Sustainable Development in Rural and Peripheral Areas Through the Safeguarding of Their Immaterial Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

This paper proposes a Southwestern Iberian perspective on the safeguarding of immaterial cultural heritage in rural and peripheral territories, addressing successful examples of safeguarding actions in different contexts of immaterial heritage study. While approaching different themes within the scope of immaterial heritage – techniques, music and rituals – the success of these examples shares many components. Among them, participation and appropriation by communities are fundamental to cultural heritage recovery and dissemination programs. The first part of the text focuses on traditional construction techniques, showing several programs with different levels of appropriation by the local population. Traditional construction techniques are a heritage tool of a particular relevance in the current context of climate change adaptation and sustainable edification. The second part of the text interprets various activities related to traditional music and dance, to analyse how they have evolved from an auxiliar daily activity to an identity symbol. Finally, the article delves into the safeguarding of festive rituals inside more or less benign circumstances, as local development programs or communities' relocation. Following the lessons learned from these somewhat disparate but productive initiatives, the article sets out a wider range of proposals, aiming to identify future tools for safeguarding and heritage management.

Keywords: Rural heritage; peripheral areas; intangible cultural heritage; local development

Desarrollo sostenible en áreas rurales y periféricas a través la salvaguarda de su patrimonio cultural inmaterial

Resumen

Este artículo propone una visión general desde la mirada del suroeste ibérico sobre la salvaguarda del patrimonio cultural inmaterial en territorios rurales y periféricos, abordando ejemplos de éxito en acciones de salvaguardia en diferentes contextos de estudio del patrimonio inmaterial. Aunque abordan diferentes temáticas dentro del patrimonio inmaterial – técnicas, música y rituales –, el éxito de estos ejemplos se debe a varios factores comunes. Entre ellos, resulta fundamental la participación y apropiación por parte de las comunidades de su patrimonio en los programas de recuperación y difusión del patrimonio cultural. La primera parte del texto aborda las técnicas de construcción tradicional a través de distintos programas con diferentes grados de apropiación por parte de las comunidades locales. Las técnicas de construcción tradicionales adquieren una gran relevancia en el momento actual de adaptación al cambio climático y de necesidad de edificación sostenible. En la segunda parte, se interpretan diferentes iniciativas asociadas a la música y baile tradicionales, analizando como han pasado de actividad auxiliar del cotidiano a un símbolo de identidad. Finalmente, el artículo considera la salvaguardia de los rituales festivos, en circunstancias tan distintas como los programas de desarrollo local o el traslado de comunidades. A partir de las lecciones aprendidas de estas iniciativas, algo dispares pero fructíferas, se esbozan propuestas más amplias con el objetivo de identificar futuras herramientas de salvaguarda y gestión patrimonial.

Palabras clave: Patrimonio rural; áreas periféricas; patrimonio cultural inmaterial; desarrollo local

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, consideration of territory linked cultural heritage has led to the rediscovery of a resource for the objectives of contemporary society (Sabaté Bel, 2004). The current concept of cultural heritage incorporates human and social production, shared memory and identity, interpretation and the everyday uses made of the environment as well as adding to the interest in the object itself; the value of its functionality or utility (Loulanski, 2006). At the same time, following the establishing and evolution of the sustainability concept, the need to apply the quality of sustainability to heritage assets has arisen in a factor decision-making body quickly incorporated into their guidelines (UNESCO, 2013).

As a result, from an academic point of view, the need arose to explore the relationship between culture or cultural heritage and sustainable development (Martinell Sempere, 2020). This task strives to return both theoretical and conceptual keys (Soini & Dessein, 2016) and possible practical consequences (Auclair & Fairclough, 2015; Barthel-Bouchier, 2016), with studies especially focused on the ways in which cultural heritage should not only be sustainable but, beyond that, actually contributing to the global challenges of sustainability (Petti, Trillo, & Makore, 2020) and, more specifically, to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that make up the United Nations 2030 Agenda (2015). Therefore, the consideration and management of heritage resources must entail the protection of the social fabric and the cultural, environmental, and economic values interlinked with heritage features and thus understanding culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability (Hawkes, 2001).

However, in the case of intangible cultural heritage, the link with socio-cultural aspects is further reinforced. With the recognition of examples such as vernacular architecture or, more recently, gastronomic heritage, there is an evolution towards identifying and valuing those heritages that lack exceptional values but which bring together a large proportion of the life and history of their inhabitants. All of this results, on the one hand, in progressive increases in the value of heritage categories traditionally deemed of minor relevance, among which we may include intangible cultural heritage and, on the other hand, in the successive rapprochement of heritage to the personal experiences of citizens and, therefore, to the social uses of their assets (Loulanski, 2006). In addition, manifestations of intangible cultural heritage intimately link to features of a shared identity, social cohesion and inclusion (UNESCO, 2015). This, as recognised by global documents such as UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda (2016), reinforces citizen links to their places of residence, and reinforced by the situation arising from COVID-19 (Roigé, Arrieta & Seguí, 2021).

Thus, in the case of rural, peripheral or vulnerable territories at risk of depopulation, this is fundamental as it broadens the scope for anchoring the local population. In this sense, innovative and sustainable strategies based on the traditional artisan trades can contribute to strengthening the socio-economic fabric of vulnerable and heritage-rich territories by creating employment opportunities, hiring and training qualified personnel and/or rooting the young population, among other possibilities (Del Espino, 2020).

However, the intangible heritage concept is relatively recent with its construction correspondingly experiencing a later evolution, starting out in the 1980s with the recognition of popular culture and folklore (Delgado Méndez, 2011) but has progressively established its role in both the theory and the legislation for cultural heritage protection. UNESCO recognised the intangible cultural heritage concept in the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Paris, 17 October 2003), acknowledging its importance as a reflection of cultural diversity and a guarantor of sustainable development. Similar issues had already been highlighted by earlier documents, such as the 1989 UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, and the 2002 Istanbul Declaration.

According to the UNESCO Convention in 2003, intangible cultural heritage is constituted by the "*practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.*" (UNESCO, 2003, art 2.1.). These precepts, which reflect an anthropological vision of culture (Carrera & Delgado, 2012), have been adopted by institutional entities with competencies for heritage protection in order to apply the safeguarding principles.

This paper aims to explore how working on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, i.e., its study, recovery and dissemination, can contribute to the sustainable development of territories vulnerable due to their rural or peripheral condition. To this end, we analyse experiences and initiatives carried out on three types of intangible cultural heritage: artisan trades related to traditional or vernacular architecture, practices related to traditional music, and religious rituals. All the cases are studied from the perspective of their territorial impacts, understood in terms of maintaining the urban-territorial structure based on reinforcing the links and identities of the local population. Specifically, we work on territories in western Andalusia in Spain and southern Alentejo in Portugal. Finally, we discuss the results obtained in order to propose conclusions and feasible approaches to working on intangible cultural heritage in these territories.

2. Trades for traditional architecture: from immaterial heritage conservation to contributions to contemporary architecture

Immaterial heritage associated with traditional construction techniques holds a dual importance. It simultaneously represents a construction culture, important in its own right, and encompasses the knowledge needed for the appropriate conservation of built heritage. From this perspective, research on traditional construction fundamentally needs to gather data from local masons. Their importance is clear when considering the deep transformations in construction techniques over recent decades, the risks of the loss of information on traditional construction and the environmental impacts of the newest construction techniques (UNESCO, 2003). The surveying and study of traditional construction techniques have experienced different contexts, both in the rehabilitation of traditional buildings or in their incorporation into contemporary architecture which values their environmental sustainability. Indeed, sustainability represents one of the contexts in which the integration of the material and immaterial aspects of heritage becomes most evident. In the sense of combining the material and immaterial know-how, the surveying and gathering of data among local masons and communities have taken place in territories where local culture associated with traditional construction faced looming disappearance following the dissemination and generalisation of post-industrial constructions.

There are two main approaches for initiatives seeking to survey local techniques. In the first option, which we shall refer to as the "applied approach", the identification and valuation of traditional techniques is executed *in situ*, either through buildings rehabilitation projects or professional training and academic education programs. In the second option, which may be referred to as the "study and survey approach" (cf. UNESCO, 2015), it is contact with masons and craftsmen that provides for

the recording and cataloguing of traditional construction techniques. This may be carried out through different formats, including the recording and transcription of oral accounts or the recourse to audio-visual media.

Southern Iberia represents an interesting study case as in recent decades it has hosted a reasonable number of study and immaterial heritage valorisation initiatives related to traditional construction practices. The forerunner was the "Encounter with master builders" that took place in Noudar on 27-29 April 1984, confirming the singular visions of Mértola's Archaeological Centre (CAM) and of Claudio Torres for their integrated perspectives on heritage as a factor of local development (Gómez Martínez, 2014). The workshops with master builders would constitute the departure point for Mértola's Professional School Conservation Techniques for Built Heritage Programs, which specialised in traditional construction techniques such as lime mortars, rammed earth, uncut schist masonry, cane roofs and curved roof tiles (Mateus, 2005).

In addition to Mértola, several other professional school programs on traditional construction techniques flourished in Southern Portugal, with examples in Serpa, Odemira, Alcácer do Sal or Sines (Correia, 2005). In keeping with Mértola, these programs were preceded by collecting knowledge from masons, for example, the works by Santiago (2005) or Sequeira (2005) on adobe constructions by master builders or the records of rammed earth master builders produced by Pereira (2005).

On the whole, these initiatives displayed a greater preponderance towards rammed earth architecture in built heritage and, consequently, some institutions were founded to address this theme, such as the "Centro de Terra". Geographically, these projects generated a greater impact in the western regions of Southern Portugal where rammed earth represented a larger proportion of traditional architecture. Nevertheless, in the case of the Algarve region, a study focusing on the mountain areas associated with the Iberian Massif and traditional schist masonry is also of interest to this article's theme. The "Revitalisation of Algarve's villages" Program, implemented between 2000 and 2007, completed surveys and analyses of traditional construction techniques with the help of local masons (Ribeiro, Aguiar, Costa, 2012).

This approach particularly emerged in the activities of the Technical Support Office for Algarve Villages (GTAA – Gabinete Técnico de Apoio às Aldeias do Algarve), where interviewing local masters and textual and photographic recordings of the information collected (Figure 1) was decisive to the different roles of the office; ranging from dissemination and awareness-raising initiatives to public works. For dissemination purposes, the highlights featured the organisation of an applied training workshop on traditional construction techniques and the publication of a synthesis book in which the various traditional techniques for preparing raw materials and construction are characterised through the transcription of numerous interviews with construction masters and other members of the local communities (Ribeiro, 2008).

In support of public works projects, there was a manual produced on the laying of slate pavements and masonry (which accompanied all the technical projects), as well as efforts to integrate local masters into the execution of these works, which converted them into precious laboratories and schools for learning the techniques related to schist construction (Ribeiro, Aguiar & Costa, 2012). However, unlike the case of the group of rammed earth construction initiatives, the experience carried out in the western Algarve region – designed from the top down (national and regional programmes) through funding structures – gained no continuity in subsequent initiatives, leaving the schist paving and masonry techniques on the list of heritage expressions at risk of disappearance.

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Figure 1. **Master preparing a thatched roof. Malhão, Loulé, Algarve**

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Nevertheless, many publications in recent times, from institutional outputs to academic works, have given considerable space both to the direct transcription of craftsmen's and local inhabitants' accounts and to the interpretation of traditional architecture according to its immaterial dimensions. Research on safeguarding the immaterial heritage associated with traditional construction techniques encompasses multiple levels of importance, which we may set within three main frameworks: research with the community; dissemination within the community; and gradual reintegration of traditional construction know-how into contemporary building processes.

The first framework relates to the most essential dimension of the cultural expression of a community (Figure 2) in its relationship with the territory, considering the architectural and landscape integration. This refers to knowledge about the behaviour of materials and their parsimonious usage, the mutual help practices associated with building techniques and the linkage between the organisation of built spaces and the complex construction of the landscape.

The second framework results directly from the first in seeking to contribute to the transmission of knowledge between generations and to the valorisation of local heritage within the scope of public policies in the current context of climate change and recognising the central role of communities in the conservation and transformation of this heritage that derives from their own identity.

The third framework refers to the technical training and transmission of knowledge and skills of the various sectors involved in construction, recognising the importance of successive adaptation to different historical circumstances, the significance of traditional techniques not only for the rehabilitation of the built heritage but also for socially and environmentally committed contemporary architecture.

Figure 2. **Master builder Manuel António Guerreiro from Barrosas**

Source: Prepared by the authors.

3. Traditional music as heritage: an example from Southern Europe

Music as a form of expression has always been present in our cultures. In each territory, tradition shapes times and spaces to reproduce sounds that define and represent the community. Exchange and creativity have been building an identity corpus that has a way of living and telling in music and its different genres.

However, despite the importance of these expressions, they often go unnoticed when not scorned both by research and by the communities they represent. Often, and especially in rural contexts, the oral traditions, traditional music and dances have been undervalued and forgotten even in moments not too distant in time. The transformations experienced in the rural world, especially in the 1960s and 1970, brought about the abandonment of villages and the distancing between those who left and those who stayed. Within this process, cultural practices (festive rituals, oral tradition, etcetera) underwent important changes and even disappeared.

The references arriving from the urban environment were incompatible with the practices of the rural world. The models were replicated, and architecture, festivals and trades had to adapt to "modernity" and the parameters this bestows. The changes in the model of production, entailed by the parameters of globalisation, alongside other aspects, were key to understanding the abandoning of the rural world (both in reality and symbolically). Henceforth, the demographic bleeding has never ceased, although we have in recent years seen the implementation of experiences that have sharply boosted their media relevance, primarily through literature, the media and the use and abuse of the demographic challenge as a point of reference in the manifestos of all political parties.

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However, the visibility of this problem and the implementation of tools for its mitigation do not result from any current proposals. Since the beginning of the 1990s, community policies, through programs such as LEADER or PRODER, have highlighted the difficulties of the rural world and the need to plan actions to curb depopulation and to bring about the necessary change of mentality in these territories.

In these processes, cultural heritage and the development of actions aimed at rural development have played a relevant role. After decades of programs in which incoherence and failures have predominated, there is clearly the need to underline the importance that cultural heritage has had on constructing and reaffirming territories as well as the relevance that heritage assets continue to hold in rural tourism discourses.

Thus, the interest in traditional forms has brought a resignification of rural worlds and their cultural practices. In this sense, the heritage safeguarding of rural worlds encounters its key ally in ethnological heritage (Delgado Méndez & Hernández, 2019). The search for identity references that consolidate communities and territory, above all centred on traditional cultural practices, continues to be a widespread and valued proposal. Therefore, the discourses linked to rural worlds find in the festivals, vernacular architecture, food and music, referents that generate visits and consolidate the feeling of belonging to a place that now does matter.

As an example, the analysis here focuses on several processes of heritage safeguarding that have taken place in the last decade and deploy traditional music as their common thread. One focuses on the ritual dances of the province of Huelva and its regions of Sierra and Andévalo (Figure 3) and the other on the Portuguese region of Alentejo (mainly Baixo Alentejo and Alentejo Central).

Figure 3. Drummer. Paco Carbajo from Hinojales

Source: Prepared by the authors.

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The selected case studies share in common their traditional music, their condition of border territories and that they are spaces that comply with rural worlds, sharing realities and difficulties and that have also both set up projects to safeguard these musical legacies. In the case of the ritual dances in the province of Huelva and Cante Alentejano song, there have been interesting processes of "recovery" and activation of these expressions and their consolidation as an identity referent for their populations. In the case of the province of Huelva, we would point out how these ritual dances are characterised by groups performing various choreographies in festive celebrations of great importance to the local population. These groups are formed by men, except for the Encinasola dance of the tambourine player, who, dressed in a specific costume, dances to the rhythm set by the drummer. Along with bagpipe music (three-hole flute) and the tambourine, some dance groups carry castanets, rattles, or other sonorous instruments (Delgado Méndez, 2016).

The revitalisation process for the ritual dances of Huelva province, as well as setting up new groups in localities where they were formerly lacking (San Telmo, Paymogo, Cabezas Rubias), has come hand in hand with substantive change in the meanings of these cultural expressions. The importance dance currently attains is motivated mainly because it has gone from signifier to signified. That spontaneous and accessory character of these manifestations has given rise to new realities and contexts in which dance is presented as a priority identity reference of the community. This fact, in turn, was based on heritage processes that have vindicated the value of these expressions as relevant signs of the identity of the localities in which they are found. However, this situation contrasts with the difficulties that dance went in the 1960s and 1970s (Agudo, Jiménez, García & Arredondo, 2010). Alongside the "recovery" of dances that had disappeared, we have witnessed the founding of new groups in places where they had not hitherto existed and, in some cases, the relaunch of adult groups that had disappeared.

To the prominence acquired by these dances in recent decades and their capacity to become identity referents for a locality, we must add that their relevance to the collective imaginary closely links to the ritual contexts to which they are circumscribed. As pointed out above, the privileged place of dance is not only exclusively centred on its role in festivals but also on its contribution to the most relevant festive occasions of the annual calendar. Closely related to the revitalisation of these expressions is the implementation of mechanisms that establish links between dance and cultural heritage. The heritage processes have delimited new contexts of valorisation for some expressions that, as important signs of local identity, also become regional and even provincial references. Among the different actions promoted by local and provincial institutions, we would highlight the protection process, from the heritage point of view, of the dances of Huelva province and their inscription in the General Catalogue of Andalusian Historical Heritage.

The heritage processes applied around the ritual dances have favoured their local recognition while simultaneously generating a certain separation between these cultural expressions. The celebration of folk festivals and other moments of encounter of these dances and other cultural expressions of this territory continue to highlight their diversity and richness as well as their spaces of relationship. However, we cannot overlook the fact that they are diluted by the market logic and the proposals deriving from cultural tourism.

The other paradigmatic example of the activation of traditional music according to the patrimonial parameters arrives with Cante Alentejano, a polyphonic song with two voices, performed by choirs whose only instrument is their voice. Among other aspects, these groups are characterised by the peculiarity of their melodies and lyrics, and by the existence of different group interpreters (the "ponto", the "alto" and the "bajos" or "coros") in keeping with their respective types of register and their interpretation.

The lyrics, in the form of poems, include both traditional and contemporary themes and therefore correspondingly display a repertoire that deals with aspects such as love, life in the countryside, nature, social relationships and alongside many others. Usually, these groups sing at certain moments that can coincide with working contexts and popular festivals, and, in more recent years, participating in music festivals and meetings. The knowledge of these groups and their stories constitute a magnificent text for analysing the historical and socio-economic circumstances of this Portuguese territory and the difficulties of a complex and poorly understood rural world.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the rural exodus resulted in the near disappearance of these groups and, with them, a heritage that has since been recovering its place to become an identity referent, especially for the Baixo Alentejo. For its performers and enthusiasts, Cante Alentejano (Figure 4) embodies a strong sense of identity and belonging. This change in the meaning of this musical expression closely relates to the recognition of these groups and their singing by UNESCO following their inclusion on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014, under the title "Cante Alentejano, polyphonic singing of the Alentejo (southern Portugal)".

Figure 4. The Cante Alentejano group: Os Arraianos de Ficalho

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Cante Alentejano is also included in the PCI Matrix, the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage produced by the Portuguese government. This project is a "management system of the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is also a source of resources for the dissemination of good practices and the valuation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Portuguese". The inclusion of Alentejo song in the Inventory followed a proposal by Serpa Municipal Council and a prior step to the application for the enrolling this musical expression on the UNESCO Representative List.

The present of Cante Alentejano therefore reflects these recognitions even though the primary support and safeguarding measures come from the neighbours in the different localities in which the groups rehearse, share and sing their joys and concerns, building spaces from the past for the future (Simoes, 2022). Closely related to the activation processes for these cultural expressions, we must also identify the role played by establishing venues for dissemination (museums, interpretation centres, etcetera) and the design of proposals (routes, temporary exhibitions, folk festivals, etcetera) aimed at raising the profile of both Alentejo song (Dos Reis, 2019) and ritual dances. These discourses interlink with the deployment of identity as a resource and the definition of strategies aimed at disseminating intangible heritage.

One example of the results of these proposals is the Museu do Cante, a museum inaugurated in the Portuguese town of Serpa in 2021. This initiative traces its origins to the managing entity that carried out the nomination of Cante Alentejano to the UNESCO Representative List of Cultural Heritage in 2013 and is presented as an innovative space that contributes to safeguarding Cante Alentejano by assuming the commitment of inscription.

The new role given to these assets and their identity character has also boosted the visibility of these expressions in central places of their respective core locations. Sculptures representing singing or dancing have appeared in the form of contemporary art. Examples include the case of Reguengos de Monsaraz where tribute is paid to Joaquim Inácio Coelho Neves Cardoso for his defence of tradition, or Alosno, Puebla de Guzmán, San Bartolomé de la Torre and Villablanca (Figure 5), locations where sculptures celebrating local ritual dances have been installed.

In this unfinished process, in which dance or traditional music went from being a festive, auxiliary facet to become an actual symbol of identity, it is important to consider the different proposals that different associations and institutions are producing. These proposals are a magnificent example of the new role that these expressions are playing in the collective imaginary.

Figure 5. **Dance group in honour of the "White Virgin". Villablanca**

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The relevance, moreover, is not only defined by their physical embodiment but also by the symbolic value attributed as representations of feelings that define a particular community. The prominence acquired by the intangible heritage, in this case, primarily dance and music, is manifested in the sculptural works produced and the spaces where they are located. In Alosno, the figure of the rattlesnake player stands on the town's central promenade; in San Bartolomé de la Torre, in a central square, and in Villablanca, Sanlúcar de Guadiana and Puebla de Guzmán, in front of the parish church. In the case of Sanlúcar de Guadiana, it is significant that, in addition to the dedicated sculpture in the church's atrium, we may also find a street named after the dance.

The strong symbolic charge of these cultural expressions has also led to the development of proposals stressing the importance of these manifestations as a tourist resource for the towns in which they are performed. At the local level, discourses have begun to generate perspectives of dance and singing as magnificent attractions for cultural tourism as it seeks new references. The presence of patrimonial goods in the discourses related to locally promoting tourism demonstrates both their prominence and the need to ensure spaces for consuming this heritage.

4. Shared times and spaces: festive rituals in the heritage scope

Daily rituals have seen significant changes in the past decades as some tools, technologies, infrastructures or commodities were introduced and democratised the daily lives of communities. In most cases, those factors raised the standard of comfort and gave people more leisure time in daily life. Carrying water from fountains and washing clothes in communal washing tanks are no longer the moments of socialisation in rural communities they once were, particularly for women, and instead replaced by coffee time get-togethers. Similar processes have occurred in work and craftsmanship rituals. For instance, gathering wood in hoods has become unnecessary with cheaper and faster energy and fuel distribution.

Those remaining are mainly connected to festivities, identity aspects or those stemming from holy and supernatural aspects. Many of these are indeed interconnected and it is their heritage value that keeps them alive as they must compete against the mass media spread "global" events (for example, Halloween coming to replace Entrudo, the traditional Carnival). Religious and popular festivities today contain a greater leisure component than spiritual dimension but continue to structure the yearly rhythms of rural communities. The village's festival and its much-expected dancing party still remain moments of sociability when unconscious rituals of passage occur.

Figure 6. **Festivity in honour of San Benito Abad. El Cerro del Andévalo**

Source: Prepared by the authors.

These festive times are moments of encounter that mark the annual cycle and underline the role of shared social occasions. The relevance of festive rituals goes beyond the singularities or formal aspects that make up these processes as they define, directly or indirectly, the collectives that give them life. Society, economy, politics and other aspects appear in these festive moments. In constructing the concept of heritage, the consolidation of the symbolic value has produced an enormous transformation in the discourses and the associated legislative content. The importance of craftsmanship, vernacular architecture and festive rituals as an expression of collective identities marks a new context in the valuation of these facets that make up cultural heritage. With the passage of time, heritage theory has attributed significant value to festive-ceremonial expressions. Rituals are no longer only a reflection of a given collective's social structure and historical processes (group, local, county, ethnicity) but also a portrayal of its outstanding signs of identity.

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The changes in the values attributed to heritage, the realities that accompany the rural world and the globalising dynamics have turned traditional culture into a resource and, above all, into a mechanism of resistance in which local identity becomes the main argument. The consolidation of these dynamics has enabled the activation of heritage processes in which festive rituals have played a relevant role. Besides appearing on local calendars as essential, some celebrations have been linked to discourses that reach beyond the municipality's boundaries. This trend has also witnessed the "revitalisation" of old festivals and the invention of traditions (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1988) that update festive cycles and provide new contexts for the consumption of heritage. These proposals both highlight the importance of these events in the cultural agenda and the corresponding need for institutions to design programs that consolidate the festive range (Hernàndez, 2016).

To identify some further examples of these aspects, in Huelva province, the activation processes have managed not only to promote its cultural heritage but also, and especially, to raise awareness of this territory's values. The consolidation of a model built on the natural environment and tradition has bestowed continuity on ways of life and enhanced the local population's recognition of the benefits of the rural world. Festivals such as the May Crosses of Almonaster la Real, the pilgrimage of San Benito Abad in El Cerro de Andévalo (Figure 6), the parade of Higuera de la Sierra, the festivities of San Juan in Alosno, the carnival of Isla Cristina or the pilgrimage of Virgen de la Peña in La Puebla de Guzmán have become references for the territory beyond local borders. Recognition of the heritage values of these festive-ceremonial rituals has consolidated a festive cycle in which the diversity of manifestations and the specificity of shared times and spaces stand out (Figure 7).

Figure 7. **Festivity of the "Crosses of May". Almonaster la Real**

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Together with the heritage processes of festive rituals and their values, the promotion of new celebrations based on the "recreation" of traditional manifestations related to agricultural or livestock activities also requires highlighting. In addition, we must add the appearance on the festival calendar of cycles of events deploying history as a resource, including those festivals specifically recreating historical periods or events. There are medieval fairs in many municipalities and days designed to attract tourists to places that, based on their mainly monumental heritage, guarantee an occasion and a space to remember the past.

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Despite the recognition and prominence held by festive rituals, there is a lack of study on the role these patrimonial goods are playing within the scope of rural development. Without here going into why certain festive occasions are valued from the heritage point of view, and why processes are generated to make them visible, we need to advance knowledge on the role cultural heritage plays in the rural world, the meanings and consequences of these resignification processes.

For instance, religious celebrations have not been the object of special attention in the study of southern Portuguese heritage. However, municipalities there have promoted many local events as ways to consolidate the local identity and eventually promote tourism in the area. As an example, the city of Loulé sponsors the singular "Algarve Nativity Scene" at Christmas, in which a grown and standing Baby Jesus crowns an altar covered with crocheted white towels and surrounded by sheaves of wheat and oranges (Barlavento, 2021). The artistic value of the materiality associated with these rituals (Figure 8) is undoubtedly the best studied and well-maintained aspect of the rituals. Nevertheless, the academic study of religiosity and its material forms rarely focuses on its heritage component. In terms of academic and institutional studies, the most significant efforts went into the cataloguing of the Catholic Church's cultural and artistic items. Some outstanding examples in southern Portugal are the survey and catalogue of the Sacred Art of the Beja Diocese (Falcão, 2003) and the systematic study of recourse to the "talha dourada" gilded wood technique (Lameira, 2012).

Figure 8. **Altar integrated into a traditional house**

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The valorisation of these material or immaterial assets takes place mainly through heritage education (Falcão, Ribeiro, Flor, 2004) and museography. The many Museums of Sacred Art associated with the Church's treasures are more often expressions of ecclesiastic power and erudite culture than any reflection of the immaterial heritage of rural communities.

A singular case inside these musealisation processes is the appearance and development of the Sacred Art Centre of the Museum of Mértola (Boiça, 2001), which resulted from the collaboration between local political decision-makers and scientific institutions. During the 1980s, when religious images in abandoned rural shrines were being systematically robbed and sold to antiquarians, Mértola's mayor, António Serrão Martins, the head of the opposition, Olímpio Bento, and university professor Cláudio Torres joined efforts to raise awareness about the problem and provide a solution through setting up a local museum of Sacred Art. In that museum, images that were otherwise deteriorating in shrines and chapels closed to worship could be kept and restored in appropriate conditions. The museum would also allow worshippers to take the sheltered figures for worship in ceremonies such as processions (Gómez-Martínez, 2014).

Regarding these processions (Figure 9), we would duly note that their occurrence is less and less frequent. These expressions of popular spirituality, often alien to the Catholic Church's purposes, are now under threat of extinction. Ancient devotions to "obscure" healer saints are being replaced by the canonical cult of Our Lady of Fátima. Also under threat, and without any recording or material forms to document them for future memory, are the pagan rituals passed on from generation to generation, often by women. Rites on the edge of the "acceptable" sphere of ecclesiastic procedures, such as blessings to protect the home and family, praying for the sick and processions to ask for rain are rituals of pagan origin and currently perceived as superstitions, signs of underdevelopment and a lack of culture and formal education.

Figure 9. **Procession in Mértola**

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Running counter to this general trend, some religious manifestations have recovered their vitality in the form of local festivities and have experienced valorisation through their capacity to promote tourism. In Mértola, three local development associations (Rota do Guadiana, Alentejo XXI and Terras do Baixo Guadiana) and a scientific institution (Campo Arqueológico de Mértola) have backed the popular religiosity project "Caminhos da Religiosidade" that strives to promote display local rituals as an identity and differential trait of the region. In this sense, such rituals may generate specific attractions for their host contexts resulting in the benefits (social, economic) of tourism activities.

However, the project's primary goal not only involves contributing to promoting and disseminating local cultural heritage but also safeguarding its future. The project extends to nurturing environmental values and relationships with nature as almost all sacred places of popular spirituality share outstanding landmark positions with important landscape values. In this way, beyond disseminating canonical artistic expressions, the project investigates the popular local manifestations, promotes rural chapels, and recovers legends and traditions. Some of the legends refer to the construction of shrines spread among the highest hilltops to create a symbolic protective ring around Mértola.

Regarding the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage as a process reinforcing how certain populations construct their cultural identity, one remarkable case study took place at Luz Museum, a collaborative project born from the physical destruction of an entire village. The village that gives its name to the museum, Aldeia da Luz, is now submerged due to the construction of the Alqueva dam that impounds the Guadiana River, on the border of Beja and Évora Districts in southern Portugal. Considered the largest artificial lake in Western Europe, spanning 250 square kilometres, it was completed in 2002 and with its reservoir first reaching capacity in 2010. The overall operation impacted on local heritage, beginning with the archaeological patrimony, including water mills, windmills, fountains, chapels, corrals and threshing floors, representing a popular culture that remained in the collective memory. Lousa Castle, a site inhabited since Roman times, stands out as the most iconic feature. However, the consequences for the intangible heritage also requires approaching from an anthropological point of view, capable of understanding the way the populations dealt with the sense of losing their sociability, their physical spaces within and outside the village and the strategies deployed to deal with the change. In 2002, the Aldeia da Luz population, around that time 363 residents, moved to their new houses in a modern village designed considering neighbouring and fraternal relations and the population's cultural identity. Before moving, in a complex and traumatic process, the deceased had also to be removed and replaced in the new cemetery on a long funeral procession. In a community already feeling victimized by the decision to submerge their village, the relocation of the cemetery reached to the sacred core of people's relationship with death, seen as a disruptor of social harmony. According to the anthropologist Clara Saraiva (2003), touching the community of the dead was touching the sacred memory of an entire village. This process triggered a collective catharsis and a feeling of solidarity within the community. Later, the sacred images were also taken in a long procession to the new church. It is important here to highlight the symbolic meaning of this sanctuary as the village's own history has it deriving from the legend of the Virgin appearing on the site where the church would later be built. The architectural heritage is profoundly interconnected to the human, a sense of belonging to that territory, rooted in the sanctuary as a symbol, a sacred space of devotion, but also the very genesis of the village.

Between 1998 and 2005, an interdisciplinary team of anthropologists, ethnobotanists, architects and archaeologists followed the overall process to promote the musealization in a large-scale process designed to safeguard intangible cultural heritage. The great impact of this operation on the cultural territory was studied and registered in written materials, films, and the collection of cultural artefacts. As stated, the population, the deceased, the goods, plants, animals, and sacred objects were relocated to a new village constructed in a nearby territory in a particularly ritualized process. In a very vulnerable situation, the population delivered a ritual response, succeeding practices related to religious rituals. After some critical perspectives on the most recent approaches in the areas of intangible cultural heritage research, conservation, and display, including audio-visual and digital methods, the study and records of these ritual practices underpinned the development of collaborative methodologies in the construction of a visual archive for future consultation in the Museum. This image bank features images of the Our Lady from Aldeia da Luz festival, captured in 1999 and 2002 and other ritual festivities where performativity and tradition stood as a response to

the idea of a disappearing world. Processions (Figure 10), bullfights, catholic rituals, baptism and marriage masses, and Easter activities where the village population spends the day in the countryside celebrating a touch of belonging to their natural landscape were recorded by ethnographic research that sought to trace the continuities and ruptures.

Figure 10. **Procession with sacred images leaving the village**

Source: Laranja Azul Produções Culturais.

The team coordinated by ethnologist Benjamim Pereira, would have to transcend the scope of any regional museum and become a privileged space both for re-encountering the common past and for participating in local community development. The museum was thereby considered a depository for all the ethnographic collections already carried out in the old village, such as artefacts, documents, and photographs. Also, the museum became a place for indirect testimonies of a certain way of life that would soon disappear. The visual methodologies were then important to storing and recording experiences, actions, environments to invoke the human context inherent to objects, material culture and ritual practices. Audio-visual means were adopted as the preferred format, for their cinematic and sensorial characteristics, ideal for translating and representing the ways the culture was performed.

The Luz Museum is a small building made up of three main areas: the Temporary Exhibition room, the Luz room and finally the Memory Room, which stores the overall audio-visual archive and projects images from the archive. This space has a table and chairs and was designed as a kind of in situ place for memories and narratives of the past. The Memory Room, as its name implies, is a privileged space for present and future reflection on the transmutation process in addition to playing a fundamental role in the construction of the local collective memory. It was idealized as a place of meeting between different generations, a place where the inhabitants of Luz could review the images, discuss them, interrogate them, reflect on their present after the change, participate in the construction of their own memory-file, of their self-representation, as a second opportunity to give voice to the participants in the process.

While ethnographic artefacts may be defined, segmented, detached and carried out by ethnographers, we cannot take with us the intangible, the ephemeral. To this end, we turn to recordings, films, photographs and other ethnographic documents.

As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2016) states, "you can detach artefacts from their makers, but not performances from performers" (p. 26). The process of unveiling the rituals associated with traditional culture in Aldeia da Luz was, more than a record of cultural objectifications and reinventions of traditions, a *praxis* to record what might not be repeated. In this category, there were the recordings not only of activities related to the agricultural cycle, traditional technologies, religious rituals like the Our Lady of Luz festival, Christmas, Easter, All Saints' Day but also rituals related to food or to the presence of sacred entities inside the houses. The connection between the physical territory and the rituals thus became an important issue that required consideration. On 19 November 2002, the new Aldeia da Luz village was solemnly inaugurated, followed by traditional music playing and dancing, a gesture that remains as the beginning of the new territory's ritual appropriation. The projection of Catarina's Mourão documentary "My Village Doesn't Live Here Anymore" (2006) took place later, in the new square. The film's director selected images and scenes from the Museum's previously existing archive to tell the story of the changes in Aldeia da Luz. To achieve this, she made specific footage in the new village involving children and young people, asking them to reflect, in the context of a school writing assignment, on the changes they had experienced. The reconfiguration and reappropriation of visual archives can contribute to the sustainable development of territories that are vulnerable not just because of their peripheral condition but, and in the case of Aldeia da Luz, due to their rapid transformation following economic and political changes (Figure 11).

Figure 11. **Aldeia da Luz during the Dam's construction**

Source: Laranja Azul Produções Culturais.

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5. Conclusions

The success of programs, initiatives and measures involving the safeguarding of Cultural and Intangible Heritage is obviously always dependent on the participation and appropriation by communities. In some cases, the importance of knowledge on the different expressions of Cultural and Intangible Heritage is not restricted to the registration and safeguarding of more or less ancestral practices. This may simultaneously constitute a fundamental asset for finding solutions to the new problems and challenges with which society is systematically confronted. In this sense, the safeguarding of intangible culture refers, once again, to the changing dimensions of the various heritage expressions, themselves reflecting ongoing socio-cultural changes.

Although the cases here presented are few and sometimes isolated, one may currently find interesting proposals in the Southwestern Iberian Peninsula that envisage new spaces and contexts for the safeguarding of immaterial cultural heritage. However, it still remains necessary to make progress in research as a mechanism of knowledge as well as in the identification of agents who know traditional techniques, play or sing traditional music and practice inherited rituals, reinforcing their daily transfer to new generations and not only as a means of reinterpretation or rehabilitation.

Concerning the study of traditional practices, the concept of participation is present in academic discourse, social movements, and public administration but the necessary instruments and resources have not yet been developed to apply it comprehensively in ways that allow its different aspects and meanings to be spun out and its multiple and varied social and cultural functions to be defended based on social innovation and public responsibility.

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Safeguarding cultural and intangible heritage includes study, recovery, and dissemination. It also implies defending its multiple values for society, which requires a collective effort: committing the time, technical-research personnel, spaces and means necessary to make this co-management of heritage possible. Some of the actions on which efforts should continue to focus are: collaborating in safeguarding the traditional mechanisms of knowledge transmission through formal and non-formal education; promoting the figure of masters or experts in the different arts, crafts, and practices, proposing their teaching in vocational training modules or workshop schools; implementing a fiscal policy favourable to developing traditional activities regarding immaterial cultural heritage, and/or generating a system of incentives for their production, marketing, and consumption; promoting knowledge and appreciation of traditional practices for their inherent social and cultural values by training and dissemination activities; and supporting traditional knowledge and know-how by creating the necessary forums for their transmission; among other aspects.

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