

Festivities and Sustainable Development in Baixo Alentejo (Portugal)

Dulce Simões
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

In recent decades we have seen the emergence of festive inventions as a factor of sustainable development in rural contexts, associated with the dissemination and promotion of cultural products and practices, expressing different motivations. In Portugal and Spain, the relationship between festivals, music, and sustainable development was the object of study, based on musical celebrations that allow the creation of formal networks and participatory models between cultural agents, musicians, and community members. With this text I intend to question the phenomenon of the festive invention in the Baixo Alentejo (Portugal) as a strategy of sustainable development, focusing on the Islamic Festival of Mértola and the “Noche Flamenca” of Barrancos, taking into account the motivations and impact of organized parties and promoted by municipalities and cultural agents, in the construction of possible futures.

Keywords: festivals, sustainable development, cultural heritage, cross-border relations, Portuguese-Spanish streak

FESTIVE INVENTION AS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

In the last decade, studies have emerged that have seen the growing number of festivals and festivities as a factor in sustainable development in rural contexts. One may mention: Gertz (2007 and 2010), Ali-Knight *et al.* (2009), Costa (2012), Gibson and Connell (2012), Jepson and Clark (2015), Moreno Fernández (2015), Brás (2016). The studies are guided by three major discourses of knowledge production: (1) the discourse of anthropology and sociology, referring to social roles and meanings, of festivities impact on the life of communities; (2) the economic discourse, dominated by the value of the influence on tourism, which gave rise to considerable reflection and critical content of the clear marketization of these events; and, (3) the business discourse, focused on the management of events (human resources, risks, logistics, and marketing), which ignores the socio-cultural reasons for the emergence of new festivities (Gertz 2010). Authors such as Gibson and Connell (2012) consider festivals important factors of social and economic revitalization, in the development of places where productive resources are scarce (2012: 201). However, the analysis of festive invention in rural contexts must be based on approaches that question the power of global capitalism and its impact on the lives of communities. This implies a close look at the transformations of the rural world, derived from “late capitalism”/neoliberalism (Comaroff & Comaroff (2001), Harvey (2007), Ortner (2011)) and its implications in culture, which requires “the use of understanding the currents of force inherent in capitalist reproduction, as well as the trends that underscore everyday experiences” (Godinho 2017: 77). As David Harvey (2007) points out, transformations in agriculture, with the progressive depletion of common goods and the degradation of habitats that exclude all forms of agricultural production distinct from the capitalist intensive system, is translated into the marketization of

nature in all its forms (2007: 176). In this context, the market for natural heritage and culture, such as spectacle and leisure, as well as the exploitation of authenticity and popular creativity, presupposes assigning a price to things that were never produced as commodities, according to Harvey (2007: 182).

The central problem relates to the beneficiaries of a process that leads to the disarticulation of a value system, which transforms the “endogenous resources” of each region into goods transmarketable at a global level, according to the logic of sustainable development. The term “sustainable¹”, when used to define human actions and activities that aim to meet the subsistence needs of the populations without compromising the future of generations to come, generated a unanimousness and an almost global consensus². However, the relationship between economic growth and sustainability represents a contradiction, because the objective of sustainability is incompatible with a global capitalist system directed towards cultural homogenization and environmental destruction (Norgaard 1997). As Barkin (2002) points out “the question is whether in underdeveloped regions the various population groups continue to live and in what way” (2002: 185), because sustainability is not only related to environmental protection or social justice, but the survival of peoples and their cultures. The problem can be formulated from the report of the UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development (1997), in which the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins placed the following question:

Is culture an aspect or an instrument of development, understood in the sense of material progress, or is it the objective or purpose of development, understood in the sense of human life in its many forms and its entirety? (UNESCO 1997: 15).

Sahlins’ question is pertinent, especially in regions where cultural heritage is placed at the service of the “industry and tourism”, which presents itself as the central axis of “sustainable development” in peripheral countries (Moreno 2002). According to some authors, tourism does not represent a route of economic development “but a path that leads to the perpetuation of socio-economic and cultural dependence, and ultimately, to underdevelopment” as said by Hernández-Ramírez (2015: 5), based on studies that question the marketization of local culture at the service of the desires of tourists. This implies, in his view, that the existing economic and cultural resources, and others that can be recreated and invented, “are transformed into products for consumption, destined to the global market that annihilates local culture” (2015: 8). Currently, it is impossible to ignore the repercussions of the values transmitted by the industry’s culture and tourism, arising from the coexistence of tradition and modernity, due to the economic and social differences at a global level (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). In addition, there is a tendency to associate development with economic growth, which is based on patterns of consumption and to forget human development “which is the one that places people at the centre and makes them protagonists of their development process, based on a human rights approach” (Millán Acevedo 2014: 673). Indeed, the market for cultural heritage (Lowenthal 1998, Choay 2001, Jeudy 2008), which finds sustainable disengagement in rural contexts, corresponds to the demands of the market according to two complementary perspectives: cultural globalization and cultural heterogeneity cultivated by reference to localized identities (Jeudy 2008).

European programs to stimulate cooperation between peripheral regions of the European Union, such as INTERREG, financed by the European Regional Development Fund, include the enhancement of cultural and natural heritage as a support for the economic basis of the cross-border region.³ Supranational policies determine the priority axes of a mercantile logic of “sustainable development”, in the exploitation of natural, material and non-material resources at the service of tourism and leisure.⁴ But they are the Regional Tourism Authority of Alentejo and Ribatejo, the Association of Municipalities of The Baixo Alentejo and Alentejo Litoral – Intermunicipal Community of Baixo Alentejo, and the municipalities, the main agents of local and regional development. The festive invention in the Baixo Alentejo arises in a context of patrimonialization and touristification, and can be observed as a strategy for the economic growth of municipalities, through the creation of places imagined as attractive cultural and tourist destinations.⁵ In the line of Prista (2013) it is necessary to think of tourism as a construction of a sense of place, because social perceptions about heritage and tourism merge with representations of the past that attribute visibility to processes of construction of tradition in the cultural and social diversity of the place, as we will see in

the case of the Islamic Festival of Mértola. In this sense, the phenomenon of the festive invention can only be understood in its local specificity, taking into account the “dialectic between the abstract and the formal, the tangible and the informal, the universal and the specific, the deterritorialized and the territorialized”, as Eriksen suggests (2016: 207).

For this purpose, I analyze the 9th edition of the Islamic Festival of Mértola (celebrated in 2017) and the 15th “Noche Flamenca” of Barrancos, from an intensive and extensive ethnography carried out in the last decade in the Baixo Alentejo, tending to the particularities of the socio-economic, cultural and territorial context of the space in which they are registered, and to the practices of their organizers. Ethnography shows us that people live in worlds with cultural meanings and in different material circumstances, which allow us to problematize, for example, how European regional development policies are applied in local contexts. This means that people understand and act on the processes of touristification and marketization of culture in different ways. In particular, depending on the cultural materials at their disposal, the social positions they occupy in their place of belonging, the characteristics of that place, and the position it occupies at regional, national, and international levels. From these arguments, I question the phenomenon of the festive invention in the Baixo Alentejo as a strategy of sustainable development, taking into account the motivations and impact of parties organized and promoted by municipalities and cultural agents, in the construction of possible futures.

**FIGURE 1
STUDY AREA DEMARCATED BY THE AUTHOR ON THE PORTUGAL /SPAIN MAP OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



**FIGURE 2
STUDY AREA DEMARCATED BY THE AUTHOR ON THE PORTUGAL /SPAIN MAP OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE BAIXO ALENTEJO STREAK

The Raiana populations of the Baixo Alentejo (Portugal) shared with the Spanish neighbours of Extremadura and Andalusia a similar historical process, marked by political, socio-economic, and cultural conditions, to which contributed the Arab influence on the peninsula, the Christian reconquest, the repopulation by the intervention of the military and religious orders, the pastoral life system and agriculture as the main economic activities (Medina García 2006). In the 20th century, the policy of deamortizations concentrated properties in a restricted social group on both sides of the border, which favoured agricultural underdevelopment and social asymmetries (Barros 1980, Cutileiro 2004). In the past, before the migration flows of the 1960s and the “decline of agriculture”, analyzed by Baptista (1996), the subalternate classes complemented the economic subsistence in agriculture with smuggling, as shown by the studies of several authors.⁶ This activity consolidated relations of economic interdependence, which united the two sides of the border in a culture of resistance to the Iberian states (Cairo Caro *et al.* 2009, Godinho 2011, Simões 2013).⁷ With the membership of Portugal and Spain to the EEC (1986) and the “Schengen Europe” (1992), the life of the Raiana populations has undergone profound changes due to the loss of the “traditional geologic and geo-economic functionality” (Podadera Rivera and Calderón Vázquez 2014: 25), based on formal and informal exchanges, which consolidated relations of economic interdependence.

Since the Maastricht Treaty (1992), tourism has been officially recognized as one of the fundamental axes of development in Europe's rural peripheries, among which are the border areas of the Iberian states. The development of tourism would be linked to the promotion of regional awareness and would reflect the ambition to promote integration through the internal borders of the European Union (Prokkola 2007: 124). Europe's regional policy, especially the INTERREG cross-border cooperation program, the process of institutionalization of border areas, and their projection as areas of economic opportunity have made the Spanish border a disjointed, heterogeneous, and diverse area.

El espacio de cooperación transfronteriza de España y Portugal is characterized by tener una relative debilidad demográfica, expresada territorialmente en bajas densidades de población (40 hab./km), un mayor grado de envejecimiento y bajos índices de accesibilidad por carretera y por ferrocarril, que le confieren un claro carácter rural. (...) Todo ello convierte al espacio de cooperación en un área de las menos desarrolladas de Europa, constatándose un claro predominio de NUTs 3 con un PIB por debajo del 75% de la media comunitaria (*Resumen del Diagnóstico Socioeconómico de la zona de Cooperación*, 2013: 1).

The ageing and desertification of the territory correspond to the disappearance of the collective memory of the groups, associated with practices of culture, to which the political powers counteract patrimonialism and touristified social memory at the service of local development. The questions that arise, about a region in transformation, are multiple. What is certain is that the disappearance of the political frontier does not correspond to the disappearance of the cultural frontier, which is increasingly acquiring new meanings. In the tour guide *Roteiros do Baixo Guadiana* the border represents a new territorial perspective, “framed in community programs that are allowing the creation of a territorial identity between the three regions that integrate the Baixo Guadiana, Algarve, Baixo Alentejo, and Andalusia” (*Roteiros do Baixo Guadiana* 2013: 8). The space recreated and substantialized by material heritage, natural and immaterial, obeys an institutional discourse oriented towards a joint tourist strategy, seduced by “nostalgia that clings to a world to disappear” (Certeau 1996: 190), at the service of “cultural tourism” (Choay 2001).

The populations live in a time of “festive revitalization” (Boissevain 1992), with “inventions of traditions” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) by municipalities and cultural agents who try to resist the phenomenon illustrated by the demographics and socio-economic diagnoses of the European Union.⁸ In actuality, the Luso-Spanish border represents a space recreated by the new “tourist mythology” and by the flows of people (tourists and excursionists) that turn it into a space of fun. In this context, local agents reinvent and reaffirm identities (Castells 1998), and “produce fictions of their own” (Pais de Brito 2006) to

attract outsiders and translate into a competitive image with other places, to combat the cultural displacement associated with the globalizing process (Gibson and Connell 2012). The festive invention, based on products and cultural practices, transform political borders into “tourist products”, as some authors suggest (Leizaola 2006, Silva 2007, Cunha 2010, Rovisco 2011, Godinho 2011 and 2012). In the case of the Gallic-Portuguese streak, Paula Godinho (2014) points out that the Raian municipalities have replaced “the informal networks of the past” with models of cooperation that “update the place of the border” (2014: 197). Susana Moreno Fernández (2015), in her study on festivals in the north eastern transmontana border area, points out that “these are initiatives that contribute to the development of rural tourism and ecotourism, as a viable option for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.” (2015: 10).

The municipalities of Baixo Alentejo are the main local employers and are struggling with structural problems, including unemployment and desertification. Since 2011 they took multiple actions in the area of social support to the populations, which are not within their competence, but of the State.⁹ Mainly in the provision of meals, transport, support in medicines, and incomes, to the unemployed, the elderly, children, and disabled (*The ANMP and the current situation of the local government in Portugal* 2012: 1). Most households depend on precarious jobs in services, agriculture and livestock, temporary contracts abroad, pensions, social inclusion allowances and income stemming from emigration savings.

FIGURE 3
STATISTICAL DADOS OF THE RAIANOS MUNICIPALITIES OF BAIXO ALENTEJO (2019).

Municipalities	Moura	Barrancos	Serpa	Mértola
Surface in km ²	958,5	168,4	1 105,6	1 292,9
Resident population	13. 734	1.640	14.339	6.172
Unemployed registered at the job center (% of pop.)	11%	9%	7%	6%
Pensioners of Social Security (% of pop.)	45 %	44 %	46 %	59 %
Number beneficiaries of RSI	1.396	80	707	155
Municipal revenues (Thousands Euros)	14.748	4.556	15.250	14.641
Expenditure on culture and sport (%),	12,2%	12,9%	24%	10,2%

Source: PORDATA.¹⁰

The supranational programs for the development of Europe’s peripheral regions have led to the patrimonialisation and touristification of the Luso-Spanish border. The Raian municipalities reinvented themselves in a logic of tourist promotion and created fictions of themselves, expressed in slogans such as: “Moura - Encanto Natural, Encanto Interior”; “Barrancos - Terra Única”; “Serpa - Terra Forte” and “Mértola - Vila Museu”. The festivals also appeal to differentiated imaginaries and complement the offer, basically focused on: (1) on the dissemination of products (wine, cheese, bread, ham, sausages, and aromatic herbs), which are essential to local economic growth; (2) in approval of natural heritage (water and landscape); (3) re-affirmation of the heritage of the cultural (ethnographic and musical); (4) the re-creation of local, cross-border and transnational identifications.¹¹ All these components are part of the tourist offer, not yet as autonomous sectors of economic development, but as a unifying way of gathering resources, as is the case with the Islamic Festival of Mértola.

THE ISLAMIC FESTIVAL OF MÉRTOLA

In the wake of Donald Getz (2007) the festivals are thematic celebrations of a public nature, usually with annual periodicity, which bring people together around various objectives: fun; entertainment; sharing of knowledge and experience, to escape the daily routine and seek new experiences (2007: 31). The Islamic Festival of Mértola (of biennial periodicity) is part of the so-called “community festivals”, by planning to involve the community and celebrating its culture (Jepson and Clarke 2015: 3). Corresponds equally to the principles of community-based tourism, outlined by the heads of the municipality of Mértola as a

sustainable development strategy. Mértola is a Portuguese village, the seat of a municipality with 6,909 inhabitants and a population density of 5.3 people per km² (PRODATA 2013), belonging to the district of Beja, Alentejo region, sub-region of the Baixo Alentejo.¹² In a deserted, aged and economically disjointed rural context, one of the reasons for the regularity of festivities, according to the vice-president of the municipality, “is to promote local products and entities, which are essential for the economic dynamics of the municipality and for improving the quality of life of its inhabitants” (João Serrão Martins, Vice-President of the Municipality of Mértola, April 13, 2017).¹³

The invention of the Islamic Festival in 2001 was legitimized by archaeological studies of the Islamic legacy of the 12th century, developed in 1978 by a team of researchers coordinated by Cláudio Torres, at Campo Arqueológico de Mértola (CAM).¹⁴ For João Serrão Martins it is a structuring project, of the safeguard, valorization, and promotion of the cultural heritage of Islamic heritage, “based on a prolonged work of scientific research capable of promoting the encounter between different peoples, cultures, and creeds, and simultaneously an opportunity to develop municipality of Mértola” (João Serrão Martins, 13 April 2017). The festival is used in strategic partnerships established by the municipality and in the interdisciplinary team of CAM, constituted around the cultural heritage. The initial objective of the festival was to involve the community in the dissemination of the arts and knowledge that constitute the cultural heritage, as a strategy of the economic dynamic of the community base, that would attract visitors outside the logic of touristification (Cláudio Torres, director of CAM, 19 May 2017).¹⁵ Over the years the festival has gradually extracted itself as a tourist product, with a strong impact on the local and regional economy (João Serrão Martins, 13 April 2017). In 2015 he received the “Best Wind Award”, awarded annually by the Regional Tourism Authority of Alentejo and Ribatejo, for contributing to the tourism development of the region, by attracting and attracting the interest of thousands of national and foreign visitors.¹⁶

Recreating Cultural Spaces, Times, and Identities

The organization of the Islamic Festival is the responsibility of the Municipality of Mértola.¹⁷ Planning, programming, and assembly depend on the work of municipal officials, a collaboration between local partners (public and private), and consolidated indirect networks by municipal leaders with the Islamic Community of Granada (Andalusia), and the municipalities of El Granado (Huelva) and Chefchaouen (Morocco). Local partners (associations, companies, institutions, and populations) boost and exploit the potential of natural, cultural, and commercial spaces. According to João Serrão Martins, this is “a consensual event”, because it gathers the participation of local associations, music groups, schools, and the population. In this process stands out the role of individuals and groups, motivated by the enthusiasm to collaborate in an event that traffics the purely economic scope. Although the general objective is the tourist promotion of the village, the festival stimulates creativity, serving as a platform for the materialization of new ideas. One of the innovations of the 9th edition of the Festival was the creation of the portico installed in Largo Vasco da Gama, inspired, as well by all graphic materials, in the museological collection of ceramics of the Islamic period.

During the four days of the festival (celebrated between 18 and 21 May 2017), the village of Mértola reinvented itself as the western part of the Mediterranean, which reached the peak of its mercantile function during the Islamic period (12th century), according to a policy of Encontro de Culturas. In the process of the festive invention, the municipality found him in the Islamic Community of Granada (Andalusia) a fundamental partner, which contributes to the “authenticity” of the event in several areas. One of them is the market (*souk*), which urges side in the streets of the historic area, which symbolically transformed the space and daily life of the Alentejo village into a place that appeals to cultural diversity and exoticism. By bringing artisans and family groups, the Islamic Community of Granada collaborated and set out to create a family and communitarian ambience, anchored in cooperation and reciprocity. In the *souk*, we find more than a hundred exhibitors, local producers of honey, cheese, and bread, and various artisans from other places of Alentejo, Spain, and North Africa, who side by side share experiences and proceeds.¹⁸

FIGURE 4
ENTRY PORTAL TO THE MARKET (SOUK), LARGO VASCO DA GAMA



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, 2017

The cooperation between the municipality and the Islamic Community of Granada took place in the organization of various cultural activities. One of the most significant examples was the conference “Islam: it divine and human laws”, given by Ahmed Bermejo, Imam Jatib of the Greater Mosque of Granada. The conference, together with exhibition, literary, ritual and musical initiatives, contributes to the knowledge of Islamic culture and were “reasons of pride” for Jalid Nieto, Director of Communication of the Fundación Mezquita de Sevilla” (Guita 2017). On the other hand, the *slogan* “Mértola - Vila Museu” acquires particular meaning during the festival, for the doors of municipal museums, cultural associations, and some private houses to open up to outsiders, to disseminate and share the history, memories, sounds, and flavours that celebrate and exalt the culture of the people of the south, linked to the imaginary of the ancient Al-Andaluz. Visitors¹⁹ can enjoy accommodation and the gastronomic diversity provided by the hotel and restaurants, and the locals, in addition to boat trips along the Guadiana River, donkey rides, and hiking trails organized by associations and individuals. The public can visit free museums, photographic and fine arts exhibitions, attend documentary film sessions, *workshops*, book launches, conferences, and musical performances.

The music was always present, including at the opening ceremony of the festival that brought together representatives of Alentejo, Andalusia, and Moroccan municipalities and the Islamic Community of Granada. After the speeches related to the cultural significance of the event, symbolically reiterated by the inauguration of the sculpture “3 Cultures””, by the Alentejo artist Silvestre Raposo, we watched the performance “Dança Goblin e Coreosofia” by international dancers Michel Raji and Yumma Mudra²⁰. The music is one of the main attractions of the festival, in street animations, concerts, and shows that mix the sounds of traditional Alentejo and Maghreb music with rock, flamenco, and fado. The musical programming is planned so that there are no overlaps of shows, which will take place in different spaces. Artists are chosen in a logic of promotion of local musical groups, and interchange between Portuguese and foreign musicians. The partnership with the municipality of Chefchaouen (Morocco) ensures the participation of musical groups that allow the community and visitors to meet artists from the Maghreb, some with international routes.

The first show took place in Praça Luís de Camões, with the performance of Portuguese musicians Sebastião Antunes and Bruno Baptista (Lisbon), dedicated to the poetry of Omar Khayyam [Nichapur (Persia, actual Irão) 1048 - 1131], poet, mathematician and astronomer whose work served as the motto for the 9th edition of the festival.²¹ The show entertained music and dance with the poetics of the *Rubaiyat*,²² as cultural expressions that mediate between the past and the present. On the second night of the festival, the Alentejo musician Pedro Mestre, accompanied by the Rancho de Cantadores de Aldeia Nova de S. Bento, debuted the main stage with the sounds of the Alentejo singing, inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO.²³ On Saturday night, the show opened with the concert of Hamid Ajbar Sufi Ensemble (Morocco) and closes with the Nigerian group Kel Assouf. Anana Harouna, the founder of the Kel Assouf, was born in Agadèz (Nigeria) and participated in the first Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s (against the States of Mali and Nigeria), which aimed to claim the rights of the nomadic populations of the Sahara. Currently, Anana Harouna uses traditional Tuareg music woven by rock as an arm of protest, to translate the struggles of a people who remain on battlefields.

The Repercussions of a Meeting of Cultures

The socio-economic and cultural repercussions of the Islamic Festival are immeasurable, and there are no academic studies or municipal reports that determine them, despite the expectation of the president of the municipality pointing to 50,000 visitors.²⁴ The profitability of natural and cultural resources, collective participation, and the creation of “social capital” (Bourdieu 2001) are structuring elements, due to the ability to transform the event into a significant product for local development. The “social capital” is defined according to Bourdieu, as the sum of the resources accumulated by local agents, thanks to a network of stable relationships. In the article allocated to the launch of the 9th edition of the festival, published in the *Municipal Bulletin* we can read:

The City Council, the organizing entity, thanks all those who chose to visit Mértola on this occasion, to the residents, the nature of the municipality, and will work rivers that worked for the Islamic Festival to be a party and a moment of unique culture union. The City Council is already preparing the 10th edition of the Islamic Festival of Mértola, to take place in May 2019 (*Municipal Bulletin*, no. 45, July/2017, p.10).

For the people participating in this network, the most significant aspects of the festival are related to the identity affirmation of local culture, and the social interaction that the Islamic legacy of the past can proportionate in the present to the members of the respective communities. As Gibson and Connell (2012) point out, it is precisely in the rural context that the repercussions of the festivals are more evident and positive, because regardless of whether the economic results are not significant, it is likely that the residents themselves will benefit the most (2012: 201). Nídia Brás (2016), in the study on the Islamic Festival of 2015, reinforces this idea, concluding that there is “an approximation of peoples and an exchange of cultures, providing residents and visitors with unique experiences that contribute to their satisfaction” (Brás 2016: 108). In this sense, being idealized and materialized by cultural agents socially involved in the creation of a “significant past” (Williams 1977: 115-116) represents an intercultural community experience, based on festive sociability and cooperation.²⁵ Cooperation, as a structuring element, represents a strategy of mutual support, based on experience and collective participation. In the past, survival strategy configured a culture of resistance to Iberian states. In the present, it seems to become the axis of a “project identity” (Castells 1998: 34), when local agents, based on the cultural materials at their disposal, build a multi-cultural identity to define their position in the global world, and, in doing so, seek a path to development through “possible practices” (Godinho 2017).

RECREATING CROSS-BORDER RELATIONSHIPS: IMAGINARIES OF FLAMENCO

The Raianas populations of the Baixo Alentejo shared over time the sounds of flamenco in the festivals and pilgrimages of the Spanish neighbours, which still constitute spaces of sociability. With the so-called

traditional cultural practice, Flamenco was conformed by knowledge and performative expressions (Cruces Roldán 2012). In this way it is present, mixed with other more folkloric generic (sevilhanas), in multiple religious festivities, cattle fairs, and pilgrimages, such as Andalusian identity referent (Agudo & Moreno 2012). In actuality, the dance of Sevillanas attracts the younger generations of the Baixo Alentejo streak, mainly female, giving rise to a diversity of groups, shows, and performative experiences. The anatomical and physiological dimension of the dance, and its material practices, can be apprehended through structuring theoretical concepts, such as those of social class, ethnicity, gender, and sociability, principles that help us “to overcome the contemplation of dance as a mere evidence alien to the cultural processes that articulate its morphology”, as proposed by Cristina Cruces Roldán (2015: 76).

The first dance group was born in 2000, in Barrancos, the most peripheral municipality of Baixo Alentejo (Portugal).²⁶ In the 1990s, the municipality began the process of building a “significant past” (Williams, 1977), based on historic and cultural ties with the Spanish neighbours, a version that ratified the continuity of relationships based on solidarity and reciprocity (Simões, 2013). In the same decade, Daniela Carvalho (Barrancos, 1985) was part of the group of young people, aged between 12 and 13 years, who attended the classes of Sevillanas at the Integrated Basic School of Barrancos (EB1), taught by a teacher of History (from Lisbon) temporarily placed in Barrancos. Initially, the group consisted of ten girls who showed enthusiasm for the practice of the dance. The performances at local parties gave visibility to the group, which participated in diverse shows organized by the municipality and by the school. The transfer of the teacher led the young women to manifest, together with the vice-president of the municipality, the interest in perfecting the art of dance, whose referring identitarians corresponded to the “cultura Raiana” recommended by municipal policies. To satisfy the request, the local leaders triggered relations with the Spanish neighbours and hired the teacher and dancer Ana Castilla (Cortegana, 1972). The teacher had trained in Seville and Huelva and had returned to Cortegana to found her Escuela de Baile. The school created a teaching network in the villages of Sierra Aracena and Picos de Aroche (Huelva), but it was the work developed with the young from Barrancos that allowed us to extend the network of influence to the Alentejana Raianas villages, as we will see later.²⁷

In August of the year 2000, the “Alma Raiana” debuted publicly in the festivals of the village of Barrancos, with the name chosen by the godmother of the group, the vice president of the municipality. The group consisted of seven dancers, who danced Seville, rumbas, fandangos, joys, and pasodoble. In 2001 they organized the show “Noche Flamenca”, to provide the community with moments of conviviality and sociability through dance, innovating the performances. On the 14th of Maio of 2004, the young dancers created the association with the same name and the *blog* “O Cantinho das ‘Alma Raiana’”, to promote the art of the dance and promote the group²⁸. Between 2001 and 2009 participated in several shows from north to the south of Portugal, and in Spain. They worked at weddings, local parties, political shows, and television shows. Daniela Carvalho, one of the dancers of the group, who currently directs the Escola de Baile de Safara (Baixo Alentejo) recalled with emotion that “the success was so much, that until 2009, the year the group ended, the hiring did not stop” (Daniela Carvalho, October 4, 2015). The group ended because the young women left Barrancos to continue their studies and build their lives, as with all young people who do not find future alternatives in the rural environment. As Daniela recalled: “In the meantime, we have married, and some of us already have children. We are married to each one of each one we always did small performances, to remember the old days, in which our anthem before the performances was: one for all and all for one” (Daniela Carvalho, 4 October 2015). “Alma Raiana” was an emblematic group that represented Barrancos in institutional events, and regional, national, and cross-border parties. The success of the group aroused the interest of young women from neighboring localities, from Mourão (Alto Alentejo), Moura, Santo Aleixo da Restauração, Serpa, Amareleja and Póvoa de São Miguel (Baixo Alentejo)²⁹. Following the work developed by Ana Castilla that was born at the Municipal School of Dance de Barrancos, funded by the municipality and with free access.

The Municipal School of Dance currently has about thirty students of both genders, aged between six and nineteen years, and three dance groups: (1) “Zapatito de Tacón”, created in 2006 by six young females, between 14 and 16 years; (2) “Rumbo Flamenco”, created in 2009 by five young females and one male; (3) “Flemish”, which brings together students and students of the children’s class since 2013. These groups

participate in the important parties of the village and are invited to act in fairs and parties related to equestrian art or bullfighting on both sides of the border. In addition to these activities organized annually the musical celebration “Noche Flamenca”, a show that was instituted as a practice of the dance groups directed by Ana Castilla.

FIGURE 5
ESSAY AT THE SCHOOL MUNICIPAL OF DANCE DE BARRANCOS



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, 2015

The “Noche Flamenca”: “to Find the *Duende* There Is No Map”

The “Noche Flamenca” is a musical celebration of local enjoyment organized annually, the months of July to September, by each of the dance groups of the Portuguese and Spanish localities in which Ana Castilla develops teaching activities. The main objectives are: (1) to celebrate the end of the school year; (2) to share the technical and artistic experiences gained with the community and neighbouring dance groups; (3) to raise funds for the maintenance of the group's mainly wardrobe renovation. The organization of the festival results from the voluntary work of the members of the groups and family members, the logistical support of association local cultural actions, and the municipalities, with the coordination and artistic direction of Ana Castilla. The initiative of these collectives is valued in the communities and apoiada by the respective municipalities, as fundamental to cultural dynamics and human development (Alguacil Gómez 2005). Leadership comes from the intensity of commitment and the ability of younger generations to overcome everyday limitations and difficulties. The “Noche Flamenca” provides the group with fundraising, through the sale of numbered tickets (2 sevillanas=2€) that are drawn among the public. The winning number corresponds to one of the offers, which can be a sevillana dress, a liquid, or another prop. The sale of tickets lets us know that these shows have an audience that ranges between 800 and 1200 people, a public that is both Portuguese and Spanish.

The 15th edition of the “Noche Flamenca” of Barrancos took place in the Municipal Fairs and Exhibition Park, on the first Saturday of August 2015, with the logistical support of the municipality and the Party Commission. The visitors explored the bar of the enclosure, whose recipes reverted to the Village Festival, in honour of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (which takes place on the last weekend of August). In total, 980 tickets were sold, but people have far surpassed this number. The public was built by family and friends who accompanied the invited groups, by representatives of the municipality, and by the local

community, which gives the feasts intergenerational congeniality. The vice-president of the municipality is an assiduous figure in these events and intervened publicly, to reiterate the municipal support for a performative practice that “represents for the barranquenhos an identity referent of raiana culture” (Isabel Sabino, August 2015).

All the intervening groups participated in the opening of the show, a practice common to these musical celebrations. The children's group dance on stage, while the remaining groups walk through the venue space, dancing among the audience, filling the atmosphere with colour, movement, and festive exuberance. The teacher Ana Castilla took the stage to present the spectacle and announce each of the participating groups, which presented affectionately at the end of each exhibition. Ana Castilla also participated in all the performances of the groups that directed, establishing a permanent relationship of complicity. More than 100 dancers from Alentejo and Ribatejo (Portugal), Extremadura, and Andalusia (Spain), represent generations and presented several levels of learning and performing genres.³⁰ The invited groups were offered a *buffet*, and a reminder of the gracious participation, in an exchange founded on user-friendliness and reciprocity. This means that the participating groups must thank the invitation, according to Marcel Mauss's “gift theory” (2001), based on the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate.

FIGURE 6
OPENING OF THE 15TH EDITION OF “NOCHE FLAMENCA” BY BARRANCOS



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, 2015

The audience was infected by the rhythms of rumbas, bulerías, alegrías, pasodoble, and reggaeton, which contributed to effective collective participation, with people vibrating, clapping, and encouraging the participating groups. The children danced, encouraged by their parents, or ravished by the rhythm of the recorded music, in front of the stage, imitating the gestures and steps of the dancers, their friends, neighbours, or family members. After the performance of the dance groups, the flamenco groups “Calle Sierpes” by Encinasola (Huelva) and “Val de Reales” by Barrancos were exhibited. This group, of local enjoyment, was created in 2010 by five young people, who usually work in restaurants, private parties, and bars.

In aged and economically disarticulated rural contexts, the potential of music as a sustainable cultural resource is fundamental to human development (Turino 2009), because not only do people sustain music, but music sustains people, Tilton (2009: 14). Consequently, the management of a Raiana cultural heritage implies the creation of participatory models, through a relationship between cultural agents and members of the community, to develop activities that will give way to a possible future. In the line proposed by Tilton (2009a: 129), to save music and dance the most important is to promote habitat conditions in which the species can continue to make music of different types of kinds, of different forms and modes, and for multiple reasons.

FIGURE 7
VIDEO STILL SHOWCASING THE PUBLIC IN THE 15TH EDITION OF “NOCHE FLAMENCA” OF BARRANCOS



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, 2015.

The Paths of a “Regionaut”

The “Noche Flamenca” represents an experimental work that encompasses not only the social processes of interaction between neighbours but also the aesthetic and performative process, as a fertile ground for the creation, of “imaginative fantasy” and “physical practice” (Frith 1996: 124). About dance groups, we can say that they transformed Professor Ana Castilla into a “regionaut” (Löfgren 2008), whose paths spread between the imaginaries of flamenco and teaching opportunities, in a cultural logistics of crossing the border, attractive and familiar, in which he applied his experience and developed social influence. Ana Castilla’s “social capital” represents the sum of accumulated resources thanks to an informal network of stable relationships, for which ideas, opportunities, and knowledge are imported through social interactions built on both sides of the border.

Baixo Alentejo

If we look at the teaching network and musical celebrations entitled “Noche Flamenca”, from the perspective of the “social capital” of Ana Castilla, we can conclude that they are sustained in cooperation and consolidated relations, with families and local agents. Depending on the involvement of the family and trust relationships, they have a high level of interconnections, resulting from the cooperation between the members of the groups and the municipal ones in the preservation of significant musical practices.

FIGURE 8
RED AND GROUPS OF BAILE THAT ORGANIZE THE “NOCHE FLAMENCA”



PREPARED BY THE AUTHOR, 2015

FINAL NOTES

European policies determine the priority axes of regional development, in a mercantile logic of exploiting endogenous resources at the service of tourism and leisure, while local authorities adopt and implement their programs according to concrete realities. Ethnography shows us the processes, conditions, and strategies of men and women who participate in the construction of the future of their communities, resisting the economic and cultural hegemony associated with the globalizing process through “possible practices” (Godinho 2017). The “possible practices” are anchored in the experiences and expectations of local agents, who seek to respond adequately to the conjunctures of the present, with the material and cultural resources available to them. To this end, they are based on informal networks and participatory models, unrelated to cultural and tourist industries, regardless of whether the festive invention is oriented towards a sustainable economy subordinated to tourism. The local leaders highlight in their discourses the importance of cooperation and social inclusion in the organization of the festivals, as a factor of economic and human development, when considering the investment in culture as a means of tourist attraction at the service of the quality of life of the populations (Lavrador 2017). In the case of Mértola, the strategy outlined by the municipality is oriented toward cultural and environmental diversity, according to a logic of cooperation, local, cross-border and transnational. The Islamic Festival serves to establish the relationship between heritage and culture, past and present, in the production and social construction of a place that calls for intercultural dialogue. The representations of Islamic culture attribute meaning to this place imagined, constructed, and produced by the established relations between the partner “other” and the visiting “other”, as a meeting point of cultures and exchange of experiences.

In Barrancos, the “Noche Flamenca” is a representation of the “Raina culture”, institutionally built and produced, linked to historical and cultural relations with the Spanish neighbours (Simões 2008, 2013). But it is not a show directed to tourism, before local enjoyment, which appeals to social creativity and shared imaginaries. In “Noche Flamenca” stands out the motivation and leadership of women, which comes from the intensity of commitment to the community, to overcome challenges and imagine the future, beyond the limitations and difficulties of daily. By gathering around participatory activities, they transform musical

celebrations into spaces of creativity and sociability that did not soothe the dance of an incorporated culture, as a value of belonging to a “social place” (Augé 2005), with historical and identity meaning.

As Paula Godinho (2017) points out, ethnography is a means of understanding paths, with individuals as agents and processes that insert women and men into history, in a world that is always complex, rarely cohesive, and the word “crisis” (2017: 77). The phenomenon of the festive invention in the Baixo Alentejo streak is part of a broader context of patrimonialization and turistification on a global scale, as a sustainable development strategy based on participatory experience and transformative power of people who resist the monopolization and massification of the cultural and tourist industries, operated by supranational consortia. In southern rural societies, mercantile logic has not yet replaced or destroyed the relations of cooperation between people, who remain present, “although the victory of rationalism and mercantilism has elevated to the category of principles the principles of profit and the individual”, as Marcel Mauss (2001: 188) stated. The festivals show us how the actions of local agents expand opportunities for collective participation, supported by formal networks that allow the materialization of ideas and the construction of utopian places. On the other hand, the imaginaries of the festivities act socially, because their content is shared, communicated, and internalized by others – that is, by being culturally integrated, as a way of acting and thinking about the world.

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ENDNOTES

1. “Endogenous resources” means rural and urban architectural heritage, as a structuring factor of regional identity; natural heritage, in particular the agro-pastoral system of the cork; and ethnographic heritage, represented by the craftsmanship and the before Alentejo, recently recognized by UNESCO as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (*One Smart Specialisation Strategy for Alentejo* 2014: 54).
2. The concept of “sustainable development” applied to socio-economic development was formalised in 1987 in a document known as the Brundtland Report entitled *Our Common Future* (our Common prepared by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development. This definition was assumed in Principle 3 of the Rio Summit Declaration (ECO-92), or Earth Summit, and entered into strategic development proposals to be implemented in underdeveloped countries, stripped of their natural and environmental resources by multinational companies.
3. See a summary of the INTERREG V-A SPAIN-PORTUGAL (POCTEP) program. https://www.adcoesao.pt/sites/default/files/cooperacao_territorial_europeia/poctep_espanha_portugal/poctep_resumo_cidadao.pdf [Consultation: 15 April 2017].
4. The Euro-region EUROAAA (Alentejo, Algarve, and Andalusia) presents as main references for cross-border cooperation: (v) heritage, culture, and tourism; (viii) environment, heritage, and natural surroundings. <https://www.euroaaa.eu/site/node/36> [Consultation: 15 April 2017].
5. See *A Regional Strategy of Intelligent Specialization for Alentejo* (2014), which presents as strategic axes: (1) economic attractiveness, valuing an economy based on endogenous resources and emerging activities with a high technological index; (2) valuing cultural and heritage identity; (3) social responsibility (2014: 9, et each other).
6. See Valcuende Del Rio 1998, Cunha 2006, Medina García 2006, Freire *Et Al.* 2009, Godinho 2011, 2013 Rovisco, Simões 2013.

7. In Manuel Castells line, the culture of resistance is forged by social agents who, when they find themselves in subalternized conditions or devalued by the logic of domination, build survival strategies based on principles different from those that permeate the institutions of society (1998: 31).
8. "(...) en It Raya Iberian there is an important network of archaeological, architectural, cultural, paisajístico y ambiental heritage of enormous trascendencia y potencial as elements of desarrollo. Cuenta con 8 sitios considered as Patrimonio de la Humanidad por la UNESCO, y numerosos Bienes de Interés Cultural (BIC), que actúan como factores de atracción turística y desarrollo local. (...)" (*Resumen del Diagnóstico Socioeconómico de la zona de Cooperación*, 2013: 3).
9. This context is due to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Portuguese, the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission (Troika), date of the of 17 May 2011, aiming at an economic adjustment programme that has contributed to the impoverishment of the State and populations.
10. Research conducted at PORDATA-Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation. Numbers of municipalities and regions of Portugal. 2019. Summary frames of Moura, Barrancos, Serpa and Mértola:
[http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/Moura+\(Munic%c3%adpio\)-7982](http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/Moura+(Munic%c3%adpio)-7982);
[http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/Barrancos+\(Munic%c3%adpio\)-7868](http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/Barrancos+(Munic%c3%adpio)-7868);
[http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/Serpa+\(Munic%c3%adpio\)-8075](http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/Serpa+(Munic%c3%adpio)-8075);
[http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/M%c3%a9rtola+\(Munic%c3%adpio\)-8107](http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Quadro+Resumo/M%c3%a9rtola+(Munic%c3%adpio)-8107).
 [Consultation: 31 March 2019].
11. As examples I find the following, accompanied by the respective start dates: "Fair of Honey, Cheese and Bread" (Mértola, 1998); "Festival of Wine and Vine" (Amareleja-Moura, 2001); "Festival do Peixe do Rio de Pomarão" (Mértola, 2002); "Meeting of Cultures" (Serpa, 2002); "Alentejo Cheese Fair" (Serpa, 2007); "ExpoBarrancos" (Barrancos, 2007); "FATOR – Fair of Arts and Crafts of Raia" (Vila Verde de Ficalho-Serpa, 2007); "Festival Cultural Ervançum" (Santo Amador-Moura, 2008) and "Festival do Peixe do Rio e do Pão" (Moura, 2012).
12. The municipality of Mértola is bordered to the north by the Alentejo municipalities of Beja and Serpa, to the west by Almodôvar and Castro Verde, to the east by the municipality of Huelva (Spain) and to the south by Alcoutim (Algarve region).
13. João Serrão has coordination functions of the Recruitment and Organizational Development Service, the Personnel Administration Section, the Information and Communication Technologies Information and Communication Service, of the Sectors of Culture and Social Action, and the Office of Communication, Image and Multimedia.
14. The Archaeological Field of Mértola (CAM) was created in 1978 to develop multidisciplinary scientific research in the field of social and human sciences. The working groups, in addition to the interest By history and archaeology, have been dedicated to history local, historical heritage, artistic and cultural heritage, in order to produce actions of local development. <http://www.camertola.pt/>. [Consultation: 15 April 2017].
15. Cláudio Torres (Tondela, 1939) is the founder of the Archaeological Field of Mértola, director of the magazine *Medieval Archaeology* and member of the Advisory Council of the Institute of Architectural and Archaeological Heritage Management (IGESPAR) since 2006.
<http://www.camertola.pt/author/cl%CAudio-torres-0>. [Consultation: 15 April 2017].
16. Agenda Cultural Apr | Mai | Jun (2017: 7). <http://www.cm-mertola.pt/municipio/comunicacao-municipal/agenda-cultural/item/2093-agenda-cultural-abr-mai-jun-2017>. [Consultation: 17 June 2017].
17. Site official of the Islamic Festival of Mértola. <http://www.festivalislamicodemertola.com/>. [Consultation: 10 April 2017].
18. Participation in the *Souk* Obeys to a previously disclosed regulation, which establishes the guiding principles of the festival and the selection criteria of the participants.
<http://www.festivalislamicodemertola.com/data/uploads/pdf-docs/regulamento-festival-islamico.pdf>.
 [Consultation: 10 April 2017].
19. Designation attributed to the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) in the 8th century, during the dominance of the Umayyad Caliphate.
20. See excerpt of the audiovisual record carried out in the fieldwork, available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeZVWTLwLJQ>. [Consultation: 29 May 2017].
21. About Omar Khayyam see, for example: Alfredo Braga. *About Omar Rubaiyat Translations Khayyam*. <http://alfredo-braga.pro.br/poesia/rubaiyat.html>. [Consultation: 25 May 2017].
22. *Rubaiyat* was the term used by Edward Fitzgerald (1809 - 1883) in the translation of a selection of poems, originally written in Persian, attributed to Omar Khayyam (1048 - 1131). One *rubai'i* is a two-line stanza, with two parts (hemistiquios) each, the name *Rubaiyat* (quartet), derives from the word "four" in Arabic.

23. Sing Alentejo. <https://ich.unesco.org/es/RL/el-cante-alentejano-canto-polifonico-del-alentejo-sur-de-portugal-01007> [Consultation: 25 May 2017].
24. As expected the mayor of Mértola pointed to “a huge number of visitors, perhaps more than 50,000.” *Alentejo Diary*, 19.05.2017. <http://da.ambaal.pt/noticias/?id=10873>. [Consultation: 21 June 2017].
25. Raymond Williams (1977) states that in a given culture some meanings and past practices are selected, while others are neglected or excluded. This selection is presented, and usually passes successfully through “tradition” or “significant past”. Or “significant past” is, in that sense, an aspect of contemporary social and cultural organization, in the interest of a specific group or class, as a version of the past that intends to connect and ratify the present, offering a sense of continuity (1977: 115-116).
26. Barrancos is bordered to the north by the municipalities of Oliva de la Frontera and Valencia del Mombuey (Badajoz) and to the east by Encinasola (Huelva). To the south and west it is bordered by the municipality of Moura (Baixo Alentejo) and to the northwest by Mourão (Alto Alentejo).
27. Between 1988 and 2015 Ana Castilla develops activities teaching in Spanish localities: Cortegana, Almonaster La Real, Alajar, Repilado, Jabugo, Saint Olalla, Los Marines, Aroche, Rosal de la Frontera and Encinasola. Between 2000 and 2015 she developed activities in Portuguese localities: Moura, Santo Aleixo da Restauração, Amareleja, Póvoa of São Miguel, Serpa, Beja (Baixo Alentejo), and Granja (Alto Alentejo).
28. See or *blog* “The Corner Of Alma Raiana”. <http://almaraiana.blogspot.pt/>. [Consultation: 20 May 2017].
29. From 2013 new dance groups were created in the Baixo Alentejo lane that maintain their continuity: (1) “Pasión Flamenca”, consisting of twelve young female dancers and one male dancer, from the village of Amareleja (Moura), that debuted publicly at the “Amareleja Youth Festival” of the same year; (2) “A Mi Manera”, with twenty-seven young female dancers and one male dancer, from Póvoa de São Miguel (Moura), that debuted in the 13th edition of “Noche Flamenca” of Barrancos; (3) “Art & Compás”, formed by nine female elements, originally from Santo Aleixo da Restauração (Moura), which debuted in 2014, in the 1st Edition of the “Noche Flamenca” from Póvoa de São Miguel (Moura). Watch video clips at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q36DhEoo7-E>. [Consultation: 20 May 2017].
30. Watch video clips at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6jMAGgV2oc>. [Consultation: 20 May 2017].

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