

PORTUGAL

Threats to the World Heritage

Introduction

Under Portuguese law, World Heritage is considered a National Monument and its buffer zone matches a “special protection zone” (*Lei 107/2001*, 8 Sept. and *Decreto-Lei 309/2009*, 23 Oct.). The municipalities, in partnership with the regional and central administration, are required to draw up a detailed safeguarding plan for the area to be protected. However, most of the properties are not protected by a safeguarding or management plan, and some are not safeguarded by a special protection zone, which does not comply with Portuguese law, the World Heritage Convention signed by Portugal in 1979, or the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. This is the case, for instance, in the historic centre of Évora that does not have a management plan or a buffer zone to protect the property. In other cases, the buffer zone was recently published, as for “Oporto’s Historic Centre, Don Luís Bridge and Serra do Pilar Monastery”, legally protected since 2019, 21 years after being listed as World Heritage.

Concerning the tourist pressure that Portugal has been experiencing in recent years, interventions are mainly focused on tourist activity, thus causing a reduction in the number of permanent residents, while the number of short-term accommodation and hotels is increasing. Vivid examples of this are: the monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça, where about one third is being adapted to a hotel; the cultural landscape of Sintra that is threatened by the new construction of a hotel; the historic centre of Oporto, as well as Sintra, both of which are in the process of gentrification, with historic buildings being transformed in order to respond to new needs and lifestyles of a wealthier population. None of these properties are protected by a safeguarding or management plan, just by a master plan.

In spite of several alerts from ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre (WHC) of UNESCO to the responsible authorities, work is in progress with extensive demolitions and negative impacts. ICOMOS Portugal wishes to highlight three main properties under threat, taking into account the fundamental principles of the World Heritage Convention, which those responsible for World Heritage properties must respect in order for a property to be put on the World Heritage List. Therefore, properties must retain the attributes that characterise the OUV of a property, protecting its criteria, integrity, authenticity, legislative protection and management.

Monastery of Alcobaça

The Monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça, founded in the 12th century, was listed as World Heritage in 1989, as a masterpiece of Cistercian Gothic art, due to: “its magnificent dimensions, the clarity of the architectural style, the beauty of the material used

and the care with which it was built” (criterion i); “a unique infrastructure of hydraulic systems and functional buildings” (criterion iv); “no major changes that could affect the integrity of the property”; “it has not suffered major renovation/ restoration projects, maintaining the physical and intangible authenticity of the property”. Since then, minor changes have occurred: refurbishment of the 18th-century cellar; electrical installations; restoration of baroque terra cotta and wooden sculptures; infiltration repairs, and construction of the Saint Bernard exhibition gallery.

The General Direction of Cultural Heritage (DGPC – Direção Geral do Património Cultural), the Patriarchy of Lisbon, and the Municipality of Alcobaça manage the monument. In 2015, about one third of the property was granted to the private holding group Visabeira, SA, for hotel operation with an annual rent of 5,000 euros over the next 50 years. The luxury hotel will occupy the Rachadouro cloister and the east aisle of the Cardeal cloister. These spaces will be transformed and will be inaccessible to the public. The project endangers the OUV of the property, namely: i) its integrity, with irreversible interventions, demolition of domes and foundations, which were ingeniously constructed to resist earthquakes and unstable soils; ii) the architectural authenticity, including breaking the relation between the two cloisters; iii) the reduction of the “magnificent dimension” of the monument.

Due to the significance of the intervention, ICOMOS-Portugal recommended in March 2019 that work be suspended and the property be included in the List of World Heritage in Danger. The project should be changed, not allowing demolitions of the original monument; instead a use with lower requirements, excluding the construction of a swimming pool, a spa and shops, but also intrusive infrastructures that are incompatible with the World Heritage property. Furthermore, it is desirable to enlarge the buffer zone, to protect the property from further constructions and the hydraulic system located outside the actual limits. Be-



Fig. 1: Santa Maria de Alcobaça monastery. Identification of the property (top left); Ongoing works (bottom left); Area occupied by the hotel in red line (right, google maps).

sides, according to paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, the World Heritage Committee should be informed as soon as possible of any major restoration or new construction in an area protected under the Convention (Fig. 1).

Cultural landscape of Sintra

Sintra cultural landscape was the first European cultural landscape to be listed as a World Heritage property. It was listed in 1995 under criteria (ii), (iv) and (v). The buffer zone comprises 946 hectares and 3,641 hectares. The “Parques de Sintra – Monte da Lua – SA”, represented by DGPC, Institute for Nature and Forest Conservation, Tourism of Portugal, and the Municipality of Sintra address the management of the World Heritage property.

Since November 2017, ICOMOS Portugal has been alerted to the progressive loss of integrity and authenticity of the urban tissue and its landscape. The most blatant case is the project of the Quinta da Gandarinha hotel, occupying a palace from the 19th century, located at the entrance of the historic centre. The new project has 5,555 m² of construction and 3,900 m² of parking. Considering its criterion (iv) “*The landscape is a unique example of European Romanticism with the cultural occupation of the northern slope of the Serra that has maintained its essential in-*

tegrity (...) The villas and quintas with their gardens and parks that cover the major area of the property correspond to a clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by people through landscape design”, the intervention undoubtedly endangers the OUV of the property.

When the project was assessed, ICOMOS Portugal recommended the elaboration of a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA). Unfortunately, it was not addressed. Now, an imposing construction is visible from various points within the classified area. In spite of this project being rejected several times by the central administration DGPC, the municipality allowed its construction in 2005. A court case dragged on for several years and the work was suspended until a final decision was made in favour of the municipality. In 2017, the property was sold again and work restarted, despite strong popular protest and media reports. Finally, in early 2019, non-conformity with the approved project, in particular with the construction area, led to an embargo on the works, a situation that has been maintained until today.

Another substantial problem is the Municipal Master Plan (PDM) which is currently under revision. It proposes an enhancement of the tourism sector, an increase of the construction index on rural and urban ground, in coastal areas, in natural and forest spaces. Furthermore, on urban ground, the construction of a lower floor and the alteration of the roofs are allowed; in tourist areas, any kind of use is allowed without restrictions.

ICOMOS Portugal recommends that the new PDM should not change the rates and the constraints of construction in the protected area, compared to those existing at the time when the property was included in the World Heritage List. Any alteration to the Master Plan should be submitted to the World Heritage Committee for evaluation. Regarding the Gandarinha hotel, ICOMOS Portugal recommends that the new building should be demolished to safeguard the OUV of the property. Sintra must be protected from overbuilding, especially in natural areas, to avoid a negative impact on the cultural landscape (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Gandarinha Hotel in Sintra: Work in progress (left); location at one of the most important accesses to the historic centre (top right); model of the project, including the palace of the 19th century and the new buildings in white (bottom right, in <http://www.serradesintra.net/inicio/8-noticias/114-gandarinha>, accessed in 29/12/2019)

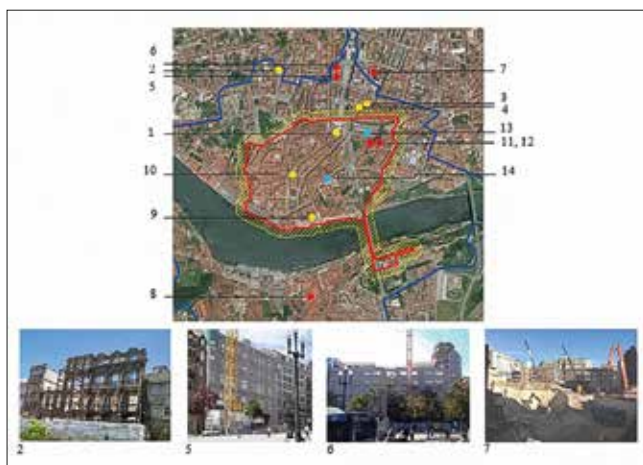


Fig. 3: Demolitions and facadism in the WH property of Oporto, reported in February 2018; map location: completed works – yellow; ongoing works – red; ongoing projects – blue (top); some examples of interventions: 2, 5, 6 and 7 (bottom).

Historic Centre of Oporto, Luiz I Bridge and Monastery Serra do Pilar

The management of the site is the joint responsibility of DGPC, the Northern Cultural Regional Direction (Direção Regional da Cultura do Norte), Oporto City, and Porto Vivo-SRU (Urban Rehabilitation Society). The site was listed as World Heritage in 1996 under criterion (iv), on the basis of the exceptional urban landscape, the overall integrity and the authenticity of the urban fabric. However, at present, there is a gradual loss of its integrity due to massive demolitions of the historic buildings and new constructions affecting the urban landscape. Related to this, and due to the growing pressure from tourism since the property became World Heritage, the population of the Historic Centre has decreased (by more than 50 percent), while the World Heritage Committee recommended dealing with the issue of depopulation.

In 2018, ICOMOS Portugal reported and documented several threats to the property, based on observations made on site, all characterised by facadism (Fig. 3):

Completed works

(1) Demolition of structures of the 15th-century Lóios Convent: all the 19th-century constructions inside the block, originally composed of 42 plots, including the Cardosas Palace and the 17th century buildings (Hotel and luxury residence in Cardosas block); (2) Complete demolition of the inside of the buildings

dating from the 18th to the early 20th centuries (residence and commerce at D. Carlos Alberto block); (3) Demolition of the interiors, except the restaurant and the coffee shop “Brasileira”, adding of three floors (Hotel); (4) Total demolition of the inside (Hotel Eurostars).

Ongoing works

(5) Demolition of the inside, including a printing house in the Art Deco style (Monumental Hotel); (6) complete demolition of the inside (Seguros Garantia AXA/hotel); (7) Complete demolition of two 17th/18th century buildings (hotel, residence and commerce, Casa Forte block); (8) Massive demolitions of buildings and interiors of the port wine cellars (end of 19th and 20th centuries) originally meant for storage and bottling, with a total of 19,187.34 m² in the slope (City of Wine: museums, restaurants, commerce); (9) Demolition of houses by the Douro River (hotel); (10) Demolition of the interior of the famous building of the Araújo e Silva Stationery (hotel); (11) and (12) Complete demolition of interior of two buildings close to the São Bento Station.

Ongoing projects

(13) São Bento Station /Alteration of the south aisle into a restaurant, granted to Time Out: Demolition of the interior of the south aisle and construction of a panoramic tour restaurant. ICOMOS Portugal recommends an integrated project for São Bento station (the north aisle is already occupied by a hotel). The project for the existing building is an intervention focused on the maintenance of the façade, the tour is well integrated, but not the entire area should be occupied, since it will neglect the function and accessibility of the station. The train station should never be separated from its urban mobility function, as this is of utmost importance for the historic centre of Oporto, also as an entry to access other World Heritage sites: Alto Douro Wine Region and the Prehistoric Rock Art Sites in the Côa Valley and Siega Verde. Taking into account paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, the project was submitted to the World Heritage Centre. Notwithstanding, the municipality recently approved the project, without restrictions.

(14) Morro da Sé (cathedral hilltop)/Student’s hostel: Creation of approx. 100 rooms (to lodge 120 people) and common areas (about 7,000 m²). The project is not clear in the available plans, but the planning of 22 plots presumes unviable demolitions. ICOMOS Portugal recommends that the WHC request a detailed project for analysis, avoiding more facadism, as occurred in other cases promoted by the same entity Porto Vivo –SRU (e.g. block of Cardosas, and Casa Forte; in the case of Cardosas, the plans sent were very general, without detailed information on demolitions and new constructions).

Conclusions and recommendations

The ongoing threats to World Heritage in Portugal are due to a lack of application of national regulations and international recommendations. The World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines are not being respected, as previously presented. Several projects did not follow paragraph 172, were not submitted to be evaluated by the WHC and its Advisory Bodies (e.g. construction of Gandarinha Hotel in Sintra cultural landscape, and most cases in Oporto); one project was submitted too late, with work already in progress (conversion of Alcobaça Monastery into a hotel); and one project was submitted on time, but then approved by the municipality without considering the WHC recommendations (e.g. conversion of São Bento Station into restaurants, in Oporto).

The responsible entities – managers, municipalities, regional and central administration – should show more respect for the OUV to be retained in order to ensure the protection of the properties. The elaboration of effective management and safeguarding plans could help control potential threats.

The analysis presented here is not exhaustive and is based on an analysis of architectural projects and observations on site. A complete and detailed evaluation of the state of conservation of the monuments and sites needs to be addressed. If in the very short term, protective and emergency measures are not undertaken, the same type of random interventions will be applied, with an expected increase in negative effects.

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