

Social sustainability and collective participation: cyclical dynamics of the multipart singing in the village of Manhouce

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FIGURE 1, 2

Cantos e Encantos na Semana Cultural de Manhouce. 2017

Throughout the 20th Century, and even more forcibly in the 21st Century, the village of Manhouce underwent great transformations as a result of the impact of modernity in agrarian societies, i.e. successive economic crises, migratory movements of its inhabitants, digital communications, and, more recently, the consequences of climate change in the local forests. These setbacks threaten the locality, obliging residents to reimagine their social life and their sense of community. As this paper discusses, local activists, political agents, and other residents of Manhouce create cyclical cooperative networks to fight for the sustainability of their society and social life, and for their local public spaces. Participatory performances of traditional songs related with the lost and imagined communitarian agrarian society are at the core of their repertoire. With the aim to understand such stewardships of traditional musical practices, I conducted field work and a long-term research in Manhouce, one of 14 parishes in the county of São Pedro do Sul in Portugal.

In Manhouce, singing traditional songs in three parallel voices has been a cyclical tie, uniting the population regularly. In 1938, the village sang and danced to be elected a symbol of the policies and values of the Estado Novo autocratic regime; in the 1980s, to access the recognition of the music industries and media; in the 21st Century, to conquer UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage recognition and to resist oblivion and social disconnection. Each new cycle brings about a (i) conversion of discourses around values of “authenticity”, “antiquity” and “uniqueness” and a (ii) diversion of performative practices that are reformulated and actualised, e.g. by adding or removing musical instruments, by integrating different generations, migrant family members, foreign accents or speakers of other languages.

