

Article

Cultivating Slow Curating in Times of Acceleration

Alice Semedo *  and Fabiana Dicuonzo 

Transdisciplinary Research Centre Culture, Space and Memory, Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
University of Porto, Via Panorâmica s/n, 4150-564 Porto, Portugal; up202202184@edu.letras.up.pt

* Correspondence: asemedo@letras.up.pt

Abstract: This paper introduces key ideas and issues in the changing debates on heritage practices and sustainability. It draws attention to the capacities of heritage to activate and unfold new meanings and increase the resilience of territories and landscapes—namely depopulated ones—through slow curating processes. We will argue that slow curating processes cultivate ‘slower’ ways of knowing, act as seedbeds of emergence and as catalysts to transformation that recuperate the pieces of a fragmented territory while also helping to re-locate its existence—its past, its present and its future—in balance with and within a constellation of living networks. Through heritage criticality, we will investigate territory interpretation and intervention examples that adopt disruptive, cross-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary approaches, including artistic, architectural, urban, performative, and curatorial practice, as effects and methods of slow curating taken as a public activity. We will pay special attention to its production contexts (reasons, subjects. . .), to what and how resonance dispositions and axes are produced within these non-linear public acts, and how the co-presence of past and the future is extended so heritage public acts may engender new forms—of knowledge, being. . .—and become a resource for current times.

Keywords: slow curating; slow memory; displacement; recomposition; communities; rural areas



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1. Introduction

This article introduces key ideas and issues within the evolving debates on heritage practices and sustainability. It highlights the capacity of heritage to activate and unfold new meanings and to enhance the resilience of territories and landscapes—especially depopulated areas—through slow curating processes. Drawing on approaches from “slow memory”, we argue that slow curating cultivates critical practices of knowledge and engagement, acting as incubators of emergence and catalysts for transformation, recovering fragments of a fragmented territory while realigning its existence—past, present, and future—in harmony within a constellation of living networks.

Adopting a critical post-humanist approach to heritage, we explore examples of interpretation and territorial intervention that incorporate border-crossing and disruptive practices, including arts-based, architectural, performative, and curatorial approaches as methods and outcomes of slow curating as a public activity. Special attention will be paid to production contexts (reasons, agents. . .) and the “what” and “how” of producing dispositions and axes of resonance, examining “how” the co-presence of past and future is expanded in these non-linear public acts to foster new ways of knowing and being, transforming them into a resource for contemporary times.

The first part of this essay explores how the concept of slow curating defines a specific role in the design and implementation of such projects and encourages alternative ways of

“thinking through and with” places and curatorial practices. The second part expands on these considerations, examining two curatorial projects developed by different actors in rural areas.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. *Curating as a Verb*

Julie Carson [1] suggests that we should think of curating as a verb, highlighting its agentic and mutable nature, transforming it from a noun to an action. Viewing curating as a process, Carson recognises its incompleteness and the promise of becoming, stressing how curatorial action emerges in constant interaction with the world. Tim Ingold [2] reinforces this view by arguing that using verbs instead of nouns reveals the world’s evolving nature, where the attributes of things are processual and relational, emerging over time (p. 117). Any attributes of curatorial action are, therefore, merely means or possibilities of vital processes for a given intention. Maria Lind [3] also speaks of curating as a verb when she refers to this curatorial action as a method of practice “beyond art” and “towards the cross-disciplinary” (p. 9).

Considering curating as a verb means rejecting an essentialist view, seeing it as something indeterminate and situational, dependent on practical use and the contexts in which it takes place. In this sense, curatorial practice as a processual action is never a final state, but rather a constantly evolving aspiration, a “not-yet being” [2] (p. 118). Thus, meaning emerges from its relationships and contexts throughout curatorial practice, challenging universal or rigid definitions. Curating along these lines manifests itself as a field of multiple possibilities, where identity and meaning are not predetermined but are configured in a continuous process of resistance and transgression. One could even say that the singularity of curating refers to the practice of the self as a process of the subject constitution that is immanent and dynamic. Rather than defining what curating is, it is important here to understand how it happens—a process of continuous interaction and transformation in which its uses, inclinations, and intentions construct meaning. In this case, the curatorial action takes place in slowness.

2.2. *Slow Curating*

The concept of curating is given here with a new aesthetic and ethical dimension by adjectivalising curatorial action with slowness. Associating “slow” with a verb is not only about qualifying an action but also about intensifying and complicating its meaning. Slowness, thus, becomes an active agent that modifies the curatorial action, allowing it to suspend itself between what it does and how it does it, going beyond a simple choice of rhythm to achieve an ethical and poetic stance. This movement is in line with what Jacques Rancière [4] describes as the aesthetic reconfiguration of the sensible, creating new resonances and broadening the political and affective reach of curatorial practice. Let us then outline the meanings and practices born of this adjectivisation, offering a brief yet evocative exploration of their resonance within curatorial methodologies.

One important aspect to consider when thinking of slow curating is that it proposes a break with the fast-paced rhythm of capitalist modernity, characterised by the pressure for productivity and immediate efficacy. By challenging the utilitarian temporality of neoliberal politics, slow curating invites an extended experience, privileging duration and presence as conditions for meaning making. According to authors such as Megan Johnston [5], slow curating represents a form of resistance to productivist time, becoming an ecology of influences and organic relationships. This approach ensures that community voices and knowledges are not only included but central to the process, creating spaces where curators and communities collaborate to shape shared cultural narratives. Diverging from

established curatorial methods, which are often shaped by the pressures of acceleration and spectacle, slow curating insists on a relational ethics of becoming-with. It privileges co-creation with communities and landscapes, embedding itself in the temporal and spatial specificities of place. It is therefore not just a matter of lingering but of establishing forms of connection and coexistence that allow all the entities involved to contribute to an experience that, unlike more traditional curatorial approaches, values the emergent and the uncontrollable. By resisting universalisation and embracing situatedness, slow curating transforms the curator's role from one of authority to one of facilitation. This approach invites us to rethink curatorial work as a dynamic, processual practice—one that activates potential memories, forges new connections, and reimagines futures through the lens of care and collective transformation.

Building on this and inspired by Hartmut Rosa's concept of "deep time" [6], slow curating proposes a more resonant connection with the world while embracing uncertainty and openness to the unexpected. In this sense, it addresses Chantal Mouffe's notion of the "political", where dissent and plurality are essential to democratic space [7]. Slow curating rejects temporal hegemony as a political practice and constructs a new temporality that embraces dissent and plurality. This political position supports slow memory and open experimentation with time and space and favours a view of the world as a pluri-verse. In this way, slow curating goes beyond a mere aesthetic of deceleration to become a political and ethical practice that redefines the understanding of places and temporalities. It allows one to experience time and space as a horizon of resonant meanings, where dissent and dialogue become tools for constructing a collective and democratic experience.

A further point to consider is that slow curating takes place in marginal spaces, allowing it to transgress borders—not as rigid divides but as zones where diverse elements can be placed in close proximity, fostering connections, creating cross-pollinations, and producing junctions for a relational ecology that maps new paths and articulates different locations [8] (p. 1). These curatorial practices, aligned with slow memory, use productive resistance to uphold the material integrity of places through dialectical approaches and curatorial materialism [9]. They address urgent global challenges and create new performative alliances by challenging dominant disciplinary systems and engaging in "epistemic disobedience" [10]. This transgressive approach pushes the limits of what can be said, shown, and seen, redrawing boundaries, and fostering a relational imaginary that connects places, times, and beings. It has introduced complex, open ways of thinking, knowing, and caring that play a vital role in the circulation of socio-aesthetic imagination, collective memory, and gestures of resilience while addressing the complexities in the world—especially across time, space, and value.

2.3. *Slow Memory and Slow Curating*

What, then, is slow memory, and what affinities might it weave with the ethos and gestures of slow curating? Jenny Wüstenberg's concept of slow memory [11] challenges the contemporary obsession with immediacy, proposing a memory that privileges the continuity and depth of experiences over singular events, echoing Augustine's concept of time as the three presents of past things (memory), of present things (perception), and of future things (hope) that inhabit the human mind [12] (p. 284). For Augustine, these three times are not independent of each other but coexist subjectively in the mind in an "out-of-joint" temporality [13] (p. 20), where past, present, and future interact in complex ways. This concept deconstructs temporal linearity and allows for the simultaneous interaction of multiple temporal layers, where the past continuously shapes and interferes with the present.

Wüstenberg [11] suggests that slow memory emphasises subtle and continuous transformations that include invisible crises, such as climate change and deindustrialisation, which are forms of “slow violence” and remain as invisible resistances. These transformative memories remain latent in the everyday as “potential memories” [14] (p. 183), waiting to be reactivated and reintegrated into the present in a living way. This approach suggests that time is a field of potentiality in constant suspension, where past and present coexist in negotiation, fostering an experience of memory and history that remains open and dynamic. Drawing on Derrida’s vision of spectrality [13], slow memory also makes the past present in a spectral way, not as nostalgia but as a space that accommodates hidden injustices and resistances. By proposing a transition from *lieux de mémoire* to *milieux de mémoire*, Wüstenberg reinforces memory as a continuous presence in the everyday, where slowness allows the past to emerge at its own pace, challenging the Enlightenment tradition with almost forgotten modes of recollection, such as the memory of the wind or the river.

In this view, slow memory constitutes a form of resistance to the slow violence of invisible transformations and promotes an ethical and compassionate understanding of temporality. This embracing of slow time, so valued by Wüstenberg, goes beyond the immediate present, amplifying the “present of future things” and recognising time as a space of experimentation and potentiality, where what “is not yet” coexists with what “is” in a dialogue that continually reconfigures our reality and opens up possibilities for alternative futures [15] (pp. 52–53).

Slow memory and slow curating intertwine in a profound alliance against the relentless acceleration of contemporary life, advocating for a deliberate engagement with time that honours the complexities of human experience. Embracing the continuity and depth of memory over singular events, they foster spaces where past, present, and future coexist in a dynamic interplay. This synergy allows for the reactivation of latent memories and the emergence of silenced narratives, facilitating an ethical relationality that reconnects communities with their landscapes and histories. By dwelling in this temporal openness, slow curating becomes a practice of care and potentiality, resonating with the ethos of slow memory in its quest to unveil invisible crises and foster transformative possibilities.

In contrast to traditional curatorial approaches that often prioritize spectacle, linearity, and commodification, slow curating resists such reductive frameworks by prioritising co-creation, participatory processes, and situated engagements. Also, it challenges hegemonic narratives and the anthropocentric gaze, echoing Braidotti’s posthuman ethics by acknowledging the interconnectedness of humans, non-humans, and the environment. This departure not only redefines the role of the curator but also invites a reimagining of heritage and memory practices—transforming them into inclusive, dynamic, and ethically grounded endeavours that open pathways toward alternative futures rooted in compassion and collective resonance.

2.4. Practices and Tactics of Resistance

Considering the above-mentioned aspects, slow curating positions itself as a practice of resistance, operating across diverse temporalities—past, present, and future—and between spaces and human and non-human entities. A practice of resistance that proposes a politicised social intervention model and uses “dialectical contemporaneity” [16] to integrate multiple times and conflicting narratives. This approach fosters a field of critical memory, where dissent challenges hegemonic narratives, allowing alternative and marginalised memories to gain space and expression.

To achieve this, slow curating employs diffractive tactics, such as (dis)placement and (re)composition, to destabilise fixed meanings by emphasising dynamic and interdependent relationships between objects, identities, temporalities, and spatialities. These

practices allow for new interpretations and challenge established narratives, opening up the curatorial field to complexity and transformation. By acting on objects and spaces, slow curating creates zones of potentiality where time and space are seen as constantly renewing elements, allowing memories to adapt and reconfigure. Rather than simply preserving heritage, this approach transforms it into a living process of signification and resistance, where the past is continuously activated, and the present becomes a platform for dissent and social transformation.

2.4.1. (Dis)placement

In slow curating, the act of displacing objects or concepts to new spaces allows their meanings to be redefined through interactions with other elements and settings. This practice goes beyond the physical relocation of an object, transforming the relationship between the object and its environment, allowing space for multiple, fluid interpretations and meanings. Inspired by Braidotti [17] and Barad [18], displacement can be seen as the creation of relational spaces open to becoming, where each object can shape and be shaped, fostering an ethic of deep attentiveness and a renewed sensitivity to the resonances and memories that emerge within the exhibition space.

With this nomadic approach, slow curating breaks with rigid hierarchies and anthropocentric perspectives, demonstrating the fluidity of entities and the co-constitution of meanings in relationships. In this sense, slow curatorial practice embraces movement as a central value, allowing the meanings of objects to evolve across multiple contexts and interactions. Rather than preserving a fixed narrative, nomadic slow curating stimulates the continuous transformation and expansion of meanings, developing according to contexts and encounters in a process that rejects authoritative interpretations and opens space for a multiplicity of readings.

In this way, curatorial displacement becomes an action of “becoming other”—an intra-active process, as defined by Barad [18]—in which both object and context are transformed through interaction. From this perspective, slow curating activates a network of relationships in which objects, places, and participants co-construct meanings. Latour’s [19] actor-network theory enriches this vision by emphasising that all entities have agency through their relationships. Displacement is thus not just spatial movement but a tactic for reconfiguring the entire network of meanings, where value emerges from the collaboration between participants, objects, and spaces, promoting a more organic and shared interpretation.

2.4.2. (Re)composition

Displacement is inseparable from recomposition, as the introduction of objects into new networks creates a reconfiguration of the relationships, functions, and meanings involved. Each object, when repositioned, interacts with new elements, altering its connections and challenging any notion of a fixed identity or static structure. This continuous recomposition reflects the relational and mutable nature of meanings, where displacement paves the way for a network of new connections and interpretations. Inspired by Latour’s [19] concept of “assemblage”, slow curating eschews imposed meanings and embraces fragmentation and fluidity, proposing a practice of recombining cultural and contextual elements without aiming for rigid unity.

In this curatorial action, recomposition operates as a collaborative and inclusive process, inviting participants to co-create meaning in a dynamic of continuous discovery. By actively involving participants, slow curating becomes a field of experimentation where traditional hierarchies are challenged, and each new interaction is an opportunity for transformation. The active participation of communities expands the possibilities of

interpretation. It transforms the curatorial action into a collective, affective, and dialogical experience in which the meaning of objects is continuously expanded and enriched through collaboration.

2.4.3. Defetishisation and Profanation

In *Radical Museology* [16], Claire Bishop defines defetishisation as a curatorial strategy that uses juxtaposition to challenge the traditional aura and authority of objects, exposing them to critique. Displacement and recomposition allow slow curating to displace and reposition objects, defetishising and subverting sacralised interpretations by placing them in new contexts alongside disruptive elements. This tactic creates a diffractive space where meanings overlap, inviting critical and complex interpretations. Agamben [20] describes this movement as “profanation”; by returning objects to everyday use, the process desacralises them, making them more accessible and relatable. This practice encourages a critical approach, demystifying cultural hierarchies and revealing the fluidity of the objects’ value. Furthermore, activating slow memory allows each interaction with the object to unfold new layers of meaning, fostering a prolonged reflection and a deeper connection with the past, heritage, and places.

2.4.4. Unlearning

The processes of displacement and recomposition in slow curating reveal the potential of the liminal zone to stimulate unlearning and becoming-other. By reorganising objects, subjects, and practices, slow curating allows previously ignored layers of meaning to surface, promoting what bell hooks [21] describes as radical opening spaces—spaces where rigid assumptions are unlearned and more critical, open interpretations are embraced. This liminality creates an environment where fixed identities dissolve, allowing for a multiplicity of readings and relationships that transcend rigid anthropocentric categories. In constant recomposition, these interspaces allow all involved—objects, subjects, and practices—to transform and mutually influence each other.

Agamben’s [22] threshold theory reinforces the idea of the liminal zone as a space of potentiality where conventional meanings are suspended, allowing for new forms of expression and understanding. Slow curating uses this liminality to create moments of ambiguity and experimentation, where the meanings of objects and ideas remain in flux, continuously reconfigured through arts based practices and diverse contexts. This liminal space acts as a resonance field [6] where slow memory intertwines past, present, and future, forming a living network where each encounter adds new interpretative layers. The liminal zone of potentiality thus provides a dynamic co-presence in which participants are engaged in an experience of transformation and discovery, resonating with the memories and interactions that emerge within it.

2.4.5. Deep Listening

By incorporating the practice of deep listening, slow curating commits to an ethics of radical attention, allowing each object, subject, and context to have a voice. Listening here is not passive; it requires the slow curatorial action of actively tuning in to the resonances and meanings that emerge from trusting and care-full interactions in slowness. This kind of listening promotes a more empathetic and reflective relationship with other actants in the world, establishing an ethical and continuous presence that embraces the complexities and nuances arising from the context [21].

Inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy’s [23] concept of “presence”, slow curating transcends the mere “showing up” or occupation of space and becomes an experience of “inhabiting the world” in a relational and open way. For Nancy, presence is a “being-with” in which individual existence is interwoven in the world and with others in an interdependent way.

In the context of slow curating, this presence suggests a space where objects, participants, and the environment co-construct each other in mutual resonance. Slow curating thus invites co-presence—a “being with”—that embraces and respects stories, affections, and temporalities. It promotes a slow curatorial practice in which each element is defined and transformed by the relationships it forms.

Having explored the theoretical underpinnings of slow curating as a practice of temporal and relational resistance, we now turn to two case studies—Experimenta Paisagem and Fertile Futures—that exemplify its principles in practice. These projects demonstrate how slow curating can foster heritage preservation, community empowerment, and ecological renewal through embedded and participatory methodologies.

3. Objectives and Methods

To investigate the practices taking place on the ground, two case studies have been selected for their capacity to engage with the aforementioned themes of resistance and transgression, as well as for their ability to curate various territories within the Central Region of the Interior of Portugal (Figure 1). These case studies are Experimenta Paisagem, a long-term territorial transformation project that has been active since 2019, and The International Summer Seminar held in July 2023 in Fundão as part of Fertile Futures, Portugal’s contribution to the 18th International Architecture Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia 2023.

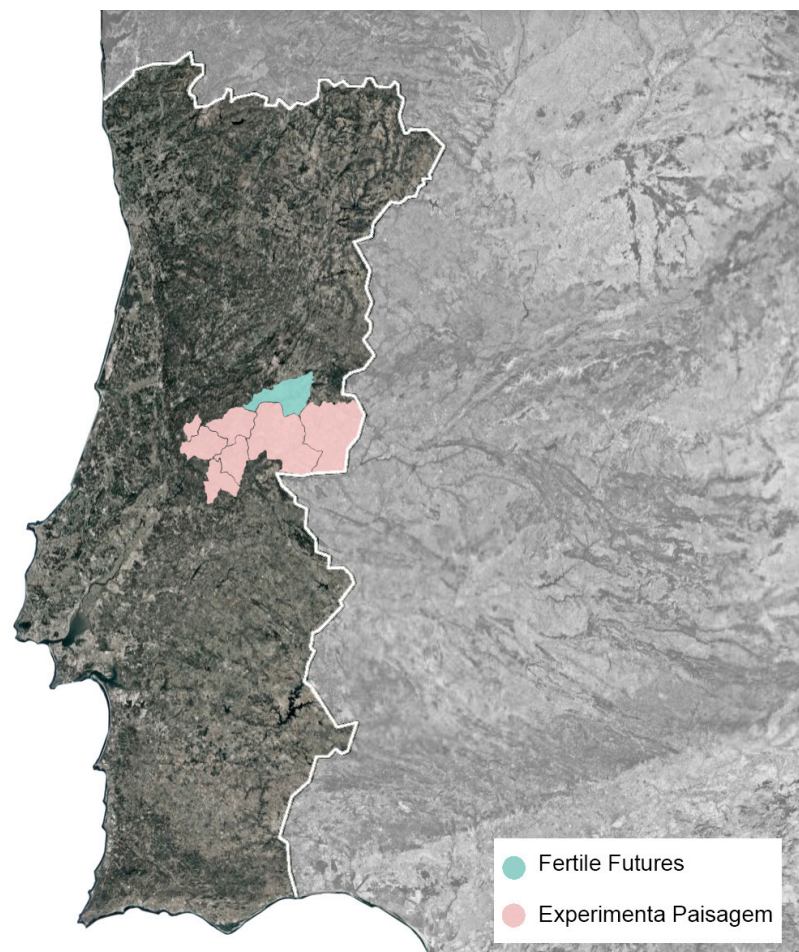


Figure 1. Location of the municipalities’ areas involved in the two projects in the Central Interior area of Portugal. Elaboration by the authors on the base of Google Earth photo.

The aim of this study is to explore, understand, and analyse the *how*—how the projects operated, developed strategies, and implemented methods that led to specific outcomes. This focus led to the adoption of a qualitative case study methodology centred on data gathered through desk-based research and semi-structured interviews. The case study approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of the unique dynamics of each project, providing insights into how slow curating is conceptualised, negotiated, and applied in practice.

The selection of these two case studies was guided by purposive sampling criteria, prioritising projects that, although not explicitly labelled as such, integrate the principles of slow curating. The key criteria for selection were as follows:

- The curatorial projects focused on reflective processes and fostered deep engagement with artists and local communities.
- The projects were developed and implemented within the last five years.
- The projects involved a balance of cross-disciplinary exploration, social engagement, and environmental and cultural themes, making them ideal for exploring the intersection of slow curating and social change.

Since 2019, MAG has been a key player in driving the transformation of the landscape of the central interior area of Portugal by amplifying and showcasing its hidden heritage through the *Experimenta Paisagem* open-air museum. MAG is an architecture studio founded by architects Marta Marques Aguiar and Mariana Costa. The atelier specialises in architecture and urbanism, with a focus on transforming spaces through art–architectural based interventions and community-driven place-making initiatives. The MAG team is multidisciplinary, with Mariana Costa as leader, coordinating the implementation projects for the *Experimenta Paisagem* Museum. The team includes Teresa Castro, a musical artist with a background in visual arts, who oversees communication and production activities, fostering artistic co-creation with diverse partners. António Morais, a geographer, is responsible for systematising the museum’s information as a strategic planning interface, organising all data through geographic information systems (GIS). Additionally, Sofia Marques de Aguiar, an architect and artist, is renowned for her body of work that combines various artistic media with a refined sense of composition and aesthetics.

On the other hand, *Fertile Futures* represented Portugal at the 18th *International Architecture Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia 2023*. The proposal addressed the challenges of water resource management across seven Portuguese hydro–geographies, fostering reflections on a sustainable and equitable future. The project emphasised an experimental and speculative design approach while tackling issues of freshwater management and protection in Portugal through a laboratory-based, multidisciplinary framework. The programme featured contributions from seven teams¹, following a tripartite strategy encompassing practice, theory, and teaching for the exhibition. It also included five Assemblies of Thought for knowledge exchange and a two-week *International Summer Seminar* that engaged seventy students in developing art-based solutions for the Fundão territory [24] (p. 19). This territory was chosen as the focus of this research due to its inclusion of on-site participatory laboratories aligned with the principles of slow curating. The *Fertile Futures* curatorial team was led by architect and university professor Andreia Garcia, a specialist in interdisciplinary research. She was supported by assistant curator Diogo Aguiar, founder of a multidisciplinary studio blending art and architecture, and deputy curator Ana Neiva, an architect and researcher exploring the intersection of architecture with art, society, health, and well-being.

To gain a rich and nuanced understanding of how slow curating was implemented in these two projects, the same semi-structured interview was conducted with a range of participants. The curatorial decisions were central to the process of engaging the individuals

who developed the curatorial aspects of the projects. A total of five interviews were conducted across the case studies: one for *Experimenta Paisagem* and four for *Fertile Futures*.

Over the years, *Experimenta Paisagem* has been shaped under the leadership of MAG—Marques de Aguiar atelier, which played a pivotal role in the pilot project (developing the artworks in collaboration with Sofia Marques de Aguiar). The atelier has acted as a promoter, creator, and curator of interventions in partnership with national and international stakeholders across museology, creation, research, and business development. Therefore, the interview for *Experimenta Paisagem* included one of the co-founder of MAG, Marta Aguiar, who is identified for her curatorial role in the team, in addition to being the strategic coordinator and custodian of the project's milestones across the years.

Differently, for the seminar in Fundão within *Fertile Futures*, the curators worked on the coordination, inviting the seven design teams to undertake both theoretical and practical actions in the investigated territories. To embrace the main curatorial structure and the transformative process on the field, the interviews featured architect Ana Neiva, who serves as the deputy curator of the whole project, along with representatives from three of the seven teams that contributed, adopting different approaches, to the curatorial implementation of the seminar. These representatives are Filipe Paixão from Corpo Atelier, Ana Pedro Ferreira and Pedro Maria Ribeiro from Ponto Atelier, and Daniel Duarte Pereira from Space Transcribers.

The interviews were conducted via video conference², with an average duration of 50 to 80 min. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions and audio files were shared among the authors to ensure the accuracy of the transcription process.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis and deductive coding, following the stages of familiarising with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and reporting. Cross-case analysis was also employed to identify similarities and differences in the application of slow curating across the two projects, emphasising the influence of context on curatorial practices.

4. Results

4.1. Reimagining Rural Futures Through Slow Curating

This section focuses on the case studies of *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* exemplifying the transformative potential of slow curating within the rural Portuguese context, particularly in the inland areas of its Central Region. These regions face persistent challenges, including depopulation, environmental degradation, and the erosion of cultural heritage. Through slow curating strategies such as displacement and recomposition, these projects create relational ecologies that integrate curatorial practices with the rhythms and needs of local life.

In the context of rural environments, Portugal emerges as a nation urgently requiring strategies to tackle the challenges of rural depopulation and the impacts of climate change [25] (p. 2). In recent years, the Interior Central Territory of Portugal has faced significant challenges, as highlighted in the Pinhal Interior Region Revitalisation Programme 2030³ [26]. Depopulation, ageing, low business density, vulnerability to fires, and lack of services and resources jeopardise the survival of these landscapes and their cultural heritage. In particular, the inland areas severely affected by desertification combined with intensive monocultures [27] (p. 2) challenge the population to ensure circumstances that are detrimental to their daily well-being. The area explored by *Experimenta Paisagem*, which includes Proença-a-Nova, Sertão, Oleiros, Idanha-a-Nova, Castelo Branco, Pedrógão Grande, and Mação (Figure 2), has experienced a weakening bond between its communities and the land, exacerbated by wildfires and economic shifts. Additionally, Fundão (Figure 2), one of

eight Portuguese cities included in the European Union Mission for Adaptation to Climate Change [28] (p. 157), demonstrates complex tensions between ancestral traditions and protected practices, unspoiled natural landscapes and ecological crises, including pollution from abandoned mines, migrant worker exploitation in monocultures and water shortages. Simultaneously, the heritage associated with those landscapes includes traditions of old origin and exceptional value, which are gradually being forgotten due to progressive depopulation [29] (p. 1).

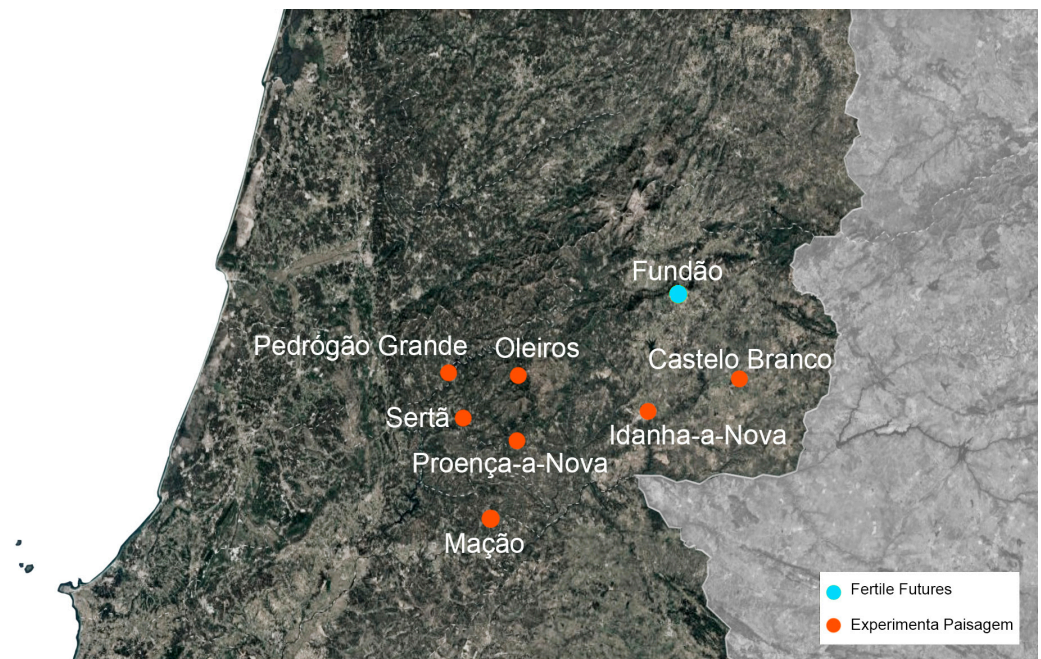


Figure 2. Identification and location of the municipalities involved in the two projects. Elaboration by the authors on the base of Google Earth photo.

Despite these pressures, small, resilient communities still inhabiting these remote places continue to preserve cultural practices and traditions. Against this backdrop, *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* have emerged as examples of slow curating, because of their ability to slow curate the territories of the Central Region of the Interior territory in Portugal. These projects challenge dominant narratives of decline, positioning art, architecture, and community engagement as tools for transformation. The different time frames in which the two projects took place define two approaches to slow curating that foster a relational ecology that embeds curatorial practices in the rhythms of local life. Their approach creates what Agamben calls a “continuative dialogue”, linking different places and times and resisting static categorisation. In this respect, *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* emphasise co-creation in response to the socio-political challenges of rural depopulation and environmental decline. By treating curatorial practice as a verb and in slowness, these initiatives are explored as acts of political transformation, engaging curators, artists, and communities in an ongoing process of questioning and reconstructing social, cultural, and political realities.

4.2. Methodological Foundations and Stakeholder Engagement of *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures*

Both *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* employed methodologies deeply rooted in slow curating principles. These methodologies emphasised participatory, relational, and situated practices, fostering long-term engagement with local communities, landscapes, and traditions. The delicate task of capturing the micro-histories of a small, increasingly

abandoned inland region challenges conventional architectural, political, and institutional frameworks that bridge memories into potential memory. These micro-histories represent the first phase of the methodology that involved designing a vision for the future and defining the method of action.

In *Experimenta Paisagem*, the methodology was anchored in iterative processes led by MAG—Marques de Aguiar atelier. The project's approach integrated planning strategies with collaborative and participatory practices, involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including local residents, diaspora communities, and enterprises. By embedding curatorial practices into the local socio-cultural fabric, the project revitalised cultural heritage and fostered sustainable development. Specific interventions include the following:

- The collaborative branding of Cunqueiros reconnected communities with their heritage and promoted tourism. These initiatives reflect a dynamic curatorial process that evolves through continuous interaction with local contexts.
- A competition for students and the *Cortiçada Art Fest*⁴ 2023, involving Ajimadeiras (a timber company), the municipality of Mação (noted for its robust forest management strategy), and Sami Rintala (known for his practice of self-construction in wood). This collaboration resulted in the creation of a toolkit and the construction of the MEP itinerant shelter using national pinewood. Although pine is typically a weak material for construction due to its tendency to warp, the challenge—and the associated business development programme—focused on presenting concrete design and construction solutions using small-scale components.
- The MEPVISIT tourism product, developed in partnership and through an invitation to participate (14 November 2024), engages regional businesses, four vocational training schools, and a management degree programme (ESGIN).

These initiatives exemplify how engaging with local communities and stakeholders can lead to innovative solutions that honour cultural heritage while addressing contemporary challenges. Marta Aguiar articulates this approach as “drawing an idea of the future”. The critical challenge for architects working with art is to identify the needs of a territory and its inhabitants, framing these concerns within a broader, transformative process. As Aguiar told us “it is the process that matters. It can be a catalyst. Catalysts can exist if the work of art and the whole process gives voice to the issues that are not just about the heritage but also about the people who live there and who have lived there and who need to be promoted to free a system”.

Fertile Futures, as the Portuguese representation at the 18th Venice Architecture Biennale, adopted a multidisciplinary methodology. It engaged seven design teams to address pressing water management issues across seven Portuguese hydro-geographies. Through its participatory framework, *Fertile Futures* facilitated assemblies of thought, critical discussions, and practical actions, such as the *International Summer Seminar* held in Fundão. This seminar brought together seventy students from national and international universities, enabling them to co-create solutions for local challenges through arts-based laboratories. By connecting theoretical discourse with practical action, the project highlighted the potential of curatorial practices to engage new generations in deeply contextual, community-centred processes and simultaneously to involve local companies linked to traditional handicrafts.

Both projects demonstrated the importance of balancing external expertise with local knowledge. In *Experimenta Paisagem*, traditional ecological practices shared by local farmers influenced the design of installations, ensuring that interventions remained rooted in local traditions. In *Fertile Futures*, curatorial methodologies integrated speculative design approaches with insights gathered from interdisciplinary workshops, highlighting the adaptability of slow curating principles to the collaboration with the administration of

Fundão that is currently facing innovation, combining investments in social inclusion with experimental initiatives that merge advanced technology and ancient practices.

These approaches exemplify how slow curating can create a relational exchange, fostering mutual learning and respect among curators, artists, and communities.

4.3. Key Results and Broader Influence

The methodologies adopted by *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* resulted in significant social, cultural, and ecological outcomes.

When public art is co-created by practices and participants, it allows for the assimilation of new meanings beyond mere aesthetic appreciation.

In *Experimenta Paisagem*, the creation of what they call an open-air museum represents the physical effort of transforming the Central Interior territory into a living cultural space composed of six permanent site-specific works together with the enhancement of a cultural walking trail within the landscape of the central Region of Portugal. The works, set in rural locations or in the vicinity of villages, start from stories, memories, or local materials for a transformation and experimentation in contemporary languages. The works are *Farol dos Ventos* in Chão do Galego (Figure 3); *Magma Cellar* in Cunqueiros; *Moongate* in Oleiros; *Véu* in Sertão; *MEP Gate* in Cernache do Bonjardim; *Menina dos Medos* and the related itinerary *Menina dos Medos* in Sobral Fernando.



Figure 3. *Farol dos Ventos* is one of the installations in the landscape of *Serra das Talhadas*, Proença-a-Nova. Reproduced with permission from Pedro Costa.

By combining art-architectural interventions with community-driven place-making initiatives, the project revitalised neglected heritage and addressed environmental challenges. Its success lies in its ability to reconnect communities with their landscapes, fostering a renewed sense of ownership and identity. Marta Aguiar confirms that “the participation of local people is more than outsiders”, enhancing the intense feeling of involvement and belonging that this initiative creates. Aguiar also expresses that a feeling of deep admiration characterised the participants who came from urban areas but that a feeling of miraculous surprise pervaded the local people, who had no idea what was possible at the beginning of the project. These efforts also contributed to sustainable business development, as seen in

projects like the wooden shelter and the Cunqueiros branding initiative, which promoted cultural and economic resilience.

Fertile Futures, with its focus on water management, demonstrated how slow curating could address global challenges through local action. The project's participatory model amplified diverse voices and created a platform for intergenerational dialogue. Its outputs included speculative design interventions, educational programmes, and assemblies of thought that left a lasting imprint on the Fundão region. *The International Summer Seminar* brought together seventy architecture students and seven multidisciplinary design teams over fifteen days. During this intensive programme, participants developed and implemented seven unique interventions across villages in the Fundão municipality, engaging with over two hundred community members. The interventions featured a range of performative events, such as Guida Marques' performances in the mining area and the storytelling performance by Space Transcribers; site-specific installations, including those by Ilhéu Atelier at Castelo Novo River Beach and Ponto Atelier's work on a fountain at the refugee centre in Fundão (Figure 4); experimental pieces by Pedrez; collaborative designs from Dulcineia Santos Studio; and an immersive artifact by Corpo Atelier near the Zêzere River.



Figure 4. The installation *Fo(u)r* by Ponto Atelier. Reproduced with permission from Ponto Atelier.

By engaging with critical socio-environmental issues, *Fertile Futures* showcased the ability of curatorial practices to navigate complex and contested terrains. In Fundão, the small rural communities showed remarkable openness to and active participation in the artistic activities, supporting the involvement of young students—many of whom were foreign and new to these contexts. The isolating nature of this setting has fostered a strong sense of empathy, allowing students and residents to work together to overcome challenges. For Ponto Atelier, the relationship with the community has proved invaluable. The ongoing collaboration between students and refugees for the realisation of this fountain in the courtyard of the old monastery has engendered “a sense of deep belonging to the fountain”, say Ponto's architects, transforming it from a transient intervention into a lasting community meeting place, shelter, and playground. In this sense, the mere presence of a

water mirror became a symbolic nexus, connecting diverse places, memories, and cultures, transcending their original meanings and exposing them to critical questioning. In these models of engagement, which are open to radical democratic expression, art can tap into deep emotional currents that resonate across the layers of time in people's souls. As Ana Neiva emphasises, "It is not just about architectural forms. It is about being. Human beings, and that was emotional".

4.4. Sustaining Transformation: The Critical Role of Funding and Partnerships

The success of these initiatives was underpinned by diverse funding sources and strategic partnerships. *Experimenta Paisagem* grew from small-scale local projects into a nationally and internationally recognised initiative, securing funding from DGARTES—Direção Geral das Artes, Creative Europe, and the Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway Grants. These resources enabled the expansion of its scope and the implementation of impactful interventions. Specific projects like the MEP Visit initiative, funded by BPI La Caixa, highlight the role of private and public partnerships in sustaining these efforts. Similarly, *Fertile Futures* relied on contributions from DGARTES—Direção Geral das Artes and municipal funding, to sustain its *Biennale* exhibition and related activities, as well as various Erasmus+ collaborations to involve multiple international universities, demonstrating how collaborative networks can amplify curatorial impact across local and international scales.

However, the reliance on short-term funding underscores the challenges of aligning slow curating's extended timelines with the temporal pressures of institutional frameworks. To ensure sustainability, these projects highlight the need for alternative funding models that prioritise long-term engagement and processual outcomes over immediate results.

4.5. Transcending Borders

Experimenta Paisagem and *Fertile Futures* transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, positioning slow curating as an ethical and political practice. By challenging fast, consumption-driven approaches, these projects foster sustainable cultural inheritance that integrates art, community, and environmental stewardship.

The findings highlight the potential of slow curating to foster co-creation, amplify underrepresented voices, and establish relational networks that connect the past, present, and future. However, the complexities of sustaining these initiatives—ensuring inclusivity, maintaining long-term funding, and balancing local and external expertise—reveal critical areas for reflection and development.

Through these efforts, slow curating emerges as a transformative approach that reimagines heritage and community engagement, fostering resilience and creativity in marginalised territories. While challenges remain, these projects underscore the relevance of slow curating as a practice of care, resistance, and co-creation, offering vital pathways for cultural and social transformation.

As Marta Aguiar mentioned in her interview, residents reported a greater appreciation for the interpretation of local heritage through art intervention. Specifically, the performative event by vertical dancer Dimegaz and musician Nahia Zubeldia realised in the place of *Farol dos Ventos*, one of the six artworks in the landscape, was a stunning moment for all the sixty people participating among residents and guests.

"The reaction of the local participants has been extremely positive. On the one hand, there's the issue that they're already associated with the project, they already have a relationship with the project, so they feel a bit at home in the activity itself. For example, this was the case with the *Farol dos Ventos* performance, where people were in their own homes receiving something unexpected. Many participants felt an emotion about how it

could be happening here. One of the expressions that one of the people watching here, who was from a nearby village, said was, this is a miracle, isn't it? That was the reaction".

Similarly, Ana Neiva highlighted the impact of the temporary interventions, emotionally testifying the involvement of the community during one of the performative events *Reparar/Repair* by Guida Marques: "The last day, we went up on the bus, and we went to see all the interventions. When Guida Marques and the students did this emotional manifesto in the mining area, everyone started crying. Like one hundred people started crying".

In *Experimenta Paisagem* efforts were made to ensure diverse community participation, including outreach to women's groups, youth organisations, and the Portuguese diaspora. For *Fertile Futures*, participatory design sessions created opportunities for diverse groups—local farmers, policymakers, refugees, and elders—to co-create solutions to local challenges, such as water management. However, challenges persist in reaching marginalised voices, particularly migrant workers involved in monoculture industries, highlighting the need for further inclusive strategies.

4.6. Evaluation of Results

The projects *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* exemplify the transformative potential of slow curating as a practice of relational and processual engagement with cultural heritage. Through participatory methodologies such as workshops, interviews, and collaborative design, these initiatives have deepened community connections, empowered local voices, and fostered a renewed sense of cultural identity and ownership. By aligning curatorial slow practices with ecological and temporal sustainability, they have addressed pressing challenges such as environmental degradation and socio-economic marginalisation in rural Portugal. Moreover, these projects have acted as a political reclamation of marginalised territories, contesting hegemonic narratives and activating latent cultural assets to foster resilience and transformation. The outcomes of these initiatives illustrate the profound impact of slow curating in reimagining heritage as a dynamic and participatory process that engages communities in shaping plural and inclusive futures.

5. Discussion

Drawing on the results presented earlier, this section explores, in particular, how slow curating disrupts dominant temporal narratives while fostering deeper resonance within local communities.

5.1. Temporal Strategies and Critical Engagement in Slow Curating

In slow curating, relationships are inscribed in a process that is disconnected from linear time, where the "present of things past", the "present of things present" and the "present of things future" are intertwined. This network of times, entities and places is recomposed into new meanings and outcomes through the strategies of displacement and recomposition that guide both practices. For the curators of *Experimenta Paisagem*, the multivocalism between populations, experts, creatives, and companies has triggered the discovery of real needs and dreams, facilitating a non-hierarchical approach guided by the common cause of recovering a territory. The team analytically engages in research, education, and dissemination to foster participatory discussions between places and audiences through talks, workshops, art curating and festivals, namely the *Cortiçada Art Fest*. This method opens up creative processes and reveals disclosed memories that, displaced from their original contexts, "become-other"⁵. The displacement strategy resulted in the creation of what Marta Aguiar refers to as an evolving open-air museum. This transformation of the central interior Portuguese landscape into a museum "desanctifies" cultural heritage and integrates it into the rhythms of daily life, inviting residents and visitors alike to

engage with memory as a living, participatory act. This approach aligns with Agamben's idea [20] of profaning what is "sacred" in order to give it back to the community, fostering a shared, dynamic sense of belonging. A sense of belonging that reduces the risk of abandonment, as Marta Aguiar points out.

As we have seen, participatory actions and collaborations are vital strategies for both projects. In this context, the methodology applied to Ana Zelaia's work in the 2024 *Cortiçada Art Fest* is worth mentioning. Building on her artistic interest and exploration of death, the artist worked with the community of women of Cunqueiros to adapt the so-called song, *Encomendação das Almas*⁶. A "community", which is different from a "site-specific intervention", as Aguiar highlights. Over the course of four intensive working sessions, the performative artist intertwined the *Commendation of Souls* tradition of the women of Cunqueiros with the commission for her work, resulting in a compelling collaborative artistic creation that is both profoundly contemporary and deeply rooted in ancestral tradition. Moreover, collaboration serves as a methodological cornerstone, enriching the team with experts offering diverse and invigorating perspectives. For instance, during the *Cortiçada Art Fest—EEA Grants Wood Edition* (2023), the partnership with Sami Rintala, a Finnish architect renowned for his expertise in wood construction, presented a unique challenge. It sought to merge the Norwegian tradition of wood craftsmanship with a distinct perspective on Portuguese cork in a self-construction workshop with architecture students. By treating time as a space for reflection and growth rather than a resource to be saved, *Experimenta Paisagem* embraces a deep time approach, where memory and heritage unfold through patience and openness, fostering an authentic connection with the place and its people, building sustainability rather than imposing quick fixes.

Conversely, with its more constrained timeframe, *Fertile Futures* embodies a curatorial practice that sows the seeds of new possibilities, fostering a space for reflection and critical engagement where future social and environmental transformations can be actively and radically reimaged. The curatorship begins with a proactive, activist proposal to overcome the ephemerality of the *Biennial* exhibition in a laboratory of horizontal learning and un-learning. Specifically, the "temporary displacement" [24] (p. 23) of architecture students from all continents to Fundão aims to establish new dialogues with a non-colonial, horizontal approach between new generations, the teams, and the local population. Over fifteen days, the teams spread over the vast area of the small villages of Fundão, contributed to the swift development of interventions, each addressing a specific issue related to the degradation of the land. They were all asked to develop the research for the exhibition; however, each team responded differently. Corpo Atelier, for example, proposed to depart from the general line with *Beatriz*, "an architectural artefact of sensorial experience", as Filipe Paixão states. By creating two parallel and opposing staircases of hay bales near the Zêzere River, they opted to create a listening tool for the pure enjoyment of the present, experiencing the touch, sounds, and smells of the anthropic and natural elements that surround the area (Figure 5). On the other hand, Space Transcribers maintained the playful approach of their exhibition in *Auto da Barca de Janeiro de Cima*. Using a "non-conventional architectural methodology", as Daniel Duarte Pereira asserts, they proposed storytelling about fabulations of the future intertwined with ancestral legends shared by the community, to imagine stories of a Fundão without water. Ponto Atelier had the opportunity to work in an old monastery and refugee centre. *Fo(u)r* is the title of the intervention in which the four corners of the monastery's cloister gave rise to a square fountain created "for"⁷ its community, representing four different nationalities, religions, and cultures (Figure 4). All the interventions bring art closer to the local community, demystifying its production and enabling a direct, tactile connection through everyday, perishable materials that incorporate the tactic of defetishising art and heritage. At the same time, the findings illustrate a form of

resistance to productivist time [6], reflecting Johnston’s [5] reflexive approach to curatorial practice that values depth, duration, and community engagement.



Figure 5. The installation *Beatriz* by Corpo Atelier. Reproduced with permission from Diogo Silva.

5.2. Resonance and Disruption

Experimenta Paisagem and *Fertile Futures* demonstrate the transformative potential of slow curating by applying, for example, displacement and recomposition tactics that align with its core principles, as mentioned earlier. These strategies enable the integration of elements into new contexts, fostering reinterpretations of heritage and encouraging communities to challenge traditional narratives. This process reflects a “not-yet” approach, allowing the continuous reimagining of past and present to shape emergent futures. Such an approach exemplifies Mouffe’s concept of “agonistic pluralism” [7], where curatorial spaces become arenas for dissent and dialogue, promoting shared agency and challenging hegemonic narratives. By doing so, these projects create opportunities for community engagement and a dynamic connection to place, redefining curatorial practices as acts of cultural and social resistance.

The resonance created by these initiatives stems from their ability to immerse themselves deeply in marginal territories, reactivating latent memories and fostering a sense of belonging. In *Experimenta Paisagem*, slow curating unfolds through a “deep time” approach, as articulated by Wüstenberg [11] and Rosa [6]. This temporal framework facilitates an authentic connection with the landscape and its people, ensuring that memory and heritage evolve through sustained and reflective engagement. This practice transforms cultural heritage from a static relic into a living, participatory resource integrated into the rhythms of daily life. For example, the evolving ‘open-air museum’ curated by *Experimenta Paisagem* exemplifies this approach, using site-specific installations and cultural walking trails to reimagine the central inland region of Portugal. These initiatives actively counteract rural depopulation and environmental degradation by cultivating collective agency and enhancing the region’s cultural and social vitality.

Similarly, *Fertile Futures* exemplifies the potential of slow curating to inspire critical reflection and radical imagination. *The International Summer Seminar* in Fundão, a temporary intervention within this broader project, fostered a collaborative environment where students, architects, and local residents engaged in a dialogue about the socio-environmental challenges facing the region. This engagement led to the development of site-specific installations that addressed issues such as water scarcity and the preservation of local traditions. For instance, the installation *Beatriz* by Corpo Atelier used sensory elements like hay bales to create a reflective space that invites participants to engage with the natural and anthropic elements of the landscape. Similarly, *Space Transcribers* weave storytelling and ancestral legends to inspire imaginative responses to the challenges of water management, while Ponto Atelier's intervention in a historic monastery incorporates cultural diversity into its design, symbolising the harmonious coexistence of multiple identities and traditions.

The curatorial actions of these projects also reflect a profound ethical commitment to inclusivity and relationality. By decentring institutional authority, *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* invite plural voices into the memory-making process, fostering shared ownership of heritage and place. This approach brings into line Mouffe's [7] vision of a "pluri-verse", where diverse histories and perspectives coexist and interact. For example, the temporary interventions of *Fertile Futures* challenged conventional authorship by foregrounding collaborative processes that blended ancestral knowledge with contemporary practices. These actions demonstrate how ephemeral, community-driven initiatives can create lasting emotional connections and inspire ongoing dialogue about identity, heritage, and sustainability.

The transformative potential of slow curating, as demonstrated in these case studies, finds echoes in other memory projects that centre community participation and temporal multiplicity. For instance, heritage initiatives in post-industrial regions or rural revitalisation schemes elsewhere⁸ have similarly embraced slow time to repair fragmented landscapes and recover cultural meanings. Rather than treating memory as static or purely commemorative, these projects activate what Wüstenberg [11] terms 'potential memories'—latent processes through which forgotten voices and histories regain visibility and ongoing processes through which the past and present intersect to generate futures. Yet, where *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* stand apart is their emphasis on memory as a co-creative process. This approach not only decentres the role of institutional authority but also invites new, plural voices into the memory-making process, fostering shared ownership over place and meaning. The decelerating power of slow curating is evident in the way these projects create latent fields of possibility, where past traditions, memories, and stories resurface over time. These actions challenge the "slow violence" of depopulation, environmental neglect, and cultural erasure that often define rural and marginal territories. Rather than imposing immediate solutions, these projects privilege depth, duration, and relational engagement, fostering cultural resilience through the gradual reactivation of collective memory. The participatory nature of these initiatives is central to their success. As we have seen, *Experimenta Paisagem* exemplifies this by integrating local voices into the curatorial process through workshops, artistic collaborations, and community events. Likewise, *Fertile Futures* fostered horizontal learning and unlearning through its seminar, where students and locals co-created installations that addressed regional challenges, blending theoretical discourse with practical interventions.

5.3. Implications for Cultural Resilience and Sustainability

The broader implications of slow curating extend well beyond these case studies. Slow curating redefines our relationship with heritage, memory, and place by embracing a posthuman ethics of care and relationality. It challenges anthropocentric hierarchies

and instead offers a pluri-verse of meanings—an inclusive framework where humans, landscapes, objects, and temporalities interact symbiotically. As Felix Guattari suggests [30], such practices establish ecosophic relations that harmonise the social, environmental, and cultural spheres. This approach is not merely a curatorial strategy but also an ethical commitment to fostering co-resistance and co-creation.

Slow curating provides a counter-narrative to the forces of acceleration that dominate cultural production. By privileging slowness, resonance, and connection, it cultivates futures that transcend linear constraints, opening spaces for collective imagination and action. Projects like *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* illustrate how slow curating nurtures emergent plural knowledges, demonstrating that memory is a living process requiring careful tending to reawaken its transformative power. These projects exemplify how marginalised landscapes can become *milieux de mémoire*—spaces where past, present, and future interact fluidly.

5.4. Challenges and Limitations

The slow curatorial approach exemplified by *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* represents a radical ethical and political stance emphasising relationality, care, and an expanded temporal framework for engagement. By resisting the accelerated rhythms of capitalist modernity, slow curating redefines curatorial practices as acts of care and co-becoming, deeply embedded within specific communities, landscapes, and materialities. Yet, as with all transformative methodologies, slow curating is not without its limitations. “The limits of our practice”, Ana Neiva emphasises, “are that architecture cannot solve the world on their own, that sometimes we just need to be more political, and we need to be more social, and we need to focus on what can we do to change the world without building or without designing? And that was so looking back, it’s, I would say, self-critique, that we should learn from this process because we were very, very optimistic, and that’s also interesting, the way the different teams reacted, but they also showed us our limits and our capacity of what an exhibition or what architecture can do to the world”. These challenges, far from diminishing its value, highlight areas of friction that offer opportunities for further refinement, innovation, and research.

One of the most pressing challenges lies in the time-intensive nature of slow curating. Space Transcribers put it this way: “This kind of project have a deadline, everything afterwards is out of sustainability, it is difficult”. By prioritising prolonged engagement and ethical resistance to immediacy, slow curating often clashes with institutional frameworks that demand measurable outputs and prioritise short-term deliverables. Funding cycles rarely align with the extended timelines required to foster meaningful relationships and realise transformative processes. In *Experimenta Paisagem*, for example, the reliance on sustained engagement revealed the fragility of financial structures designed for rapid outcomes. While the project successfully revitalised cultural landscapes and strengthened community bonds, its long-term sustainability depended on rethinking funding models to support emergent and processual practices. Without alternative funding mechanisms—such as long-term or multi-phase grants—projects like this risk being constrained by systems that favour immediacy over depth. This disconnect underscores the urgent need for funding models that align with the temporal demands of slow curating, enabling it to fulfil its transformative potential.

Another critical challenge is the potential for community fatigue and uneven participation [31]. Community engagement lies at the heart of slow curating, foregrounding shared ownership and collective agency. However, the prolonged nature of these engagements can overburden communities with limited material, temporal, and emotional resources, leading to disengagement. Moreover, uneven participation levels risk amplifying dominant

voices while sidelining marginalised perspectives. In *Fertile Futures*, participatory workshops facilitated dialogue between diverse groups, including students and local residents. Still, the interviews revealed that established community leaders were overrepresented, while migrant workers and other marginalised voices remained underrepresented. Despite concerted efforts to ensure inclusivity, challenges arose in engaging groups such as migrant workers in the region's monoculture industries. Language barriers, precarious working conditions, and limited availability posed significant hurdles. These dynamics highlight the structural challenges of engaging transient or economically precarious populations, who may lack the time, resources, or sense of belonging necessary to participate fully in curatorial processes.

Ensuring inclusivity requires deliberate strategies to amplify marginalised voices while mitigating participant fatigue. Future iterations of slow curating could benefit from adopting further flexible participation models, facilitated dialogues to level power dynamics, and partnerships with local organisations to build trust and accessibility. These approaches would help sustain broad-based involvement and enhance the ethical dimensions of slow curating.

A further limitation lies in balancing external expertise with local knowledge. The success of slow curating depends on ensuring that external inputs enrich, rather than overshadow, community contributions. In *Experimenta Paisagem*, for example, traditional practices shared by local farmers influenced the design of installations, reflecting the community's historical relationship with the landscape. Similarly, in *Fertile Futures*, local tales and place-based narratives shaped the conceptual frameworks of the temporary interventions. By adopting the role of facilitators rather than authorities, the curatorial teams ensured that projects remained deeply connected to the lived experiences of the communities. However, this balance requires ongoing reflection to prevent the perception of external expertise as prescriptive. Transparent communication about the roles of external contributors, alongside deliberate efforts to foreground local narratives, is essential to maintaining the integrity of slow curating as a community-centred practice.

The embedded, situated nature of slow curating also presents challenges when considering how these practices might be scaled to broader contexts without compromising their integrity. Slow curating thrives on its embeddedness within specific geographies, cultural rhythms, and relational networks. Attempts to adapt these practices to urban environments or post-industrial landscapes risk diluting their ethical and relational depth. The success of *Experimenta Paisagem* stemmed from its integration with the cultural and ecological dynamics of central Portugal. Scaling this approach to other contexts requires sensitivity to local specificities and an understanding of the unique dynamics of each setting. Without careful adaptation, there is a danger that scaling could lead to superficial replication, reducing slow curating to formulaic processes that undermine its transformative essence. Research into adaptive frameworks that preserve the situated ethics of slow curating while enabling its application in diverse contexts is essential to addressing this challenge.

Finally, there is the difficulty of measuring the intangible, process-based outcomes that are central to slow curating. Traditional evaluation frameworks, rooted in linear and quantitative metrics, often fail to capture the subtle, long-term impacts of slow curating, such as shifts in collective memory, community cohesion, and relational ecologies. In *Fertile Futures*, for instance, the project successfully provoked reflective dialogues around sustainability; however, the qualitative nature of these impacts resisted conventional assessment tools. Developing evaluation tools that integrate qualitative narratives with quantitative indicators—such as changes in community engagement, ecological restoration, and cultural resilience—is essential to demonstrate the full value of slow curating to stakeholders and institutions.

These challenges, however, should not be viewed as obstacles but as opportunities to refine and expand the slow curatorial approach. They underscore critical areas for future development, including funding models that prioritise long-term engagement, inclusive strategies that amplify marginalised voices, adaptive frameworks for scalability, and qualitative and longitudinal evaluation tools. By addressing these challenges and leveraging them as sites of growth, slow curating can continue to evolve as an ethical and political practice that fosters care, relationality, and resilience. Its commitment to resisting acceleration and homogenisation offers a vital counter-narrative to contemporary cultural practices, creating spaces where memory, community, and place can be reimagined in transformative and sustainable ways. Rather than diminishing its value, these tensions affirm slow curating's relevance as a dynamic and evolving practice for the present and future.

6. Concluding Remarks

This article highlights the transformative potential of slow curating as a framework for rethinking curatorial practices in marginalised territories. The findings and reflections presented emphasise three fundamental aspects of slow curating. First is slow memory's relational and transformative nature, which underscores how participatory and situated practices deepen connections between communities, landscapes, and cultural heritage. Second, the political dimensions of resisting erasure and fostering shared ownership, challenge dominant narratives, amplify marginalised voices and redistribute power within cultural production. Finally, memory processes' future-oriented, dynamic potential, moves beyond preserving the past to actively shape inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable futures.

6.1. Future Directions for Research and Practice

The slow curatorial approach exemplified by *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* stands as a transformative methodology that reimagines the relationships between time, memory, and community. While these projects have demonstrated the profound potential of slow curating, they also reveal critical challenges and areas for refinement. To ensure the continued relevance of this practice, future research must address key areas, including scalability, inclusivity, evaluation frameworks, digital integration, and structural sustainability.

Slow curating has proven effective in rural and marginalised landscapes, where it engages deeply with local communities and ecological rhythms. However, its principles and methods must be tested in more diverse socio-cultural contexts, particularly urban and post-industrial settings. These environments, shaped by temporal pressures, institutional structures, and spatial dynamics distinct from rural areas, pose unique challenges and opportunities. Urban settings, for instance, are often marked by hyper-acceleration and fragmented social ecologies that contrast sharply with the deep temporality and relational focus of slow curating. Future research must explore how the principles of slow curating—such as relational engagement, care, and participatory processes—can resist the commodification of urban memory while fostering new connections and shared imaginaries in these rapidly changing environments. Similarly, post-industrial landscapes offer opportunities to reclaim abandoned spaces and revitalise fragmented communities, demanding adaptations that preserve the integrity of slow curating's core values.

Another critical area for development is the creation of robust evaluation frameworks capable of capturing the nuanced impacts of slow curating. Traditional metrics often fall short in assessing the long-term, qualitative outcomes central to slow curating, such as strengthened community bonds, cultural resilience, and shifts in collective memory. To address this, future research should prioritise hybrid evaluation tools that integrate

quantitative indicators—such as participation rates, ecological restoration metrics, and economic revitalisation data—with qualitative insights into relational and processual transformations. These tools would provide a comprehensive understanding of slow curating's impacts, strengthening its case for institutional and policy support while demonstrating its multifaceted value to stakeholders.

Inclusivity remains a cornerstone of slow curating, yet challenges persist in ensuring equitable participation from all community members, particularly marginalised groups such as migrant workers, transient populations, or economically precarious communities. These groups often face structural barriers to participation, including language obstacles, precarious working conditions, and limited availability. Future research must address these challenges by developing inclusive methodologies that amplify underrepresented voices. Strategies such as multilingual facilitation, flexible participation models, and cultural mediation can help ensure that slow curating remains accessible and equitable, fostering a diversity of perspectives and narratives. In doing so, slow curating can better fulfil its ethical commitment to care and co-creation, creating spaces where all community members feel empowered to contribute.

Integrating digital tools offers significant potential to complement the relational ethos of slow curating. Virtual platforms could expand the reach of slow curating, enabling trans-local dialogues, shared cultural narratives, and international collaborations. However, digital tools must remain critically grounded to avoid diluting the core principles of slowness, depth, and situatedness. Hybrid approaches, such as interactive digital workshops or virtual storytelling sessions, can enhance access and scalability while preserving the relational and processual nature of slow curating. Future research should investigate how these tools might document and archive memory processes, connect geographically dispersed communities, and extend ephemeral interventions' lives without compromising the ethical and relational foundations of the practice.

Structural sustainability is another pressing challenge for slow curating. The reliance on short-term funding cycles and temporary project frameworks threatens its capacity to foster enduring change. Memory work requires time to unfold its impacts and nurture deep relationships within communities and landscapes. Future research must explore models for long-term partnerships with cultural institutions, local organisations, and policymakers to address this challenge. These partnerships could provide the structural support necessary to sustain slow curating initiatives, ensuring their impacts resonate across generations rather than dissipating after funding cycles. Such collaborations would enable slow curating to function not as a finite project but as an ongoing relational process deeply embedded in the communities it serves.

Slow curating's strength is in its commitment to care, relational engagement, and ethical practice. By addressing these challenges and opportunities, slow curating can continue to evolve as a transformative methodology for cultural resilience, co-creation, and ecological stewardship. Future research must prioritise the adaptation of slow curating to diverse contexts, the development of inclusive and sustainable participation strategies, and creating robust tools for evaluation and scalability. As the practice integrates digital innovations and establishes long-term partnerships, it will remain a powerful tool for reimagining heritage, fostering inclusive futures, and inspiring collective transformation. In a world increasingly defined by acceleration and homogenisation, slow curating offers a vital counter-narrative—one that honours complexity, relationality, and the enduring potential of memory to reconfigure the present and imagine alternative futures.

6.2. The Ethical Commitment of Slow Curating

Slow curating is not merely a methodology but an ethical commitment—a way of remembering that holds space for forgotten stories, latent memories, and potential futures. As Wüstenberg [11] reminds us, the power of slow memory lies not in preserving the past as static but in allowing it to resonate, reconfiguring the present and inspiring new possibilities for the future. The projects examined here reflect this ethos. By resisting the forces of acceleration and fostering relational and temporal resilience, they activate the potential of slowness to nurture emergent plural knowledges. This is exemplified in *Experimenta Paisagem*, where revitalised landscapes catalyse collective imaginaries, and in *Fertile Futures*, where ephemeral acts provoke enduring reflection and action.

Through its emphasis on care, co-creation, and resistance, slow curating emerges as a transformative tool for collective future-making. It repositions curatorial practice as an act of radical hope—a commitment to the “not-yet”, that fragile space of possibility where futures can be imagined anew. Projects like *Experimenta Paisagem* and *Fertile Futures* remind us that memory is not a fixed entity but a living, relational process that, when carefully tended, holds the potential to reshape our present and inspire alternative horizons.

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Notes

- ¹ The seven teams invited are Space Transcribers, Dulcinea Santos Studio, Guida Marques, Pedrêz, Corpo Atelier, Ilhéu Atelier, and Ponto Atelier.
- ² The interviews were conducted in the following dates: Marta Aguiar, 9 October 2024; Ana Neiva, 22 October 2024; Filipe Paixao by Corpo Atelier, 7 October 2024; Ana Pedro Ferreira and Pedro Maria Ribeiro by Ponto Atelier, 10 October 2024; Daniel Duarte Pereira by Space Transcribers, 16 October 2024.
- ³ The Pinhal Interior Region encompasses all municipalities involved in the two projects, with the exception of Idanha-a-Nova. In this context, the Revitalisation Programme 2030 has proven to be a valuable tool for the updated analysis of the territory.
- ⁴ *Cortiçada Art Fest* is a free festival and a laboratory for managing art in the landscape involving collaboration with architects, designers, and artists taken place in the land of Cortiçada every year.
- ⁵ In fact, this curatorial action emphasises how *Experimenta Paisagem* views curating as a verb and adopts a continuously evolving approach where curatorial actions are not fixed or final but are constantly transformed. This action also aligns with the notion of curating as a processual and relational practice, where meaning and impact emerge over time through interactions among the community, landscape, and curators. Rather than simply managing or presenting objects, the curatorial process becomes a living, active engagement, embodying what Lind and Ingold describe as a ‘becoming’ where the essence of curatorial work unfolds dynamically within and alongside the community.
- ⁶ *Encomendação das Almas*, translated as “The commissioning of souls”, is a popular religious tradition in some of the villages and towns of Beira Baixa, Portugal. On certain nights during Lent, some women go up to the church’s bell tower or the village’s highest places to commend the souls and chant melancholic verses.

- ⁷ The title still retains a meaning related to traditional curatorship, which is, however, superseded in the spontaneous co-design phase of the work between students, tutors and inhabitants of the refugee centre, going beyond the boundaries of a curating “for” but a curating “with-for-through” more proper to slow curating processes.
- ⁸ See, for example, *RURITAGE*, a project has turned rural areas into laboratories to demonstrate natural and cultural heritage as an engine for regeneration. By enabling participants of all ages and abilities to take part in artistic activities, *RURITAGE* has generated new cultural capital and further increased creativity, proving that successful reinforcement of rural societies through arts creates inclusion through awareness of diverse cultures and identities (<https://www.ruritage.eu/>, accessed on 21 December 2024).

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