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The Medieval Town of Óbidos (Portugal): Restoration, Reutilisation and Tourism Challenges from 1934 to the Present Day

Clara Moura Soares *  and Maria João Neto 

ARTIS—Art History Institute, School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon, Alameda da Universidade, 1600-214 Lisbon, Portugal; mjneto@letras.ulisboa.pt

* Correspondence: claramourasoes@letras.ulisboa.pt

Abstract: Heritage conservation and cultural tourism are central features of academic debates, as this relationship has not been always peaceful. This paper seeks to evaluate the correlation between the extensive conservation and restoration of the wall and castle of the medieval town of Óbidos (1930–1950) and the tourism-oriented projects developed since this period. Due to the criticism of several previous studies, one of the primary aims of this research was to assess whether this Portuguese town constitutes a good example of medieval reconstitution, or if it is a fanciful twentieth-century intervention. Another main goal was to establish our position regarding the challenges inherent to the management of this historic centre, especially those concerning current tourism challenges and the preservation of and regard for historical buildings and monuments. By means of a long-term study based on the common history of art methodology (cross-analysis of bibliography, archival research, in situ observation of the heritage and attendance of festivals and events), we were able to make the following contributions to advance the debate: although the earlier interventions in Óbidos abided by strict criteria which merited international praise, the management model of the town as a tourist destination over the last two decades calls for a revaluation, placing greater importance on history, historic and artistic heritage and the identity of the location.

Keywords: historicist revival; restoration; revitalisation; tourism; cultural heritage management



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1. Introduction

Óbidos is a medieval town located in the centre of Portugal, near the Atlantic coast and approximately 80 kilometres north of Lisbon, Portugal's capital city. This research seeks to analyse the Portuguese town as a paradigmatic case study as regards the development of two concepts that are usually paired: cultural heritage and tourism. Within this context, during the two first decades of the twenty-first century, the set of innovative initiatives related to monument restoration, repurposing and use evident in Óbidos were later replicated in other regions of the country.

The Portuguese town was the object of an extensive conservation and restoration intervention in the 1930s, which allowed it to become a target for the heritage and tourism promotion policies increasingly endorsed by the Portuguese dictatorial regime at the time (Estado Novo). The interventions were implemented by Direção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais [General Directorate for National Buildings and Monuments] (DGEMN), the entity created to design and launch a programme of interventions on the monuments in Portugal [1]. The criteria adopted at that time have been globally criticised over the last 40 years, with accusations against the public entity for basing its decisions on the style unity thesis defended in the nineteenth century by the French architect Viollet-le-Duc, which led to the loss of a significant part of our heritage. According to this perspective, the forged medieval character currently apparent in Óbidos today would have been based on such principles [2]. As in the case with other historic centres and medieval castles across

Europe, Óbidos has borne this stigma. However, this has been further aggravated by the fact that its rehabilitation occurred during the dictatorial regime, a context in which it played a prominent role in the endorsement of the ideology and in political propaganda.

On the other hand, the general rehabilitation of the town between 1930 and 1950—which was in a severe state of decay—allowed for the devisal of projects geared towards its promotion, use and enhancement. Initially, those projects were framed within the regime’s ideology; however, when the dictatorship ended in 1974, new plans were drawn up. Nevertheless, this development was only possible because the town had already been restored and was now in a better position to deal with new challenges.

Regarding the tourism management resolutions adopted over the last twenty years, Óbidos has been the focus of various studies in view of the tourism phenomenon it has become: from territorial marketing [3] to creative tourism and creative industries [4–7], including place branding [8], tourism marketing and advertisement [9], tourism-related anthropological [10,11] and geographic research [12] and historical re-enactment events and their impact on tourism [13]. The opinions do, however, tend towards the extreme. On the one hand, many aspects of the promotion and the tourism and territorial marketing strategies have been praised—as proven by Óbidos’ prominence in the field of creative and experiential tourism. On the other hand, the nature of the proposed initiatives has been vehemently criticised, since it fosters a type of mass tourism that is detrimental to the identity and authenticity of the town, the latter understood in a traditional static sense. Furthermore, studies on the historic and artistic heritage are scarce [14–16], reflected in the evident shortage of papers on this subject, especially on the town’s monuments. The research previously conducted [16] sought to report on the restorations of the monuments in Óbidos during the Estado Novo period. As such, this paper aims to present a critical diachronic analysis by means of a comprehensive approach connecting historic and artistic heritage, tourism, conservation, and restoration, from the Estado Novo period to the present day.

To this end, this study employed the following research methods:

- Critical reading of the available studies, on Óbidos, namely those based on interviews and surveys conducted by other authors.
- Research of historical archives, mainly unpublished documents.
- Analysis of the minutes of meetings, reports and other publications of the municipality, as well as published interviews with mayors.
- In situ observation of the town heritage (both from the point of view of its conservation and its tourist enjoyment).
- Attendance of festivals and events promoted throughout the year by the town council, in order to formulate our own opinion based on experience).
- Informal contact with some residents and merchants of Óbidos.
- Establishment of a theoretical framework of the various issues.
- A critical analysis of the results of this research.

With this workflow, the present study focused on the following core questions:

- What were the prevailing criteria in the conservation and restoration of the town of Óbidos from the 1930s to the 1950s?
- How did those interventions impact tourism during the Estado Novo?
- Does tourism currently play an active role in the preservation and conservation of the historic buildings and monuments of the town?
- Do the tours to the town and the attendance of the events currently included in the cultural and tourism programme facilitate a deeper knowledge of the town, its history and its monuments?
- Can we speak of authenticity in Óbidos, both in the restoration works it has undergone and in its tourist management strategies?

The answers to these questions will actively contribute not only to the deliberation on the future of Óbidos and the challenges involved in the preservation of its history

and identity, but also to the debate on authenticity, seen from a dynamic perspective, as approached in the more recent research on heritage and tourism [17–21]. Furthermore, by sharing our considerations regarding this case study, the national and international debate on the issues involved in the interdisciplinary management of similar historic centres will be enhanced.

2. Case Study and Contextualisation

Óbidos became the property of Casa das Rainhas [House of Queens] in 1210, when it was donated by King Afonso II to his wife, Dona Urraca. This granted the town a privileged status for more than six centuries, during which period it earned the favour and dedication of the successive queens who left their signs of affirmation and power to the benefit of the local people and development.

However, the liberal reforms in the administrative structure of the state and of the *Casa Real* [Royal House], which led to the extinction of the Casa das Rainhas in 1833, had harmful consequences for the town, which quickly became a bereft, neglected location, left to ruin. (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Partial view of Óbidos, prior to 1930, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP), Iconography, pi3082.

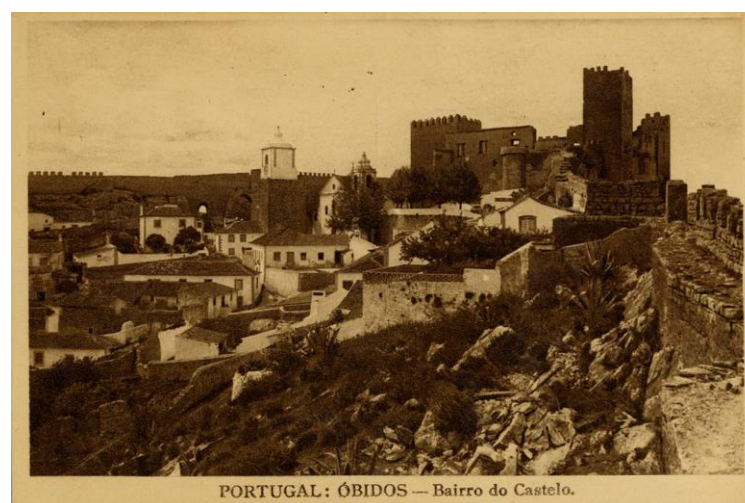


Figure 2. Castle district of Óbidos, prior to 1930, BNP, Iconography, pi3079.

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, a period of enthusiastic nationalistic exaltation in the Estado Novo regime, Óbidos regained its past notoriety and was the object of a bold urban rehabilitation programme, which quickly became one of the state priorities. The interventions devised for Óbidos were part of an ambitious political programme for the whole country that fostered very clear underlying propaganda and power ideals linked to the promotion of nationalistic values and symbols, especially the glories of the Portuguese history. The choice of Óbidos as the setting to launch the intervention programme on the Portuguese castles was justified by the urban and architectural integrity it maintained. However, the picturesque characteristics of the town, its proximity to Lisbon (the capital) and its historical connection to the foundation of Portugal and the conquest of territories from the Moors were also decisive.

The restoration of the ruined segments of the wall and the reconstruction of the alcazar (Palácio dos Alcaides) allowed for an interpretation of the town's atmosphere. This was in line with the intention to ennoble the town whose history was linked to the Reconquista (the Christian reconquest) and to the creation of the Kingdom of Portugal, with the seizure of land from the Arabs in 1148 by the first King of Portugal (Dom Afonso Henriques).

The steep, narrow, winding streets, the materials used in the architecture (predominantly stone, whitewash, clay and wood) and the traditional architectural details (such as the "mourisca" roof tiles, cylindrical chimneys, eaves, porches and the colourful stripes framing the corners and bases of the houses) create a unique urban atmosphere, where noble and manorial houses alternate with modest dwellings, thus creating an unusual frame for the monuments.

In addition to these marks of rurality and tradition, a significant number of monuments (the Santa Maria, São Pedro, Santiago, and Misericórdia churches; the São Martinho chapel; the Pelourinho; the Nossa Senhora da Conceição and Senhora da Graça oratory chapels; the roof of the former medieval market), may be observed, all bestowing upon the walled town the character of a real open-air museum.

The restoration and improvement of historic buildings in the mid-twentieth century were essential to the reestablishment of the Óbidos urban setting, to the growth of the cultural and artistic dimensions of the town, and to it becoming a mandatory tourist destination.

Additionally, the reconstruction of the former mayors' palace and its repurposing into tourist accommodation inaugurated the establishment of modern, comfortable hotels in historic buildings—which was unprecedented in Portugal—as a strategy for the revitalisation and preservation of the castle, as well as for the creation of an appealing tourist attraction.

The classification of the urban area of Óbidos as a National Monument (1951), justified by the relatively good state of preservation of the walled town [15] (p. 478) [16] (pp. 89–93), also contributed to inspiring an awareness of new values regarding heritage at a time when the acknowledgement of the notion of "setting" was still under debate internationally, and only incorporated in the Venice Charter in 1964.

Identifying the exceptional conditions that turned Óbidos into a role model of monument restorations and cultural tourism in Portugal in the mid-twentieth century will allow for a better understanding of the tourism phenomenon into which this small town in the Portuguese Estremadura region has been transformed over the last few decades. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to finding solutions that will lead to the development of a more discerning and sustainable type of tourism.

3. Research Results

3.1. A Restoration Programme for Medieval Óbidos (1934–1949)

The establishment of a large construction site in Óbidos was one of the dictatorship's first initiatives in favour of the historic town and was part of the "national patriotic crusade" to safeguard the country's monuments.

The works began in 1934 under the supervision of the DGEMN architect António do Couto Abreu and comprised three areas of intervention: the wall encircling the town (1934–1935); the castle (1934–1949); and the alcazar or Casa dos Alcaides (1946–1949).

Despite its considerable size and the state of disrepair of all the defensive structures, the reconstruction works of the wall were concluded in a year, between 1934 and 1935. They consisted essentially of the general consolidation of all the structures in the enceinte; the partial reconstruction of several walls; the removal of vegetation and the filling of joints; the restoration of the missing merlons in accordance with the existing ones; the repair and reconstruction of some of the towers (the Dom Dinis and Dom Fernando towers).

The works on the castle, located in the oldest part of the town, also began in 1934, but lasted throughout the 1940s. The intervention on the keep tower was also part of this enterprise, as was the reconstruction of the alcazar. The adaptation of the latter into a hostel was only considered in 1946, with the intention to ensure its reconstruction with a functional use that could generate economical value [22] (p. 21).

In general, the intervention on the castle included the consolidation of several walls using covered reinforced concrete; the demolition of some additions that were deemed unappealing; the restoration of stone pieces in doors and windows in accordance with found vestiges; the reconstruction of the exterior stone steps; the construction of the roof structure and covering; the demolition of the nineteenth-century clock belfry built on the keep tower and the reconstruction of its extremity (Figures 3 and 4).

Other procedures included the restoration of the flooring in the interior of the alcazar; reconstruction of the barrel vault in the keep tower, in accordance with the remains found; restoration of the barbican, including the chemin de ronde, the merlons, and the stone door; as well as the repair and paving of the walkways.

The intervention on the alcazar was already quite advanced when the decision of turning it into a hostel was made, an unprecedented initiative in Portugal. Thus, Óbidos became the first Portuguese location with a hotel installed in a classified historic building (a National Monument since 1910). This decision was a direct result of the restoration, which had created a monument with no function [23] (p. 164), [24] (p. 115), [15] (p. 399).



Figure 3. View of the southern side of the town, after the intervention, Direção-Geral do Património Cultural (DGPC/DGEMN), Photo 519199.

The structure of the building was a limiting aspect in the repurposing project, since respecting the pre-existent features as much as possible meant there could only be six rooms. The integrity of the monument was more important than the functional aspects [23]. The intervention only comprised the construction of some dividing walls—in order to establish the rooms, the kitchen and the washrooms—and of several interior stairs to connect the newly built areas. It was also necessary to install the required water supply,

sewage and electricity infrastructures, as well as to refurbish and decorate the interiors with furniture and ornaments that recreated historic ambiances.



Figure 4. Alcazar, during its restoration, DGPC/DGEMN, Photo 519690.

3.1.1. ‘Reintegration’ Criteria

Óbidos presented the DGEMN technicians with a particular challenge, considering the characteristics of the town and the state of the castle and the walled area. Certain parts of the former building were already in considerable ruin, but the main features of its structure were still standing. The “style unity” principles usually endorsed by this institution could be zealously applied here, through an archaeological and architectural reproduction of the missing elements in accordance with the existing ones. Thus, a clear attempt was made to avert any “risk of damaging or spoiling . . . the historic essence of the building” [22] (p. 21).

The “reintegration of the town”, with the restoration of its wall and castle, sought to restore it to its original state, thus rescuing the town from the neglect it had suffered for decades. This implied respecting its history, architectural features and surroundings. The term “reintegration” was preferred in the documents of the time over the infamous “restoration” due to the reputation of excessive interpretation and reconstruction acquired by the latter in the nineteenth century.

The technicians took the Athens Charter’s (1931) principles into consideration and employed both traditional and modern technologies and materials, in particular when reconstructing segments of the ruined wall, which were either missing or at risk of collapse [25]. Despite the use of reinforced concrete—which was “covered” in order to ensure the structures’ integrity—the retrieval of the town’s medieval appearance would be better attained through the use of centuries-old techniques and materials. The priority was to reuse materials taken from downfalls or demolitions [16] (p. 82). Thus, there was an appeal to use “the stones from previous demolitions, thus granting the new wall segments an appearance similar to the original one, since the patina-covered sides would be put on display” [26]. The option for a reconstruction technique based on building double walls with air chambers allowed for an effective use of the available materials [27].

The set of principles adopted by the DGEMN clearly demonstrates that this entity was not only discerning in its selecting intervention procedures, always ensuring the monuments were duly respected, but also went beyond the ideologically motivated general criteria, as argued by some authors [28,29]. Despite a relative methodological unity, the completed works demonstrate a practical adjustment to each monument’s needs.

Along with the technical aspects, the intervention in Óbidos also considered the revitalisation of the whole town. By respecting and valuing its history and art, the restoration process was decisive for the transformation of the “Museum Town”, on the brink of falling

into oblivion, into an attractive and dynamic “Cultural Town”, capable of reviving the local traditions, customs and resources [22] (pp. 22–23).

However, this Estremadura town was not only valued for its past. Along with the marked reverence for its history, traditions and artistic heritage, an investment in the modernisation of the town was clearly evident, in an attempt to make it more suitable for “modern life” [22] (p. 22), with electricity, domestic water supply, public washrooms and new roads. This was, in fact, the image that the regime strived to advertise, based on minister Duarte Pacheco’s discerning and competent approach: tradition and modernity, as per the Ministry of Public Works’ maxim.

The preservation of historic, traditional and rural values combined with the pursuit of progress and the urge to develop tourism in the town had the advantage of averting any tendency to crystallise the town into a cemetery of memories and pointless architectures. Investment in accommodation was encouraged—with the establishment of quality hotels such as the Pousada do Castelo (which opened in 1950), an accomplished repurposing of the former alcazar—and in cultural entertainment as a developmental strategy that fostered a more authentic and intense experience of the town. In fact, the project designed for Óbidos by the Estado Novo did not differ greatly from the more recent (2007–2013) restoration project of the Karytaina medieval castle (in the Peloponnese), which was supported by the European Commission and strived to preserve and use heritage in order to develop the tourism activity in the region and stimulate the local economy [30].

3.1.2. International Recognition. Baron Henck van Tuyll Serooskerken’s and Cesare Brandi’s Accounts

The intervention that “revived” the town of Óbidos was one of the exemplary projects presented by the DGEMN in various international exhibitions and conferences on the subject of restoration and heritage policies, as was the case of the 1964 Venice Congress [31]. The latter resulted in the publication of the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, which included the Portuguese architect Luís Benavente among its authors [32].

In addition to the congress, the Seconda Mostra Internazionale del Restauro Monumentale was held in that same Adriatic historic city, at the Palazzo Grassi. There, the DGEMN presented examples of the restoration projects implemented in Portugal over the past 30 years. The careful selection aimed to present representative examples of the employment of the most recent scientific knowledge and techniques in the field of restoration, and of monuments adapted to modern life. An example of the latter was the conversion of the Óbidos castle into a hostel [32] (p. 94), which was presented as a way to preserve and revitalise the town’s heritage. The interventions of which Óbidos was object constituted an enlightening example of the application of the best practices established by the 1931 Athens Charter, which were now reaffirmed and expanded in the new Venice Charter, especially in terms of the following subjects: the notion of monument and setting; the respect for the surrounding environment and the historic evidence; the use of traditional techniques; an acknowledgement of all of the construction phases, “style unity” no longer being a goal; and, especially, the establishment of a function deemed useful to contemporary society, thus rehabilitating Óbidos, starting with its history and monuments.

In 1964, during the fourth meeting of the IBI (International Burgen Institute, established in 1949, based in the Château de Rapperswil, in Switzerland) executive committee—of which the DGEMN was a part—, Portugal was included in the field study programme for the following year [33]. Thus, the Óbidos castle and its intervention received international attention in 1965, since it was one of the Portuguese castles visited by IBI members between 9 and 18 June. In the guide of this field study, it was stated that “Óbidos retained the appearance of a fortified medieval town to this day”.

The field study was a great success, as demonstrated by the praise of the DGEMN Director-General by IBI President, Baron Henck van Tuyll Serooskerken. He applauds the attention and work of the Portuguese authorities in safeguarding the heritage:

That visit was not only a success, but also a great accomplishment on every level. We could learn about major moments of your national history in the realm of both archaeology and history ... I can ... recognise the care and work that the Portuguese State has devoted to its cultural heritage. [34]

However, it was Cesare Brandi, the renowned Italian art historian and restoration theorist, who intelligently composed one of the most attentive commendations of the state of the town and of the ongoing revitalisation process, which was based on the idea of “respect for art” and simultaneously turned Óbidos into a “dead city” and a “living thing”. In this town, one is not “immersed in the past” alongside skyscrapers, as is the case in Italy. Preserved from some of the challenges involved in progress, the town does not succumb to a loss of animation or vitality. Rather, it fulfils its human, social and cultural duties, which is the responsibility of all Portuguese towns, regardless of their size (Figures 5–7).



Figure 5. Rua Dom Antão Moniz (c. 1950), Carlos Marques edition, postcard from Clara Moura Soares (CMS) collection.



Figure 6. Rua Padre António de Almeida (c. 1950), Carlos Marques edition, postcard from CMS collection.



Figure 7. Rua Direita (c. 1950), António Passaporte editions, postcard from CMS collection.

The contributions of Cesare Brandi's theory to the modern practice of conservation and restoration became indisputable, and its contemporaneity and validity are still acknowledged today. His vast and varied curriculum only reinforces the importance of his writings on monument restoration in Portugal, in Óbidos in particular. He was able to recognise the principles of education, respect and civility in a location he only happened upon by chance, as he confesses.

Brandi believes that Óbidos' value stems from the notion of setting as integral to the interventions of which it was the object, which resulted in a living and barely restored historic centre that celebrates former values linked to the present time in a "dignified" and "melancholic" manner. His acknowledgement of the work conducted on the former queens' town and of the attitude of the Portuguese authorities regarding the country's art and monuments—which contrasts sharply with the Italian policies—is quite clear in Brandi's words:

Now one could argue: is it really necessary to travel to Portugal for such an inexpensive immersion in the past? Perhaps there is no such thing in Italy . . . and how do I yearn for it. Because in Italy there is no place as well preserved as Óbidos, as is the norm in Portugal, regardless of Óbidos' unique and modest features. In Italy, any small town like Óbidos (if there is one) suddenly has a ridiculous quasi-skyscraper, the presumptuous little houses that had to be built near the fortress wall, graceless, disrespectful, lacking concern for both people and things. [35]

3.2. Óbidos in the Context of the Tourism Policies of the Estado Novo

Along with the restoration of the country's monuments, a "great tourism plan" was set into motion [36] (p. 102), always aiming at the idea of a glorious nation and its acclaim. Journalist and politician António Ferro was fundamental in this process, as he was chosen by the Estado Novo, ruled by the Head of Government, António Oliveira Salazar, to play an active role in the regime propaganda. He became director of the Secretariat for National Propaganda (SNP) on its establishment in 1933. Six years later, he would argue for the incorporation of tourism under the administration of the SNP (which was controlled by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers), defending it as a fundamental, wealth-generating propaganda tool for the country [37] (p. 37). It was necessary, however, to create a new legislative framework that could regulate and unify the sector and be more active in order to completely renew the touristic image of the country—building accommodation units, roads, promoting media coverage, tourist guides and posters, monument restoration and museum organisation [37] (p. 41). There was a clear need for an attractive model for the Portuguese and foreign public, one that would be able to compete with the tourism offer of other, larger European cities. Ferro's approach was based on a distinctive kind of tourism,

founded on the modernisation of national identity traits while retaining the folklore and the ancient, traditional and popular features.

António Ferro played a crucial role in the development of the Portuguese tourism sector, managing it with a clearly modern approach. Óbidos played a prominent role within this programme of tourism reorganisation and revitalisation programme, especially as regards tourist accommodation. Benefiting from the progress made on the restoration of the town and its monuments, and from its proximity to the capital city, Óbidos was chosen as the setting for establishing the Estalagem do Lidador. This hostel was established in the former Pensão Fuas Roupinho in 1940, under a project designed by architect Jorge Segurado, setting an example for other renovations of hotels and hostels in Portugal [38] (pp. 283–284), [16] (p. 100). It was also in Óbidos that the first National Historic Hostel was established in 1950, with a project by architect João Vaz Martins for the alcazar of the newly restored castle, following the example of the Spanish Paradores established in 1930s (e.g., Oropesa and Úbeda Paradores) [15,16,24]. However, unlike the latter, the Portuguese hostels set in monuments were not design as tourism projects from the outset; rather, they derived from the need to preserve the restored buildings and grant them a practical function [24] (p. 115).

The tourist influx in Óbidos increased from this period on, due not only to the restored monuments, but also to the rehabilitation of public buildings, private houses and streets, the creation of inviting accommodation units, the campaigns advertising its attractions and the compelling events (both religious and secular). Among the latter were musical shows, art exhibitions, film shootings and theatrical performances, such as the film *Les Lavandières du Portugal* (1957) directed by Pierre Gaspard Huit and Pierre Lary and starring Paquita Rico, a Spanish actress and singer, and the play *Le Chemin de la Croix* (1963) by Henry Ghéon, which was broadcast on Portuguese television.

In 1970, with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Municipal Museum was housed in the sixteenth-century building of the former city hall. The aim of the new museum was meant to complement the collection of archaeological vestiges and architectural fragments exhibited in the São Martinho chapel. The opening of the Ogiva art gallery, founded by sculptor José Aurélio, made it possible to broaden the cultural and artistic offer of the town by promoting contemporary art. The gallery held not only art exhibitions, but also gatherings and musical performances attended by the most eminent Portuguese artists, musicians and scholars.

Understandably, the rehabilitation of Óbidos' urban structures and monuments allowed for the implementation of initiatives designed to culturally stimulate the town. There was already a clear connection between the town's historic and artistic heritage and the cultural activities that could contribute towards establishing Óbidos as a distinguished tourist destination, both for the Portuguese and the foreign public. The goal was not to create a museum town frozen in time, but rather an attractive cultural and dynamic town that would inspire its visitors to return. This idea was reinforced, from the 1940s onwards with the project for a tourism school in Óbidos, setting an example that would be followed in other parts of the country [16] (p. 116).

However, the rural population was left out of the development project of the town and encourage to move to its outskirts [39]. The demands made by the municipal regulations and the settlement of wealthy families in the town threatened its displacement, thus initiating a transformation of Óbidos' social fabric [11] (p. 373). From this period up to the establishment of the Portuguese Constitution in 1976, foreigners were prevented by law from buying houses within the walled town, since this area was classified as a National Monument [40].

3.3. Current Challenges Posed in the Management of Óbidos Heritage

3.3.1. Growth of Cultural Tourism: Development, Innovation, Creativity and (Un)sustainability

Since the rehabilitation of Óbidos in the mid-twentieth century, the government has been mostly invested in animating the urban setting by exploring its potential for tourism and attempting to project an image of both development and tradition—one that could be linked with the Portuguese identity in Portugal and abroad. The main basis of that project was, for many decades, the town's historic and artistic heritage, the grand celebrations of the history of Portugal and the religious festivals, all contributing to the development of tourism in the region (Figures 8–10). In an area with a strong Catholic tradition (as is the case throughout the country, in general), the traditional religious feast days and festivals, with secular origins (e.g., Holy Week, pilgrimage of Santo Antão, Feast of Nossa Senhora da Graça, the fair and feast of Santa Cruz, the feast of São Pedro, the fair of Santa Iria), went on to gain a greater dimension and far more visitors.



Figure 8. General view of the town of Óbidos, photo by Clara Moura Soares (CMS), 2018.



Figure 9. General view of the town of Óbidos, with the bell tower of the Church of Santa Maria in view, photo by CMS, 2021.



Figure 10. Partial view of *Rua Direita*, Óbidos, photo by CMS, 2018.

In the 1980s, with the democratic regime already established in Portugal, there were art and classical music festivals (e.g., the I Festival de Música Antiga [1st Festival of Ancient Music], 1982; the I Bienal Internacional de Artes de Óbidos [1st Óbidos International Art Biennale], 1987). These initiatives were designed to promote artisanal and cultural production, with the goal of involving the local communities in the process of establishing Óbidos as a tourist destination [11] (p. 373). There was also an investment in the rehabilitation of the castle wall (Cerca do Castelo) and in the establishment of cultural institutions in historic buildings, such as the case of Santiago Church, which was turned into a municipal auditorium in 1989 [41]. Nevertheless, the city council's guidelines, although effective in promoting the town as a tourist destination, were not able to prevent the depopulation that had been occurring since the Estado Novo, and which would become even more severe in the future [11] (pp. 373–374). As mentioned by Prista, quoting the Instituto Nacional de Estatística [National Statistics Institute], “between 1940 and 2001, the population inside the city walls decreased from 734 to 154 inhabitants, 20% of which were seasonal” [11] (p. 374).

With the passing of time, in an attempt to follow international examples and experiences, the cultural programmes tended to become more varied and aspired to reach more diverse audiences. This was necessary for the development of a financially sustainable cultural tourism, the profits of which were destined for heritage conservation and boosting the local economy, without forgoing a conscious and responsible use of the heritage and respect for the local communities.

These were the circumstances in which the Portuguese town sought to adapt to the new current challenges. The healthy coexistence of the art of the past with the most recent contemporary art, for instance, has turned Óbidos into a present-day town, “alive” and adapted to contemporaneity. The launch, of the Óbidos Criativa [Creative Óbidos] brand campaign in 2002 was fundamental to this. The opening of contemporary art galleries (Casa do Pelourinho, 2004; Nova Ogiva, 2005), as well as of the Centro de Design de Interiores Maria José Salavisa [Interior Design Centre Maria José Salavisa] (2008)—which brought important contemporary art exhibitions to the medieval town—were some of the city council's initiatives for the development of cultural and creative industries [6] (p. 44).

At a time when the number of competing cultural attractions is ever-increasing, cultural consumers, excursionists and tourists yearn for unique and memorable new experiences for their leisure periods, seeking to combine culture and entertainment. The debates on the subject of cultural tourism's new directions and approaches frequently

suggest that the uniqueness of locations is no longer sufficient for them to become tourist attractions, since the planet is full of exceptional destinations [42] (pp. 101, 124). Hence, the campaign for investment in creativity, sensory stimulation and immediate gratification, turning historic centres into amusement parks and enhancing reality by means of virtual effects [43] (p. 49). This, however, is a deeply controversial concept that often leads to the creation of distorted “hyperrealities”—as some authors have warned [44] (pp. 195–196), [45] (p. 40), [46] (p. 10)—thus compromising the “spirit of the location” and its authenticity. However, these concepts are not static either [17,18], and have multiple and contrasting meanings nowadays, resulting from the offer of tourist experiences the perspective of those (governments, tourists, hosts). All these issues need to be taken into consideration in the analysis of our case study.

In Óbidos, experiential tourism was promoted as a complement to historic heritage, since the latter was considered insufficient for the development and consolidation of the town as a tourist destination [5], [9] (pp. 16–17). Óbidos became a sort of setting for a marked theatricalization, which led to the estrangement of the population residing within the walled town. This resulted in the depopulation of the historic centre and, consequently, to the neglect and ruin of its buildings [10] (p. 61). The local government’s initiatives focused on tourism and on the creation of new business opportunities [4] (p. 101), [6] (p. 48), to the detriment of the resident population [11] (pp. 370, 376) and local shopkeepers, who were dissatisfied with the limited impact of the growing tourism on their businesses [10] (pp. 56–58). With no incentives to rehabilitate their houses, a large portion of the local population chose not to embrace potential initiatives related to the development of tourism in the region and relocated to larger cities, turning many of the town houses into second homes [10] (p. 61) for national and foreign families with more financial capacity.

Yet, how could the town heritage be explored manageably, both respecting the inhabitants and attracting new residents, while simultaneously taking the sustainability of the local economy into consideration and ensuring the conservation of the cultural heritage? There are “some strategic tools that may be employed to avoid over-use of heritage” [44] (p. 205). Those managing heritage bear the responsibility of accomplishing this bold task, which requires a careful and responsible planning, with a clear didactic and pedagogical inclination, and where knowledge plays a central role. It is hoped that the cultural experience will be simultaneously educational, filled with knowledge, admiration and entertainment [42] (p. 5), [21] (p. 78). As an underlying element to these initiatives, heritage conservation should always be addressed in a way that communicates its susceptibilities to visitors.

Nowadays, the notability of Óbidos is not only due to its urban features, history and cultural landscape, but also to its reinterpreted identity, its various seasonal events, the many cooperation networks it has established (e.g., European Union network URBACT II—Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas) and to the territorial and touristic marketing strategies that have been implemented [3] (pp. 8–9), [9]. As a result, the town has remained active all year round, appealing to varied audiences, and sometimes involving the local population, who now acknowledge some positive impact on the quality of life in the town [3] (pp. 12–13), but no major improvements [10] (p. 56), [6] (p. 44).

The most notable events in the town are the Festival Internacional do Chocolate [International Chocolate Festival] (since 2002), Mercado Medieval [Medieval Market] (since 2002), and Vila Natal [Christmas Town] (since 2006), each attracting 100,000 to 200,000 visitors. They advertise themselves as memorable cultural experiences and pose great challenges to the managers of the town heritage [47] (pp. 262, 265). Other noteworthy events are Semana Santa [Holy Week], Maio Barroco [Baroque May], Junho das Artes [June Contemporary Art Month], Semana Internacional de Piano [International Piano Week], Festival de Ópera [Opera Festival], Temporada de Cravo [Harpsichord Season] and, more recently, FOLIO—International Literary Festival and Festival Literário Latitudes [Literary Latitudes Festival](which are part of the project Óbidos Vila Literária [Óbidos Literary

Town], project launched in 2013)—all of which contribute to combatting the seasonality of this tourist destination [10] (p. 66), [7] (p. 74). (Figures 11–14).



Figure 11. International Chocolate Festival, Óbidos, photo by CMS, 2012.



Figure 12. Óbidos Medieval Market, photo by CMS, 2010.



Figure 13. Óbidos Medieval Market, photo by CMS, 2018.



Figure 14. Óbidos, Christmas Town, photo by CMS, 2012.

History, art, music and literature have broadened and enriched the Óbidos tourist experience. The events, especially the most famous ones, such as Mercado Medieval, Vila Natal and Festival Internacional do Chocolate, are the main reasons for the reputation of Óbidos as a distinguished tourist destination, mostly in Portugal but also abroad [8] (p. 697), [9] (p. 52), [7] (p. 66). According to a study by Vera Reino [9] (pp. 76–77), based on a survey with 200 visitors at the Mercado Medieval, the keywords most often associated with the town are *ginja* (a typical local liqueur), castle and chocolate, clearly demonstrates the priorities of the visitors, at least of those who attend the most popular events.

Óbidos should not succumb to the expansion of these types of initiatives and consequently miss the opportunity to develop a civic and cultural programme. In our opinion, the authenticity of the experiences, which have been questioned by some authors, is not so much at stake, but their sustainability may well be. A delicate but desirable balance needs to be attained which will simultaneously safeguard the interests, the local economy, the heritage and tourist's expectations.

The entertainment feature should communicate the value of the historic and artistic realm, and especially the importance to safeguard the local cultural heritage. The strategy for the improvement of the town, the local population and the economy is based on its cultural heritage; and it is the cultural heritage that ensures, to a large extent, the quality of the visitors' experience, who value the natural charm of the town, its heritage, history and medieval ambiance, even when attending the promoted events [8] (p. 696), even though they acquire little knowledge during the visits. One experiences the ephemeral, living it intensely and returning for a new event the following year, with new themes, new attractions and new protagonists.

Tourism is undoubtedly decisive for social, cultural and economic development, which, in turn, are highly dependent on creativity, knowledge and innovation [4,48,49]. It is, however, an ambivalent activity, one that can bring great cultural, social and economic benefits, but also contribute to the deterioration of the environment and to the loss of local identity and authenticity [50–53].

The International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICOMOS, 1999) states that “the natural and cultural heritage, diversities and living cultures are major tourism attractions” [54]. However, an excessive or mismanaged tourist influx can endanger local heritage, environment, culture and ways of living, as well as undermine the visitors' experience and fail to meet their expectations. Nevertheless, these recommendations are not easy to follow and largely depend on the conduct of all the stakeholders and interested parties in the tourism industry.

As for Óbidos, some authors consider that the adopted tourism management model does not compromise the authenticity of the visitor's experience [12] (p. 493), and that local history and heritage have been duly considered [13] (p. 39). Others believe that all its authenticity has been erased by the touristification of the town and the ensuing loss of inhabitants and of rural environments [11,15,55]. Safeguarding a historic setting implies preserving its built structures, but also its life and symbolism. According to the Nara Document (1994), heritage authenticity resides precisely in its cultural and social diversity, and in its tangible and intangible nature. Since there are no established criteria for assessing such qualities, they should be determined within their social and cultural context [56,57]. The degree of authenticity sought by the tourist in their tourist experience is also a determinant factor [17] (p. 376), [18] (pp. 56, 352), [58].

The abundance of places of interest in terms of culture and heritage combined with the small size of the town contribute to Óbidos' vulnerability. Tourism has undergone considerable development, especially over the last two decades, based on elements deemed fundamental to their sustainability, such as the diversity of the hosted events, which target different types of audiences and are spread out across the year; the active participation of local associations in the planning of the events [13] (pp. 47–48); the creation of new varied infrastructures for accommodation and parking, the latter in adjacent areas; the restriction of vehicle circulation inside the town; the improvement of cultural venues and heritage rehabilitation; the investment in researching and publishing information on cultural and natural heritage; and some measures that aim to decentralise tourism in order to enhance the whole county.

Larger events in which the historic town is the main centre of attraction, such as Festival Internacional do Chocolate, Vila Natal and Mercado Medieval, generate surges of temporary but cyclical tourist influxes, thus promoting the region and attracting tourists throughout the whole year.

However, the tourist crowds that tend to congregate in Rua Direita, Óbidos' main street, hinder an authentic understanding of the location and a perception of the town as a whole, thus resulting in natural wear and tear, on the one hand, and in limited possibilities of use, on the other. Óbidos' local authorities are well-aware of the visitors' predilection for the axis connecting the Porta da Vila [town entrance] and the castle. This is a common situation in historic cities and towns, such as in Albarracín and Ávila in Spain. The "selective use" of a very small fraction of heritage that places the most famous monuments on the centre stage is an issue closely related to heritage fatigue [59] (p. 422). Enticing visitors to alternative itineraries and installing points of interest throughout the town would help to mitigate the tendency towards the linear route. Furthermore, the available heritage resources should be adapted and prepared for public visits, allowing visitors to enter and offering them accessible and instructive information using attractive and appropriate interpretation and presentation methods and employing new technologies—which could be an attainable and suitable opportunity for private commercial initiatives [60] (Figures 15–17).

Another aspect to consider is the so-called "day-tripper" and the strategies for permanently attracting tourists. In Óbidos, as in other historic cities and towns near major cities, the excursion mode is the most prevalent, and the percentage of visitors staying overnight in the town or in the region is not significant [9] (p. 66). Finding strategies to shift Óbidos' tourist profiles is one of the major concerns of the heritage managers, and necessarily implies creating new initiatives and partnerships with the accommodation industry, creating attractive events that last several days, and appealing to alternative market sectors by hosting business meetings and scientific or sport events.



Figure 15. General view of Rua Direita from the Church of Santiago, photo by CMS, 2021.



Figure 16. Rua do Hospital, Óbidos, photo by CMS, 2021.



Figure 17. Partial view of Rua Dom Antão Moniz, Óbidos, photo by CMS, 2021.

3.3.2. Conservation, Restoration and Promotion of Cultural Heritage Concerns

As regards heritage, since the extensive conservation and restoration interventions during the Estado Novo, the local authorities have focused on devising strategies to promote Óbidos as a tourist destination, especially over the last 20 years. This has been based on creative management models of the territory, as previously demonstrated. Although the local authorities express a commitment to articulating heritage, knowledge and innovation, and to preserving historic, material and immaterial heritage [4] (p. 92), the reality has shifted away from some of those goals. However, the profound difficulty imposed by these challenges should be noted, and it is not always possible to succeed in every endeavour. The marketing strategy developed for Óbidos, based on the Óbidos Criativa brand [61] has been widely praised, as it has generated outstanding outcomes for tourism and the local economy and stimulated the growth of companies and businesses in the Óbidos county [3–5,8]. Nevertheless, the council's policies have not given due attention to the heritage located within the town wall—upon which the whole process is founded. To complete our argument, and in line with the position of Aylin Orbasli, the sustainability and development of a tourist location depends on future planning, on a reactive management (that adapts to certain results), on the interdisciplinary dialogue between planning and conservation, marketing and tourism management, but also on the role that local communities have in some decisions. Otherwise, the location will fall into decay and be quickly discarded [62] (pp. 2–3).

A number of warning signs may be recognized on a visit to Óbidos: a town full of historic monuments and buildings may be observed; however, they are in need of management and of communication strategies that convey information on the town's identity and history in order to raise public awareness of the importance of preserving and valuing heritage. If this is not achieved, the town will continue to be the target of iconoclast actions such as visitors writing on the white façades of the town buildings, using them as a guestbook of sorts. The communication strategy which has successfully attracted an average of 1.5 million visitors to Óbidos each year [10] (p. 80), thus turning it into a true tourist destination, must also educate those same visitors on the value of heritage, its vulnerabilities and the danger of certain behaviours. This should be done by explaining the underlying reasons. The posters at the entrance of the town, which announce that writing on walls is prohibited, are manifestly insufficient and ineffective (Figures 18–20).

The evident lack of an effective communication strategy regarding heritage becomes clear when reading of the council's archival documents (such as records and activity plans), which reveals entertainment events (dance, theatre, music, visual arts) as the main projects within the walled town.



Figure 18. Walls with marks from tourists near the Calçada do Lidador, Óbidos, photo by CMS, 2021.



Figure 19. Calçada do Lidador, walls with marks from tourists, Óbidos, photo by CMS, 2021.



Figure 20. Poster at the entrance to the town, announcing that writing on walls is prohibited, photo by CMS, 2018.

The buildings' conservation and restoration are highlighted as a weakness in the SWOT analysis of the "Creative Model of the Óbidos Council" [5] (p. 89). In fact, the intervention policy for the town's historic buildings and monuments is clearly ineffective. There are, however, two noteworthy projects that have been developed over the last few decades: the conservation and rehabilitation of the castle wall, and the transformation of ruined buildings into creative hubs.

Conservation and Rehabilitation of the Castle Wall

With regards to heritage conservation and rehabilitation, the city council has mainly invested in the castle wall (see Information on Municipal Activities), a fundamental setting for its cultural and artistic programme and an absolute must in the town's tourist itinerary. Initially, the efforts were geared towards improving the space and preparing it for tourist visits; however, with the passing of time, its routine conservation and maintenance became the priority, as it was susceptible to overuse due to the high number of visitors and the vibrations caused by the yearly musical shows.

In the last few decades, two crucial phases have marked the interventions on the wall: the restoration of the Cerca do Castelo [Castle Wall] (1991–2004), and the more recent restoration of the fortress wall and the parapet walk (2018–2020).

The first of these projects was designed to adapt and prepare the walled area, thus making it more versatile and adaptable to future uses [16] (p. 141). During this period, under a project by architect José Garcia Lamas, the floors within the wall and the parapet walk were improved, the western side of the wall was better integrated into the landscape and two outdoor amphitheatres were built. The latter were strongly criticised for clashing with the pre-existing structures in terms of scale [15] (p. 434). The intention was to revitalise the Castle wall, “so that it could function as a location for leisure, enjoyment, and contemplation” and which would facilitate “cultural exhibitions and a reunion with history and the memory of its past cultural environments” [63] (p. 18). Since then, shows within the castle wall have proliferated (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Partial view of the Castle with amphitheatre for performances, photo by CMS, 2021.

The second major intervention on the wall occurred between 2018 and 2020, and included the restoration of the wall surfaces, repairing the floor of the parapet walk to ensure the visitors’ safety, and the posting of signs indicating passageways and alerting the visitors to the dangers of the narrow path. As regards safety, we believe that a guard rail should also have been installed along the entirety of the wall in order to prevent any falls, and that the visit should have an established one-way system, thus preventing visitors from bumping into each other (Figure 22).

Among the structures that were also the object of intervention were the Porta da Vila, Porta da Senhora da Graça, Postigo de Baixo, Miradouro da Pousada, Torre do Facho and the portal of the Santa Maria Church. The interventions consisted mainly of cleaning and consolidation procedures [64] (p. 8), [65] (p. 21).

Repurposing of Ruined Buildings into Creative Hubs

The second noteworthy intervention project that was part of the urban renovation of the medieval town, consisted of the restoration of ruined or severely decayed buildings bought by the city council and also occurred in two main stages: first (2002–2008), it sought to allocate spaces to contemporary art, such as Galeria Nova Ogiva, Galeria da Casa do Pelourinho and Centro de Design de Interiores, which were designed to promote both established and emerging artists. Later (2011–2013), European funds (Cities and Urban Development Programme) supported the interventions on eight buildings: the restoration

of two churches (Nossa Senhora do Carmo and Santiago, the latter turned into a bookshop), the construction of five creative hubs, and the rehabilitation of a venue for “Casa das Rainhas—Óbidos Interpretative Centre”, a projected museum that would employ digital and multimedia technologies [7] (pp. 69–70) (as of 2021, the interactive museum had not yet opened).



Figure 22. Partial view of the town, seeing visitors walking along the wall, photo by CMS, 2021.

These initiatives were managed by the town council’s architecture office, and they allowed for the use of historic buildings and monuments by adapting them to new purposes that were compatible with the specific nature of each one of them [66]. The upper floor of most of the restored buildings was turned into housing to attract new residents in the hope of increasing the number of inhabitants (slightly over 100 residents were registered at the time) [10] (p. 60). The fact that the interventions followed principles of minimal intervention, compatibility and reversibility, thus respecting the authenticity of the heritage as far as possible, especially its typological and morphological characteristics, and allowing them to be repurposed at any time, is also noteworthy [67].

The “Óbidos, Literary Town” project was also developed during this period, closely in line with the examples of Hay on-Wye (Wales) and Paraty (Brazil) [12] (pp. 506–507), despite the lack of any known literary tradition in the town. The initiative was promoted by the local government in partnership with a private entity, the *Ler Devagar* bookshop, with the goal of involving the public and the historic heritage in the development of a creative territory via literature. Within this context, several specialised bookshops opened in innovative spaces that had previously been run-down or abandoned, thus promoting their restoration and tourism-related use. Among them are a church (the deactivated Church of Santiago, which had been repurposed into a municipal auditorium in 1989, was turned into the Santiago bookshop), an organic market (*Livraria do Mercado Biológico*, which specialises in second-hand cookery books, books printed by independent publishers and self-published books), a former wine cellar (*Livraria Artes e Letras*, with antique and collectible books), and a former hostel (*Literary Man Hotel*, a themed hotel and restaurant) [68] (p. 62). Among these, the Santiago Church project is especially noteworthy. It was authored by architects Rita Zina, Pedro Trindade, and Cristina Cardoso, who promoted the repurposing of the conserved and restored building into a bookshop furnished with “floating” shelves, which do not interfere with the architectural features and enable new ways of seeing the church.

Since there can be no bookshops without customers, the event FOLIO—International Literary Festival of Óbidos—was established in 2015, the year in which Óbidos was acknowledged as a creative town in the realm of literature and joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network [6]. In 2018, the literary festival Festival Literário Latitudes was created. Moreover, as part of the “Óbidos, Literary Town” project, the Galeria Pelourinho, a former contemporary art gallery, became Casa José Saramago de Óbidos (2018)—in homage to the Portuguese writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature (1998)—to which the municipal library was transferred. The town also hosts two literary residences each year, when writers from all over the world are housed in buildings restored by the town council.

In short, in addition to the restoration and repurposing of badly decayed buildings in order to increase the variety of tourist attractions, the wall was the main object of intervention—as it always remained a priority for the local government as regards the conservation and restoration of the town monuments. The wall is the chosen setting for most of the entertainment, cultural and artistic events held in the town, and it is susceptible to the wear and tear caused by the exponential increase in the number of visitors. Nevertheless, the intervention works on the Santuário do Senhor Jesus da Pedra, a baroque church located outside the town wall, which had needed restoration for decades [67], and the project for the establishment of a Centro Interpretativo de Óbidos (Óbidos Interpretative Centre) might indicate a shift towards a strategy with heritage at its core, one based on identity and innovation, where history and knowledge have their due place.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Our research was prompted by the perpetuation of an idea turned commonplace that, during the Estado Novo, Óbidos was the target of a creative restoration that transformed it into a fictional medieval town. The explicitness of the criteria followed in the restoration was demonstrated in the archival documents and old photographs showing the sites before and after the interventions. They also attest to the rigour of the intervention, which kept the remains as a reference and reused the materials of the actual buildings. Furthermore, the priority in Óbidos was not to restore historic buildings per se, but rather to establish connections between the various identifying elements (both material and immaterial) of the town, to implement programmes to promote culture, as well as plans for safeguarding and repurposing monuments—as was the case with the former alcazar, which was converted into the first hostel set in a historic building in Portugal. The assets of the town, its geographical features, its proximity to Lisbon, the singularities of its heritage and the set of political inclinations all contributed to making the town an exemplary and internationally acclaimed model, which was also one of the first “settings” classified under the Portuguese Heritage Law. The innovative intervention and promotion project that was designed to boost tourism in the town allowed for true territorial and tourism marketing strategies—as they would be called today—based on history, historic and artistic heritage, established traditions and the cultural and natural landscape which is responsible for the prestige gained by this town in Estremadura. Some authors have suggested that there is a lack of authenticity in the town as a consequence of the restoration interventions, referring to it as a staged medieval town. Since MacCannell’s studies, the concept of authenticity has become much broader and more multifaceted, no longer associated only with historical and past values, or as a synonym for original and genuine [69]. Furthermore, as described herein, the adopted criteria were, on the contrary, quite rigorous when dealing with a wall that was not as decayed as one was led to believe, and which has undergone inevitable transformations since the Middle Ages. There were frequent conservation, restoration, extension works and alterations in medieval fortifications, which added to the marks of other time periods. If they had been left purposeless and neglected, they would inevitably be sentenced to dereliction and ruin. Carcassonne (France), San Gimignano (Italy), Ávila (Spain), Cochem (Germany), Bruges (Belgium), Dubrovnik (Croatia), Mdina (Malta) and Tallinn (Estonia) are all living examples of this, and many of these cities have even been deemed World Heritage sites.

The management of the use, maintenance and protection of the site, as well as its promotion, is a crucial element of the issue under study. That was one of the conclusions reached during the *Estado Novo*: it was not enough to restore the Óbidos town and its historic buildings and monuments; they had to be enlivened.

Today, with the nationalist motives that propelled the *Estado Novo*'s long gone policies, the artistic and historic heritage is still a powerful asset for cultural tourism, especially on a regional level [70]. Allowing its use while ensuring the preservation of the cultural heritage in a balanced manner remains the biggest challenge for the managing authorities [71]. Therefore, in order to responsibly employ a region's valuable heritage, one must genuinely know such heritage—which can only be achieved by extensively learning about its multiple aspects, be they artistic, gastronomic, linguistic or natural. Knowing the history and worth of heritage implies an awareness of its weaknesses and a commitment to it. Knowledge is, therefore, a crucial tool for managers, conservationists and restorers, tourism professionals, and for the public experiencing the heritage sites, which should be honoured.

Despite their value and abundance, this research made it possible to understand that over time, Óbidos' history and historic and artistic heritage have progressively been relegated to a secondary position in the managerial policies of the local government, which are geared more towards the activities that have turned the medieval town into a popular national and international tourist destination. Although the political discourse, based on experiential tourism principles, focuses on promoting these initiatives as a means to value the existing heritage and to encourage new ways of experiencing it, the idea is also conveyed that Óbidos is far more than history, and that heritage is insufficient, on its own, to implement a territorial management model capable of developing the region [8] (p. 696). It is precisely by diversifying its tourist attractions that Óbidos distinguishes itself from other Portuguese historic towns such as Marvão, Monsaraz and Almeida. This is partnered with a strong promotional place branding strategy, in which creativity and creative industries are important keywords. The strategy has demonstrated its effectiveness over the last 20 years, especially as regards the number of mostly Portuguese tourists [9] (pp. 52, 87) who seek Óbidos as a tourist destination. This is naturally reflected in the social and economic development of the region. The variety of cultural, recreational and entertainment activities not only combat the seasonality of tourism in the region, but also contribute decisively to appeal to new visitors, who are attracted by new events. This generates surprising results in such a sparsely populated territory, thus turning Óbidos into an interesting case study.

Notwithstanding, there are some unfavourable aspects in the process that compromise the sustainability of the adopted model. These are directly correlated with the endorsement of mass tourism, which tends to be invasive and undiscerning, which the kind of events held in the town attract. This is further aided by the limited acknowledgement of the historic and artistic heritage and of the town's identity in its management project. How many of the Óbidos' visitors are aware of its history and of the heritage and artistic worth within and surrounding the walled town? Óbidos cannot just be an idyllic setting for events that attract thousands of visitors and that are often completely unrelated to the region—as is the case of the Vila Natal or the Festival Internacional do Chocolate. "Intersecting the magical world of chocolate with the medieval atmosphere of the castle" [72] is not a solid argument. Hosting frivolous events that are far-removed from the history or cultural tradition of the location entails the huge risk of generating counterproductive consequences and of damaging the reputation of any location [73].

It is crucial that heritage, history, the people, and their memories become the focus of the policies for managing historic centres, for they are the ones granting their identity and authenticity [74,75]. The new attractions and cultural and entertainment activities are indeed important—as has been shown by other tourist destinations, such as the castles in Poland [76]—but they should only serve as a complement in which the local population can have an active role [6] (p. 50). As stated by Silverman, sustainability results from a dynamic

negotiation between those who receive and those who visit [21] (p. 76); otherwise, the depopulation of Óbidos will continue and the number of vacant buildings susceptible to ruin will increase. Enhancing the tourism-oriented image and offer undoubtedly promotes the notability of the town, but it will hardly contribute to improving “the self-worth of the population and their feeling of belonging and of local unity”, as the leaders of the local government have argued [8] (p. 696). Furthermore, the events, shows and exhibitions depend greatly on public funding, which explains why such initiatives have contributed so little to the local economy [77] (p. 1121)—leaving both inhabitants and shopkeepers dissatisfied [10]—and to the promotion of the town’s historic and artistic heritage.

The heritage management approaches must be reconsidered in order to grant Óbidos a reputation that is compatible with its history, beyond the fanciful theme park and the historical re-enactment, and one capable of engaging neighbouring towns. It is necessary to renew and redirect the attractions of this tourist destination, which had been showing signs of fatigue and threatened to enter decline [78]. The so-called Xerox copy [79] (p. 245) of successful formulas that led to the reproduction of similar events throughout the country certainly contributed to that situation.

In Óbidos, as in the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the frailties of the territorial development models that are exclusively dependent on tourism. It is necessary to turn adversities into opportunities, and to rethink strategies for the near future. without losing sight, however, of the fact that each case is unique and that the solutions to be found must be strategic for the location and suited to the needs of the local community [62] (p. 4).

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