

# Charting Iberian Research Paths Based on Portuguese Cultural Identity

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## Abstract

This text provides a brief literature review of academic works on Portugal's Cultural Identity, using the elements that comprise this identity as anchor points and starting points to establish the research pathways for an ongoing postdoctoral research project. These research proposals involve data collection and investigative activities in Portugal and Spain during the 2027–28 biennium, with the objectives of understanding and analyzing the cultural identity of diverse populations through the cultural pedagogies present in their respective geographical spaces; interpret postmodern globalization processes of commodification and spectacularization in the Iberian Peninsula; and observe the effects of these identity-related phenomena in the contemporary era. We are interested in understanding the formation and maintenance of Portuguese identity in postmodernity.

*Keywords:* Cultural Identity; Portugal; Cultural Studies.

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## Article details | Open peer review

Edited by:  
Michel Goulart da Silva

Reviewed by:  
Anna Juliace  
Michel Goulart da Silva

Citation:  
Koch, R., & Rodrigues, C. J. (2026). Charting Iberian research paths based on Portuguese cultural identity. *Scientia International Journal for Human Sciences*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.56365/mxapgh32>

## Article history

Received: 16/12/2025  
Reviewed: 02/03/2026  
Accepted: 14/03/2026  
Available: 14/03/2026



## 1. Introductory notes and methodological aspects

In recent decades, the field of Cultural Studies has focused intensely on research into the cultural identity of specific populations and/or minorities. This research has contributed to the understanding of and access to cultures that were, to a certain extent, oppressed and hidden from the general public. Among the various authors commonly cited by Cultural Studies in these discussions, we draw primarily on Zygmunt Bauman (2001; 2005; 2008), and Stuart Hall (1997; 2010; 2019), bringing into the debate the fluid, decentralized, and fragmented conditions of postmodern individuals in their identity formations as pointed out by these thinkers. Other authors, such as Anderson (2008), Canclini (2003), Debord (2005), Lipovetsky (2016), and Steinberg (1997), also contribute to this process of conceptual construction regarding cultural identities. In the observations of Bauman and Hall, there are some striking characteristics that define contemporary societies.

[...] the old identities, which for so long stabilized the social world, are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the individual [...]. This process produces the postmodern subject, conceptualized as lacking a fixed, essential, or permanent identity. Identity becomes a “mobile celebration”: continuously formed and transformed in relation to the ways in which we are represented or addressed within the cultural systems that surround us (Hall 2019, pp. 9–12).

[...] we are moving from an era of predetermined “reference groups” to one of “universal comparison,” [...]. Today, patterns and configurations are no longer “given,” much less “self-evident”; there are many of them, colliding with one another and contradicting each other in their conflicting commands, to such an extent that each and every one has been stripped of much of its power [...] (Bauman 2001, pp. 14–15).

It is also worth adding that Hall’s analyses of nations are highly productive. Drawing on the theory of the “Imagined Community” (Anderson 2008), the sociologist asserts that we speak metaphorically about national identity, since these are not literally imprinted in individuals’ genes—that is, they are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed within the realm of representation. Hall emphasizes that a nation is a symbolic community and, for this reason, has the power to generate identity and a certain loyalty.

A national culture is a discourse—a way of constructing meaning that influences and shapes both our actions and our conception of ourselves. [...] The differences between nations lie in the different ways in which they are imagined (Hall, 2019, p. 31),

Finally, in summary, the thinker establishes five main elements that define a national cultural identity:

the nation's narrative (historical events, symbols, and rituals); possible origins; the invention of traditions; a founding myth; and the belief in an original people.

By bringing Bauman into this debate, this other sociologist analyzes identities through the lens of the contemporary globalizing world and warns that “Our dependencies are now in fact global. However, our actions are, as before, local” (Bauman 2008, p.189).

Perhaps, instead of speaking of identities—whether inherited or acquired—it would be closer to the reality of the globalized world to speak of identification, an activity that never ends, always incomplete, in which all of us, by necessity or choice, are engaged (Bauman 2008, p. 193).

Based on the research agenda established through postdoctoral research projects in the Departments of Social, Political, and Territorial Sciences; and Languages and Cultures, at the University of Aveiro; the objective of this text is to provide a brief bibliographic review of the formation of Portuguese Cultural Identity, as the elements that compose this condition will offer clues and serve as anchor points and starting points for future research paths that will be mapped out for two distinct projects: one—exclusively—on Portuguese soil; and another, which involves a geographical area of the Iberian Peninsula. We will provide further details on these projects in the concluding section of this text.

This brief review does not aim to exhaust the subject of Portugal's Cultural Identity, much less serve as a kind of state-of-the-art overview of it. For this work, we will draw upon selected research from Portuguese-language databases, based on the relevance of the studies and their importance and applicability to our investigations. Therefore, we are aware that there is a vast body of material to be explored by other researchers, but which—for us—is currently unfeasible to address due to its complexity and the likely deviation from our research focus. In the following pages, following a chronological order of publications, we present some data and considerations from the works listed in this initial phase of research on Portuguese Cultural Identity.

## **2. Elements that may define Portuguese Cultural Identity**

According to common sense, for Brazil we can point to Carnival, Soccer, Caipirinha, Feijoada, and the Amazon Rainforest, among others, as striking symbols of our Cultural Identity. These are elements that define the country from within and without and that largely constitute the diversity of the Brazilian population and th . In this review study, we aim to identify and attempt to define the hallmarks of Portuguese identity,

in order to use them as a basis for future research paths on Portuguese soil. We seek to organize the review of academic works chronologically and by the themes of the notes on each of the cultural elements that constitute Portugal's identity.

We begin these notes and analyses with three thinkers who, to a certain extent, complement but also contrast with one another, as they express diverse positions on the formation of Portuguese identity. Vakil (2006) described a dystopian scenario in which the researcher imagines a debate between students and teachers about identity a few decades from now in any primary school in the Portuguese capital. Indirectly, he asks whether the conquerors of past centuries would cease to be considered heroes. The thinker highlights this issue by bringing into the discussion elements that supposedly unify the colonized and the colonizers and that have made everyone speakers of the Portuguese language. He also raises questions about the ambiguity of the concepts of homeland and suggests that teachings on colonization and decolonization be revised, warning of the rise of populist demagoguery that redefines notions of security and belonging through anti-immigration political platforms. At the end of his reflections, Vakil (2006) asserts that “the Lisbon of 2050 will be a multicultural society, that Portugal will have a Portuguese history made up of other histories as well, and that the true defense of the nation lies in the quality of its democracy, not in the securitarianism of a xenophobic cultural identity.”

In a lecture delivered in Elvas in January 2004, Graça (2005) argues that Portugal was overcome by a sense of guilt following the decolonization process, which began in the mid-1970s and shook its national identity. In his speech, the researcher seeks to reclaim the vibrant past of the conquerors and the Portuguese within the European context. Graça (2005), in his defense of the Portuguese nation, highlights that “the University, in its multiple forms of higher education and scientific research, is a factor of change and development and inevitably of national reflection, which means that it is also a factor in the consolidation of national identity” (Graça 2005, p. 82). Finally, he notes that unlike other European ethnic groups, the Portuguese possessed a rare characteristic, which was xenophilia—the opposite of xenophobia—and that this also shaped the country in the postmodern era.

On a theme similar to that of Graça (2005), about a decade earlier, Seabra (1994) delivered the inaugural lecture at the Solemn Opening Session of the 1994 National Defense Course, which took place at the National Defense Institute in Lisbon on November 10, 1993. In the words of the speaker, who had already published an essay in 1990 on Portuguese Cultural Identity, the historical achievements of the discoverers and Portugal's overseas vocation from centuries past were once again highlighted, as well as the identification of nationalist symbols that constitute a certain Portuguese cultural identity, in addition to Camões's work \*

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Portugal was a pioneer of what is today called interculturalism, practicing it before others came to theorize it. For the Portuguese, one of the essential elements of communication with other peoples was language, which, being their “motherland,” as Pessoa put it, became a “homeland of many homelands” [...] (Seabra 1994, pp.130-131).

In this speech, the speaker concluded by noting that young Portuguese people are not very engaged or interested in preserving a national identity; a fact that aligns with some of the concepts put forward by Hall and Bauman in the opening section of this text. In an essay from the early 1990s, José Augusto Seabra explores the duality of Portuguese culture, viewing it not only as a national identity with specific traits but also as an openness to universalism, manifested in its history of expansion and its cultural legacy throughout the world. The concept of ‘universalist personalism’ suggests that Portuguese identity is defined by its own specificity and individuality (“personalism”), while simultaneously projecting itself and expanding into the world and the whole (“universalist”), influencing and being influenced by other cultures. “The more we seek the roots of the Portuguese, the more we discover the universal in the essence of the national” (Seabra 1990, p. 95). In this essay, the thinker lists some elements that constitute Portuguese cultural identity, such as the overseas and explorer/conqueror vocation, sentimentality and nostalgia, fraternity, and the language: “Among these values, the most universal is the language we speak and write, which today is common to seven independent and free countries, with a diversity of cultures and even civilizations, with their literatures and oral traditions, through which we communicate, coexist, and cooperate” (Seabra 1990, p. 100).

Among various works that cite historical and social changes in Portugal beginning in the 1960s and at the turn of the millennium, we selected that of Barreto (2002), who, among other aspects, highlights that “A country traditionally of emigration has become a country of immigration: this is perhaps one of the most dramatic changes to have occurred in Portugal in recent decades” (p. 8). Without directly pointing out which traits and markers of national identity have changed—and continue to change—under the effects of globalization, Barreto (2002) offers a brief reflection on migratory flows, adopting ambiguous positions. In this study, we are interested in and challenged by the analyses of the “new” Portuguese youth, precisely because this is the population of future research in Portugal and the Iberian Peninsula.

With the development of “youth culture” and the “youth” age and social category, a new active generational segment emerged—one that is electoral, consumer, and producer: the young “.” With the evolution of the economy and the education sector, younger generations have postponed their entry into professional life by several years. They are present in secondary schools and institutions of higher education, which have since grown in number and size. Virtually exempt from military service,

they no longer face that link to the administration and public service. With the right to vote at age 18 (since 1976), they are the focus of special attention from political parties and authorities. They are recruited by party youth groups to assist in political campaigns. They are sought after by businesses and the advertising industry. Their gathering places are found in entertainment venues, public cultural spaces, and nightlife spots (bars, nightclubs, etc.), leaving an indelible mark on cities (Barreto 2002, p. 10).

Furthermore, Pires's (2007) study employed participant observation methodologies that inspire us and are also of interest for future research directions. The researcher sought to define the cultural identity of the Portuguese village of Barrancos, located in a border area with Spain, examining how this community has built and periodically reconstructs its relationship with others, whether they are Portuguese, Spanish, or of other ethnicities. Pires (2007) considers that there is "[...] a cultural identity of a hybrid nature, in a complex process of identity (re)construction" (Pires 2007, p.128), since it is rare to find families in this village who do not speak both Portuguese and Spanish and, in turn, create a local dialect. There are myths of origin and diasporas constantly invoked by public authorities to reinforce identity traits, which are also quite present in local cultural festivals, such as the largest of them: the bullfight—a source of controversy in both local and national contexts (Pires 2007).

In another study of interest to us, Arroteia (2010) examined the flow of recent Portuguese migration around the world and sought to address issues of identity and citizenship among these groups within diasporic movements. Among the various survey questions, for our future analyses, it is worth highlighting the symbols of Portugal identified by the Portuguese emigrants interviewed in this researcher's study. The most frequently cited by the study's participants, in order, were: family, language, national symbols (flag and anthem), art, cuisine, soccer, religion, and fado.

In addition to the studies already cited, Simões's dissertation (2010) explored Portuguese cultural identity in product design. The author notes that among Portuguese-speaking countries, "it is not at all possible to analyze the cultural identity present in the industrial design of all countries due to the lack of available information [...]" (p. 4) and concludes that

[...] Lusophone design gives primacy to colors such as white, brown, and black; wood is its material of choice; and the forms of its products are simple and rational. The in r its rate of innovation is not high, but they produce user-friendly products devoid of graphic markings (Simões, 2010, p. 111).

However, this work contributes little to our sociological interests regarding Portugal's cultural

identity, as it represents a very specific area of scientific research.

Sousa (2011) explores how the historical and mythical legacy of King Dom Dinis is constructed and maintained in the collective imagination of the city of Leiria, influencing its local cultural identity. In seeking to establish a founding myth for Portugal, the author asserts that the ‘Expansion’ and the ‘Discoveries’ are fundamental milestones in the constitution of the Portuguese myth, with Luís de Camões’s work *\*Os Lusíadas\** being the greatest architect of the mythogenic and poetic framework of the nation. In the analyses of the research she conducted, Sousa (2011) highlights that:

King Dinis left his mark on the history of Portugal and the Portuguese imagination, and this can be seen in the multitude of myths surrounding this king. This king and his reign were viewed as the result of divine providence, [...]. Viewed as an intermediary between divine beings and human existence, the poet-king is credited with the virtues and prophetic acts of creating a great nation and a great homeland: [...] Although still far from the Age of Discovery, this king is credited with creating all the conditions for the great epic to unfold. It was during his reign that the birth of the Fatherland and the greatness of the future began. It was King Dinis who paved the way for the rise of the Portuguese empire [...] (Sousa, 2011, p.8)

In the concluding remarks of his study, Sousa (2011) contextualizes and identifies tourist sites in the city of Leiria that bear strong markers of identity within the myth of King Dinis.

In addition to our future research directions, Baptista (2013) draws on historical moments in her work, establishing identity-defining characteristics for each period and highlighting the date of the Carnation Revolution, April 25, 1974, as a cultural turning point in the construction of this Portuguese identity. In analyzing the filmography that addresses conceptions of Portuguese identity, the researcher reveals that when memories of the Portuguese Empire are evoked, the identity of this nation is linked to the figures of the “Adventurer-Colonizer” or the “Colonial Hero,” also associated with a “civilizing genius” in contrast to Black Africans, in a prejudiced view, characterized as savages and capable of being domesticated or trained: “[...] now in a tropical climate, they build in the middle of the bush [...], their ‘Portuguese houses’ [...] presenting themselves as an essentially agricultural and rural people, hardworking and honest, who ‘cling’ to the land, building villages, towns, and cities that replicate, as faithfully as possible, the Metropolis” (Baptista 2013, p. 274).

In these contexts, the Black person—occupying the role of the ‘other’—will appear in film and literature as a reference point for defining the identity of the Portuguese colonizer. According to Baptista (2013), the initial idea is later replaced by that of the “Colonist-Emigrant,” with the contours of a “[...] condition of economic, social, and religious superiority over Black people, a condition essential for

continuing to ‘Portuguese-ize’ Africa, earning respect and even veneration from the natives for the whites and garnering their goodwill and inclination toward assimilation” (Baptista, 2013, p. 277). This new Portuguese figure sometimes joins the independence movements, with his cultural identity, in some cases, being questioned, rejected, and repressed. He is portrayed in an exotic manner and viewed by his compatriots as stubborn, simple, affable, and ignorant. In Baptista’s analyses, a final figure of Portuguese cultural identity is the “Returnees-Colonialists,” that is, Portuguese by family but of colonial origin, and thus born and holding citizenship in countries conquered by the Portuguese Empire. They are “exiles from nowhere,” in the thinker’s words.

To define the scope of our research, we are also interested in works such as those by Brambilla (2015) and Gevehr, Berti & Matte Junior (2020), in which the authors investigated cultural and identity aspects of the Douro River Region and its links to tourism and academia. Characterized as cultural heritage, the primary elements constituting this region’s identity are its landscapes, architecture, gastronomy (largely centered on regional wine), art, and archaeological sites. Brambilla (2015), when discussing cultural identity alongside other Cultural Studies scholars, also invokes and draws upon Hall’s theories in the debate. At the end of her thesis, she highlights the tension between the preservation of cultural traditions and the need for consumerist wine tourism:

[...] while some authors consider that tourism in rural areas has turned these places into spaces of consumption exclusively, we can understand that rural tourism is just one of the external influences affecting the rural area and its residents, since one cannot prevent people from living in the present in the best possible way, nor can one prevent the processes of transformation desired by rural communities. Thus, we consider that wine tourism in the Douro has transformed the region’s rural areas, turning them into leisure spaces, and, at the same time, strengthening local identities [...] (Brambilla, 2015, p.205)

Gevehr, Berti & Matte Junior (2020) also cite the involvement and role of the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD) in the local community through research and activities dedicated to viticulture.

We also add the research by Marchi (2015), which focused on investigating and analyzing the formation of a Portuguese identity linked to far-right political movements based on historical milestones from the post-World War II era and their ramifications in the contemporary postmodern landscape through the media lens of the National Action Movement (MAN). After providing a historical overview of events from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the researcher details the MAN’s publications in an escalating anti-racist trajectory. There are manifestos against immigration, advocating for job priority for whites, and inciting the

end of aid and hatred toward foreigners. In the conclusions of his study, Marchi begins by stating that “The Portuguese people, an ancient nation in the far west of Europe, have a deep attachment to their identity” (Marchi 2015, p.439) and, contextualizing—once again through the history of Portuguese conquests in the Americas and Africa—the gradual miscegenation that occurred in Portugal through the migratory flows of the colonized. “The signs of the identity crisis were particularly evident in those political and ideological circles that made identity-based radicalism their banner” (Marchi 2015, p.440). Indirectly, the unifying element of Portuguese cultural identity in this study is the language.

Sobral (2016), in the work *Portugal, Portugueses: Uma Identidade Nacional*, seeks in the first chapter to define an individual identity for each Portuguese person, drawing on cultural elements and landmarks, such as traditional and centuries-old families, and the language, among others, and how the latter serves as the educational and guiding axis of a Portuguese national identity. “[...] we study Portuguese more deeply than any other language, and Portuguese writers more than any others. The history of Portugal occupies a central place in our understanding of History” (Sobral, 2016, p.9). The author also refers to the emotional and aesthetic experiences of everyday Portuguese life and points to a certain social pessimism as a characteristic of these identities. As regards our future analyses, Sobral cites soccer as a source of collective joy; and further lists reductive behavioral habits such as tardiness to appointments or politicians’ lack of accountability for their promises: “[...] all national groups possess stereotypes about themselves and others, which are inherent to the construction of an identity” (Sobral, 2016, p.11). Finally, in this opening chapter, the author launches a discussion on nationalism, pointing out that there are at least two types of nationalism in Portugal, which are not consensual: a civic one and an ethnic one, which may complement or oppose each other in the formation of identities. In the following chapters, following the example of other thinkers already cited, Sobral (2016) takes a historical journey through Portugal’s past and examines how specific events contributed to the construction of characters and a certain Portuguese identity. He emphasizes that the best way to get to know a Portuguese person is to experience what it means to be Portuguese.

Silva (2018), in questioning how to approach Portuguese national identity, states that:

[...] the definition of the identity of any social collective occurs on two complementary levels: that which brings its constituent elements together into a certain unity, making them part of the same whole; and that which distinguishes the whole thus formed from others with which it is effectively or virtually related. The first level concerns the formation of a “we”; the second, its distinction from others—ly in relation to them (Silva, 2018, p. 10).

The author seeks to define the Portuguese from both internal and external perspectives, distinguishing

them from other peoples and nations. “Identity is not merely what one is; it is what one claims to be—many voices, many statements, and thus various subjects and various representations” (Silva, 2018, p. 18). In the opening sections of his study, Silva (2018) revisits Portugal’s historical past of great conquests (“discoveries”) and voyages across the American and African continents, listing these figures as defining elements of Portugal’s national/cultural identity. In other words, there is a strong connection to the seas and to geopolitical strategies, which in turn gave rise to hybrid cultural alchemies. Bringing the debate into the contemporary era, the author concludes that in postmodernity, Portugal acquired “Western-centric” traits and, perhaps for this reason, the best and greatest unifying element of Portuguese cultural identity is the language.

Ferreira’s dissertation (2021) discusses the cultural identity of Portuguese Generation Z and how it has been shaped by media mechanisms, leading to its Americanization. The author states that “Cultural identity is an aspect that develops according to the environment in which a person is embedded; family, school, experiences, language, and traditions are just some of the aspects that impact cultural identity” (Ferreira 2021, p.6). In her research, Ferreira highlights that young Portuguese people shape their identities in a hybrid and multicultural way, creating a peaceful foundation for coexistence between local and global culture. As in other studies already cited, she indirectly points to language as one of the hallmarks of Portugal’s cultural identity. The brief study by Castro & Ribeiro (2022) with higher education students in Bragança confirms Ferreira’s (2021) observations, identifying language as a strong defining element of cultural identity in postmodern times.

### **3. Considerations, Implications, and Future Research Directions**

In this brief survey we conducted on Portuguese cultural identity in recent academic works, we observed that the most frequently cited element constituting markers of Portuguese identity is the Portuguese language; it transcends eras and occupies an ambiguous position, bringing cultures together while at times establishing who the “outsiders” and the dominated are. As for the so-called “heroes” of the Age of Discovery—sometimes caricatured—literature, fado, and nationalist symbols (flag, anthem, traditional dress), and religion, in the words of the thinkers analyzed, refer to a recent but outdated past, one that right-wing political movements attempt to revive through anti-immigration and, to some extent, xenophobic campaigns. On the other hand, soccer, wine tourism, and gastronomic, cultural, and consumerist tourism are linked to globalizing, cosmopolitan, multicultural, and postmodern contexts. There are explicit elements, such as the aforementioned “,” as well as implicit and psychosocial elements that constitute Portuguese Cultural Identity. Fraternity, hospitality, sentimentality, and saudade, as well as ways of life outside major cities, are examples of this. We believe that for a deeper analysis of the theme of Portuguese Cultural Identity

in postmodern times, *on-site* immersion in the territory is necessary, enabling participant observation inspired by ethnography—something that is planned for the postdoctoral project in Portugal. This condition is also suggested and indicated by Sobral (2016). It is evident in several of the studies analyzed, and it is worth noting that April 25, 1974—the date of the Carnation Revolution—marks a turning point in the construction of Portuguese cultural identity.

As mentioned earlier, this brief review in this text will serve as an anchor and starting point for two postdoctoral research projects at the University of Aveiro. The first of these, linked to the Department of Social, Political, and Territorial Sciences, is titled “The Productivities of Soccer Celebrity Cristiano Ronaldo in the (De)construction of Cultural Identity Among Portuguese Children and Youth,” and aims to understand and analyze the cultural identity of soccer-obsessed Portuguese children and youth through the lens of the idol CR7; investigating the construction and formation of identities, and interpreting the globalizing processes of commodification and spectacularization of the sport in Portugal, as well as the cultural pedagogies at play.

In the second project—“The Cultural Identity of the Communities of the Douro River (Portugal) / Duero (Spain)” —in collaboration with the Department of Languages and Cultures—we also aim to understand and analyze cultural identity, but specifically that of the communities along the Douro River, interpreting the globalizing processes of tourism commodification and the cultural pedagogies present in this geographical area; analyzing the outcomes and transformations of these identity-forming processes in the contemporary era. For both research proposals, while in Portugal, during the first phase of the research (approximately 60 to 90 days), observations will be made regarding the construction and formation of cultural pedagogies that contribute to the (de)re)constructions of Cultural Identities linked to Portuguese children and youth who are soccer fans and followers of the celebrity Cristiano Ronaldo; as well as to the communities living along the banks of the Douro River. In the second stage, questionnaires and interviews will be conducted with young soccer fans and with representatives of the communities along the Douro River (Portugal)/Duero (Spain). During the postdoctoral period, media discourses present in the Iberian Peninsula related to the theme of Cultural Identity that contribute to fueling these circuits will also be evaluated. Subsequently, the collected material will be analyzed to produce scientific articles and, in the future, potentially publish books. The methodology employed in this study will have post-structuralist aspects linked to Cultural Studies, also drawing on Discourse Analysis.

In this brief review, we found works that are inspiring and serve as a starting point for future research paths in Portugal. It is worth mentioning the text by Barreto (2002) and the dissertation by Ferreira (2021), which contain significant information about the Portuguese Generation Z and will serve as an initial basis for

studies on the (de)constructions of identity among young people who follow soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo; as well as Brambilla's (2015) thesis and the article by Gevehr, Berti & Matte Junior (2020) regarding the data collection we intend to conduct with the populations comprising the Douro River region, with the aim of defining a local cultural identity for this geographical area. We emphasize that this review did not aim to exhaust the topic of Portugal's Cultural Identity and that the studies we selected were chosen based on their relevance and applicability to our research.

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