

Tourism in Portugal at the beginning of the Second World War – an innocent oasis in Europe, or the achievements of disguised propaganda

Cândida Cadavez,
Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril

Whenever I refer to the subject of propaganda, I associate it to the political education of the Portuguese people. The main purposes of propaganda are the following: firstly to inform, and secondly to educate in political terms.

Salazar, 1943: 195

Introduction

This article discusses the importance of tourism-based representations as an effective vehicle of hidden propaganda for strengthening and validating the *Estado Novo* dictatorship in Portugal, particularly within the context of the outbreak of the Second World War. As more and more areas fell under the auspices of the official bureau of propaganda, it proves worthwhile to acknowledge how tourism narratives became relevant tools for disseminating the features of the new political regime. In fact, these seemed particularly effective devices for displaying the new “Nation” both to nationals and to foreign guests. The former group were to recognize the uniqueness and singularity of Portugal through the display of allegedly national icons, while the latter group was invited to recognize and advocate the neutrality confirmed by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, the ruling president, in September 1939.

Propaganda and the Portuguese Context

The *Sociedade de Propaganda de Portugal* was established in the final years of the monarchy, in 1906, by a charter that stressed the need for a well organized system of national propaganda able to pursue the activities appropriate to promoting the country. This official document highlighted the patriotic drivers of propaganda and indicated ways in which these would serve to attract national and foreign guests to visit and get acquainted with Portugal. In keeping with this motivation, tourism was identified as one way to accomplish this goal, while the need for an inventory of monuments, the importance of creating more itineraries, the relevance and purpose of participating in exhibitions and fairs, alongside the importance of holding tourism conferences and studies were all mentioned (vd. *Sociedade de Propaganda de Portugal*, s/d).

Nevertheless, the ideological context that followed the 1926 National Revolution, which ended the military dictatorship that had taken over after the declaration of the Republic in 1910, enabled the implementation of Salazar’s nationalist oriented political regime that demanded a far more formal and state-dependent sort of propagandistic strategies within the framework of its broadly dictatorial approach. As such, 1933, the year when several iconic moments legitimized the new political paradigm, including a new political constitution and the setting up of a new political police entity, also proved the occasion for launching the *Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional/SPN* (the Bureau for National Propaganda). Decree number 23:054, dated 25th September 1933, explained the need for this department, perceived as a humble Portuguese version of the ministries of propaganda already existing in other countries at the time and stated that such a bureau had to be effective enough to rally the Portuguese population around the moral creeds deemed to henceforth constitute the values of the “Nation”. This same decree highlighted an apparently urgent need to organize and monitor Portuguese internal and external propaganda, as was ongoing in other European regimes and correspondingly clarifying that the new secretariat would be divided up between national and international departments. Such a strategy represented a clear indication as to the importance attributed to foreign audiences within the scope of ideologically validating the *Estado Novo*, therewith providing an obvious clue as to the significance that would therefore be assigned to the tourism industry. The same decree furthermore informed how public festivities and national and international exhibitions would be organized and staged as acknowledged and valuable means of both education and propaganda.

Between 1933 and 1949 the national bureaus of propaganda in Portugal would be managed by António Ferro, the journalist and writer who had “interviewed” Salazar in 1932. Apparently only after strong insistence from Ferro did Salazar acknowledge the need for this new institution that ended up boosting the relationships bet

ween the politician and the population. Ferro became a vital figure in designing and promoting the new Portuguese “Nation” as was to a great extent involved in pretty much all of the events incorporating the newly hatched political paradigm, which also included his concern with the representations drafted for the purposes of tourism. He undertook intense and assertive initiatives that would end up shaping and impacting on different sectors of the *Estado Novo*. Popular culture, art and tourism were some of his favourite areas and he explored them widely throughout those sixteen years, in which Salazar trusted him to prepare and exhibit the authorized representations of the “Nation”, both to domestic and international publics.

Salazar on propaganda

In 1911, Salazar had already stated that the “motherland should be the root of life (...). We should go back to the traditional values, which are the basis of civilization: Nation, Family, Authority, Hierarchy and above all, God” (Trabulo, 2008: 27), thereby already announcing the foundations of the ideology that would come to shape the *Estado Novo* in later decades. In fact, these would be the core elements of the propagandistic narratives set out to describe and validate the new political regime. They made up the essence of the frequently reproduced narratives of the “Nation” imagined by Salazar and designed by Ferro, and especially at a time when Europe was plunged into severe conflict, i.e. in the latter half of the 1930s.

However, the five “interviews” Salazar gave to António Ferro in 1932 probably represent the first and one of the foremost assertive propagandistic devices of the *Estado Novo*. Their undeniable value results from the fact that those dialogues, whose official motivation was to introduce the new political leader to the “Nation”, stated Salazar’s opinions about the most important issues to be achieved through the still young political paradigm, such as the regime’s validity and his legitimacy for leading it.

In 1933, these five “interviews” were published in book format, with readers clarified of its purposes from the outset through the preface written by Salazar himself. The first thirty three pages of the book provided the scope for the politician to explain that those “interviews” should “correct wrong interpretations, improve the quality of the picture, replace incorrect notions of a man and his work” (Salazar, 2007 [1935]: ix). This preface would basically enable Salazar to call the attention of readers to what he considered the most important information provided by the book, guiding them down very obvious propagandistic paths and framing the reading of the actual “interviews”.

Out of the several subjects discussed by Salazar over the five “interviews”, he referred to one particular issue, which would be frequently recalled in by the representations of the “Nation” that simultaneously held both ideological and tourism purposes. In fact, *a propos* his alleged meanderings with Ferro, Salazar mentioned one of the narratives that would become more recurrently deployed as a means to portray the uniqueness of Portugal in his elaboration of the differences between the authentic and essential countryside versus the falsity and inaccuracy of the cities (vd. Salazar, 2007 [1935]: xx).

Propaganda was the main subject of several official discourses issued by Salazar. In particular, we may refer to the speech he delivered on the opening of first bureau for national propaganda, the SPN, on 26th October 1933. He took the occasion to clearly explain how the regime made sense of propaganda, illustrating his beliefs when mentioning the need to reveal the truth and help everyone in “looking beyond whatever can be seen from the window of their bedroom” (Salazar, 1961 [1935]: 263). “National Propaganda”, the speech delivered by Salazar on that occasion, was broadcast on the national radio station and published in the newspapers, with the opening of the bureau justified as a need for new political paths. Propaganda, he added, should not only be recognised as a tool beneficial to the good government of the “Nation” but should also specifically reflect the Portuguese reality (vd. Salazar, 1961 [1935]: 259-268). The ruler took the opportunity to comment on the need for the production of valid documents about the history of Portugal and its national monuments, while also announcing that the national borders and public life were open to everyone, while simultaneously stressing the kindness of traditional Portuguese hospitality (Salazar, 1961 [1935]: 265). In a formal meeting with the National Union, in February 1940, Salazar stated his belief that the sort of education provided by propaganda would allow the population to identify with all the developments undertaken by the new regime, thereby ending any feelings of ingratitude (vd. Salazar, 1943; 195-197).

Tourism as a vehicle of propaganda

Assessing how the propagandistic mechanisms were managed by the *Estado Novo* regime proves particularly interesting especially when considering how other countries were either at war or going through severe conflict, as happened for example with the beginning of the Spanish civil war in 1936 and the world conflict triggered in 1939. The serious political and social problems spreading throughout Europe in the late 1930s seem to have fostered new inspiration among those in charge of creating and promoting the core of the so called “new Na

tion". While on the one hand the Salazar regime feared that similar winds of controversy might damage the calm and peace they were frequently mentioning to refer to the new state of affairs in Portugal, on the other hand, those same problems happening just on the other side of the border somehow allowed Portuguese propaganda to emphasize a supposed national distinctiveness.

The "Nation" was officially portrayed as a unique geography, different to all other countries and, as António Ferro uttered, while battles were going on Portugal should implement the necessary infrastructures so as to prepare itself in such a way that the rest of the world would come to identify the country as the much longed for peaceful oasis amidst the tormented and devastated Europe (vd. Ferro, 1949: 62). Portugal should be identified by everyone as "the ideal model of tourism and becoming the nursing home for a suffering, tired and sick Europe" (Ferro, 1949: 54).

The possibility of linking tourism and propaganda had previously been lengthily discussed at several official meetings. The National Union, the only "non-political party" allowed in Portugal and whose purpose was to support *Estado Novo*, met for the first time in a congress held in 1934 and convened with the objective of paying tribute to the deeds accomplished by Salazar's regime. Considering the importance of the event, it is particularly relevant to acknowledge that some of the papers presented argued that tourism was a nationalist activity in the sense that it was the perfect arena to recall, exhibit and praise the traditional and authentic representations of the Portuguese "Nation" (Silva, 1935: 55, Torres, 1935: 93). Tourism was declared as a legitimate vehicle for evoking the material and moral assets of the "Nation" and to raise awareness over the past, present and future of Portugal (vd. Torres, 1935: 71). Only countries like Portugal that were not plunged in war would have the opportunity to develop their tourism industries, which should try as much as possible to captivate foreign visitors who would later be able to spread the word about the particularities of the *Estado Novo* (vd. Ferreira, 1935: 347). The delegates to this congress also agreed that Portugal could increase its tourism skills by paying attention to that then being done by Spain and Italy, for example (vd. Torres, 1935: 111).

Two years later, in 1936, another meeting took place in Lisbon with its major purpose being to give the floor to the professionals involved in the tourism business. The First National Congress of Tourism was widely covered by the media and officially supported by the regime, as would be expected. During the four-day gathering seventy nine delegates discussed specific destinations and plans for developing the industry, and praised the way Salazar was protecting the "Nation", thus allowing tourism to expand (Fonseca, 1936: 61, Guimarães, 1936: 46). In most speeches, tourism was presented as a vital mechanism for exhibiting the new "Nation" and as a mirror to the blossoming of Salazar's Portugal, a country that honoured its heroic past through displays in museums and monuments (vd. Guimarães, 1936: 48-49). The specific propaganda requested by tourism (vd. Santos, 1936: 1, Sousa, 1936: 4) and the labelling of Portugal as a shelter for Europe (Santos, 1936: 4) were recurrent subjects, as was the importance of perfectly welcoming and hosting foreign visitors (vd. Spratley, 1936: 5).

A 1939 decree stated that tourism would be a new competence of the SPN bureau for national propaganda. The reason for this was probably still some months away, the Portuguese World Exhibition, which would take place between June and December 1940 in Lisbon. However, ever since the opening of that bureau, António Ferro had always been very much involved in all sorts of tourism related activities, which he considered as the ideal stage for exhibiting popular culture as understood by the *Estado Novo*. The bureau director was an enthusiast of all sorts of activities involving foreign contacts and considered tourism as a field worthy of investment. Hence, this follower of Salazar's ideology maintained that "the international reputation of a nation results, in many aspects, from the way it organizes its tourism activity" (Ferro, 1949: 35).

The hidden propaganda in two different tourism representations: tourism for nationals and tourism for foreigners

As happened in ideological paradigms similar to that implemented by Salazar in Portugal throughout a significant proportion of the last century, popular culture would feed most of the representations of the "Nations", as it was officially believed that this group of society stood out as the most authentic core of an ancient country protected from evil by brave leaders, as supposedly was the case with the Portuguese council president. Therefore, the virtues of this segment of the population were very often extolled in narratives that exhibited it as a religious, loyal and hard-working people.

In 1938 the SPN published a set of seven posters, *A Lição de Salazar (Salazar's Lesson)* due to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Salazar's first serious involvement with Portuguese politics and exalt the benefits brought to the "Nation" by Salazar's dedicated input. *Deus, Pátria, Família (God, Motherland, Family)*, maybe the best known poster in this collection, is a clear reflection of the regime's preferences by featuring a spotless modest rural household, in which religious and national icons were also on display.



Image 1 - *Salazar's Lesson*, 1938

This would also be the pattern followed when coming up with tourism representations. The exhibitions and re-enactments of iconic moments and characters in a history deemed brave and heroic were designed to support the unique “Nation” concept and constituted another subject shared by authorized representations of Portugal, even when the goal was promoting the country’s tourism sector.

The sharing of these two main thematic areas would then be carefully negotiated by Ferro throughout his propaganda campaigns so that Salazar’s ideological purposes might be spread to both nationals and foreigners and the political goals achieved.

In the 1930s, Portugal was clearly divided into two different tourism destinations, which also corresponded to two obvious ways for conveying the propagandistic patterns of *Estado Novo* in a disguised, but effective fashion.

On the one hand, there was the national target. The authorized tourism stories due to be told this particular group suggested humble practices and insisted on representations of popular culture and of historical themes, thus reminding us of *Salazar's Lesson*. Actually, as illustrated by the following examples, rather similar images would be deployed a couple of years later in a document also prepared by Ferro’s SPN, *Cartilha da Hospedagem em Portuguesa* (*Booklet of Portuguese Hospitality*).



Image 2 – *Booklet of Portuguese Hospitality*, 1941

This booklet explained how Portuguese tourism authorities were to go about preparing the hosting infrastructures designed to accommodate national tourists outside urban areas. Augusto Pinto was the author of the written guidelines with Emério Nunes, the picture editor. The final result was an easy to understand and follow document that insisted on this type of lodging sticking to the trends of a supposedly authentic national simplicity and avoiding chic patterns unsuitable to the surrounding locations.

The plan to set up the *Pousadas* which represented an important facet to the whole entire 1940 Double Co

memorations of the “Nation” programme also referred to the need to retain a rural imagery. The *Pousadas* were lodging houses located outside the cities and thus instructed to obey non-urban trends in terms of both their decoration and their gastronomy. There is a general belief that the *Pousadas* somehow resulted from copying the Spanish *paradores*. However, they had already long since been proposed as a response to the need to provide a so-called traditionally Portuguese sort of accommodation for tourists travelling around the country on more modest means. We would here identify the following interesting coincidence: in the very same year that the Spanish civil war broke out, which drove fears in the Portuguese regime over its stability getting threatened by such close conflicts, also proved the date when the *Fundação Nacional para a Alegria no Trabalho / FNAT* (*National Foundation for Joy at Work*) was established. This was a poorer and less ambitious version of similar organizations then existing in Italy and Germany, and whose main purpose was to enable the regimes to organize and structure the free time of workers. A 1936 decree implemented FNAT based on an officially announced need to care for the physical and psychological wellbeing of the poorest social classes, otherwise unable to afford proper leisure or education. For several decades FNAT would serve as another surreptitious but effective propagandistic tool for spreading new Portuguese values. Excursions and tours would be carefully prepared so the participants might have the opportunity to get acquainted with meaningful locations within the particular ideological frame of *Estado Novo*. Thus, visitors would preferably travel to iconic Guimarães (a symbol of the birth place of the Portuguese national identity), Alcobaça (intimately linked with the founding of the Portuguese monarchy and the place where Afonso Henriques was proclaimed King), or Batalha (a monastery built to commemorate the victory of the Portuguese over the Castilians at the Battle of Aljubarrota in 1385). Other favourite activities run by FNAT included visits to public exhibitions of popular culture artefacts or practices, which might consist of visiting a museum or attending a musical parade.

As mentioned above, these three examples of tourism-oriented representations mostly targeted the Portuguese tourism market and were designed to result in an effective strategy to spread, repeat and validate ideological lessons that would remind nationals of the characteristics that featured this old new “Nation”.

The international market was also a preferential target of the Portuguese propaganda through naive tourism stories, probably as a consequence of the statement of neutrality announced to the world by Salazar in September 1939 and due to the strategic and political interests prevailing. To attract foreign empathy to his political paradigm, Salazar authorized the creation of a completely different kind of tourism that not only nurtured but also boosted behavioural and social practices incomparable to those forced upon the national population. That micro tourism destination was labelled as *Costa do Sol* (*Sunny Coast* would be the international brand used) and comprised the coastal area between São Julião da Barra and Guincho, just outside Lisbon itself. Fausto de Figueiredo had identified that region several years earlier but only under Salazar’s regime did it become the international resort Figueiredo had dreamed of, particularly in the region that included São Pedro do Estoril, São João do Estoril and Santo António do Estoril.



Image 3 – *Sunny Coast*, 1930s

Instead of extolling and promoting humbleness and modest attitudes and practices, *Costa do Sol*’s imagery was luxurious and sophisticated so that the task of attracting foreign markets would be easier. Those travellers, fleeing from conflicts and wars, such as the Spanish civil war and the Second World War, would be hosted in an ambience that allowed them to carry on the social routines of the high societies they had been forced to leave behind. The schedule awaiting these travellers was busy and included parties, movies, parades and open-air

activities. The accesses there had been improved tremendously so the poorest and most degraded areas located a little further from the coast would not be identified by those touring either onboard the comfortable Sud-Express train that travelled from Paris to Santo António do Estoril, or along a recently constructed coastal road which linked Lisbon to this *Costa do Sol*. The accommodation catering for these foreigners differed from the facilities dedicated to national tourists. In fact, palace hotels and similar chic lodging houses hosted not only these travellers, but also refugees and spies.

It seems clear that there was a very valid motivation for the *Estado Novo* regime to accept and authorize all the differences happening in *Costa do Sol*. This exception does suggest that allowing such diverse patterns of behaviour was probably a propagandistic strategy of *Estado Novo* and reflected its neutrality towards the conflicts then ongoing around the world. *Costa do Sol* was sought out by travellers and refugees from the most different national and social backgrounds, who arrived seeking the promised peace and tranquillity that distinguished the “Nation” sheltered from danger and riots by Salazar. Here, they were able to continue a social routine similar to that otherwise shattered by the war and witness the tolerance and neutrality promoted by the Portuguese regime. On the other hand, this different imagery would be observed from afar by nationals, who were thus taught to consider these as behaviours not suitable for adoption.

Conclusion

This article argues that the tourism narratives of the early years of the *Estado Novo*, i.e. during the Spanish civil war and the Second World War, were compounded by references similar to those put forward by the regime’s ideological propaganda. The lessons dedicated to Portuguese travellers would repeat the same iconic stories based on a popular culture deemed authentic and on the history of the “Nation”. This continuous echo of the same national representation left hardly any void space for wondering or creativity, which ended up forcing the population to accept the official validations created as a means of self-authorization by the regime and thereby imposing this belief in a coherent national unity.

However, in contrast, foreign visitors were allowed to pursue distinct practices and enjoy less regulated social routines thereby inviting them to believe in the much heralded tolerance and neutrality of Portugal.

Tourism is usually associated with the idea of relaxed ambiances, where light, unimportant activities are engaged in. As such, tourists easily accept what they observe and experience during their leisure time. Therefore, conveying propagandistic messages through tourism representations would seem a particularly cunning strategy for imposing ideologies in a very veiled way. People would easily accept these lessons without a great deal of questioning. Portuguese targets would acknowledge a father-like protector and understand the need to remain united against foreign dangers as well as the non-approved attitudes of peoples at war and without modest patterns of behaviour. Thus, the conflicts overhanging other nationalities worked as a natural boost for national cohesion.

In one of his speeches, Salazar stated that propaganda was a means of political education, whose purpose was to inform and to educate (vd. Salazar, 1943: 195). Tourism was the ideal arena to attain this objective. Within this framework, Salazar and Ferro proved easily able to negotiate just what to show and what to hide with censorship, a tremendous effective tool deployed by propaganda to play this game of hide and seek within an activity otherwise not especially linked with serious information. The already mentioned 1933 decree founding the SPN was very clear when it mentioned the urge to stop spreading any information that might result in the upsetting of ideas that would corrupt national unity or its defined interests. Tourism was, and still is, acknowledged as an activity exhibiting simple and natural realities and able to promote peace.

Curiously enough, in 1944, when the Bureau for National Propaganda changed its title, the word “propaganda” was replaced by the expression “information, popular culture and tourism”. With the long period of conflict drawing to a close, retaining “propaganda” in an official title would have represented some sort of embarrassment to the regime. Thus, the Portuguese solution became renaming the entity which continued with just the same sort of propagandistic activity as before. To achieve that purpose, “propaganda” was replaced by “information, popular culture and tourism”, i.e. the vehicles that had always been applied by the propaganda mechanisms of the *Estado Novo* regime. And tourism was certainly one of these, and especially where there were wars going on.

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Legislation

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