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Route to nowhere: assessing the failure of the *Ave Basin Industrial Heritage Route* (Portugal)

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ABSTRACT

Implemented in the early 2000s by the *Ave Basin Regional Development Agency* (ADRAVE), the *Ave Basin Industrial Heritage Route* (IHR) was deactivated without fully establishing a lasting circuit to showcase the region's industrial history. This paper aims to identify and critically analyse the contributing factors to the IHR's inability to create a sustainable industrial heritage circuit. Drawing insights from industrial heritage tourism studies and examining academic papers produced by members of ADRAVE during the IHR implementation to publicise the route, as well as an urban intervention in one of its hubs (Sampaio, Ferreira & Co. Riba d'Ave), the study reveals missed opportunities and challenges in the IHR's implementation, calling for a revaluation of strategies to effectively preserve and promote industrial heritage in Portugal. The analysis highlights the impact of dominant memory narratives shaped by local political and economic powers, hindering community engagement, and discouraging local involvement. The findings extend beyond Ave Basin, emphasising the importance of more inclusive approaches that involve local communities in heritage conservation initiatives.

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Introduction

Located in northern Portugal, the Ave Basin has a rich industrial history linked to the use of water as a driving force, leading to the establishment of large cotton factories in the nineteenth century. As many of these have become important examples of the region's industrial heritage, they have been the focus of local heritage conservation efforts.

One of such efforts was the *Ave Basin Industrial Heritage Route* (IHR) which was planned and managed by the *Ave Basin Regional Development Agency* (ADRAVE, in 2002) and co-financed by Portugal's *North Region Operational Program*. Its aim was to implement 'a circuit of visits to a set of significant testimonies of pre-industrial and industrial activity in the region' (Faro and Cleto 2002, 148).

According to Suzana Faro (then IHR coordinator) and Joel Cleto, the IHR was born out of the 'concern to inventory, study, value, musealise and, above all, disseminate and make accessible, to a growing number of interested parties, this important part of the region's heritage' (Faro and Cleto 2002, 149).

In the context of IHR, the Ave River would unite the territory of eight Municipalities. The route was thematically organised into sub-routes ranging from pre-industrial to energy remnants, from

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the textile industry to tanneries and cutlery, comprising twenty-four industrial units (Faro and Cleto 2002, 148; Providência and Baptista 2002, 187).

The IHR's 'thematic musealisation' strategy was based on 'connecting all [museological] units' and aligning them by 'thematic networks' and organising them 'in routes suggested in the promotional material and in the road signs', which should make 'visible and accessible the local aspects that are fundamental for understanding the route themes' (Providência and Baptista 2002, 187).

Hence, it was expected that any IHR hub could be a starting point to a journey to other hubs that were part of the route (Faro and Cleto 2002, 148). The IHR hubs consisted of 'units to visit', 'interpretation centres' specific to each theme, and 'paths and landmarks'. Each Municipality had a unit that would be 'musealised' based on 'three fundamental themes to understand the industrialisation of Ave Basin': 1) 'River and water mechanisms'; 2) 'Production spaces'; and 3) 'Industrial Landscape' (Providência and Baptista 2002, 187, 190).

The IHR had a range of core objectives, which included: dissemination and appreciation of the region's rich industrial heritage; contribution to the region's economic and social development; development based on the self-esteem of its communities; development based on the cultural and tourist potential of a portion of its historical memory; encouragement of industrial tourism; accessibility to an increasing number of stakeholders (Faro and Cleto 2002).

Despite initial efforts and investments, and in contrast to global heritage route trends in the same period, the route was practically deactivated in less than a decade.

This paper aims to examine the contributing factors to this failure by drawing insights from tourism studies related to industrial heritage. Furthermore, through the analysis it suggests that dominant memory narratives, portraying perspectives of local political and economic power, were instrumental in shaping the IHR's historical discourse and heritage strategy, affecting community engagement, and possibly discouraging their involvement with the route. To address this, it conducts a case study focusing on one of its hubs, Sampaio, Ferreira & Co. (SFC), in Riba d'Ave. The primary sources analysed are two articles written by academics involved with the IHR (Faro and Cleto 2002; Providência and Baptista 2002) aiming to publicise the route and what the IHR called a 'museological intervention' in Riba d'Ave.

Sampaio Ferreira & Co.: the IHR hub in Riba d'Ave

Founded in 1896, in Riba d'Ave (Vila Nova de Famalicão, Portugal), by Narciso Ferreira, SFC was one of the main textile factories in the Ave River Hydrographic Basin and is an exemplary case of both its industrialisation and deindustrialisation. After a period of decay, the company declared bankruptcy and ceased its activities in 2005. This was followed by the abandonment, progressive degradation, and partial ruination of its facilities, which, in parallel, began to be re-signified as industrial heritage.

With the support of the Council of Vila Nova de Famalicão, ADRAVE selected SFC and Riba d'Ave as 'units for museological intervention' (Providência and Baptista 2002, 187, 190), drawing inspiration from Seixas and Seabra article (2002), a cornerstone of the 'urban musealisation project led by Paulo Providência' (Seixas 2019). Faro and Cleto (2002, 151) indicate the textile industry as one of the IHR sub-routes, as it was emblematic of the industrialisation in Vila Nova de Famalicão and Ave Basin. They highlight the importance of SFC, still in operation at the time of the IHR implementation, for being 'the oldest textile industrial unit in this municipality'.

Part of the SFC musealisation was to place a metallic sign at its entrance to indicate the link with the IHR (Figure 1). A small text indicated the factory foundation date (1896), its original name (*Riba d'Ave Spinning, Fabrics, and Dyeing Factory*), the founder's name and the factory's vertical structure of production (spinning, weaving, and dyeing). It also marked the SFC 'as an important milestone in the industrial development of the region, giving rise to several other factories as well as investments in pioneering experiences in production and electricity'. Finally, it highlighted the role of Narciso Ferreira and his heirs to transform Riba d'Ave into a 'small centre of the industrial



Figure 1. The IHR sign in front of SFC. (Photo by the author).

universe of Ave Basin (. . .) The village that once dreamed of being a city is today a village that tells the story of a family of industrialists and of an important period of the Ave Basin industrialisation’.

The expression in the sign about Riba d’Ave which says that it was ‘village that once dreamed of being a city’ refers to Narciso Ferreira’s attempt of emancipating Riba d’Ave in the 1920’s. However, it is also the exact quote from the Seixas and Seabra article (Seixas and Seabra 2002, 170) which inspired the museological intervention on the sidewalk in front of the factory, along Narciso Ferreira Avenue (Figure 2). This intervention consisted of three monuments sculpted on the sidewalk containing small texts accompanied by representations of topographical plans. Buildings were represented in metal while streets and roads were in high relief and the river Ave in low relief. The museological intervention consisted of building intentional monuments (Choay 1999; Le Goff



Figure 2. The sidewalk in front of SFC (in yellow) and sidewalk-monuments of the museological intervention (in red). (Photo by the author).



Figure 3. The first sidewalk-monument, 'making industry' (Photo by the author). To facilitate viewing, the buildings were highlighted in black, the streets in white and the river in blue. The SFC is on the riverbank and the other buildings represented are the OFC, the National Guard post, the primary school, and the Narciso Ferreira Hospital.

1990), as they were intended to celebrate what they refer to and to 'excite, through emotion, a living memory' (Choay 1999, 16).

The first sidewalk-monument is entitled 'Making Industry' (Figure 3), and it highlights the role of Narciso Ferreira in Riba d'Ave.

The second sidewalk-monument, 'Making City' (Figure 4), highlights the continuity of Narciso Ferreira's enterprises by his son Raúl Ferreira.

Positioned in such a way as to bring the north of the plans closer to the geographic north, to read them in the correct order it is necessary to be facing north, towards the SFC entrance itself. The first sidewalk-monument, 'Making Industry', places Narciso Ferreira as the protagonist of its textual and



Figure 4. The second sidewalk-monument: 'Making City' (Photo by the author). The buildings which are shown again are: SFC and OFC factories, the Narciso Ferreira Hospital, and the primary school. The buildings which were added up are: the Saint Peter Church, the parish council building, the Narciso Ferreira Theatre, the Narciso Ferreira Market, the Saint Peter Inn, the volunteer firefighters headquarters, the Post Office building, and the Riba d'Ave Count residential centre (in white).

iconographic narrative as founder of the SFC and OFC factories and the person responsible for the urban infrastructures in Riba d'Ave. It is implied that for Narciso Ferreira to envision 'Riba d'Ave as a city', it first needed to become an 'important industrial hub', and that to realise his dream likely involved constructing the primary school, hospital, and guard post. According to the second sidewalk-monument, 'Making City', the dream would only be possible, at least 'in part', through his son Raúl Ferreira.

Although other urban structures were engraved, the only one textually mentioned is the Riba d'Ave Count Residential Centre (RCRC). The text takes up an excerpt from Seixas and Seabra (2002, 168) which effectively interprets the RCRC in the urban context. Nonetheless, removed from the original source, the passage takes on a euphoric and nationalistic tone by pointing out the RCRC as a 'metaphor of country, city, Riba d'Ave and family' and that it was 'the dream city itself'.

Although Seixas and Seabra (2002) primarily analysed the RCRC space symbolically, portraying it as a representation of the connection between industrial enterprise and urban development, they also positioned it as a metaphor for a country and city. However, they did not critically examine the historical implications of these assertions (Seixas and Seabra 2002, 168).

In the third sidewalk-monument, 'Making Region' (Figure 5), Delfim Ferreira, another of Narciso Ferreira's sons, plays a leading role for having expanded his family's territory by focusing on 'producing and utilising electric power' from the Ave River.

Historical and heritage discourses sustained by the IHR interventions in Riba d'Ave

Considering the historical discourse as derived from the sidewalk-monuments, it could be argued that the 'museumological intervention' perpetuated narratives that actively forgot the importance of the workers' community of Riba d'Ave (Pozzer 2022). It is even possible to argue that it helped legitimise heritage narratives in Riba d'Ave, since it was the analysis by Seixas and Seabra (2002) that provided the foundation for the sidewalk-monuments discourse.

Planned to be read in a specific sequence, the topographic plans vary in scale, select events (social works and industrial enterprises), and organise them in a way to strengthen and propagate a narrative which highlights the expansion of areas of action, power, and influence of the Ferreira family.



Figure 5. The third sidewalk-monument, 'Making Region' (Photo by the author). It shows the 'Ermal hydroelectric plant' and its reservoir area for the dam. The Ave River is represented all the way to *Caníços Thermal Power Plant* and there are three locations: Póvoa de Lanhoso, Taipas and Riba d'Ave itself.

Intended for a specific order, the sidewalk-monuments differ in scale. They pick key events, like social projects and industries, and carefully arrange them in a way that strengthens the Ferreira family's areas of action, power, and influence.

The sidewalk-monuments suggest that Narciso Ferreira sons not only inherited economic power, but also social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu (1983 1986)) and Riba d'Ave, in turn, is shown as the starting point of the Ferreira family's industrial expansion in the Ave Basin.

When explaining why Riba d'Ave was chosen as an 'example of museological action', Providência and Baptista (2002, 191) mention that the place would allow the 'possibility of working on landscape changes and urban planning operated by the industrialisation process'. The authors add that the sidewalk-monuments' texts would provide 'succinct information, but necessary to understand the specific thematic component of each [museological] unit'. As a result, 'the museological actions', such as the sidewalk-monuments, were 'intervention projects' and were designed to 'reinforce the narrative capacity of the place itself' (Providência and Baptista 2002, 187).

However, the authors did not question which 'narrative of the place' was being reinforced by the sidewalk-monuments. They merely reproduced dominant historical narratives which highlighted the relationship between Ferreira family's actions and the development of Riba d'Ave and Ave Basin.

In consequence, the local community, primarily of former industrial workers, could not feel represented in such narratives. Moreover, their history and perspectives were 'actively forgotten' (Ricoeur (2004 2007)) by a heritage strategy oriented by 'authorised discourses' (Smith 2006) that effectively ignored workers as historical subjects, contributing to the silencing of their voices.

Such dominant narratives seem to have impacted the very discussion on SFC and Riba d'Ave's roles as an IHR hub. In Providência and Baptista's argument (Providência and Baptista 2002, 190–191), Riba d'Ave was a place that 'clearly reproduces the model of the Modern Industrial City as experienced in the first half of the twentieth century' or even that 'it is the most significant urbanistic example of the industry power in transformation and social organisation of the first half of the twentieth century'.

The perspective presented is, in fact, a reflection of memoirs chronicled throughout the twentieth century, and it tends to convey an idealised viewpoint rather than relying on concrete data to substantiate these claims (Pozzer 2022). For Providência and Baptista (2002, 191), SFC was unquestionably 'a symbol of progress in the region', ignoring that such symbols were socially and culturally constructed.

While the authors correctly acknowledge that the factory 'is the origin of urban transformations implemented in Riba d'Ave' they seem to overlook that Riba d'Ave, which 'once aspired to be a city and the hub of an empire' (Providência and Baptista 2002, 191), was, in fact Riba d'Ave from the Ferreira's viewpoint.

Similarly, while the authors acknowledge that Raúl Ferreira's continuation of 'his father's work reflects the Estado Novo [fascist government] corporatist spirit' (Providência and Baptista 2002, 191), there is no exploration of the political and social ramifications of power dynamics and control over the working class in Riba d'Ave. Nor is there an examination of the symbolic implications in constructing the memory surrounding Narciso Ferreira and his successors.

In this regard, Providência and Baptista align with narratives that highlight the prominent role of Narciso Ferreira, characterised by his 'republican philanthropic spirit' and his pursuit of three primary avenues of activity as an industrial entrepreneur: the establishment and financing of multiple factories; the exploration and generation of electrical power; and, ultimately, the transformation of Riba d'Ave, where he founded his first factory (SFC), into a genuinely 'modern industrial city' (Providência and Baptista 2002, 191).

For Providência and Baptista (2002, 191), it would have been the urban infrastructure constructed near the SFC that transformed Narciso Ferreira Avenue into a 'new urban centre in Riba d'Ave', a 'strategic location' that would have enhanced 'the symbolic significance of the factory, positioning it on an avenue at the heart of the new urban area'. According to their

perspective, it was the perception of the factory's symbolic importance that justified the 'museumological intervention' under the theme 'Industrial landscape – local persistence and modernisation', which involved 'proposing a new pavement for the public walkway on the boulevard [Narciso Ferreira Avenue], adjacent to the SFC factory wall'. And because the sidewalk 'is a hinge between the factory and the urban space, is strongly symbolic and evocative'. Therefore, 'references were inscribed on the two phases of urbanisation linked to the transforming power of industry and the greater dream of transforming Riba d'Ave into the centre of a family empire'.

Although the authors acknowledge the symbolic power of Riba d'Ave's urban structure, they lack a critical perspective regarding its historical significance. They appear to accept well-established narratives concerning the Ferreira family and Riba d'Ave. Consequently, the museumological intervention on the sidewalk aligns with and reinforces these narratives without ever subjecting them to scrutiny.

Monuments, such as the ones in the sidewalk, challenge memory (Choay 1999, 16) by evoking the past and perpetuating memories; they have the 'power to perpetuate, voluntary or involuntary, historical societies', constituting, therefore, a 'legacy to collective memory' (Le Goff 1990, 536–537). Moreover, they are instruments to intervene in memory by reinforcing narratives already socially and culturally established, in this case, about Narciso Ferreira and his heirs, excluding any other historical subjects.

Assessment of contributing factors to the IHR failure

Riba d'Ave's involvement in the IHR fell short of achieving several fundamental objectives. Among these, five contributing factors to the IHR failure seem to stand out. Specifically, the lack of identity as a tourist route, hindrances in accessing heritage sites that impacted industrial heritage preservation, inadequate assessment of inherent risks in the initiatives, negligible local economic impact due to insufficient promotion of local productive development and stimulation of regional and local economies, and low levels (if any) of community engagement stemming from heritage strategies that marginalised workers' history.

Lack of identity as a tourist route

Therefore, the IHR's plan for tourist use of the Ave Basin industrial heritage was also not successful. This failure contradicts the global trend of the 'last decades' in which tourism acquired 'increasing importance' and 'an increasing dimension in the set of economic activities' (Cordeiro 2012, 09).

Abad (2004, 09) attributes this shift to bankruptcy and closure of factories, primarily caused by the severe economic crisis of the 1970s. This period of distress drew attention to these facilities, particularly those that had been abandoned. The author notes that following an initial phase of purely scientific exploration that concentrated on inventorying and analysing industrial structures and territories, research began to emphasise the social and cultural dimensions of industrial heritage. In this context, it is not surprising that one of the approaches that emerged centred on repurposing industrial heritage as a resource for tourist attractions (Abad 2004, 10).

According to Cordeiro (2012, 10–12), industrial tourism began to emerge as a 'structured tourist product' in the late 1980s, primarily taking the form of an itinerary or route for tourists. He also notes that organising the tourist offerings at industrial heritage sites involves some unique aspects that stem from the distinctive characteristics of these sites.

Industrial tourism takes different forms, which can involve operational factories (Abad 2004, 29; Cordeiro 2012, 12) or fall under 'heritage tourism' (Abad 2004, 29). However, according to Frew, 'industrial tourism' typically pertains to active industrial sites whose primary purpose is not tourism (Frew 2000, 20). In contrast, 'industrial heritage tourism' relates to former companies where tourism has become the primary function due to the end of production (37).

In Abad's view, the focus in the latter scenario is on 'visits to abandoned factories, reuses by museums, or installations in some artistic or interpretive centre... In industrial tourism, the primary interest is of a cultural nature' (Abad 2004, 29). Therefore, Abad believes that industrial tourism's heritage aspect carries cultural, historical, and symbolic significance in addition to facilitating an understanding of the industrial past and the appreciation of successive productive and technical transformations (20).

In 'tourist routes and itineraries', the offerings are diverse and can include 'a variety of locations – industrial sites, museums, operational factories, heritage related to the industry theme in general – organised as networks within a specific territory' (Cordeiro 2012, 14). Organising these routes often adheres to 'two criteria, which are sometimes combined within the same itinerary: the thematic criterion, centred on a particular industrial sector, and the geographical criterion, connecting different elements of industrial heritage found within a specific city or region' (14). This is the approach the IHR followed.

According to Firth, 'tourism has gained a significant role in the conservation of built heritage in many cities confronting redevelopment pressure to accommodate a growing population and adjust to industrial shifts in the economy' (Firth 2011). The notion of 'heritage tourism' is now widely recognised as a central element within the tourism sector across various economies (Firth 2011, 46; Li, Wu, and Cai 2008).

In the context of industrial heritage, the economic outcomes resulting from tourism have played a role in mitigating the impact of deindustrialisation on many European regions facing economic and social decline. This process has facilitated the rejuvenation of former landscapes and industrial sites, previously considered unattractive, contaminated, and unremarkable (Cordeiro 2012, 10). In turn, Rodrigues emphasises that 'the development of industrial tourism hinges on both the political necessity for regional cultural identification and the economic necessity to create new activities and products' (Rodrigues 2019, 989–990).

Ebert demonstrates that, in numerous former industrial regions, the triumph of tourism centred on industrial heritage has become a vital element for their future. Consequently, 'the preservation of industrial monuments is no longer perceived as a cultural extravagance, but as a vital investment that holds the promise of substantial economic gains' (Ebert 2012, 178). However, as Ebert (181) notes, 'industrial heritage tourism should not only be seen as a commercial aspect of the local heritage site's activities', as it can function as 'means to narrate the history of industry and the individuals who contributed to it'. As Rodrigues summarised, 'industrial tourism places value on culture and society', it strengthens community identities, and incorporates industrial heritage as a fundamental component of the region's territory and culture (Rodrigues 2019, 989–990).

In this context, according to Abad, the fundamental underpinning of all experiences involving the tourist repurposing of industrial heritage is the revival of the past and the reinforcement of collective memory (Abad 2004, 08). Consequently, its role as a 'tourist attraction' extends beyond just 'presenting broader possibilities for repurposing, but also reinterpreting the technical, economic, and social history' (10). This perspective acknowledges not only the tangible worth of industrial heritage but also the intangible value that imparts a unique character to a place and fosters the sense of belonging that forms the essence of cultural identity (Firth 2011, 59).

This is why Firth asserts that heritage tourism can enhance the well-being of host communities by strengthening the connection between heritage and people. To achieve this, 'tourism managers' must foster inclusivity at every stage of the development process, from planning to the resulting experience. This approach would not only provide more opportunities 'for local residents to share their story and engage with the site' but also foster a deeper local interest in heritage, making the community more welcoming to tourists and encouraging them to consider themselves 'guardians of these heritage resources' (Firth 2011, 59–60). Therefore, tourism becomes a powerful means of emotionally valuing the heritage significance of objects, places, and social practices (Fortuna 2012, 23).

In this context, it appears that the IHR lacked a clear vision of its identity as a tourist route (Sá 2017). It did not present a unified approach, be it within the realm of ‘industrial tourism’ or ‘industrial heritage tourism’.

Despite being themed around the industrial heritage of the Ave Basin, the IHR failed to establish itself as a recognisable tourist route. However, this alone does not entirely account for the IHR’s shortcomings, as there are successful tourist routes worldwide that effectively leverage industrial heritage for both ‘industrial tourism’ and ‘industrial heritage tourism’ (e.g. *Industrial Heritage Circuits of São João da Madeira*; and *European Route of Industrial Heritage*). Nonetheless, the IHR struggled to position the industrial heritage of the Ave Basin as a viable industrial tourist product and to efficiently harness tourism as a means of heritage conservation (Firth 2011, 59).

The IHR showed a limited comprehension of tourist resources and their optimal utilisation. For instance, in the SFC case, where, as the company’s financial circumstances evolved, it became unsuitable for tourism. Despite the IHR’s objectives to ‘protect, enhance, and revive industrial culture and heritage’ (Mota 2011, 94), it primarily fell short of achieving this vision. This deficiency largely resulted from the absence of a contingency plan to adapt its role on the route after the SFC’s closure.

Hindrances in accessing heritage sites

The IHR was influenced by various factors, including ‘accessibility, permission to visit, recreational and educational potential of sites and monuments’ (Faro and Cleto 2002, 150). In other words, for a site to be part of the IHR, it needed to have pre-existing infrastructure in place. Consequently, despite the architectural and historical significance of these locations, many of them were in a state of disrepair, making their integration into the route challenging (150).

The IHR acknowledged the significance of abandoned and deteriorating heritage sites. However, it primarily concentrated on locations immediately suitable for use. This approach meant it did not provide any restoration proposals or suggest alternatives for repurposing derelict spaces for inclusion and use. While there were aspirations for ‘museumological interventions in some spaces, making it possible to penetrate the site and inviting a longer visit’ (Faro and Cleto 2002, 152) the IHR did not anticipate any investments or partnerships for the preservation of the heritage featured on the route. Consequently, the IHR did not have a primary objective to prevent the physical deterioration of its sites, especially those that closed after their inclusion in the route, such as the SFC.

The absence of a clear plan for the operational industrial sites that closed after the IHR’s implementation, whether they should be recovered or repurposed, is evident. Moreover, there was a lack of direction on how to appreciate, safeguard, and use industrial ruins and abandoned spaces for tourism. As Sá highlights, despite the IHR’s initiation, numerous sites were not easily accessible, only permitting visitors to view them from the outside and often from a distance (Sá 2017, 02).

A notable contrast exists between the IHR’s stated intentions to choose accessible hubs (Faro and Cleto 2002, 150) and the actual implementation of the route. This disparity arises from the fact that ‘for a tourist attraction to be worthy of the name, it must be visitable’ (Sá 2017, 04), and many of the hubs did not meet this criterion. Consequently, the IHR ultimately failed to achieve its goal of promoting the ‘appreciation of the region’s rich industrial heritage’ and contributing to its ‘development’ (Faro and Cleto 2002, 152).

Inadequate risks assessment

Reflecting on the outcomes of the IHR in Riba d’Ave, the struggles to overcome the pre-existing risks, difficulties, and obstacles, are evident. Despite drawing inspiration from successful tourism routes in Portugal, such as the Vinho Verde, the Castles, and the Romanesque routes (Faro and Cleto 2002, 150), and the presence of initiatives and studies

on tapping into the tourist potential of industrial heritage at that time (Edwards and Llurdbas i Coit 1996; Frew 2000; Rudd and Davis 1998), it is apparent that the IHR disregarded potential challenges and barriers, particularly of an economic and organisational nature (Cordeiro 2012, 10–12).

In Riba d’Ave, these economic and organisational challenges were two key constraints on the IHR’s success. This does not just relate to local issues; it also illustrates the broader difficulties faced by the IHR. As per Cordeiro (2012, 11–12), the primary economic obstacles for preserving industrial heritage for tourism arise from its designation as ‘private property of companies or individuals’. Consequently, it is usual for assets, both movable and immovable, to be at risk in cases of bankruptcy. Equipment is often sold as scrap, and there are attempts to generate profit through property speculation. These circumstances may result in industrial heritage sites being ‘off-limits’ for visitors or a lack of investments in the restoration or repurposing of industrial structures.

From an organisational perspective, Cordeiro underscores that simply having the ‘heritage value of a site’, such as SFC, does not guarantee its transformation into a tourist attraction. Creating the necessary conditions to turn it into a tourist product demands human and financial resources, various types of infrastructure, and appropriate planning (Cordeiro 2012, 12). In this context, it is apparent that the IHR lacked a contingency plan. This plan should have considered the economic environment and possible crises affecting the companies in the Ave Basin associated with the route, particularly those that saw their productive activities cease (Sá 2017, 04), such as SFC.

Hence, due to evolving economic and political conditions, companies became stranded in a heritage limbo. They remained part of the route, yet inaccessible; calls for their preservation went unheeded, leading to material decay; communities were encouraged to cherish them, but these heritage spaces remained distant from citizens.

Negligible local economic impact

The IHR did not boost revenues for the companies involved in its ‘industrial tourism product’, according to stakeholders (Mota 2011, 95). For companies like SFC, the IHR was not seen as a profitable option. Local investments were largely unrelated to the IHR. The IHR also did not drive substantial urban reorganisation (Ebert 2012, 178), and there was no significant improvement in infrastructure, particularly concerning companies, like Visitor Centres, roads, and cycle paths (Mota 2011, 95).

The museological intervention on Narciso Ferreira Avenue can be seen as an infrastructure upgrade, but circularity remained unchanged, and no visitor’s centre was built. In Riba d’Ave, the role of a visitor’s centre was taken on by the Textile Industry Museum of Vila Nova de Famalicão, the factory management, and informally by the Narciso Ferreira Foundation, which had severed ties with the company.

It is possible that SFC’s bankruptcy led to the IHR’s decline in Riba d’Ave, as the route failed to promote ‘the involvement of local companies in the project and interaction with local products, which could have stimulated the regional economy’ (Mota 2011, 95).

In Riba d’Ave, the IHR’s actions, including the museological intervention, were superficial (Firth 2011). They did little to preserve SFC’s material heritage, failed to incorporate community-proposed activities, and neglected the intangible aspects of local industrial heritage.

Hence, despite its goal to diversify the region’s tourism offerings, the IHR’s failure is evident. It did not extend tourists’ stays or their local spending, nor did it reduce the seasonality of tourism. Factories are a year-round attraction (Mota 2011, 95), yet the IHR could not generate enough interest to sustain itself, especially after SFC’s closure.

Furthermore, the IHR failed to consider the impacts of deindustrialisation, such as insolvency, factory closures, and collective redundancies (Mota 2011, 01).

If industrial tourism should provide insight into the region’s industrial cultural identity through a comprehensive inventory of local industrial resources, both material and immaterial (Mota 2011, 94), it is clear that the IHR did not sufficiently leverage the social, cultural, and industrial history of the Ave Basin.

Low levels of community engagement

If there was any integration of IHR activities into the Riba d'Ave local routine, it had no impact to prevent the IHR failure. A potential contributor to this failure was the vertical way by which local heritage was socially constructed in Riba d'Ave. It adhered to dominant narratives and focused on what was 'officially considered heritage' (Aguilar 2017, 251).

Despite one of the IHR's goals being to address elements of the worker's perspective, it ultimately failed in this regard. Any plans to incorporate such elements did not come to fruition, and the initiative ended before it could materialise.

Conversely, the discourse surrounding the IHR's intentions appeared to aim at reducing the rigid, hierarchical dynamics that were common in the industrial environment. However, by not effectively including the community's perspective, the IHR, in practice, reinforced such social disparities.

Despite SFC being a potentially authentic 'industrial tourist product', the IHR failed to leverage Riba d'Ave's 'cultural uniqueness' (Mota 2011, 94) for competitive advantages or to benefit the local community of Riba d'Ave. After all, even though the SFC hub was located in a deindustrialised area deeply affected by unemployment, the IHR did not create jobs (94). Nor empowered citizens to participate in decision-making processes to become 'active elements in the development of the industrial tourist product and of having autonomy and entrepreneurial initiative developed in moments of clarification and training' (95). Riba d'Ave's community was not included as an active participant in the IHR, making it challenging for the IHR to enhance its quality of life (95).

The IHR's approach to Riba d'Ave's industrial heritage marginalised the community when attempting to value local heritage. The historical discourses that underpinned the IHR's strategy and actions at Narciso Ferreira Avenue were centred on perspectives that focused on Narciso Ferreira and his heirs as the sole protagonists of local history. The community of former workers was marginalised, cast as secondary figures in their own history, depicted as passive beneficiaries of the Ferreira family's social endeavours. In many instances, they were entirely excluded from historical and heritage narratives. Such a gap in historical representation appears to have made it challenging for working-class citizens to relate to the IHR historical discourse.

The IHR not only failed to boost the community's self-esteem or enhance the cultural and tourist potential of its historical memory (Faro and Cleto 2002, 152), as it missed the opportunity to mediate between the past and present for a fresh interpretation of established narratives. Instead, it inadvertently reinforced these narratives, preventing both potential external visitors and the local community from having an authentic and meaningful experience (Firth 2011, 45).

Discussion: route to nowhere or the first step to somewhere?

Despite the significance of projects like the IHR in deindustrialised settings, its impact on preserving and appreciating the river Ave Basin's industrial heritage remained limited due to various shortcomings in planning, community involvement, investment, adaptation to changing economic conditions, and addressing the closure of companies integral to the route, effectively terminating any IHR tourism activities at these sites.

While the IHR acknowledged SFC's historical importance in both the industrialisation and deindustrialisation of the Ave Basin, it was ill-prepared to confront the practical consequences of the latter, notably the abandonment and deterioration of structures and sites. The IHR's historical perspective was limited and failed to offer tools for accessing the history of SFC, Riba d'Ave, or the Ave Basin in a diverse and compelling manner that could stimulate interest in the industrial heritage's material culture. The museological intervention merely reinforced established commonplaces dictated by dominant narratives concerning the factory and the role of Narciso Ferreira and his descendants, completely ignoring other active historical subjects such as the workers.

The IHR possessed the potential to leverage the industrial history of the region, promoting tourism and community development in the midst of deindustrialisation. It aimed to consolidate various industrial assets across different sectors in the Ave Basin. However, the implementation of the route failed to match these ambitions, exemplified by the SFC case. Regrettably, the IHR made minimal contributions to preserving, sharing, and advancing knowledge about SFC and other sites as part of the regional industrial heritage, even though these were among its fundamental goals.

The objective of making the route accessible to an increasing number of stakeholders mirrors the trajectory of SFC: initially, its activity dwindled, then it underwent partial alteration due to new uses, and finally, it suffered from a degradation process that entirely distanced it from the local community.

Nevertheless, despite the near absence of positive outcomes from the IHR, its examination adds two critical dimensions to discussions regarding industrial heritage in Portugal. Firstly, it provides a basis for considering how industrial heritage was conceptualised during the IHR's inception, making the IHR itself a subject of historical analysis. Therefore, it becomes a subject of study within the history of industrial heritage preservation, holding equal significance to other tourist routes, including those that have been successful.

Conversely, the failure of the IHR may also provide insights into the challenges faced by heritage policies and actions, not solely in the Ave Basin but throughout Portugal. This is hinted not only by a growing body of research on the uses of industrial heritage for tourism over the last decade (Carneiro 2015; Cordeiro 2012; Mota 2011; Ramos 2015; Rodrigues 2019; Vieira and Cordeiro 2014), but by the development of policies and plans to improve it: in 2014 a plan to reintroduce the IHR using its original structure was devised by the *Intermunicipal Community of Ave region* (CIM-Ave, founded in 2009), in 2017, the *Portuguese Quality Standard for Industrial Tourism* was established, and in 2021, the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic sanctioned the *Resolution N. 98/2021*, with recommendations to enhance the value of the Ave Basin industrial heritage.

The “new” Ave Basin Industrial Heritage Route

Since 2014, the CIM-Ave, an association of councils to collaboratively manage projects, included the IHR in the ‘Culture and Heritage’ axis of its Strategic Plan 2014–2020 (CIM-Ave 2014). It underscores the significance of cultural resources, particularly built and musealised heritage, as well as cultural facilities and heritage enhancement projects in the region (140). Among the tourism revitalisation initiatives, those associated with the industrial heritage stand out, involving 10 municipalities and 20 hubs (142, 145). Making use of a SWOT analysis, it emphasises the relevant industrial heritage with potential for integration into tourist routes, the growth of national and international tourism as an opportunity, but noting the proximity of competing territories and strong competition with neighbouring regions (149).

Furthermore, the Strategic Plan highlights the application of Benchmarking tools to analyse projects implemented in similar territories. In this regard, the *XATIC Industrial Tourism Project in Catalonia* (Spain) highlights aspects that should inspire ‘tourism strategies by the CIM-Ave’, such as: integrating different industrial heritage by connecting museums, interpretation centres, old factories, and mines; offering visitors first-hand experiences with production processes; interdisciplinary understanding of the territory historic development; ‘Living Industry’ initiatives to allow companies to reveal production processes, to promote education, training, and establishing innovative relationships with customers and tourists (164–165). The CIM-Ave strategic vision would have tourism as one of its Strategic Development Objectives and the ‘revitalisation of the Ave industrial heritage route as an identity and tourism asset’ would be one of its lines of action (164–165).

However, despite the SWOT analysis and the Benchmarking approach being a clear effort to better understand the Ave Basin specificities and to learn from past experiences, the Strategic Plan did not reference or assess the previous IHR experience itself, having done no more than mentioning the historic relevance of the region’s industrial history and heritage. And, to date (2023), the now titled ‘Industrial Tourism Route’ (CIM-Ave 2021) has not yet been implemented.

The Portuguese quality standard for industrial tourism

The Portuguese Quality Standard for Industrial Tourism (2017) emerged following a directive from Portugal's National Tourism Strategic Plan (Ministério da Economia e do Emprego 2013). This plan emphasised the need to promote and implement quality systems within the tourism sector. A collaboration between Tourism of Portugal (the national authority responsible for promoting, enhancing, and sustaining the country's tourism) and the Portuguese Quality Institute (the national standardisation body) led to the development of quality standards for tourist products, with the goal of certifying quality management systems. In 2013, a Working Group, spearheaded by the Council of São João da Madeira, recognised for its successful industrial heritage circuit, and guided by Tourism of Portugal, was formed. This group, consisting of experts and sector representatives, undertook the task of developing the Standard for Industrial Tourism (Cordeiro 2017).

As Cordeiro (2017, 10) notes, the Standard when this cultural tourism segment was in its early stages in Portugal, encompassing visits within the realm of 'living industry' or to industrial sites and heritage routes.

In essence, the Standard seeks to set forth criteria and certify the quality of industrial tourism services, covering aspects like hygiene, safety, business confidentiality, environmental and social sustainability, and accessibility. It places emphasis on 1) Management System, 2) Services, and 3) Facilities and Equipment.

In the scope of the Management System, tourism service providers are required to establish and uphold a Quality Manual outlining service delivery, procedures, and instructions for quality assurance. Regarding Services, providers are required to furnish visitors with transparent details about the services offered, insurance coverage, and the total cost of the activities. Concerning Facilities and Equipment requirements, the criteria encompass signage, access, parking, sanitary facilities, cleanliness, visitable areas, reception space, and guidelines for sustainable development.

While not explicitly referencing tourist routes, the Standard implies its applicability to them since industrial tourism routes, whether organised thematically or geographically, have proven to be a successful strategy in attracting visitors (Cordeiro 2017, 14).

Regarding the contributing factors to the IHR's failure, as mentioned earlier, the Standard adequately covers them, though not in exhaustive detail. Particularly about the negligible local economic impact and the low levels of community participation, the Standard not only integrates 'recognition of communities' as a vital component for continuous management improvement (Instituto Português de Qualidade 2017, 13) but also highlights the 'involvement of local communities' in social, cultural, and economic aspects. This includes promoting the collaboration with local partners and valuing regional products (26) as a sustainable development strategy.

As cautioned by Cordeiro (2017, 14), despite instances of successful industrial heritage routes managed by councils or private companies in Portugal, as seen in São João da Madeira, establishing a legal entity would be crucial for implementing the specified Standard requirements. Yet, such an entity still does not exist.

Furthermore, despite the simultaneous planning of the 'new' IHR by CIM-AVE and the elaboration of the standard, so far, there has been no signs of implementing the Standard as a strategy for revitalising the IHR.

The resolution N. 98/2021

In late 2020, the Left Bloc party's members of parliament (MP) proposed a resolution to the Assembly of the Republic, focusing on enhancing the Ave Basin Industrial Heritage value. The proposal urged the Government to task the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage to survey the industrial properties in the Ave Basin for potential classification. They also advocated for a funding

line by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) to support research and propose the creation of a new Historical Itinerary of the Industrial Heritage of the Ave Basin to be managed by Tourism of Portugal and Tourism of Porto and Northern Portugal.

The MPs emphasised that the Ave Basin's industrial heritage is not just a subject for academic interest but holds significance for the region's territory, social experiences, and economic history. They acknowledged challenges in preserving privately-owned industrial heritage, calling for strong government action, robust public policies, and collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, including local communities, academics, workers, local authorities, the Ministry of Culture, heritage conservation associations, and public entities.

Following parliamentary approval, Resolution N. 98/2021 was published in the Official Gazette (Portugal 2021), advising the establishment of an FCT funding scheme to further scientific and academic knowledge about the region's industrial past, and the creation of a new historical itinerary for industrial heritage.

However, it remains unclear whether these recommendations are associated with CIM-AVE's 'new' IHR project, or if there are concrete plans or actions in place for implementing the historical itinerary.

Additionally, while establishing a direct connection between the specific challenges faced by the IHR and these subsequent policies and plans might be elusive, their shared emphasis on strategies to prevent issues akin to those that contributed to the IHR's failure suggests a shared awareness of its downfall which likely influenced their conception.

In summary, whether directly or indirectly, the IHR might have served as a valuable learning tool for those three policies and plans dedicated to preserving and promoting industrial heritage. This underscores its capacity to enrich community identity, collective memory, and the overall well-being of communities involved in future industrial heritage endeavours.

Conclusion

This paper sought to unveil challenges, missed opportunities, and shortcomings in the implementation of the IHR in one of its hubs, Riba d'Ave. The IHR, despite its ideals and efforts, was unable to fully realise its objectives and create an enduring industrial heritage circuit. The case study of SFC stands as a poignant example of the IHR's limitations and the factors contributing to its ultimate failure.

The significance of this study extends beyond the Ave Basin, shedding light on broader issues surrounding industrial heritage preservation and heritage tourism in Portugal. The analysis of the IHR's flaws provides critical insights for policymakers, heritage professionals, and communities seeking to engage with their industrial past. Understanding the difficulties faced by the IHR can inform future initiatives, potentially leading to more successful initiatives that contribute to heritage conservation, historical awareness and that have significant impact in the lives of post-industrial communities.

While this paper offers a comprehensive view of the contributing factors to the failure of the IHR, it is not without limitations. The analysis primarily relied on sources produced at the time of the IHR implementation and existing literature on tourism studies related to industrial heritage. Deeper insights could be gained through additional fieldwork, interviews, and engagement with local communities and through an historicization of how some memories became dominant. Furthermore, Riba d'Ave is only one of the IHR hubs and the findings may not fully represent other hubs with distinct historical, economic, and social background. The very suggestion that dominant historical narratives were instrumental in shaping the IHR's historical discourse and heritage strategy, affecting community engagement, and possibly discouraging their involvement with the route, would benefit from more extensive research.

Future research in this area could explore the experiences of other industrial heritage hubs within the IHR allowing comparative studies to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of the route and the factors that ultimately led to its demise. Additionally, bringing perspectives of local communities on the IHR heritage strategy could offer valuable insights into how to strengthen partnerships between different stakeholders.

In essence, understanding the factors that played a part in the IHR's failure can help future initiatives to better develop strategic plans to face similar challenges and develop more inclusive heritage making practices, fostering community engagement with its own past, and sense of belonging and empowerment.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Dr Guilherme Pozzer is a historian specialised in Industrial Heritage and Industrial Archaeology, with an international academic background (Postdoc, Ruhr University Bochum, Germany; PhD-European Doctorate Label, University of Minho-Portugal/University of Seville-Spain; MPhil in History, Unicamp-Brazil). Currently, he is a Teaching Associate at the Department of Archaeology of the University of Sheffield (UK) and is affiliated to the international project *Deindustrialization and the Politics of Our Time* (DéPOT - Concordia University, Canada) which examines the historical roots and lived experience of deindustrialisation as well as the political responses to it; and to the *Southern Research Nucleus* (NUDISUR, Chile), which develops comparative studies between global north and south from decolonial perspectives. His work focuses on abandoned, ruined, and reused industrial sites to understand symbolic meanings and representations, social impacts, the role of built material culture in urban planning, and impacts on processes of memory and heritage making. He makes use of qualitative research methods to approach cultural heritage and to analyse historical data, particularly from the perspective of Critical Heritage Studies, Industrial Archaeology and Social Semiotics. His current research seeks to understand the relationship between industrial heritage, memory making and wellbeing in contexts of deindustrialisation through digital cultural heritage, arts-based, and community-based methods.

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