Rural tourism and national identity building in contemporary Europe: Evidence from Portugal

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Abstract This article examines the relationship between rural tourism and national identity, with reference to a southern European country. Particular attention is devoted to the meaning making work that the state, national visitors and residents do at two of the most popular Historic Villages of Portugal. Drawing on ethnographic materials, the article sheds light on the links between historic conservation and “heritagization”, as defined by Poria and Ashworth, and demonstrates the force of the nation’s medieval origins in the dominant discourses on Portuguese national identity. In addition, it shows that “felt history” has been targeted by the state to increase the levels of consumption through rural tourism, but also triggers a sense of national pride among Portuguese visitors. The residents of Castelo Rodrigo and of Sortelha contest, but they also recycle the officially sanctioned interpretation of the sites as medieval to convey the fascinating distinctiveness of the local identity.

Keywords Rural tourism; Historic sites; Felt history; Heritagization; National identity; Portugal;

1. Introduction

Though there is no standard definition of rural tourism, it is, nowadays, widely accepted in the scholarly literature that it embraces a range of tourism activities which take place in the countryside, such as agritourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, nature tourism and adventure tourism (e.g. Lane, 1994; R. Sharpley and J. Sharpley, 1997). Rural tourism is growing in many parts of the world, but mainly in developed countries, and has substantially expanded since the 1970s, both in terms of demand and of supply (e.g. Lane, 2009; Long and Lane, 2000).

The growth of rural tourism mirrors both a general expansion of all types of tourism and a diversification of tourist experiences (Woods, 2005, p. 173), closely associated both with the rise of a lifestyle-led and leisure-oriented society, and with the widespread mobilization of tourism as a strategy for rural development and regeneration (Walmsley, 2003). On the supply side, underpinning this general support for rural tourism is the assumption that it provides a number of potential benefits to rural areas (see Hall et al., 2003; Roberts and Hall, 2001, for a summary). However, several studies (e.g. Iorio and Corsale, 2010; OECD, 1994; Silva, 2015; Walmsley, 2003) have shown that, despite the positive effects that it may have in some cases, tourism is not a remedy to the problems facing rural areas, that not all rural spaces are suitable for the development of tourism and, similarly, that tourism development often fails to stimulate the anticipated socioeconomic revitalisation.

National identity is commonly described in the scholarly literature as an individual identification and as a specific form of collective identity, in the construction of which
the existence of a common past plays a critical role (e.g. Friedman, 1992; Löfgren, 1991; Schlesinger, 1987). In fact, history is an important element in both the “ethno-genealogical” and the “civic-territorial” models of the nation, as defined by Anthony Smith (1991). Although the ethnic history of the nation is arguably a history of the nation before the nation, the civic and territorial history of the nation is a history of the nation after the “Age of history”. In any case, the nation is constituted as an “imagined community” not only through simultaneity, as Benedict Anderson (1991 [1983]) emphasizes in his theorisation of the nation, but also through historical continuity; it is constituted as a kind of “imagined community” unifying the living and the dead. Nairn’s (1977) description of nationalism as a “modern Janus”, which looks backwards and forwards, illustrates the point.

Research inside and outside Europe has shown that there are a number of tools used in imagining and representing the nation as a collective moving throughout time, including archives, history books and archaeology (e.g. Díaz-Andreu and Champion, 1996; Kohl, 1998; Meskell, 2002), or cultural heritage and heritage displays, such as museums (e.g. B. Anderson, 1991 [1983]; Boswell and J. Evans, 1999; L. Smith, 2006). Such meaning making forms and practices are part of a wide range of “aesthetic” resources through which governments and groups perform and materialize the nation to evoke and regulate a sense of identity and feelings of belonging (Mookherjee, 2011).

This is particularly the case of historic monuments and sites turned into tourist attractions (e.g. Bruner, 1994; Edensor, 2002; Handler and Gable, 1997; Johnson, 1995). Viewed as material testimonies of important events and/or achievements in the national past, they are converted into places for the patriotic pilgrimage and education of nationals, as well as for the curious wanderings and admiration of foreigners. They are, therefore, subject to interventions intended to render them legible in the present. Historically, these interventions have involved a range of changing ideologies and practices of preservation, restoration and commodification through tourism, the objectives of which were to locate those physical resources more firmly in a past that is always constructed from the viewpoint of the present. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, pp. 149-150) rightly points out, heritage is “a new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past […] [and] gives buildings, precincts, and ways of life […] a second life as exhibits of themselves”.

A considerable body of research has already been amassed in Europe and other parts of the world on the practices and ideologies aiming to endow historic monuments with a second life as heritage, from erasure of the present to sanitised or simplified reconstructions of the past (Hewison, 1987), and contemporary forms of romantic preservation of ruins (e.g. Choay, 2001; Falser et al., 2010; Finley, 2004; Klekot, 2012; Sutton and Fahmi, 2002; Winter, 2007). Yet, in spite of some recent contributions (e.g. Hodges, 2009; Prista, 2013; Watson, 2013), there is a paucity of research on the connections between historic conservation and rural tourism.

This article aims to contribute to bridge this knowledge gap, while studying the case of the Historic Villages of Portugal (hereafter HVP). For this purpose, it analyses the HVP programme and a selection of the promotional materials of that rural tourism product. In addition, it examines the identity work that both residents and Portuguese visitors do at two of the most popular HVP, namely, Castelo Rodrigo and Sortelha. By doing so, the article also contributes to contemporary discussions on the dissonant quality of heritage (e.g. Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996).

This contribution will be developed as follows. After presenting the study methods, the article sheds light on the importance of the nation’s medieval origins in discourses on Portuguese national identity and on its reflects in the design and
implementation of the HVP programme at the two sites under analyses. Then, it stresses the relevance of “felt history” (Connor, 1994) in the visitors’ experiences of the sites as well as the relevance of the countryside in their emotional involvement with the nation’s past. The subsequent examination of the residents’ responses to the HVP programme shows that resistance to the negative impact of “heritagization” (Poria and Ashworth, 2009) on their everyday lives coexists with some local recycling of the officially sanctioned medieval narrative. The main conclusions and theoretical implications of the research are put forward in the concluding section.

2. Study methods
This article is part of a wider investigation on rural tourism developed by the corresponding author in Portugal, now briefly introduced. First, the research focused on the most popular tourist accommodation sector in the Portuguese countryside, namely, Turismo em Espaço Rural (TER – Tourism in Rural Areas) (e.g. Silva, 2009; 2013). Second, it tackled the HVP at two levels of observation. At the state level, there was an analysis of the HVP project and the promotional materials of this tourism product, complemented by six (recorded) semi-structured interviews with the coordinator of, and the architects associated with, the HVP programme.

At the local level, there was ethnographic fieldwork in Castelo Rodrigo (four months in 2009) and in Sortelha (two months in 2009 and one week in 2013, plus five months in 2003), during which the corresponding author worked and stayed in the villages, gradually expanding the network of acquaintances and respondents. The main methods of data collection were participant observation, semi-structured interviews with residents and Portuguese visitors, and detailed field notes. We had numerous other informal discussions with both villagers and visitors, and participated in family and village events. This was complemented by a content analysis of the statements written, from 2003 to 2009, in the guestbook available at the tourist office of Castelo Rodrigo and of the statements written, from 1997 to 2003, in the guestbook of a tourist accommodation unit located in Sortelha.

The two villages were chosen for different reasons. Sortelha was chosen in order to complement the material on the HVP theme collected during the fieldwork previously carried out in that village, as part of the abovementioned study on TER. In turn, Castelo Rodrigo was chosen due to its specific location at the border between Portugal and Spain and the fact that, unlike all but one HVP (Castelo Mendo), the great majority of its population lives inside the citadel. Besides, the villages have similar socioeconomic features. The resident populations are aged (33 percent of people in Castelo Rodrigo and 51 percent of people in Sortelha are over 64 years old), relatively poor, and have low levels of formal education and training (the illiteracy rate is 5 percent in Castelo Rodrigo and 18 percent in Sortelha). The main sources of income for local families are a small-scale agriculture for family consumption, services in public/municipal administration,

1 This is a type of small-scale and familial tourist accommodation that includes agritourism.
2 Over time, we have conducted 85 interviews with residents (25 in Castelo Rodrigo and 60 in Sortelha: 40 in 2003, 15 in 2009 and 5 in 2013) and 57 interviews with visitors (17 in Castelo Rodrigo and 40 in Sortelha: 20 in 2003, 5 in 2009 and 15 in 2013). About a quarter of the interviews with residents and a third of the interviews with visitors were recorded, and notes were taken on the remainder. The recorded interviews were transcribed and subject to a content analysis.
small-scale commerce, money transfers from pension and retirement payments, and tourism.

Notwithstanding the seasonality characteristic of many other destinations worldwide (e.g. Butler, 2001), despite the existence of exceptions (Jimura, 2011), tourism plays an important role in local economies and employment – 14 percent of residents in Castelo Rodrigo and 15 percent of residents in Sortelha work in TER units (2 in Castelo Rodrigo and 5 in Sortelha), restaurants (1 in Castelo Rodrigo and 2 in Sortelha), cafés/snack-bars (2 in Castelo Rodrigo and 3 in Sortelha), local shops (2 in Castelo Rodrigo and 1 in Sortelha), the tourist offices (1 in each village), and handicrafts or homemade food products. In both cases, there are a significant number of vacation houses – 8 in Castelo Rodrigo and 12 in Sortelha –, most of which are owned by outsiders of predominantly urban origin who use them infrequently. However, whereas the great majority of the permanent residents of Castelo Rodrigo live inside the historic site (57 of the 62), only a residual number of the permanent residents of Sortelha live in the citadel (3 of the 234).

3. Results
3.1. The perspective of the state
Located in the Western side of the Iberian Peninsula, Portugal is a country with one of the most ancient and stable territorial borders of Europe, which lost its independence for a short period of time, from 1580 to 1640. Despite the geographical diversity of the territory (Ribeiro, 1967 [1945]), central power has a long tradition here. Usually considered one of the most ancient “old continuous nations” (Seton-Watson, 1977) of Europe by historical literature on nationalism, Portugal is also regarded as such by dominant discourses on national identity. It is maintained that the Portuguese nation/national identity is a political construction initially forged in the thirteenth century, when the territorial borders of the kingdom of Portugal were established – through the Treaty of Alcanizes (1297) – and a medieval form of government was implemented (e.g. Herculano, 1980-1981 [1846]; Mattoso, 1985; Sobral, 2003). The wars against both the Muslim power and Castile in the Middle Ages, described as “national wars”, and the independence wars in the seventeenth century (1640–1668) are considered crucial moments in this perspective (Mattoso, 1998).

This does not mean that the discourses on Portuguese national identity have not debated the ethnic antecedents of the nation. Although Fabião (1996) has argued that the links between archaeology and nationalism are in Portugal feeble, mainly when compared with other countries (e.g. Díaz-Andreu and Champion, 1996; Kohl, 1998), this is evident in the importance of the Lusitanians in the archaeological imagination of the nation (e.g. Correia, 1944) and in the more general importance of archaeology in the discourses on Portuguese national identity between 1870 and 1950 (Leal, 2000, pp. 63-82).

In any case, in Portugal, as in other European countries (e.g. Choay, 2001; Lowenthal, 1998), historic monuments have been the object of practices and discourses on national identity since the nineteenth century, especially during Salazar’s dictatorship (1933–1974). As various scholars (e.g. Neto, 2002; Tomé, 2002) show, this was part of an ideological project in which monuments were used to evoke the nation and to prove the historic authenticity of the events and facts narrated according to a triumphalist version of the nation’s history. This was especially visible in the Commemorations of the Centenaries – the VIII Centenary of the Birth of Portugal, taking into consideration the year of 1139, when Afonso Henriques (1109–1185) titled himself King for the first time; and the III Centenary of the Restoration of Independence – promoted by the state around 1940. Special attention was paid to the medieval castles and fortresses. Many of these –
including the military architecture of Castelo Rodrigo and of Sortelha – were not only subject to intervention by the DGEMN, a public agency created (in 1929) for the management of the “national buildings and monuments”, but also chosen to host the festivities.

From the late 1930s onwards, part of this effort directed towards national monuments had already recourse to the language of tourism, both at the national and the international levels (e.g. Prista, 2014; Tomé, 2002). However, it was more recently that the touristic uses of the past, particularly the monumental past, have significantly increased, most especially in the context of rural tourism. This forms part of the abovementioned societal trend in which tourism is used strategically for the purposes of rural development and renewal in line with orientations from the European Union – which Portugal joined in 1986 – (e.g. Cavaco, 1995; Jenkins et al., 1998; Silva, 2009). The Recovery Programme for the Castles (2000–2006) (see IPPAR, n/d.) and the HVP programme are two good examples. This study focuses on the later of these programmes.

Designed by the Portuguese government and the Commission for the Development and Coordination of the Central Region, which coordinated it, and funded by the European Union, the HVP programme was implemented between 1995 and 2006, in cooperation with the Portuguese historic conservation agencies (the former IPPAR and the former DGEMN),\(^3\) the INATEL foundation, the municipalities and private entities. The purposes were to renovate the historic monuments and the built fabric and, thereby, to promote, via “cultural tourism”, socioeconomic regeneration in 10 historically significant villages located on the east side of central Portugal – that is, near the border with Spain – negatively affected by the de-ruralisation process of the Portuguese economy and society (MPAT and MCT, 1994; PPDR, 1995) (see Fig. 1).\(^4\)

Poria and Ashworth (2009) distinguish “heritagization” from conservation and preservation of heritage. According to the authors (ibid., p. 522), while conservation and preservation are linked to objects and the supply of cultural tourism, “heritagization” is a social process in which heritage is used, through heritage tourism, to achieve certain sociopolitical objectives, mainly establishing solidarity among members of a group (national, ethnic, religious, etc.), by highlighting their uniqueness and, thereby, legitimising a certain sociopolitical order and ideological framework.

This theoretical formulation provides a useful tool to describe the case of the HVP, where the state’s effort for the conservation/preservation of nationally significant monuments and sites have come to play an important role in the ways in which a nation’s common history and present national identity are being imagined and represented and, hence, affirmed and reinforced in the contemporary, global world, through and in terms of tourism in the countryside. This is clear in various aspects of ethnographic analysis.

Besides the chosen designation – Historic Villages of Portugal –, the nationalist reading of the sites forms part of the overall programme. In fact, this was also presented as a “culture programme”, a programme expected to “allow renovating an important part of our cultural inheritance”; “some of the places that were significant in our history” (PPDR, 1995, p. 5).\(^5\) In the words of Alexandre Relvas, at that time Secretary of State for Tourism,

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3 These two agencies disappeared in 2007, as a result of the creation of the IGESPAR.

4 In 2003, the HVP programme spread to two other “villages”, the small towns of Belmonte and of Trancoso.

5 All translations by the authors.
“[i]n few places in our country we have such a direct and exciting encounter with history as in the villages that will be renovated under the Programme, thus constituting this route a constant evocation of our past in all its grandeur” (MPAT and MCT, 1994, p. 5).

In official history, except Piodão, all villages have elements of military architecture and played an important role in both the Christian Reconquista and the wars against the other Iberian Christian kingdoms in the Middle Ages, a period consensually considered formative of the Portuguese nation/national identity, as noted above in this article.

In addition, and illustrative of the role that tourism texts and images may play in communicating a collective identity (Henderson, 2003; Jamison, 1999), a nationalist-inspired reading of the HVP forms part of the promotional materials disseminated by the state departments for tourism. For example, in the official web site of the HVP it is asserted that

“The formation of Portugal and significant periods of the country’s history left strong marks on this frontier lands. [...] Castles, fortress walls and defensive ditches are timeless witnesses of the decisive role that the Historic Villages have played in the conflicts and strategies underlying the defence and affirmation of nationality” (http://www.aldeiashistoricas.adsi.pt/index_.html#home).

Likewise, the web site Visit Portugal states about the HVP,

“Perched on the top of mountains, they can be spotted from afar by the tall towers of their medieval castles. [...] Moors and Christians, Spaniards and Portuguese, all tried to take them for themselves and so each has a very ancient history or a tale to tell. Today, they are peaceful and preserve in the street cobbles and the stone of the houses the real Portugal: the authenticity of its people and a proud 900-year long history” (http://www.visitportugal.com/en/node/73751).

That preferred text resonates in a tourist guide for the HVP, published only in Portuguese language, where visitors are invited to

“rediscover our roots” and “feel the emotion of the place, [...] a patriotic feeling, which spoke louder at various times in the history of Portugal”; and to “[c]onquer the 12 most emblematic villages of our country [and] [l]earn how much they have contributed to the creation, defence and consolidation of our national identity” (Falhas, 2010, pp. 2, back cover).

Moreover, the nation is a core element in both the display and the officially sanctioned interpretation offered to visitors at the HVP, as the cases of Castelo Rodrigo and of Sortelha will demonstrate.

3.1.1. Castelo Rodrigo
Located on the top of a hill, at about 820 metres above sea level, Castelo Rodrigo is a village as well as, since 1836, the seat of a parish that bears its name. The village is part of the municipality of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, some 70 kilometres from the city of Guarda. In its physical form, the site is made up of about 100 buildings – including 30 old barns, 10 garages and 65 houses –, most of which are privately owned and representative of vernacular architecture; with narrow streets, a few local shops and two
small *TER* units; a church, a pillory and a cistern well; and the ruins both of a castle and of a palace constructed inside it. The built fabric is surrounded by a ruined wall-like structure, originally composed of 13 towers, some of which still remain.

The ways in which the monuments and the built fabric of Castelo Rodrigo were put on display by experts in architecture in the context of the HVP programme are described and analysed in detail elsewhere (Silva, 2011). The important point to bear in mind is that the site was restored and rendered “historical”, or, in other words, intervened according to patterns that prefigure a re-traditionalisation and stress continuity and tradition. This was accomplished through various activities, such as the preservation of monuments; the restoration of facades; the restoration and standardisation of roofs; the removal of “modern” elements from the facades and roofs of buildings, such as television antennas and gutter pipes; the placement of wooden doors and windows in the facades; and the uncovering of the stonework of buildings.

At the same time, a preferred interpretive framework for the site was constructed and disseminated (both nationally and internationally) through tourism brochures and books, as well as guidebooks, web sites and other “markers”, which place it “out of real time and space” (MacCannell, 1999 [1976], p. 41). Locally, besides tourism brochures, which are available for collection at the tourist office, the preferred reading is conveyed through two inscriptions in sight – written exclusively in Portuguese language – put at one of the entrances to and inside the citadel. The former describes Castelo Rodrigo as part of a territory

“...conquered from the Arabs in the eleventh century, under the authority of the Kingdom of León, [when] from a small town, it was raised to the statute of municipality by the King Afonso IX [1171–1230], having finally become part of the Portuguese territory on [...] September 1297, through the Treaty of Alcântara”.

It adds that, “[b]ecause the town took the side of Castile in the crises of 1383–1385, the King Dom João I [1357–1433] punished Castelo Rodrigo, by ordering the town to display its royal arms upside down”. After mentioning the destruction of the palace, described in the other inscription in more detail, it calls attention to the stone monument – inaugurated in 14 June 1940 – that signals and commemorates the role played by Castelo Rodrigo in the “restoration of national independence”, particularly in 1664; at that year, it is asserted, “as part of the wars against Spain”, the town “was sieged by the Duke of Ossuna” and “his 150 men garrison resisted heroically until help arrived, when the battle of Salgadela occurred, near the Monastery of Santa Maria de Aguiar”, some 500 metres from the citadel. Finally, it affirms that, “[f]rom the historical viewpoint, no other border town played such an important role in the Portuguese – Castilian relationships and in the defence of the Portuguese territory for so long”.

The later inscription, put in the clock tower, is specifically devoted to the castle, and asserts that the castle – which, like the *Manueline*6 style pillory, is protected as a “national monument” since 1922 – “suffered several reconstructions over time”, namely, in 1297, when the King “Dom Dinis I [1261–1325] promoted the restoration of the castle and the re-settlement of Castelo Rodrigo”; in 1508, when the King “Dom Manuel I [1469–1521] rebuilt once again the fortress”; in 1590, when “the son of a mayor of the village and defender of the Castilian cause”, the Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, Cristóvão de Moura

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6 The *Manueline*, or Portuguese late Gothic, is the ornate Portuguese style of architecture of the first decades of the sixteenth century, incorporating maritime elements and representations of the discoveries.
(1538–1613), ordered his palace to be built inside the citadel; and in 10 December 1640, when, “quickly after the restoration of independence”, “the population burnt down the traitor’s palace, which remains in ruins since then”, for considering it “a symbol of Spanish oppression”.

That text is also communicated by the employees of the local tourist office in the form of guided tours throughout the village, including to the ruins of the castle/palace, and to the church of Our Lady of Rocamador. The latter is described as “a roman style” church constructed by a congregation of friars, in the thirteenth century, to assist the pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela.

3.1.2. Sortelha

Sortelha is a village and, since 1855, the seat of a parish with the same name located in the municipality of Sabugal, some 30 kilometres from Guarda. The village has two separate places: the walled village, which is the protected site, and the outskirts of the village. Physically, the site is made up of approximately 100 stone buildings, including 17 old barns and 70 houses, most of which are privately owned and representative of vernacular architecture; with narrow streets, a few cafés, local shops and TER units; a restaurant and a church, near which there are some unmarked anthropomorphic graves; a Manueline style pillory and a castle. The built fabric is embraced by well preserved fortress walls. As occurred in Castelo Rodrigo, under the HVP programme, the citadel of Sortelha was restored and rendered “historical” (see Silva, 2014, pp. 621-622, for details).

As in Castelo Rodrigo also, in Sortelha, the setting of the scene was accompanied by the construction and dissemination of a preferred interpretation for the site. Locally, along with tourism brochures, the preferred reading is offered to visitors through two inscriptions in sight – written exclusively in Portuguese language – put at one of the entrances to and inside the citadel. Aside from mentioning the status of Sortelha as the seat of a municipality from 1228 until the nineteenth century, the former inscription describes the citadel as “a medieval urban space (centuries XIII–XIV)”, of military character, which “is still observable today”, unchanged by modernity, and where housing is mostly characterized by the “two-story house built from local materials”, that is, stones and wood.

The other inscription, put near to the castle – which is protected as a “national monument” since 1910 –, places the first re-settlement efforts of Sortelha approximately in the year of 1121, during the reign of the King Dom Sancho I (1154–1211), and assigns the construction of the castle to the king Dom Sancho II (1209–1248). Then, it describes the site of Sortelha as

“a medieval fortified structure, embracing the castle, the fortress walls and the built fabric inside it, […] designed to meet the needs imposed by the Christian Reconquista in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries: to promote the re-settlement of Muslim territories annexed by the Kingdom of Portugal and to sustain the border territorial disputes with the Christian kingdoms of Castile and León in the region of Riba-Côa”.

It adds that Sortelha has ceased to form the frontier line of the kingdom of Portugal after the signing of the Treaty of Alcanizes – through which Portugal took possession of the lands then owned by the Kingdom of León on the east bank of the Côa River, including Castelo Rodrigo; and that, despite that fact, “the castle of Sortelha has played an important geostrategic role throughout the history of Portugal”, particularly during “the reigns of the Kings Dom Dinis I, […] Dom Fernando I [1345–1383] […] and
Dom Manuel I”, as well as “in the war between Portuguese and Spaniards that followed the restoration of independence”.

That text is also communicated by the employee of the local tourist office in the form of guided tours throughout the village, including to the marked ruins of a church initially constructed in the fourteenth century and a section of a medieval sidewalk located outside the fortress walls.

3.2. The viewpoint of visitors
Between 2006 and 2013, Castelo Rodrigo received more than 308,000 visitors, while Sortelha received more than 389,000 visitors. As is often the case in the HVP (see statistics at http://www.aldeiashistoricasdeportugal.com/ahp.htm) and in many other historic/heritage sites worldwide (e.g. Jimura, 2011), the great majority of visitors were domestic (74 percent in the case of Castelo Rodrigo and 80 percent in the case of Sortelha), while Spaniards accounted for much of the remaining share (14 percent in Castelo Rodrigo and 9 percent in Sortelha), due to geographic proximity. This study is centred on nationals.

Ethnographic fieldwork shows that, although each individual visitor is free to construct his or her readings of the site(s), and only a small part of the visitors actually read the inscriptions in sight or go on a guided visit, there are certain patterns that recur. First, although visitors in fact travel in space, there is a perceived travel in time back to the past, notably to the medieval era. For example, a couple in their late 20s has described Castelo Rodrigo as “a time machine, where people feel transported to the Middle Ages”, while another visitor wrote about the same site that it “transports us to the times past” (Guestbook, 2004). A couple in their 50s interviewed in 2003 similarly stated that “Sortelha delves us into the Middle Ages, making us live as in a movie of that time”, whilst another interviewee in her 40s declared that, “when entering into Sortelha, [he] had the feeling that [he] was entering into a different world; [he] felt that [he] was not in 2013, but many, many centuries ago”.

Such sense of time travel towards the past is fuelled by two main factors. On the one hand, there is the “mimetic credibility” of the sites, that is, the fact that they were produced to be “believable to the public” (Bruner, 1994, p. 399), as shown above in this article. On the other hand, there are two linkages between the sites and the countryside. One is vernacular architecture. Indeed, visitors tend to value the similarities between the vernacular houses in existence in the HVP and more generic forms of rural architecture that prevail in central Portugal. These were turned into symbols of a pristine and idealized rural past by processes of objectification throughout the twentieth century (Leal, 2000, pp. 107-223). For example, an interviewee in his 30s has defined Castelo Rodrigo as “a medieval border village which maintains that medieval character, with the small houses made from stone and the cobbled streets characteristics of the region”. Equally, a couple in their 50s has described Sortelha as “one of the more beautiful and authentic medieval villages of our country”, mainly because of “the magnificence of the granite and the small stone houses with rocky outcrops at the base”, whereas another couple of visitors in their late 20s have emphasized the fact that “the houses are inlaid in granite stones” to illustrate “the perfect harmony between nature and culture” that one may find there (Field Journal, September 2009).

7 Although the tourist office was created in Sortelha in 2003, a year later than in Castelo Rodrigo, the information produced by it until 2006 is unreliable, since it did not operate on a daily basis and its previous location was less visible than its current position at the entrance to the site.
The second (and strongest) linkage between the HVP and rurality is that they are consensually considered a highly valued aspect of the rural landscape that is a primordial object of the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 2002 [1990]) (see Figs. 1 and 2). This is clearly expressed by a couple of visitors in their 30s, who have claimed to be “regular visitors” of Castelo Rodrigo, “mainly because of the surrounding landscape that one may gaze upon” from its citadel, “a vast and rural landscape”, “with fields of olive trees, vineyards, almond trees and some sheep”. In the words of two visitors hosted in a TER unit in Sortelha,

“Sortelha ... the acropolis of Sabugal, where gigantic stones are piled in balance, which only nature produces, a sublime castle was born from where one can enjoy a beautiful landscape of greens and ochre. A generous and perverse wind touches our faces between the robust fortress walls and silences interrupted by the distant sound of a stream with waters jumping on its small dams” (Guestbook, 1997).

“We rested here from the adventures on the surrounding hills, from Almeida to Trancoso and Monsanto [...]. The landscape contrasts between rough and harsh and the softness of the meadows that surround the stream waters and of the villages in close proximity to the defensive castles, and the sweetness of traditional architecture” (Guestbook, 1999).

The rural landscape described by and celebrated in the visitors’ discourses, thus, does not correspond to a wild landscape, where human activity is less conspicuous, or to a fully humanised landscape, where the civilisation marks a more pronounced; instead, it corresponds to a “middle landscape”, along the lines set out by Tuan (1974, p. 109), that is, “the ideal middle world of man poised between the polarities of city and wilderness”.

Moreover, and illustrative of the sentimental dimension of heritage (e.g. Smith, 2006) and heritage tourism (Poria et al., 2003), such sense of time travel is towards the visitors’ national past. Table 1 exemplifies this point.

**Table 1**
Indicative attitudes of visitors e the HVP as a journey to the national past.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“It was wonderful go back to the medieval times and remember our history of Portugal”</td>
<td>Guestbook, Castelo Rodrigo, 2001.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We have boarded on a time machine that took us to enjoy the experience of the Portuguese past”</td>
<td>Guestbook, Sortelha, 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This stay at Sortelha made us go back in time and approximate us of our ancestors”</td>
<td>Guestbook, 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The meaning [of Sortelha] is historical. We, the Portuguese, are this; this is part of our history, of our existence”</td>
<td>Man, 37 years old, interviewed in 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The HVP provide a journey to the history of our country. Our country would not exist if these constructions did not exist, [because] the history of Portugal is made up of constant military conquests and, after the conquests, of attempted defence from the Spaniards”</td>
<td>Man, 54 years old, interviewed in Castelo Rodrigo.</td>
</tr>
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<td>“I feel that I had a quite intense life in the medieval era, and I'm experiencing that life now”</td>
<td>Man, 43 years old, interviewed in Sortelha in 2013.</td>
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Source: Fieldwork.
Connor’s (1994) approach to the nation is useful here. Connor distinguishes the realms of national identity and the nation from those of reason, while arguing that an emotional/psychological, non-rational attachment is mainly based on a sense, a feeling of consanguinity whereby the nation is constituted as a kinship group founded upon a unique and separate line of descent. The central point is not whether the origins are in fact unique, but the existence of an “intuitive conviction” that they are unique. The sense of unique descent claimed by many nations may not accord with factual history, because “[i]t is not chronological or factual history that is the key to the nation, but sentient or felt history” (ibid., p. 202).

The importance of “felt history” in shaping the heritage tourism experience is well recognised in the scholarly literature. For example, Palmer notes that felt history is critical in heritage tourism, because heritage tourism “is experienced primarily from within the confines of the imagination, becoming in a sense an intimate communicator of nationness”; and that affective responses are central to the formation of identities through felt history, because identity is both intimate and sentimental in character (Palmer, 2005, pp. 10, 22). According to Pretes (2003), when the nation is conceived of as “imagined community”, historic sites often provide tourists an avenue to affirm and maintain a form of national identity. In a similar vein, Park (2010) highlights the role that heritage tourism may play in the promotion of felt history of the two Koreas, thereby reinforcing their ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Such representations that focus on a social imaginary have recourse to national essentialisms as felt history to increase consumption through tourism, particularly as they apply to nationals who imbue the site with familiarity (Prentice and V. Anderson, 2007).

In the HVP, not only felt history has been targeted by the state to increase the demand associated with rural tourism – especially among Portuguese urban dwellers –, as noted in a previous section of this article, but it also triggers a form of national pride amongst virtually all Portuguese visitors, as exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2
Indicative attitudes of visitors – the HVP as a source of national pride.

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<td>“Walking throughout the streets of the citadel, finding in every</td>
<td>“It's good to feel that we participate in our history. Congratulations to Sortelha and to</td>
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<td>corner the history that unites us, […] make us feel proud of our</td>
<td>Casa da Cerca for making us feel proud of what is ours” (Guestbook, Sortelha, 1997).</td>
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<tr>
<td>rich ancestry” (Guestbook, Sortelha, 1997).</td>
<td>“Sincere tribute to those who have built this heritage, rich and beautiful; I'm proud to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We, the Portuguese, should be proud of our past and it is through</td>
<td>a descendant of these Portuguese people who did so much for our country; honour and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the preservation of this heritage that we feel our history” (Guestbook, Castelo Rodrigo, 2004).</td>
<td>glory to all of them” (Guestbook, Sortelha, 1997).</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We came to visit the historic villages, because of the history that</td>
<td>“These visits enrich our self-esteem, because they allow us to realise that we have a rich</td>
</tr>
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<td>these sites transmit to us: a suffered, but victorious Portugal that</td>
<td>history” (Couple, 34 and 32 years old, interviewed in Sortelha, Field Journal, April 2013).</td>
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<tr>
<td>makes us feel proud” (Woman, 44 years old, interviewed in Castelo</td>
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<td>Rodrigo).</td>
<td>Source: Fieldwork.</td>
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</table>

The reaction of national visitors to the historical dimension of the site(s) reflects the more general importance of history in the dominant discourses on Portuguese national
identity, discussed above in this article, but also a more general attitude of most Portuguese people regarding their nationality, namely, pride in history. As shown by the results of the International Social Survey Programme 2003, particularly in its national identity module, pride in history is not only the main source of national pride to the Portuguese respondents (92 percent), but also the topic on which the difference between Portugal and the European average is higher (+14 percent) (Leal, 2010). The medievalist contour of the national pride evoked by the visitors must also be stressed: it does not only correspond to the historical facts surrounding both Castelo Rodrigo and Sortelha, but is also attuned with the discourses on Portuguese national identity that stress the importance of the Medieval age in the national structuring of Portugal as an independent nation.\(^8\)

3.3. The viewpoint of residents
Ethnographic literature has shown that the inhabited historic monuments are characterized by tension and conflict between historic conservation and the secular use of buildings (e.g. Fabre, 2000; Fabre and Luso, 2010; Herzfeld, 2006; 2010). In his study of Rethemnos, in Greece, Herzfeld (1991) has argued that this is due to the coexistence of two competing conceptions of time/history projected into the same spaces – the “social” and the “monumental”. While the latter is technical, bureaucratic and, thus, desocialized, the former is more experiential and affective (ibid., pp. 10-16, 248-259). In Herzfeld’s terms,

“[s]ocial time is the grist of everyday experience. It is […] the kind of time in which events cannot be predicted but in which every effort can be made to influence them. […] Monumental time, by contrast, is reductive and generic. It encounters events as realizations of some supreme destiny, and it reduces social experience to predictability. Its main focus is on the past – a past constituted by categories and stereotypes. In its extreme forms, it is the time frame of the nation-state” (ibid., p. 10).

Herzfeld does not cite Riegl’s (1996 [1903]) analysis of the “cult of monuments”. However, it is clear that the distinction between “social time” and “monumental time” echoes the distinction between the “use value” of a historic monument and its “age value”. According to Riegl, historically, people have attributed two sets of values to monuments (either “intentional” or “unintentional”), namely, “commemorative values” (“intentional commemorative value”, “historical value”, and “age value”) and “present-day values” (“use value” and “art value”). The former, or the values of the past, tend to collide with the latter. In particular, the practical use value of an artistic or historic monument stands in conflict with its age value, because the former requires the maintenance of the object or building, while the latter emerges out of the dissolution of its form and colour over time (ibid., pp. 79-80).

Both Herzfeld’s and Riegl’s theorisations are useful to describe the cases of Castelo Rodrigo and of Sortelha. Either because they relate the spatial elements to their everyday lives, memories and identities, or because they inhabit (which is an extreme form of use) a historic monument, the residents of both villages in general tend to object/resist both to the monumentalisation of their living spaces and to the values of the past attributed to them by the state. In particular, they object to, and challenge, the

\(^8\) This medievalist trend is mostly evident in the work of José Mattoso, a Portuguese medievalist who is arguably the most famous historian Portuguese alive and the author of Identificação de um País (“Identification of a Country”) (Mattoso, 1985), one of the major books on Portugal and on Portuguese national identity written after the 1974 revolution.
restrictive disciplinary measures adopted for architecture in the sites that are considered responsible for hindering the improvement of their small houses according to the needs and possibilities of the present. For example, countering the argument that it is forbidden to change the appearance of houses to preserve local history, a retiree who was not allowed to raise the ceiling of a room where she could not stand upright, replied that “people do not live on appearances” and that “the history of Castelo Rodrigo is the history of its former, present and future inhabitants”. The president of the parish council at that time emphasized the same point during an interview at his office. In contrast, the two tourism entrepreneurs and the recent second house owners approve the protectionism of the built environment, because this serves their private interests (see Silva, 2011, for details).

The case of Sortelha is different from that of Castelo Rodrigo, but only in that the tension between the conservation and the inhabitation of domestic familiar spaces officially declared monumental does not affect directly a high number of residents. In fact, most of the buildings inside the citadel are vacant, and this is permanently inhabited by only three individuals, as noted above, of which two are retirees and the other is a craftsman and tourism entrepreneur in his 40s; in MacCannell’s (1992) terms, the historic/heritage site of Sortelha is almost an “empty meeting ground”.

Despite these tensions, most local inhabitants have been able to appropriate the medieval meanings associated with their living spaces. However, when they do it, it is not to articulate a sense of national identity; it is to articulate a sense of local identity. Perhaps better yet, as occurs in many other designated historic/heritage sites worldwide (e.g. Shackley, 1998; Jimura, 2011), the sites of Castelo Rodrigo and of Sortelha now function as a source of personal and collective pride. And, in both cases, the medieval quality of the site has become important to its residents for defining their identity, a sense of community and belonging in the form of place pride. In Castelo Rodrigo, this is clear in a rhyme constructed by a widow in her 70s who occasionally sells woollen handicrafts to visitors and plays the role of a guide:

“I live at the edge of the Sierra / With pleasure I say to you / Beautiful is our land / Small town of Castelo Rodrigo. // Its name is in history / Already passed many years / We were given the victory / In the fights against the Castilians”.

Besides the material presented elsewhere (Silva, 2014, pp. 626-627), the case of Sortelha is well exemplified by a song that forms part of its songbook, which is currently performed by the local folkloric group (created in 1984) and which starts as follows:

“Goodbye small town of Sortelha / As beautiful as I see you / The stones all united / Seem exiting from a kiss. // Goodbye small town of Sortelha / Three things give you grace / The tower and the castle / And the pillory at the square”.

As with the visitors, discussed above in this article, vernacular architecture occupies an important position here. An event that occurred in Castelo Rodrigo during the implementation of the HVP programme exemplifies this point. Influenced by the priest Canário Martins (1911–2005), residents demanded the uncovering of the stonework of the facades in all buildings located inside the citadel – including buildings which, according to the architects, should have been covered with plaster and whitewash or paint, as in the past –, for considering it typical and representative of traditional architecture (Silva, 2011, p. 46). Moreover, in both cases, the restoration of many stone buildings that were in an advanced state of ruin inside the citadel is one of the main perceived virtues
of the HVP programme. In the words of a resident in Castelo Rodrigo, the programme “was good, because it restored various houses whose walls and roofs were already in ruins”, mainly in the main street. In Sortelha, similarly, there is a widespread opinion that, with the implementation of the programme, “the old village has become new”. This, for example, is the case of a resident of the citadel in her 70s, according to whom the intervention by the state in the village “had the virtue of renovating many stone houses located inside the [citadel] which were in ruins, both on its walls as on its roofs” (Field Journal, September 2009).

5. Conclusions
This article set out to provide an ethnographically informed contribution on the connections between rural tourism and national identity building focused on the case of the HVP, in order to bridge a knowledge gap in rural studies.

Taken together, the study results offer an empirical illustration of the intersection of historic conservation in the countryside with “heritagization”, in the terms espoused by Poria and Ashworth (2009). In fact, especially since the 2000s, the state’s conservation/preservation efforts in both HVP have come to play an important role in the ways in which a nation’s common history and present national identity are being imagined and represented in the global world, through and in terms of rural tourism. Regarding the state, there is the designation of the sites as HVP, but also their display according to patterns that stress continuity and tradition; their officially sanctioned interpretation as material testimonies of the nation’s medieval origins; and the recourse to “felt history” (Connor, 1994) to increase the levels of consumption through rural tourism.

On the visitors’ side, stands out the perceived experience of a travel in time back to the Middle Ages, which is strongly influenced by the rural location of the HVP, and the experience of felt history, particularly history felt as national pride. Besides reflecting a more general attitude of most Portuguese people in relation to their nationality – pride in history –, this is because the symbolic content of the sites and the memories evoked enable visitors to tie their personal memories with those of the wider society, as is often the case in heritage tourism (Palmer, 2005; see also Bruner, 1994; Palmer, 1999; Pretes, 2003).

Most residents, by contrast, resist to the monumentalisation of their living spaces imposed by the state and do not internalize the officially sanctioned meanings of the site(s) as their own, because they tend to stand in conflict with their everyday lives. However, there are circumstances in which they recycle the preferred reading of the site(s) constructed by the site producers, considering medieval an accepted ingredient of the local identity and a source of personal and collective pride.

The research results have two main theoretical implications. First, several recent studies on the subject of national identity have stressed the importance of more informal modes of establishing a shared sense of national belonging (e.g. Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002; Herzfeld, 1997). These, of course, are important modes of national identity building in the contemporary world, particularly in well-established nations such as the European ones. However, the case of the HVP has shown that more formal and monumental modes of imagining the subjective “antiquity of the nation” (B. Anderson, 1991 [1983], p. 5) continue to play an important role.

Second, the study has demonstrated that the dissonant quality of heritage, or the lack of agreement on the meanings of (built) heritage (e.g. Graham et al., 2000; Smith, 2006; Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996) may well be associated with the existence of different viewpoints regarding the role played by national identity in people’s imaginings of collective belonging. The national that is valued by the Portuguese state agencies and
visitors is not the same national that is appropriated by the residents of Castelo Rodrigo and of Sortelha, who share a more circumscribed reading of the historical values attributed to the places in which they locally inhabit in the present. Actually, the HVP programme aimed to enhance a sense of national identity and national belonging among Portuguese visitors/tourists, but turned out to enhance a sense of place identity among residents.

In addition, the study has the potential to add nuance to the conceptions of rural space underlying its association with national identity. It is maintained that, in European countries such as Britain and France, the rural space has been viewed as homeland, the place from which the nation emerged and where its “true” features can still be found in its most pure form, whereas in postcolonial settler societies such as Australia and the United States of America, it has been identified as frontier, the dividing line between civilization and wilderness/barbarism (e.g. Short, 1991; Woods, 2005, pp. 280-282). This is a point that certainly needs further investigation, but this study suggests that the identification of rural space as frontier may also be an important element in the national identities of European countries like Portugal. Indeed, as it has also become clear in the article, ideas of conquest and of frontier occupy an important position in the preferred reading of the HVP, of which Castelo Rodrigo and Sortelha are two examples.

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