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## Cultural heritage policy. The Alto Douro wine region - World Heritage Site. Is there an argument for reinforcing the role of the state?

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**Abstract:** In this paper we trace the emergence of a specific case of cultural policy: the example chosen is a UNESCO World Heritage site, namely the Alto Douro Wine Region (ADW) a portuguese living and evolving cultural landscape. In order to contextualize the particularities of the means that have been adopted for the management of the ADW, we use Throsby's (2001) typology of most commonly-used cultural heritage policy instruments. Additionally we draw on the arguments that are frequently used to support public intervention in this sphere. We conclude that ADW's management policy should: 1) use binding agreements to operationalize a range of measures that compensate farmers who become providers of cultural products; 2) strengthen education and information so as to promote greater physical access and personal appreciation of the ADW's cultural goods and services; and 3) formulate an integrated set of social policies able to mitigate the negative socio-demographic trends that characterize the region and its population.

**Keywords:** World Heritage; Alto Douro wine region; Cultural heritage; Public intervention

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**Resumo:** Neste artigo, salientamos a emergência de um caso específico de política cultural: o exemplo escolhido é um local de património mundial da UNESCO, designadamente a região do Alto Douro Vinhateiro (ADW), uma paisagem cultural viva e evolutiva. Para contextualizar as particularidades dos meios que têm sido adoptados para a gestão do ADW, tivemos como referência os instrumentos de política de património cultural de Throsby (2001), comumente utilizados. Adicionalmente avançamos com os argumentos frequentemente usados para apelar à intervenção pública nesta esfera. Concluímos que a política de gestão do ADW deve: 1) estabelecer um conjunto de medidas compensatórias para os agricultores que se tornam fornecedores de produtos culturais; 2) reforçar a educação e formação para promover maior acesso físico e apreciação pessoal dos bens e serviços culturais do ADW; e 3) formular um conjunto integrado de políticas sociais capazes de mitigar as tendências sócio-demográficas desfavoráveis que caracterizam a região e a sua população.

**Palavras-chave:** Património Mundial; Alto Douro Vinhateiro, Paisagem Cultural e Política Pública.

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## Introduction

Nowadays, for a number of reasons, the state is called upon – almost automatically – to intervene in the cultural sphere. Thus, in many countries, government attitudes and policy priorities as well as public opinion, have shifted, and now tend to pay greater attention to the cultural sphere.

In this paper, the Alto Douro Wine Region (ADW) has been selected as the object of study in order to test the above assertion. The ADW is a living and evolving landscape whose cultural uniqueness and value was internationally recognized in December 2001 by its inclusion in UNESCO's list of world heritage sites. Due to this inclusion Portuguese state was automatically attributed a reinforced role in the conservation/preservation of the cultural landscape. But are the instruments in use in the heritage cultural sector adequate or sufficient with regard to ADW reality and its specificities namely its relation with the agricultural sector and the social life of the population? The main aim in preparing this paper was to assess the degree to which the means and measures that to date have served public policy in the cultural heritage sphere and that have been widely referred to in the literature, are appropriate in the case of the ADW re-

gion. To answer this question we established an economic basis to ADW policy.

In order to achieve these aims, in addition to the introductory section, Section 2 provides a review of the theoretical arguments in favor of public intervention in this sphere; Section 3 looks at the definition of the ADW as a world heritage site, while Section 4 provides an analysis of the role of the state in the ADW with a view to developing an economic conceptual framework that could justify cultural policy as applied to the ADW. The paper concludes with some final reflections.

## The theoretical argument of public intervention in the cultural sphere

The economic underpinnings of cultural policy contain a series of arguments in favor of government intervention and point to a number of different policy instruments and measures that can be applied. First there is the efficiency argument, the fact that cultural products are ever more thought of as public goods, and the recognition that inherently cultural heritage items generate externalities. Then there are normative issues to take into account, including the notion that cultural products constitute “merit goods”, and the perceived need to provide more and better information regarding cultural conservation. Finally, there are

| INSTRUMENTS   | AIMS   |
|---|--|
| “Public ownership and operation of heritage institutions, facilities and sites”         | The coordination of various policies; also, given the high costs of heritage goods/services, equity issues are incorporated in policy (Mason, 1998).<br>Delivery: direct provision   |
| “Financial support for the maintenance, operation and restoration of heritage,”         | Maintenance of current quality levels; encourage those initiatives that have the greatest spillover effects; stimulate new cultural activities (Towse, 1994).<br>Delivery: financial and tax benefits                                |
| “Regulation limiting or constraining private action in dealing with cultural heritage,” | Promotion of behavioral change (Giardina and Rizzo (1994); Throsby (1997, 2001)<br>Delivery: Hard/soft regulation  |
| “Education and the provision of information”.   | Better conservation decisions (Throsby, 2001)<br>Important role of information in (a) identification and documentation; (b) recognition/certification; (c) stakeholder coordination; (d) education; and (e) persuasion (Mason, 1998) |

Table 1. Heritage policy measures currently in use. Source: compiled by the author.

equity questions arising out of the differential access to cultural products that people currently enjoy.

Regarding the policies that naturally derive from such interventionist arguments, Throsby (2001:89) identifies four groups of measures currently in use in the heritage sphere. Table 1 presents these policy instruments and their corresponding aims.

Notwithstanding the ostensible autonomy of each of the above-mentioned policy measures, it is generally recognized that optimum efficacy is best achieved by using a number of instruments in a complementary way. In brief, public ownership and the management of heritage institutions provide the basis for direct state provision of heritage goods/services, and regulatory measures (such as financial penalties and incentives) permit specific types of behavior to be promoted and/or modified. Though information can be deployed to coordinate efforts, to change attitudes and behavior, and to educate current and future generations, it can also be used to complement all the other forms of intervention to which government has recourse.

Nevertheless the definition of cultural heritage<sup>1</sup> embraces various items. For example UNESCO (1972) considers as susceptible of classification: monuments, groups of buildings and sites “which are of outstanding universal value”.

Due to this multidimensional concept we put the question if the above general conceptual framework about heritage policy measures currently in use is sufficient to apply to a specific case that is a “cultural landscape”.

### **The Main Features of The Alto Douro Wine Region World Heritage Site (ADW)**

#### **Description**

In December 2001, UNESCO included the ADW in its list of World Heritage sites as an evolving and living landscape. The “cultural heritage good” itself is Portuguese, and embraces 13 counties (*concelhos*) of the Douro Demarcated Wine Region, the first such zone to be created anywhere in the world.

The feature of the ADW that makes it

unique is the way its landscape has been modified by the terracing that successive generations of farmers have undertaken over the centuries, thereby taming a natural environment that was, and still remains extremely challenging: precipitous gradients, harsh climate and low levels of rainfall. Vineyard agriculture has long predominated and has given rise to the internationally famous “Port wine”.

The landscape exhibits both natural and cultural features. The physical environment is characterized by steep inclines, complex systems of valleys, water resources limited by the scarcity of rainfall, vineyards everywhere, interspersed with other Mediterranean crops such as olives and almonds. The rural landscape has its own particular palette of colors, its own smells, and above all, its silence. The cultural dimension of the landscape draws heavily on the architecture of its estates (*quintas*) and smaller outlying farm houses (*casais*), the key lines of communication (the Douro waterway, the riverside railway, the winding country roads and paths), the patterns of cultivation dominated by the limited crops farmers have chosen to grow there, the extensive use of stone-faced terracing to limit erosion in the vineyards, and the ever-present chapels and sanctuaries that frequently dominate the highest points.

UNESCO has summarized as follows the way in which the ADW's main landscape features comply with key criteria for selection as a world heritage site:

”The Alto Douro Region has been producing wine for nearly 2000 years and its landscape has been moulded by human activities.

*Criterion (iv)* The components of the Alto Douro landscape are representative of the full range of activities associated with winemaking - terraces, *quintas* (wine-producing farm complexes), villages, chapels, and roads.

*Criterion (v)* The cultural landscape of the Alto Douro is an outstanding example of a traditional European wine-producing region, reflecting the evolution of this human activity over time.” (UNESCO, 2001: [whc.unesco.org/sites/1046.htm](http://whc.unesco.org/sites/1046.htm)).

The landscape and heritage of the ADW are intimately connected to the

living conditions and social characteristics of the local population, as witnessed by the fact that the corresponding property rights are distributed among myriad owners namely private vineyards. In general terms, the region is losing population and that which remains increasingly dominated by the elderly; aside from these demographic characteristics, there is a large section of the population with little or no schooling. These interrelated factors impose key constraints on the types of policies that can be applied to the ADW world heritage site.

#### **Particularities of the safeguard process**

Compared to other items of cultural heritage, as a historical monument, the safeguarding process of a cultural landscape presents some peculiarities. These area result of its living and evolving nature and are summed up in the next five points:

- *A living and evolving cultural heritage.* The ADW is a living and evolving cultural heritage and this sets it apart from other components of our cultural heritage, such as historical monuments which are much more rooted in the past, remaining largely static in social terms (though our perception of their importance may change over time), and therefore more immutable;
- *Multi-faceted heritage product.* The ADW is more a “multi-faceted” complex of heritage products than a single cultural product. The shape and dynamics of the landscape depend (in particular) on the day-to-day and professional activities and economic decisions of vineyard owners. For this reason, in contrast to the purely heritage items that typically are no longer associated with the activity that brought them into being – and therefore only need to be physically preserved, the ADW has to be simultaneously preserved and (re)produced.
- *External conditions.* A number of external conditions (related to various economic pressures, the low profitability of the vineyard sector, labour supply constraints, and the socio-economic profile of the population) require that the ADW maintain (rather than transcend) its an-

cestral techniques and practices ;

- *Dynamism and development.* The process of conserving the landscape can neither ignore the productive and heritage-related aspects of the past, nor the legitimate needs and demands of its producers. Therefore, the conservation process has to be dynamic, and as a result, must exhibit greater tolerance towards the contemporary issues and pressures of development, as distinct from what typically happens with other types of heritage products, in which conservation is much more static; and
- *Multiple actors.* The process of simultaneously treating cultural heritage as something to be protected and out of which value may be generated necessarily involves more actors – namely both technical experts and private vineyard owners, whereas in the majority of other cultural heritage cases (where ownership may be predominantly or exclusively public/institutional), only sectoral specialists are active in policy formulation and implementation.

#### **The ADW and the role of the State**

Having presented the singularities inherent to a cultural landscape, in this section we draft a table to constitute the economic basis for heritage policy as applied to the ADW. In this sense, table 2 summarizes the pro-intervention arguments and the policy forms each might take.

From the standpoint of appropriate policy measures, given the public goods nature of cultural landscapes and the fact that such items are susceptible of generate external benefits, the full cost of conserving the cultural landscape<sup>2</sup> of the ADW should not fall on the Douro vineyard owners. Indeed, they should receive compensation for the contribution to the conservation of the cultural landscape that they make, simply by continuing to be active in the sector.

In this regard, the most appropriate means would consist of financial assistance, provided directly through grants and subsidies, and/or indirectly through fiscal incentives and tax breaks. In return, those benefiting would be bound by

| PRO-INTERVENTION ARGUMENTS  | PROPOSED POLICY MEASURES   |
|---|--|
| <b>1. Market failure</b>  |  |
| The public goods nature of cultural landscapes;   | Direct/indirect financial assistance with the aim of allowing local producers to share in externalities in return for submission to public regulation  |
| External benefits: on consumption and on production;  | Impose (obligatory/coercive) regulations so as to preserve the cultural characteristics of the landscape   |
| <b>2. Incomplete and/or inaccurate information</b>  |  |
| a) <i>On the part of the producer</i><br>Either relating to the best means of preserving the cultural landscape, and/or due to poor levels of schooling and/or training   | Training initiatives for the local population; Increase in local population's self esteem;<br>Increase in research studies in/on the region  |
| b) <i>On the part of the consumer</i><br>Either due to limited knowledge of the cultural goods available; and/or because of limited publicity on the cultural goods available in the "quality tourism" circuit. | Promotion of education;<br>Greater provision of information;<br>Easier physical access;<br>Expansion of "intellectual" access;<br>Improved signposting;<br>More visitor centers " (centers for "heritage interpretation")  |
| <b>3. Poor living standards of key contributors to ADW landscape production/conservation</b>  |  |
| The low level of self-esteem may threaten local residents' continued involvement in vineyard production, thereby casting doubt on sustainability of the ADW as a cultural landscape.                            | Measures to promote a generalized redistribution of income and/or greater equity in the distribution of regional value-added, with a view to at least maintaining the <i>status quo</i> , if not actually to improve the standard of living of the poorest strata. |

Table 2. The ADW World Heritage Site: pro-intervention arguments and measures. *Source:* own elaboration.

the regulations relating to the conservation of cultural landscapes.

A further issue raised by public intervention, and of particular importance with regard to the ADW, relates to the provision of information to both producers and consumers:

- *Producers.* Given the social and economic characteristics of the ADW's population in general, and of its grape growers in particular, the level of schooling and training are somewhat low, and therefore it would be inappropriate for them to shoulder the entire burden of choosing the best techniques of landscape conservation (Rebelo *et al.*, 2001). Thus the provision of information by public institutions

(central and/or local) should take the form of training programs for the Douro population combined with increases in the scientific research undertaken on the problems and potentialities of the ADW.

- *Consumers.* With regard to the consumer, despite the fact that – in principal – the inclusion of the ADW in UNESCO's list of world heritage sites should help substantially in the promotion of the region, there is still very little information available on the quality tourism circuit, and there is generalized ignorance of the range and scale of the cultural heritage that the ADW offers (FRAH, 2000). In a sense this is not surprising, because the

ADW is more than just an area of outstanding natural beauty, and it requires more than just the five senses to fully appreciate it. Behind the terraces, the stone walls and the Mediterranean crops, there lies the complex 2000 year history of the peoples that successively imposed themselves on the landscape. In order to promote this physical and social cultural heritage, not only information but education is required. Furthermore, a tremendous investment effort has to be made in better infrastructure and more helpful signposting so that physical access is improved. Nor should intellectual access be ignored: more visitor centers are required, so that all aspects of the cultural landscape can be more fully appreciated; local staff need to be recruited and trained to act as guides and interpreters; the national and regional population needs to be more thoroughly informed through education and training programs. Also, if we understand "heritage" as a process by which history and memory are used to construct contemporary products for a wide range of distinct clienteles, each with their own needs, and not simply as a means of filling leisure time (Vicente, 2002), then that heritage has to be continually interpreted and reinterpreted<sup>3</sup>.

However, the continuation of the traditional cultivation systems is dependent on two factors: 1) life conditions of the ADW population and 2) settlement of young people in the region. In this sense, these reflections are an argument for public intervention requiring equity or income redistribution by the producers. Nevertheless it is not an argument exclusively for cultural activity due to the symbiotic relation between this and agricultural activity.

To sum up, we can conclude that the cultural political instruments more appropriate to ADW are: information provision, financial support and regulation. As the literature says, efficiency in cultural policy is found in complementary use of various instruments.

Nevertheless, due to the specific fea-

tures inherent in the conservation of landscapes in general, we can conclude that in the specific case of *cultural* landscapes, there is a larger role to be played by the state. The nature of this expanded state role is less a question of form (given that the measures it can deploy in this sphere are appropriate), and rather more a question of intensity. More specifically, the state needs to intervene:

- by making more and better information available (to enable the public to "interpret" i.e. more fully appreciate the cultural landscape they are experiencing; to this end, the state can (a) improve and increase physical and intellectual access to public revenues arising out of the use of such public goods and (b) more clearly differentiate, in the minds of the public, the natural and the humanised landscape;
- to improve the co-ordination and combination of the various measures available to it;
- to improve the integration of cultural policies with those relating to other sectors, especially agricultural, since cultural production is indissociable from the vineyard economy; and
- in the more accurate and equitable imputation of costs and benefits relating to cultural activities, given that cultural production involves the undertaking of other activities.

### Final remarks

The ADW as a living and evolving cultural landscape is the result of various generations' arduous work to transform a rough wilderness in to a singularly beautiful landscape which produces the internationally famous "Porto" wine.

The cultural landscape preservation/conservation exhibits public good properties and has the potential to produce external benefits related with its use or with its existence in sustainable conditions. On the other hand, due to the social characteristics of the ADW population, both information and training tend to be low. Furthermore, we identified certain problems in preserving the cultural landscape that must be considered

if we want to establish a rigorous conceptual framework as the basis of cultural policy.

In this paper, we conclude that if the *regulations* that restrict agents/owners actions allow them to protect and value the heritage, the *financial support* is the incentive for these actions and necessary to cover the cost increase that eventually can occur. *Information* is the key instrument both for producers and consumers. Finally, because of the low profitability inherent in responsible activity in the countryside (agricultural activity) there is also a need to compensate producers.

The intrinsic relation between the cultural and agricultural activities points to a reinforced role of the state: a) to coordinate measures; b) to distinguish/separate the costs and benefits of each activity; c) to adjust the cultural policy in the context of other sector-based policies.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Koboldt (1997:52) defines cultural heritage as "Common understanding of the environment that has been passed on from earlier generations".
- <sup>2</sup> These costs include: (1) the continued use of building materials and infrastructures that in other regions could be substituted by cheaper and/or more effective ones; (2) the use of specialized labor; (3) the continued use of antiquated cultivation techniques that further limit the al-



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ready limited mechanization possibilities, thereby contributing to lower productivity and higher production costs.

- <sup>3</sup> This corresponds to what Hutter (1997: 8) has referred to as the phase of “communicative maintenance”, in which constant reinterpretation – consisting of the provision of new interpretations and the establishment of new relationships between subject and object – helps the memory to retain the objects that make up our cultural heritage.

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