

Chapter 16


Amiais: Territory and Memories Translated From Local Speeches

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ABSTRACT

The chapter takes a journey through the place, revisiting the central dimensions for its development, particularly, for LOCUS project – playful connected rural territories. These dimensions are playfulness, labor and school, affection, architecture, and religion. For the knowledge and understanding of all these dimensions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, agents from and in the territory (stakeholders), informal conversations with inhabitants, and participant observation of two of the oldest traditional festivals in the village. Amiais is facing some social and demographic processes, (1) search of the younger population for more densified urban areas, (2) which leads to aging population and depopulation of the territory, which tends to cause the (3) loss of cultural heritage, but, at the same time, (4) a change in local architecture.

INTRODUCTION

For some years now, Portugal has witnessed a depopulation of the most inland areas. At least since 2004, the phenomenon of depopulation has received attention from the media¹²³⁴, but also from academia (Branco, Oliveira, Ferreira, & Póvoa, 2010; Neves & Roxo, 2011) and public policies (Rosário, 2004).

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With depopulation, other phenomena occur, such as the abandonment of land and housing, loss of the identity of a space, loss of the cultural heritage of that specific territory and its population. Considering that cultural heritage is a fundamental part of what characterizes a village, a parish, a city, a country, it is important to contribute to its preservation.

The main ethnographic objectives of LOCUS are (i) to discover the culture, rituals, habits, stories and histories of Amiais and its inhabitants and (ii) to become familiar with the motivations and plans of the inhabitants, visitors and stakeholders of the place. Through these dimensions it will be possible to revive Amiais and its cultural heritage.

Amiais is a small Portuguese village situated in the Center Region, specifically in Sever do Vouga. It is a rural village, being its main inhabitants older than 60 years old, and has been suffering with the depopulation phenomenon which may lead to the loss of its Cultural Heritage.

The goals of this chapter are essentially focused on the prior knowledge of Amiais' culture through the voice of the territory agents. Two socio-religious events were surveyed, namely, the festivals in honor of São Francisco de Assis and Nossa Senhora do Amparo, held in Amiais and Vilarinho (a nearby village), and also of the Feast of Lord, held in Couto de Esteves. Participant observation and informal conversations with the inhabitants and visitors of Amiais and Vilarinho were the privileged data collection techniques. These two techniques of data collection were complemented with semi-structured interviews with territory agents who occupy decision-making positions (stakeholders), namely, the Mayor of Sever do Vouga city, the President of the Couto de Esteves Parish Council, the President of the Association League of Friends and Naturals of Couto de Esteves (LANCE) and the President of the Cultural and Social Association of Couto de Esteves (ACSCE). In this chapter, all the collected data will be analyzed, discussed and complemented with documentary information regarding Amiais' traditions.

All the information gathered and knowledge acquired, described in this chapter, aims to contribute to a next step of ethnographic research, in which the uncover of Amiais' cultural heritage will continue, along with the co-design of scenarios and narratives for playful experiences within an Internet of Things (IoT) system, intended to the intergenerational exploration of Amiais' cultural heritage.

In this system, it will be possible to interact with everyday things around the village (such as farm implements, buildings and so on), thus learning and exploring the cultural heritage of Amiais, through the use of a wearable device (a bracelet) and a smartphone. As such, a smartphone application will be developed, which will pair with a bracelet, and will be able to identify places and objects, and how these objects are being handled, responding accordingly, in a logic of playfulness, by allowing gamified activities, showing information through Augmented Reality, asking for the upload of specific multimedia content, and so on.

The chapter is organized into three sections. In the first section, LOCUS research project and its relationship with Amiais will be presented in detail, in a logic of understanding the project relevance for that particular place, but also, and considering one of the most relevant and comprehensive dimensions of the project (which is the replication of LOCUS), for Portuguese places that are depopulated or at risk of depopulation, at risk of loss of cultural heritage.

In the second section the reader will be taken on a journey through Amiais, as its socio-geographical context will be presented. This journey will include several important dimensions for the understanding of the context, namely, (1) the playful, which will reflect on the occupation of free time for children and adults, traditional games, popular parties, among others; (2) the most frequent labor occupations, which include adults and children (focusing on school and land work in their spare time), in a logic of socio-professional analysis; (3) affective bonds, since the previous dimensions were often mentioned

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