-industrial cooperatives are also of interest, as well as agrifood clusters.

13. Socio-economic profitability

This evaluates the landscape unit's contribution to the sustainable socio-economic development of local communities. Hence, value is placed on the organization of agrifood chains into regional networks, sustainable production models and the capacity of the landscape itself for carrying out sustainable economic activities.

13.1. Organization of agrifood chains into networks

This values the organization of agrifood chains into networks associated with household agriculture, small agrifood companies and SMEs, and the small circuits for sale in the region, therefore ensuring an equitable distribution of the value created, minimizing losses and optimizing human and natural resources. In this sense, help for household agriculture is taken into account, as well as value placed on local supply chains and on bolstering agrifood SMEs, in addition to consolidating agro-industrial clusters.

13.2. Sustainable production models

This values production models that involve appropriate management of natural resources, restricting environmental impact and fostering multiple ecosystem services (for supply, regulation and culture). A sustainable use of resources is valued.

13.3. Capacity of the landscape itself to develop sustainable economic activities

The landscape is an asset for sustainable economic development, representing an opportunity to generate wealth and employment [78]. In this sense, a landscape unit is a working economic and productive space with the potential to boost local social and economic dynamics in future. With this in mind, the MTASs are a distinctive factor in fostering economic activities such as tourism, trade and in attracting new residents [11], etc. Value is placed on production and the sources of income generated by the landscape that contribute to sustainable development and an improvement in life in the community. Furthermore, the territory should be able to attract agrifood companies and industries by providing suitable services and infrastructures, as well as security and scenic quality. Economic activities related to conservation of the MTAS's landscape, such as cultural and gastronomic tourism or "territorial brands", are also contemplated.

14. Vulnerability

The fragility of the landscape means its susceptibility to suffering modifications to its structural elements [57]. Such a territory is increasingly subject to external and internal influences that make it more vulnerable. Some of the more significant threats to the landscape unit are abandonment or lack of maintenance, unplanned tourism and pressure from urban planning, which contribute to a loss of identity and a lack of interest and unawareness of the landscape and traditional agrarian practices among some sectors of the community.

14.1. No situation of abandonment

This evaluates the abandonment of landscapes, whether as regards the loss of inhabitants or production areas, which leads to a transformation of the landscape unit and processes of degradation. For example, a rural exodus leads to a lack of maintenance of the agrarian landscape, which implies that it is underused and becoming wild, with the resulting loss of its heritage values. Moreover, abandonment of production areas has negative effects on the environment and on the visual quality of the landscape. If the MTAS shows signs of abandonment, its potential and viability is lower.

14.2. No threats linked to unplanned massive tourism or pressure from urban development

Tourism provides an opportunity for endogenous development and fosters preservation of the landscape. However, growing tourist activity is one of the most significant threats for the conservation and management of heritage landscapes [79]. Numerous environments are subject to pressure from mass, unplanned tourism, contributing to a loss of identity and transformation of the landscape. Indeed, some territories are witnessing progressive urbanization and expansion of activities and infrastructures to the detriment of agrarian space, leading to their fragmentation, a reduction in cultivated areas and their scenic degradation [37]. If the landscape faces processes linked to mass tourism or urban planning pressure, it will have lower potential and viability.

14.3. No threats linked to lack of knowledge or disinterest by part or some sectors of the community regarding the landscape or traditional agrarian practices

This considers a lack of interest in the landscape, since some sectors of the population are sometimes unaware of the cultural and socio-economic value of their landscapes and territories. If the local community does not value the landscape or become involved in preserving it, then it can be transformed and face degradation. When ancestral agrarian practices are forgotten and abandoned, this is also evaluated negatively, whether it is due to disinterest or because there are problems of adaptation when confronted with

modernization of production processes and the demands of a global market. If threats are detected that are linked to the local community's disinterest or lack of awareness about the landscape or traditional agrarian practices, the agrarian area's potential and viability will be lower.

15. Accessibility

This refers to the ease in accessing, viewing and passing through the landscape unit. These aspects determine the number of observers that can admire, enjoy and understand the territory. It values an adequate connection between the agrarian elements and access to the plots, the presence of historical roads and paths, cultural itineraries and educational or approved paths and routes, as well as roads enabling adequate access to the landscape. The capacity for visitors must not be exceeded, and control over the existing flows must be planned and managed.

15.1. Connection between agrarian elements and accessibility to plots and smallholdings

This values an adequate connection and access to all the agrarian elements via footpaths or any other kind of roadway in suitable conditions. In addition, value is placed on roads providing access to plots and smallholdings for farmers, other road users and machinery for agricultural work.

15.2. Presence of historical roads, cultural itineraries or routes and approved or educational footpaths

This values routes allowing the local community, visitors and tourists to get to know and admire the landscape. Hence, it contemplates historic roads, cultural itineraries and approved footpaths that enable access to the landscape and to move around within it. Drivers' roads are heritage of the first order. They are also considered to be educational routes spreading the values of the landscape. The network of paths and roads are the main way to access the landscape and for new uses to penetrate it and spread [11]. In spaces where tourism is a threat, value is placed on applying planning tools to control the flow of people. Minimal damage to the landscape must be ensured, not exceeding the visitor capacity.

15.3. Road access

A landscape's accessibility is assessed according to the type of road enabling the landscape unit to be approached. Access by a highway in an adequate state makes it possible for a greater number of visitors and incidents than a narrow footpath. The landscape will have greater value the more relevant the path or road and its state, since that will enable more people to admire the landscape. Nevertheless, uncontrolled access to the flow of visitors may damage the traditional structure of the landscape unit. That is why it is necessary to plan the environs and not exceed the capacity at the entry points.

2.2.4. Scoring System

Each MTAS is scored using a simple binary system based on compliance with each of the 45 variables in the method. Hence, if the quality is met, it is assigned a value of 1; if not, 0. There is no weighting or hierarchy for any indicator over others. This quantification system enables greater operability for the indicators and has shown its efficiency in heritage evaluation systems such as the one by Bravo (2018) [80], Hermosilla and Iranzo (2014) [81], Hermosilla and Mayordomo (2017) [54], and Serrano and González-Trueba (2005) [82]. The global calculation for each MTAS is obtained from the sum of the scores given to the 45 variables. The result is expressed on a scale of 0 to 10 points, using six levels of heritage interest: Very high (8.6–10); High (7.2–8.5); Medium (5.8–7.1); Low (4.4–5.7); Very high (3–4.3); and No interest (0–2.9). It is possible to evaluate each category and criterion individually with the aim of analyzing and specifying the most relevant values, features and peculiarities. The score for each category is calculated by the sum of the scores from their criteria, whereas the evaluation of each criterion is found by summing up the scores assigned to their variables.

2.3. Phases of the Work Plan

The work plan is made up of various consecutive phases that enable the proposed evaluation method to be applied. These tasks are based on other similar ones used in scientific studies linked to implementation of heritage evaluation systems such as those by Antequera (2015) [83], Bouzekraoui, Barakat, Touhami, Mouaddine and El Youssi (2018) [84], and Pereira and Pereira (2010) [85].

- (a) The first phase involves a search, consultation and study of the sources of information related to the landscape being considered. Bibliographical references and scientific works are analyzed, as well as maps and other documents of interest. This makes it possible to examine the characteristics, features and unique aspects of the MTAS, with the aim of correctly assigning scores and a heritage evaluation.
- (b) The second phase is based on the fieldwork by making different visits to the landscape being studied. This task is essential to objectively apply the evaluation method, since different indicators require processing and direct observation with the landscape to correctly assign the scores. Simultaneously, specialists, local technicians, residents, agricultural farmers, cooperatives and agrifood or agro-industrial companies, producers, distributors and other kinds of entities and groups linked to the MTAS selected are consulted. These territorial stakeholders provide valuable information which is often not found in the bibliographical sources.
- (c) The third phase involves processing and systematizing the information obtained in the previous phases, whether it has been acquired through documentary sources or fieldwork. Based on this analysis, scores are assigned to each of the variables that make up the evaluation system. These data are entered into a spreadsheet and the landscape's global score is determined, as well as the evaluations for each category and criterion.
- (d) The last phase of the work plan involves analyzing the information gathered and interpreting the statistics and results of applying the system. Based on this study, the research reports are drawn up.

3. Results and Discussion

One of the main benefits from this study lies in applying the proposed evaluation method to an exemplary agrarian space, Valencia's agricultural gardens or "Huerta". The evaluation of heritage carried out on that landscape can be seen in Table 2. Each of the 45 variables that make up the system is assigned the figure of "1" or "0" depending on whether or not it complies with the statement. Then, scores are tallied for each category. The global score obtained here was 8.9 points, which represents a very high heritage interest according to the six levels of evaluation proposed.

Table 2. The proposed evaluation method applied Valencia's agricultural gardens.

Categories	Criteria	Scores		Categories
		Variables		
Intrinsic values	1. Representativeness	1.1.	1	8.3: High (10/12)
		1.2.	1	
		1.3.	1	
	2. Authenticity	2.1.	0	
		2.2.	1	
		2.3.	1	
	3. Ecological integrity	3.1.	1	
		3.2.	1	
		3.3.	0	
	4. Visibility and visual quality	4.1.	1	
		4.2.	1	
		4.3.	1	

Table 2. Cont.

Categories	Criteria	Scores		
		Variables	Categories	
Heritage values	5. Historic	5.1.	1	10: Very high(15/15)
		5.2.	1	
		5.3.	1	
	6. Social	6.1.	1	
		6.2.	1	
		6.3.	1	
	7. Symbolic/Identity	7.1.	1	
		7.2.	1	
		7.3.	1	
	8. Artistic	8.1.	1	
		8.2.	1	
		8.3.	1	
	9. Informative/Scientific	9.1.	1	
		9.2.	1	
		9.3.	1	
10. Food production, security and quality	10.1.	1		
	10.2.	1		
	10.3.	1		
11. Awareness among social stakeholders	11.1.	1		
	11.2.	1		
	11.3.	1		
12. Participation and integration of local communities	12.1.	1	8.3: High (15/18)	
	12.2.	1		
	12.3.	1		
13. Socio-economic profitability	13.1.	1		
	13.2.	1		
	13.3.	1		
14. Vulnerability	14.1.	0		
	14.2.	0		
	14.3.	0		
15. Accessibility	15.1.	1		
	15.2.	1		
	15.3.	1		
Global score		8.9 Very high (40/45)		

The results from applying the method to each of the criteria in it are analyzed and described below, then interpreted and compared with previous studies.

The Intrinsic Values category achieved a score of 8.3 points, meaning a high heritage interest according to the proposed values. Most of the variables that make up the criteria in this set of values received positive scores, though specific attributes were given an unfavorable score.

The criterion of Representativeness scored favorably in all three of its variables. The study by Hermosilla (2007) [86] states that Valencia's agricultural gardens have sufficient unique qualities and arguments to be conceived as a referential landscape and a milestone in traditional irrigation on an international scale. In this vein, said study points out that this agrarian space is exemplary of Valencia's historical irrigation as a whole and of the Mediterranean basin, as well as of the county's cultural and heritage legacy. The Huerta is considered to be a representative element identifying local society with a specific territory. To sum up, it is a landscape that is exemplary of Valencian and Spanish irrigation, a reality representing the values of this Mediterranean space [32]. In fact, the *Atlas de los*

paisajes agrarios de España (Atlas of Agrarian landscapes in Spain) [64] selects Valencia's agricultural gardens as a representative or archetypal model of a Mediterranean horticultural landscape unit.

The Huerta is characteristic for having unique crops that are a point of reference internationally and representative of the territory, providing emblematic products for traditional cuisine. Horticultural and citrus crops stand out, particularly oranges. Furthermore, the agrarian space has unique crops that are difficult to find in other areas of Europe. For example, local varieties of rice have been grown in the environs of the Albufera lagoon for centuries, used in cooking Valencian paella [87]. Another unique crop is the tiger nut (*Cyperus esculentus L. var. Sativus Boeck*), located mainly in the Horta Nord county, which is used to make the traditional drink horchata.

The Authenticity criterion has been given favorable scores for two of its attributes. The secular maintenance of traditional productive practices that made up the original landscape has been valued positively. The method of water distribution adopted for irrigation originated in the Islamic period. It is a symbol of secular domestication of a water resource to be able to cultivate throughout the year [87]. The water channels have been designed to irrigate by gravity, with the water distributed for irrigation in a progressive order from the top of the system to the bottom. In addition to the knowledge related to the irrigation methods, there are ancient, unique artisan techniques that are still used, such as manufacturers specializing in traditional instruments and tools used by agricultural farmers for centuries.

In this criterion, the steps taken to manage and recuperate the landscape have been evaluated positively. In this vein, the application of Law 5/2018 of 6 March on the Huerta of Valencia is worth noting, whose purpose is to preserve, recuperate and stimulate this agrarian space. This regulation includes the formulation of the PAT, a supra-municipal tool to regulate permitted uses and activities. In addition, in recent years there has been growing interest in the creation of urban agricultural plots in the city of Valencia and its periphery [88]. These spaces enable knowledge to be transmitted about local horticultural culture, tradition and biodiversity, and to foster the recuperation of the water-based landscape.

The variable indicating how faithful the landscape is to its traditional image has been scored negatively, however. This is mainly due to the transformations in the scenery over recent decades due to the expansion of Valencia's metropolitan area. The greatest kinds of impact include urban development aggravated by a lack of supra-municipal coordinated planning, as well as the development of service infrastructures and modernization of irrigation [89]. These factors have contributed to a depreciation of the agrarian space and deterioration of its associated heritage, which can be seen in the proliferation of land in disuse [90]. The process of urbanization has brought with it a continual loss of agricultural land, as well as a fragmentation of the agricultural gardens, mainly in L'Horta Sud, particularly in recent decades.

The Ecological Integrity indicator was awarded positive evaluations in the variables of agrobiodiversity and ecological agriculture. There are numerous species of flora and fauna in Valencia's Huerta thanks to the diversity of uses of the land and habitats. The availability of water from the traditional irrigation system itself has helped increase the diversity of conditions in which 50 or so horticultural species co-exist, most of which are fresh vegetables [87]. Furthermore, the mosaic structure of the landscape of Valencia's agricultural gardens helps maintain a high level of biodiversity. Hence, the diversification of crops is ensured by the great many local varieties and typical structure of the landscape, made up of small plots. Moreover, according to data from the Valencia Community Region's Ecological Agriculture Committee (CAECV), the county of L'Horta has a certified ecological agriculture area of 1640 ha with 228 companies engaged in such work [91].

The variable for the state of environmental conservation has been scored unfavorably, however. The abandonment of fields, mainly near urban hubs and large infrastructures, has brought about multiple unofficial garbage dumps, with rubble and waste piling up on land [92]. Furthermore, irrigated agriculture in Valencia's Huerta is intensive in phy-

tosanitary products, fungicides, herbicides, insecticides and plant growth regulators [93]. Similarly, numerous irrigation channels act as urban sewerage or untreated effluent points for industrial estates and activities [94].

The criterion of Visibility and Visual Quality received favorable scores in all three of its attributes. The landscape of Valencia's agricultural gardens is a combination of many kinds of environs such as the Mediterranean coastline, the Túria River and the Albufera lagoon. This space is made up of an invaluable, balanced mosaic of irrigation canals and systems, waterworks, plots of land, farmhouses and paths. The secular interaction between humans and the structure of the local territory have helped shape a unique landscape that is the result of a blend of the traditional irrigation system, the rural network of roads and the agricultural settlements and patterns [87]. The existence of the different species cultivated in the landscape (polyculture) is also valued, since it has a positive effect on the observer. There is also a noteworthy amount of non-crop species of vegetation next to the agricultural plots. One example is the hedges and small trees used to mark the edges of the fields.

As for the breadth of views or visibility, the PAT has carried out a visual analysis identifying the main views toward the landscape [92]. The document classifies the study of visibilities into different groups according to the lines of observation considered. The analysis carried out states that there are physical barriers from Valencia's main access and urban roads due to safety fences or advertising hoardings, as well as buildings. Even so, this variable has been scored positively due to different factors. First, the PAT states that the secondary roads, and mainly the rural and cultural ways, enable wide stretches of the landscape to be observed. These roads and paths make more direct contact possible with the landscape, so one can perceive it in greater detail not only through sight, but also other senses such as hearing and smell. In addition, given that the Huerta is a flatland, it is possible to see panoramic views with a considerable level of openness.

The category of Heritage Values has attained the highest score possible because the variables in its criteria have all been scored favorably.

Valencia's Huerta is of significant historical value. This cultural landscape based on water represents one of the contributions from the Muslim world to the history of humanity. It is a cultural product that was created with the expansion of the Muslim civilization in the Middle Ages and the formation of Al-Andalus [41]. The resulting landscape structure is thus heritage from an Arabic legacy that has been shaped for hundreds of years and where humans have adapted to the surrounding environment. In fact, many of the species cultivated are a result of the availability of resources due to the water management system adopted since the Islamic period [87]. The agricultural gardens conserve numerous elements of ways of populating linked to traditional or vernacular architecture. Noticeably, there are traditional buildings for housing such as the farmhouses known as "alquerías" and smaller homes called "barracas".

The Tribunal de las Aguas de la Vega de Valencia (Valencia Water Court of the Plain of Valencia) is the oldest judicial institution in Europe, providing unique testimony to a cultural tradition. It has a two-fold legal and administrative purpose, settling disputes and complaints over the use of water among the irrigators from Valencia's agricultural gardens. Its self-managing, equative and solidarity-based way of justice regarding water harks back to its Al-Andalusian origins [89]. Another relevant institution is La Tira de Comptar, founded during the Arabic domination and made official in 1238 by King Jaume I. This institution has ensured a supply of fresh products in the city and the right for agricultural farmers to take part in the fruit and vegetable market [87].

The Huerta or agricultural gardens is also a social space. The structure of property and arrangement of plots reflect the social organization behind it. In addition to its production activity as an agrarian space, today it has different types of functions such as recreational and social ones, providing green, open spaces for the community to enjoy. It is a living, anthropized, dynamic space influenced by continual changes [32]. The peri-urban area also provides agricultural, cultural, environmental and heritage services that help improve the inhabitants' quality of life. In the Huerta there are different kinds of architecture related

to the rural organization of the area, which represent a way of life characteristic of the irrigation-based landscape.

The landscape is associated with the traditional knowledge related to agriculture and the historical irrigation. The uniqueness of this system springs from the method for distributing the water, originating in the period of Muslim rule. The water channels are designed on a gravity-based irrigation method, with the water distributed among the farmers in a cascading order. The system is a symbol of secular domestication of water resources to cultivate all year round. Likewise, the water from the Túria River has traditionally been shared among the eight irrigation canals of the Huerta of Valencia using a system of 138 rows, based on the proportionality between the amount of water corresponding to each canal and the amount of land irrigated by each water system [95]. This traditional knowledge has been conveyed from generation to generation and is necessary to maintain the landscape [87].

The Symbolic/Identity criterion of the Huerta of Valencia has attained favorable scores in its three variables. The space is an element of identity representing centuries of history and culture, providing testimony to the passing of the different peoples who have each left their mark [96]. In this vein, the landscape has become a sign of identity for those living there [41]. From the 19th to the 20th centuries, a cultural image of the irrigation found its way into the collective imagination as a symbol of grandiose fertility. Consequently, the population today perceives the landscape of the agricultural gardens with the characteristic features that define its clearest archetype, despite the transformations of recent decades [92]. Furthermore, there are relevant representations from folklore linked to the landscape, associating the agrarian activity with the traditions and culture typical of the territory. Some of the traditions of greatest interest linked to the agrarian activity include the procession to the Ermita de Vera church, with a short pilgrimage through the Huerta; the Passejà de Sant Onofre (Saint Onophrius) parade, originating in the 18th century and related to a miraculous salvation of the harvests; and the tradition of La Mocadorà, held on Saint Denis' day, when marzipan sweets in the shape of fruit and vegetables from the Huerta are given as gifts wrapped in a handkerchief (mocador) [97].

Numerous ceremonies and events take place in the Huerta of Valencia related to the territory and landscape, aimed at fostering the identity and feeling of belonging among the community. These activities are related to gastronomic days, craft fairs, music festivals and more. Some of the Huerta's most representative events are [40]: Festival dels Horts in Picanya; Feria de la Chufa (tiger nut fair) in Almàssera; Teatro de L'Horta, representing ethnological scenes in the Museum of Almàssera; gastronomic and musical days in Aldaia; Fiesta de la Siembra (Sowing Fiesta) in Paterna; and more. In addition, the town of Alboraià holds the Day of Horchata, when a thousand liters of this traditional drink are given out to the citizens; and the popular dance of "*Ball de la Mangrana*" (Dance of the Pomegranate), on the day of Corpus Christi. Other interesting activities taking place in the Huerta include campaigns to foster consumption of agrarian products or self-sufficient agricultural gardens [88].

The Huerta or agricultural gardens of Valencia are also of significant artistic value. The space forms a coherent whole adapted to the natural environment. Its landscape generates a picturesque scene with a combination of agrarian practices and historical paths to access habitats and plots of land. The water systems, together with the morphology, roads, ditches, rural constructions and mosaics of crops, make up a landscape of extraordinary aesthetic values (Figure 2).

Artistic manifestations such as literature and painting have helped to shape the Huerta's unique, representative character [32]. The first literary references date back to the 12th century in the era of Muslim rule in Valencia. Following the reconquest, some writers stood out such as Francesc Eiximenis, Lluís Vives and Gaspar Escolano, as well as European travelers or physiocrats and luminaries such as Cavanilles. In the 19th century, the work *La Barraca* by Blasco Ibáñez became a point of reference. The sphere of art has also produced notable contributions. There are notable scenes of the agricultural landscape

with intense human presence from the second half of the 19th and first of the 20th century. Some of the noteworthy artists from that period include Julio Vila, José Mongrell, Ricardo Verde, Vicente Milet and Juan Rivelles. The period is also relevant for the attention paid to the barraca as an icon of the Huerta, with paintings by artists such as Justo Vilar, José Luis Galiana and José Benlliure. Other painters such as Pinazo and Sorolla placed their representations in the landscape of the Huerta as an artistic subject of the highest order [92].



Figure 2. Landscape of Valencia’s agricultural gardens.

The variables in the Informative/Scientific criterion have been valued positively, too. There are numerous studies in this field, most notably the contributions by Burriel (1971) [98], Glick (1988) [99], Hermosilla (2007, 2009) [86,100] and Romero and Francés (2012) [96], though there are many more. Indeed, this agrarian space boasts numerous inventoried, cataloged and protected cultural assets. In this sense, the PAT includes a catalog of elements containing 547 heritage assets grouped into two levels: the first or structural level, made up of essential assets in the Huerta’s cultural identity which, by their nature, imply their inclusion in the sphere of protection; and the second or non-structural level made up of the other buildings integrated into the landscape which they characterize [92]. Furthermore, the progressive awareness raised among the population about the value of their landscapes has led to an increase in associations and other social groups related to the protection of the landscape and heritage of Valencia’s Huerta. Some of the citizens’ collectives and platforms of greatest relevance are “Per L’Horta”, “L’Alqueria de L’Horta”, “Llaurant Cultura” and “Alboraià, Horta i Litoral”, involved in saving and appreciating the landscape.

The Potential Values and Viability category obtained a score of 8.3 points, meaning a high heritage interest. The criteria that make up this category of values scored the highest, except for the criterion of vulnerability. Indeed, the variables that make up this latter criterion received no positive score due to various factors, mainly related to the process of urban development of Valencia’s metropolitan area, the crisis in the agrarian sector and the progressive social detachment between citizens and the Huerta of Valencia.

The criterion of Production, Security and Food Quality achieved the highest score. Thanks to the irrigation system, Valencia’s market gardens provide healthy produce from

6000 household farms, including ten fish farms. Approximately 80% of the production area is engaged in growing fresh fruit and vegetables, and the products obtained are for both self-consumption in the household and sale in local and municipal markets [87]. The Huerta's peri-urban nature has enabled a close relationship to exist between agricultural production and the city of Valencia, which is seen in traditional markets where agricultural farmers send fresh produce directly to retail shops and municipal markets [101]. Fresh agrarian produce for proximity consumption allows the Huerta to be maintained as a unique landscape and acts as a complementary strategy for development [102].

Furthermore, different products from this space have schemes to distinguish their quality. Tiger nut production in the Huerta of Valencia is regulated by a Protected Designation of Origin for Tiger Nuts from Valencia, the highest agrifood quality distinction provided by the European Union. Rice from Valencia also receives the distinction, grown in the Albufera Natural Park and other wetlands. Finally, there is the PGI for Valencian Citrus, which certifies such fruit (oranges, mandarins and lemons) from the Valencian territory that comply with the requisites demanded to guarantee their origin and quality.

The variables in the awareness of social stakeholders indicator have been scored favorably. In recent years, a growing involvement and commitment has been seen by the territorial stakeholders in conserving and raising appreciation for the Huerta of Valencia. In this vein, to halt degradation of this space, foster its preservation and stimulate it, Law 5/2018 of 6 March on the Huerta of Valencia came into force. Internationally, the Dobris report is worth noting. It acknowledges the Huerta of Valencia as one of the six millenary Mediterranean horticultural areas still surviving in Europe, and in 2019 it was also included in the FAO's GIAHSs.

Investment from public administrations and other entities and collectives aimed at preserving, informing and raising awareness about the Huerta's landscape has been growing considerably for years. In this sense, cultural itineraries and sustainable tourist products have been created. For example, a green way has been opened in L'Horta Nord, known as the Vía Xurra, therefore bringing the urban population closer to the Huerta, as well as a proliferation of agricultural business in the environs. Likewise, there are numerous proposals involving the creation of itineraries and products in other Spanish irrigation landscapes [103,104]. In addition, educational content has been improved, and there has been a proliferation of materials and activities to spread awareness of the significance of the Huerta, with seminars, exhibitions, workshops and open days [37]. The awareness-raising work done by museums in this agricultural area is also relevant, such as the work done by the Ermita de Vera Museum in Valencia. Lastly, there has been a fundamental boost from metropolitan territorial plans taking into consideration the importance of agrarian activity [94]. In this vein, the PAT or Agrarian Development Plan is particularly relevant, with strategies and activities aimed at stimulating and preserving the landscape's agriculture and re-appreciation.

The criterion of participation and integration of local communities has been scored positively. In recent years, the legislation regulating territorial planning has recognized the need to include citizens' considerations. To do so, it states that it is obligatory to make plans for public participation from the outset of the process, for them to be representative of the society they are aimed at. The PAT includes these new dynamics in the supra-municipal territorial planning, based on citizens' participation and public transparency. This has led to all the stakeholders becoming involved (public administrations, associations, agricultural farmers, professional colleges, universities, companies, etc.) to achieve consensus in planning proposals. During the process of consultation and public participation for the PAT, numerous participatory activities were carried out, applying techniques with a varying scope of implication and different levels of information contributed. In this process, agrarian stakeholders had preferential treatment, particularly agricultural farmers [92]. Indeed, it is essential to include agricultural farmers in the planning and strategic management of peri-urban agrarian areas [105].

On a municipal level, participation from the community can also be seen in creating plans and documents related to management, research and knowledge regarding the Huerta. This has happened, for example, in drawing up the diagnosis and characterization of the agricultural sector in the municipal area of Alboraiia, promoted by the town council. Mechanisms for citizens' participation were implemented that dealt with agrarian activity from the agricultural farmers' point of view. Likewise, the Valencia City Council has recently drawn up the Plan for Urban Agriculture of Valencia. To create it, a participatory process was used with stakeholders linked to urban agriculture, as well as neighborhood and social entities [106].

The Socio-Economic Profitability indicator also attained the highest possible score. The efficiency of the unique systems of traditional irrigation in the Huerta has enabled sustainable agricultural techniques to be developed, which also ensure a homogeneous, continual availability of water. The Huerta has always maintained a close relationship with the towns in its county, and especially with the city of Valencia, which it has efficiently served as a supplier of foodstuffs and raw materials [107]. In addition, in this agrarian space it is common to re-use materials from by-products to preserve the soil, which has helped create a self-sufficient system.

In the Huerta of Valencia there is also a noteworthy organization of agrifood chains into networks in which agrarian activity acts strategically for the economic sustainability of families and irrigators. In this vein, the La Tira warehouse is relevant, occupying 6000 m² where 1300 farmers sell their produce. The peculiarity of this system is that each farmer sells products grown on their property while La Tira is the shortest, most direct channel to sell their fruit and vegetables [87]. Finally, the landscape of the Huerta of Valencia is an asset for the community's sustainable economic development, since it is an element that helps foster economic activities such as agrarian production, tourism, crafts, sale of crops, the production of horchata, attracting new residents, etc.

The three variables in the Vulnerability indicator have been scored unfavorably, so this criterion is the one that has obtained the lowest score in the method. The landscape of Valencia's agricultural gardens or Huerta has been experiencing a far-reaching, accelerated transformation for decades. The cultivated fields and water systems currently co-exist with urban and industrial zones associated with Valencia's metropolitan area. The crisis of this space is the result of diverse factors: urban development, the crisis of the agricultural farms, competition from products from abroad, the instability of agriculture as a source of income, modernization of irrigation, degradation of the landscape, social detachment of citizens from the agrarian space, and abandonment of the water-based heritage [32,41,86]. The great urban pressure from Valencia's metropolitan area has resulted in abandonment of agrarian activity and a reduction in the cultivated area. In some sectors, the irrigated area has completely disappeared, or there are only disconnected residual areas of Huerta subsisting. Hence, whereas in the mid-20th century the irrigated area of the Huerta came to 1260 hectares [108], today the area comes to just 800 hectares [47]. These processes of peri-urban and metropolitan development have an effect on the degradation and dis-articulation of the Huerta's landscape. There are numerous studies on this matter such as the ones by Marco, Mateu and Romero (1994) [109], Mateu (1999) [110], and Arguelan, Díez, Vallés and Galiana (2014) [111].

Today, the space of the Huerta of Valencia is socially and culturally detached from the city. The progressive dis-articulation between urban activity and the neighboring agricultural area has been aggravated as of the 1960s as a result of urban industrial development and the city's expansion [112]. The study by Mayordomo and Herмосilla (2019) notes a great lack of awareness about the heritage assets in the Huerta of Valencia among its inhabitants [37]. Other studies corroborate this lack of awareness, such as the ones by de la Vega and Iranzo (2021) [113], Sanchis (2004) [114] and Mangue (2016) [115]. The scant appreciation and level of knowledge among the local population about the Huerta's heritage is caused by a variety of factors. Some reasons are related to the general crisis in the agrarian sector and the recent dynamics of Spanish metropolitan areas; while others are

specific to the peri-urban nature of Valencia's Huerta. Moreover, the message conveyed by this agrarian space in numerous schools is limited to its productive function. Thus, it is essential to implement action aimed at citizens' re-appreciation of the territory.

Accessibility has been scored positively. The paths and roads of Valencia's market gardens give the basic structure between the plots of land. The ways that give access to the Huerta of Valencia are generally in good conditions. The road network follows a logical hierarchy ranging from the main roads connecting the urban hubs to the smaller paths that connect the different plots or agrarian homes [116]. Moreover, the territory's flatness simplifies the accessibility.

The PAT catalog identifies five heritage itineraries, which coincide with historical routes and are elements that structure the territory. Furthermore, they are green ways of social and landscape interest that are connected to each other [92]. They are the Camí Vell (Old Path) of Godella, the Camí Vell of Borbotó to Massarrojos, the Camí of Alfara to Carpesa, the Camí Vell of Picassent and the Camí Vell of Torrent. Similarly, different public administrations and entities in the county have designed routes that enable people to get to know and understand the landscape. The study by Hermsilla, Mayordomo and Fernández (2020) [40] gives a list of itineraries through Valencia's agricultural gardens.

Finally, Valencia's Green Metropolitan Ring, currently being built, is also relevant. This itinerary will connect the Huerta of Valencia with the sea by linking up the metropolitan area by means of historical and natural pathways, as well as passing through the natural parks of the Túria and the Albufera, as well as other green infrastructures and cultural assets [117].

By applying the proposed evaluation method, it has been possible to quantify the heritage interest of the agrifood landscape of Valencia's Huerta, as well as characterizing its main peculiarities. The overall score obtained (8.9) shows a high landscape value for this space as a whole. In addition, the detailed scores by categories and criteria have enabled characteristics of greater relevance to be identified, thus verifying the existence of a landscape of undeniable qualities and attributes. It is an exceptional space of significant environmental, historical, social, symbolic and aesthetic values. Furthermore, this agrarian system contributes to the local community's food security and sustenance. On the other hand, the indicators with the lowest scores are linked to the progressive reduction in agricultural area and degradation in the environment and landscape in the Huerta in recent decades. This is the result of different factors related to the crisis in agrarian activity and the recent socio-economic dynamics of Valencia's metropolitan area, as well as the Huerta's peri-urban nature. The pressure from urban development has brought with it a continual loss of agricultural land and a fragmentation of cultivated areas. A social detachment is also seen between the local population and their agricultural environs. It is thus necessary to implement mechanisms, instruments and action to ensure the survival of Valencia's agricultural gardens or Huerta as a legacy for future generations.

The method developed allows for an evaluation of the MTAS' heritage, addressing not only aspects such as the landscape quality but also the heritage recognition process. The system has been implemented in an exemplary landscape, Valencia's agricultural gardens or Huerta, which combines features of a MTAS in metropolitan and coastal flatland contexts with a high level of applicability. It is essential to look into the landscape and heritage significance of agrifood systems and analyze their many components in an aim to implement coherent strategies for heritage management and appreciation. In this vein, the detailed scores enable characteristics and attributes of greater relevance to be identified. The nature of the indicators used acknowledges the multi-disciplinary nature required by agrifood spaces. The criteria in the method are objective, understandable and measurable, though some variables and the scoring system could arguably be improved. The results obtained enable the MTASs' heritage interest and their most notable values to be quantified to the benefit of the community, decision-makers or any interested user. The proposed evaluation system is therefore a useful method. It is an efficient evaluation instrument

for public administrations and other territorial stakeholders to apply in planning and managing agrifood spaces.

Based on the research carried out, there are interesting possible future lines of work that can be proposed. First, the evaluation method proposed is open, flexible and dynamic, while susceptible to being revised and improved. It may be possible to remove, introduce or change some indicators, for example. Weightings could also be used for the criteria on applying the method, using quantitative methods such as Delphi or AHP. Secondly, it would be convenient to include activities related to the participation of social stakeholders, since it is fundamental to involve the community in evaluating and managing their cultural elements [118,119]. The method that has been used as the basis to design the system proposed in this study, developed in the studies by Mayordomo and Hermosilla (2020) [46] and Mayordomo, Hermosilla and Antequera (2021) [47], applies two kinds of participatory activities in various agrarian spaces: surveys among the local population and a panel of experts. These qualitative techniques foster strategies of participative governance and could be decisive for the future management of heritage goods [120]. Thirdly, it would be interesting to analyze the real impact of applying the method in the territory by monitoring the activities carried out according to the results obtained in the evaluation. There is also the possibility of putting forward mechanisms for institutions, companies and other potential beneficiary stakeholders to be able to adopt and apply the proposed evaluation method, designed through the academic sphere. Finally, it is essential to implement the evaluation system in other MTASs to corroborate its effectiveness and applicability in different territorial spheres.

4. Conclusions

This study has developed a method for evaluating MTAS values. It is a quantitative, multicriteria system. Its structure uses a hierarchy of indicators based on three categories of values that are in turn broken down into different criteria and variables. The use of general categories enables the indicators to be classified according to their common attributes or qualities. Thus, it is possible to identify the most significant values and compare their main characteristics and unique attributes. The variables are scored using a binary system according to whether they are met or not, with no weighting or hierarchy of any criterion over the others. The use of a binary, equative scoring system achieves a notable operability for the indicators.

The parameters used are objective, measurable and simple to understand and apply, so it is a useful, practical method that can be reproduced. Nevertheless, the interpretation of some variables may be questionable, and the scoring system could be improved. Furthermore, a certain level of subjectivity is inevitable, so it would be desirable to control it. In this vein, to reduce the subjectivity inherent in any evaluation system, different aspects have been considered such as the use of binary scores, a high number of variables and precise definitions.

Identification, characterization and evaluation of agrifood systems are necessary tasks to suitably preserve and appreciate such systems. The method proposed here has been applied to the Huerta or agricultural gardens of Valencia, which represents an exemplary Mediterranean agrifood landscape. By implementing the system, it has been possible to analyze and identify the values and significance of this space, its formidable production capacities and the relationships between the Huerta and the city. Elements that are a threat to the survival of this peri-urban agrarian landscape have also been addressed, such as urban development and expansion, a lack of joint planning at the supra-municipal level, environmental degradation and pollution, and some inhabitants' scant appreciation. The high global score indicates the significant value of Valencia's Huerta, while each indicator's score has enabled its most relevant attributes to be specified. The method has been applied with satisfactory results, showing its effectiveness and high level of applicability.

Nevertheless, cultural heritage is an eminently qualitative reality, so the design of a numerical method to evaluate and address it may generate controversy and discrepancies.

Even so, a quantitative approach has been chosen to provide an applicable, objective system able to create order. Thus, implementing the method with different MTASs will enable them to be placed in a hierarchy according to their value, and hence prioritize coherent measures to conserve and appreciate heritage. To sum up, the method is intended to become a recognized tool used by public administrations and other institutions to take decisions and implement reasoned measures related to the preservation, appreciation and management of MTASs.

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