Environment as a Frame of Social and Economic Integration of Cultural Heritage: the Portuguese Case

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Portugal

Portugal is a small Latin country, located in the Iberian Peninsula in south western Europe.

It has an Atlantic coast and forms a border with Spain, and its physical topography and climate are mild. Its original population, typically Mediterranean in their features and customs, underwent a period where there was much interbreeding of races, brought on both by invasions (by Arabs and Nordics in more distant times) and by emigration (more recently, by Africans and East Europeans).

Independent since the 12th Century, Portugal's history has been a troubled one, characterised by very different stages, such as:

. 12th and 13th Centuries – under a strong Arab and Spanish influence, these were troubled times, during which several wars were waged for Independence and for autonomy from the neighbouring kingdom of Spain; there are still many architectural remains from this era (particularly the structure of some neighbourhoods, somewhat chaotic and with inner courtyards which encourage neighbours to socialise together, some churches which still show vestiges of the mosques on which they were built, some gastronomic and culinary and above all linguistic features);

. 13th to 15th Centuries – clear predominance of the Catholic church which dwarfed all Arts and Sciences outside of its domain; there are still many and varied churches, monasteries and manor-houses from this time, with religious features

. 14th to 17th Centuries – the era of the Maritime Discoveries, during which many groups of Portuguese citizens set off on journeys around the world, and when colonies were established in Africa, South America and Asia; this contact with other peoples and cultures left traces which are still in evidence today in the mixture of races, habits and customs, although the vestiges of Portugal in these tropical countries are stronger, given the event of colonisation; nevertheless, the use of spices and of some foods, such as the potato, corn, sugar and coffee in the day-to-day lives of Latin European populations, is one of the most common testaments to this era;

. 20th Century – during this stage, the fight for independence of the former colonies and the establishment of a dictatorial regime dominated the 1st half of the century, generating some social instability and a split-off of Left-wing politics; April 25th 1974 saw the "Carnation Revolution" which led to the fall of the previous dictatorial regime, the establishment of a Left-wing regime with strong predominance of the Communist Party, the start of the process for the independence of the former colonies and some social instability; the integration of Portugal in the European Community opened up new horizons, with the prospect of financing activities which up until this time had not been very profitable, and developing intensive training initiatives for senior and middle management executives;

. present – today Portugal is dominated by full integration into the European Community, which determines the economic and political life of the country; the Socialist

Party is in Government and all the country's trade falls within the framework of the European Community.

1.2 Portuguese cultural heritage

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Portuguese Cultural Heritage is the result of a varied development in which numerous and very different people played a part.

Contact between Portugal and various peoples led to the construction of a multi-faceted culture, with the Judaic-Christian culture in predominance, but with smatterings of the most varied cultures.

At the present time, and because of general globalisation, Anglo-Saxon culture has become increasingly significant.

But the immigration of large groups of Africans from the Portuguese ex-colonies and of East Europeans seems to be slowly altering this course, and we can predict that linguistic terms and habits which have been foreign up until now will be introduced into Portuguese daily life.

2. ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE: RECENT TRENDS AND CURRENT SITUATION

Up until around the mid-19th Century, the notion of the Environment was seen in a strictly physical/naturalist light, and was studied almost only in academic terms and was associated to Sciences such as Biology and Geography. Man was a separate entity, who granted himself rights which placed him above all other beings, above the rules of Nature.

Following the start of this century, this view was discarded and Man broadened his scope, and Social Sciences were incorporated into environmental issues. Thus, Man was deemed just another element of the Environment, governed by the same rules which govern every other animal, vegetable or mineral, and was added to the five essential biochemicals.

This all-encompassing view was gradually developed, and today the entire Human Society forms part of a much more wide-ranging remit.

Therefore, when we analyse the "Cultural Heritage" of a peoples and a country, we cannot separate it from the more general framework which is the Environment.

This general concept enables us to analyse the interdependence of the natural, physical, social, economic and cultural elements of each and every civilization.

It is in accordance with this developing and synchronous perspective that this account is given, establishing the full background of the position of Portugal at the start of the 21st Century.

In recent years, the Environment has provided the framework for the majority of the economic activities in the European Community, and several Directives have been drawn up with regard to predicting physical, ecological, economic and social impacts arising from the future implementation of large-scale or environmentally significant projects (producing dangerous wastes, occupation of sensitive areas, etc).

The adoption of the Principle of Prevention underlies all the economic trade of all the countries which make up the European Community and as such it is only possible to perform relevant economic activities after a prior evaluation of the consequences of such an action.

At the present time, large-scale projects can only be executed in Portugal following the completion of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes, during which different types of conditioning are established and measures implemented in order to minimise negative impacts.

Over time, the notion of Environment has undergone some considerable changes in Western Europe:

What prevailed initially was a structure associated to Natural Sciences, and mathematical models from Physical Sciences were applied; at that stage (starting in the 18th Century at the time of the Industrial Revolution) ecology was a science which revolved around the natural environment and the conservation of natural resources.

The awareness that there was a possibility of using up all the resources which formed the basis for their economic activities (mainly industrial activities) and the mass use of oil as an energy source, dominated the panorama of scientific knowledge and gave rise to the principles of conservation. Up until the middle of the 1950's, Social Sciences were studied in tandem with Physical Sciences, and Man was not incorporated as an element of the Environment;

After the mid 1950's and in tandem with the accelerated growth of Social Sciences in Western Europe, Man started to be an integral part of the Environment and his activities were analysed as part of a more general whole.

Thus, in addition to the preservation of species and Natural Resources, human activity began to be seen as the object of an integrated environmental assessment, and the rational management of natural and human resources became a prevailing concern.

In today's European Community, the Policy of Prevention prevails, spanning all activities, and the Social/Cultural aspect is always a dominant factor in the majority of decision-making processes.

From this viewpoint, Cultural Heritage (which until recently was analysed and assessed statically, merely as an element of Social Sciences, chiefly History) became an environmental component playing a significant and active role in human actions.

3. ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONDITIONING

Against this political framework, the Cultural Heritage of the peoples of the European Community has started to be seen as conditioning development and its importance was incorporated into very significant preventative actions, such as Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA).

This procedure was first set up by Community Directive 85/337/CEE and today corresponds to Directive 97/11/CE. These Community Directives are discussed by all Member-States, and are later passed into the Laws of each Country, adapted as necessary with regard to the situation of each Society, but with the common basis already discussed.

Thus, the majority of the projects which are relevant to Society (construction of motorways, airports and marine ports, setting up of factories, sanitary landfills and housing estates, etc) should be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment prior to being licensed, during which the environmental sustainability of the project is established, as well as the measures necessary in order to reduce the negative impacts.

This procedure – which is legislated, regulated and co-ordinated by each State – comprises two specific stages, which run in tandem:

technical assessment of the Environmental Impact Surveys by an Assessment Committee made up of technicians from various State Departments (chiefly the Ministry for the Environment and also the departments responsible for Cultural, Architectural and Archaeological Assets);

Public Consultation, which contemplates the most varied social strata, from the technical groups in the same branch of activity, to Associations for Environment Protection, positions of Local Power, professional and political associations, etc.

The Environmental Impact Surveys contemplate the prediction of impacts and minimisation measures relating to the following parameters:

physical – such as the soil, water (surface and subterranean), air, climate, habitats, flora and fauna, the sound Environment, etc;

humans – such as the population, quality of life, accessibilities, economic activities, preservation of historic monuments and archaeological remains, etc.

Varied Cultural Assets are therefore incorporated into both domains: into the drawing up and evaluation of Environmental Impact Surveys and into Public Consultations.

Thus each country in the European Community evaluates the precedents and the consequences of implementing large-scale projects.

4. CASE STUDIES - PORTUGAL

Given the diversity and large number of EIA processes, it is difficult to decide which are the most significant.

Nevertheless, considering the theme of this conference, I have selected two projects which are subject to an EIA in which Cultural Heritage plays an obvious role.

4.1 Vila Nova de Foz Coa Dam

Vila Nova de Foz Coa is a small city, a county town, located in NE Portugal, along the River Coa – which is one of the main tributaries of the River Douro, the country's second largest river which begins in Spain and flows into the Atlantic Ocean at Oporto.

This district was to be the setting for the construction of a large dam using hydroelectric energy produced by the River Coa.

Located in the arid heart of Portugal, with predominantly rural features, the area's main economic activities are grazing goats and sheep and extensive cereal and olive tree agriculture.

Given the district's low economic capacity, the installation of a large-scale dam represented an accentuated increase in the number of jobs created, both direct (civil construction) and indirect (restaurant sector, tourism), and so the project was well received in the Public Consultation for the Environmental Impact survey; only the owners of large estates downstream from the dam, who cultivate the vines which produce the country's Port wine, were openly against the idea.

The technical evaluation of the Surveys also detected the possible existence of some rock engravings in the area which would be flooded; this arose from the research carried out by academics at Minho University, given the proximity of the area of intervention.

Having predicted the positive and negative impacts of the dam, it was felt that it could be built, and so the EIA process concluded with a favourable opinion, and a licence was sought in order to go ahead with the construction.

However, local research on the heritage etched into the rocks continued, with the participation of the Institute of Archaeological Heritage, and more engravings were found, whose value was gradually assessed by international specialists. A few months later, experts reached the conclusion that the value of these engravings was unique, given the rarity of the art which dates from Pre-History and given the good state of conservation of the remains.

This conclusion led to a long discussion which moved public opinion about the decision of whether to go ahead with the construction of the dam and produce more hydro-electrical energy and employment or to abandon the idea and preserve the region's Pre-Historical Heritage.

The final decision led to the project being dropped, and to the creation of a Historical Site which preserved the rock drawings and which led to their being classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage site.

4.2 Vasco da Gama Bridge

The Portuguese capital, Lisbon, is located at the source of the River Tagus, on its right bank.

The connections between the two banks have always been complex, since the river forms a natural barrier; a bridge was built at the end of the 60's for road crossings (which was extended to include rail crossings two years ago), and this bridge encouraged growth on the left bank and facilitated access from the capital to all the southern regions of the country.

But this was not enough, since movements between the banks entail the daily crossing of hundreds of thousands of people (from and to work throughout the year, and to the beach during the summer).

A new bridge was therefore built further upstream (on the boundaries of NW Lisbon, next to the EXPO-98 site), and was subject to an EIA process.

The main impacts found were as follows:

- on the north bank, on the Lisbon side – some illegally built suburban housing estates had to be demolished. These estates were occupied by very poor families of African and gypsy origin for whom resorting to the construction of illegal houses was their only alternative at the time; this demolition and the subsequent re-housing of these people in mixed council housing estates was the object of a thorough analysis and careful monitoring by the appropriate authorities (Lisbon and Loures County Councils, Bureau for the New Crossing and the Ministry for the Environment's Monitoring Committee). This was fairly complex because, given the cultural differences and habits of the populations in question, their integration into the community life of the new estates was somewhat difficult. Systematic meetings were held with the leaders of the existing groups, and social workers were consulted to monitor on a daily basis the transfer of these groups of people. Even with all these minimisation measures being adopted, this integration was difficult and today, three years after the bridge was inaugurated, various types of problems still remain.

- on the south bank – one of the most significant negative impacts resulted from the effects on the River Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve (which preserves the Natural Heritage of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area), since the new Bridge crosses a nesting area for species of birds which are internationally protected due to the interest in their conservation (Bern Convention) and a *"nursery"* for fish in the adjoining wetlands. In order to minimise these effects, two measures were adopted: the Area of Special Protection of Bird Fauna was extended by over 400 hectares, and a Foundation set up for Management of the Samouco Salt-Marshes, whose aim is to manage the wetlands in the areas surrounding the accesses to the bridge, and to encourage compatibility between preserving traditional local activities (fish-breeding, salt extraction and fishing) and conserving natural habitats.

5. CONCLUSION

The EIA consists of a procedure undertaken prior to a project in order to forewarn against the majority of the negative impacts which can be expected when a large-scale project is implemented.

This enables several very different parameters to be taken into account, including descriptors associated with the Cultural Assets of those living in the area.

Respect for archaeological and social remains and vestiges of our heritage, for the habits and customs of different social groups and their integration into large-scale projects, should be considered to be an instrument of rational and balanced Development.

Although this procedure is still relatively recent (around 20 years in the European Community, 11 years in Portugal, 30 in Canada and in the United States), it has been showing good results, although some delays and have occurred and there have been some cases of inefficiency, which are typical of situations undergoing growth.

Since it is more flexible than traditional processes, it enables co-operation between various interests and target populations, and makes negotiations possible with a view to preserving the preserving the Cultural Heritage of those residents.

6. MYSELF

As a result of the kind invitation extended by the Royal Academy of Sciences of Prague, I would like to present a brief summary of my professional experience, so that my presentation can be placed into context.

A Geography graduate, I have gained experience abroad, having given lectures for two years in S. Tomé and Príncipe, in the Gulf of Guinea, in Africa, where I also taught higher education courses with a view to providing training for middle and senior management executives. As far back as then I was already interested chiefly in the Environment, and I developed some projects aimed at linking Economic Growth with preserving the Natural Heritage of those islands.

Following my return to Portugal, I undertook a scientific and pedagogical placement in order to train as a Secondary School teacher, during which I developed Environmental Education projects.

This was the springboard to my professional activity at the Ministry for the Environment, where I still work.

Having initially worked on Environmental Education projects (aimed at youngsters and adults in education and as members of Associations for Environment Protection), I started work in 1987 on the Environmental Impact Assessment process.

At the same time – since 1987 - I dedicated myself to academic life, and was a Visiting Professor of Urban Ecology as part of the Town Planning course, at the Lusófona University in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal.

In addition to publishing some articles and communications for Congresses and Seminars on Environmental Impact Assessments, which continues to be my main professional activity, I also drew up some Environmental Impact Surveys and collaborated on the production of others.

At the moment I am committed to the Strategic Assessment of Environmental Impacts which is being developed by the European Community to enable the prediction of the environmental impacts arising from Plans such as Energy, Traffic and Economic Plans, etc.