

hiWOOL Portugal trip with the Norwegian team

First day visit: Rosa Pomar yarn store In Lisbon (<https://retrosaria.rosapomar.com/pt>).

We were escorted by Guida, and were introduced to the wonderful Rosa Pomar, who started the store 12 years ago and now works with four local spinning mills in order to produce yarns from Portuguese sheep breeds. The three main groups of sheep breeds in Portugal are: Merino (called Merina, and there are three breeds here, including one that is black/brown), Churra (heritage breeds, with horns) and Bordaleira (a cross between the two other breeds); however, a map of the breeds in Portugal show 15 breeds all in all (so there are sub-breeds). The Portuguese name for sheep is 'ovelhas', in Spanish 'oveja'. Rosa goes to the farms herself to secure the best wool, and to the mills to make sure they spin HER wool and not someone else's. She has a wide range of yarns available, and the shop was busy with customers. Some yarns were hand-spun, and the store had a spinning wheel that was developed in the 13th century, and that has remained unchanged since then (it looked rather uncomfortable to work with). The store also sold fabrics, and Rosa showed us the 'every-day' version used for all sorts of purposes such as saddles on donkeys and wrapping, and the 'fancier' one that was used for clothing and special occasions, such as weddings and trips to the market. The patterns were markedly different, the latter of course being much more decorative and complex.



She also described how the Azores were actually populated by sheep before people, as the islands were a stopping-point for travelers across the Atlantic who needed to refresh supplies. Later, an orphanage there was one of the early textile production places for Portugal. For many years most of the wool was thrown away, as the sheep are kept mainly for their milk and for the meat, but as of last year Rosa has been able to save most of the wool and turning it into yarns, she said. Ingvild invited Rosa to Selbu spinning mill, and Rosa is very eager to go, as she is mulling over starting a mini-mill herself, to have better control.

Some woolen differences between Norway and Portugal that we discovered:

The sheep are very prominent on Rosa's labels, but not in the patterns. The marketing, the banners, etc. all had a delicate design that Rosa put a lot of emphasis on. She works with artists to develop the designs and they had all been given "natural shades" and were bright and playful with sheep as the dominant motif. She also sold other people's yarn and showed us one with clear, very saturated colors that she thought was awful and unprofessional. The colors that dominated her own yarn were either un-dyed natural colors (sheep white, sheep black and shades of gray and brown), or more muted colors. It was somewhat reminiscent of Shetland yarn, because it was dyed before spinning and thus had the same heathered effect.



They knit with purling, so they knit the inside, not the outside; as their technique is quicker for purling. The merino is only spun as woolen yarns, as the fibers are too short to make worsted yarns. The yarns, when washed after knitting, become softer and this is important for the customers to understand. Rosa Pomar's prices were in general half of the prices of yarn from the old Norwegian sheep breeds at Selbu spinneri, but she was very concerned with giving the farmers a fair price, and the price of the yarns had been monitored for what the customers were willing to pay. Paying the farmers a fair price for the wool was reflected in better shearing practices, which had been a problem. Her price was 1 euro per kilo, while earlier most farmers had received 20 centimes. During the dictatorship in Portugal, it was the authorities who set the price, and it was forbidden to import wool, when the dictatorship was overturned, suddenly the Portuguese market was flooded with wool from Argentina and Australia. As a result, the local wool lost its value. Rosa also said that when dealing with the farmers and spinning mills originally, she was 'all wrong': An urban woman with ambitions of making breed specific yarn, but this had changed once they saw the results. Half of her production is exported.

Rosa has published a book on Portuguese knitting history and developed patterns based on Portuguese traditions. She also sold patterns online and in the form of yarn kits. We bought the book and yarn kit to try this out. She sold a shoddy yarn with a mixture of wool and cotton which she thought was suitable for Portuguese conditions. We raised the question of how such a mix will work when worn and washed. Ingvild bought a ball of this yarn to test the properties more thoroughly.

Visit to shepherd Virgilio in Caneças (guided by Guida and Gianni) was very close to Lisbon, and the sheep grazed land owned by a bank. The breed was Bordaleira, and the 'lead sheep' called Amelia, came when he called and the flock followed her. The team fetched several fleeces, black and white, that we later worked with and that were brought back to Norway for processing. It was impressive to see how the shepherd spoke to the herd and how close this communication was with the sheep. He had a shepherd's stick which he used gently, together with his voice to guide the sheep and move the flock. Another thing that surprised us was the theft of lambs. He had recurrently experienced this himself and it was also a well-known problem. People with little income, stole lambs for the meat.



Visit to Pedagogical Farm in Olivais (<https://quintapedagogica.lisboa.pt/>) (guided by Gianni). A few days each year, the farm is open for local schools and institutions. The association Salva Lã Portuguese contributed to a set-up that shows the entire wool value chain. Stations showed shearing (not very well done, animal welfare here could be questioned), scouring (where the children themselves actually scoured the wool), carding, spinning (Guida did this as a member of Salva Lã Portuguese), yarn-dyeing, knitting/crocheting and weaving. The children were led by their teachers from station to station in the through the value chain. At some of the stations they watched and asked questions, at others they got to try the process themselves and everywhere they sat or stood in a close circle around the person who demonstrated and explained the processes. Very instructional and a great way to show with hands-on experience. Could be exported as an idea.



National Museum of Costume - Museu do Traje (<http://www.museudotraje.gov.pt/>) guided by Gianni and the museum's curators. We were invited into the archives to see what they had in wool related mainly to their regional costumes/traditional dress. We were guided from the north and south through different garments and the wool traditions were amazing, some even woven with spun gold. As Gianni later offered us a book that shows much of the same textile tradition, and gave us postcards that show all these regional traditional dress traditions – we have a lot of documentation on these clothes. The museum houses around 40 000 items of clothing; and the main exhibition is a traditional 'fashion history' exhibit – the traditional dress is not shown to the public, not all were the original 'folk costumes', but rather clothes made for display in regional staged events. We learned that the close tie between the nationalism of the dictatorship gave a 'sour' flavor to the use of national dress, and it was mainly when regional dance was integrated in ballet that they were shown now.

In general, the warp was cotton, and the weft is wool for the woven materials. Interestingly, the Portuguese have a saying: 'What protects from the cold, protects from the heat'. We saw many items of clothing that we would think, unless this is understood, would be too warm for the climate. Such as capes. One that was popular in the Azores, a sort of pre-bourka, was very interesting. We were also presented with some very interesting uses of tradition, one was a felted coat using the 'burel' material in two layers, where the top layer is intricately cut out in patterns, which was later copied by a famous Portuguese designer (Guida later showed us this coat). We also saw the Poveira sweater, that was recently copied by designer Tory Birch and there is now an ongoing discussion how the local community will be reimbursed by the designer. 650 different patterns are tied to the local families (who were illiterate, so the patterns reflect their occupation and identify them, also through making new lineage patterns). A rain-hat (sydvest) in wool that had been treated to be rain-proof caught the Norwegian team's eye, but the 'nisselue' or knitted and slightly felted green hat worn by 'matadors' or 'cowboys' in a certain region, was perhaps what really struck us as a common denominator. On a more comic note, the 'catch skirt' was also an interesting clothing item, it looked like balloon shorts, but was actually a skirt for women, that ensured they were not bitten by mosquitos. Good design!



One similarity is how traditional patterns or clothing garners debate when exploited commercially and outside the tradition they are a part of. Another similarity was the clothes themselves, and especially the knitted, green hat. The differences were how the tradition is used and included in today's Portuguese clothing. Here it seems as if both knowledge of folk costumes/bunad and the use of these clothes in themselves were distant and exotic, while in Norway it is more present. It was not the clothes as outfits, but certain details such as techniques, fabric qualities and the like that were continued and used.

At the museum we also saw a photo exhibition that was to open the next day with fashion photography from the 1950s with Portuguese folk life as a background setting. It was an interesting contrast between the two "worlds" and the way of thinking and wearing clothes that we could have

spent more time discussing. We also just briefly had a glimpse of the museum's magnificent garden, and rich museum shop, with a good selection of books dedicated to clothes, as we were in a hurry.

The wool scouring facility (Alcanena) was our first meeting with the actual value chain for wool in Portugal. The married couple who owns Chicoração, also runs this scouring mill that has a capacity for 1000 kilos wool per day, however, as there is not enough wool to optimize this capacity, they do not operate every day. Size-wise, it seemed to be on par with Ullkontoret (Gotland). The machinery was old, but very well maintained/adapted, the mechanical workshop was also impressive with a lot of equipment and plenty of space.



We then travelled to Mira D'Aire, where the other stages of the company's production took place. First, we visited the yarn-production, which is located in one part of an old carpet factory (Multilãs factory). Here, all the rain-water is captured, so it can be utilized in the production (for dyeing). Throughout the day 'of discovery' we learned a lot about Mira D'Aire and the old factory we were in, though the company as such started in Othelia's living room more or less.



This was a hub for textile production and the valley was dotted with factories, few are left, among them Chicoração, who took over the old carpet factory here, and where we saw some of the remnants of the old factory. Across the road, we also visited Ethnographic Museum (Museu Industrial e Artesanal do Têxtil - <https://www.miat.pt/>), where the carpet factory had started, and when it expanded (across the road), this became the living quarters for the workers who travelled here from the entire region to work, not unlike the current situation in the Far East. The museum was small, but interesting, as Guida's textile work was also on exhibit here. The Norwegian team was surprised how well Portugal actually documents their textile history in museums, as opposed to Norway. Even though there is little left of the wool industry. Our partners estimate around 7-8 factories left (one spinning mill), in the hey-day there were at least 30. There is also a large-scale scouring mill, which we did not visit, but that we were made aware of.



When that is said, Chicoração has wonderful product; the blankets (throws), the jackets/coats and the small items are all wonderful. They have a great tourist following, also. We had visited one of their stores in Lisbon, the first day we were there.



The factory has developed a shoddy-based yarn, with 25% virgin wool. They collect all their waste, on color, and then re-spin this. This yarn will be tested by the Norwegian team.



We then traveled to a mountain region also known for its textile history, Colvilhã. There was plenty of water and hydropower here - and grazing opportunities. Thus, both raw materials and opportunities to process them were present. From the hotel we stayed, we drove over the mountains past Portugal's highest point, an area with trails for hikers as well as cabins and restaurants. The mountain was stunning with heather in purple and bright yellow flowers.

Guided visit to Burel Factory (<https://www.burelfactory.com/pt/>). This was in the village of Manteigas, and the front of the factory was very unassuming. However, the most interesting about this factory, was our fellows in the guided tour; they were bird-watchers, British tourists. We asked the guide, and he said he always bring his group here. This was in the Portuguese mountains (or more correctly, we had driven over the highest pass in Portugal to get here). The factory was actually started in order to meet the needs of tourism, using the 'burel' fabric, which is felted (loden) – a traditional fabric for mountaineers, so it had been used in the interior fabrics of a local hotel and this was the origin of the factory.



Here the Bordaleira sheep (also the basis for Chicorção's production) were native (<https://www.burelfactory.com/en/ajuda/faqs/the-origins-of-the-burel-sheep-2/>). The original factory went bankrupt, but it was revitalized. They have developed some very exciting new products, besides the traditional blankets (the BIG seller), clothing items such as caps, jackets, slippers, handbags, etc.; such as a unique rucksack that is also a back-cover/cap and a stool formed as a sheep. When we visited the factory, a team of Danish buyers were special guests, so the factory and the brand must have a very high stamp internationally. The interesting point that the machinery is from as far back as the 19th century, could be a basis for a collaboration f. ex. with Hillesvåg? The spinning machine is a self-actor spinner in full production, it seemed to be ancient, but working perfectly. It worked very silent, and it was a pleasure to see it in action.

We have not seen a similar dissemination in Norway where products/production is so directly linked to landscape/pasture/history. Maybe this is because grazing and wool are more taken for granted in Norway? The factory had a tempting shop with large and small products in felt and woven qualities.

The guided visit to Wool Museum of the University of Beira Interior

(http://www.ubi.pt/entidade/Museu_de_Lanificios) was our last visit. The factory here was established in 1762, and has since become an educational institution (in 1884). The water-quality here was fantastic, so dyeing was made easier. The main knowledge-transfer was from France. The factory had the stamp of the King of Portugal, which was a stamp of quality, and delivered to the army, of course. In the 1970's synthetic fibers entered the market full force, and our guide stressed that the Portuguese held on to natural fibers, and that was a catastrophe. There were of course many other factors, and she mentioned the very large cottage production that had been important. There were schools dedicated to teaching spinning, weaving etc. Originally cottage production was the whole basis, not industrial facilities. We also learned that the colonies were very important for the raw materials for dyeing. Obvious, but needs to be stressed. And how important steam was for this development, of course. We ended the visit with a meeting with the wonderful director, Dr. Rita Salvato. The discussion is open!



Conclusions:

After some very intense days with fantastic good tours, beautiful and colorful products in many qualities, we are left with a different image of Portuguese wool than we had to begin with.

The first is that the dissemination of the textile and the wool history is very good and multifaceted. It takes place, as we could observe it in shops, factories, museums and in agricultural centers for children. We do not in any way have a corresponding "value chain" for dissemination in Norway. Wool forms a small and underappreciated part of the exhibitions in our big museums, while the museums that do take this seriously, are either small/local (like Selbu) or concerned with the dissemination of other themes (such as the history of the workers).

The next thing that strikes us is the quality and dimensions of what is being done. It seems that what is missing most is small-scale facilities. Small-scale provides opportunities for development and testing - and it provides opportunities to produce wool products based on local breeds that are threatened by extinction or in other ways.

The part of the value chain that seems to be the most problematic, was shearing/sorting/classification - ie the first part of the value-chain. Much could have been done better in the actual wool handling.

During the last part of our visit, we discussed the next development of hiWOOL. Selbu spinneri will spin yarn from selected Norwegian wool, combined with the Portuguese wool that was sorted during the visit, and also, some spinning tops from Chicoração that were combed thoroughly. Then the yarn will be used for a knitting challenge in the two countries. The idea is to encourage to knit a small item, maybe a hat. The Portuguese have traditional hats that are interesting, and interesting to compare with the Norwegian hats. In Norway, there is a traditional red hat that is considered very typical for Norway. It is often named "nisselue" after the little mythical "Fjøsnisse" or just "nisse". This figure lives in the barns on the farms, and it was important to take care of the "nisse" and give him porridge on Christmas Eve, because if he was not happy with the care of the farmer, he was capable of making the farm animals sick, and the cows would stop giving milk. This "fjøsnisse" always had a red hat with a pompon. This hat became a symbol for the free Norway during the German occupation in the Second World War, and it became prohibited and could be punished by the German occupants. To avoid persecution, the hat was therefore depicted in green, red or yellow, for example on Christmas cards. This interesting parallel to the green hat we saw in Portugal, in several versions, and could be a starting idea for the knitting challenge.

