

THE DOURO RURAL HERITAGE: HOW TO CONCILIATE CONSERVATION, INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT?

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ABSTRACT

The landscape of the Demarcated Douro Region (DDR) reflects a valuable history and the high quality wines that are produced there, notably Port wine. Throughout its 250 000 hectares of terraced vineyards we also find manor houses in the farms or in architectural complexes in some inhabited places. Thus the “World Heritage” classification awarded by UNESCO in December 2001 is amply justified.

Although the rural areas prevail, the landscape is also characterized by multifunctional urban areas, with a superb architectural heritage, and classified areas, such as Vila Real, district capital, Lamego, an Episcopal city, and Peso da Régua, the “capital of Port”. The landscape continues eastwards with Tabuaço and S. João da Pesqueira, with its manor houses, and Torre de Moncorvo and Vilarica Valley, in addition to Freixo de Espada à Cinta, a Manueline town. And how can we ignore the “Côa Valley Archaeological Park”, also classified by UNESCO, and the “International Douro Natural Park”, with its headlands and cliffs? Although the vineyards and wine are the mainstay of the singular Douro landscape, the existence of a diverse landscape and architecture that need to be protected is unquestionable.

Against a backdrop in which the tourist dimension is increasingly emphasized in the activities that need to be undertaken to develop the DDR, how do we plan the rural spaces without underestimating or changing the nature of the many regional strengths? How do we increase the sustainability of this landscape and its heritage? What is the role of the manor houses scattered in the rural areas?

It is possible to characterize some of the dynamics associated to these manor houses and their local and regional impact by interviewing the representatives of some of these Douro manor houses, indicative of different development strategies, in addition to thorough field work and documentary research.

KEYWORDS: Douro manor houses, landscape heritage, TER (rural tourism), sustainability

BACKGROUND NOTES

To write about the Demarcated Douro Region (DDR) and its landscape, we need to encompass the economic, environmental, social and cultural aspects. We need to stress, however, the action of Man in a problematic, multifaceted yet extremely attractive framework, which is full of potential.

The region's "backbone" is the Douro River, stretching over 927 kilometres, 213 of which in Portuguese territory, set in a difficult landscape shaped by deep valleys formed under strong tectonic processes, and crossing different geological formations. Indeed, while its final section crosses magmatic rocks from the Palaeozoic period, upstream, in the Demarcated Douro Region, the river carves its valley into the metamorphic rocks of the schist-greywacke ante-Ordovician complex (Pedrosa, 2009, 38). Continuing towards its source, from Lagoaça to Zamora, the river crosses Palaeozoic formations on the Meseta plateau, surrounded by a landscape characterized by steep valleys and cliffs of up to 400 m in altitude. For centuries, the Douro River has, nevertheless, been the preferred access to the DDR, to Northeast Portugal and to Spain, particularly because of unsafe land routes (Pina, 2007). This was further increased with the expansion of the vineyards and the internationalization of Port wine, since the river was once again used to ship the wine, despite its many transport difficulties. This preference suffered some decline only in 1879 with the construction of the Douro railway line, but became particularly pronounced from the 1960s, following government investments in road infrastructures.

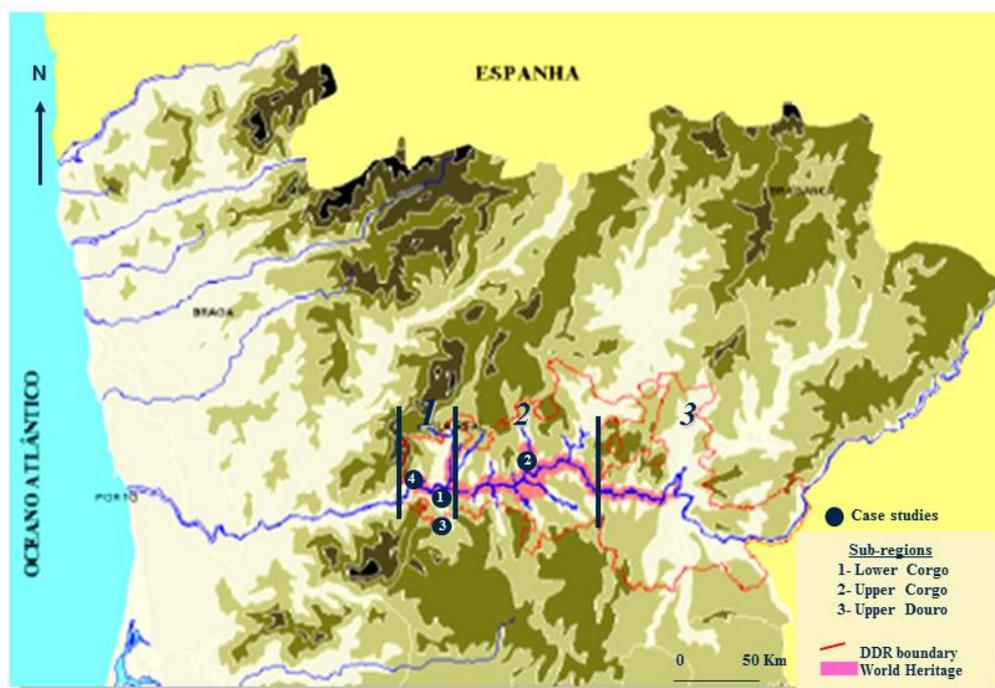
After the construction of dams, the Douro River became navigable for about 320 kilometres. The first dams were built in its international section in the 1950s and 1960s⁴³, another two were built by Spain⁴⁴, and in the 1970s and 1980s, dams were built in its national section. The landscape and lifestyle changed drastically in the Douro region, since the river flows were controlled and investments were made in hydroelectric power, as well as in connecting the two river banks, enhancing tourism and enabling the rebirth of the river in 2001 as a strategic axis. In this context, while in 1999 more than 100 000 tourists sailed up the river, in 2011 this number increased to more than 375 000 visitors (IPTM, 2011). The DDR and its privileged landscape rightly deserve the reputation and distinction it has been bestowed.**

⁴³ Picote in 1958, Miranda do Douro in 1960 and Bemposta in 1964.

⁴⁴ The dams of Saucelle and Aldeadávila.

Although peripheral, the emblematic DDR has much potential in terms of landscape, architecture, culture and winegrowing. With 250 000 hectares, of which only 45 000 are taken up with continuous vineyards (IVDP, 2011), the DDR begins in the foothills of the Marão and Alvão mountains, on the right bank of the Douro River, and of the Montemuro mountain, on the other bank. It extends towards to border with Spain, stretching along the Douro River valley and its major tributaries, valleys in which the slopes often exceed 30°.

With a history spanning more than 250 years, the region is not, however, homogeneous. In fact, although the vineyards and wine afford it its originality and support the scenario, the diversity of landscapes is preponderant but in a context that enhances its potential, with three sub-regions: *Baixo Corgo* (Lower Corgo), *Cima Corgo* (Upper Corgo) and *Douro Superior* (Upper Douro) (Fig. 1).



Source: Plano Intern. De Orden. Territ. Do Alto Douro Vinhateiro, UTAD

Fig. 1 - The Demarcated Douro Region and the case studies: 1 - Casa da Azenha (Lamego), 2 - Casa da Calçada (Sabrosa), 3 - Hotel Rural Casa Viscondes da Várzea (Lamego) and 4 - CS Solar da Rede Hotel (Mesão Frio).

Thus, the Lower Corgo, the westernmost sub-region, where the Mediterranean climate common to the region has higher humidity and lower mean annual temperatures⁴⁵,

⁴⁵ Although peak summer temperatures can exceed 40°C and negative temperatures in winter, and snowfall is only occasional.

corresponds to the area most transformed by Man and with the longest history. Here we find the main Douro urban centres, such as Vila Real, district capital that developed at the crossroads of the main access roads in the region, Peso da Régua, the “capital of Port Wine”, and Lamego, Episcopal city with a long history visible in its diverse architectural and cultural heritage.

The sub-region of Upper Corgo, to the East, boasts the largest share of farmsteads owned by exporting companies, formed by larger and more famous estates backed by a wealth of capital and highly skilled technical staff working in recent, extensive and mechanized vineyards.

Heading East and towards the border, we have the Upper Douro with a more recent wine history and a landscape characterized by olive and almond trees largely due to water shortage problems⁴⁶. However, this is the sub-region in which, since the 1970s, the expansion of the mechanized vineyard is more significant. There are several populated centres, among which Torre de Moncorvo and Freixo de Espada à Cinta, a Manueline town already set in the borderland. Lastly, we cannot ignore the cultural aspect, the “Vale do Côa Archaeological Park”, also classified by UNESCO, and in terms of environment and ecology, the “International Douro Natural Park” (PNDI), in contact with Spain, only partially overlapping with the DDR wine area.

The DDR offers a diverse landscape and architecture that can be enjoyed particularly because since the early 2000s the region has good access roads, including the A24 which links to the IP4 and subsequently to the A4, thus providing quick connections to the metropolitan area of Porto and Spain. We can, however, also refer to other access routes, some of which have a long history, for example the railroads, particularly the Douro Line, completed in the 1880s, and the waterway, the Douro River. Transport connections are undoubtedly a key parameter in the sustainable development of a region.

These appealing features were expanded further with the partial classification of the Douro landscape by UNESCO in December 2001 as “Evolving Living Landscape, World Heritage”, even leading to strategic investment in the DDR, considered since then as a priority tourist hub in accordance with the “Strategic Tourism Plan” (MEI, 2008).

Despite this potential, the region is still struggling with various problems, ranging from the poor land use structure and wine distribution problems to demographic decline, the aging of its residents, perilous local route ways, particularly the roads to wine farms, and incipient maintenance works on the architectural heritage. No less significant is the gradual disappearance of traditional festivities (Pina, 2010b), a priceless intangible heritage, the reflex of experiences that have always mobilized the territory and its people. The conservation and revival of the Douro heritage is thus jeopardized. In this context, we have to

⁴⁶ In Upper Douro, the mean annual temperatures are higher and rainfall is, in average, less than 400 mm.

emphasise the local level, its dynamics and frailties, because it is at this level that the main development projects take place, when there is close cooperation between the local population and other spatial planning agents. This is this only way to achieve the sustainable development of the territory.

To achieve this goal, there are many community funding mechanisms that have been transposed to the national strategic plans. For example, the “Rural Development Programme 2007-2013” (MADRP, 2007a), the “Programa ON.2” programme, the “Tourism Development Plan for the Douro Valley” (CCDR-N, 2006), and the funding provided under PROVERE. Although financial difficulties have increased, investments in tourism have increased in the Douro region (Pina, 2011b), especially in the medium-sized and larger farms.

Although the heritage is scattered throughout the entire region, the architectural and centennial heritage is concentrated mainly in the urban areas. Now one question remains: if these history-filled buildings in the urban areas are rehabilitated when they are turned into public service facilities, what is the situation of the manor houses set in the rural areas, in the vineyards? The point is, excluding the enjoyment of the landscape, the regional strategies apparently prefer the urban centres and their heritage, and undermine the heritage in the rural areas. However, these wine areas are the economic mainstay of the region.

Additionally, given its landscape and economic framework, which is inseparable from its historical and social nature, the Douro Valley is one of the tourist destinations involved in the creation of a world tourism network aimed at “excellence”, a network recognised by the World Tourism Organisation (Bédard, 2008). But to this end, we need to enhance the local resources and increase infrastructures, since this will increase competitiveness, especially if there is complementarity and institutional cooperation with local agents. Economic, environmental and social conditions are also required in order to achieve a sustainable and innovative development, particularly of tourism, but without neglecting the fact that the vineyard is the regional economic mainstay. In this context, how do we boost the landscape’s sustainable renovation/conservation, especially in rural areas? How do we minimise demographic decline, which is so severe here? What is the role of the noble houses scattered among the vineyards?

In this article, based on the interviews carried out in the various tourist units located in manor houses, to which was added extensive fieldwork and documentary research, we will focus on the tourist sector, highlighting four examples of manor houses, two in medium-sized family farms, (Casa da Azenha and Casa da Calçada), and two in large-sized farms with a strong impact on the area where they are located (Casa dos Viscondes da Várzea de Abrunhais and Solar da Rede).

When planning to achieve “excellence” in the Douro destination, this is an unquestionable heritage element. But to achieve this goal it is implicit that the economy needs a boost, and the

territorial specificities need to be preserved, whether landscape, environmental, economic, social and cultural. Only then can we invest in distinctive quality, including in these activities public and private entities and the local population, the effective custodians of the local heritage.

THE DOURO RURAL AREAS, A BACKDROP FULL OF POTENTIAL

In this idyllic setting, where the vineyard is coupled with a magnificent architectural and cultural heritage that reflects the background of the wine industry, we find manor houses from the 17th to the 19th centuries, scattered in medium-sized and large farms. However, the vineyards predominate in the landscape, and the larger farms are surrounded by many small family-type farms, particularly in the Lower Corgo. Biodiversity also prevails, with the olive groves and fruit trees bordering the vineyard plots. These landscape elements survived the renovation of the vineyards “imposed” by mechanisation and econometric values, confirming the traditional importance of olive oil and fruit in the survival of the large households that existed here.

It was only with the increasing migratory flows in the 1950s and 1960s that the resident population dropped in the Douro area and the lack of workers became evident. The population left behind was in decline and aging, as the young people moved primarily to the surrounding urban centres. Nevertheless, these young people maintain their family and cultural roots, helping out in the family farm after work (Pina, 2007, 2011a).

Housing shortage is another problem in the region. Traditionally, the subsistence of the Douro rural parishes rested on the wine industry, although combined with a basic commercial sector and serving the purpose of accommodation. However, when the migration flows towards Europe and the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto increased, the demographic pressure in these areas decreased. The housing issue was improved only in the 1980s with the need to accommodate national and foreign tourists. This led to farms becoming multifunctional (Pina, 2010a), supported by community funds, and joining the Rural Tourism network (TER). “Charm” tourism and even luxury tourism have been added to these initiatives, especially after 2001 (Pina, 2010c). Indeed, because of the potential offered by the region and the award received by UNESCO, recognised by the World Tourism Organisation, through policy guidelines, the development of tourism is expected to boost this territory (Fazenda *et al*, 2008). But it takes a strong investment to achieve this, particularly in the qualification and upgrading of the territory and its components, including the rehabilitation of the built heritage. It is in this context that we will address the illustrative cases of manor houses.

Built during the first dynasty in the NW of Portugal, the manor houses were, in the beginning, plain and intended to “cater for a number of needs, and even served as fortress and

housing” (Binney, 1987, 8). These manor houses were built in the farms, close to the road, making it easier to market the farm produce and especially the wines. In the Douro area, these houses proliferated from the 18th century, and other were rebuilt (Azevedo, s/d, 93), following the spread of the vineyard and the opening of the royal road to Porto. Some of these houses were built in the lavish Baroque style, whilst others were simpler (Silva, s/d, 266); the increase in the number of these types of houses is related to the expansion of the vineyard and the consequent regional development.

Although there were many critical moments in the history of the region, such as the period following the phylloxera and other rust plagues that affected the vineyards in the 19th century, or the blocking of exports during the world conflicts and subsequent years when the main markets were closed, namely the European market, the Douro vineyard expanded but the future was uncertain; the manor houses in the large farms played a decisive role at local level.

Until the 1980s, these farms only invested in the vineyards and in wine production, while the residential building was used to house the owners and their friends. The strategic change took place as a result of the more attractive atmosphere surrounding Port wine from the 1970s onwards, but especially because of the Community funds available. Due to the lack of workers, the vineyards suffered technical and morphological changes, for example new types of terraces were introduced, and the “vinha ao alto” [vertical vines], although this tradition is not typical of the Douro, thus increasing the income of the vineyards. The vineyard and wine served as a catalyst to the local dynamics.

Tourism was increased at the beginning of the 2000s, especially after the DDR was classified as World Heritage. In general, these new investments are found in medium-sized or large estates and combine the wine industry and tourism; the smaller estates are usually family-run businesses, while the larger investments are operated by corporate undertakings.

THE MEDIUM-SIZED FAMILY FARMS AND TOURIST INVESTMENT

When analysing the size and nature of the investment, we need to clarify some of the existing differences, especially regarding tourism. We will begin this analysis with medium-sized wine farms, one in the Lower Corgo and another in the Upper Corgo, yet both having a long history and being relevant in the local society and economy, despite the developing economic, cultural and political changes. The first analysis focuses on Casa da Azenha (fig. 1).

Casa da Azenha is a stately house dating back to the 17th century (fig. 2) located in the parish of Cambres, council of Lamego, in Rio Bom, where there used to be a mill linked to Casa da Corredoura, in this same parish. The house flanks the public road and is surrounded by the farm’s vineyards, outbuildings and gardens. It was built by António Rebelo Teixeira (Silva, s/d,

265) whose successors, the noblemen of the Royal House and the Counts of Alvelos, in addition to being large landowners, were involved in regional life, especially the second Count of Alvelos, Francisco Perfeito de Magalhães e Meneses, who directed the construction works of the Douro railway line (Silva, s/d, 266). After the said link was extinguished, by transmission of property by inheritance, the property was subdivided and nowadays it only has 10 hectares, mostly taken up by the vineyard. The historical biodiversity was, however, preserved, with olive and fruit trees delimiting the property and flanking the inner paths, in addition to arable crops for irrigated land. Although economic indicators point to vine monoculture, in this case the preservation of the landscape is maintained.



Fig. 2 - Casa da Azenha (Cambres, Lamego), a noble manor house dating back to the 17th century, surrounded by the estate's vineyards.

Traditionally, the persons responsible for the estate, who descend directly from the Count of Alvelos, based their activities until the early 2000s on the production and marketing of wines. However, after UNESCO classified the region, they embarked on the renovation of the

vineyards, and since 2004 they have invested in Wine Tourism and family-run Guest Houses. As such, between 2005 and 2006, the owners restored the house with the help of “Turismo de Portugal” in accessing EU funds for the rehabilitation of old houses, which required the prior classification of the house as being of “Municipal Interest” and “Public Interest”.

After the rehabilitation of the manor house, the owners opened nine rooms for tourism. At first, promotion was intense through various press releases, and the Casa da Azenha was included in the “Official Tour Guides”. The resort also has its own website and is referenced on Douronet.pt and on the international Tripadvisor.com, to attract foreign clients. It is therefore not surprising that although Portuguese tourists prevail, Casa da Azenha is increasingly preferred by foreigners, mostly Americans, followed by the Swedish, English, French and Spanish tourists and, to a smaller degree, Swiss, Canadian and Brazilian tourists. These guests are mainly senior executives and medium/high class business people, between 30 and 50 years old⁴⁷.

In terms of human resources, we can add that while the owners are over 60 years old and have a higher education degree, including training in tourism obtained in Vila Real, the resort has two permanent staff assigned to the activities, between 40 and 50 years old, with basic school education (1st and 2nd cycles), who live in the parish. Between May and October, the peak season, they hire another lady worker with an identical profile to the other two women, and when they receive group visits, other temporary staff are hired⁴⁸.

In terms of tourism, the future of this resort seems promising. As regards the wine industry, its continuity is also ensured, albeit in new forms of exploitation. The vineyards, which were previously managed by the property-owners, are at the moment leased out due to the shortage of skilled labour. This is why the owners do not employ farm workers.

The Casa da Azenha is a member of the Port Wine Route since 2008 and of the Association for the Protection of the Historical Heritage of the Douro.

For its part, the Casa da Calçada (fig. 1), located in Provesende (council of Sabrosa) (fig. 3), is also an medium-sized farm that has only recently joined the TER. The farm has about 22 hectares, 4.5 of which are taken up with vineyards (2 were restructured, supported by the VITIS programme). It also preserves the traditional biodiversity, since it has 14 hectares of bush and forest in the higher grounds of the property, and a hectare of olive trees. Moreover, there are fruit trees flanking the house and at the suggestion of the current manager, there is an organic kitchen garden that supplies the house.

The classical house dates from the late 17th century (1680), predating most of the manor houses in Trás-os-Montes and Beira Alta, which are from the 18th century. It is owned by the Cunha Pimentel family and was part of the Morgadio da Calçada estate. It was classified as

⁴⁷ Information provided by the resort's responsible entity.

⁴⁸ Information provided by the resort's responsible entity.

“property of Public Interest” by the City Council of Sabrosa, and the Heritage Institute (IGESPAR) also classified it as being of “Public Interest”.

The building, which has a long and monumental façade, replaced the former house of the 4th Lord of Casa da Calçada who, “probably to adapt the house to his large fortune consisting of properties across the country, making the family one of the most important in the province” (Toussaint, 2003, 2), established its alliance to Saint Jerome, which rivalled with the alliance of Casa de Mateus. By the 19th century, the wealth of the family had increased formidably, and the Casa da Calçada became the “administrative centre” of this area (Gonçalves, 2005, 22). A long golden period was followed by unstable liberal times and the adverse consequences of phylloxera (Gonçalves, 2005, 24). The Casa da Calçada lost its splendour and only regained its supremacy in the 1960s, under the guidance of Jerónimo Cunha Pimentel and his nephew, Manuel Villas-Boas.

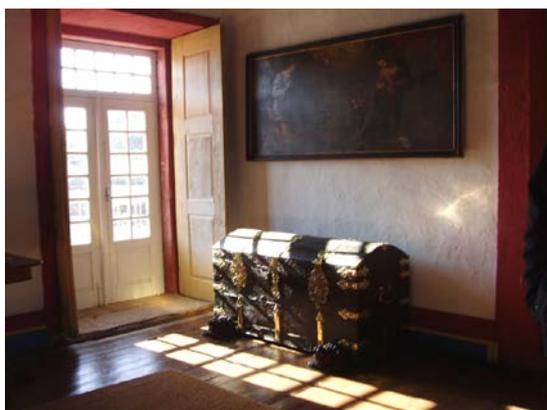


Fig. 3 - Casa da Calçada (Provesende, Sabrosa), a manor of erudite architecture, dating from the end of the 17th century, classified as a “Building of Municipal Interest” and of “Public Interest”.

Following the general strategy of the medium-sized Douro farms, after it had converted part of the vineyard in 1980, which lasted until the 1990s, the Casa da Calçada then signed a partnership agreement with Niepoort to produce the “Morgadio da Calçada” wines. At present, they produce various wines, not all of them liqueur wines, exporting to France, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany and the USA.

Until 2009, all farm works were done by a farm keeper with the help of day-workers. At the moment, there are no employees because the company Niepoort is in charge of all operations. Moreover, this resort is also concerned with environmental issues, managing its own water resources used either for irrigation, in the vineyards or in the pool; it uses certified and biodegradable fertilizers and continues to capitalize on the local sub-products, such as the vines, which are used for heating and in the smokehouse, etc. And how can we forget the already mentioned organic kitchen garden? Additionally, this project also took into account other environmental and sustainability issues, for example energy efficiency, by using solar panels that are reinforced by two pumps associated with heat recovery systems, when necessary.

The owners are now investing in the social and cultural revitalisation of the estate, supported by agrotourism and wine tourism. The project was prepared in 2000, but the current manager only left his job (in publicity) in 2008 when “Tourism of Portugal” confirmed that it would support the investment in Douro, starting with the launching of the “Morgadio da Calçada” wines, an anchor project integrated in a wine village. Then the building underwent construction works in 2011 to adapt it to tourism. The owners opened eight rooms for tourists, set in a group of rehabilitated farm buildings, using materials typical of the region, such as schist (fig. 4 and 5). The Casa da Calçada is thus rehabilitated and has joined other manor houses and public and private entities with the prospect of creating a “Network of Tourist Attractions” that includes history, landscape and innovation.

One of the co-owners is responsible for this investment, he is 44 years old, has a university education, and is dedicated exclusively to the project, given its potential. However, because this activity is seasonal, mostly between May and October, and especially during the harvesting period, he employs a permanent female worker from Provesende, aged 38 and with the 9th year of schooling. When the resort has guest groups, he employs a variable number of casual workers, between 35 and 60 years old, who also live in the parish.

As in the case of Casa da Azenha, the tourists are from a upper/middle class background, they have a high cultural level and are between the ages of 35 and 60. Moreover, although Portuguese tourists prevail, the estate is also visited by foreign tourists (English, American, French, German, Italian and Australian); in the last few years, the number of younger Brazilian and Spanish tourists has also increased.



Fig. 4 - The situation before the project (photos by Jerónimo Pimentel and Manuel Villas-Boas).



Fig. 5 - The current situation after reconversion of the farm outhouses.

Lastly, despite the fact that the TER is quite recent in Casa da Calçada, this estate has been open to the public since the 1990s, welcoming hundreds of visitors, offering lunch/dinner and business meetings, and is also the stronghold of the Provesende village, being decisive for the classification of this centre as a “Historical Wine Village”. The estate has also hosted other activities, such as the photography workshop organized by the team of the Norwegian photographer Morten Krovgold, in 1998⁴⁹, and in the same year it organized a cycle of seventeen meetings called “Encontros da Casa da Calçada” for the discussion of some regional problems, which gave rise to strategic proposals⁵⁰; to enhance the documentary Archive of the Casa, in 2000, the owners signed an agreement with the District Archive of Vila Real, thus preserving the heritage of Provesende and the role of this family in the development of the region; in 2002, the estate hosted an exhibition on the fight against phylloxera, showcased in the warehouses of

⁴⁹ The village was turned into a gigantic photo studio for 10 days, and the residents and photographers were able to interact.

⁵⁰ The re-edition of these meetings is currently under analysis.

Casa da Calçada. A museum on this subject is expected for this building. Thus, the village of Provesende is also promoted.

In short, in order to preserve and rehabilitate the two historical medium-sized Douro estates shown in the typical examples of Casa da Azenha and Casa da Calçada, their owners have combined the wine industry and tourism. Although investments are quite significant, they are not enough to cover many activities, because occupation in these resorts is seasonal; this is why employability is limited, with only one or two permanent staff. Nevertheless, these initiatives cover the investments, help to preserve the landscape and the architectural heritage, and disseminate the landscape, history, gastronomy and local and regional traditions, being a complement to the wine industry. The cultural aspect is also enhanced, as well as environmental issues, as seen in the more recent resort, with its organic kitchen garden and energy efficiency concerns. In this context, we have to value these initiatives, investing in complementarity, preservation and innovation to boost significant and various thematic investments, capable of highlighting each season and its attractions, in addition to the specificities of the area in question (Pina, 2010b). The polychrome Douro, always emphasised by many artists, must also be used as a development strategy, in a sustainable framework.

TOURISM AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE LARGE HISTORICAL DOURO AREAS

Another type of manor houses is found in the large farming estates, reflecting the background of the former owners. These houses have a strong impact at regional and sometimes, at national level, so we need to question the strategies used to preserve and maintain them. Two examples of these houses are the Casa dos Viscondes de Várzea de Abrunhais and Solar da Rede.

The first one, the Casa dos Viscondes de Várzea de Abrunhais (fig. 1), is located in the parish of Várzea de Abrunhais (Lamego), on one of the slopes of the property (fig. 6). It consists of a 19th century building surrounded by century-old trees and farm outhouses, such as the stables, olive-oil press, wine-cellar and windmills.

The Casa dos Viscondes de Várzea de Abrunhais is owned by the Silveira family, famous in the Douro region for its historical importance and the background of its members, and also because of the commitment to the community. This was most relevant during the period of the French invasions (1808), but also in later periods, for which the title of Viscount was awarded in 1823 to Francisco da Silveira Pinto da Fonseca (Taborda, 2009, 101). The son of the 1st Viscount, in turn, in the 1830s, was one of the presidents of the General Company of Alto Douro Viticulture.



Fig. 6 - Casa dos Viscondes de Várzea de Abrunhais (Várzea de Abrunhais, Lamego), dating from the 19th century, adapted to a Rural Hotel.

In the 20th century, in 1974, the property was sold to Caves Raposeira, which, in turn, sold it to Seagrams, who owned it between 1974 and 1994. During this period, investments were made only in the vineyards while the building deteriorated. The current owners, who purchased the property in 1994, recovered the building, preserving the original architecture and transformed the farm outhouses and stables. The historical aspects were thus combined with the wine industry and tourism. The estate was awarded the title of “Public Utility” and inaugurated a rural “boutique” hotel.

The farm is located in the parish of Várzea de Abrunhais and has 180 hectares scattered across several parishes of two councils (Lamego and Tarouca). Although the vineyard prevails, there are other crops that are in line with the partial integration of the farm in the DDR, with the nature of the soil and the altitude and orientation of the farming area, since it has a difference in altitude of about 300 metres, from a minimum of 90 metres on the banks of the Varosa River to more than 350 meters. The vineyard occupies 90 hectares, 45 of which are integrated in the

DDR and the remaining in the Távora/Varosa Region⁵¹. There are also 6 hectares of olive grove, 6 hectares of orchard and the remaining area is filled with gardens, forest and a kitchen garden. The estate is self-sufficient in vegetables and domestic animals, and has an organic production system, selling the surplus products.

As regards the farming work, changes occurred after 2011, when the farm was purchased and mechanised. The number of staff had to be gradually reduced by not replacing those who retired. Therefore, in 2011 the staff included 10 permanent workers (7 men and 3 women), and occasionally 8 more workers are employed every season. The workers have a relatively young cultural and technical profile⁵², but their academic qualifications are limited to the 1st basic cycle. This workforce is all local⁵³.

Additionally, with the aid of the VITIS programme, the owners were able to renovate the vineyards, mechanising them, planted new olive groves and expanded the orchards, supported by the AGRO Programme until 2006, and later by PRODER.

However, the major innovation of this estate is the multifunctional farming activity. After 2001, supported once again by EU funds, namely the SIFIT programme, the owners rehabilitated the buildings and outhouses, and opened 5 suites and 32 rooms for tourism, in addition to dining-rooms and banquet rooms. To support the entertainment activities, they added a games room and built an outdoor salt water swimming-pool, three tennis-courts and a riding facility. In Varosa, it offers many water activities, taking advantage of the difficult river bed; moreover, tourists can enjoy the walks to the windmills and participate in the farming activities. To diversify the type of guests, the owners also organise parties, thematic dinners, and other corporate events, making arrangements with companies.

In terms of staff, note that the mentors of this project, a couple aged 59 and 58, with university education, including hotel training in England, are supported in all tourist activities by 10 permanent workers, 3 men and 7 women, all young⁵⁴ and with academic training, since one of the workers has a degree and 4 have completed an environmental/rural tourism course. Furthermore, the more skilled workers are from close to the Solar, and the rest, especially the older workers, who normally have 1st or 2nd cycle schooling, are from the parish of Várzea de Abrunhais, or from close by. During the peak season, the staff is helped by 8 other casual workers, and to support the events an extra 15 casual workers are employed. They all live in the council of Lamego, in the parish itself, or in places nearby⁵⁵.

⁵¹ Corresponds to one of the suppliers of Caves Murganheira.

⁵² Three are between 22 and 26 years old, and the rest are between 41 and 59 years old

⁵³ Information provided by the people in charge.

⁵⁴ Five are between the ages of 19 and 26, and those over 30 years old are no older than 54.

⁵⁵ Information provided by the people in charge of the Rural Hotel Casa dos Viscondes de Várzea de Abrunhais, 2011.

Considering the landscape around it and other attractions, widely publicised through the Internet and media, it is not surprising that the number of tourists keeps on growing, totalling, in 2010, 2 895, 85% of which were Portuguese. The proportion of foreign tourists has also continued to increase, mostly Spanish, French and the English (tab. I). Most of the Portuguese tourists are from urban centres, followed by those from the north and the centre of the country (tab. II)⁵⁶.

Therefore the countryside atmosphere, the wine activity and the environment and tourism are combined, supported by capital and EU funds, energizing and bringing life back to a rural property with a long history and economic and social tradition in the region.

Table I - Evolution in number of tourists (2009 to 2011).

Nationalities	Year		
	2011	2010	2009
Portugal	2060	2372	2480
Brazil	84	43	95
France	105	97	127
Spain	87	132	183
Germany	57	56	48
Australia	12	6	0
United Kingdom	97	65	85
Belgium	8	6	19
Sweden	360	0	10
South Africa	4	0	0
USA	35	10	18
Holland	128	68	122
Denmark	4	0	0
Italy	4	8	2
Switzerland	35	2	26
Israel	36	0	0
Canada	2	14	6
Austria		12	16

Source: Hotel Rural Casa Viscondes da Várzea, 2011

Table II - Evolution in the number of national tourists (2009- 2011).

(Portuguese) Councils	Year		
	2011	2010	2009
Lisbon	823	906	1012
Porto	622	612	596
Coimbra	228	238	198
Guarda	18	20	16
Castelo Branco	10	26	18
Guimaraes	18	22	28
Braga	38	62	78
Beja	4	8	18
Santarem	12	22	36
Bragança	6	12	18
Famalicão	8	18	46
Sta Maria Feira	68	82	84
Aveiro	12	10	22
Leiria	28	46	48
Sintra	49	57	68
Cascais	37	42	43
Faro	29	38	43
Portimão	31	61	70
Seia	8	18	8
Others	11	72	30

Source: Hotel Rural Casa Viscondes da Várzea, 2011

The last example in this article refers to the Solar da Rede (fig. 1). The origins of the Solar date back to the 15th century, when Prince D. Afonso renewed the ownership of the properties located in Mesão Frio to Lopo de Queirós, Master of the Casa da Rede (Azevedo, s/d, 94). Overlooking the Douro River, in the parish of Santa Cristina, the Quinta da Rede and its manor house was the cornerstone of one of the most important rural estates in the Douro region, extending from the right bank of the Douro River to the foothills of Marão.

⁵⁶ These figures only include those who stay overnight at the hotel, and not the participants in social events, such as weddings, christenings and other commemorations, which are in the thousands (perhaps over six hundreds in a single day).

The vast façade of the building with its large rooms overlooks the river, and boasts magnificent well-preserved glazed-tile walls dating from the 18th century (fig. 7). The manor house includes a Baroque chapel dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, and has not been changed since the 19th century, when it was restored by José Maria Cerqueira Borges Rebelo, a nobleman from the Royal House (Silva, s/d, 96), and was already surrounded by extensive forest, orchards, vineyards and kitchen gardens.



Fig.7- The manor of Rede (Santa Cristina, Mesão Frio) whose origins date back to the 15th century, and where tiles from the 18th century have been preserved.

In 1962, the family sold this estate to the wine dealer Manuel Pinto Marques who continued to invest only in the wine industry until 1999. In that year, when the estate was sold to Mário Ferreira⁵⁷, after the restoration works the new owner decided to invest in tourism, bringing the estate under the tutelage of the Pousadas de Portugal, where it remained between 2006 and November 2011. It was then reclassified as a 5-star Rural Hotel and became part of the hotel group “CS Hotels, Golf and Resorts”. However, the new management did not neglect the agricultural activity, especially the vineyards that continued to be part of the estate, because they

⁵⁷ Administrator of the river tourism company Douro Azul.

also supported the tourism activity. Indeed, the estate consists of 40 hectares, 30 of which are taken up by vineyards, which were restructured with the support of the VITIS programme. Every year the vineyards produce 200 barrels of wine (fortified wines and table wines). Although the vineyards were renovated, some works are still done in traditional ways, much to the amusement of visitors and tourists.

The estate is a member of the Port Wine Route. Moreover, it has orchards that are used to produce jams, and to supply the resort's kitchen; the estate also includes a century-old wood and gardens, to be enjoyed by guests. This area is what remains from the former Quinta da Rede, with terraces from the banks of the Douro River up to the slopes of Marão.

Agricultural activities are ensured by 7 staff, 5 men and 2 women, all young and with the 4th year of schooling. They are from Vila Jusã, or nearby parishes, except for the oenologist and maintenance worker, also young but from nearby councils. Extra workers are needed during the seasonal farming activities, such as harvesting, but in a limited number.

However, in 2011, tourism was the most important activity of the Solar and Quinta da Rede. The 5-star Hotel has 29 rooms (12 in the main building and another 17 in close by houses). The distinct heritage is thus preserved, by adapting a stately manor house to a luxury hotel unit, offering the guests historical experiences and knowledge of the particularities of the vineyard, of wine and of the region. The peak period is obviously during harvesting, in which guests are able to participate, as well as in the picking of fruit, and in other entertainment.

As in the previous estates, this investment only materialised after UNESCO classified the region and because its owner, a 50-year old civil engineer, president of the CS Hotels, Golf and Resorts, had capital to invest and the support of his family to manage the company.

This tourist investment is an "excellence destination" and has quite a significant number of young and educated employees, 30 in total, 11 men and 19 women⁵⁸. The academic training of these employees is remarkable: two have a university degree, and twelve have the 12th year of schooling or a technical course. Only four of the employees, working in maintenance and cleaning, have no more than the 4th year of schooling. They all live in parishes near the estate, with the exception of those working in more skilled tasks, who are from the main urban centres of the region, or even from Porto.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that⁵⁹, if we limit the analysis to the tourists who stay overnight at the hotel, the number has constantly increased (tab. III and IV), especially foreign tourists of many nationalities. Most of them are North-American⁶⁰, followed by European guests, particularly from Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Spain. The

⁵⁸ Eleven are under 30 years old and fourteen are between 31 and 40 years old

⁵⁹ Except the participants of social events, such as weddings, etc..

⁶⁰ About 500 tourists in 2010 and in 2011.

Brazilian and Japanese tourists are also emerging. In 2011, Portuguese guests were not even a third of the total number, which corresponds to an inversion of the figures at the start of activities.⁶¹

Table III- Number of tourists and corresponding nationalities in 2010.

2010		36%	(cont.)	
Portuguese	2060		2010	
Germany	357		Israel	32
Argentina	6		Italy	96
Australia	66		Japan	104
Austria	78		Latvia	4
Belgium	197		Lithuania	7
Brazil	210		Luxembourg	9
Bulgaria	2		Mexico	8
Canada	249		Nigeria	4
Chile	4		Norway	70
Colombia	2		New Zealand	14
Denmark	89		Netherlands	328
Spain	226		Poland	5
Estonia	2		United Kingdom	339
USA	482		South Africa	5
Finland	10		Romania	6
France	333		Russia	31
Gibraltar	2		Sweden	52
India	8		Switzerland	191
Iran	10		Venezuela	2
Ireland	57		T O T A L	5757

Source: CS Hotels, Golf and Resorts, 2010

Table IV – Number of tourists and corresponding nationalities in 2011 (until October).

Portuguese	1841	32.5%	2011 (until October)	
Germany	392		Israel	34
Angola	9		Iceland	2
Argentina	6		Italy	119
Australia	72		Japan	85
Austria	23		Latvia	2
Belgium	123		Lithuania	8
Brazil	247		Luxembourg	6
Bulgaria	2		Mauritius	1
Canada	238		Mexico	9
China	3		Monaco	2
Colombia	6		Nigeria	6
Korea	2		Norway	60
Denmark	56		New Zealand	4
Spain	256		Netherlands	408
Estonia	10		Poland	15
USA	475		United Kingdom	356
Finland	14		South Africa	8
France	365		Russia	35
Greece	4		Sweden	54
Haiti	2		Switzerland	173
Hungary	2		Uruguay	3
Iran	12		Zimbabwe	1
Ireland	107		T O T A L	5658

Source: CS Hotels, Golf and Resorts, 2011

⁶¹ Source: C.S. Hotels, Golf and Resorts, 2011.

These are two examples with an impact at local and regional levels, strengthening the potential of houses with a long history and have been at the core of the Douro history. In fact, the main exporting firms also have, whenever possible, buildings of historical value as part of their industrial heritage, intended for guests. Thus the historical and cultural aspect of Port wine is also enhanced.

Furthermore, economic investments also lead to innovation, without deteriorating the landscape, and minimise another problem, demographic decline, by creating jobs. In fact, the two projects we have just analysed (the Rural Hotel Casa dos Viscondes de Várzea de Abrunhais and the CS Solar da Rede Hotel) have created 73 jobs, 40 of which are permanent, qualified and young⁶². These investments have allowed the local staff to remain in the area and have attracted others to the region, although in a fewer number, but they are significant in that they prevent local workers from leaving the region and help preserve a distinctive heritage and favour the knowledge of the region. The number of rooms offered by the traditional hotel units in the region and by the TER is also thus complemented.

CONCLUSION

The DDR is a privileged, world-renowned region with idyllic surroundings filled with a magnificent historical heritage classified by UNESCO in December 2001. Despite its potential, the region has many problems, for example, the stagnation of the economy as a result of the deterioration of the wine industry, and the fact that the population is in decline, which in turn is inseparable from the gradual aging of the local population, constraining the emergence of new dynamics.

However, this area needs to be revitalised. Some of the strategies include the multifunctional farming estates, particularly the medium-sized and large farms. According to the strategy, the farm owners renovate the vineyards, mechanizing and improving them in terms of technique and grape varieties, and later add to the wine production the marketing of wines and welcoming guests in their homes. This is how the TER expanded, focusing its action mostly between May and September, and more so during the harvesting period.

A particular situation is associated to the manor houses scattered among the vineyards. With different histories and various degrees of local intervention, intimately linked to their own capital or not, and the historical background and technical features of the buildings, in particular their size, these manor houses chose to be part of the TER or to be

⁶² Source: CS Solar da Rede Hotel e Hotel Rural Casa dos Viscondes de Várzea de Abrunhais (2011).

converted into luxury hotels or “boutique” hotels. The exceptional heritage is thus preserved, helping to retain the young population with academic training in the region, and highly dynamic people in the Douro area, as shown in the examples given of larger farming estates with corporate structures.

Nevertheless, although tourism, in its many aspects, is the preferred strategy, we cannot undermine the wine industry, since it is the economic and social mainstay of Douro, despite its problems; the vineyards have to be renewed, because this is the only way to overcome the lack of employees and to mechanise the vineyard, thus increasing productivity. At the same time, associativism must be strengthened in order to minimise the impact of poor farming structures, and make better use of EU funds, without forgetting erudite or popular culture, which is fading away.

In short, tourism, in its various forms, is indeed a strategic investment for this area, helping to preserve the landscape and the architectural heritage in an environment with many needs in the wine sector, and in which the population is aging. The local strengths must be streamlined in a global perspective, involving all players, investing in the quality of landscape but also in the social areas, so that the development can be systemic, holistic and sustainable. Moreover, the region needs to be marketed and integrated in international networks (OMT, the VINTUR European Association), but in a perspective of conservation/streamlining, given the wealth of existing attractions. This article has shown only four examples that represent the diversity in the Douro region, but they are not exhaustive. But we need to disseminate and strengthen them, in a context of complementarity. After all, we are dealing with a World Heritage area!

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