

CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF A CHANGING EUROPE

DESAFIOS CULTURAIS DE UMA EUROPA EM MUDANÇA

SÓNIA BOMBICO (COORD.)

IDEHUS
Centro Interdisciplinar de História, Culturas e Sociedades

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Cultural challenges of a changing Europe

Desafios culturais de uma Europa em mudança

Under the direction of Sónia Bombico

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ABSTRACTS

Num contexto marcado por profundas transformações sociais, políticas, tecnológicas e ambientais, a cultura assume um papel central na compreensão dos desafios que se colocam à Europa contemporânea. Reunindo contributos de diferentes áreas disciplinares, este volume analisa questões relacionadas com as políticas culturais europeias, o património, a memória, a identidade, a arquitetura, as paisagens culturais, os museus, o turismo e a sustentabilidade. Através de estudos de caso e de reflexões de natureza conceptual, os diferentes capítulos

evidenciam a diversidade de perspetivas a partir das quais é possível abordar a relação entre cultura, território e desenvolvimento. Ao promover um diálogo interdisciplinar, a obra contribui para uma compreensão integrada dos desafios culturais de uma Europa em permanente transformação.

In a context of profound social, political, technological, and environmental change, culture plays a central role in understanding the challenges facing contemporary Europe. Bringing together contributions from different disciplinary fields, this volume explores issues related to European cultural policies, heritage, memory, identity, architecture, cultural landscapes, museums, tourism, and sustainability. Through case studies and conceptual reflections, the chapters highlight the diverse perspectives from which the relationship between culture, territory, and development can be examined. By fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue, the volume offers an integrated perspective on the cultural challenges of a changing Europe.

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Introduction

Sónia BOMBICO

Understanding the cultural challenges of a changing Europe requires acknowledging that culture can no longer be understood solely as a legacy inherited from the past or as an autonomous sphere of symbolic production. In contemporary Europe, culture has become a key arena in which memory and future, identity and diversity, conservation and innovation, as well as local belonging and transnational integration, are continuously negotiated. It is within this context that the present volume is situated, examining how policies, institutions, communities, landscapes, Cultural Heritage practices, and tourism dynamics contribute to the cultural construction of a plural Europe undergoing continuous transformation.

Europe has historically been understood through a multiplicity of cultural, political, and territorial references. In recent decades, however, this diversity has become both a source of richness and a significant challenge. The intensification of globalisation, increasing human mobility, the emergence of new technologies, the climate crisis, the transformation of local economies, growing tourism pressures on Cultural Heritage sites, and the questioning of traditional forms of belonging have all prompted a reassessment of the role of culture in collective life. Rather than being regarded simply as Cultural Heritage to be preserved, culture has increasingly come to be recognised as a means of fostering social cohesion, civic participation, sustainable development,

and dialogue across local, regional, national, European, and global scales.

This volume is grounded in this understanding. The chapters brought together here do not merely address different cultural subjects; collectively, they explore how contemporary Europe attributes value to Cultural Heritage, develops cultural policies, constructs narratives of identity, manages sites of memory, and seeks to reconcile sustainability, tourism, digitalisation, and civic participation. The thematic and methodological diversity of the contributions reflects the plurality of perspectives from which the cultural challenges facing contemporary Europe may be examined. By bringing together contributions from History, European Studies, Heritage Studies, Architecture, Museum Studies, Tourism Studies, Cultural Management, Cultural Geography, and the Social Sciences, the volume adopts an interdisciplinary perspective on Europe's cultural challenges.

The first part of the volume focuses on European policies, cultural institutions and processes of identity construction. The analysis of Portugal's position within the framework of European Cultural Heritage policies highlights the growing prominence of Cultural Heritage on the agendas of both the European Union and the Council of Europe, while also revealing asymmetries, shortcomings in strategic coordination, and challenges related to digital presence. Through initiatives such as the *European Heritage Label*, the *Council of Europe Cultural Routes*, *Europeana* and the *European Heritage Awards/Europa Nostra Awards*, it becomes evident that national participation in European Cultural Heritage networks depends not only on the existence of significant cultural assets, but also on the ability

to develop coherent narratives, integrated governance models, and effective strategies for international projection.

The discussion of Iberian Jewish Cultural Heritage further develops this debate by highlighting the relationship between memory, diversity, and institutional representation. The chapter on Sephardic Cultural Heritage demonstrates how European policies for safeguarding Jewish Cultural Heritage have, at times, tended to privilege particular geographical contexts and historical narratives, especially those associated with the Holocaust and the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe. Without questioning the significance of this legacy, the chapter draws attention to the need to acknowledge the diversity of Jewish experiences across Europe, including the Sephardic heritage of the Iberian Peninsula. From this perspective, Cultural Heritage also emerges as a site of symbolic negotiation, where decisions are made regarding which histories are made visible, which communities are recognised, and which forms of belonging become incorporated into the European narrative.

Within the broader discussion of European identity, the analysis of the European Union's ontological security introduces an important conceptual dimension. The European Union is sustained not only by treaties, institutions, and economic policies, but also by symbols, rituals, values, and narratives capable of fostering continuity and a shared sense of belonging. The European flag, the euro, European elections, institutional commemorations, and the Union's founding values all function as symbolic mechanisms that seek to reinforce the European project in a context marked by successive crises. At the same time, the volume reminds us that symbolic power, while es-

sential, is not sufficient in itself. European identity also requires tangible practices of solidarity, democratic participation, social inclusion, and the recognition of diversity.

The second part of the volume shifts the focus towards Cultural Heritage practices, tangible legacies, and landscapes of memory. The chapters devoted to modern school architecture, nineteenth-century Lisbon paving, and the ordinary landscapes of Apulia demonstrate that Cultural Heritage is not confined to recognised monuments or exceptional assets. On the contrary, it is often embodied in everyday buildings, traditional construction techniques, urban infrastructures, rural landscapes, and practices transmitted across generations. Collectively, these contributions broaden the understanding of Cultural Heritage by showing that its safeguarding depends upon careful attention to the relationships between form, function, community, place, and memory.

In the case of Manuel Tainha's school architecture, the continued use of the buildings emerges as an important factor in their preservation, although it is not sufficient in itself to ensure the safeguarding of their Cultural Heritage values. Continued occupation enables these buildings to remain active and functional; however, in the absence of systematic conservation policies, their architectural character may gradually be compromised.

Similarly, the chapter on nineteenth-century Lisbon paving highlights the Cultural Heritage value of construction techniques, materials, and urban solutions that have often been overlooked. By emphasising the significance of traditional paving as both tangible and intangible Cultural Heritage, the chapter demonstrates that cultural sustainability depends

upon preserving construction knowledge and urban forms that continue to shape the city's identity.

The discussion of the ordinary landscapes of Apulia adds a critical dimension to this debate. Often overlooked in Cultural Heritage policies, these everyday landscapes are presented as living spaces, shaped by the historical relationships between communities, agricultural practices, ecosystems, and ways of life. The combined pressures of climate change, the accelerated energy transition, and increasingly standardised territorial policies may lead to processes of cultural homogenisation and the gradual erosion of local identities. In this context, sustainability cannot be reduced to a purely technical or environmental concern; it must also embrace community participation, territorial memory, and the recognition of landscapes as dynamic commons.

The third part of the volume explores pathways towards more sustainable approaches to culture and tourism. The chapters devoted to museums, the digitalisation of the visitor experience, the international governance of sustainable tourism, and the management of Mediterranean World Heritage Sites examine a number of challenges that are particularly relevant to contemporary cultural landscapes.

Although culture is not explicitly positioned at the centre of the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda provides a framework within which museums and cultural institutions can play a decisive role. Within this context, museums emerge as spaces for education, inclusion, participation, and critical reflection on the future.

The digitalisation of tourism, examined through the case of Évora, reveals new opportunities while also giving rise to new

challenges. Mobile technologies now accompany every stage of the visitor experience, from trip planning to the sharing of experiences after the visit. However, in Cultural Heritage destinations, the adoption of digital technologies must be approached with care to ensure that innovation does not compromise conservation, authenticity, or the quality of the cultural experience. The concept of smart tourism only acquires real significance when embedded within broader strategies for territorial management, Cultural Heritage interpretation, accessibility, data protection and sustainability.

The final chapter, examining international recommendations, for the governance of sustainable tourism traces the evolution of international policies and policy instruments between 1980 and 2024. The shift from predominantly normative and environmentally focused approaches towards more integrated, participatory, and operational models demonstrates that sustainable tourism today requires multilevel governance, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, resilience, and the capacity to adapt to local contexts.

This discussion is closely connected to the comparative study of management models for Mediterranean World Heritage Sites, which highlights the importance of participatory, adaptive, and socially embedded governance systems. The conservation of Outstanding Universal Value cannot be separated from the lives of the communities that inhabit, use, and attribute meaning to Cultural Heritage places.

Taken as a whole, this volume shows that the cultural challenges facing contemporary Europe cannot be addressed through a single discipline, a single analytical scale, or a single sectoral policy. Culture cuts across institutions, territories, communi-

ties, technologies, tourism practices, collective memories, and systems of governance.

Understanding a changing Europe therefore requires us to consider simultaneously the preservation of the past, the management of the present, and the construction of a more sustainable, inclusive, and participatory future.

The chapters brought together in this volume open new avenues for reflection. They show that Cultural Heritage is both a resource and a responsibility; that European identity is not only a symbolic construct but also a political practice; that sustainability requires not only innovation but also a strong sense of rootedness; and that cultural diversity can only become meaningful when it is recognised in policies, institutions, and communities. It is at the intersection of memory, participation, and transformation that the cultural challenges facing Europe today are situated.

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