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# The Marian Paths of Portugal and Local Development

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This study aims to analyse the contribution of Marian Paths to the development of individual sites. The theoretical framework of the work is an empirical study which uses databases such as Science Direct, Emerald, Google Scholar, and Web of Science databases to identify suitable themes for empirical evidence (2015-2021) on pilgrimage paths and local development. Based on this, 19 interviews were undertaken to develop an understanding of developments, particularly in the area of Fátima, Portugal. The contents of the interviews were analysed using NVivo. This article concludes that there is no management model implemented on the Portuguese Marian paths, more specifically the paths of Fátima. However, efforts are being made to implement a development, upgrading, and promotion strategy for paths in the area. This study allows us to identify opportunities for local communities and for a sustainable management model for the paths of Fátima. The originality of the research lies in the fact that there are still no studies on the subject, mainly due to the lack of a management model for Marian paths.

**Key Words:** Marian Paths, Portugal, Fatima, local development

## Introduction

Pilgrimages have existed since the Middle Ages, yet, in recent years all over the world, there has been an increase in pilgrimage routes and paths. In Europe, examples of this are the St. James' Way to Santiago de Compostela (Chemin, 2015), the Marian paths in Portugal (Duarte, 2014), or the Padre Pio Sanctuary Route and the Rosalie Itinerary in Italy (Di Giovine, 2015, Notarstefano *et al.*, 2021). This phenomenon is associated with pilgrim experiences along the way, which are sometimes considered more important than the arrival at the Sacred place itself (Amaro *et al.*, 2018; Kato and Prozano, 2017). In other words, pilgrims appreciate the path and the places they pass through (nature, landscapes, contact with local populations, and the heritage of each location) and not just the religious experience (Vistad *et al.*, 2020).

As such, the main objective of this study is to understand the contribution of Marian paths to the sustainable local development of the territories they pass through. Based on the Fátima paths (Map 1), namely the 'Caminho do Tejo' (143 km), 'Caminho da Nazaré' (50 km), 'Caminho

**Map 1: Fatima Paths in Portugal**



Source: [pathsoffaith.com](http://pathsoffaith.com)

do Norte' (364 km), Carmelite Route (111 km) and the Centenary Path (212 km). All these paths aim to reach the Sanctuary of Fátima (Our Lady of the Rosary), however, the status of each of them varies, as the state of evolution is different in each one. There is no system in place to identify pilgrims, contrary to what happens with pilgrims from Santiago de Compostela who can be tracked via the distribution of the Compostelas.

As there are no studies on these particular paths, and to understand how they can be prepared for the tourism development the present study includes a bibliographical survey which was carried out on how paths can be a pillar of sustainable development. Following this, semi-structured interviews are undertaken with the main agents in the territory.

## Literature Review

### *Marian Paths in Portugal*

The literature suggests that pilgrimage is the oldest form of tourism (Štefko *et al.*, 2015). Marian pilgrimages gained popularity throughout the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, increasingly connected to shrines. After the Catholic Year of Faith 2012-13, the attention given to pilgrimages increased, and because of this, resources of the sacred places became part of the social, economic, and cultural development of destinations (Cugini, 2021). Pilgrimage takes place individually or in groups and has a specific and sacred purpose (Coleman, 2017), involving the tangible and intangible elements of a trail composed of historical, cultural, religious, and natural heritage identity. As such, the path that the pilgrim takes is one composed of history, culture, traditions and multiculturalism (Heitor, 2019). Pilgrimage routes typically include a quiet passage location away from traffic (Gomes & Florêncio, 2020).

Pilgrimages to miraculous places have a spiritual character, symbolising an approach of a person to God, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary. Pilgrims seek the renewal of their faith, the resolution of problems in their lives, recovery from illnesses, and as a result, sometimes they challenge their physical strength, justifying the sacrifice (Liutikas, 2015; Heitor, 2019). Through rituals, practices, and celebrations, pilgrimages tend to offer spiritual

experiences that meet the spiritual, physical, and social needs of pilgrims (Wang *et al.*, 2020).

Pilgrims establish relationships with the landscape, with other pilgrims and residents, in search of experiences that satisfy their needs (Ambrósio *et al.*, 2019); they engage with support services in an environment in which they feel safe (Fernandes *et al.*, 2017). As such, despite following a certain itinerary, it is possible to promote points of interest, especially close to the places where they spend the night (Ambrósio, 2022).

Those who walk along a pilgrimage trail / path can fall into different categories or typologies. We can identify them as experiential explorers or tourists (Cohen, 1979), allocentric or quasi-allocentric (Plog, 2001), adventurers (Perreault *et al.*, 1979), contact-vision tourists or nature observers (Studiebureau & Underzoeu, 1986), unusual or mass tourists (Smith, 1989), explorers or those in search of belonging (Fan *et al.*, 2017). In these variations, it is possible to describe them as anonymous, assiduous, or frequent pilgrims (Heitor, 2019).

Pilgrims / religious tourists travel throughout the year through the territories where the paths pass (Ambrósio, 2020). However, if it is a group, the perception of a path can vary depending on the opinion of the various participants. Also, a path that imitates another may receive an undervalued assessment since the evaluation of individual resources can vary from person to person (Cova & Cova, 2019).

For Duarte

*the Marian cult, almost as old as the Christological cult itself, was based on references in the books of the Gospels and the New Testament. That is, during the history of mankind, the 'Mother of God' was assumed as 'the star of the path of the pilgrim and the traveller' (2014:7).*

The history of Portugal was built with direct links to the Marian theme, to the point of being identified as the 'Land of Santa Maria', along with an extensive set of places that became known through struggles and monuments with devotion and recognition to 'Our Lady, the Mother of God.' Alvarez (2015) explains further that the figure of Mary represents maternal protection, a feeling of

welcome. The Marian cult tends to be multifaceted, without the rigidity of the official cult (Silva, 2016).

From the north to the south of Portugal, we find places of faith, sanctuaries, cults, and religious festivals, resulting from a vast set of constructions based on Marian devotion. The first Marian apparition in Portugal was recorded in 1702 (Mendes, 2017). However, the first references to Marian pilgrimages date to the 18th century, that is, after the Virgin Mary became the patroness of the kingdom of Portugal. These first pilgrimages were to the Sanctuaries of Our Lady of Nazaré, Our Lady of Light, Our Lady of Lapa, and Our Lady of Penha de France.

The pilgrimages to Fátima began with the sighting of the 'Lady' and only later were directed to the chapel built in her name. Later, this became the sanctuary and the beginnings of the pilgrims paths to Fátima began to be observed. Initially, these trails were initiated by civilians, then by the Association of Friends of the Paths of Fátima, and by the Association of Caminhos de Fátima. In 1996, the National Culture Centre began to pay attention to the trails, with partners from the Sanctuary of Fátima, Turismo de Portugal, Municipalities among others.

Along the various Portuguese Marian paths, the pilgrim is invited to enjoy the heritage built in honour of the Virgin Mary.

### ***Pilgrimage Paths and Local Development***

While their main purpose is as pilgrimage paths, these trails can also incorporate thematic itineraries which can be a tourist product, and can thus, contribute to rural regions. They allow the regeneration of rural areas, in terms of territorial management and planning. They can act as greenways, being amalgams of landscape, accessibility, visibility, and equipment, all existing in an integrated manner (Balestrieri & Congiu, 2017). Although pilgrimages are a huge market niche, if there is little communication and marketing, insufficient or deficient infrastructures, it tends to be more difficult to develop their related pilgrimages and religious tourism products. Therefore, it is necessary to meet the needs of pilgrims (Nicolaidis, 2016).

Pilgrims have changed their way of experiencing these paths. Initially they were understood as a space of faith,

but now, they are currently living spaces, which is due to people walking more slowly and experiencing the feeling of community, that is, the relationships that they generate throughout their routes (Moscarelli *et al.*, 2020). The social part is so important that when pilgrims travel in groups they tend to stay longer, which contributes to the economic development of the pilgrimage territories (Heitor & Duarte, 2020).

De Almeida *et al.*, (2019) consider that religious tourism influences the development of territories, as it allows, through the presence of people from all over the world, a reach to new markets. Consequently it will generate employment and develop the local economy, while enabling the improvement of both rural and urban spaces. The authors indicate in their study that during a pilgrimage different services and products are offered, with accommodation and food services being highlighted, as well as the offer of religious items, souvenirs, food, clothing, and household items. However, it is important that pilgrims feel the pilgrimage experience is authentic, as they tend to follow behaviours that support the development of tourism (Hung Lee *et al.*, 2020).

According to Cugini (2021) the effects of pilgrimage are positive for territories because they generate employment. This form of religious tourism allows for responsible tourism that is less vulnerable to economic and social crises. However, there is a need for planning to mitigate negative impacts, such as damage to local traditional culture (Almeida *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, Mariuzzo and Carvalho (2017) warn that the sustainability of pilgrimage paths is compromised if the participation of local communities in the design and maintenance of them does not exist.

To reflect on this idea of sustainability; sustainable development of tourism aims at sustainability based on the following variables: environmental, economic, social, and cultural (Carr *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development determines 17 sustainable development goals, which tourism planning must meet in its strategies (UN, 2018). The various authors cited thus far, consider that pilgrimage paths can contribute to territories under various dimensions of sustainability. But, it is not yet clear in terms of sustainable development objectives whether

pilgrim paths can support all levels of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This is one of the aspects of trails that will be explored in this paper.

### Methodology

At the level of literature review, a number of key databases were used to identify and develop an appropriate understanding in relation to pilgrimage paths and local development. The main sources used were Science Direct, Emerald, Google Scholar and Web of Science, to search for appropriate empirical evidence within the period 2015-2021.

Semi-structured interviews were then carried out, to explore further the main themes and topics identified in the literature review. The selection of entities to be interviewed was based on the following criteria: being representatives of the territories where the paths pass and / or having influence on the decision-making processes regarding the paths. In this sense, two national and two regional governance bodies were interviewed, as well as two religious bodies, ten municipalities which the paths pass through and three associations related to use of the paths.

In terms of the interviews, they aim at an exploratory approach to the Portuguese Marian Paths, more

specifically the paths of Fátima. In the context of this research, the interviews aim to understand the views of the various agents of the territory regarding this and based on the interview findings, to identify and understand the vital points for a sustainable management model for the Marian path (Fátima).

These interviews took place during the month of August 2021 with the different entities with influence on the management of the paths. 50 entities with relevance for the management of the paths of Fátima were contacted, with 19 interviews being carried out, until the researchers identified that they had reached the point of saturation. This is the stage in interviews where information becomes redundant and no new data is being collected with each new interview. The technique used to process the information was Content Analysis. The information was analysed using NVivo software version 14.

### Results and Discussion

After identifying all the entities to be included in the analysis, it was necessary to divide them into categories - national and regional governance entities, municipalities, associations and religious entities. This categorisation allowed us to validate the idea that national (2) and regional governance entities (2), as well as religious ones (2), tend to have a macro view of the paths, whereas municipalities (10) and associations (3) tend to emphasise aspects related to the territory in which they operate.

#### Overall Objectives

In this sense, it should be noted that national, regional, and religious entities have as their main objectives for the paths of Fátima, to create a network of paths combining cultural and religious factors, reinforcing territorial and social cohesion. But they also promote economic dynamisation and empowerment of local communities. For this, it is necessary to structure the offer, make the paths safe, have adequate and uniform signage. This allows, for example, the attenuation of demand seasonality.

Municipalities tend to indicate as objectives the improvement of road safety, the promotion and interpretation of the territory in its various cultural, religious, and natural dimensions through networking

**Figure 1: Words Most Used by Respondents in Interviews**



Source: Authors

with agents in the territory in terms of accommodation, food, entertainment, and other activities. Equally, they suggest creating promotional materials and structuring partnerships, so that the path is

*a space for enjoyment and experience and not a quick way to reach a destination* [R4, R7, R8, R10].

In other words,

*turning the paths of Fátima into an anchor product for the enhancement of the territory and the cultural and religious tourism offer* [R2, R4, R7, R8, R10].

The associations' objectives are to guarantee conditions for assistance to pilgrims, the management of flows, proper identification, the involvement of all agents, but also the support for the development of new companies aimed at supporting services for pilgrims.

The most frequently used words in the definition of objectives provided in the total answers of the interviewees were: consolidation, cultural, territory, support, assistance, religious, security, promotion, tourism, improvement (see Figure 1).

### **Monitoring and Maintenance**

Regarding the definition of indicators or goals for monitoring the paths of Fatima, national, regional, and religious entities warn that they are still at the very early stages of developing the trails, since their implementation is recent. In this sense, they state that the key indicators to monitor them are number of pilgrims who travel the paths, profile of the pilgrims and their origin, as well as feedback on the experience. But also, the removal of people from national roads and the existence of demand beyond the 13<sup>th</sup> [1].

On the other hand, the municipalities consider, additional information such as the number of pilgrims by type (pedestrians/cyclists), their profile and their motivations (eg, number of nights, expenditure, support vehicles used, stops made, unmet needs, etc.). They are also interested

in the necessity to identify indicators of safety and road accidents, assistance in health facilities, signage, state of roads, balance of resources, use of cultural, tourist and religious facilities. They feel that this can be monitored through the use of passbooks, flow counting through digital platforms, surveys, or physical audits. They are interested in these measures in addition to periodic assessment of signage, safety conditions, and levels of environmental impact.

For associations, their interests in addition to the pilgrims' profile, includes information on seasonality and costs of cleaning and maintenance of spaces.

### **Contribution to Development**

As for how the paths can contribute to the development of the territory, national, regional, and religious entities indicate that the paths are useful as they allow the discovery of the territory and communities, boosting local economies, enhancing the development of the catering, accommodation and entertainment companies, among others, but also the enhancement of heritage. Not just on the 13th, but in a way that has a continuing impact on economic development.

Through the increase in overnight stays and the nature of the more rural routes, it will be possible to enhance the cultural, religious, and natural heritage, leading to a cultural exchange with people from different backgrounds. Therefore, the most remote territories can attract people and make districts viable through small businesses in areas such as accommodation, food, crafts, local production, transfers, and merchandising, leading to an increase in jobs and even the attraction and settling down of people who will work in such enterprises. This may also bring about an increase in the quality of infrastructure and support equipment, according to the pilgrim's needs and motivations. In this way, the municipalities point out that the paths can be an asset, allowing the dynamisation and enhancement of the territory, but also through the proximity economy, valuing endogenous resources and stimulating the socio-economic and cultural dynamisation of local communities.

According to the associations, the paths to Fatima, having emerged from the will of the pilgrims, make

1 The 13th refers to the 13th day of each month from May to October. These dates commemorate the apparitions of Mary to the children of Fatima in 1917. Because of this, special celebrations take place on these anniversary days each year.

Figure 2: UN Sustainable Development Goals



<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

them genuine and authentic. By improving the safety and signage conditions of these paths, they also contribute to the development of territories, through business opportunities, and also proximity tourism. As one participant stated it:

*allowing a 'softer' development as opposed to a more invasive classic tourism.*

### Ensuring Sustainable Development

In order for the development of the territory to be sustainable, national, regional and religious entities consider that measures should be adopted aimed at preserving the natural and cultural heritage. These actions must not put the territories at risk, or de-characterise them. Local areas must maintain their traditions, innovating while preserving the identity and authenticity of places. For this, it is necessary to know the load capacity and manage the flows. Development measures must focus on the pillars of the economy, social and cultural logic, environmental logic, and health issues.

In the same sense, the municipalities indicate that it is important to respect the carrying capacity, respect the norms of cultural and religious spaces and preserve landscaped spaces, maintaining the authenticity of both the routes and their communities, while avoiding massification. This will only be possible with monitoring and configuration of the support services offer, as well as measures aimed at the involvement and articulation

of destination management agents and local agents. That is, measures aimed at maintaining stable natural and rural systems while promoting the balanced use and enjoyment of resources. This promotes the integration of visitors into the social and cultural surroundings of the host communities, in harmony with the preservation of identities, while also aiming to optimise the effectiveness / efficiency of promotion and communication strategies.

On the other hand, the associations refer to the need for measures aimed at the economy of proximity such as the adoption of the circular economy, the promotion of organic farming since most of the roads are in rural areas, or, the use of teleworking to capture qualified resources for low-density territories. In other words, measures aimed at good management of resources, involving the population, developing the local economy, and avoiding unwanted massification.

With regard to the application of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to the paths of Fatima, it is observed that national, regional and religious entities tend not to specifically refer to any specific goal or goals. Instead, they chose to reinforce respect for the community, the territory, and the pilgrim.

A quite different scenario occurs in the responses of the municipalities, as they tend to identify concrete SDGs. Highlighting the following:

SDG 1- *Eradicate poverty, in all its forms, everywhere,*  
 SDG 3 - *Ensure access to quality healthcare and promote well-being for all, at all ages,*  
 SDG 8 - *Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all,*  
 SDG 10 - *Reduce inequalities within and between countries,*  
 SDG 11 - *Make cities and communities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,*  
 SDG 12 - *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns,*  
 SDG 15 - *protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage sustainably such as forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt the loss of biodiversity.*

They provide practical examples of how their implementation is possible, for example, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, using available, food, and beverage spaces, among others, and stimulating local economic activity. Protecting terrestrial life: creating paths / trails in nature can be a factor in combating deforestation and destruction of natural spaces.

Regarding the perception of associations, only a direct reference to two SDGs is made, that is, SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) for development in local communities and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and effective institutions), since the pilgrimage to Fátima is an act of devotion and conversion which is linked to a message of peace. However, the rest mention that through certification, for example, of 'hostels', or by raising awareness among pilgrims, it is possible to achieve some of the other objectives.

### ***Management Models and Issues***

National, regional and religious entities tend to consider that, in order to define a management model for the paths of Fatima, the process must take into account the different partnerships, so that the paths are properly structured and respond to needs of pilgrims and territories. In the current phase, there has been some work between the various entities, as well as training actions, financing lines and promotion.

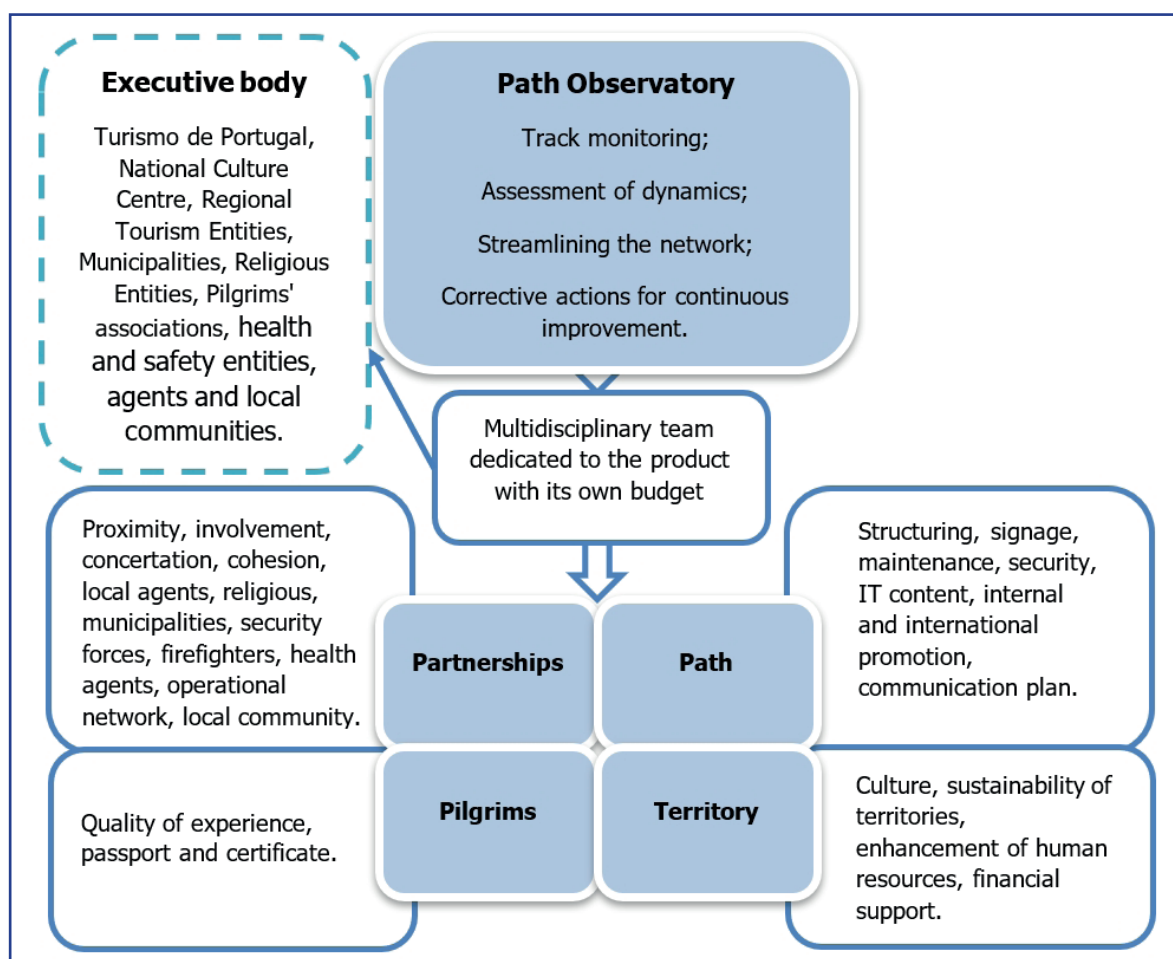
However,

*this coordination is marking signage, websites and developing a physical bibliography, but it is just not enough. It is necessary to maintain, update, and respond.*

A team dedicated to the product with financial autonomy is needed to respond to the pilgrim who may be lost or in need of support from the civil authorities, National Republican Guard (GNR) and Public Security Police (PSP). This entity would also be responsible as well for activity such as the maintenance of paths, cleaning, cutting of reeds, replacement of signage. This scenario implies that the central power needs to makes funds available for such.

In terms of the management model for the municipalities, they feel it is necessary to safeguard the quality of the pilgrim's experience in addition to the participation of different entities and local agents. In other words, it is necessary to have the participation of all to consolidate a strategy based on a partnership between entities that can create an operational and efficient network of agents in the territories. The partnership between entity and paths is vital. It is equally important to give relevance to the cultural components, signage with computerised content, support structures for the pilgrim, security, maintenance of paths, while enhancing and promoting them, based on the sustainability of the locations. A communication plan must be developed which is suited to the profile of the Fátima pilgrim, as well as the valorisation of human resources in the host territories. The municipalities also refer to the need for a passport and a single certificate for all routes arriving at the Sanctuary of Fátima. That would require, creating and concentrating the focus on an executive body from the diverse set of entities (religious, pilgrim associations, city councils, National Culture Centre, Regional Tourism Entities, accommodation, catering and entertainment networks, sports services, health, and security forces), whose competences and intervention capacities in the territory complement each other and create joint synergies. Only with this integration and involvement of everyone can the territory and the resources through which the paths pass be valued. Articulation must be done from the local to the national scale, but, must always involving the local communities. A multidisciplinary technical body must be established,

Figure 3: Proposed Model of Path Management



Source: Authors

with the technical capacity to intervene in the territory, in the areas of nature conservation and nature tourism, signage and security. The creation of an observatory to monitor the Paths, carry out a constant dynamic assessment of the Paths and take on the dynamisation of the network, namely in its national and international dissemination and promotion strategies must also be considered.

According to the associations, a management model for the paths of Fátima must be centralised, but capable of involving all agents interested in it, from pilgrims, to religious authorities and municipalities in the territories covered in addition to sector representatives, security forces, firefighters, and actors in the health area. They point out that this type of management is particularly difficult due to peaks in demand.

Considering that there are paths where demand is still residual, national, regional, and religious entities consider it necessary to promote paths based on their differentiating factors such as culture and landscape, among others. At the same time, organisations need to offer equipment and support services, adequate signage and ensure a feeling of security. It is necessary to sensitize local populations to the opportunity of the business itself (entertainment companies, accommodation, cafés, restaurants, etc.) and offer adequate solutions to those who walk the paths. It is also important to offer cultural, historical, and religious dimensions, so that participants read, or learn what there is to do along the Paths. In other words,

*'there must be something for everyone'.*

From the perspective of the municipalities, it would be interesting to link with other networks of routes, which are built upon other themes, to create packages (accommodation and catering adapted to each day),

However, these would also need to meet the interests of pilgrims, it is necessary that they feel a similar atmosphere and experience on these other Ways. As such, it is important that these trails are revealed to the promoters of pilgrimage activities, as safe routes, where a passport can be a booster for pilgrims to take other paths. Signage must be informative and provide orientation in addition to distance indications. Municipalities consider that it is necessary to create a communication plan with a theme focused on providing information to pilgrims and tourists. In the same way, the external assets beyond the Paths that allow for enjoyment of the trails must be disclosed to pilgrims.

### *Challenges*

Laws in Portugal deal with the integration of routes and national roads. The law prohibits pilgrimages on national roads, yet from May to October, the infrastructures of Portugal provides conditions (for example, suppression of traffic lanes) so that pilgrims can travel safely along national roads. Therefore, a factor that should be appropriate for the promotion of more pilgrims throughout the year would be the development of safe sidewalks and alternative routes. Another difficulty encountered is the excessive number of walking routes, which do not add value to the tourism product, or attract more tourists. This makes it necessary to create a matrix for evaluating the attractiveness of routes, both from the point of view of the conditions of the path and the complementary offer of support. Taking these two issues into consideration, perhaps some paths should either be eliminated or improved.

Along the same lines, the associations indicate there is a need for well-marked paths, accessible overnight stays (hostels), support services and an improvement of promotion. In particular they feel that parishes need to sensitize groups of pilgrims to the advantages of adopting the paths of Fatima, instead of travelling on some of the asphalt trails that are not suitable for pilgrim purposes.

### *The Meaning and Value of the Paths*

Regarding the contribution of the paths for local populations and for pilgrims, national, regional, and religious entities indicate that pilgrimages are an experience of personal meaning. While the personal

importance of Fatima in the collective memory of pilgrims is a key factor, there is potential to increase this value if these Paths can be positioned as an opportunity to join with people, to develop feelings of solidarity and overcoming personal challenges. As such, the paths allow people to feel security, live experiences, appreciate landscapes and nature, while also providing moments of introspection. At the same time they offer opportunities for communion with those we are meeting, with those we are with. This can include the populations along the route and can develop further the notoriety of places and thus offer varied opportunities, and increase multiculturalism.

According to the municipalities, pilgrims discover the territory at the same time as they discover themselves. In this way, they enjoy the landscape, the springs, the monuments, the fountains, the restaurants, the accommodation, the welcome / hospitality, and the safety that the paths offer. The benefits for the visited local communities are vast, with emphasis on low-density territories which are markedly rural. The increase in visits and the consequent improvement of the social and cultural environment, the promotion of new lifestyles, the emergence of small local tourist businesses, the dynamisation of traditional economic activities, as well as local heritage are all important factors and much of this is linked to the spiritual dimension of the place.

The income resulting from the increase in flows also has the capacity to attract new investments and projects within a sustainable matrix, whether in catering and accommodation, or in areas linked to nature tourism, handicrafts, traditional agri-food products, and a whole range of local services to support pilgrims. But also, there is potential for greater cleanliness and care for the areas along the route, greater territorial cohesion between the municipalities integrated by a path, a greater sense of responsibility and care for forests / natural spaces.

According to the associations, for local populations, the contribution of the paths offers possibilities for animation and local development, particularly for the retired population that still has sufficient vitality to get involved. For pilgrims, the contribution of the paths is the contact with nature, a safe, signposted and organised route that allows access to the Sanctuary of Fátima under the best conditions, stimulating a symbiosis between religion and nature.

### ***Future Development***

In order to understand how the trail might impact the area, it will be important to manage the maximum daily flow of pilgrims, so as to maintain the identity of the territory. National, regional and religious entities consider that the paths are currently at a 'zero' stage. So, this is not problem for now. As pilgrimage is currently a low-pressure activity in the territories, the identity of the territories will hardly be in question.

According to the municipalities of these small groups, at most, pilgrims are in the order of hundreds. This varies according to the accommodation capacity along the route. The volume of pilgrim visitors can range from 600 in municipalities where it could represents 2/3 of the installed tourism capacity to as little as provision for 20 pilgrims in others. However, they point out that at present all of the pilgrims can currently fit in the paths, and the definition of a limit is not a concern at this stage. However, it is important to have this study carried out for each municipality depending on the offer of restaurants, accommodation and other related services.

As for the associations, they indicate that the potential pressure depends on several variables, such as whether this flow is distributed along the way, or if it is in places of rest / overnight stay. The impact will depend on the available infrastructure. However, the associations note that, for example, 300 pilgrims would almost represent an invasion.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Pilgrimage has increased around the world. Holy places with shrines attract people. This growing social and spiritual phenomenon has caused an increase in the number of visitors from different religions who come to these places, promoting 'more peaceful relationships and increased tolerance between different religious groups and individuals' (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2015). This corresponds to what the different respondents indicate. These respondents are currently identifying, signalling and making the pilgrimage to Fatima safe for participants.

Pilgrimage paths are environments where people of different religions interact and learn to know and respect each other better. In addition, they are a way to create sustainable tourism projects, promoting lesser-known areas and resources in a region. In this way, a sustainable path management model allows for a better understanding of this reality, as well as being responsive to needs.

Concerns exist regarding issues related to the pillars of sustainability. However, it is still necessary for national, regional, local and religious management entities to have a better understanding about how the paths can contribute to the SDGs. Any model of sustainable management must incorporate these specific objectives, since, at the moment there is no management model for the Paths under analysis. On the other hand, because the paths are at the 'Zero' phase, it allows preventive and proactive measures to be taken, as well as a strategy based on the consultation of all partners.

Although no surveys were carried out among tourists, local communities and local agents, during this research, a proposed management model for the Paths of Fátima was developed. Despite some variations, the inputs resulting from the varying respondents' were very similar throughout the research.

### **Research Implications**

This study contributes to the development of local communities, in the sense that it identifies the opportunities for them, especially in terms of retaining people in the territories through the creation of an offer aimed at meeting the needs of pilgrims, such as accommodation, catering, among others. In a more macro sense, it allows entities to adopt a sustainable management model for the paths to Fátima.

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