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***Festab - The Patrimonialization and Touristification Process of the Trays  
Festival in Tomar***

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**ABSTRACT**

The manifestations of the Intangible Cultural Heritage are an integral part of daily life, internalized in the individuals and groups that traditionally preserve them according to their own ways of enhancing and safeguarding. According to the participatory perspective, defended by the UNESCO Convention (2003), the importance given to the temporal and evolutionary complexity of cultural manifestations considers: the dynamic dimension of the past - the historical value and the fact that the manifestation “is transmitted generationally” - while it also enhances the contemporary nature of the event, i.e the fact that the heritage “is alive”. This approach, promoted with greater impact from the 1980s onwards, defends a holistic and democratic procedure in the definition of what is cultural heritage. In turn, the heritage touristification process, as a resource to these assets and manifestations by the tourism activity to transform them into consumable products and experiences, is an unquestionable and borderless reality that naturally reached the Trays Festival in Tomar. The Trays Festival, which takes place in the city of Tomar every four years and receives about half a million visitors in a city with about 20 thousand inhabitants, presents a unique model in the framework of the so-called Festivities in Honour of the Divine Spirit. The distinctive

elements that attest to this specificity are related to the format of the offers, the Trays, which represent the payment of promises to the Divine, constituting one of its central symbolic aspects.

Assuming the historical and conceptual framework of the patrimonialization process of the Trays Festival as the main objective of the study, documentary analysis and participant observation were used for data collection. This article also aims to contribute to enhancing the role of intangible cultural heritage in society. This study results from the development of the first milestone contemplated in the project “The Trays Festival, the Cultural Heritage and the Community” (FesTab).

**Keywords:** safeguarding, enhancing, patrimonialization, Trays Festival, tourism

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

FesTab is a project that aims to contribute to the study, inventory and safeguarding of the Trays Festival, considering the dynamic dimension of the past and valuing the contemporary nature of heritage. It started in April 2021 and will last for 24 months, resulting from a partnership between the Centre for Technology, Restoration and Art Enhancement (Techn&Art) and the Municipality of Tomar.

The Trays Festival, which takes place in the city of Tomar, Portugal, every four years, and receives about half a million visitors in a municipality with about 20 thousand inhabitants, presents a unique model in the framework of the so-called Festivities in Honour of the Divine Holy Spirit. The distinctive elements that attest to this specificity are related to the format of the offers, the Trays, which represent the payment of promises to the Divine, constituting one of its central symbolic aspects. To this must be added the participation of all parishes of the county and the complementary activities that are part of it – Boys Parade (*Cortejo dos Rapazes*), Butler Parade (*Cortejo do Mordomo*), Partial Parades (*Cortejos Parciais*), Ornamented Popular Streets (*Ruas Populares Ornamentadas*), and Popular Games (*Jogos Populares*). Although we can find common elements in the various festivities of the Holy Spirit, Tomar takes on a differential and unique format. The cult consists of a wide context of meticulous ritual ceremonies, both religious and festive, which started with the Crowns Parade (*Cortejo das Coroas*) on Easter Sunday, the Parade of Offerings (*Cortejo de Oferendas*) and a generalized delivery of the so called *Pêza*, a redistribution component of fundamental relevance for the understanding of these festivities. The background is a social context in which culture presents a multifaceted body of knowledge and a conceptual place that does not belong only to scholars: “The monopoly of culture is apparently diluted and has given way to a new scenario where several actors operate, academics, scholars, media, politicians, local mediators (associations or individuals), tourist agents and local populations” (Raposo, 2002, p. 2). From popular actors or participants to organizations and institutions that promote and disseminate events, to cultural mediators (ethnographers, mediators and notable locals, regional and national intellectuals and artists), to the instituted local and

regional powers (ecclesiastical and civil), and also to diverse audiences (local, emigrants, tourists, academic or artistic-cultural) (Raposo, 2003), new visions and appropriations about the festival are constituted. Having gone through a process of revitalization (Boissevan, 1992), the festival reflects a concept of culture, which assumes itself as a “place” of confrontation, tension, dispute, consensus and negotiation. (Raposo, 2002). Anthropologist Paulo Raposo states that: "Invented and staged in terms of authenticity," culture "has become one of the greatest assets of the tourism industry (...)" (Raposo, 2004, p.7).

This paper aims to address the essential components of a process of patrimonialization and touristification related to a performative manifestation of popular culture - the Trays Festival of Tomar.

Assuming the historical and conceptual framework of the patrimonialization process of the Trays Festival as the main objective of the study, documentary analysis and participant observation were used for data collection. This paper also intends to contribute to enhance the role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in society.

Thus, we begin by presenting firstly a brief historical and cultural contextualization of the Trays Festival, continuing afterwards with the process of touristification of this heritage manifestation. The historical and conceptual framework of the patrimonialization process is then presented, taking into account the importance of social and cultural agents (notable locals, social scientists, local associations, media, parishes and municipality), who have played a central role in the new festive dynamics. Following this path, it is recognized that the domain of the “social” is no longer thought of as a totality structured in definitely hierarchical instances, but as a web of complex relationships, where each individual is inscribed in multiple ways, being all culturally constructed (Chartier, 1988, p. 83). We finish then the paper with some final considerations, alluding to the potential that intangible cultural heritage has in the media projection at different geographical scales (regional, national and international).

## **2 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE TRAYS FESTIVAL**

The Trays Festival was subject to alterations and changes, oscillating between moments of suspension, revitalization and standardization. Like what happened in other historical and social contexts (Leal, 2017), the cult of the Divine in Tomar, went through processes of diversification, differentiation and transformation, being creators of new ritual solutions, such as the introduction of new ritual segments (in view of the devitalization or suppression of certain sequences), a new festive calendar and an organizational infrastructure that started to absorb the participation of the council community. These processes of cultural and social restoration of the Festival, reflect its ability to recreate itself.

The most significant changes in the festive ritual structure began in 1950, with the participation of all the parishes and their respective trays in the Main Parade, initiating a new festive cycle. The participation of parishes of the municipality would result in the creation of a new ritual sequence, the Partial Parade. In addition to this additional element

in the Festival Script, other segments were progressively (re)introduced. Combining a traditionalist-style discourse with a rhetoric of authenticity, the ornamented streets (1953), the Popular Games (1964), the Butler Parade (1966), and the Boys Parade (1991) became part of the festive program.

Seeking to create adjustments to new material and social conditions, these ritual sequences have a particular aptitude to replicate festive cultural practices in the late 19th century, exploring new potentials of expressing scenography exuberance.

Another change resulting from the revitalization process which started in 1950, has to do with the schedule and extension of the festive cycle. Since then, it is easy to verify the consolidation of Sunday as the day of the Main Parade, as well as the lack of a regular periodicity for the celebration of the Festival, highlighting, however, two periods in which the three-year interval between festivals was the preferential (1950-56 and 1970-87), although for the latter, the phase of great political and social dynamics that preceded the events of April 25th, 1974, determined an exceptional interregnum of five years (1973-78). Also noteworthy are the periods from 1956-64, with three consecutive festivals spaced every four years between each one, and the one from 1964-70, in which the festival took place in each even year. From 1987 to 2019, the quadrennium has been the model for the celebration of the festival.

Regarding the festive period, there has been a substantial expansion since 1995, which essentially results from two factors: on one hand, the option to reinforce the traditional program of the Festival with a significant set of parallel cultural activities, or social and cultural animation; on the other hand, the fact that, with renewed causes and objectives, the Boys Parade was resumed in 1991, then held on a Thursday. In the following festival (1995), the Parade took place on the Sunday before the Main Parade, which has since contributed to the extension of the festive period to 10 days, a fact that has remained unchanged until the present.

Although there were some changes to the festive script, the cult of the Divine in Tomar, became an essential ritual technology to produce contexts of interaction and sociability, within the Tomar council community.

### **3 CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TOURISM**

The phenomenon of patrimonialization is related to the externalization of the festival for varied circuits of consumption and leisure. In other words, the growing use of culture by tourism to transform it into a consumable product like any other. "The irreversibility of the processes of commercialization and touristification of culture are compatible with the growing importance of the cultural product, which leads us to the need to relate product, culture and tourism to the economic development" (Richards, 1996, p. 265 apud Henriques, 2003, p. 26). From this point of view, cultural heritage is considered as a new form of local production, as a means through which some places become tourism destinations (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995).

During the 19th century - as it is today - the Trays Festival always brought the competition of many visitors during the festivities. In an article published in *Revista Ilustrada*, Martins Velho mentions the influx of a lot of public in the city: "The rhyming city of *Nabão* [river] regurgitates spectators, posted on the sidewalks and in the squares to see the Parade pass by" (Velho, 1891, p.143-144). In the same vein, the renowned chronicler Alberto Pimentel, describes in his book *Noites de Cintra* (1908), the trip he took to Tomar at the time of the Trays: "The Picturesque small town of *Nabão* [river], with its beautiful Convent of Christ, at the top, had an extraordinary, abnormal movement, which vitalized it, (...). And outsiders swarmed in opposite directions" (Pimentel, 1908, p.132).

The power of tourism attraction of the festival recognized a period of great expansion in the first half of the 20th century. Associated with the behavioural changes of rural and urban populations, the seasonal mobility of tourism nature benefited, during this historical period, from the progress of means of transport and from a regionalizing ideological discourse. To that extent, we find several news articles in the weekly newspapers in Tomar that describe the promotion of the festivities outside the community, as illustrated by the promotion of the 1929 festival: "The claim has been wisely oriented, and today from north to south of Portugal it has already arrived the echo that here in this beautiful land everything is prepared so that the expectation of the stranger eager for emotions that dazzle, is perfectly justified. And everything leads us to believe that on these festive days, many thousands of people rush to the city of *Nabão*, which honours the people from Tomar, to get to know up close what the so-called Trays Festivals are. The most beautiful girls in this privileged region - and there are so many - with the picturesque costumes that tradition imposes, will guide the Trays with their natural grace and give this most beautiful land, the most picturesque and unprecedented note" (A Acção, 1929, p. 3).

From the second half of the twentieth century, the festival gained supralocal projection. The traditional elements progressively (re) introduced - Ornamented Popular Streets (1953), Popular Games (1964), the Butler Parade (1966), the Boys Parade (1991) - were joined by musical shows, exhibitions, gastronomic shows, sales of regional products, handicrafts, to combine a differentiated cultural offer with a heterogeneous demand.

In 1991, the Gold Medal of Tourism Merit would be awarded to the Trays Festival, at the initiative of the then president of the Templar Tourism Region, Duarte Nuno de Vasconcelos, immediately seconded by the Executive Committee, that proposed it to the Director-General of Tourism, through a document dated from February, 21st: "For this brief history of the Trays Festival that attests to its importance, it is justified that this Tourism Region proposes to Your Honour, it to be awarded the Medal of Tourism Merit, even in the year in progress and during one of the days of its accomplishment" (O Templário, 1991, p.18). This proposal received the agreement of the Director-General of Tourism, João Strecht Ribeiro, who on April 15th, 1991, put it into consideration of the Secretary of State for Tourism with the following letter: "(...) the Trays Festival restored in the decade of 50, obeys to historical demands and strictness, framing itself into a replacement of full respect for religious and social traditions. The Trays Festival, which may be for those who visit it, a

manifestation of folklore, remains for the People of the Region of Tomar, a matter of faith, the respect for tradition and an obvious good taste. I believe that it is necessary to recognize the versatility of this very Portuguese manifestation that serves Portuguese culture, art and tourism, so I propose to Your Honour the attribution to the Festival” (O Templário,1991, p.18).

In the last editions of the festival, especially since the turn of the century (2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019), the number of visitors during the festive cycle is over half a million. As a culturally differentiated territory, the City Council of Tomar invests in this cyclical festivity as a comparative advantage, playing a decisive role in its imagination and legibility. In this way, local culture is converted into a fundamental component of tourism offer, and is conceived as a social resource, which can act as an engine of economic dynamism (Aguilar Criado et. al, 2003). This global culture of self-promotion (Dicks, 2003) is based on a new cultural economy of visibility. (Dicks, 2003). These initiatives that result from processes of patrimonialization of these cultural assets, and above all from the culturalization of tourism (Dicks, 2003), aim to promote development, through the enhancement and revitalization of this cultural heritage.

Singularized by the format of the offers to the Divine Holy Spirit, the “Tray”, presents itself in different spaces (local, regional, national and international), which corresponds to different versions of the audiences that attend the performance: the version of the community that wants to preserve local culture according to its vernacular way, the version of local powers that seek greater recognition of the uniqueness of the place in the global space, the version of tourists that stereotype local culture, the version of cosmopolitans and cultural intermediaries who place the local culture in the consumption circuit (Peralta, 2008). It is through the resonance that these “objects” - the Trays - have with the public that enter in the global sphere, where several entities negotiate their activation. Stephen Grennblatt understands resonance as the power of an exposed object to reach a wider universe beyond its formal boundaries, the power to invoke in the viewer the complex and dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged, and from which it is, for the viewer the representative (Grennblatt, 1991).

It is relevant to emphasize that the growing tourism demand has been driving the expansion of information sources to which the potential tourist may have access to. As an example, it should be noted that during the Trays Festival of 2015 and 2019, the Municipality of Tomar, the Polytechnic Institute of Tomar, Softinsa and the security forces (Police of Public Security and Republican National Guard), created the project “Smarter Fest”. This mobile application dedicated to visitors, had as its main function the improvement of conditions of access to the event, containing the festival program, location and degree of occupation of car parks and the several accesses to the city, as well as the place/street where the Main Parade was passing, interactively and in real time, facilitating not only the action of the security forces, but also that of visitors/tourists. Through an activated intelligent system, it is possible to improve the experience of tourism and the efficiency of resource management,

to maximize both the competitiveness of the destination and the satisfaction of consumers, since it shows its long-term sustainability (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014).

#### **4 THE PATRIMONIALIZATION OF THE TRAYS FESTIVAL: AGENTS AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS**

The exhaustive analysis of heritage as a category of thought has been recurrent in the social sciences, since in recent years it has gradually left its reductive materialist, aestheticist and historicist definition (Gómez Péllon, 1999), to adopt an anthropological vision. This vision is the result of the international legislation that contemplates heritage not only as a material and monumental object, but also to consider intangible cultural assets, and social life around the objects. Such theoretical inflection is mainly due to the virtuality's and conceptual extensions that the term has been gaining. Some authors speak of "heritage passion" (Guillaume, 1980), "reinvention of heritage" (Bourdin, 1984), "heritage madness" (Jeudy, 1990), "allegory of heritage" (Choay, 1992), or "heritagemania" (Martin-Granel, 1999), as hyperboles of this categorization. In this sense, cultural heritage appeared as an extension of this conceptual redefinition, which has generated a "collective obsession" (Gonçalves, 2007, p. 239), because of the progressive and uninterrupted inflation of this category, and by the unlimited semantic expansion expressed by the notion of intangible heritages.

From the nineties onwards, UNESCO universalizing policies on heritage followed three supporting moments: (1) one in the sense of "volatilization" of what is likely to be considered world heritage, (2) the other in the sense of eccentric European and popularization diffusion of the world heritage classifications, and (3) in the sense of enhancing pluralisms and cultural diversity, not only as a social and political practice but also as a heritage resource (Cabral, 2011). Thereby the "Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" emerges in 2003<sup>1</sup>, which recognizes the following manifestations: a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vector of intangible cultural heritage; b) the performing arts; c) social practices, rituals and festive events; d) the knowledge and practices that concern nature and the universe, and finally, e) the know-how linked to handicrafts.

In Portugal, the creation of the Institute of Museums and Conservation (IMC), in 2007<sup>2</sup>, attributed to itself the competences in the area of intangible heritage. However, it was with the ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, in 2008 (Cabral, 2011) that the manifestations of intangible culture gained great attention with the creation of a specific legal framework for the standardization and preparation of the process of patrimonialization. As a result, the legal regime for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage was established with Portuguese Decree-Law No. 139/2009. This decree recognizes the importance of intangible assets and creates an inventory system through a publicly accessible database. According to the ICH Matrix System

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/static/data/conservacao\\_e\\_restauracao\\_ljfdl\\_97-2007.pdf](http://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/static/data/conservacao_e_restauracao_ljfdl_97-2007.pdf)

User Manual<sup>3</sup>, the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage constitutes the only way of legal protection of the intangible cultural heritage that is legally valid at national level.

The institutionalization of protection mechanisms for the Trays Festival was initiated in 2020 through the application submitted by the Municipality of Tomar to the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage, with the purpose of registering this event in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In this context of (re) signification and (re) enhancement of popular culture, several agents occupy a central position in the processes of heritage activation.

First, the political power that has the necessary means for the elaboration and placement of a discursive repertoire that is based on the selection of certain cultural elements, their ordering and subsequent interpretation (Peralta, 2008). As stated by Llorenç Prats: “The political power that was and presumably will be the main agent of heritage activation, the main builder of museums, of natural and archaeological parks, catalogues, monuments, identities” (Prats, 1997, p.34).

The Municipality of Tomar has devoted special attention to the Trays Festival, especially since 1950, namely in the support and collaboration with the Central Commission - formal structure responsible for the organization of the festivities -, and with the Parish Councils. This support has been given through subsidies, equipment, facilities, logistics and promotional material.

Recognizing the need of safeguarding this cultural event, the municipality of Tomar was one of the founding municipalities of the Euro-Mediterranean project, “The Festivals of the Sun, Network of Traditional Urban Festivals in the Mediterranean”, supported by the European Commission's EuroMed Heritage Programme, whose first formal meeting took place in November 1998, ending its formal work in September 2001. The aim of this project was to culturally enhance and make known to the great public the popular Euro-Mediterranean festivals as a place of affirmation of the intangible tradition: language, myths, rituals, practices, ways of life and behaviours, through the systematization of information and mutual enhancement of the same.

Following this logic, sociologist Augusto Santos Silva states that: “One of the main discoveries that, over the last twenty years, has been making most of the City Councils (which some had already understood since the seventies), was precisely the functionality of the major cultural events for visibility and supralocal projection (...), tending to retain an elite of consumers and cultural practitioners and to enrol some local agents in a global network, providing a decisive symbolic resource in the visibility and marketing of the city” (Silva, 2007, p.27).

Civil society is also part of this business process of heritage activation: “The implications of civil society in the several stages of the patrimonialization process, hitherto expressed in the spontaneous form of highly localized associations, assume therefore a new

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.matrizpci.dgpc.pt/MatrizPCI.Web/pt-PT/Pages/Apresentacao>

dimension, legitimized by international legal devices. This approach does not only involve the participation of social actors in safeguarding interventions on heritage elements already selected by external operators but also implies a radical change in perspective: the participation of civil society is seen as essential also in the phase of attributing heritage enhancement to certain elements and, therefore, central to their selection" (Bartolo, 2011, p.12).

The awareness of local communities about the economic potential of the activated cultural element is equally important, as stated by Margarida Santos: "Although the manipulation of the past is a constant in the processes of identity affirmation, the awareness of local populations that there is a "public" in the global society seduced by the argument of antiquity, applicable to its history, its movements and its traditions, is a relatively recent fact in the negotiation of the political importance of communities "(Santos, 1998, p. 55).

In the context under analysis, it is necessary to consider the vast network of agents associated with heritage discourses. On one hand, the Central Commission, which is led by a Butler, elected in the People's Assembly by the people of Tomar. The President of the City Council, together with the Provider of the Holy House of Mercy (*Provedor da Santa Casa da Misericórdia*), complete the triad of the main Butlers, assigned by inheritance of their public positions. The President of the Municipal Assembly, the General Vicar of Tomar, the Presidents of the 11 Parish Councils and the Commander of the Municipal Firefighters are also members of the Commission.

The religious representatives are an essential group for the cult of the Holy Spirit, as they are responsible for its eucharistic dimension. It is in the ministry of their functions that masses are celebrated on the days of the Crowns Parade (*Saída das Coroas*), proceeding, in the same way, to the blessing of the Trays in the Republic Square, a ceremony presided by the Bishop of Santarém.

Another group actively participating in the festive ritual structure is that of the children and young people from educational establishments in the municipality of Tomar, consisting of two public school groups - Nuno de Santa Maria School Group and Templar School Group - as well as private institutions. Children from kindergartens and 1st cycle schools participate in the segment called the Boys Parade.

The associations have the particularity of actively participating in the cultural agenda of the shows that take place in the city throughout the festive cycle, with some of them playing an active role before and after the festivities. The Holy House of Mercy of Tomar (*Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Tomar*), in addition to being a faithful depository of Banners and Crowns - cultural implements -, of the city since 1889, is the place of departure and arrival of the Crowns Parade.

The Rehabilitation and Integration Centre of Tomar (*CIRE – Centro de Integração e Reabilitação de Tomar*), the hospital and the Mental Health Association contribute through the elaboration of the flowers that decorate the streets as well as the community that organizes itself by streets and is responsible for its ornamentation.

## **5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Trays Festival has been adapting to the changing context, taking on formats printed by the various social, economic and political dynamics. In response to this reality, the local cultural resources present modalities of emblemizing and commodification, inverting the “obsolete”, “archaic”, or “bizarre” of these manifestations, in symbols that can be appropriated and re-appropriated by the communities to which they report. The issue of “collective identity”<sup>4</sup> is present in the tourism and heritage dimensions of these festivals. It is the substrate on which most of the strategies for revitalizing local cultures rest, based on a reworking of heritage repertoires. Paula Godinho states that: “Revitalized, the festival universalizes an image of the place that simultaneously shows and helps to build a local identity.” (Godinho, 1998, p.46).

Effectively, and as Fortuna (2001) refers, the “heritage proliferation (...) reveals [to be] a universal process of heritage re-enhancement, as a symbolic resource at the service of strategies to modernize the image of places (...) in which its brand of tradition becomes a capital of innovation” (Fortuna, 1997, p.235).

Thereby, this study was aimed at addressing mainly the essential components of a phenomenon of patrimonialization and touristification related to a performative manifestation of popular culture and currently presents itself in a four-year format, the Trays Festival, in the city of Tomar, located in the centre of Portugal.

In addition to the nature and heritage importance that it owes, it is also inevitable to assume the Trays festival as one of the main national tourism events, which in an expeditious manner contributed directly to the increase of the economy of the city and the region.

With the development of this research and through its multi-disciplinarity, the aim is to create a support platform to produce pedagogical content that is essential to give visibility to the heritage of the Trays Festival and to create a Sustainable Business Model and Community Empowerment capable of proposing solutions in terms of economic, tourism development and territorial empowerment.

Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the innovation of the social, academic and cultural sectors, due to the promotion and study of the festive practice, ensuring the preservation and sustainable economic enhancement of the intangible cultural heritage and the local identity, as a strategic asset.

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<sup>4</sup> We understand collective identity as a feeling of belonging shared by the members of a group or by several groups, through which reality is defined and interpreted, guiding the actions of those who participate in it. The collective identity can be crystallized and objectified, but it is always subject to the possibility of change and re-elaboration (Tejerina, 2003, p. 24-25).

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