

LISBON'S FADO SOUNDSCAPE: BETWEEN IDENTITY AND TOURISM

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Citation: Zarrilli, L. (2022). LISBON'S FADO SOUNDSCAPE: BETWEEN IDENTITY AND TOURISM. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 41(2), 517–522. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.41224-858>

Abstract: In cultural geography, several authors agree on the existence of a two-way relationship between music and place. Thus emerges the concept of "soundscape", according to which a geographical space is identified and perceived also thanks to its auditory dimension. This is certainly the case of Lisbon's fado: born in the slums of the Portuguese capital during the XIX century, it has now achieved a strong tourist value, also thanks to its inclusion in the list of Unesco Intangible World Heritage in November 2011. In this paper we try to understand if fado corresponds to a still authentic feeling, or if it is turning rather into a "scenography" and a representation aimed at an audience of tourists, which inevitably involves a process of "commodification" and trivialization.

Key words: Lisbon, fado, soundscape, identity, urban tourism

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INTRODUCTION

In cultural geography, several authors agree on the existence of a two-way relationship between music and place (Leyshon et al., 1995; Connell and Gibson, 2003; Fernandes, 2013). It is argued that places, thanks to their historical-cultural characteristics, can generate specific musical genres, which, in turn, contribute to defining and making unique the places where they were born: "The idea that a deterministic relationship between place and culture exists – as musical styles and sounds emerge from different locations, and as musicians relate to their environment – remains powerful." (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 90-91). Thus emerges the concept of "soundscape", according to which a geographical space is identified and perceived also thanks to its auditory dimension: "In this sense, the sound environment is one of the most important elements of a landscape, because it can condition the quality of life but also because it is assumed, when associated to music, as a factor of identity statement and territorial marketing" (Fernandes,

2013: 34). All this is relevant from the point of view of the tourism market, which is increasingly oriented towards a multisensorial fruition of places. In such a scenario, musical traditions can become a factor of territorial competition and a tourist resource: "Tango's Buenos Aires, folk music's Dublin, fado's Lisbon or samba's Rio de Janeiro, by bounding sound artistic experiences to very particular events and urban environments, are posters for tourist promotion of the cities that intend to state before global flows of cultural tourism." (Fernandes, 2013: 34). This is certainly the case of Lisbon's fado, the subject of this article: born in the slums of the Portuguese capital during the XIX century (Figure 1) and risen to a national symbol already at the time of the Salazar dictatorship, it has now achieved a strong tourist value, also thanks to its inclusion in the list of Unesco Intangible World Heritage in November 2011, which has certainly amplified its image and



Figure 1. Graffiti depicting Maria Severa Onofriana, considered the first icon of fado. Escadinhas de São Cristóvão (Saint Christopher Stairway), Mouraria

attractiveness. In this paper we try to understand if we can speak of a "soundscape" linked to this musical genre and if it corresponds to a still authentic feeling, or if it is turning rather into a "scenography" and a representation aimed at an audience of tourists, which inevitably involves a process of "commodification" and trivialization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this paper a qualitative-quantitative approach has been adopted. We have started with the review of the literature related to the relationship between music and territory and to the concept of "soundscape" (Bithell and Hill, 2014; Connell

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and Gibson, 2003; Fernandes, 2013; Gibson and Connell, 2005; Leyshon et al., 1995; Norton and Matsumoto, 2019; Quinn, 1996). Then we have focused on the literature specific to fado (Bay Frydberg, 2012; Belo and Branco, 2010; Elliott, 2010; Fonseca, 2011; Gasparotto, 2014; Menezes Bastos, 2007; Pereira, 2008; Pimentel, 1904). We have made several field missions in Lisbon between 2016 and 2022, aimed at identifying the places of fado and its ways of fruition, both from the local and the tourist points of view. By crossing the findings obtained through field missions with data from different sources (Portal do Fado; Museu do Fado; Google map), we have quantified and located the public places intended for listening to live fado. Finally, for the toponymic analysis, we have analysed the lyrics of the 7.950 songs listed in the Portal do Fado (www.portaldofado.net), which is the official website dedicated to this musical genre.

Lisbon's tourist attractiveness

Since the late nineties there has been a constant growth of international tourism in Portugal, also thanks to the creation of new infrastructures and the organization of major events, such as the 1998 EXPO and the 2004 European football championships (De Iulio, 2010). Of course, this positive trend concerns above all the city of Lisbon, for which we can speak of a tourist boom comparable to that experienced by Barcelona since the early nineties. At the base of this success there is certainly the consolidation of the tourist image of Lisbon, which is turning into a “must-see” of urban tourism: it was declared “World's Leading City Break Destination” in 2018 and 2019, to name just the most recent of the awards obtained. The covid 19 pandemic has certainly brought about a halt to this trend. However, the prompt and effective response that national and city authorities have given to the emergency has created the prospects for a recovery in the sector in the short term.

Lisbon's tourist attractiveness is certainly based on its strong character, which is made up of several elements: a heterogeneous urban landscape with historic and traditional neighborhoods, such as Alfama and Belém, and futuristic urban scenarios, such as that of the Parque das Nações (Park of the Nations), a paradigmatic case of functional conversion of a former industrial area; the hilly topography, which guarantees the city a scenic dimension, with numerous *miradouros* (view points) and sudden panoramic views; the proximity to the Tagus River, along which some of the most important tourist areas are aligned (Belém, Baixa, Alfama, Parque das Nações, to name the best known), and a tourist resource in itself, thanks to the recovery for leisure activities of the *docas* (docks) and dismissed industrial facilities such as LX Factory and Village Underground (Zarrilli et al., 2019; Zarrilli and Brito, 2021); the monuments in Manueline style, notably the Bélem Tower and the Jerónimos Monastery, which represent well known urban landmarks in the tourist imagery; the original means of transport, such as the funiculars, the *elevador* (lift) de Santa Justa, the *eléctrico* (tram); the extraordinary brightness, an effect of the geographical position, which earned it the nickname of *cidade da luz* (city of the light); the mysterious and vaguely exotic atmosphere, a historical legacy but also a symptom of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism; its atmosphere a bit bohemian, a bit out of date, intellectual and popular at the same time, in which it is no coincidence that the figures of Fernando Pessoa and Amália Rodrigues shine with particular brilliance, now also risen to the role of “pop” icons in tourist imagery. Coming to the subject of this article, it was noted in this respect that “another good example of how fado has been used to fill the void that followed the loss of African colonies is the fact that in the souvenir shop of the Fado Museum one of the photobiographies of Amália Rodrigues is displayed next to one of Fernando Pessoa, a writer whose partial work remains indissolubly associated with fado imagery and themes. The position of the queen of fado alongside Pessoa is central to the recognition of fado's aptitude to reach non-Portuguese audiences and also imbues the genre with a strong artistic and intellectual aura.” (Fonseca, 2011: 55-56. Our translation from Portuguese).

Lisbon, the city of fado

According to the most accepted interpretation, the word fado derives from the Latin *fatum*, destiny. And it was the historical, cultural and social destiny of imperial and colonial Portugal that made this musical genre essentially urban and imbued with that exquisitely Lusitanian sentiment that is the *saudade*, a kind of melancholic nostalgia that Eduardo Lourenço defined as “the most precious and the most mysterious of all sentiments” (Lourenço, 2006: 33. Our translation from Italian). Through this musical form, a symbolic universe has been built that is continually regenerated, from its origins to the present day, thanks to generations of interpreters who, although innovating (Fonseca, 2011), still refer to tradition, that is, to what can be defined as “an unfinished process of creation-recreation, production-reproduction, continuity-discontinuity; a system in constant renewal.” (Marcos Arévalo, 2007: 26. Our translation from Italian).

The origin of fado is still debated (Pereira, 2008; Gasparotto, 2014), even if its passage through the Luso-Afro-Brazilian universe is now universally recognized (Machado Pais, 2002; Menezes Bastos, 2007; Bay Frydberg, 2012). On the other hand, there is no doubt that fado appeared in Lisbon in the nineteenth century, establishing its places of production and consumption in the popular districts of this city (Mouraria and Alfama) and in social contexts characterized by exclusion and deviance. Subsequently, and increasingly since the 1930s, fado has no longer been performed only spontaneously in the *ruas* (streets) and *tascas* (taverns) of Alfama and Mouraria, but also as a “codified” genre of entertainment in rather expensive and formal venues, the so-called *casas de fado* (fado houses), located above all in the Bairro Alto, the district of night entertainment, to then conquer the theatrical, radio and television spotlights, as well as the record market, and cross the national borders thanks to its most famous interpreter, Amália Rodrigues.

Nowadays, fado, in a traditional version or contaminated with other musical genres, occupies a stable place within the World Music¹, and has acquired great international visibility through a new wave of performers such as Mísia, Cristina Branco, Ana Moura and especially Mariza, considered by many to be Amália's legitimate heir.

¹ World Music, far from being a specific musical genre, is a broad category which includes many musical styles from all over the world, including Western ones (for example Irish folk or Salento pizzica), as well as musical expressions born from the contamination between

Lisbon's fado, between "topophilia" and toponymy

In the case of the relationship between fado and Lisbon, we believe that it's possible to refer to the concept of "topophilia", a neologism conceived by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (Tuan, 1974) to describe the emotional ties, which can be of various kinds, between human beings and places, by virtue of specific natural environments or cultural contexts to which one feels connected, both individually and collectively.

In this regard, it is our opinion that in fado, as a musical expression of a given community, a form of "topophilia" towards the city of Lisbon is inherent, as is particularly evident from the titles and the lyrics of the songs, which contain an unusually large number of references to Lisbon and to its topography and heritage. As mentioned before, we analysed the 7.950 songs listed on the website "Portal do Fado", presumably all fado ever composed, looking for toponyms and historical and geographical references to the city of Lisbon, in order to give a quantitative dimension, as far as possible, to a purely qualitative aspect, that is, the aforementioned emotional approach to the city.

If we consider the titles of the songs (Figure 2), we find that the term *Lisboa* occurs 172 times². Passing to the lyrics (Figure 3), the term *Lisboa* appears – at least once – in 487 songs³. The term *Tejo* (the Tagus River) occurs 20 times in the titles and 229 in the lyrics. Among the districts, the most mentioned, predictably, are those related to the origins of fado and its traditions, diffusion and performance: *Mouraria*⁴ (46 occurrences in the titles, 223 occurrences in the lyrics) and *Alfama* (25 and 168 occurrences respectively). In total (Figures 3 and 4), we have found 353 toponyms in the titles and 2.056 toponyms in the lyrics that can be directly or indirectly associated to the city of Lisbon as a whole, to its geographical elements (e.g. the Tagus Rivers) or to parts thereof (neighbourhoods, specific streets, squares, monuments, *casas de fado*, theatres, restaurants, bars, infrastructures, transportation means), confirming what was observed by Elliott: "One of the main lyrical themes of fado is the city itself, particularly those areas most associated with the music's origins such as Mouraria, Alfama and Bairro Alto. A mythology of place is summoned up in fado songs texts that attempts to trace the remembered and imagined city of the past via a poetics of haunting" (Elliott, 2010: 1).

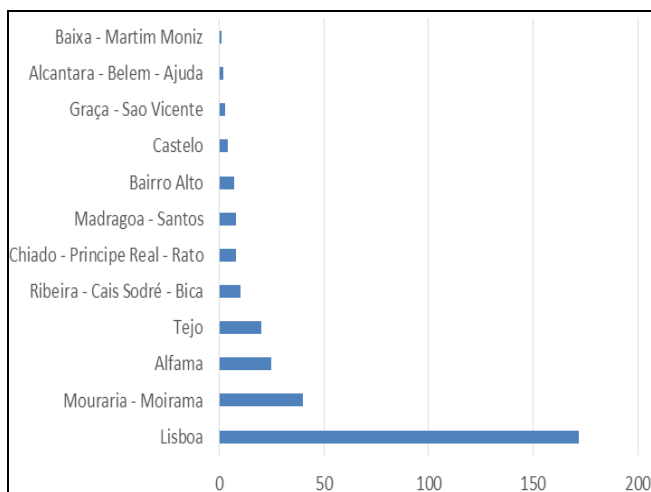


Figure 2. Titles: number of direct occurrences of toponyms by area/neighborhood (Source: elaboration on data <https://www.portaldofado.net/>)

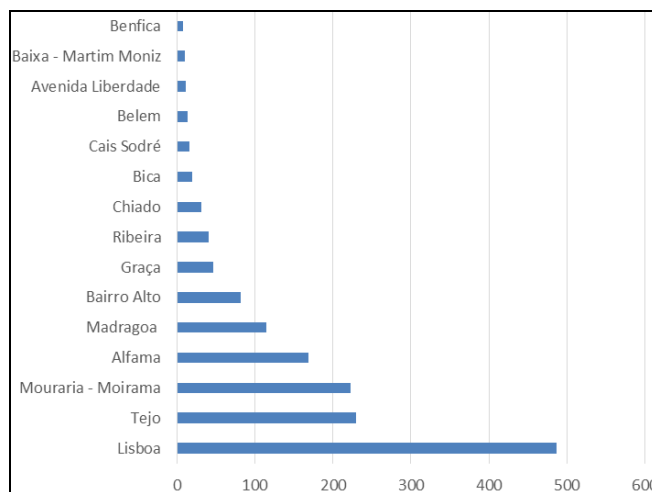


Figure 3. Lyrics: number of direct occurrences of toponyms by area/neighborhood (Source: elaboration on data <https://www.portaldofado.net/>)

The tourist dimension of fado

It can be argued that there is a special bond and an inseparable link between the city of Lisbon and fado as a musical genre. Therefore, if there are no doubts about the intrinsically identitarian dimension of fado, it should be emphasized how, hand in hand with the opening and international integration of Portugal (1974 Carnation Revolution; entry into the EEC in 1986), and also on the basis of the recent inclusion of fado in the Unesco list, a tourist relevance of this musical genre enhanced, backed by a growing offer and its use as a "brand" for the city of Lisbon, and more

musical genres that we could define as "ethnic" and international pop. Since the 1980s, the English musician Peter Gabriel has carried out a fundamental activity of production and dissemination of World Music through the WOMAD (World of Music, Arts and Dance) international festival and the Real World record label.

² More precisely, the term *Lisboa* occurs 172 times as such, but an indirect or metaphorical idea of the city occurs 8 more times under the terms *lisboeta* (that means inhabitant of Lisbon), *alfacinha* (that comes from *alface*, lettuce, a nickname to indicate the people from Lisbon) and *Ulissipo* (that comes from *Olisipo*, the ancient Latin toponym of the city, related to the myth of Ulysses: "An old legend states that the city of Lisbon was founded by Ulysses in his journey back home after the war against the city of Troy. During this long and adventurous journey he battled sea monsters and plenty of strange ocean creatures. One day a bolt of lightning appeared and exploded into flames in an unknown land. According to the legend, Ulysses was instructed by Zeus to build a city named Olissipo on the point of impact" <https://www.ulisboa.pt/info/ulisses>).

³ As in the case of the titles, also in the lyrics *Lisboa* occurs indirectly and metaphorically 10 more times under the terms *lisboeta* and *alfacinha*, for a total of 497 songs.

⁴ *Mouraria* is sometimes referred to as *Moirama*, an ancient variant that literally means "group of Moors".

generally for Portugal. In this regard, the increasing number of places where it's possible to attend fado shows should be mentioned: sometimes they are simple and cheap *tascas* (taverns), in which fado is performed in a more informal way (the so-called *fado vadio*, that is, vagabond, bohemian); more often they are *casas de fado*, in which the “commercial”, not to say “tourist”, dimension of musical performance, is clearly evident.

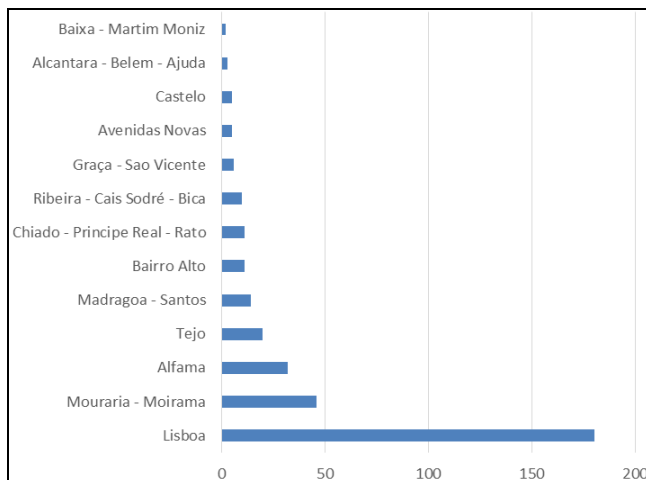


Figure 4. Titles: number of total occurrences of toponyms by area/neighborhood (Source: elaboration on data <https://www.portaldofado.net/>)

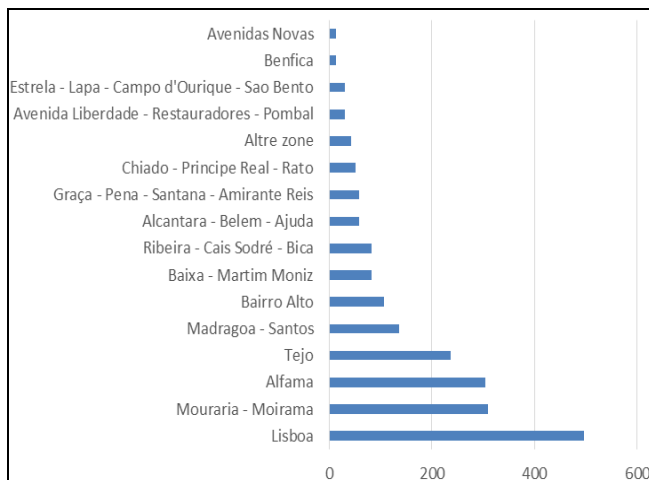


Figure 5. Lyrics: number of total occurrences of toponyms by area/neighborhood (Source: elaboration on data <https://www.portaldofado.net/>)

By crossing the findings obtained through field missions with data from different sources (Portal do Fado; Museu do Fado; Google map), it turned out that as of March 2022, despite the difficulties associated with the pandemic, there are in Lisbon at least 53 places open to the public (*casas de fado*, *tascas*, theatres, clubs, bars) where it is possible to listen to fado according to a regular schedule⁵: of these, 29 are located in Alfama, 10 in Bairro Alto, 4 in Chiado and 4 in the Mouraria. The remaining 6 ones are distributed among other central and semi-central districts. A high geographical coincidence between places where fado is performed and places of tourism can be deduced: Alfama, that hosts more than half of the entire fado offer, is perhaps the district that has been most profoundly transformed by the tourism, to the point of being almost completely monopolized by it; it is therefore not surprising that almost all *casas de fado* in Alfama primarily target an audience of tourists (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Tourist advertisement for a *Casa de fado* in Alfama (Source: author)

The same can be said for Bairro Alto that, together with the neighboring Chiado, is the main area for evening and night entertainment, especially for younger tourists. It also has a historical heritage in this sense: the first *casas de fado*, born around the 1930s, were mainly located in this district. Mouraria, which is the neighbourhood most intrinsically linked to the fado of the origins and which is building its tourist image also on the “fado identity”⁶, paradoxically has only 4 places offering fado performances. But the paradox is apparent: the tourist development of Mouraria is still at an early stage, while its reputation as a “difficult” neighbourhood, to be avoided at night-time – that is, in the hours typically dedicated to fado – resists. Moreover, it should be stressed that fado performances aimed at local people are often extemporaneous and escape institutional venues, official schedules and thorough advertising: this is certainly the case for Mouraria.

Still on the topic of the tourist relevance of cultural traditions, it has been rightly stated that “tourism relies on evidence of cultural activities, incidents from the past, tangible artefacts that can be photographed and attract tour buses and backpackers, a process that ‘reflects the importance of such cultural forms as museums, art galleries and historic houses in tourist consumption patterns’ (Quinn, 1996: 383)” (cit. in Connell and Gibson, 2003: 222). Therefore, if the living tradition of fado – whether authentic or artificial – is constantly renewed in the *casas de fado* and in the *tascas* of Lisbon, its historical memory, also for the benefit of the tourist market, is entrusted to some emblematic places. Among

⁵ Not considering bars, restaurants, *tascas* and clubs where it's possible to attend fado performances episodically or as special events.

⁶ In the guidelines of the public recovery project of the Mouraria, fado is defined as an “unavoidable brand identity” for the neighbourhood (<https://www.renovaramouraria.pt/>).

these, the Fado Museum should be mentioned, inaugurated in 1998, the year in which the Portuguese capital hosted the International Exposition and which marked a turning point for its tourism development. As stated in the presentation notes that can be found in the official website, the Fado Museum was born with the intention of celebrating “the exceptional value of Fado as an identifying symbol of the City of Lisbon, its deep roots in the country’s cultural tradition and history, its role in the affirmation of cultural identity and its importance as a source of inspiration and intercultural exchange between peoples and communities” (<https://www.museudofado.pt/missao>, our translation from Portuguese). In addition to the Museum, there are several other “places of fado” which are not only of historical but also of tourist interest. In this regard, we can mention the Amália Rodrigues House Museum, located in the São Bento area and managed since 2001 by the homonymous foundation, and the Fernando Maurício House in Mouraria, dedicated to the memory of the famous *fadista*, open to the public in 2015 with the support of the Fado Museum.

In recent years there has also been an increase of guided tours specifically addressed to fado in its many aspects: history, traditions, legends, characters, places, methods, rituals⁷. These tours generally consist of a walking itinerary in the “places of fado”, located between Alfama and Mouraria, during which the tourist is provided with the basic notions of this musical genre and its history. They end in a *casa de fado* or in a *tasca*, where the program includes live performances and a dinner based on traditional cuisine. Finally, the souvenir market should be mentioned: the “symbols” *par excellence* of fado – the Portuguese guitar and the figure of Amália Rodrigues – are now among the most typical elements of the city and its iconography: their serial reproduction helps to feed a “consumerist” vision of this musical genre. Furthermore, fado records and DVDs are widely available not only in specialized shops, but also in those commercial facilities typically intended for tourists (souvenir shops, museum shops, stalls, etc.) (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Stall in the *Feira da Ladra* market near Alfama, very popular with tourists (Source: author)



Figure 8. “O fado mora aqui! (Fado lives here!)”. Interior of the *tasca* “Os amigos da Severa”, Mouraria (Source: author)

CONCLUSIONS

“*O fado é canção bairrista*” (fado is a song of the neighbourhood), says the text of “Fado Antigo”, written by the famous interpreter and author Manuel de Almeida (www.portaldofado.net). The fado is therefore essentially a song of the *bairro*, “of the neighborhood”, and of the *bairro* – literally and metaphorically understood – it sings the stories, the people, the places, the feelings, the passions. Despite its intrinsically “local” nature, fado nevertheless has a universal inspiration and an expressive force that have allowed several generations of performers, from Amália Rodrigues to Mariza, to establish themselves worldwide. The growing international reputation of fado and the intense tourist development that Portugal and Lisbon have experienced since the eighties have paved the way for a tourist dimension of this musical genre. The establishment of the Fado Museum and other memorial sites (the Amália Rodrigues House Museum, the Fernando Maurício House), as well as the inclusion of fado on the Unesco List, represent further steps in this direction.

The use of fado as a tourist resource is, in our opinion, a clearly visible process, well evidenced by the constant increase of what we could define as “indicators” of this phenomenon: the high percentage of *casas de fado* and other fado places (like *tasca*s and theatres) whose musical offer is clearly aimed at an audience of “laypersons” (which are, in fact, tourists); thematic tours, which are obviously conceived for the tourist market; souvenirs inspired by the “symbols” of fado; the selling of fado records and DVDs even in commercial spaces intended for tourists.

Coming back to the initial questions of this work, we first believe that a “fado soundscape” is not only a suggestive metaphor, but an expression capable of describing the visual and auditory impact of the elements mentioned above, which make fado and its cultural traits a specific component of everyday life in Lisbon, clearly perceptible by those who live in the city, or at least in some of its neighborhoods, such as Alfama, Mouraria and Bairro Alto, in a stable or a sporadic way.

The answer to the second question – whether fado corresponds to an authentic feeling or it is rather turning into a tourist product – is more demanding, as authenticity and artificiality are subjective categories that greatly depend on individual

⁷ Through a simple search on google carried out on April 4, 2022, it turned out that at least 22 local tour operators and international platforms offer fado tours of different prices and durations.

sensitivity and perception. On the basis of the field experience, it is possible to state that both options are true in the case of fado. On the one hand, there is a simplified and stereotyped approach, based on the proposition of anecdotes, *clichés* and catchy melodies to an audience of novice and non-Portuguese-speaking tourists. On the other hand, exists – and resists – an authentic approach, based on a sense of belonging to the *bairro* and its culture, of which fado is certainly an essential element. We could find this mood above all in Mouraria, despite the ongoing transformation of the socio-economic fabric and the rapid, albeit initial, advance of tourism in what can be defined as a “frontier” district (Figure 8).

In neighbourhoods like Alfama and Bairro Alto, on the contrary, the success of tourism tends to emphasize a “commercial” vision of this musical genre. The hope therefore is that the tourist dimension of fado will not replace completely the “*bairrista*” feeling, but rather that they can trigger a virtuous circle to keep this tradition alive and vital.

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