COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM, A MEANS TOWARDS CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION

The case of Cante Alentejano (Alentejo, Portugal)

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8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 Intangible cultural heritage: a sustainable tourism resource?

According to several studies, creative and cultural tourism appears to be a growing trend. There is a greater demand from tourists for engaging with the places they visit (Richards, 2016); they are seeking opportunities to develop new experiences, for self-learning (Gonçalves, 2008) and “to break themselves entirely from their home lives and engage sincerely with a different way of living” (ATTO, 2015, p. 30). For these tourists, each travel experience must be unique, a cultural immersion that leads to an experience not reproducible elsewhere.

Thus, a new tourist profile is formed: the chance to participate in culture, authenticity, human interactions, etc. are taken into account when choosing a destination (Ohridska-Olson & Ivanov, 2010). In fact, studies prove that tourists can cognitively, affectively and socially benefit from their tourism experiences, and can develop emotional links with the places visited (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Ilincić, 2014).

Symbolic capital is a key element in tourism nowadays (Jensen, 1999). Tourists take ethics, spirituality and authenticity into account when making a choice and products are valued by the stories they tell, their symbolism, the emotions they raise, what they make the consumer feel, etc. In this sense, intangible cultural heritage can be an important resource in tourism, providing unique and engaging cultural experiences, once it creates a link between particular manifestations of culture and the specific locations where they take place (Richards & Wilson, 2005). Oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events are assets that promote tourist immersion into the local culture and their active participation in cultural activities, thereby bonding hosts and guests, people and places.
8.1.2 Between benefits and prejudices: the community contribution

Intangible cultural heritage become ‘visiting cards’ of the destinations. Some positive outcomes can emerge from the valorization of territorial cultural resources: place-based tourism might lead to sustainability, with local heritage, identity and culture being preserved, and economic and social value being generated (Ohridska-Olson & Ivanov, 2010). However, the culture demand might lead to the re-creation of cultural assets to attract visitors (Fernandes, 2011). This pressure to adjust cultural experiences to visitor expectations leads to ‘touristification’, the process by which local traditions, performed or produced for tourist consumption, become mere commodities (Cohen, 1988).

In fact, things that were never actually produced as commodities, such as traditional cultural forms, have been decontextualized and recontextualized, no longer representing the social and cultural life of the tradition bearers, to become subjective identity markers that are exhibited as cultural heritage (Handler, 1988). The exploitation of authenticity and popular creativity assigns a price to local traditions (Harvey, 2005), which then become entertainment subjects.

It is imperative, therefore, to safeguard the essential aspects of the cultural practices that make them unique and that attracted visitors in the first place. In order to do so, tradition bearers must be involved. To improve a cultural practice’s ability to endure, we must take into account what practitioners consider relevant in their behavioural system. A cultural practice does not subsist without tradition bearers (Cabeça, 2016): they are the driving force of the production and reproduction of cultural assets; they apply norms, socialize new practitioners, evaluate and sanction the practices, determine what belongs and what does not belong to a given practice and what can and what cannot be done. Tradition bearers, acting as regulators of their own practices, are indispensable in avoiding the dramatic change in cultural practices that tourism pressure generates.

Community involvement in the development of tourism activities related to intangible cultural heritage is a means of safeguarding it. Community-based tourism gives tradition bearers the opportunity to develop their activity according to the structure and norms of their cultural practices and so might be the path to avoiding touristification and the loss of cultural identity.

8.2 Cante Alentejano: a case study

8.2.1 The disclosure of a unique cultural form

A different way of singing without instruments can be heard in Alentejo, in the southern region of Portugal: Cante Alentejano. Long established in the territory, the ‘Cante’ artform is based on the distribution of roles within a group of singers. Divided into three parts—two solo moments and a chorus—the singer’s vocal excellence is decisive. The song (‘moda’) starts with a soloist: the ‘ponto’. After the ponto’s performance, another soloist continues the song, chanting in a higher tone: the ‘alto’. The choir comes next, singing in the same tone as the ponto, while the alto continues singing higher. The solo roles are distributed amongst the best singers and the sound thus achieved makes Cante unique and different from other musical practices from the same territory and abroad.

Cante can be heard in several places and occasions and was once executed in an informal way. This traditional chant is now mainly practiced by choir groups that are organized specifically for this kind of music and its repertoire. Before this modality of Cante
The case of Cante Alentejano

being performed for an audience, the chant was what Turino (2008) designates a “cultural formation” – a type of music that was a part of the daily lives of the communities. Cante’s performance nowadays is, instead, in Turino’s words, a “cultural group”, a group of people that gathers driven by the motivation of singing.

By the end of the last century, expectations concerning Cante’s future weren’t positive, given the aging of practitioners, difficulties in recruiting young people and a failure in the traditional means of the practice and knowledge transmission (Cabeça, 2016). But with the UNESCO application and its positive outcome in November 2014 – the internationalization and recognition of Cante as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage – Cantegained a second life. It led to a growing motivation in singers and a growing demand for Cante, which now brings in tourists interested in visiting the Alentejo region. What was once a restricted practice of some choir groups in Alentejo (and before that a spontaneous chant executed by rural workers) – executed mainly in group’s meetings organized in their home towns, and in which groups performed to other fellow groups and to a minor audience – has now become an object of tourist attractiveness.

8.2.2 Marketing the destination Alentejo using Cante Alentejano

Strongly linked with its territory, landscapes and communities, Cante is almost synonymous with Alentejo. No other musical practice in Portugal refers geographically to a (cultural, social and political) territory so peremptorily as Cante: whether singers are in Alentejo, in the South Bank of the River Tagus or in Toronto, they call themselves “Alentejanos” (from Alentejo); and being from Alentejo is almost the equivalent of being a bearer (in a broad sense) of this original chant (Cabeça & Santos, 2016).

Although Cante can be heard in several parts of Portugal and even abroad (in Paris, Zurich or Toronto), its historical territory is southern Alentejo, where visitors expect to connect with this traditional chant.

With a greater reach since the UNESCO recognition, Cante is now an important asset used in the marketing of Alentejo as a tourist destination (Cabeça, 2018), and Cante’s bearers and practitioners are seen as ambassadors of the region. Publicity campaigns directed at tourists have not forgotten Cante. In fact, a content analysis of the descriptions made while promoting Alentejo and Cante Alentejano demonstrate how much the region is linked with its cultural capital: the same key elements are used to define both, and Cante Alentejano’s definitions can be related to every key idea that defines Alentejo: “landscape and nature”, “identity and authenticity, “gastronomy and wines”, “fairs and festivities”, “culture and heritage”, “people”, “leisure and recreation”, etc. (Cabeça, 2018).

Cante Alentejano’s recognition as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage brought new possibilities for economic gains for tourism entities in the region. Such potential income, however, demands that we question the commodification of culture as a development strategy (Simões, 2017). In fact, much of the tourism experience related to Cante doesn’t benefit the community; instead of being visited in their social and cultural space, singers are hired to perform in hotels, to sing in restaurants and to entertain visitors in crowded and noisy local fairs. Reaching this new audience entails some challenges that might have an influence on the practice of Cante itself and turistification is already noticeable: new groups, hardly identifiable as Cante, are formed and present themselves as “Cante Alentejano’s Choir Group”, adding elements that don’t belong to this cultural form (instruments, for example). Others lighten the melody to please a cheerful audience. A tourism offering that allows communities
to practice their traditions according to the structure and norms that make those traditions unique is indispensable.

8.2.3 Tradition bearers’ involvement in Alentejo’s promotion

As stated, although Cante can be performed informally, the predominance of Cante Alentejano’s choir groups (“Grupo Coral Alentejano”) turns this traditional chant more stage-oriented, into an increasingly spectacular and presentational form of music rather than one that is participatory and freer (Turino, 2008).

Cante Alentejano’s Choir Groups are the most powerful imagery of Cante and see themselves as representatives of Alentejo. Throughout the region, communities express willingness to have a local group to make their land known “through their songs” (Cabeça, 2016). Most of the choir groups carry the name of their land in their own name and sing ‘modas’ addressing their territory. They also organize their own groups’ meetings in their places, inviting other choir groups to the event. The festivity usually includes a parade in the streets of the village/town, a stage performance (usually three modas each), and a social dinner (or a meal in a convivial atmosphere, at least).

Choir groups have become recognized local institutions (by the parish, the municipality and other local bodies) and claim for themselves a role as local illustrators, performing in fairs and other local events, and meeting tourists in hospitality places. In such performances, choir groups are not more than a picturesque note, and Cante is a mere attraction that doesn’t involve the tourist’s immersion into local culture. In order to bring sustainability for people and places, Cante must, instead, invite visitors for an incursion into Alentejo’s landscape. That is why the Cante’s Route (“Rota do Cante”), a community-based tourism offering from the Municipality of Serpa, is unique and challenges the ordinary means of sharing this intangible cultural heritage.

8.3 Rota do Cante: a community-based offering

8.3.1 Serpa

Serpa is a municipality in south-east Alentejo. Near the Spanish border, Serpa has five parishes (“Brinches”, “Pias”, “Serpa”, “Vila Nova de São Bento e Vale de Vargo” and “Vila Verde de Ficalho”). In all of them there is at least one choir group – male, female, youth, children or mixed – devoted to Cante, and in most cases there is more than one. At present, this territory with just over 15,000 inhabitants has more than a dozen groups, with a few facing a period of inactivity: three in Serpa (“Academia Sénior de Serpa”, “Os Ceifeiros de Serpa”, “Casa do Povo de Serpa”), five in Vila Nova de S. Bento (“Madrigal”, “Rancho de Cantadores”, “Rancho Coral e Etnográfico”, “A-do-Pinto”, “Infantil de Vila Nova de S. Bento”), one in Brinches ("Casa do Povo de Brinches"), three in Pias (“Os Mainantes”, “Os Camponeses de Pias”, “As Ceifeiras de Pias”), two in Vale de Vargo (“Os Camponeses”, “As Papoilas do Enxóê”) and two in Vila Verde de Ficalho (“Os Arraianos”, “Flores do Chança”).

The identification of Serpa with its heritage is not recent. Several cultural initiatives related to Cante have been developed in the past four decades and choir groups are supported financially by the municipality. In local taverns, even today, it is possible to hear (and participate in) informal and spontaneous performances of Cante. The Municipality of Serpa was also the promoter of the UNESCO application, supported by “Casa do Cante” (Cante’s House), an initiative of their own that intends to be, as the name suggests, the house of Cante and its choir groups, supporting and sharing this heritage.
The Municipality of Serpa, through its House, established a Route in its territory. This traditional chant – according to João Matias, the House’s responsible (J. Matias, Personal Communication, August 2019) – is an “identity activity” of Serpa. The Route is, therefore, an answer to visitors’ expectations: when travelling to Serpa, people search for the ‘authenticity’ of Cante (“They always want to have an experience that no one else had”, according to João). In this sense, Cante’s Route was thought to be an adequate means to share Cante, once it is set in a local environment that is not staged.

8.3.2 Rota do Cante (Cante’s Route)

Cante has a musical structure that is easy to recognize and to accompany, and who comes to Serpa can prove that attending a choir group rehearsal (…) Visit Casa do Cante, search here the information about the next rehearsals open to the public and prepare yourself for an intense and authentic experience.

This is how Cante’s Route is presented on the municipality’s website (visitserpa.pt, 2019).

Tomé Pires (in Community Museums, 2018), president of the Municipality of Serpa, defines the Route as a means to make Cante available to those who visit Serpa and for the residents “without interfering in the choir movement’s life”. Rather than establishing a new agenda for Cante and specific events, the Cante’s Route is a tourism offer that makes use of events that are already taking place in the region: the traditional moments when group members reunite in their headquarters to rehearse and improve their performances. On these occasions, which usually take place once a week, singers practice their parade movements (the pace, the balancing); choose and rehearse the songs to be presented in the next performance (on stage and in the parades); distribute the soloist roles for each moda; readjust singers’ places in the formation lines; and, overall, try to achieve the best sound possible. The weekly reunion is sometimes used to discuss important matters as well, such as invitations received, mistakes in the last performance, and improvements needed. This is what a visitor can expect to see and hear in a Cante’s Route experience.

In Serpa, every month, each choir group from the region conducts one open rehearsal. That day is then placed on the Route’s agenda. With 12–15 groups active, it is expected that the experience can be provided on a regular basis, every other day. In actuality, seven to ten open rehearsals occur every month in diverse parishes.

Cante’s Route relies on the community’s willingness to participate in the tourism offering: it is the group that decides when and what happens during the sessions, and who is ‘in charge’. “From the group’s door in, who orders is the group”, explains Mariana, head of the group “Ceifeiras de Pias” (M. Cristina, Personal Communication, August 2019). The first thing that stands out is, therefore, the importance of the community in the design of the experience. The agenda depends on the group’s activities. During some periods of the year (summer and Christmas holidays particularly), groups have an intense performance agenda, travelling often to attend meetings, and some have annual breaks (after the summer, for example). Through the year, repertoire changes and specific songs are performed during Easter, Christmas and New Year. The Route is not an imposing activity and if, in a given month, a group is in no condition to receive visitors or has no rehearsals planned, it is free not to participate. “As you wish” is the motto. This lack of imposition and the self-commanding of the activities is what makes the Route a successful case: choir groups feel involved in the tourism offering. In fact, all the groups currently active in the region have participated in Cante’s Route.
Choir groups are the hosts, inviting visitors to their homes, their headquarters. “Each group is a world”, said Mariana Cristina, while working in Cante’s House (in Community Museums, 2018). And, in fact, attending a rehearsal is an experience that largely depends on the group that visited. All of them are different and have different conditions. More the less, they also sing differently, and those variances can be observed even in the same locality from one group to another. There are male groups, female groups and mixed groups in the offer as well. The conditions for receiving visitors also differ. While some have headquarters provided by the municipality or the entity they belong to (some are settled in “Casas do Povo”), others still gather in provisory places. So, if one decides to attend a Camponeses de Pias rehearsal, for example, one will have the opportunity to be in a real tavern as well.

Cante’s Route was initially developed as an answer to visitors’ demand, but in time it became a means to generate economical income for the groups and brought recognition to local communities. It started in 2016, as UNESCO’s decision approached. “Following the increasing of external demand, it was decided to organize the offer for visitors”, explains João Matias. The initiative started in “the simplest way”, making use of something that already existed. In fact, before the Route’s inception, it was possible to attend some rehearsals. Often people were moved by curiosity, entering a group’s headquarters after hearing the music from the streets. The Route “instituted something that already happened” occasionally and extended the offering to the whole county. It is the Route’s intention not to disturb the groups’ dynamics, providing an activity that can easily fit into “the normal rhythm of the groups”.

Once the door is open, visitors can enter without previous reservation, but most learn about the Route through Cante’s House, with an open door in Serpa’s historical centre.
Therefore, most times groups learn about visitors ahead of time. The Route is also publicized on the municipality’s webpage and the social networks of Cante’s House. When visitors wish to attend events, but their schedule is not compatible with the chosen dates, there is also the possibility of checking with groups to see if they are willing to receive them outside the agreed upon agenda.

Cante’s Route has been object of curiosity. Some fan trips have been made, and Cante Alentejano has captured the attention of TV channels across the world. Recently, a Japanese magazine, *Transit*, devoted several pages to Cante and visited some of the group’s headquarters. “Why do their voices touch us and entangle us?” they ask.

### 8.3.3 Providing a unique experience

João Matias sometimes accompanies tourists to the rehearsals as an intermediary: “Rehearsal time is a very interesting moment, more interesting than presentations, because everything is very close”. It is an ordinary moment in the group’s life, spontaneous, “not a staged thing”. Rehearsal is so uneventful that sometimes visitors witness the group’s discussions. That is why only one rehearsal per month is open to the public: an external person might cause some disturbance.

Despite being a regular moment, each rehearsal is different and each group has its own way of practicing. Some have external rehearsal directors; others have internal ones. Masters (the groups’ leaders) might be more or less picky. Some groups sing the same moda over and over until it’s perfect; some masters interrupt the song to adjust tones; some repeat the most difficult parts; some make experiences, moving singers from one place to another… It is also important to practice the pace used during the parades, the feet movement while walking, how to make a perfect curve while singing and walking, etc. Mariana Cristina explains what happens in her group’s rehearsals: “If it’s not well sung, we stop the moda”; “people, this is badly sung”, “this is going too high”, “let’s stop, let’s start again”, “I’m hearing a voice that is not on the right tone”. The ambience is informal, and groups are in a place where they can try new things and make mistakes without the pressure of satisfying an audience. As Mariana recounts, in rehearsals it is possible to hear the singers’ comments on their own performances (“this is not going well today”): “It is like we’re receiving a friend, so there’s no formality”.

Visitors’ reception is also different from one group to another. Groups have become keen of these moments and feel recognized and proud of their heritage. Some interact with the visitors, explain the group activity; others welcome the visitors and invite them in (“come in, sit”). They also like to sing emblematic songs. The “Grupo Coral e Etnográfico da Casa do Povo de Serpa”, the group that was present in Paris during the UNESCO decision, likes to sing “Alentejo, Alentejo”, the moda sung in the decision session. They also like to show visitors their picture with the Eiffel Tower in the background. “Ceifeiras de Pias”, a female group, likes to sing “heavy modas” (that is to say, songs that are difficult to sing because they require strict breath control) to prove that women can sing them as well as men. When visitors are foreigners, some groups need a translator, and others don’t.

In Ceifeiras de Pias’ case, “an open rehearsal can be whatever the visitor wants”. After the rehearsal itself ends, some visitors like to know more about Cante or about the history of the group. The singers who wish to stay show visitors the group’s souvenirs and tell them their history. Sometimes, chanting and conversation proceeds. Visitors get to know the singers, the familiar relationships between them, the absence of a given member due to illness, etc.

As expected, some groups have more visitors than others (although there are no accurate numbers registered). It is easier to have visitors in Serpa when the city capital has
more tourists. Also, some groups are more popular than others. “Cefeiiras de Pias” recently appeared in a movie; “Casa do Povo de Serpa” represented Cante at the UNESCO headquarters; “Rancho de Cantadores da Aldeia Nova” recently toured Toronto, Canada; and “Camponeses de Pias” performed in an international festival in Brazil.

8.4 Heritage preservation and sustainability

8.4.1 Preserving traditional ways of singing

As stated, tourism demand might generate pressure that leads to a staged performance of local traditions. When performing for tourists and non-connoisseurs, Cante Alentejano choir groups might lighten the pace, presenting more rhythmic, vivid or famous modas in faster interpretations (Cabeça, 2016). Some groups note that the iconic pieces of the “heavy” traditional repertoire are not of great interest to this type of audience, so they choose a more modern one: lighter, catchier. What this adaptation evidences is that each performance is a mediator between tradition and its bearers and the consumers (Bohlman, 1988): the audience can encourage creativity or denounce abuses, be more receptive to certain words or sounds, get bored, thus impacting the performance itself.

In the case of rehearsals, however, the bearer’s community has total responsibility and full control of how the sessions are developed and the tourists don’t change the rhythm of the sessions. “We don’t feel the pressure of a staged representation. We feel that we are in our home. There’s no formality, and people end up feeling involved in Cante”, says Mariana. While in stage performances, groups travel to meet the audience, in this offering tourists travel to meet groups in their social and cultural space. This is, in fact, a key aspect: the valorization of the groups’ regular activity and personal space means that there is no need to be separate from traditional practices to meet the expectations. In fact, such derivation would be unfounded. “Everything goes as usual because the audience is aware that they come to a rehearsal, that they are coming to our home and that we are not representing Cante but working on Cante”, explains Mariana. In the rehearsal, people find ‘pure singers’, something they cannot see in a stage performance (Table 8.1).

Some of the negative effects of turistification, such as changes in practices, mimicry or a false search for genuineness, can be prevented by involving the community in the tourism offers. In Cante’s Route, tradition bearers are not disconnected from their practice and act as their regulators. By doing so, the Route allows groups to meet the structure and norms of Cante Alentejano, preventing dramatic changes to please an audience. João Matias notes that, despite the renewed search for Cante, “none of them [groups] has escaped from the matrix … they are not pop stars”. Some groups don’t refrain from making incursions into other musical fields, but they certainly know how and when to perform according to the Cante’s attested practices.

8.4.2 Bringing sustainability to communities

Cante’s Route “brings people to places” and to attend a rehearsal of a Serpa’s group is an “excuse to visit a parish” that, otherwise, might have not been known by visitors. “Many people wouldn’t come to Pias if it wasn’t [for] Cante”, says Mariana. Sometimes, a brief trip to meet a choir group results in a longer stay: “People realize that Pias is more than a road to go somewhere else”. Once in these small territories, visitors find other interesting assets: culture, monuments, bread, cheese, olive oil, wine…
This evidence has made the groups and the municipality consider a more focussed offer, combining local resources that strongly mark the cultural identity of the territory. Driven by citizen needs and the specific features of a given place, such ‘on the ground’ initiatives might promote sustainable development (Barata, Molinari, Marsh, & Cabeça, 2017). Groups, restaurants, taverns, wineries, entities devoted to nature and cultural activities, etc. can work together to provide a unique experience. When connecting with the territory’s richness, what was supposed to be a three-day stay might become a week-long one. That was the case of two Japanese visitors in Pias. Jointly carrying out activities, involving different local actors in tourism, as studies prove (D’Angella & Go, 2009), can improve the sustainability of local communities.

Some concerted offerings are being developed, and some are already in place. For instance, when visiting the “Casa do Povo de Pias” choir group, it is possible to visit a winery as well. Some groups also provide meals in their headquarters for larger groups. On such occasions, groups may rehearse or simply sing some modas. Last year, “Ceifeiras de Pias” received more than two dozen German tourists in a single occasion, and a meal was provided in their garden. This is an offer that differs from an open rehearsal experience. In these meetings with rehearsals made for large groups, expectations also differ. On such occasions, groups might feel the need to represent Cante, presenting themselves in their traditional outfits and singing modas thought to capture the audience’s attention. Mariana says that her group doesn’t feel great pressure when choosing the repertoire but tries to present songs with themes often sung in Alentejo: love, women, landscape, pastures and fields. Travelling with translators, these visitors capture the moda’s feelings: universal emotions like longing, such

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Source: Author (2019).
as that present in the “Águia” (eagle) song: “oh eagle that goes so high / flying from pole to pole / take me to heaven where I have / the mother who brought me on her lap”.

Interactions between visitors and the visited result in a unique experience for both parties. Not only do visitors benefit from the immersion into local culture; local communities also learn something from their visitors’ culture. “Topophilia” (Casey, 2009), the emotional attachment to place, for both residents and visitors, is also boosted. When places allow visitors and residents to feel being in a special place, both “will enjoy emotional experiences, will perceive a characteristic atmosphere and will intensely appreciate the history and the stratified culture of the place” (Lorentzen, 2009, p.460).

Cante’s Route has some successful outcomes: it meets visitors’ expectations, valorizes groups and communities, brings financial income and increases the number of visitors in lesser-known places. Open rehearsals do not cost anything, but there are opportunities for groups to raise funds (through records and souvenir sales, meals, etc.). On the other hand, visitors often leave donations. An increased number of visitors might also benefit other local businesses, bringing financial income to communities.

As Galani-Moutaf’s study (2013) proves, when activities are provided by individuals that are not members of the communities, residents see tourism activities as “out of place”. In this case, with experiences provided by local residents, singers and broad communities share perceptions: they are involved in determining what is so special about their place and group members, and communities feel recognized and valorized, made “special by living in a special place” (Gu & Ryan, 2008, p. 646).

### 8.4.3 Balance and future

Interaction between visitors and heritage bearers is a factor for satisfaction (Ilincic, 2014). In Cante’s Route, the visitors’ reactions have been very positive and groups are greeted and thanked for the “magical” moments they provide. Accompanying the tourists, João notes people are surprised by the sound projection and pleased because singers correspond to a certain “imagined rusticity”. Although no registers have been made, people attending the rehearsals are mainly tourists that correspond to the cultural tourist profile or people with a connection to the territory. French, Belgian, Luxembourger, German and Portuguese people are thought to be the most common audience.

The lack of statistics and numbers is explained by the small scale of the offering, now in a setting stage. Cante’s Route, despite being an “important dimension” in Serpa’s tourism strategy, is not a major activity. In fact, Cante’s Route is not expected to be a mass tourism offer as tourists’ pressure will destabilize groups and eventually turn Cante into a mere commodity. In the present, the offer is adjusted to demand, but if demand increases, other modalities of open rehearsals can be designed, although less spontaneous. That is to say, another type of offering.

Cante’s Route might never generate working places or bring a large financial income to the municipality but, by allocating the communities’ social and cultural capital, it can play a positive role or even be a driver in the local economy (Herslund, 2012). In the future, the municipality intends to continue working with the groups, improving the dispersion of this community-based offering: namely by designing a flyer for each group in three languages (Portuguese, English and French) with the group’s history and further information about Cante. Above all, the Route intends to maintain the ideals that led to its foundation, preventing Cante – despite being a tourism product – from becoming a turistified product.
8.5 Conclusion

Cante Alentejano is no longer a cultural form exclusive to rural workers from the deep and lonely Alentejo. It has become an identity marker of the region, a cultural heritage that achieved a new symbolic capital and needs to be safeguarded (Cabeça & Santos, 2016). A spectacle of “local genuineness” (ibid.), it become mostly a practice in which a group of performers presents the music to an audience. Moments of spontaneous chanting that are not mediated by an audience are rare, and even more so when Cante is performed for tourists. The reinforcement of Cante as a performative practice can endanger the practice itself. We’ve seen how singers are brought to restaurants and hotels to please tourists, how they skip some modas that might bore the audience, how some rhythms are being lightened and modas are being sung faster. Groups that don’t follow Cante’s rules present themselves as Cante Alentejano groups and the public, unaware of the Cante’s structure, is misled. Clapping hands during the performance, play musical instruments, have no soloists, dancing… are elements that don’t belong to this cultural form but are sometimes added to meet expectations. In this cases, what is supposed to be a unique way of chanting becomes “something else” (Cabeça, 2016).

But intangible cultural heritages, Cante in particular, can serve tourism without compromising their connection to the practices, territories and to its communities. Placing tourism offerings in their social and cultural environments, and jointly planning the experiences with the tradition bearers, is a sustainable way of engaging visitors and communities, presenting heritage not as a commodity but as a cultural asset that makes a place unique and special. In order to achieve community welfare, it is necessary to bring visitors to localities in order to promote their immersion into the cultural life of the communities. The community’s resilience (Magis, 2010) depends on its capability to incorporate their common ground and their shared culture into a development strategy.

Studies indicate that when tourism products integrate local communities in their planning, economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits can be achieved (Simpson, 2008) and evidence of the sustainable use of cultural capital in tourism offerings can be found in several works. Miettinen’s (2005) case studies on local craft communities in Namibia relate tourism to local empowerment, economic benefits to communities and visitors’ satisfaction by involving tourists and communities in learning experiences. Ilincic’s (2014) study on cooking workshops in Barcelona evidence the satisfaction of participants in learning local cuisine and culture, and in developing cooking skills while enjoying the company of others. Thomas, Harvey and Hawkins’ (2013) analysis of craft-based networks in south-west Britain underlines the need to establish a link between offers, territories and historical context. And Lazzeroni, Bellini, Cortesi and Loffredo (2013), addressing the case of Volterra, state the close link between cultural heritage and territorial context, and the need for shared actions developed by local networks.

The mobilization of the cultural resources that are specific to each location is extremely important to create unique destinations and make each place special. Its use can improve the quality of the tourist experience, generate competitiveness and unique products, and be a path towards sustainability. Such a path is, however, endangered by the commodification of cultural products and the disrespecting of the “spirit of place” (Imon, 2017; Cabeça, Gonçalves, Marques, & Tavares, 2018). Community-based tourism offerings, as Cante’s Route, which involve communities in the design of the tourism activity, can assure the safeguarding of cultural heritage: tradition bearers, involved and mobilized, are the social basis for the tradition’s creation and re-creation according to its original cultural form.
In Alentejo, community-based tourism that relies on the communities’ knowledge and autonomy is assuring that Cante remains a dynamic and living practice, adjusted to its rules and structure, and that it is neither a mere tourism product for external consumption nor as trained practice whose safeguarding implies making it an immutable object.

References


The case of Cante Alentejano


