

DESIGNING THE «SABROSA: TERRITORY AND HERITAGE» EXHIBITION AT THE GOOGLE ARTS & CULTURE: CHALLENGES AND RESULTS

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INTRODUCTION

From a contextualized analysis of a pedagogical experience, carried out as part of the MA in History of Portuguese Art offered by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto during the 2015/2016 academic year, we wanted to show how to create heritage dissemination products in an academic context. These products were assumed as an investigation experience/learning process, bringing together teachers and students from two mandatory curricular units: Project Seminar I (1S) and Project Seminar II (2S). The project involved a learning method that allowed students to master methodologies and the vocabulary of scientific research, as they directly contacted with a concrete heritage case study. As the academic year advanced, the students developed skills to draw, construct and disseminate the project, identifying and cataloguing objects, and to build an expository narrative with a digital format in mind. Cohesion and cooperation among students were encouraged, promoting an entrepreneurial spirit in order to answer a common goal.

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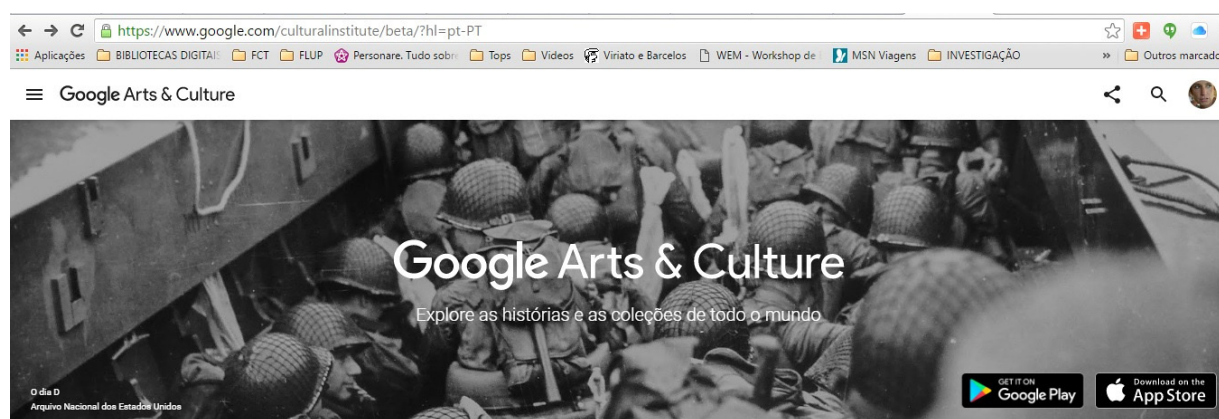


Fig. 1. Frontpage Google Arts & Culture. Available at <<https://goo.gl/XupNJo>>

The contacts between the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto and the Google Cultural Institute (nowadays known as Google Arts & Culture) started in 2014. In July 14, 2015, we shared the first results, in a worldwide inauguration that took place at the Noble Saloon of the Rectory of the University of Porto. *Porto Património Mundial (Oporto World Heritage)*¹ was thus presented. In September 23 of the following year, and taking advantage of the European Heritage Days 2016 (that were devoted to the theme «Communities and Cultures»), we inaugurated a virtual exhibition in Sabrosa, entitled *Sabrosa: Territory and Heritage*². What these two exhibitions had in common was not only the dissemination of results in a bilingual format (PT and EN), but the fact that they concerned two locations inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, in 1996 and 2001, respectively. Both shared with a global audience two narratives of landscapes, urban and rural. Both were built from the knowledge of the respective territorial characteristics, their History and their Heritage, and always from a contemporary point of view³.

The present paper intends to reflect upon the ways of interpreting and presenting the Heritage and the Landscape of Sabrosa, which is inscribed on the UNESCO List as part of the ADWR, as an evolving and living cultural landscape (2001). The basis of our narrative consists of images, whose «Details» present the information resulting from the scientific investigation process, and their respective interpretation, which in turn led to the production of contents and guided the definition of the narrative. This level of discourse, that provides images and texts for multiple individual uses (the collection), is complemented by the route of the exhibition. The route develops a number of narratives — created by the images themselves — and stimulates visual and dynamic dialogues that try to translate the conceptual relationships behind their selection and articulation. In this sense, and according to M. Forte, «the more we have learnt, the more we can tell; but also

¹ FLUP, 2015.

² FLUP, 2016.

³ BOTELHO *et al.*, 2017.

the objects, the places, the sites, tell»⁴. A symbiotic relationship is created between student and object, empowered by the common goal of a highly object-oriented visual narrative.

The concept and the construction of this exhibition were, therefore, defined by teachers and students, who devoted their time to the necessary fieldwork, bibliographic and archival research, and a critical content systematization within the classroom. The field lessons, that covered the council of Sabrosa⁵, were fundamental. In these, the students had the opportunity to «educate» their gaze and, attended by the teachers, were prepared to see beyond things. The need to learn in articulation with the visual culture of each context was highlighted, as was its role as the main tool with which a History of Art researcher interacts with the object, in this case the landscape and the heritage of the council of Sabrosa do Douro.

SABROSA: TERRITORY AND HERITAGE

The goal of this exhibition is to present the landscape and heritage of the Sabrosa council, which is part of the ADWR Cultural Landscape, classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2001. It is an invitation for the visitor to wander through, and enjoy, this unique landscape.

The cultural landscape of the Alto Douro Wine Region (ADWR) is listed as World Heritage⁶. Although wine production dates back earlier, it was in the 18th century that it became the main crop in the region. Port wine became renowned worldwide for its quality. This long winegrowing tradition produced an exceptional cultural landscape which reflects its technological, social and economic development.



Fig. 2. Frontpage from the virtual exhibition *Sabrosa: Território e Património* (2016) at Google Arts & Culture
Available at <<https://goo.gl/v8pjHp>>

⁴ FORTE, [s.d.].

⁵ We thank here the support from the Council of Sabrosa and four wine producers for the accommodation of all the students and teachers involved in the project: Quinta do Crasto, Quinta da Marka, Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo and Quinta do Portal.

⁶ UNESCO, [2001].

As a cultural, evolving and living landscape, the ADWR was appreciated for its land use that, apart from representing the evolution of a wealth of material and immaterial culture, comprises a type of landscape which illustrates representative moments in history, patent in its terraces, vineyards, settlements, chapels and pathways. It is also a unique testament of a tradition that still lives on but has been modernised, that uses and builds a new landscape, builds material heritage and preserves its immaterial legacy. The ADWR is indeed Living Cultural Heritage.

The listing of the ADWR as World Heritage «involves the space and mankind and, consequently, the activity generated through a centuries-long relationship, which is constantly renovated by the soil, the cultivation of wine, wine production and a whole range of associated material and immaterial heritage assets»⁷.

The *Québec Declaration* on the preservation of the spirit of place («*Spiritu Loci*»)⁸ emphasises the need «to safeguard and promote the spirit of places, namely their living, social and spiritual nature». The ADWR materialises a way of life connected to the culture of vines and wine, which shape the monumental and humanised landscape, designing unique forms with its terraces; for its religious and civil heritage, which is only intelligible in its perfect relationship with the more vernacular culture. But above all, for the intangible heritage which bestows meaning, values and context on this cultural, evolving and living landscape. According to the *Québec Declaration*, «Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), that is to say the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place»⁹. In the ADWR and in Sabrosa, the spirit of place persists, shaped by mankind in response to their most varied needs, part of «a continuously reconstructed process, which responds to the needs for change and continuity of communities»¹⁰.

This exhibition intends to respond to one of the most innovative principles of the *Québec Declaration*, the use of new digital technologies «to better preserve, disseminate and promote heritage of places and their spirit»¹¹.

The Territory

Heritage encompasses all that has quality for the cultural and physical life of man and has profound meaning for the existence and affirmation of communities, from the rural and parochial to the municipal and regional, as well as national and international.

⁷ CENTRO NACIONAL DE CULTURA, 2013: 46.

⁸ ICOMOS, 2008.

⁹ ICOMOS, 2008.

¹⁰ ICOMOS, 2008: Art. 3.

¹¹ ICOMOS, 2008: Art. 7.

Heritage is quality and a wealth of memory that is ideally alive. Without quality, whether intrinsic or circumstantial, there is no fundament. Heritage cannot be seen only as a reserve and even less as a recollection or nostalgia of the past. It should, rather, be regarded as part of our present¹².

Based on these ludic reflections, and considering heritage as the conjugation between past and present, we have selected the council of Sabrosa as the theme for this exhibition, selecting parishes that are most closely related with winegrowing, due to their location.

The quality of the council's landscape, a *handmade landscape* (common to the entire territory of the Alto Douro Wine Region), results from domination of adverse geomorphological conditions. We owe the aesthetic wonder the landscape has today to the arduous work of man over the centuries and to the control the dams built have taken of the irregular, turbulent waters of the Douro River.

In the council of Sabrosa, spatial planning has mitigated the dissonances arising from the expansion of the settlements. Its wealth of heritage, of incalculable quality, comprises old and contemporary architectures for housing and production, vernacular constructions, urban design, religious architecture and public architecture dedicated to culture. The quality of this heritage has been its own cause and effect.

Heritage

The heritage of Sabrosa is spread through the parishes described in the exhibition, such as Provesende, Celeirós do Douro or Vilarinho de São Romão, among others. They either stand out due to the appreciable number of noble houses they are home to, their orderly urban design, the richness of their sacral interiors, or the presence of a vernacular heritage and high-quality contemporary architecture. These parishes reveal a diversity that should be viewed within a historical process and according to the distinct economic power of their populations. The council's heritage landscape, in the area closest to the Douro and Pinhão river valleys, is profoundly marked by constructions from the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as the 20th and 21st centuries. It is home to the region's more imposing heritage, richer and more visible, revealing greater «artistic will». Viticulture and the international trade of wine are the cause and effect of buildings of an accentuated architectural quality, both in the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as today.

The old settlements, founded in the Middle Ages, show a taste of the Baroque in manor or noble houses, the parish churches and chapels, the fountains, crosses and *via sacra*. It is in the wealth of the churches' interiors especially that the Baroque stands out. Elevated with imagery and retables in gilded woodcarvings, the elaborateness and decorative detail of the interior contrast vividly with the exterior, which is often quite modest.

¹² ALMEIDA, 1998: 10-17.

This heritage remains alive due to its use in the present, with rituals of devotion and new collective celebrations, the dynamics of viticulture and winegrowing supported by modernised facilities of attentive architectural design, and a keen awareness for the value of the heritage of the past in contemporary life and the region's international projection and that of its products. Thus, the council of Sabrosa is today highly sought-after by those who wish to discover the Alto Douro Wine Region in the present and past.

Wine Production

The cultivation of wine and of other products typical of the Mediterranean gastronomic culture found expression with the Romanisation of this region. It is proven archaeologically that vines already existed at least since the 3rd millennium B.C. when the Romans settled in the Douro Valley. Although the grape seeds found in various excavations are not proof of the transformation process of grapes into wine, they do prove that vineyards and grapes did exist in this region¹³. The extension of vineyards or where they were planted across the territory is still unknown. The cultivation of vines and the transformation of their fruit into wine were boosted during Roman times. This is shown in the various archaeological findings over time, for example, the various ruins of wine-related facilities such as wine-presses, and also ceramic fragments of containers used for storing wine¹⁴.

THE EXHIBITION AT THE GOOGLE ARTS & CULTURE: CHALLENGES AND RESULTS

The creation of virtual exhibitions¹⁵, as projects that congregate research processes, resulted in enriching pedagogical experiences for the students, who authored the images and texts. The students were imbued with the significance and the pertinence of the contents that were to be presented, the need to direct their discourses, regardless of the vehicle that delivered the message, by selecting and communicating a way of seeing the object, that is, the narrative.

For the teachers, the project became an exploratory tool for research methodologies applied to a collective project, based on what is known as «Learning by doing»¹⁶. The responsibility to coordinate the project was assigned to the teachers of the Project Seminar I and II curricular units, which in the case of Sabrosa involved additional curricular units. The scientific commission ultimately involved the entire faculty of the MA in Portuguese History of Art. In order to incorporate the exhibition design in the curricular context, we decided to: 1) include the global project in the curricular unit program,

¹³ ALMEIDA, 2006: 370-372.

¹⁴ ALMEIDA, 2006: 372-373, 375.

¹⁵ BOTELHO *et al.*, 2017.

¹⁶ WINN, 1995.

developing the concept of the virtual exhibition in Project Seminar I and its construction and dissemination in Project Seminar II; 2) assume the project as a mandatory evaluation component, with a weight corresponding to 30% of the final grade, in order to increase the output and stimulate student participation. The adopted methodology was adjusted to the goals defined for each curricular unit.

It is important to note that the high number of students involved, with different levels of motivation, posed challenges in terms of coordination, more so as their activities were taken into account in the evaluation process, demanding more from both parts. Where teachers are concerned, the exploratory nature of the project, the responsibility to carry out what had been agreed with Google Arts & Culture and the pressure imposed by the intended impact/visibility were, most certainly, significant challenges that directly influenced every decision in terms of exhibition curatorship.

Also to be considered was the challenge posed by the size and scale of the territory under study, its distance from Oporto (159 km) and the absence of surveys and reference studies on the council of Sabrosa. All of this increased the effort involved in the research work, as did its exploratory and unprecedented character. Notwithstanding, we need to stress the coherence of the obtained results and the continuity of the investigation process, which roused the inclination of a number of students towards this field of scientific research. Some of them have continued to study this territory in their theses and internship reports.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on different starting points, the *Sabrosa: Territory and Heritage* exhibition extends an invitation to visit the council of Sabrosa, offering a glimpse of a certain aspect of the landscape or heritage element. The exhibition focuses on the landscape, feeling the spirit of place and its quality. This approach tried to capture, by visual means, the ambiance provided by the integration of architectures in the wine region or urbanized landscape. The scale used is sometimes altered — sometimes dramatically — because the ADWR demands it so. Moreover, *Sabrosa: Territory and Heritage* is an exhibition that, based on the quality and the spirit of place, is observed and discovered by walking its paths, by visiting different agglomerations and farms, something that an isolated or static image would be incapable of encompassing.

Instead of merely attesting to the possibility of creating heritage diffusion products within a pedagogical context, as a learning experience involving several investigation methods, this project ultimately stood out as a heritage diffusion product itself, capable of reaching a global audience on the Google Arts & Culture platform. We believe we were able to captivate different audiences and to effectively transmit knowledge concerning the Heritage and the Landscape of the Sabrosa council, as part of the World Heritage List. We adopted a digital communication method, focused on heritage, showing that it

«should be oriented towards the capacity to change ways and approaches of learning»¹⁷. A digital tool is, by nature, more dynamic and, consequently, more appealing.

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¹⁷ FORTE, [s.d.].