

Article

Temporal Layers in Heritage Tourism: Christianity and Islam in an Algarvian Chapel

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Abstract: The worldwide expansion of cultural and heritage tourism presents several opportunities for destination development, but also poses significant challenges in terms of management. This is especially true when different, overlapping, and potentially conflicting meanings coexist in the same location, as when distinct layers of the history of a site are unearthed by archaeology. Considering faith as confidence in the perpetuation of identities, an element common to both heritage and religion, this paper presents the results of a study of the heritagization process of a Christian chapel in Loulé (Algarve, Portugal), where traces of the city's Islamic past were uncovered, and of the strategies implemented considering the site's overlapping meanings. The results indicate that the embracement, rather than the suppression, of dissonant layers of significance in the heritagization of a religious site can contribute to a community's richer sense of its enduring memory through a new dialogue with its multifaceted past and the validation of previously disregarded traces of its identity.

Keywords: faith; heritage; tourism; heritagization; religion; Christianity; Islam

1. Introduction

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary provides two definitions for the word “palimpsest” (the second a derivation of the first, historical meaning): “1: Writing material (such as a parchment or tablet) used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased”; “2: Something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface ([Palimpsest n.d.](#)). Places, in fact, are like palimpsests: Multilayered, with traces of different, sometimes forgotten pasts beneath the surface of the visible, palpable present. Heritage itself can be seen as a palimpsest, considering that “far from being fatally predetermined or God-given, [it] is in large measure our own marvelously malleable creation” ([Lowenthal 1998](#), p. 226), i.e., a series of objects, places, and practices to which a special meaning or significance is attributed according to mutable societal contexts ([Harrison 2013](#); [Harvey 2001](#)). Its importance for our individual and communal sense of identity should not be ignored. In Hewison's particularly felicitous terms:

The impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self. Without knowing where we have been, it is difficult to know where we are going. The past is the foundation of individual and collective identity [. . .]. Continuity between past and present creates a sense of sequence out of aleatory chaos and, since change is inevitable, a stable system of ordered meanings enables us to cope with both innovation and decay.

([Hewison 1987](#), p. 47)

Faith, generally defined as confidence or belief in a person, thing, or concept ([Faith n.d.](#)), is here defined precisely as confidence in the perpetuation of identities, since identity formation is an

element common to both heritage and religion, as both strive to create communal links between the present, the past, and the future, providing a sense of an enduring identity (Bremer 2006; Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes 2016; Nuryanti 1996). Its importance for local communities must not be overlooked in the process of heritagization and management of sites—especially religious ones, where both dimensions converge—requiring adequate mediation strategies when potentially conflicting perspectives coexist (Olsen 2006). This is especially true as the demand for heritage, accompanying the growth of tourism, forces policy makers, site managers, and other actors to develop and implement strategies capable of dealing with a growing number of increasingly diversified visitors with dissimilar backgrounds and interpretative abilities (Gravari-Barbas 2018; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Macdonald 2013; Recht 1999). Archaeology, on the other hand, can at times reveal new layers of meanings emanating from overlapping and potentially conflicting traditions. This may force a reinterpretation of heritage and its assumptions with eventual impacts on the identity and image of the community whose accepted past is questioned, especially if issues of religious faith are involved.

In Loulé, Algarve, Portugal, archaeological excavations carried out inside a seventeenth-century chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary during restoration works conducted in 2007/2008 revealed elements of the city's defensive structure and the remains of one of the gates of the medieval *madinat Al-'Ullā*, exposing elements of the city's Islamic past inside a revered Christian edifice. The chapel, still a place of worship, has in the meantime become one of the most visited places in the city, attracting nearly 65,000 visitors in 2018, according to official statistics provided to the researchers by the municipality. Considering the site's newfound life as a tourism attraction and the different cultural and religious layers of the city's Christian and Islamic past—the latter all but disregarded for most of Portuguese history (Coelho 2018; Leite 2017)—qualitative research was conducted to study the heritagization process of the chapel. Given the definition of faith presented above, the aims established were the ascertainment of the importance of faith at the site, namely considering how the cultural and religious layers of the city's Christian and Islamic past were taken into account in the heritagization of the chapel, and the strategies currently implemented to mediate between those facets, the dual nature of the site, as heritage and space of religious faith, and the pressures of tourism demand.

2. Theoretical Overview

Even though an interest in the rediscovery of the past can be seen as one of the constitutive elements of tourism at least since the Grand Tour (Towner 1996), its intensification in the last decades has been considered one of the main reasons for the contemporary growth of heritage tourism (Harrison 2013; Smith and Richards 2013). Its appeal should not come as a surprise in this intensified stage of modernity (Bauman 2002; Harvey 1991; Lipovetsky 2005), given the potential of heritage to “forge stronger links between past, present, and future” (Nuryanti 1996, p. 258), and the relevance of those links for our very sense of self, for our identities (Harrison 2010; Hewison 1987). Globalization, in fact, has contributed to a “powerful tourism ‘heritage production machine’”, a “driver of heritagization” especially since the 1990s (Gravari-Barbas 2018, p. 8). Assumed as inescapable due to its importance as a relevant economic resource, the relationship between heritage and tourism, however, is seen as offering both opportunities and threats given the inevitable impact of tourism on sites and communities, requiring strategies capable of balancing an informed presentation of heritage with the intended objectives of tourism development (Harrison 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; McKercher and Cros 2002; Messenger and Smith 2010).

Tourism reshapes the discourses of heritage, as its essential nature “is dynamic, and its interaction with heritage often results in a reinterpretation of heritage” (Nuryanti 1996, p. 250). Indeed, if the past is a foreign country, to use Lowenthal's famous phrasing (Lowenthal 1985), then the past of a foreign country lies doubly in the domain of the Other, focusing the tourist gaze on the difference inherent to that alterity (Urry 1990). Evoked imaginaries often differ from those of the host communities (Gravari-Barbas and Graburn 2012; Salazar 2012; Salazar and Graburn 2014), a process leading to the

creation of contact zones that may produce “frames that challenge the populations in destinations to appropriate and nurture projections of their own Otherness” (Picard and Di Giovine 2014, p. 5).

This can be especially true in the case of religious sites, integral elements of heritage environments (Olsen 2006), places where faith and tourism tend to overlap, creating tensions between residents and visitors, the sacred and the profane, the extra-ordinary and the everyday (Harrison 2010; Norman and Cusack 2015; Poria and Ashworth 2009; Recht 1999; Timothy and Olsen 2006). Religion and heritage, however, can be seen as sharing a fundamental trait, as both endeavor to establish communal links between the present and the past—a crucial element for our social and individual identities, especially as these identities necessarily involve “our conceptions of who we are as social beings” (Moya 2000, p. 8). Heritage sites can be seen as “places [. . .] in which the ‘sacred’ nature of a group irrupts into the chaos and uncertainty of the present [. . .] places in which the ‘cosmogonic myths’ of a social group (be they secular or religious in nature) are concretized, referenced, and reproduced” (Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes 2016, p. 6). The making of place, in fact, always involves the making of identities, with religious sites, for their part, contributing “decisively to the social affiliations and personal identities of those who enter their precincts” (Bremer 2006, p. 34). As both religious and heritage sites necessarily involve “the production of identity and community” (Harrison 2010, p. 39), faith in the perpetuation of identities can be considered an element intrinsic to both spaces. Questions of identity, which ultimately imply faith in some type of permanence of social groups, melting communal and temporal dimensions, can thus be said to be always and inextricably linked to both religious and heritage sites.

The very concept of heritage, considered as a process, naturally implies heritagization, i.e., the attribution of meanings or significance to objects, places, or practices that converts them into heritage through the establishment of relevant connections between the past evoked and the transient present. This constitutes a “past presencing”, in the words of Macdonald (2013), following different prescriptions according to the specific societal contexts in which it occurs (Harvey 2001). In our intensified stage of modernity, tourism heritagization is seen as producing “heritage objects of different nature than the ones produced by the central States in the 19th [century]” (Gravari-Barbas 2018, p. 8). Tourism is considered the driving force behind most heritagization processes, including the conversion of disused sacred spaces into heritage sites where a new connection between past and present is established. As a “present-centered cultural practice and an instrument of cultural power” (Harvey 2001, p. 336), heritagization, however, inevitably implies tensions between different stakeholders, requiring effective strategies for the development, presentation, interpretation, and management of cultural resources, namely when different layers of history are uncovered by archaeology, revealing the palimpsest of a site’s past (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Labadi and Long 2010; Polyzoudi 2013; Timothy and Boyd 2003). In the process, a potential dialogue between different traditions and belief systems can also be unleashed, capable of spurring new forms of interfaith understanding (Gallagher 2016; Jansen and Khül 2008).

Interpretation thus becomes one of the key elements of management in heritage destinations, with the presentation of the historical background of visited sites and the fundamental narratives, meanings, and values attributed to them (Bremer 2006; Howard 2011; Messenger and Smith 2010). Tour guides and site interpreters play a decisive role in this respect, as they interface between the host destination and its visitors (Ap and Wong 2001). They have considerable impact on the tourist experience (Poria et al. 2006; Salazar 2014), and serve as mediators of meaning and facilitators of cultural understanding (Bryon 2012). However, guided tours and site interpretation activities are never as neutral as they may seem, especially given the political dimensions eventually involved (Hallin and Dobers 2012); this becomes considerably significant when eventual tensions between different stakeholders have to be considered. Interpretation, however, described in the Charter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (2008, p. 4) as “the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of a cultural heritage site”, is seen as including not only site interpreters, but also the concepts of presentation and interpretive

infrastructure. Considered a major component of the visitor's experience (McKercher and Cros 2002; Moscardo 1996; Nuryanti 1996; Poria et al. 2006), interpretation reveals its crucial importance when the inevitable discrepancies between the cognitive and emotional expectations of visitors and the cultural realities of destinations are considered—a fundamental aspect in spaces of faith, such as religious and heritage sites where different narratives and overlapping traditions are made manifest (Bremer 2006; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Norman and Cusack 2015; Oliveira et al. 2017; Shackley 2001; Timothy and Olsen 2006; Waterton and Watson 2015).

In this process of placemaking, of producing identity and community through heritagization, site managers play a decisive role as arbiters of differentiated stakeholders, especially when the contemporary pressures of tourism are considered (Bremer 2006; Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes 2016; Harrison 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Timothy and Boyd 2003). The present study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the strategies of heritagization in sites with potentially conflicting cultural and religious traditions, and of the importance of faith when regarded as confidence in the perpetuation of identities in such spaces.

3. Methodology

A case study design was used (Yin 1984, 2003; Woodside 2010), considering its adequacy in situations where “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 1984, p. 23). This method comprised the analysis of documents about the site, including information leaflets, relevant webpages, and documentation produced by the municipality; participant observation activities, conducted during an exploratory visit to the site on 9 August 2019, and a guided visit integrated in a larger tour of the historic center of Loulé, conducted by a senior member of the Culture and Heritage division of the municipality on 14 August 2019; and two semi-structured interviews, conducted by the main author with two members of the division responsible for the chapel and its contextualization for visitors, on 16 and 29 August 2019.

Qualitative discourse analysis (Phillips and Hardy 2002) was used, taking into account specific aspects of netnography and document analysis (Bowen 2009; Kozinets 2015), considering how the different meanings of the location—as a space of religious faith, a heritage site, and a tourist attraction, with Christian and Islamic connotations—were negotiated in the heritagization process of the chapel and the interpretation strategies implemented. Considering that discourse analysis follows “interpretive, context-sensitive, often historical methodologies to analyze discourses empirically, to discover how ideologies permeate and manifest in these discourses” (Heracleous 2004, p. 187), the collected data were independently triangulated and analyzed by the authors and results were later discussed to arrive at the main conclusions.

4. Results and Analysis

A summary of elements analyzed in subsequent, dedicated sections is initially presented to better contextualize the research and facilitate the presentation of results.

Five main temporal layers were detected in discourses about the site (Harrison 2013; Harvey 2001; Polyzoudi 2013; Timothy and Boyd 2003), corresponding to the Islamic period, when *Al-Ullia* was founded and its defensive walls erected; the 17th century, when the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Conception was built to celebrate Portugal's renewed independence from Spain, as attested by the engraved stone of the façade; the 18th century, when gold shipped from Brazil helped finance the Baroque decoration of numerous churches with gilded altarpieces and the characteristic blue and white tiles of the period; the 19th century, when the ceiling image of Our Lady of the Conception was painted by Joaquim Rasquinho, a renowned local artist; and the 21st century, when restoration works and archaeological interventions helped uncover important elements of the history of the site and of the city itself. Of those five moments, two distinct pasts can be differentiated in terms of belief systems: Medieval Islam and modern Christianity, traditions with potentially conflicting meanings eventually requiring pondered mediation strategies (Norman and Cusack 2015; Olsen 2006).

The dual nature of the site, as both heritage and religious space, means that the interests of different stakeholders have to be taken into account (Harrison 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; McKercher and Cros 2002). These stakeholders include the municipality, which is the guardian of local heritage and, in this case, the promoter of conservation activities and the archaeological excavations of 2007/2008, the Catholic Church, which is the owner of the space and custodian of its spiritual significance, and the users of the site. These users range from locals—including both believers who see it as a space of faith and non-believers whose past is nonetheless referenced—to tourists, especially heritage tourists. The chapel, in fact, cannot truly be considered a religious tourism site, given that religion is not the prime reason for visits, even if faith, in some cases, can be considered an important element of the tourists' experience.

The five temporal layers indicated encompass the entire history of the city, from its medieval Islamic origins to the present day. A clear effort to preserve and promote Loulé's heritage is visible on the municipality's website and in associated publications and events, where the Islamic roots of the city are granted a relevance denied until quite recently (Coelho 2018). Such effort is clearly evident also in the visit to the museum and in certain elements of the guided tour of the city center, namely the archaeological excavation of the medieval *hammam*. Located in a region normally seen as a sea and sand tourism destination (Correia and Crouch 2003), but removed from the coast, Loulé understandably invests in works of conservation and preservation and in the promotion of its heritage and culture. The aim is to attract visitors desiring "to know an Algarve different from that of the beaches", in the words of one of the members of staff of the municipality, benefiting from the contemporary growth of cultural and heritage tourism (Harrison 2013; Smith and Richards 2013).

This is the background of the interventions carried out by the municipality in 2007/2008 in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception, which considered the historical and architectural importance of the seventeenth-century building and especially of its interior, including the eighteenth-century altarpiece and tile panels and the nineteenth-century ceiling painting of the Assumption. Although they date from different periods, these Christian elements integrate a common religious and cultural tradition. This fact is emphasized both in the dedicated page of the website of the municipality and in the information leaflets available at the site, with the ceiling painting of the Virgin on the front page.

What distinguishes this case from other local interventions is the archaeological discovery of medieval Islamic remains in a Christian space—the stone foundations of the gate of Portugal inside the main nave of the chapel. This forces a reinterpretation of the heritage site (Nuryanti 1996; Picard and Di Giovine 2014) by introducing an apparently dissonant note in an otherwise harmonious score—a potentially conflicting meaning given the different belief system associated with the newfound heritage elements (Labadi and Long 2010; Polyzoudi 2013; Timothy and Boyd 2003). An understanding between the Catholic Church, the municipality, and the contractor made possible the simultaneous, in situ preservation and presentation of the several elements that testify to the evolution of the space, including the section of the defensive tower that can be seen in the sacristy and the remains of the Islamic gate in the main nave. The decision implied the development of a new museographic project that included the placement of glass panels above the archaeological remains with the inscription "FOUNDATIONS OF ONE OF THE GATES OF THE ISLAMIC CITY WALLS". Two different areas were thus created in the main nave, with the help of church benches: One near the entrance, where tourists tend to stay, near the glass panels, and one near the altar, in front of which the benches are placed, namely for prayers. One area is dedicated to heritage, the other to religion, and both to faith in permanence, albeit of a different kind, with on-site interpretation activities helping reconcile differing perspectives.

The strategies of the Municipality as policy planner and site manager associated with the Chapel of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception can thus be described as falling under the following categories, detailed in Table 1 and further analyzed below: Research, Interventions, and Publications, External Communications, and Interpretation.

Table 1. Heritagization strategies of the municipality associated with the site.

Research	Interventions	Publications	External Communications	Interpretation
- Historical - Archaeological	- Excavation - Restoration - Conservation - Preservation - Presentation	- Journal - Books - Conference Proceedings	- Website - Leaflets	- Interpretation panel - Leaflets - On-site interpreters - Guided-tours

4.1. Research, Interventions, and Publications

Numerous studies and archaeological interventions in the area have helped shed new light on the history of Loulé. The respective results, available in different publications, help understand both the current state of knowledge regarding the history of the area and the importance attributed to the promotion of heritage by local authorities. Publications include *Al-'Ullā*, the journal of the Historical Archives of the municipality, published since 1992; the important catalogue of the exhibition, *Loulé: Territories, Memories, Identities*, held at the National Museum of Archaeology in Lisbon between June 2017 and June 2019, presenting “the state of the art of archaeological research” in the area of the municipality and “the history of its communities from Pre-Historic times to the Middle Ages” (Fernandes 2017, p. 14); or relevant conference proceedings, such as those of the 7th Meeting of Archaeology of the Algarve, where the results of the 2007/2008 intervention in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception were presented, including the discovery of the exact location of the medieval Gate of Portugal (Luzia 2010).

Alongside the details of the restoration works—from roof to floors, in the sacristy and main nave, with the conservation of the Baroque tile panels and gilded altarpiece, as well as of the painting and surrounding plasterwork on the ceiling—the text describes the discovery of several elements that help shed light on the history of the chapel and the city itself: A previous altarpiece, hidden behind the gilded Baroque one, seven Christian burial sites, a section of the Islamic wall, a previously unknown tower, part of the medieval defensive structure of the city, and the foundation stones of the gate. In terms of heritagization decisions, the final commentaries significantly state that it took a mutual understanding between all parties involved—the Catholic Church, contractor, and several different services of the municipality—for the simultaneous, in situ preservation and presentation of the diverse elements that testify to the evolution of the space. These objectives required a new museographic project that included a new lighting system and the use of glass panels over the remains of the medieval Islamic gate, revealing a clear effort from the Municipality to assume and integrate the Islamic past of the city and grant it a renewed relevance, denied until quite recently (Coelho 2018; Leite 2017).

4.2. External Communications

Relevant webpages of the municipality pertaining to the chapel and the past of the city, namely the “Heritage and Culture” and “History” sections of the website, were analyzed, as well as leaflets available both online and at the historic site, to assess the meanings of the space conveyed in official external communications.

The Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception is one of eleven Catholic churches listed in the “Heritage and Culture” section of the website, one of three Catholic churches located in the city center. A photograph of the Baroque gilded woodcarvings that decorate the chapel serves as a link to a webpage with a text in Portuguese describing the chapel and its history, a slightly longer version of the one used in the leaflets available at the site (in Portuguese, English, Spanish, and French). The origins of the church are traced back to 1646, when, “after the re-establishment of Portugal’s independence”, following a 60 year period under Spanish rule, the king, João IV, declared “Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception patron saint of Portugal”. He ordered the construction of chapels dedicated to her near the main entrances of cities and towns and the placement of “engraved stone[s] evocative of this

event”, like the one that can still be seen on the façade of the chapel, with the clear indication of the date: “1656”. Architecturally, the “characteristic elements of Estilo Chão (Plain Style) are evident”, especially in the “single nave” structure and “the sobriety” of the limestone “façade”. The renovation of the interior in “the middle of the following century” is said to have constituted, at the time, one of the “most interesting artistic events in the Algarve”. Although “later interventions” are said to have “mischaracterized the ornamentation” of the space, some of the main elements resulting from that renovation can still be seen, namely the gilded “altarpiece, as a major architectural element”, and the blue and white glazed “tiles” on the walls. On the altarpiece, the “image of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception [. . .] occupies the leading place”, with “the Child Jesus placed on the niche above” and “Saint Anne, mother of the Virgin, in the center”; Saint Joachim and Saint Joseph, respectively the “father [. . .] and the husband of the Virgin [. . .] occupy the pedestals between columns”, with “the Guardian Angel and St. Michael [. . .] beside Saint Anne”. On the ceiling, there is “a beautiful painting representing the Assumption of the Virgin” by a well-known local artist from the 19th century, Joaquim Rasquinho. The restoration works of 2007/2008, during which an older altarpiece was discovered hidden behind the altar, are also mentioned in the text, as well as the archaeological excavations that were then conducted, revealing elements of “the defensive structure of the city dating from the Islamic period”, namely “the remains of one of the gates of the medieval town”. Accompanying the text, the leaflet presents, on the front page, the painting of Our Lady of the Conception, and inside, photographs of the façade, the gilded altarpiece, one of the tile panels, the altarpiece discovered during the works, and the archaeological remains of the Islamic gate.

The Islamic past of the city is also clearly mentioned in the “History” page of the website of the municipality, namely how, after “the arrival of the Muslims”, the “medieval urban area that would later become the city of Loulé was born”. With the name “*Al-'Ullā*”, it would be described “for the first time [. . .] in the chronicles of Ibne Saïde [ibn Sa'ïd] and Abd Aluhaid as a small, prosperous, fortified medina (city) belonging to the Kingdom of Niebla, under the command of Ibne Mafom (ibn Mahfud)”.

In the “Heritage Route” proposed in a bilingual leaflet entitled “Loulé: Two routes for taking a stroll, shopping, and seeing heritage”, also available in the website of the municipality ([Câmara Municipal de Loulé n.d.](#)), a more traditional but less accurate view of the origins of the city is presented, with the claim that Loulé “was already an important town” when “the Arabs invaded the Algarve”. The text also minimizes the influence of the Islamic presence by immediately jumping, in the following sentence, to the period of “the conquest of the Algarve by the Moors”, a term with historically negative connotations, reminiscent of a period when the Islamic tradition in Portugal was disregarded (see [Coelho 2018](#); [Leite 2017](#)). Another leaflet, available in Portuguese, English, Spanish, and French, with an itinerary for a visit of the historic city center (“Loulé: um percurso a descobrir”), presents a more accurate depiction of the history of the city, mentioning how it was probably “founded in the twelfth century, at a time of great political unrest in the territory”, fact that would explain the “fortified walls [. . .] encompassing an area of around five hectares”. Actually, ten of the fourteen cultural attractions indicated in this leaflet, including the Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception, are located inside or immediately adjacent to the perimeter of the original Islamic wall, demonstrating its profound influence in the history of the city.

An evident effort to assume and integrate the Islamic past of the city is clear in the activities sponsored by the municipality and in related publications, as well as in external communications, as evidenced in the website and available leaflets. Regarding the Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception, the Christian elements naturally take center stage in the documents analyzed, given the religious nature and history of the site, although they are presented as heritage, alongside the more recently discovered Islamic remains.

Apart from publicizing the heritagization efforts of the municipality, the open reference to the *process* of renovation and the archaeological excavations can be said to constitute an effective strategy of assimilating the dissimilar element ([Picard and Di Giovine 2014](#); [Urry 1990](#)) in discourses about the site by introducing a new moment in its history, corresponding to the present phase of its existence,

and by connecting it to its early origins, when the stones now on display were first used in the original structure of the site.

4.3. Guided Tour

In addition to the many independent options available, the Municipality, through its Museum Services, offers guided tours of the historic city center to groups of visitors or researchers. The guided tour of the historic center of Loulé conducted by the senior member of the Culture and Heritage division of the municipality, which allowed the assessment of important elements related with the present stance of the municipality regarding the Islamic past of the city and some of the interpretation strategies implemented, began precisely near the Chapel of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, because “you inevitably pass by the chapel to get to the city center”, and because “we are going to pretend that we are actually entering Loulé, the old Loulé”. The exercise of imagination of pretending to enter medieval Loulé cannot be seen as ideologically neutral (Bryon 2012; Hallin and Dobers 2012), as it will help highlight the Islamic past of the city, disregarded by official discourses for most of its history. Outside, we have “an engraved stone indicating when the church was built [. . .] in 1656”. In order to celebrate the end of Spanish rule, the king, João IV, ordered the construction, “at the gates of every town and city of the realm, of churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary”, to whom “he dedicates the Kingdom of Portugal”. An interpretation panel in Portuguese and English can also be found outside the chapel summarizing the information of the leaflet regarding the origins of the building, its architecture, and the discoveries made during the restoration works.

Entering the chapel using the door of the sacristy and passing by a visible section of the defensive tower discovered in 2007/2008, the guide announced that “we will enter Loulé as people did” when they came “from the north, from the Kingdom of Portugal”. “Over there is Portugal Road. There is always a Portugal Road here in the Algarve, heading north”. The gate of Portugal was located in what is now the middle of the main nave of the chapel—divided into two differentiated areas also by the presence of church benches near the altar—and “right now we are still outside Loulé; over there we will be inside”. The gate does not “face the enemy; it is hidden by the typically Islamic elbow entrance, a defensive technique that helps protect it”. Another discovery made in 2007 was of a section of the defensive wall behind the Baroque tiles, which had to be temporarily removed, as “the wall is a defensive structure that was not meant to be covered with tiles”; it was “reused, after all this time [. . .] as a mere side wall”. In the words of the guide, “cities are always manifold, they have different pasts that we gather to be able to tell a story”. The size of the chapel was determined by the size of the fortified wall that still existed at the time of its construction and “obviously, in 1656 it did not look like this”. The open reference to the process of renovation and the archaeological excavations is also a form of entering the backstage of the destination to allow a different experience of the space and consider its different facets ((Oliveira et al. 2017); see also (MacCannel 1976)).

The altarpiece and the tile panels “are from the Baroque period and will only appear in the eighteenth century”. The tiles “tell the story of the Virgin”, from “her birth and presentation in the Temple to the birth and circumcision of Jesus and the adoration of the Magi”, a panel with a “curious detail, as one of the magi, wearing a strange crown, is a Brazilian Indian”, a clear “political” statement at a time when Brazil was a Portuguese colony. Mary “lived, died, and went to heaven, which is what is represented in the ceiling, in the painting by Joaquim Rasquinho”. The image of Our Lady of Conception is “the epitome of the feminine and has some attributes that distinguish her from other representations of the Virgin”, as “she stands on a crescent moon, has her hair loose and uncovered, for she is not yet a married woman”. With the Baroque movement and the eighteenth-century “gold fever”, namely due to its discovery in Brazil, “all churches substituted their previous altarpieces for gilded ones”. In the case of the Chapel of Our Lady of Conception, the former was kept “behind the new altar”. Nowadays, “seen from the street”, what attracts the attention of passers-by is clearly the Baroque “gilded woodcarvings and tile panels”. These elements can be said to be the most representative of the present space of the chapel.

After leaving the chapel, the tour included visits to the museum, the castle complex, the archaeological remains of the hammam, the narrow, winding streets of the city center, the square where the Mother Church of Loulé is located, built in the thirteenth century using the structure of the previous mosque and adapting the minaret as a bell-tower, the adjacent garden on top of a section of the wall, two of the towers dating back to the Islamic period, a Manueline window in one of the streets of the city center, the early twentieth-century municipal market, with an Islamic-inspired architecture, and the area of one of the former city gates, where archaeological excavations were being conducted. The importance and influence of the Islamic period were highlighted throughout the entire visit, namely given the importance of the original defensive wall “for the urban layout of Loulé”.

The tour might best be described as a movement not only in space but through time, given the constant juxtaposition of different layers of the history of the city, including that of the original *Al-'Uliā*, demonstrating its importance for the present identity of Loulé. Alongside the provision of relevant, detailed information (Ap and Wong 2001; Poria et al. 2006), storytelling, namely the narration of historical episodes, the occasional use of humor, and the establishment of links between the present and the past of the city were the main strategies used during the visit. Though not constant, the exercise of imagination, the simulation of being in the 12th century, not only when “entering” the city, but in other moments of the visit as well, helped frame the other elements and establish a different connection with the visited spaces. “Seduction”, Noel Salazar’s term (2014), does come to mind to describe the enriching experience of visiting Loulé as if stepping on the cobblestones of old *Al-'Uliā*, establishing a different connection with the city’s past and a renewed experience of the present.

4.4. On-Site Interpreters

Staff members from the municipality who are responsible for the chapel simultaneously guard the space during opening hours and provide on-site interpretation to visitors. The interviews tried to ascertain their perceptions regarding visits to Loulé and the Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception (reasons, expectations, types of visitors), aspects related to the provision of information at the site (languages used, main elements highlighted), the reactions of visitors to the different elements and the religious nature of the site, and their perception of the impact of the Islamic elements on tourists and residents, namely on the sense of identity and image of the local community.

According to the interviewees, the chapel is frequently visited by locals, but especially by tourists, namely French, Dutch, English, and German, among other less represented nationalities, creating a need to balance the interest of different stakeholders (Harrison 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; McKercher and Cros 2002; Messenger and Smith 2010). Regarding the reasons for visiting the city, one of the members of staff mentioned that tourists “used to come to the Algarve essentially for the beaches, but now they have started discovering Loulé”: “They enjoy coming to Loulé, a cultural town [. . .] and visit the castle, the art gallery”; “they want culture”, and are “surprised” by what they find in the chapel, “the gilded woodcarvings [. . .] the Baroque tiles really catch their attention”. Confirming an interest in the rediscovery of the past that is in line with the general growth tendency in the sector of heritage tourism witnessed in last decades (Harrison 2013; Smith and Richards 2013), the second staff member stated that tourists want “to know an Algarve different from that of the beaches”, having heard of its “monuments and archaeological discoveries”. In fact, “they come to the historical district [. . .], notice the chapel and come in”, for “it is impossible to ignore it when walking by”.

The staff members indicated that information is provided in leaflets in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English, and orally in Portuguese, French, and English. Outside, there is an informative panel in Portuguese and in English, and, inside, the foundations of the gateway are identified in Portuguese and in English. Several tourists ask for information regarding “the name of the chapel, the century when it was built”. The main elements highlighted are its history and the more recent discoveries, “the defensive structure behind the Baroque tiles and the foundations of the gateway from the Islamic period”. Some are “interested in the story told in the tile panels”, and tourists are described as being “dazzled by the artistic richness of the site”, by “the gilded woodcarvings and

blue and white tiles from the Baroque period, especially foreign visitors, less accustomed to these decorative elements”, thus (re-) confirming the focus of the tourist gaze on difference, alterity, and its importance for tourism planning and site management (Urry 1990).

While visitors’ reactions seem to be more associated with historical and aesthetic elements, the interviewees also emphasized the religious character of the space and different reactions to it. Visitors “undoubtedly” consider the site a place of worship: “Some come specifically to pray; others, realizing it is a religious space, visit it and eventually end up praying; some, when glancing through the door and being invited to come in”, indicate, “either verbally or through gestures, that they are not adequately dressed [. . .] especially [. . .] the English, or tourists arriving after visiting Spain”. Such reactions are prompted by their perception of the site as a “Catholic space”, immediately triggered by the “central image of the altar”. Locals, especially “older ladies, devoted to Our Lady of the Conception”, also come to the chapel “to pray and, frequently, we can also see flowers or vases with plants near the altar”, placed as acts of worship. For locals, the fact that the chapel is dedicated to Our Lady of the Conception grants it a special character, for “here the Virgin is always seen as the Mother”, especially “in a city having as patron saint Our Lady of Mercy, here called the Sovereign Mother”. One of the members of the staff stated that some unexpected religious manifestations also occur occasionally, as when, “especially in Winter, small groups of about six or seven Germans come inside [. . .] and start singing [. . .] hymns to Mary, something really beautiful”.

As integral elements of heritage environments (Olsen 2006), places where faith and tourism tend to overlap, religious sites inherently require special attention in terms of management to accommodate the different, sometimes conflicting interests of stakeholders—a task, in this case, to great extent attributed to the on-site interpreters. When entering the chapel, the foundation of the Islamic gateway is the first thing visitors notice, with quite diverse reactions. Some, especially French visitors, occasionally make “negative comments”, apparently surprised by the presence of Islamic traces in a Christian chapel. The “English also react, but do not seem shocked by them”. Alterity (Urry 1990), in this case, the presence of elements associated with a different belief system, seems to lose its intrinsic tourism appeal in the face of faith, causing an unfavorable response. When information is provided by the on-site interpreter, though, explaining that the remains, the foundations of the Islamic gateway, date back to the 12th century, when Loulé was surrounded by an Islamic wall, and that “the church is Catholic”, tourists are said to “feel more appeased”. The Islamic remains, however, do not cause any discomfort among locals. According to the interviewees, people may ask about the stones, but do not find it strange to see them there, as they are part of the history of the city: “I tell them about the gate of Portugal [. . .] because this was one of the entrances of the city coming from the north when the south of the Iberian Peninsula was occupied by Islam. [. . .] It is part of our history [. . .]; we are Moors; we are of Moorish origin”. The city’s Islamic past is considered “unavoidable, as it was when the city developed as such”. For locals, the presence of Islamic remains is not “a problem, quite the contrary [. . .]; people still believe there are Moorish tunnels with hidden treasures beneath the city” and “any fisherman from the Algarve knows how to take a boat to Morocco”. Considering the general disregard with which the Islamic heritage in the territory was treated for most of Portuguese history, the display of the Islamic remains can certainly be said to constitute a felicitous opportunity challenging “the populations in the destination to appropriate and nurture projections of their own Otherness” (Picard and Di Giovine 2014, p. 5). The “Moors and their legacy”, in fact, are described as being not “part of the past”, but as “part of our identity”.

The on-site interpreters play a fundamental role. They mediate between the contrasting facets of the site, its dual nature—as heritage site and space of religious faith—and the pressures of tourism demand, controlling the flow of visitors, ensuring appropriate behavior, and providing detailed information about the different heritage elements present in the chapel. Several strategies could be detected in their discourses, as well as during the guided tour. They are grouped below, in Table 2, following the proposals of Oliveira et al. (2017), considering the main features of successful cultural tourism attractions described by McKercher and Cros (2002). These strategies help interweave the

different layers of meaning present at the site, helping establish links between the present and the multiple pasts of the space—a fundamental element for the constitution of social and individual identities (Bremer 2006; Harrison 2010; Moya 2000).

Table 2. Discursive strategies used in on-site interpretation.

Storytelling and Asset Enlivenment	Participatory Experience	Relevance (for Tourists)	Quality and Authenticity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narration of episodes from the discourse of history and folk tradition - Use of humor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interaction with visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of links between past and present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of relevant, detailed information - Highlighting, instead of dismissal, of apparent inconsistencies - Penetration into the backstage of the destination by referencing the <i>process</i> of heritagization

5. Conclusions

As indicated in the interviews with the members of staff of the municipality, the historical character of the city is one of the reasons why tourists visit Loulé, manifesting an interest in the rediscovery of the past that confirms the general growth tendency in the sector of heritage tourism witnessed in the last decades (Harrison 2013; Smith and Richards 2013). Local authorities are aware of the phenomenon and try to capitalize on its development, especially given Loulé's geographical location, removed from the coast, traditionally Algarve's main asset in terms of tourism. As the guardian of local heritage, the municipality obviously played a central role in the heritagization of the chapel and its opening to the public. Although the space cannot simply be considered a product of tourism heritagization in the sense employed by Gravari-Barbas (2018), given the intrinsic responsibility of the municipality to preserve its heritage, tourism was certainly taken into consideration in terms of heritagization. This aspect is clearly demonstrated by the organization and management of the space, namely by the display of the archaeological remains with a bilingual inscription on the glass panels and the constant presence of multilingual site interpreters.

As it now stands, the Chapel of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is a new, original space, unlike any of its previous incarnations, the product of the interventions of the Municipality in 2007–2008. Although tourism was not the only reason for the heritagization of the chapel, the decision to exhibit the Islamic remains added a new, visible layer of meaning to the site, a foreign element to its traditional history that forced its reinterpretation (Macdonald 2013; Nuryanti 1996). Different imaginaries (Gravari-Barbas and Graburn 2012; Salazar 2012; Salazar and Graburn 2014) are evoked by this new element, some apparently in conflict with the Christian character of the site, as evinced by the reactions of some visitors to the Islamic reference on the glass panels covering the medieval archaeological remains. Alterity, however, can not only disrupt, but “eventually also renew the social and cosmological orders of ‘modern’ culture and everyday life” (Picard and Di Giovine 2014, p. 1). For locals, the discovery and presentation of the Islamic archaeological remains, far from clashing with their sense of identity or the sacred nature of the site, allowed a renewed link with their past and a new experience of their shared community's permanence in time. If “the Moors and their legacy” are not “part of the past” but “part of our identity”, then the decision to exhibit the Islamic vestiges gave credence to the faith invested in heritage for the preservation of a community's social and individual selves (Hewison 1987).

After a long period during which the Islamic presence in the territory was overlooked by official discourses (Coelho 2018; Harrison 2010; Leite 2017), a practice that left behind traces that can still be detected in one of the leaflets published by the municipality, the decision to display the medieval

Islamic remains, especially considering the religious nature of the site, can be said to symbolize the current approach of embracing the city's once neglected past. From research to on-site interpretation, this effort is visible in the heritagization strategies adopted by the Municipality. The discreet but inescapable display of the Islamic archaeological remains, for its part, can actually be said to symbolize one of the main discursive strategies used to mediate between the potentially conflicting stances and the diverse interests of visitors, both locals and tourists: The open reference to the *process* of renovation and the archaeological excavation that led to the discovery of the vestiges. By introducing a new layer in the history of the site and connecting it to its early origins, it constitutes an effective strategy of assimilating the dissimilar element uncovered by archaeology in discourses about the chapel. The fact that references to the works conducted in 2007/2008 can be found in the website, the leaflets, the discourses of the tour guide and of the staff members of the municipality responsible for the chapel and its contextualization to visitors clearly demonstrates its importance for management.

The dual nature of the location, as heritage site and religious space, can be said to have been effectively considered in the heritagization of the chapel (see Bremer 2006; Gravari-Barbas 2018; Olsen 2006; Macdonald 2013). According to the interviewees, both religious visitors and heritage tourists seem to approach the site and experience it with a clear sense of respect. They show that respect either for its sacred character or for the importance of its heritage elements: The first with manifestations of faith ranging from prayers and offers to the Virgin to the intonation of religious hymns, the second displaying a sense of reverence and admiration mirroring spiritual faith, especially when we consider their reactions to the artistic "richness" of the site, namely the gilded woodcarvings and blue and white tiles from the Baroque period (see Bremer 2006; Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes 2016; Recht 1999).

The definition of faith as confidence in the perpetuation of identities, in fact, allows its consideration as an element common to both religion and heritage, as both strive to create communal links between the present, the past, and the future, providing a sense of an enduring identity. Of the five pasts found at the site, two can be differentiated in terms of belief systems: Medieval Islam and modern Christianity, traditions with potentially conflicting meanings requiring pondered mediation strategies, namely by on-site interpreters. Spanning 800 years, the heritage elements present at the site encompass most of the history of the city, a clear testimony to its longevity and the ancestry of its inhabitants, quintessential reasons of any heritagization effort.

Less than 50 m from the chapel, as indicated by the tour guide, is Portugal Road, heading north in the direction of the mountain ranges that separate the Algarve—nominally a kingdom in its own right until 1910—from the rest of the country. Located in the exact place where the Gate of Portugal once stood, the chapel of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception can be said to symbolically stand at the point where Christianity and Islam intersected more than seven centuries ago. The foundation stones of the gate that are now visible when entering the site remind visitors of that past, part of the history of the region, and of the identity of its inhabitants. In a space of religious faith, the unearthing of the past is here seen as confirming the faith of heritage in the perpetuation of identities.

As the present study focused mainly on the perspective of site managers, further and more detailed research on how visitors, both locals and tourists, perceive this multifaceted heritage is deemed necessary, if our faith in a more profound intercultural understanding is to be preserved.

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