Chapter 9
Folk architecture heritagization
in rural Portugal

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1. Introduction

"*Historic Villages of Portugal*" is the name of a political programme implemented in twelve rural villages located inland, in the Centre region of the country. These are Almeida, Belmonte, Castelo Rodrigo, Castelo Mendo, Castelo Novo, Idanha-a-Velha, Linhares da Beira, Marialva, Monsanto, Piódão, Sortelha and Trancoso. Most of the villages have protected historic monuments, such as castles, fortress walls, churches and pillories. Largely, this was the leitmotiv for including them in the programme. Funded by the European Union, the programme was implemented between 1994 and 2006 with the aim of regenerating the social and economic fabric of the villages through cultural tourism, i.e., of capitalising the economic value of heritage (Graham *et al*., 2000, p. 17, 20-22). To this end, public authorities invested in the protection and exhibition of the villages' built environment in order to convert them into tourist destinations (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) (see Silva, 2009).

The article focuses on the implementation of the programme in one of these villages, namely, Castelo Rodrigo.[2] The main aim is to describe the social implications of the housing heritagization process. Specifically, I want to show that such processes gave rise to a conflictive relationship between historic conservationists and inhabitants because of their different conceptions of time and repertoires of intervention in the space as well. I hope this text will contribute to the study of social life within protected spaces and, therefore, to

the "*ethnology of historic monuments*" (Fabre, 2000; see also Fabre, 2010; Faubion, 1993; Herzfeld, 1991; Palumbo, 2003). A brief description of the village and a commentary on the programme implementation are followed by an analysis of the construction of a local architectonic canon.

I will focus on Castelo Rodrigo, where I have done fieldwork in the first half of 2009, as it is a case where most of the inhabitants actually live in the historic centre, unlike other Historic Villages of Portugal, such as Almeida, Belmonte, Sortelha and Marialva. Currently, the village has 65 permanent residents and around 35 commuters, 35 percent of them being over 65 and also retired.

2. Setting the scene

Castelo Rodrigo is a village as well as the seat of a *freguesia* (parish) that bears its name, which is part of the municipality of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, some 70 kilometres from the city of Guarda, near the border between Portugal and Spain. *Freguesias* are local entities of a territorial nature whose governing bodies are the *Junta de Freguesia* and the *Assembleia de Freguesia*. The village is situated on the top of a hill, at about 820 meters above sea level, a vantage point from which it is able to observe the territory around it. Mostly for this reason, in the official history it played a major geostrategic and administrative role in the country for centuries. On the one hand, it has been in the advanced line of the defence of the kingdom of Portugal from the 13th until the 17th century and also during the Napoleonic Wars (1807-1814). On the other hand, it has been the seat to a municipality from the 13th century until the 19th century. In the second half of the 20th century the loss of geostrategic and administrative importance was accompanied by ongoing social and economic decline, driven by the rural exodus and the crisis of the primary sector-based economic model. Demographically, as the censuses elaborated by the National Statistics Institute show, the parish's population remained relatively stable at around 450 inhabitants until the 1960s, but it subsequently trended downward until 1991, when the lowest number of inhabitants since mid-19th century was recorded, namely, 287. The village itself has followed similar demographic trend, with numbers declining since 1950. Despite gaining some residents in the 1970s in the form of returnees from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, particularly Mozambique, in the early 1990s the village suffered from depopulation and abandonment. In 1991, according to the census, the village was inhabited by 127 individuals; however, there are reasons to believe that the figure was lower than one hundred.

In 1994 the process of change was "*interrupted*" as a result of intervention by public authorities. Under the Historic Villages of Portugal programme, the historic centre was officially appropriated and classified as a heritage ensemble;

this was done on a top-down basis, i.e., by primary initiative of the Portuguese government. The municipal and the local governments supported the project because it was in accordance with their previous intention of converting the village into a tourist attraction by preserving its historic monuments – in the early 1990s they promoted the preservation of the ruins of the castle / palace and the fortress walls precisely in order to attract tourists.

The historic centre is of medieval origin and has an oval urban structure characteristic of the villages of this historical period. Within the fortress walls stand the pillory, the medieval church and the ruins of the medieval castle as well as of the palace constructed within it in the 16th century.[3] The pillory, the castle and the fortress walls are classified as national monuments since 1922, while the church is classified as a building of public interest since 1961.[4] The historic centre also has about 30 barns, 10 garages and 65 houses, most of them dating from the 19th century, when they were built or rebuilt after the Napoleonic Wars. Less than half of these houses are permanently lived in, approximately one third of remainder are used only as holiday homes and the rest remain abandoned. Most of them belong to native people, some resident in the village and others in other parts of the country and abroad, including France, Brazil and South Africa.

Between 1994 and 2006 the historic centre has been rebuilt according to technical criteria approved by the overall managers of the programme, among whom architects had a prominent role. Designed by a team of architects hired by the municipal government, the project identified what work was to be done in Castelo Rodrigo and which institution would be responsible for adding value to built heritage and for promoting urban and economic renewal. Over time, the programme has invested around four million euros in the village. Most of the money was spent on infra-structures and on the aesthetic characteristics of buildings – historic monuments, houses, barns, etc. But the programme also invested in tourism facilities and in the promotion of cultural activities, such as historical re-enactments (Boura, 2002).[5]

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3   The palace was burnt down by the inhabitants in the 1640s, after the Restoration of Portuguese Independence, because the marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, Cristóvão de Moura (1538-1623), had supported the Castilian domination over Portugal.

4   In the outskirts of the village there are also a church and convent classified as national monuments since 1932, as well as a fountain classified as a building of municipal interest since 1983. A cultural good is considered as having "public interest" when its protection and enhancement represents a cultural value of national importance, but for which the system of protection inherent to "national monuments" is considered disproportionate; besides, it is considered as having "municipal interest" when its protection represents a cultural value of municipal importance.

5   The author mentions that the investment amounted to some three million euros and that 78 buildings had work done on their facades and roofs, but these figures date from 2002 and the village had further investments thereafter.

The purpose of the urban plan was to create an aesthetically pleasing historic tourist attraction, without architectural dissonances and modern elements. In the process, arguments arose between historic conservationists and inhabitants over how the space was to be developed. Residents' complaints focused mainly (but not exclusively) on delays in completing most of the work. However, the most contentious issue was the work on domestic architecture, for reasons presented in the next section.

3. Architectonic tradition and social positions

From the 19th until the mid-20th century houses in Castelo Rodrigo tended to be built of stone and mortar, sometimes with rocky outcrops at the base. They used to have two floors – ground-floor and first floor –, like traditional rural houses in the region (Sobral, 2004:247). The ground-floor was used for keeping animals and/or for the installation of the winepress and the cellar, which not all residents possessed, particularly the poorest among them. In some cases, there was also a bunk where single male children slept, while females slept in the bedroom. The first floor had a kitchen and one or two bedrooms. The internal divisions of the houses were made of narrow partition walls prepared with straw and clay. The doors and windows were made of wood and the roofs were supported by wooden beams, without slabs of reinforced concrete. The more affluent owners tended to cover the stonework of the facades, unlike the poor, who kept them visible.

The situation started to change in the first decades of the 20th century with the use of industrial or mass-produced materials, such as concrete, brick and aluminium. This became a common practice in the 1970s and 1980s. In all situations, house owners managed to improve the housing conditions of old stone houses where they were born and where they lived, adapting them to the physical and social requirements of the moment. Aside from building one additional floor, many owners have replaced the wooden doors and windows of the facades by others of aluminium and iron. They also whitewashed the facades, mimicking a standard practice in the Alentejo region. Additionally, they reorganized the interior design of houses: they converted ground floors into kitchens, bedrooms, storage rooms or garages, and they built a bathroom.[6] To sum up, the domestic architecture derives from a historical process; it is not something static. Houses had been built and renovated according to several factors. These include materials and construction techniques, conceptions of home and domestic space, style and aesthetic preferences, as well as the possessions and social positions of their successive owners (Roigé *et al.*, 1997:26-28; Sobral, 2004:250).

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6   The village has had electricity since 1970, mains water since 1987 and sanitation since 1988.

At the municipal level these changes were perceived as being contrary to the local architectonic tradition. To prevent them, in the 1940s the municipal council decided to ban the whitewashing of the houses and all work not authorized by it and not approved by the national body in charge of national monuments (Borges, 2001: 139, 160). The aim was to prevent the eruption of modernity within the village and to protect the prestigious architectonic brand of the past. But neither the municipal government nor the body in charge of historic conservation were able to make residents respect the rules. The first application made by the municipality to integrate Castelo Rodrigo in the programme was rejected not only because of the poor state of its buildings, but also because many of them were wrongly described in the application. In the early 1990s stone facades were visible on only a few buildings, and many were derelict, while others were built partially or totally of brick and concrete. The application was approved later on, when the architects who designed the urban plan included in the application requested its review and claimed it was an excellent opportunity to correct this situation of "ruin and contamination" of pre-modern with modern elements, or vernacular with industrial architecture.

The historic then conservationists put a stop to the historical dynamism of private architecture in favour of a fixed and partial representation of the past. The representation is constructed by selecting elements of the past and simultaneously rejecting other elements added over the course of time but which are considered contrary to the model (Frigolé, 2007:158; Sobral, 2004:254). The aim of the work on the private architecture was to "*recover the built area*" and "rectify architectural dissonances" (Boura, 2002), i.e., to correct the anomalies represented by the new and spurious. The anomalies are defined by opposition to what is perceived to be traditional and authentic. But these definitions are subjective and bear the traces of the period when they are processed. As Samuel (1994:211) notes, "*in any give period, conservation, and with it ideas of 'heritage', will reflect the ruling aesthetics of the day*". In Britain, for example, domestic architecture which some years before had been perceived as obsolescent and slum-like came to be seen in the 1960s as a gauge of authenticity (Samuel, 1994:153-154). In Portugal, too, that which was once rejected as being old-fashioned is nowadays seen as traditional and authentic, namely, the use of older and craft materials such as stone and wood, as opposed to modern and industrial materials like brick, cement and aluminium. Accordingly, under the programme the work on the village's houses almost always involved restoration and standardization of facades and roofs, and removal of all alleged modern impurities, such as television antennas, balconies, gutter pipes, clothes' lines and aluminium.[7] The stonework of the facades was

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7   The municipal government decided to fund totally the work on facades and roofs in order
     to support local residents, to encourage them to be part of the project and to overcome their
     initial resistance.

uncovered and highlighted by putting orange-coloured mortar into the joins. At the same time, the roof tiles were standardized and the use of wood became compulsory for outward-facing doors and windows.

Nevertheless, in some buildings the formula proved unworkable, for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, there were owners who could not be contacted or whose properties were not correctly registered. On the other hand, the work was completed in stages and funds were at times lacking. Another reason was the fact that they were not built of stone, but of brick or blocks of cement. In these cases, the architects decided to cover the facades with plaster and orange-coloured paint, mainly because the soil of the region is rich in clay. Applying clay on the facades of buildings represents an "*invention of tradition*" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) at the level of local architecture.[8] In Castelo Rodrigo the state played a significant, indeed crucial role, in the process. But residents also played an actively influential role. Influenced by the priest, there were cases in which the residents impelled the uncovering of the stonework of the facades as something which would be "*traditional*"; according to the architects, however, in these cases the facades should have been covered with plaster and paint, as in the past. The residents' attitude is associated with a change in the meaning of visible stonework: in the past it was associated with poverty; now, instead, it stands for affluence and good taste (Frigolé, 2007:159; Roigé *et al.*, 1997:208).

As some authors (Herzfeld, 1991; Fabre, 2010:24) note, monumentalization processes change the social space within and around the monument by framing it into a new legal and administrative system and creating a new repertoire of intervention in the space as well. Accordingly, in Castelo Rodrigo the historic conservation rules severely restrict changes to the size and aesthetic characteristics of buildings located within the fortress walls, and advocate the use of older and craft materials in the facades, such as stone and wood. At the same time, all projects must be signed by an architect and have the approval of the national body in charge of historic conservation, namely, the Institute for Managing Architectonic and Archaeological Heritage (*IGESPAR*). Because the village and the architectural elements that constitute it are considered relics of the past that should be preserved as a historic monument.

The bodies in charge of ensuring compliance with these rules are the municipal council, the Commission for Coordination and Regional Development of the Centre Region (*CCRDC*) and, above all, the *IGESPAR*. In practice, these organizations have to manage the tension between the historic conservation

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8   Many residents criticize the fact that this mortar has been put on the facades because rainwater washes it away and makes their homes more porous and wet.

and the secular use of houses which, nevertheless, continue to be lived in.[9] The tension is intimately linked with the different conceptions of time that they project into the space.

The situation can be well described using the ideas of Herzfeld (1991) on historic conservation in the Greek town of Rethemnos. The author argues that historic conservationists have a "*monumental*" conception of time, which is technical and bureaucratic, and does not consider the individuals' forms of life, feelings and ties to the spaces. Residents, in turn, have a "social" conception of time, and relate the spatial elements to their daily lives, memories and identities (Herzfeld, 1991:10-16, 248-259). In Castelo Rodrigo, too, these two conceptions of time fuel a debate between residents and bureaucrats over the fate of houses which, at the same time, accommodate the individual's present and both the village's and the country´s past. Historic conservationists strive to promote a voluntary interruption of time and to freeze familiar domestic spaces in time accordingly. Nevertheless, most inhabitants resist this official appropriation of their living spaces, especially when they cannot continue transforming them according to the needs and possibilities of the present.

The official version of vernacular architecture corresponds to a process of "*cultural objectification*", as defined by Handler (1988). With this concept, notes the author (idem, p. 14), *"the fundamental notion that I wish to convey is that of seeing culture as a thing: a natural object or entity made up of objects and entities (traits)"*. Accordingly, in the framework of the programme the villages' architectonic tradition turns out to be perceived as a trait of local culture and identity. The representation corresponds to a perspective that Dicks (1999) would describe as "*the view from the hill*", in which the community is represented as being enclosed and homogeneous. But, in her perspective (1999:352), "*if the viewer descends the hill, back into 'the community', its wholeness disappears from view*". Accordingly, the people of Castelo Rodrigo are not a single and enclosed totality or a homogeneous and characteristic group of individuals, with similar ways of life. Much as in the past, today's residents occupy different social positions. This fact becomes clear when we focus on the work carried out on the houses. According to the architects, in order to avoid conflicts, they negotiated the work to be done with the owners. However, owners with more bargaining power were (and still are) at an advantage point compared to the rest of the population. For example, a man in his fifties who holds a position in the local government has managed to retain an open balcony in his house in the main street, unlike a woman of the same age who lives nearby. He later reinstalled aluminium windows on the

9   None of these agencies has supervisors. They only act when someone is reported or when their officials see something wrong. In these cases, they usually fine the owner and embargo the work, rather than demand demolition, for, as the residents say, 'what is already built, cannot be unbuilt'.

facades – although of a type that looks like wood – without triggering protests from the historic conservation organizations. Most poor people do not change the material prescribed by the conservationists for outward-facing doors and windows. In spite of the loss of insulation, because wooden doors and windows are permeable and get warped, they keep them because they have no money to spend in others. Another example is the case of the brother in law of the local mayor who was able to retain small stones stuck in the facades and also to raise some centimetres his house because of his high social and economic status. By contrast, a poor man in his early sixties was not allowed to open a window in his house next to the fortress walls where he lives, even though he had no sources of light there other than a small door and a minuscule window. Likewise, a poor couple in their seventies were not allowed to raise, by 50 centimetres, the ceiling of a room in which they cannot stand upright.

These differences in part explain why residents have different perceptions and evaluations regarding the work carried out on the houses and on architectural conservation measures. In general, less well-off residents disapprove it, while the better-off approve it. The former tend to say that "with the programme they no longer own their homes" and "cannot do any work on them except as they [the entities in charge of historic conservation] want". They recognize the need for rules, but they object to how strict those rules are. The latter, in turn, argue that "it is fine that people are not allowed to do what they want because it is important to preserve the architectonic tradition and the old lines of the buildings", as advocated by the historic conservationists.

To further understand the situation we must take into account that most houses are very small, despite the extensions that many owners did over time, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, their internal design does not conform to the physical and social requirements of a modern family, such as plenty of light, individual bedrooms and adequate bathroom space. Affluent and politically influential homeowners can afford to expand them upwards by adding floors and principally sideways by knocking together adjacent buildings. This is not true for the less affluent. It should be noted that the property market is highly inflated, and few indeed are those who can afford to buy a house and adapt it to the requirements of modern life. A house just with facades or a barn may cost twenty-five thousand euros. In the course of my fieldwork I met three young couples who went to live in a nearby village precisely for this reason. Conversely, there are some individuals who live in houses made up of two adjoining buildings, including tourist entrepreneurs and some second home owners as well.

These reasons account in part for the different attitudes to living in monuments. For some it represents a limitation, especially when they fail to improve their

living conditions – for example, some residents criticize the fact they are not allowed to add floors or raise ceilings in order to accommodate the families of their children when they come to visit. For others, conversely, it is an opportunity to have a second home in a historic village and/or to create a source of revenue through tourism. Some permanent residents have settled in the village precisely in order to benefit from the new added value. This is the case of one couple, biologists in their thirties, who settled a few years ago in order to explore a family tourist accommodation provided by the three contiguous buildings they purchased. And it is also the case of one former French bank clerk in his late sixties, who settled here in 2003, having bought five buildings in order to run a tea house with a terrace, a crafts shop, and a gourmet food store. It is worth noting that six permanent residents earn their principal income from tourism at present, most of them as entrepreneurs, and also 10 individuals who do not live in the village, seven of them as employees.

Almost everyone feels proud to live in a classified ensemble, which is "clean, nice and restored". They reproduce the rhetoric of historic conservation, particularly when it suits them to do so. For example, many residents argue that the state or the municipal council should restore all buildings located in the historic centre because of their value as monuments, i.e., "*because they are very old*". But they criticize the rhetoric when it goes against their interests. For instance, in countering the argument that it is forbidden to change the appearance of houses in order to preserve the history of the village, a humble lady in her seventies who was not allowed to raise the ceiling of a room where she could not stand upright replied sharply that "people do not live on appearances" and that "*the history of the village is the history of its former, present and future inhabitants*". And she added that "*historic conservation will turn Castelo Rodrigo into a ghost village, with only tourist accommodations and second homes, where some individuals come to spend a few days twice a year*".

4. Conclusion

At the end of the last century the village of Castelo Rodrigo was converted into a picturesque historic tourist attraction by primary initiative of the Portuguese state. This has changed the local social context in various ways. In the first instance, it added value to the built environment. In an earlier phase, this fact raised the number of permanent and temporary residents by encouraging some homeowners to return and others to stay. There were also some natives' sons living in other parts of the country and a few outsiders who decided to build second homes in the village, as well as others who settled as tourist entrepreneurs; they all contributed to a process of social gentrification. Later, particularly in

late 2000s, it drove some native young couples to move from the village because of high property prices.

Secondly, the tourism sector has developed in the village, in both its demand and supply. On the one hand, the village is visited by about 30 or 40 thousand individuals in search of cultural tourism experiences every year. On the other hand, tourism has become a source of additional income for some households, particularly those of tourism entrepreneurs, but also those of workers in tourism related businesses and services.

Thirdly, it emerged a new repertoire of intervention in the space. This gave rise to a tension between historic conservationists and residents because of their diametrically opposed views on domestic architecture. For the bureaucrats the houses are monuments that need to last and be maintained in their idealized fixed aesthetical image. For most residents, by contrast, houses are dynamic living spaces that should be transformed according to the needs and possibilities of the present. Still, individuals do not live nor perceive these houses in the same way. Unlike the rest of the population, politicians, tourist entrepreneurs and other affluent individuals do not see the monumentalization of their homes as limiting the possibilities for improving the circumstances of their lives; largely, this is because they can afford to buy larger houses, they have managed to renovate them up according to their own interests, and they even profit from the new added value.

Looking to the future, there will certainly be problems with the physical maintenance of private architecture in the medium and long term. At present, many houses are not inhabited and speculative activity on houses prices is driving young couples to move from the village; additionally, most of the barns are also not used. Therefore, if no measures are taken to promote housing for young people the village will be without permanent residents – due to the advanced age of most actual residents and the departure of young people – and more buildings will fall in ruins; shortly, there will be no owners to carry out the maintenance of houses and is unlikely that the public authorities will continue to invest in it eternally.

To conclude, it should be noted that the processes described in the text are not limited to local dynamics or to the time frame analyzed. The promotion of cultural tourism is a global phenomenon and the enhancement of the folk traditional architecture observed in Castelo Rodrigo takes place in other areas of the country and abroad. Nowadays, this is associated with the construction of a new image of rural spaces according to what is considered traditional, typical and authentic. By contrast, from the late 19th century until roughly the last quarter of the 20th century it was associated with a process of national identity building.

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