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6 Storytelling and online media as narrative practices for engaging with the Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL)

The case study of Porto, Portugal

Ana Rita Albuquerque, Maria Leonor Botelho and Dominique Crozat

Introduction

Over the last two decades, Porto (Portugal) has undergone a deep rehabilitation of its urban buildings and public spaces, accompanied by demographic transformations and a profound change in the ways of experiencing the city. The UNESCO label in 1996 and the designation of Porto as 2001 European Capital of Culture opened a new phase in the urban rehabilitation process (Antunes 2019). More recently and until early 2020, Porto has experienced an increase in tourist flows. In 2019, the number of non-resident tourist arrivals in Portugal reached 24.6 million, 7.9 per cent more than in 2018 (INE 2020).

Social changes, the rise of gentrification, touristification, and real estate pressures have posed significant threats to the idealised image of Porto as both historic and contemporary city. The preservation of urban heritage is no longer focused solely on the protection of material and historical assets, but also on the management of transformations taking place in the urban landscape (Bandarin and Van Oers, 2012; 2014; Ginzarly, Pereira Roders, and Teller, 2019).

The UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (hereafter HUL) is a heritage management tool providing guidelines for heritage and landscape management in an urban context, in every city, not necessarily only on those that have World Heritage (WH) properties. It was established in the Vienna Memorandum (UNESCO, 2005) and was officially adopted in November 2011.

The Recommendation defines the HUL and distinguishes heritage attributes and values:

The historic urban landscape is the urban area understood as the result of a historical layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historical centre” or “ensemble” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting.

The attributes refer to both intangible and tangible heritage that is preserved, while the values concern the motivations and why the heritage resource needs to be protected (UNESCO, 2011).

Following the UNESCO Recommendation, it is crucial to develop accurate, both bottom-up and top-down, tools and methods to identify HUL attributes and values, and to understand the complex cultural, visual, spatial, and urban system of meanings, experiences, and interactions.

Porto is a relevant case for exploring the HUL approach, not only because it is a multi-layered urban settlement in a dynamic landscape, but also due to its own urban conservation history (Ferreira and Silva, 2019). The city's Historic Centre was the stage of one of the pioneer studies on urban conservation in Portugal. The "*Estudo de Renovação Urbana da Ribeira Barredo*" (Távora, 1969) is a multidisciplinary and integrated study including urban, architectonic, physical, and human elements, as well as the legal framework and policies proposals. The idea behind this work "to continue innovating" connects with today's urban rehabilitation programmes and the objective of HUL approach 50 years later (Ferreira and Silva, 2019).

Since 1996, the historic centre of Porto has been included in the World Heritage List. This property has a perimeter of 51 hectares and a buffer zone of 186 hectares (UNESCO, 1996). The elements that determine the extent of this perimeter are linked to the Douro River and the medieval layout of the town (Loza, 2000; ICOMOS, 2018).

The role of social media for the implementation of the HUL approach just recently started to draw attention (Ginzarly, Pereira Roders, and Teller, 2018; Van der Hoeven, 2019, 2020). Urban-oriented social media platforms, as well as individual accounts or profiles, contain a wide range of memories, information, historic audio-visual material, and stories related to the heritage and urban past and present. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the generalization of social media to tell stories has increased. It also changed our perception of space and time and our landscape experience.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the role of storytelling and social media in the engagement of the inhabitants with the urban landscape and in the awakening of Porto's heritage as a resource. Therefore, we pose the following research questions: how does storytelling constitute our experience of urban landscapes? How is it used to legitimise what to preserve and transmit to future generations?

This chapter is structured as follows. First, we present the theoretical framework drawn upon literature from the field of cultural geography and heritage studies, as well as digital ethnography and urban conservation. Second, we discuss the methodological approach. Third, we present the research findings by defining heritage categories, situating attributes, and identifying social and affective values, and the significance attached to the urban landscape.

Theoretical framework

Storytelling in heritage landscape studies

New approaches to storytelling have been explored and proposed in heritage landscapes. Geographers have conceived concepts of narrative and storytelling as part of a relational and material turn within the discipline and of non-representational and (post)phenomenological theory (Thrift, 2008; Daniels and Lorimer, 2012; Burlingame, 2020). Davis (2011) provides an environmental history conciliating different landscapes representations from both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Daniels and Lorimer (2012) offered a synopsis of landscape as “a narrative medium” and the impact in reconstructing some key geographical concepts such as landscape. Mossberg (2008) and Moscardo (2020) formulated the relation between creating unique stories, experience, and tourism. More than a *narrative turn*, they talk about the importance of a story *turn*.

Storytelling is also relevant in the production of urban narratives, as highlighted by urban studies (Goldstein et al., 2015). Narrative is an essential element in the formulation of urban systems and in the understanding of transformative change.

Applied to the specific study of HUL, we recall the work of Van der Hoeven (2019; 2020) in the field of media and communications studies about how people engage with urban heritage through participatory heritage websites. Nevertheless, in his work the spatial dimension is less addressed, and he fails to assess how it can be integrated in heritage policies.

In the context of the present chapter, we use the terms story and narrative interchangeably. Three dimensions can be highlighted. The first dimension is the spatial one. Narrative does not exist without spatiality of the characters that “anchor” the narrative and set them in scene (Certeau, 1990 [1980]). Then we have the narrative experience, attached to the temporal dimension that deals with shared experiences of space (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 17). The third dimension is about the performative function of these narratives and upholds the “layers of lived experiences” through body postures, movements, and juxtaposition of spaces: presence, co-presence, and absence.

Heritage “from below” through the lens of storytelling, co-presence, and lived experience

Heritage “from below” (HFB) is often simply addressed as a counter-narrative of what constitutes one’s heritage. These counter-narratives are particularly useful in revealing the partiality and selectivity of official versions of the past or in representing counter-sites that the “authorised heritage discourses” (AHD) (Smith, 2006) excluded or forgot (Robertson, 2016). There is a tendency in the literature to romanticise alternative heritage formulations, as subservient to dominant official discourses, driven by only selected grassroots (Muzaini and Minca, 2018).

Drawing on “critical heritage studies” (Winter, 2013), in this chapter we adopt a definition of heritage “from below” (Robertson, 2016) applied to cases where individuals and groups manifest alternative or forgotten types of heritage attributes and values, thus problematising the ways the past and present are engaged. We argue that HFB and AHD should not necessarily be seen as antithetical but possibly complementary to one another.

The concept of co-presence means the online and offline engagement, the mutual interweaving of sense perception, emotions, and materiality in the construction and articulation of space, place, identity, and knowledge (Hjorth et al., 2017). Storytelling and social media are also means to structure perception and contribute to the new (post)phenomenology approach. They constitute a space of flow in which the values participate in the redefinition of the materiality and in the redistribution of the sensible (Thrift, 2008, p. 46). Co-presence can also occur without sharing the same physical space, as long as the actors share a mutual perception.

Methodology

The methodology employed in our work is combining digital ethnography (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Hjorth et al., 2017; Hine, 2020), photography analysis, observation, and information gathering in situ (semi-structured interviews and institutional data).

For the visual documents analysis, we have drawn upon the work of Gillian Rose on visual methodologies about the dimensions and modes of interpretation applied to the field of urban, geographical and heritage studies (Rose, 2016).

Our paper is based on a fieldwork that took place in two main phases between 2018 and 2020. Parallel to the systematic analysis of 35 Facebook and Instagram accounts and pages from Porto locals, we carried out semi-directive interviews divided into three parts: general social media and digital behaviours; images and representations of the city and heritage; online behaviours and offline practices connected to the urban and heritage fabric.

The selection of the inhabitants’ social media accounts was done in two steps. First, they were chosen to follow three criteria: place of residence (Greater Porto), belonging to the 25–45 age group, and active presence on social networks. Two techniques were used to refine the selection: the use of one of the three hashtags #Porto, #portoponto, #cidadedoPorto and/or the methodological sampling technique called the “snowball effect”, where the people selected for the study propose new participants from their network of friends and acquaintances.

Data analysis

The interview was composed of 30 questions. There were 15 questions with direct answers. The open answers invited interviewers to react to different

statements about the current heritage-making processes, urban transformation, and its impacts in Porto (touristification, real estate pressures, housing rights and gentrification).

Interviewers were asked to choose two to four of their own social media photos of Porto and its heritage. They had to describe the images and justify their choices. When developing their arguments, they used personal memories and factual descriptions of the place or element. For the interviewers, the photographs often serve as a support to the discourse, but they also have a force all by themselves and allow them to think of the image as a social fact. We collected 90 photos that allowed us to specify and detail the relationship of the inhabitants with the city and their heritage, the way they feel and practice space, and finally the opportunity to speak about their representations in order to capture the collective narrative on urban heritage. Almost all of these photos were taken with mobile phones when the interviewers were walking between their homes and work, or just randomly around the city.

Data was further analysed considering the spatial distribution and localisation of the city regarding WH property: inside the limits, buffer zone, city centre (downtown), or other parishes (mainly oriental zone).

We used a thematic analysis to identify the kind of heritage preserved or not preserved (attributes) and the significance and meanings attached to it (values). Data was first organised into five heritage categories of attributes: built environment and public space; social-cultural elements and urban environments; cultural activities; intimate heritage; and heritage deprived of their status. For each category of attributes, interviewers assigned multiple values. We distinguish nine kinds of heritage values: aesthetical, historical, artistic, ecological, social, political, economic, scientific, and experiential. Data was organised to the frequency that each category of attributes was mentioned by the interviewers and identified in the photos.

The analysis of photos reveals additional information and highlights that are not detected through the analysis of geographical location or simply through the interviews. While some photos focus on a specific category of attributes (e.g., built environment), others have a broader scope by including several categories and multiple attributes.

To complete the analysis, tags were assessed automatically through a quantitative and a categorical analysis: it was meant to show the most and least used tags in the ensemble of the photos and to help identify tag patterns. We obtained information on how the users refer to the different assets and attributes of the HUL and give insights on how they value them and how they relate socio-cultural practices, meanings, and places.

Such qualitative research methods allow a detailed understanding of the ways in which people perceive and value heritage and provide us with information about the lived experience of Historical Urban Landscapes. Instead of the exclusive top-down approach, it enables the values and attributes to emerge and to be studied inductively.

Findings and discussion

Perceiving the landscape and locating data: attributes on their place

When asked about which heritage attributes were more representative of the city and what they wanted to preserve, all the interviewees initially answered the “whole city”, the “ensemble”, or the “urban landscape”. They addressed the HUL as a coherent whole. They perceive it as a dynamic and interconnected entity. They were not focusing on specific categories, but instead, they combined all dimensions and attributes as a whole.

As the interview progressed, more specific attributes were redefined, and they began to share the stories behind them. The results revealed that the most cited and photographed category of attributes is the built environment and public spaces (cited 85 times): urban landscape, waterfronts, the Douro River and its bridges, the main monuments of the city and its architectural details. Public spaces, such as gardens, squares and streets are also indicated. These attributes are for the most part located inside the limits of the WH property (26 per cent) or in the buffer zone or city centre (37 per cent).

Another important category of attributes cited was the socio-cultural elements and urban ambiance (cited 70 times). This goes beyond visual appearance and includes the character of the city and the social fabric, traditional crafts, street art, gastronomy, traditional shops, and local traditions connected to the festivities.

Inside this category, several important attributes were cited. Most are located between the buffer zone and the oriental part of the city. Interviewees cited the same number of issues and attributes as those located inside the WH property (26 per cent).

The *Calçada das Carquejeiras* was cited as an attribute of those two categories several times. This place (known as *Calçada da Corticeira* until 1992) is a long, steep climb of 220 metres located in the hillside in the *Fontainhas* district between the Douro River waterfront and the *Alameda das Fontainhas*.

This walk is visible from several places on both sides of the Douro River between the Ponte Dom Luís I bridge (550 metres away) and Ponte Infante Dom Henrique bridge. It depicts the story of a group of poor women of *carquejeiras* (gorse women) from the end of the 19th century until the early 20th century, who spent their days bent over carrying bunches of *carqueja*. This shrub-like plant was harvested in the Douro Valley and transported by boat to Porto. Then, these women would transport them from Ponte Dom Luís I bridge, to the bakeries and the stately homes located in the upper part of the city.

Today, this part of the city is characterised by a profound and rapid transformation of the escarpment and the development and creation of new tourist areas. Telling these stories sheds light on areas where heritage boundaries are challenged, and alternatives to dominant narratives can be articulated. These areas create spaces, in which heritage values are in permanent evolution and transformation. They reveal heterogeneity and diversity and provide a platform to rethink the HUL (Albuquerque and Botelho, 2019).

Telling the stories and co-presence: practices of remembering together

For me, the most representative place of Porto is the viewpoint of Fontainhas. When I was young, I used to come here to visit my grandmother. She told me stories about this place. We used to walk around and visit the abandon chapel and the vegetable gardens in the middle of the ruins.

(Interview, 2020)

Remembering this place means to know about the history and identity of the Porto urban landscape and rediscover a less tourist part of the city with strong industrial and fluvial ties. Through the attributes and stories, we obtained information regarding the factories, storage houses, and ruins of former economies and social activities of Porto (e.g., “ilhas” traditional social housing, the old ceramic factory of *Carvalhinho* from 1841 and the ruin of the *Senhor do Carvalhinho* Chapel).

The process of the reactivation of collective memories began in 2015 with the foundation of the civil organisation *Homenagem às Carquejeiras do Porto*.¹ This organisation allowed a greater recognition of the dignity of these characters, strangely forgotten by the institutional leaders, as well as by most of the inhabitants of the city of Porto. This allows for a multifaceted and general critique of both the historical narrative and modernity.

Today Porto faces strong development of new tourist areas; cultures and practices have emerged as a result of the visitor’s desire to go beyond the central districts, to experience the city and to interact with the local community.

Since the 2010s, visiting “ordinary” places has become common practice for visitors and residents alike (Maitland, 2007).

The tours offered by local associations in the oriental part of the city contribute as well to the collective urban narrative. Local organisations such as *The Worst Tours* (2012) and *Slow Motion Tours* (2015) stem from an alternative conception of tourism in Porto. These tours, set up during the economic crisis that shook Portugal and other countries (2008), propose practices such as urban walking combined with photography and walking debates. They offer a collective and shared experience of the urban landscape, representing a shift from passive contemplation to social exchange and tourism as an act of citizenship and active participation (Istasse, 2017).

Through their guided tours, we discover places beyond the historic centre, but also through the walking debates, we have access to information about the austerity measures imposed by the Troika² and their perverse effects, the impact of tourism in the local economy and its repercussions, the similarities and differences with other European cities, and potential solutions for the problems presented.

These tours are important tools for mediation, initiating a conversation, and recounting experiences in the city. The interactive walking stimulates the exchange of very personal experiences between participants. All the photos and other materials are shared in the social media groups or pages from the organisations where they continue to interact after the visit ends.

The photos capture the contemporary and quick transformations of the urban fabric, but also different points of view of the different layers of the landscape. Subsequently, posting on social media enables urban and heritage information that might otherwise remain unknown to be shared. These practices enhance public knowledge of Historic Urban Landscapes on a daily basis.

Identifying values through storytelling and lived experiences

Storytelling enables people to express their attachments. This ties in with the objectives of the HUL approach. The HUL Recommendation calls for civic engagement tools that facilitate dialogues between people about the key values in their urban areas (Article 24, UNESCO, 2011). Storytelling and social media are relevant because they make the affective and social values associated with historical heritage emerge, through the account of daily practice, personal and intimate experiences, individual and collective memories and feelings. Storytelling practices invite citizens to actively engage with urban heritage in virtual spaces. In this way, urban residents who might otherwise not physically meet are brought together in the virtual space, facilitating practices of remembering together.

We distinguish the categories of experiential, social, and affective values. These different categories are not exclusively tied to specific heritage attributes. One heritage attribute or category of attributes can have multiple values attached to it. No matter which category of attributes were cited by the interviewees, we noticed a high level of the ensemble's presence in these three categories of values.

By social value we consider a collective attachment to the place that embodies meanings and values that are important to a community, or communities, providing a basis for a sense of belonging and social interaction (Jones, 2017).



Figure 6.1. Screenshot of one of the interviewer's Instagram account: Corticeira street, transversal to the Calçada das Carquejeiras

When I took this picture, several feelings came to my mind. I saw the two bridges, the ruined landscape, I remembered the stories of these women. When I climbed this *calçada*, I thought of these women. When I got to the top, I saw a whole stunning landscape, my beautiful city. I am always proud to make part of this community, of this city.

(Interview, 2020)

This quotation illustrates the sense of pride and belonging is very strong. When interviewers were asked to choose a photo that for them represents the heritage and the urban landscape, they always revealed their sense of affection and nostalgia. The personal perspective and the experience of the landscape implies a reflection on whether the cities have changed for the better or worse. It's not just merely a personal perspective, it concerns collective meanings and social relationships between the local community members, place, and time.

When expressing their feelings, interviewers do not focus on specific categories; instead, they blend and combine them. Through the tags in the photos, we also obtain important information regarding the attribute and its location, but also the city's history and how different layers are interconnected. The results show how key words differ from one area to another within the city. The interviewers use terms about the location and temporalities, but mostly also about feelings and emotions (e.g., #authentic, #happiness, #emotional, #beautiful).

The tags express the interaction between the interviewers, the environment, and the attributes that impact their landscape perception. These tags include users' own vocabulary and reflect daily life practices or expressions (e.g., "cityscape"; "daily life") and sometimes concern conflictual values in relation to the landscape, the social fabric, or the social and economic conditions (e.g., "the worst tour ever"; "multi-layer collage").

The tags, the images, and the quotations reveal how people relate urban heritage to their own lives and how individuals experience certain events and places. This experiential value (Van der Hoeven, 2020) captures the personal significance attached to urban landscape and heritage, through memories, emotions, and opinions.

Social, affective, and experiential values contribute to our understanding of how cities have evolved. Engaging with the urban landscape cannot be separated from the historical value. These values support filling knowledge and historical gaps, uncovering the multiple layers associated with the urban landscapes, and document emotions and affects.

Conclusion

Heritage practitioners and policymakers often regard social, affective, and experiential values expressed by contemporary communities as more ephemeral than historic, scientific, economic, and aesthetic values. Also, the means for evaluating historic, scientific, and aesthetic values have been established for a long time. Therefore, storytelling combined with lived experience and co-presence

might be useful to reach a consensus on the identification of the heritage attributes and values to preserve. It is important to work closely with institutional and academic actors, recognising the need to diversify the criteria and to incorporate it into the digital inventories, databases, and master plans.

The methodology applied improves our understanding of people engagement and the context of exceptional and everyday urban landscape. Results highlighted areas where heritage boundaries are challenged and alternatives to the AHD can be articulated and complementary. Storytelling plays a significant role in the development of new tourist practices, combining urban walking, photography, and social media (Robinson and Picard, 2009). The heritage attributes identified reveal predominately affective, social, and experiential values. Further research is required to combine with the visitors' perspectives and to make comparisons between residents' and visitors' stories and representations.

Opening up heritage to new groups, restructuring the dynamics between actors, the possibility of a more democratic engagement with the past and history (Adair, Filene, and Koloski, 2011), and finally the possibility of creating more participatory heritage and sustainable tourist organisations (possibility of exchanging information in a more fluid way, creation of consultation spaces, etc.) constitute a way forward, that could be integrated into the broader heritage practice.

In this sense another form of engagement is possible by creating complementary pathways to heritage representation that move away from a binary opposition between "real objects" and their digital representations, but rather explores the possibilities of a model of urban landscape engagement.

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Notes

- 1 <https://it-it.facebook.com/carquejeirasdoporto> (accessed 20 July 2021).
- 2 The Troika (2010) was constituted by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, being responsible for auditing the economic situation of Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus during and after the economic crisis of 2008.

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