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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

‘We Can’t Die Here by this Wall’: public buildings between heritage and urban development in Miranda do Douro, Portugal

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Abstract

This article examines how the mid-twentieth-century conflict between heritage and urban development shaped the current urban landscape of Miranda do Douro, Portugal. It traces the production of the historic centre through the histories of three essential public buildings: the fire station, municipal market, and primary school. The research draws upon primary sources from local and central archives, construction records, and meetings’ minutes, complemented by oral testimonies collected locally – including the voices from people of different generations, professions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and diverse connections to the city. By setting official accounts in dialogue with personal narratives, the study contrasts institutional understandings of heritage with lived experiences, revealing how heritage operates as a historical process embedded in everyday life and central to urban development. The findings show that central authorities, prioritizing a conservation strategy aimed at tourism, invoked heritage laws to paralyze the construction of public buildings within the walled town. The consequent relocation of these buildings created a new urban centrality outside the historic area, which became the dominant space of residence and collective life. The displacement of these collective facilities from the historic core has weakened the social fabric of the old center, now oriented towards tourism. Paradoxically, heritage conservation policies have accelerated the decline in the maintenance of historical buildings and produced a loss of vitality in this area.

Keywords: heritage, public buildings, urban heritagization, urban history, 20th century

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Introduction

Miranda do Douro is a small town in northeastern Portugal with a population of approximately 2000 people (INE, 2021). Few residents persist in its historical centre, defined by the limits of the original walled settlement, which now shelters some restaurants, a few shops, commerce focused on high-quality traditional goods for tourists, cultural facilities, the various services of the town hall and many empty houses. The rules governing the construction and conservation of the built environment within the walled town are strict and seek to preserve a constructed image of the traditional settlement, often precluding more economical options and discouraging owners from taking part in conservation work or making the necessary adaptations to bring houses up to standard, such as replacing window frames, repairing roofs and extending areas. The same effort to construct and maintain the walled town as heritage, which has historically been associated with a project for the development of tourism starting in the mid-20th century, has also impacted the construction of needed public facilities, the majority of which were only built during the expansion of the town outside of its walls from the 1970s onwards. Through the relocation of public buildings – which had long served as essential services and poles of sociability – to outside the city centre, associated with the simultaneous limitation of private construction, the historical centre has become frozen in an imaginary past.

This understanding is shared by members of the community. While guiding the researchers throughout the scenically preserved ruins of Miranda do Douro's town wall, Margarida Nunes, a resident with a history degree, paused from sharing her knowledge of the town's past and said with frustration, 'We can't die here by this wall.' In her view, conservation regulations have been the main cause of Miranda do Douro's decline, despite the owners' efforts to rehabilitate. The majority of Miranda do Douro's inhabitants have opted to relocate, leaving an old centre that remains largely intact but socially depleted and in continuous decline. Margarida pointed out the culprits: 'The strength of the National Monuments, the Northern Direction of Culture, the Northern Commission for Regional Coordination and Development, their will is much stronger, they are many more, they have the power, and they say no.'[1] (Interviewee MN, 2023)

This view reflects dissonances between local needs and central decisions that can be traced back to the 1950s and had a lasting impact on Miranda do Douro's urban development. In translating different views and aspirations for the town's social and economic growth, conflicts arose between protecting what existed and creating something new, not only between local and central authorities, but also among local actors. These were particularly clear in the often long processes leading to the construction of public buildings, over which central bodies responsible for heritage protection had the final decision. This article explores the constraints and tensions arising from the classification of Miranda's walled area as a *non aedificandi zone* in the 1950s from the vantage point of public buildings, whose associated historical documentation exposes the multiplicity of actors involved and their divergent interests, and tells a story of local agency and resistance. Additionally, often functioning as pillars of community life and milestones of social progress, the history of these buildings highlights the urban and social consequences – past and present – of the historical social and political process of the construction of heritage between the 1950s and 1980s.

Through this approach, the research bridges two fundamental facets of existing literature on Portugal: 1) Historical research focusing on the construction of heritage by the *Estado Novo* through the action of the National Information Secretariat (SNP/SNI) – including the contest *The Most Portuguese Village*, the construction of internal tourism as related to the new Inn network (Bártolo, 2021; Ribeiro, 2020; Oliveira Martins, 2020; Cunha, 2020; Alves, 1997), the reconfiguration of monuments by the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage and Museums (DGEMN) (Neto, 2022; Correia, 2019) –, and the existing but underexplored investigation – mainly conducted in the field of architecture – on the role of public works for the construction of a national aesthetic (Tostões, 2019; Agarez, 2019); 2) Research focusing on contemporary aspects of the relationship between historical heritage and tourism, the neoliberal processes of touristification and financialisation of cities and their social consequences (Ashworth, 2014; Franquesa, 2013).

1 "*Nós não podemos morrer aqui nesta parede. [...] A força dos monumentos nacionais, da direção geral da cultura do norte, da CCDRN, a vontade é muito maior, eles são muito mais, têm o poder, e dizem não.*"

An important part of national and international literature explores the invention and adaptation of national reality as propaganda in the context of State-making by 20th-century authoritarian regimes and their late century transitions to democracy (Paek & Zoh, 2025, Santos Silva, 2024) but also by democratic states from the 19th-century onwards (Smith, 2006). These studies tend to focus on the symbolic and cultural aspects of heritage creation, neglecting material aspects with consequences for the everyday life of citizens, such as allocation of public resources. Through a diachronic view of past and present that focuses on specific public buildings, the article argues that heritage-making is not a self-contained process; it has implications for the entire construction of urban social space.

The ways in which heritage-based political projects can be contradictory to the interests of local communities have been widely studied in multiple temporal and geographical contexts (Meskell, 2015; Herzfeld, 2015; Katapidi, 2023), as well as how they function as catalysts for a certain type of urban regeneration (Rezaei *et al.*, 2019). Research conducted on the Portuguese context examines how the protection and urban regulation of traditional settlements have tended to neglect local everyday life and residents' comfort in favour of preserved – often "frozen" – urban space. Many of these studies focus on small urban areas comparable to Miranda do Douro, but which have been the target of systematic tourism programmes, such as Óbidos, Belmonte, Castelo Rodrigo and Monsanto (Ashworth, 2014; Prista, 2013; Silva, 2012; Alves, 1997).

Through this case study, the article explores the construction of heritage as a social process, whose forms depend on the social, political and economic context in which it is developed (Smith, 2006). It follows Ashworth's (2014) statement that heritage is, in itself, a development programme, which necessarily precludes different strategies for urban growth and the social and economic strengthening of a region. Furthermore, as what is preserved and how it is preserved reflect the power balance between interest groups, heritage is a deeply political field.

In Miranda do Douro, the conflict this research explores becomes one between heritage construction for tourism development and the construction of local facilities as two parts of conflicting political projects for the town. Caught between the remnants of its past and the necessary economic viability of this region in the contemporary context, Miranda do Douro is a paradigmatic example of how what Françoise Choay (2010) called the international market of old town centres and neighbourhoods is formed through a complex process of contrasting ideas and conflicting interests.

In this context, this article seeks to examine three main questions: How was Miranda do Douro socially and historically constructed as a tourist destination? What were the urban implications of this process? How is this process experienced and understood by the local community?

Materials and methods

This article employs a combination of archival research and fieldwork to develop a diachronic view of the construction of heritage in Miranda do Douro and its contemporary social consequences.

Archival work was conducted in both central and local archives and focused on documentation pertaining to the construction of collective-use buildings during the second half of the 20th century. Built through a negotiation between local actors and central bodies, the history of these buildings directly reflects tensions between government policies and local needs, while also being indicative of community life and urban development. Primary sources, such as construction records and meetings' minutes, were sought for all publicly funded collective facilities built in Miranda do Douro between 1950 and 1985 with the objective of identifying instances that reveal tensions, contrasting perspectives, and opinions related to heritage conservation between and within institutions. Three buildings were selected from the wider sample (Table 1) for following parallel trajectories and being essential for the understanding of past and present local dynamics: the fire station depicts an important example of associativism; the market reflects local dynamics of production and exchange; the primary school provides an essential service to the community's growth. These events are interpreted from a historical perspective, which seeks to identify key moments for the construction of Miranda as a tourist destination and for its urban development outside the historical walls.

Table 1. Collective facilities constructed in Miranda do Douro in the 2nd half of the 20th century

	Developer	Date of 1st design	Date of final design	Inauguration date	1st location	Final location
Courthouse* (a)	Central body	1946	1963	c.1965	Walled area	Walled area
Hospital (b)	Central body	c.1956	-	1959	Walled area	Walled area
Primary School* (1)	**Local body**	**1968**	**1976**	**1979**	**Walled area**	**Northern expansion**
Municipal Market* (2)	**Local body**	**1968**	**1978**	**1982**	**Walled area**	**Northern expansion**
Fire Station* (3)	**Local body (association)**	**1968**	**1979**	**1982**	**Walled area**	**Northern expansion**
Post Office/Bank* (c)	Central bodies	1968	1981	1983	Walled area	Walled area
Nursing Home* (d)	Local body (church)	unknown	unknown	Late 1970s	Walled area	Walled area
Sports Pavillion (e)	Local body	c.1975	-	1981	Northern expansion	Northern expansion
Middle School (f)	Local body	c.1975	-	1982	Northern expansion	Northern expansion
Housing estate (g)	Local/Central bodies	1975	1976	1983	Northern expansion	Northern expansion
Health centre (h)	Local body (church)	c. 1980	-	1981	Walled area	Walled area

*Cases whose documentation registers conflicts related to heritage.

Fieldwork was carried out between April and December 2023 using an ethnographic approach that combined observation, semi structured interviews, and informal conversations conducted on the three public facilities analysed in this article within the broader context of a wider study on public facilities. The material includes ten semi structured interviews including two group interviews, five informal conversations including one group conversation, and a public meeting with around fifteen participants organised with the municipal archive to share research outcomes. Participants included users and workers connected to the local market, the fire station, and the primary school, long term residents, and people engaged with local history who shared photographs from family albums and memories of urban change. Access was facilitated through family ties of one researcher, direct presence in the sites, and the collection of family photographs, which helped establish rapport and enabled snowball sampling that expanded the range of experiences documented. A time constraint during fieldwork limited the possibility of prolonged observation over continuous periods of several weeks. Both researchers at times felt moved by participants' generosity while being conscious of the limited time available to respond to the trust placed in them. This was partly addressed through repeated visits and follow up exchanges with participants, including some online communication. The ethnographic material was analysed through inductive thematic coding centred on lived experience, focusing on uses and transformations of the built environment, social memory and symbolic constructions of place, and the effects of urban change on community relations.

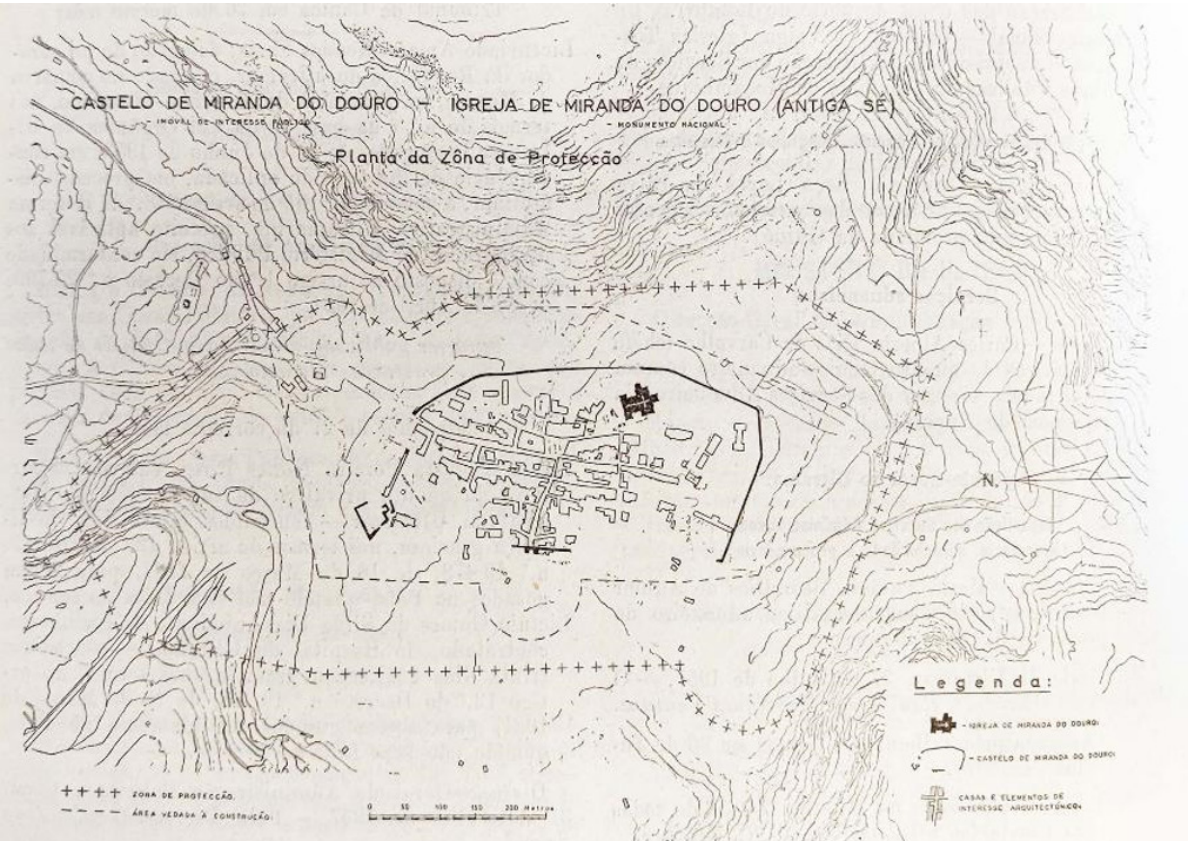
The combination of architectural historical and ethnographic methods has become more current in recent years, as a way to bridge the analysis of the built environment with the lived experience of communities, connecting the material record of urban transformation with the social and political processes that shaped it (Agarez *et al.* 2025, Gosseye 2019). This approach is grounded in a broader recognition that space itself carries a particular capacity to activate shared memories and conversations about social history (Ünlü 2019, Hayden 1995).

Findings

Background

In the second half of the 1950s, Miranda do Douro experienced substantial population growth due to the construction of a nearby dam on the Douro River. Within a few years, the initial population of 600 people was greatly outnumbered by around 4000 workers who arrived from other parts of the country and settled around the existing town (HED, 1958). By then, urban development and construction in Miranda were already subject to heritage conservation laws: the cathedral had been listed as a national monument in 1910 (*Diário do Governo*, henceforth DG, 136 1910), and the castle had been legally protected as public interest heritage in 1955 (DG, 228 1955), which meant that any interventions within a certain perimeter from the two buildings were subject to scrutiny by the Superior Council of the Fine Arts (CSBA, *Conselho Superior de Belas Artes*) and the National Education Board (JNE, *Junta Nacional de Educação*). In 1957, an ordinance went further by defining the entire walled section of Miranda do Douro as a *non-aedificandi zone*, closing the entire area off to new construction (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Miranda do Douro's non-aedificandi area



Source: Ordem de 9 de agosto de 1957.

Miranda do Douro's urban extension was, by then, still largely limited by its wall. The new housing and facilities necessary to accommodate the incoming dam workers were the first be built on its outskirts, marking the beginning of the town's urban expansion, as recognised by its first urbanisation master plan, which designated potential locations for diverse urban functions, such as housing, industry, and the weekly market. It also proposed the construction of essential public buildings within the town walls, including a municipal abattoir, a primary school, a theatre, a courthouse, a cemetery, an inspection office at the border with Spain and a sports area (Archives of Bragança District, henceforth ADB, 19 March 1957). As such, the plan did not comply with the 1957 ordinance. Additionally, it permitted new construction within the entire walled town, provided it was intended

for 'housing, commerce, liberal activities, culture and recreation, restaurants, cafés, public services, garages and handicrafts' and it preserved 'the town's distinctive atmosphere' (ADB, 19 Mar. 1957).

All evidence suggests that, for a few years, the urbanization plan took precedence over the 1957 ordinance, allowing for the construction of some public buildings within designated lots during the latter part of the 1950s and through the 1960s, such as the town's hospital (1959, Figure 2), and courthouse and prison (1969).

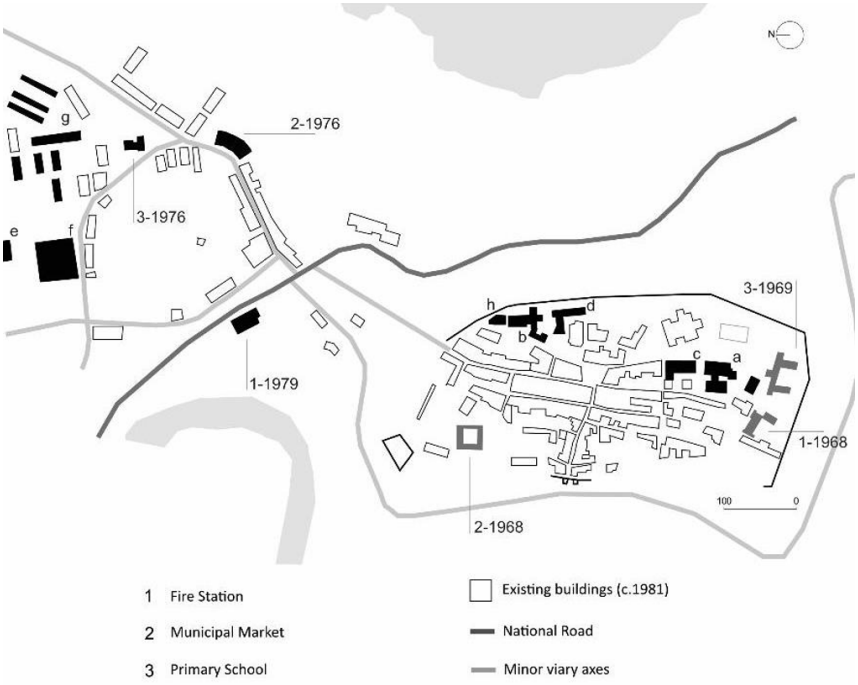
Figure 2. View of Miranda do Douro's nursery home and hospital behind the historic walls



Source: Catarina Ruivo (2023).

Without much interference from the state agencies overseeing heritage maintenance, the walled area was becoming the civic centre of a growing town. The 1957 urbanization plan envisaged space for the construction of a primary school, a fire station and a market - all of which were eventually built outside the town walls (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Location of collective-use facilities in Miranda do Douro and of the initial designs for the fire station, market and school



Source: Authors' own.

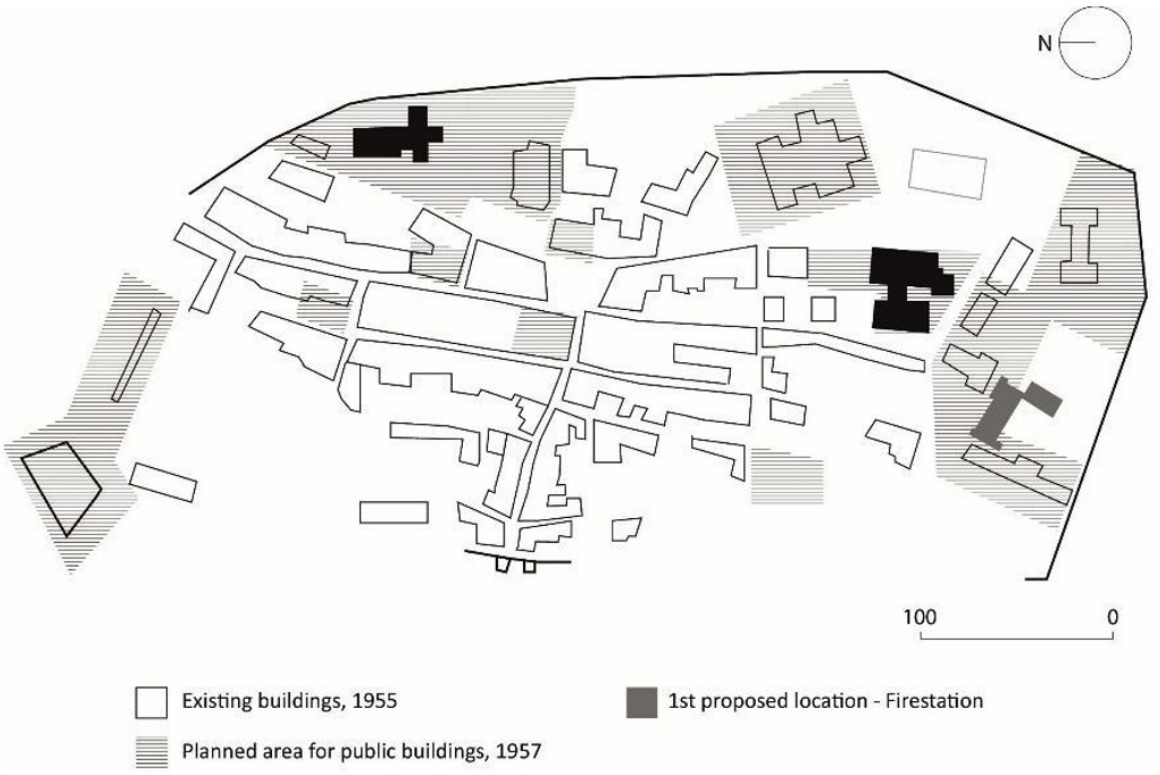
The construction of tourism in the contested location of the fire station

After the construction of the dams in the mid-1950s, Miranda do Douro only reappeared in the government's development plans. In 1964, the government's development plan defined Miranda do Douro as a strategic location for the development of tourism. It provided for state investment in the creation of 'the necessary hotel capacity and complementary infrastructures' (DG, 291 1964) and made plans for conservation and restoration work on national buildings and monuments. The implementation of this strategic decision from 1965 onwards coincided with the first moment when newly proposed public buildings started being put under the rigorous scrutiny of the JNE.

The process of construction of the new fire station is illustrative of this apparent strategic shift. Over two decades, seven different plots of land in the town of Miranda do Douro were taken into consideration for the construction of a new fire station. From 1968 to 1979, five distinct architectural plans were created for these parcels of land by the local architect Carlos Alberto Coelho Garcia.

While the first preliminary project for the new station, dating from 1968, was planned in the eastern part of the walled town – making use of the existing convent and its adjacent land (AMMD, Jul. 1968, Figure 4). The Directorate-General for Urbanization Services' (DGSU, *Direção Geral dos Serviços de Urbanização)* appraisal of the project recognized 'the difficulty of obtaining better land in Miranda' and valued the integration of the Fire Station in an area that was destined for public buildings in the urbanization plan of 1957, near the new judicial courthouse and prison, the farmer's guild and a future school complex (Archives of the General Directorate of Territory, henceforth ADGT, 27 Aug. 1969).

Figure 4. First proposed location for the fire station in relation to the urbanisation plan



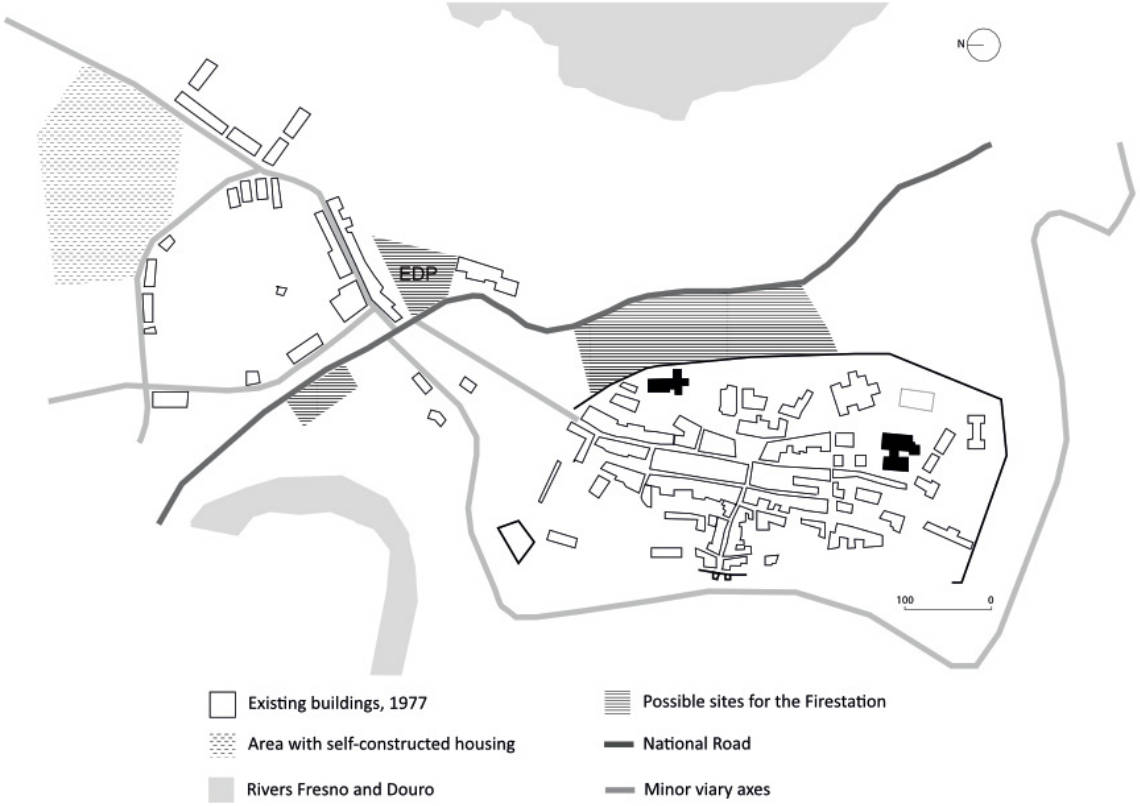
Source: Authors' own.

However, less than a year later, the JNE issued an unfavourable opinion that, while accepting the location, required the stylistic adaptation of the project to the town's historical core, and which consists in the first instance found in the documentation when the maintenance of the unique characteristics of the historical centre were evoked in a process that resulted in the delaying of construction of a needed public facility for more than a decade:

> 'The town of Miranda do Douro deserves special care from all the entities responsible for its development and valorisation to defend its unique characteristics, which give it a special position among the old walled towns. For this reason, the National Board of Education (...) believes that (...) the present project needs to be revised to achieve adequate integration with the urban characteristics mentioned above. However, this assessment in no way implies the imposition of a path of mere artistic archaeology: on the contrary, it is an invitation to [seek] an up-to-date architectural stance.' (ADGT, 27 Aug. 1969)

Despite the favourable appreciation from the DGSU and the assurance by the JNE that its negative assessment was an 'invitation to an up-to-date architectural stance', the architect proposed a different site outside the walled town for the fire station in his subsequent design (1972), which was ultimately abandoned, for unknown reasons. The following project (1977) was intended for a plot of land offered by the electricity company, EDP, near the local inn, which had been built by the State during the construction of the dam and remained its property (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Possible locations for the fire station, 1977



Source: Authors' own.

By 1977, the political panorama had changed significantly. After a period of political instability following the fall of the dictatorship, during which an Interim Administrative Commission had run the Town Council, it was now run by its first freely elected members who, representing different political forces and distinct sections of the electorate, brought conflicting views regarding the belated construction of the fire station. The majority side, represented by councillors from the centre-left and centre-right parties (*Partido Socialista* (PS) and *Partido Social Democrático* (PSD), respectively), sought the quickest possible resolution for the problem, while the opposing side, representing the conservative and economically liberal party (*Partido do Centro Democrático Social* (CDS)), argued for the value of EDP's land for future tourist investment: the site should be maintained as a reserve to be used for the future construction of a hotel unit (ADGT, 4 Apr. 1977).

Despite the Town Council's decision to authorise the construction of the new building adjacent to the inn, on EDP-owned land, and the firefighters' active and continuous protests against the paralysation of the construction process, the central institutions concerned with heritage protection maintained reservations: the area surrounding the inn was reserved for its future expansion (ADGT, 12 Jul. 1977), and the construction of the fire station '[would] greatly compromise the setting and tranquillity of the Inn' as well as 'the advantage that tourism represents for this region' (ADGT, 23 Aug. 1977).

It took another year and the firefighters issuing a strike (ADGT, 4 Sep. 1977) for the fire station's location to finally be determined, in July 1978. Against the will of the firefighters and the majority of the Town Council, the site was proposed by the Institute for the Safeguarding of Cultural and Natural Heritage (IPCPN, *Instituto de Salvaguarda do Património Cultural e Natural*) and approved by the State Secretary for Culture (ADGT, 13 Jul. 1978). The fire station was finally inaugurated in 1982 (ADGT, 17 Oct. 1982).

To this day, the local inn has not been expanded. The plot of land to its north, offered to the firefighters by the EDP, has been privately developed. The new Fire Station, sitting on a steep slope over the Fresno River, has considerable structural problems resulting from its location, which were identified as soon as it went into operation (ADGT, 3 Nov. 1987, Figure 6).

Figure 6. View of the fire station



Source: Ricardo Costa Agarez (2023), iArquitectura Aqui (2023), em https://arquitecturaaqui.eu/pt/obras/1672/quartel-dos-bom-beiros-voluntarios-de-miranda-do-douro#gallery-3

The story discussed above shares parallels with those of other public buildings constructed in Miranda do Douro after 1970, many of which are the product of lengthy processes of negotiation between local and central authorities, as well as within local bodies and citizen groups (table 1). The concern with tourism is explicit in the documentation. It is patent at the level of central administration but could also be identified as a point of conflict within local bodies. Notably, in this case, the question of heritage protection was taken outside of the town walls, as the reservation of land for the construction of tourist accommodation came accompanied by the protection of the view lines over

the historical town as well as the new dam. These two features, nature and built heritage, became the keys to the invention of contemporary Miranda do Douro as a tourist destination.

If tourism was a long sought out plan for Miranda do Douro, actively constructed during the *Estado Novo*, it was the democratic opening of the border with Spain that boosted the town's economy from the late 1970s. The years that followed are recalled in several testimonies as a time of economic effervescence. Raul Silva, a local resident in his fifties, talked about 'ten really *really* important years. (….) Back then it was every Saturday, every Sunday. These were buses, 40, 50 buses. (…) That's two and a half thousand people (…) [M]any millions of escudos were made every Saturday. It was a lot of money. Lots and lots of money.'[2] Another resident in her early fifties, who 'always worked behind a counter'[3], also remembers all the trade coming from Spain:

> 'From mid-June to mid-September was when there was business. On Saturdays, you could count 20 or 30 buses. The main product was towels. We sold towels, bed sets and sheets. At the time, we sold a lot of T-shirts with Portuguese advertising and tracksuits in Portuguese cotton. The Spanish came to eat cod. People came from Salamanca, Valladolid, Madrid, Burgos.' (Interviewee A, 2023)[4]

While tourism has since then drastically decreased, when interviews focused on views of the future of Miranda do Douro, many interviewees looked back on these times to propose investment in tourism as a possible solution and the development of any kind of production was mostly absent from conversations. Whereas some of the oldest residents interviewed, who originate from nearby villages, have worked as farmers and sold their produce around the district, the majority of Miranda do Douro's population lived in a place that only ever produced energy and was quickly defined by its potential as a tourist hub. When thinking about the future, interviewees remembered moments when Miranda do Douro's demographic desertification – a process that started in the 1970s – was countered: the dozens of buses on the weekends or the short-lived installation of a university branch that brought hundreds of students to town. The main employers in town today are the Town Hall as well as two facilities which, per the safeguard of historical sites, might not even exist: the firefighters and a retirement home. Most other jobs are in the restaurant and retail services. In this context, highly qualified young people are compelled to take on jobs that do not correspond to their education or to migrate to major cities in Portugal or Spain.

Tourism and retail are, nevertheless, incipient. Inside the walled town, there are few restaurants, bars and accommodations. On the outside, there are a few hotels, mostly old and not up to today's standards of comfort. The town extends north along three streets where rows of shops sell the same souvenirs and textile products. The latter are produced in Portugal and highly regarded for their quality. Residents criticize the absence of investment in tourism. A man in his sixties who worked in restaurants in Lisbon for a part of his life often repeated that, in Miranda do Douro, 'There are only rag shops!' (Interviewee RZ, 2023). Raul's testimony points in the same direction, as he mentioned that 'back then, you made money out of nothing (…) A shop that sold potsherds. Shards with mugs and clay like that.' Even the interviewed woman, who values Miranda's touristic potential, explained that it has declined after the COVID lockdowns and travel limitations of 2020 and 2021. The people coming today are not the same as before, she clarified: 'They no longer come to shop, but to visit the viewpoints, because Miranda now has many viewpoints'[5].

Heritage and public buildings in the construction of a new centrality

The expansion zone to the North of Miranda do Douro consists mainly of public buildings posterior to 1970 and was, at least partly, the result of an option to relocate facilities to serve a new residential

2 'Mas esses 10 anos foram 10 anos muito (*acentuado) importantes. (…) Na altura eram todos os sábados, todos os domingos. Isto aqui eram autocarros, eram 40, 50 autocarros. Nós pensávamos que 50 autocarros são 50 pessoas, são duas mil e quinhentas pessoas (…) Aqui fez-se muitos milhões de euros, na altura escudos, não é? Mas fizeram-se muitos milhões de dinheiro todos os sábados. Era muito dinheiro. Muito, mas muito dinheiro.'

3 'Trabalhei sempre numa loja, sempre atrás de um balcão.'

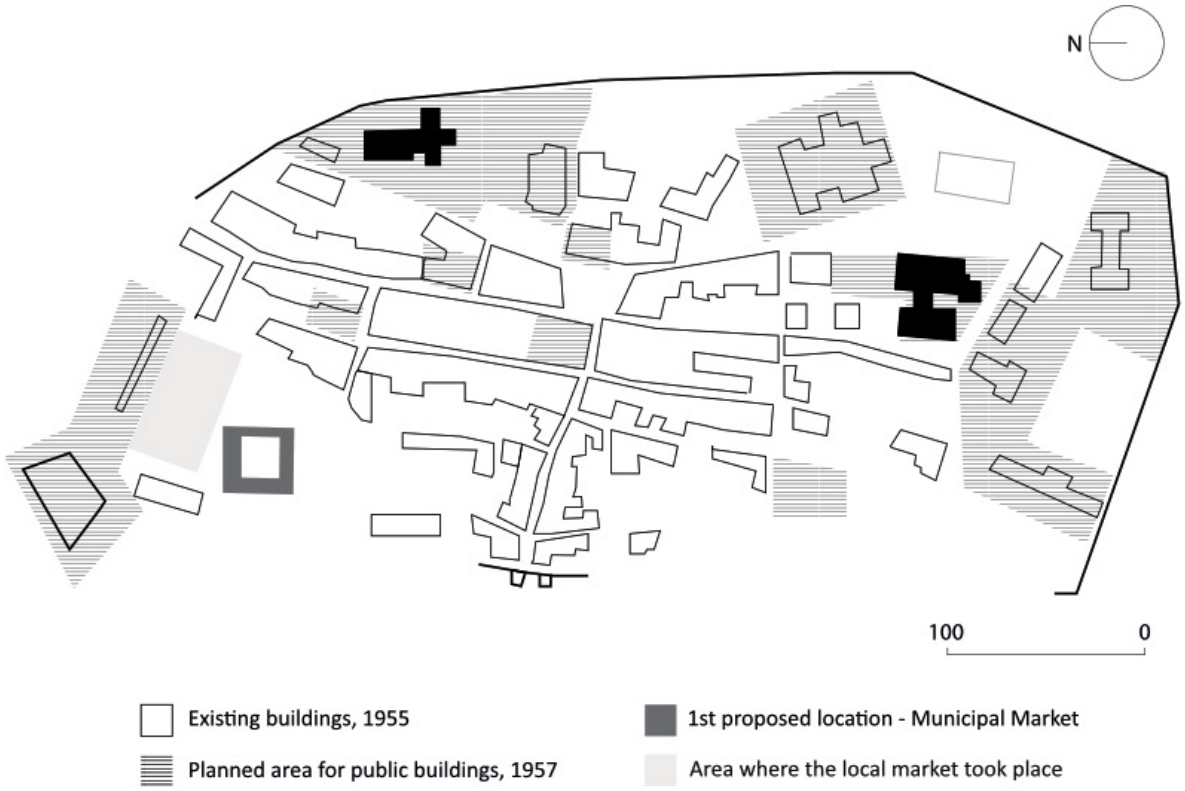
4 'De meio de junho até meio de setembro era quando havia negócio. Nos sábados podiam-se contar 20 e 30 autocarros. O produto principal eram as toalhas. Vendiam-se toalhas, jogos de cama, lençóis. Na altura vendiam-se muitas t-shirts com publicidade portuguesa e fatos de treino com algodão português. Os Espanhóis vinham comer bacalhau. Vinha pessoal de Salamanca, Valladolid, Madrid, Burgos.'

5 'Agora vem mais pessoal de Madrid, não vem mais a fazer compras, mas vem a visitar os miradouros, porque agora Miranda tem muitos miradouros.'

neighbourhood. In this process, the plan for the historical area around the cathedral to become a civic centre, where essential communal functions were concentrated, was abandoned. However, as the stories of the construction of the municipal market and primary school make clear, the transition of these essential communal services to a new expanding area was not part of a planned strategy, but the consequence of an explicit concern with Miranda do Douro's preservation and touristic potential, in articulation with the later conformation of a new residential area to the North.

The Miranda do Douro municipal market was first conceived in the mid-1960s and finally constructed in the early 1980s. Originally designed to offer better conditions for food sales that took place in a vacant area in front of Miranda's castle, in 'dismantled sheds' subject to the region's harsh weather conditions (AMMD, 11 Mar. 1969), the new market was built in a different location, its construction long overdue and, according to local testimonies, its facilities never fully utilised.

Figure 7. First proposed location for the municipal market in relation to the urbanisation plan



Source: Authors' own.

Like in the case of the fire station, the first architectural design for the new building had it inside the walls, near the area where the local market was held (Figure 7). Its design statement expressed the intention of not 'aesthetically damaging such a characteristic town', by using 'regional materials in combination with a reinforced concrete structure' (AMMD, 11 Mar. 1969). Nevertheless, the location was viewed unfavourably by central authorities, which questioned the proximity to the town's castle. The project was abandoned until 1976, when a new design was developed for a plot of land outside the town walls. This decision was justified in the brief, which referred to the site as being 'between the old area and the new expansion zone' of the town, where a new middle school was already being developed and a new housing estate for 600 people was being built (see Figure 3). The project was approved, and construction started in April 1981 (Figure 10) (AMMD, 17 Dec. 1982).

Inaugurated only in 1982, the new market building encountered a context where its function had been transferred to other types of commercial structures, mainly supermarkets (Figure 8). Furthermore, the prolonged absence of a formal market had consolidated a different type of close

relationship between local producers, shopkeepers and consumers, through informal exchanges such as door-to-door selling (Interviewees L and RS, 2023).

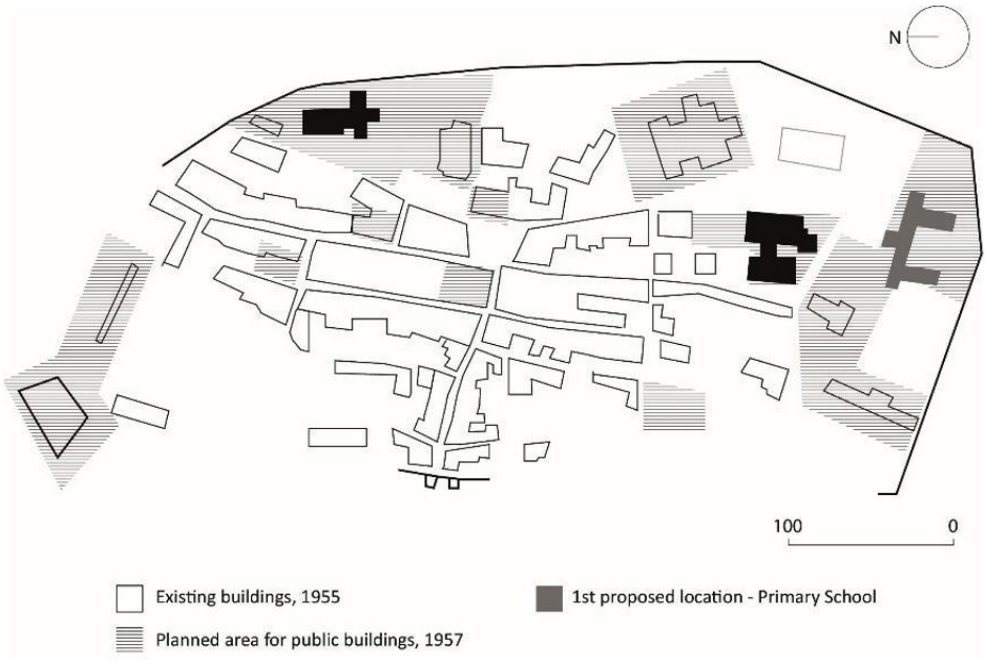
Figure 8. The municipal market, mostly empty



Source: Catarina Ruivo (2023).

Similarly to the market, the new primary school was also initially planned to be constructed on land near the town's dilapidated Bishop Palace, having been endorsed by a ministerial order on 14 March 1968 (AMMD, 20 Dec. 1969). It is unclear why or when this project was abandoned but, in 1969, a second design was proposed by the Town Council, which located the school in the vicinity of the recently constructed courthouse and a planned post office. (AMMD, 20 Dec. 1969, Figure 9). Thus, the new school formed part of a group of public facilities that were being developed around the Cathedral and the Bishop Palace, on a plot of land designated for public structures in the town's urbanisation scheme (Figure 6). Nevertheless, while the Northern Directorate of School Constructions (DCEN, *Direção das Construções Escolares do Norte*) and the regional branch of the DGSU saw the location favourably and noted that it had already been anticipated in urbanisation studies preceding the construction of the courthouse and prison (AMMD, 14 May 1970), the JNE requested the elaboration of a development plan for the intramural complex of public buildings, considering that 'the gradual and fragmented construction of buildings in this area could [...] irreversibly jeopard[ise] a site of greatest interest.' (AMMD, 15 Mar. 1971)

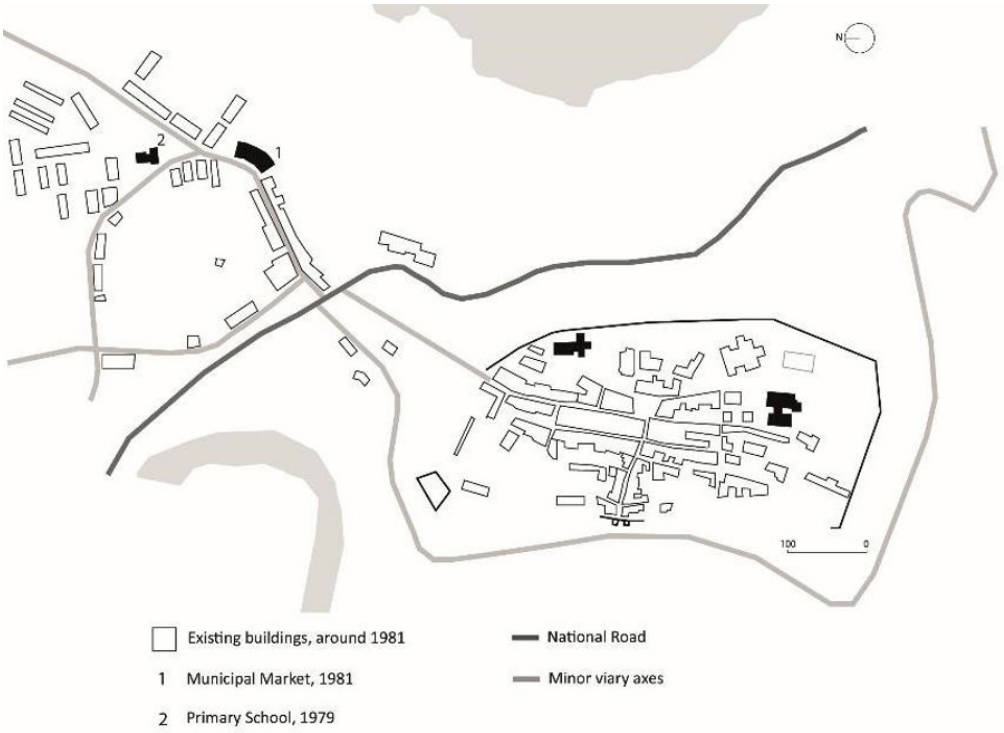
Figure 9. First proposed location for the primary school in relation to the urbanisation plan



Source: Authors' own.

From this point on, the project for the new primary school followed the municipal market's path out of the walled town and was finally constructed in 1979 (Figure 10) (AMMD, 16 Aug. 1979). In this case, records show that the Town Council supported – or even proposed – this alternative. In 1976, five years after the last JNE ruling, this local body had weighed up the delays in the construction of the school and the development of the town in the meantime, concluding that it no longer made sense to build it where originally planned (AMMD, 16 Jan. 1976).

Figure 10. Location of the municipal market and primary school



Source: Author's own.

The town's growth outside its walls was launched mainly through public housing schemes and became a functional centrality through the planning of schools, sports facilities and the municipal market. Simultaneously, construction within the walls became more limited. In 1984, a document on Historic Centre Regulations was issued by the Town Hall, which defined the types of works that could be carried out within the walled town (CMMD, 1984). The same type of restrictions was fixed in law with the town's 1995 Municipal Masterplan (*Diário da República*, henceforth DR, 104 1995) and then further defined in its 2007 Safeguard Plan (GTL, 2007). The latter is highly critical of past interventions in the urban fabric, defending that, historically,

> '(...) everything within the walls has converged in the polishing of an architectural jewel, which, having withstood history's hard knocks, now needs to be 'encased' in the protection of the Law so that it can also emerge unscathed from the encounters with growth, which, announcing itself with concrete horns, could destroy it, just as [it happened to] the walls of Jericho, which collapsed at the sound of Jehovah's trumpets.'

Many of the conversations held in Miranda do Douro highlight a clear contradiction between valuing the heritage of the historic centre and the frustration felt at the impossibility of transforming or improving it. Arménio Gomes, a local man of around seventy years, active and highly positioned in Miranda do Douro's community services, described transformations within the walled city, including how original wooden window frames used to be replaced with aluminium (painted to imitate wood) or how stone walls have been plastered with cement, and justified it: 'With all the bad weather here, the elements, the sun and the rain, everything is ruined. Now we wouldn't be able to live here... Who would want to live here?' In an expression of frustration evocative of our first conversation with Margarida, he added, 'And yet the Town Council doesn't authorize much, less and less.'[6] Raul Silva's testimony translated similar frustrations: 'We live there in the historic centre. We're treated like animals. (...) Because they want us to continue living in the historic centre as we did 400 years ago.'[7]

Furthermore, the preservation of Miranda do Douro as an 'architectural jewel' is understood by the population as a sort of fabrication, as is illustrated in the testimony of Raul Silva:

> 'For those who believe that the Cathedral has always been straight - you see, the floor of the Cathedral is like this, look: regular sand, then they put the stones. But this is what we see in the town today. It was cleaned up during the [dictatorship]. They did this all over the country, didn't they? But here they did something special, because of the coming of the dam, in other words, to prepare the population to receive an object they didn't want. (...) The [castle's] turrets were destroyed, as were the rest of the walls (...) They came and made it an approximate figure of what it was, something approximate. Just like the castle in Lisbon. Which is a complete lie, isn't it? (...) it doesn't exist, it's a lying castle (...)'[8]

Discussion

Like Lisbon's castle, the historic centre of Miranda do Douro is a lying town. In the construction of 'a unique and indisputable interpretation of history and national identity', as identified by Santos Silva (2024, p.10) as an essential basis of the regime's legitimisation, the central government made decisions that favoured heritage-making and resulted in the construction of an historic centre that is mismatched with local development and community needs. The importance of this process of heritage-making for *Estado Novo*'s propaganda, and its connection with the development of intranational tourism for the middle and upper classes has been thoroughly investigated in the

6 'Isto com as intempéries que há aqui, as condições dos elementos, o sol a chuva, acaba com tudo. Agora nós não poderíamos viver... Quem é que gostaria de viver aqui? (...) E ainda a Câmara não autoriza muita coisa, cada vez menos.'

7 'Nós morámos ali no centro histórico. Somos tratados como animais. (...) Porque querem que a gente continue a viver lá no centro histórico como se vivia há 400 anos'

8 'Para quem acredita que a Sé foi sempre direita. Estão a ver, o chão da Sé é assim, olha: areia regular, depois é que puseram as pedras. Mas isto é o que hoje vemos na cidade. Foi uma limpeza que foi feita no tempo do Estado Novo. Mas fizeram isto pelo país todo, não é? Mas aqui fizeram uma coisa especial, por causa da vinda da barragem, ou seja, para prepararem a população para receber um objeto que não - que a população poderia não querer, não é? (...) Nós temos a porta que são os torreões. Estavam destruídos, tal qual o resto das muralhas aqui. Estavam destruídos. Eles vieram e fizeram aquilo uma figura aproximada do que era, uma coisa aproximada. O castelo de Lisboa, não é? Que é uma mentira completa, não é? porque o castelo não era assim. Era do tempo, para dar a ideia, do castelo. Mas, ele não existe, é um castelo mentiroso, não é?'

field of history and openly recognised in the 1941 creation of the National Secretariat of Information, Popular Culture and Tourism (SNI) (Bártolo, 2021, Ribeiro, 2020, Oliveira Martins, 2020).

In Miranda, the action of the SNI can be found in the local inn, whose expansion and views over the old town were to be preserved at the cost of the systematic delay of the fire station. But the construction of heritage in Miranda do Douro also depended on a process of invention and adaptation of reality, through the strategy of selection and manipulation of existing heritage that was conducted all throughout the country and, particularly, in the villages selected for the competition The Most Portuguese Village (*A Aldeia Mais Portuguesa de Portugal*). Monuments – the cathedral and derelict castle – were renovated with the aim of restoring their original aesthetic (Neto, 2022; Quintas, 2020; Correia, 2019), and limitations were imposed on any further development of the walled town, which resulted in the continued delaying of the construction of essential public facilities.

It was the democratic reorganisation of political structures that enabled the unblocking of various processes that had been dragging on for decades, through the strengthening of local power. Nevertheless, while the democratic structure resulted in a redefinition of heritage-making in which local entities gained further agency, the development strategy eventually shifted towards tourism again.

The town's evolution followed a pattern like that noted by Scobey (2002) in his analysis of urban transformation. The author highlights two dynamics: the connection to large-scale economic projects and the ideological construction of space. In Miranda, the underlying economic project is tourism, incrementally leading to the segregation and exclusion of collective and everyday uses from the historic centre. During the *Estado Novo,* this process relied on the civic myth of a heroic past through references to specific buildings, such as the castle and the cathedral, which become cultural, economic and political symbols and poles of a new social and spatial order. During the democratic period, aesthetic values, such as beauty and serenity, continue to be used to justify this process. The study of the construction of Miranda do Douro in the second half of the 20th-century has shown that heritage-making was not merely a symbolic and cultural process. In particular, the transformation of public buildings – sites of encounter and community life – had long-lasting effects on local social dynamics and urban growth. In parallel to monuments, these everyday facilities were also a tool for the creation of a national identity, not only as symbols of the State at the local scale, as identified by Tostões (2019), but also through the government's capacity to determine whether and where they were constructed, thus conditioning social and urban life. The processes of their construction reveal a political urban project which prioritised the construction of a tourism-favourable image of the existing town over its lived reality.

The effects of heritage-making were felt beyond the scope of heritage policy and ideological definition, affecting social and economic policy at the local level. Miranda do Douro is a paradigmatic example of how governmental protection and regulation of traditional urban spaces has tended to overlook everyday life (Katipidi, 2023; Ashwoth and Graham, 2005). Alves (1997) has studied the historical construction of heritage in Monsanto and its contemporary effects and identified similar tensions between central power, allied with local elites, and the aspirations of the community, where the former favoured exterior aesthetics and tradition and the latter claimed the right to local infrastructure. In Óbidos, where the DGEMN and SNI collaborated in the reconstruction of its walled centre, producing a 'picturesque medieval village out of the ruins of Óbidos castle', Prista (2015) also noted how this resulted in the transformation of the population's way of life. Strict regulations against begging (1962), animals (1964), or making the expensive maintenance of housing mandatory, eventually resulted in the displacement of poor and large families and the return of local noble families.

The Portuguese example confirms Choay's (2010, pp.196-197) conclusion that 'the conditioning suffered by historic urban heritage in view of its cultural consumption (...) tends to exclude local or underprivileged populations and, with them, their traditional and modest daily activities'. Today, the trend continues. Benefiting from its closeness to Lisbon, Óbidos developed much differently from Miranda do Douro. Tourism has continuously grown, becoming a major part of its population's identity (Prista, 2015). However, even there, where tourism was successful in becoming the town's economic basis, the population feels that the recent massification of tourism has excluded them as touristic actors, leading many to lose their main source of income.

In Miranda, if the existing urban fabric of the town is, at least in part, the result of a long process of heritage preservation with the explicit objective of protecting future tourist-oriented endeavours, no strategy seems to have accompanied it. Simultaneously, in the absence of other sustainable economic projects, residents continue to see tourism as the obvious solution for the declining population and ageing demographic. As Ashworth (2014, p.16) noted, 'the more mono-functional, heritage dependent places are likely to lack these diversities and thus reap lower potential profits (...) the places most reliant upon heritage-based development will benefit least from it.' Miranda's reliance on heritage may be in itself a cause for its incipient tourism.

Nevertheless, in Portugal, tourism has been promoted as an economic solution for ageing regions experiencing significant population loss since the late 20th century – see the Programme for the Recovery of Portugal's Historic Villages (1994) – and tourism-oriented projects often maintain a conservative approach to heritage preservation. Regarding Portugal's Historic Villages, Silva (2012) has noted that the programme's aims were 'to restore the façades and roofs of buildings, and to eliminate the modern and spurious industrial materials, such as brick, concrete and aluminium, which are considered to contaminate the prestigious materials of the past, such as stone and wood'.

This description echoes the testimonies gathered in Miranda do Douro, in which residents lamented the obligation of maintaining expensive and often less efficient materials, such as wooden frames. In turn, these experiences reflect Harvey's (2013) understanding of an apparent contradiction inherent to the commodification of heritage, often associated with the growth of tourism. While dependent on an image of the uniqueness of cities, this process also results in the loss of some of their distinctive marks and in the displacement of the original resident population. In this process of loss or conservation, collective-use public facilities are crucial elements in the definition of the city since they are specifically oriented towards social needs (Agarez *et al.*, 2025). Consequently, the symbolic capital of cities is a sociopolitical construction in continuous negotiation which, as we have seen, make also take place in an illusory way: in the form of strict regulations or even of lying castles.

Conclusion

The development of Miranda do Douro's urban landscape as it exists today was largely shaped by decisions made in the mid-20th century regarding heritage conservation, some of which could be identified in the micro-histories of the construction of public buildings.

Three different stages were identified. First, it is notable that for a whole decade after its definition, the *non-aedeficandi* area was never mentioned regarding the construction of new public buildings within the town wall. It was only in a second stage of development, after the conclusion of the dam's construction and the definition of Miranda do Douro as a place whose tourism potential should be harnessed in the second Development Plan of 1965, that laws enacted decades before were invoked to paralyze new construction. During this period, there was a clear trend of central bodies with different competences emitting contradictory opinions, with heritage-related issues being prioritized in the non-approval of otherwise acceptable projects, revealing a preponderance of a strategy of conservation over other concerns, such as the construction of essential local facilities. If the conflict between local needs and central regulations is clear throughout the entirety of the studied period, it was in a third stage, after the 1974's democratization of the country, that this became more explicit. Furthermore, it was after the subsequent democratization of local power that another type of conflict rose to the surface: that between disparate local interests.

What the reading of these processes made clear is that Choay's statement that 'the power of individuals remains strong' and that the 'determination of a mayor, an Inspector of Historic Monuments, an architect, a town planner or a heritage administrator can still change the fate of a monument or an ancient city' (2010, p.186) is true, but incomplete, as it was a wide network of conflicting actors and the power balance that changed according to social and political context that in each case determined a bit of the fate of an old town. Democratization, which brought along the creation of local finances and autonomy, allowed for local power – with a more intimate knowledge of the territory, its people and its necessities – to negotiate and compromise in ways that resulted in the unblocking of several ongoing processes for the construction of urban facilities. This compromise resulted in the construction of a whole new centrality, outside the to-be-preserved historic town. In this way, Miranda do Douro may only metaphorically have died by its wall.

The persistent lack of a consistent economic strategy in the region has contributed since the 1960s to the connection between heritage conservation and tourism. However, tourism has itself remained incipient in a town of difficult accessibility from both Portugal and Spain. Miranda do Douro's inhabitants relocated outside the walled town, leaving behind an increasingly inert and empty historic centre, putting at risk the very maintenance of the buildings and the vitality of this space.

Recapturing these concerns and following Tim Winter's critical approach, this study has implemented a methodology that sought to understand 'the economic, political and social relations that weave in and through and constitute heritage.' (2013, p.541) Thus, our study suggests that the same processes that have worked to protect heritage at the cost of public facilities in the historic centre have contributed to its decreasing vitality. In Miranda do Douro, the historic centre depopulation is only indirectly and partially the result of the economic logic of keeping-for-selling heritage, which is a key dynamic present in gentrification processes, as noted by Jaume Franquesa (2013). Rather, the displacement of the population and their collective practices is the result of a political strategy of conservation with a poorly defined and limited economic project. This long heritage preservation process has led to a contradictory circumstance, finally jeopardizing the preservation of buildings and community life.

The history of Miranda do Douro and its public buildings shows how heritage-making is not merely symbolic and cultural, and how heritage studies can benefit from the examination of how it has historically and continues to shape urban form and, consequently, urban dynamics and social life. Public buildings, as sites of encounter and community life, proved to provide a useful perspective, as their location, delayed construction and displacement conditioned the spatial organisation of everyday life and the social fabric of Miranda do Douro. By focusing on these facilities as both tools for the construction of national identity and determinants of local social and economic policy, this article adds a new perspective to existing research on the role of public works in the *Estado Novo*. This research shows that the capacity by central entities to determine whether and where public buildings were constructed was itself a form of ideological intervention, with material consequences that extended well beyond the scope of heritage policy.

Miranda do Douro constitutes an additional case study in the Portuguese context that confirms findings from earlier research and explores how heritage-based policies have often been contradictory to the interests of local communities. It provides a clear illustration of the delicate balance between the maintenance of a local, largely aestheticized, identity, and the transformation of its associated social fabric in the construction of both national identity and tourism economies.

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