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The rural village as an open door to nature-based tourism in Portugal: The Aldeia da Pedralva case

Abstract

This case study describes a good practice in the rural tourism field. At the end of 2005, a young entrepreneur found a deserted village in the South of Portugal, where only seven locals were left from the initial dwellers. He and his colleagues decided to buy and rebuild the houses, a pile of ruins, and develop a rural tourism village project. The village's integration in the Natura 2000 network and its close proximity to the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park allows multi-sensory experiences based on nature-based activities. Although oriented towards tourism, the project has benefited the local community. It includes the organisation of local events, partnerships with local enterprises and the support of the local council. Recently, the project aims to gather local enterprises into a single structure of public access, with a view to create conditions for higher quality nature-based experiences and job opportunities for locals. Furthermore, tourism in rural areas is also seen as a complement to the seasonal 'sun and sand tourism' in Algarve. This paper aims to discuss the economical, social, cultural and environmental implications of the project, presenting a contextualization regarding the recent developments of rural tourism in Portugal.

Key words: rural tourism village; nature-based experiences; sensescapes; Portugal

Introduction

Tourism in the countryside has witnessed an increase in political and academic interest as an important development tool for rural areas that are socially and economically depressed (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Kastenholz, 2005; OECD, 1994; Sharpley & Roberts, 2004). Indeed, there are trends in the tourism market that can be pinpointed as boosting the rural tourism phenomenon: the increasing level of individuals' education and tourism experience; the growing interest in the authenticity of natural and cultural heritage; the growing concern with the environment; health and well-being; and the increasing preference of travellers for short yet novel vacations during the year (Kastenholz, 2003; Kastenholz, Carneiro & Eusébio, 2006; Koscak, 1998; OECD, 1994). Additionally, the massive occupation of coastal areas (focused on beach-based tourism) and the emergence of new overseas destinations

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highlighted the interest of European countries in the previously neglected rural destinations, which offer conditions to a large variety of activities (Fons, Fierro & Patiño, 2011; Roberts & Hall, 2001). In fact, tourism experiences in the countryside offer close links to nature and cultural values (Kastenholz, 2011). Natural resources such as water, vegetation, and wildlife are indeed attractive features of pristine areas, and are ideal locations for hiking, bird-watching or fishing (Kastenholz, 2003; Momsen, 2000).

In this context, tourism motivated by a desire to contemplate and interact with nature, represent 22 million international trips per year in Europe and it is expected that nature-based tourism will reach 43.3 million trips in 2015 (THR, 2006). In Portugal, tourism is a strategic sector in the country economy. Indeed, with a view to boost the destination's attractiveness for tourism, the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Ministério da Economia e da Inovação, 2007) pinpointed nature-based tourism as one of the ten national strategic products. In the context of enhancing the rural tourism phenomenon, several projects have been implemented in small villages in depopulated rural areas of Portugal. These tourism projects promote the region's sustainability, involving the local community, with cooperation between public and private sectors (Ribeiro, Freitas & Mendes, 2001).

The good climate and the beaches stand out in the Algarve, a region located in the South of Portugal. This is the most important tourist destination in the country measured in terms of tourist overnights and accommodation capacity (INE, 2010). Over the last 30 years, the development of tourism in the region focused on sun and beach related activities. This fact led to a mass tourism phenomenon, creating new forms of territory occupation, which centred on coastal areas. Eventually, this process aggravated the urban/rural dichotomy, which was generated by the transition of an agricultural-based to a service-based economy. This phenomenon caused a gradual desertification of rural areas and a saturation of services and infrastructures in urban areas, especially during the summer (CCDR Algarve, 2002; Ribeiro & Marques, 2002).

Against this background, an advertising executive who was looking for a vacation house in Algarve found a village in the west of the region. As with many other deserted villages in Portugal, Aldeia da Pedralva was in ruins and there were less than ten residents. The entrepreneur and three colleagues decided to rejuvenate the village by developing a tourism guest village. However, their aim was not only to offer a typical overnight rural retreat, but rather to provide an experience for guests to actively engage with the flora, fauna, and landscape in its natural setting. Indeed, Aldeia da Pedralva is situated in the Vila do Bispo county, where about 64% of the area is part of the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park, and more than 90% of the European Natura 2000 Network (Ministério do Ambiente e do Ordenamento do Território, 2000). The private tourism venture dynamised the village, motivating the support of the public sector, bringing better living conditions for residents, and promoting farming and fishing of local produce.

This paper aims to analyse the Aldeia da Pedralva project as a good practice in tourism, with far-reaching implications. As such, the project has economic, social, cultural, and environmental implications, as this paper discusses further below. In addition, the case study will be contextualized regarding to the recent developments in rural tourism in Portugal.

Theoretical background

Rural tourism and local development

The pursuit of outdoor activities is the main motivator for recreation and tourism in rural areas. In this context, several authors state that tourists seeking recreational experiences in rural areas are closely linked to nature-based motivations (Kastenholz, 2003; Momsen, 2000; Roberts & Hall, 2001). Health reasons and psychological balance are driving forces behind tourists visiting the countryside, where the aesthetic value of the landscape is a key attraction. Another motivation for visiting rural areas is experiencing the novelty of a rural lifestyle (Kastenholz et al., 2006). Childhood nostalgia about 'the good old days' when life was characterized by simplicity and purity is another motivator for rural tourism, a motive that is also associated with migration to urban areas for economic and professional reasons (Kastenholz et al., 2006; Urry, 2002). Tourists are also driven to rural locations in the pursuit of a spiritual experience with nature (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). In the countryside, outdoor recreation is diverse: hiking, bird-watching, biking, sight-seeing, water-based activities, visiting parks and heritage sites, as well as trekking and nature appreciation including experiencing farm activities and rural life (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Momsen, 2000; OECD, 1994; Roberts & Hall, 2001).

However, the concept of rural tourism is not consensual among countries and policy entities (Page & Getz, 1997; Roberts & Hall, 2001). Lane (1994a) states that rural tourism establishments should ideally: be located in rural areas; be functionally rural; be based on features unique to a rural context, such as small-scale enterprise, open space, natural resources, and traditional practices; be rural in scale (small) and traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, controlled locally and developed for the long-term good of the area. Despite the characterization of rural tourism in its 'purest' form, the author highlights the emergence of a general market for less specialized forms of rural tourism. Roberts and Hall (2001, 2004) named it as 'tourism in rural areas', which is focused on the activities performed by tourists. According to the authors, the importance of the countryside as a tourist's motivator can be used to distinguish these two forms of tourism. Bearing this in mind, the researchers present a continuum which indicates that the participation in general tourism activities in the countryside (e.g., general sight-seeing) is related to low importance of the countryside factor for consumer satisfaction, being more correctly described as tourism in rural areas. On the other hand, experiences such as trekking or bird-watching, which presuppose high involvement with nature, suggest that the rural environment is of primary relevance for tourists. Hence, the model shows "how the importance of the countryside factor may be used to evaluate whether or not a market niche (or market niches) might exist" (Roberts & Hall, 2001, p. 183). Nevertheless, the authors point out that, due to the fact that consumers are increasingly interested to participate in a wide range of activities, the identification of a product's core value might be somewhat difficult. In addition, the model should be seen as flexible, allowing moving the activities along the continuum according to the way in which they are consumed.

In this context, tourism activities in rural settings are increasingly transforming from relatively passive to active and significant agents of environment, economic and social change (Roberts & Hall, 2001, 2004). Krippendorff (1982) was an earlier critic of unrestricted tourism growth and its negative social and environmental implications, and cautioned that the economic benefits of tourism need to be balanced with social and environmental costs. This view resonates with the contemporary concept of

corporate social responsibility, which postulates that sustainability involves a responsibility to society in general, and is applicable to both private and public entities involved in tourism projects (Font & Harris, 2004). Indeed, several studies question the sustainability of tourism in rural areas with respect to economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues. Irrespective of its benefits, rural tourism should not be seen as a panacea for all of the problems facing the area (Fons et al., 2011; Hall, 2004; Lane, 1994b; OECD, 1994; Sharpley, 2002).

Rural tourism and the sensescapes

Nature is a diversified collection of undeveloped resources that creates sensory effects that can be experienced by tourists (Farrell, 2000). Indeed, tourism elicits a sensory response from the individual, allowing one to celebrate the desires of the body (Quan & Wang, 2004; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). Nevertheless, tourism studies have been systematically centred on the visual component of the tourist experience (Veijola & Jokinen, 1994; Urry, 2002). More recently, several authors reveal the importance of all bodily senses in understanding tourist experiences, focusing on a holistic approach of the sensescapes (Agapito, Valle & Mendes, 2012; Dann & Jacobsen, 2003; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Rodaway, 1994; Urry, 2002). This involves a set of sensory experiences, developed from stimuli received through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, which materialise into visual, auditory, atmospheric, gastronomic, and tactile sensations (Hultén, Broweus & Dijk, 2009; Krishna, 2010). Therefore, it is considered that the richness of outdoor activities offered in a rural environment, in contrast to the features of the urban environment (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011), can increase the overall quality of the tourist experience, offering them conditions to boost their experience (Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques & Lima, 2011).

Rural tourism villages in Portugal

In Portugal, rural tourism originated in the late 1970s on an experimental basis (Decreto Regulamentar nº 14/78). In 1986, tourism in rural areas ('TER-Turismo no Espaço Rural') was legislated (Dec.-Lei nº 256/86). The concept is defined as a paid set of activities and services provided in rural areas, in establishments with family character aiming at offering a complete and diversified tourism product in rural areas. These establishments should preserve, restore and value the regions' architectural, historical, natural and landscape heritage (Dec.-Lei nº 54/2002). According to recent Portuguese legislation (Dec.-Lei nº 39/2008), tourism in rural areas is classified into the following forms: countryside cottages ('casas de campo'), agro-tourism ('agro-turismo'), and rural hotels ('hotéis rurais'). Countryside cottages are defined as properties located in villages ('aldeias') and rural areas that exemplify typical local architecture. It should be noted that 'aldeia' means a small rural location, without administrative autonomy, usually with few inhabitants and simpler organisation than a 'vila' or a city. When the cottages (minimum of five) are situated in 'aldeias' and are operated in an integrated manner by a single entity, they are 'turismo de aldeia' (tourist rural village).

Since the concept of 'turismo de aldeia' emerged in Portugal in 1997 (Dec.-Lei nº 169/97), several projects have been initiated to promote the sustainability of previously depopulated rural areas, by involving the community and fostering cooperation between public and private investment. Aldeia da

Cuada, in Azores Island, Aldeia de S.Gregório in Alentejo, Aldeia de Póvoa Dão in Viseu, the Schist Villages Network (Aldeias de Xisto) in the centre of Portugal, and Aldeia da Mata Pequena, about 30 kilometers from Lisbon, the capital, are a few examples. An European network of rural tourism villages (Rede Europeia de Turismo de Aldeia) was initiated by the tourism board in Évora, Portugal, in 2003, integrating 40 villages from Portugal, Italy, Finland, Poland, and Romania, with recognition from the World Tourism Organisation. Recently, in Algarve (South of Portugal), a deserted village where many of its houses lay in ruins was rejuvenated after the development of an innovative, private tourist project that embraced the name of the rural village – Aldeia da Pedralva – focused upon the nature-based experiences allowed by the richness of the surroundings.

Aldeia da Pedralva: A case study in Portugal

Methodology

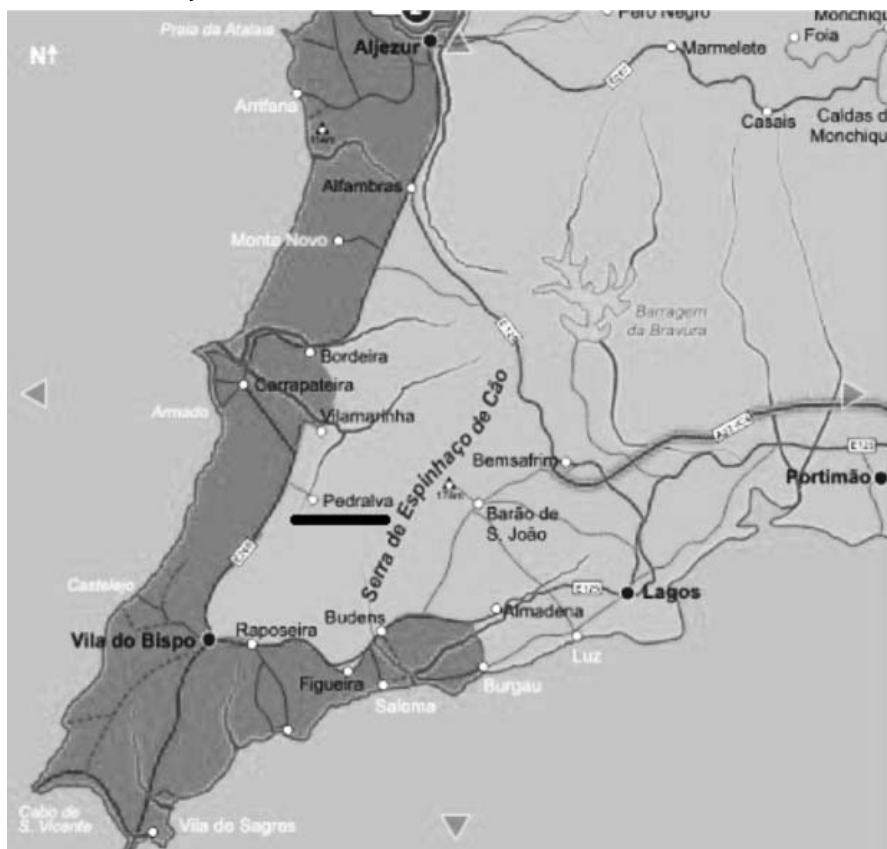
Discussed as a good practice in tourism, the case study of Aldeia da Pedralva was developed using observation and semi-structured interviews with the entrepreneurs' spokesperson (own-manager), the main trekking guide and the locals, which took place between January and March 2011. Also included in the analysis are secondary data, such as promotional brochures, photos, press releases, and material published by the municipal council.

Setting

Aldeia da Pedralva is situated in Algarve (4,996 km²), in Vila do Bispo (179 km²) county, between the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park (approximately 60,567 ha of land area and 28,858 ha of sea area) and several beaches (Figure 1).

With Atlantic and Mediterranean influences, Vila do Bispo is located on the western coastline of Algarve, bordering the Aljezur and Lagos municipalities. It consists of five parishes: Vila do Bispo, Vila de Sagres, Raposeira, Budens, and Barão de São Miguel. The landscape comprises coast lagoons, hills, dunes chains, and interior valleys, reflecting the diverse local geology and consequently, a variety of fauna and flora. Indeed, since 1988, a large area of the municipality has been located in the national network of protected areas – the Alentejo Southwest and Vicentine Coast Natural Park – which also covers coastal areas of Sines, Odemira, and Aljezur municipalities. Internationally, the existing natural values justified the integration of the area in the Natura 2000 network. The flora is characterized by a large diversity of natural resources with over 700 species of plants. It includes several rare species, some of which are protected at the national and international levels. Moreover, some of the species are endemic to the region such as the tojo-de-sagres, biscutela vicentina, diplotaxis vicentina and the hyacinthoides, among others. The region also has more than 100 species of birds, mammals and aquatic fauna, such as the cetaceans, some of which are protected species. Therefore, along with local agricultural and hunting activities, the small-scale fishing stands out. Local gastronomy combines the flavours of earth and sea, such as fish, shellfish, hare, partridge, rabbit, boar, fruits and traditional confectionery. As artifacts of the local culture, handicrafts on offer include handmade products made from wood, wool, cord grass, palm, lace and embroidery, as well as handmade sweets (Globalgarve, 2003; Santos, n.d.).

Figure 1
Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park



Source: ICNB - Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e Biodiversidade

Besides the geological and natural importance of Vila do Bispo, the territory is also culturally significant. Indeed, the origins of Vila do Bispo date back to prehistoric times. Infante D. Henrique, the fifth son of the Portuguese king D. João I, positioned Sagres parish as strategic to the Portuguese Maritime Expansion project in the fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century, Vila do Bispo became a municipality. Given its importance throughout history, the municipality has a notable archaeological, religious and military heritage (Jesus, 2005). Although the historical records of Aldeia da Pedralva are practically nonexistent, archaeological discoveries near the village (such as two zoomorphic statues, representing a bull and a boar) have revealed the presence of humans in the area as early as the Iron Age, 4th century BC (Gomes & Silva, 1987).

Remaining locals confirm that Aldeia da Pedralva used to have nearly 200 residents in about 50 houses, until the depopulation phenomenon began. In the 1950s and 1960s the daily life in the village included mainly agricultural activities, with donkeys used as a common mode of transportation. The eldest villager (aged 75), born in Aldeia da Pedralva, and his wife (aged 65) affirm that until the onset of the revolution on April 25, 1974, the village was famous in the region for its popular dance events and social life. People from the neighbouring villages came to Pedralva every Saturday to participate in these events, hosted alternately by two residents. Regarding day-to-day activities, the village was known for the production of apples, being regularly called 'land of apples'. The villagers also produced wine, corn

and other cereals, vegetables and fruit. Indeed, every house had a vegetable plot, and neighbours usually exchanged produce. The cultivation of olives trees allowed the production of olive oil and hunting was a common activity. Following depopulation, the number of residents dwindled to six villagers by the time of this research. The abandoned houses were deteriorating and life for the locals who continued to live there became increasingly difficult. The depopulation phenomenon stems from urban migration, whereby young people move to urban centres in search of better opportunities and the decline of traditional agriculture, which was a critical component of the local population's subsistence (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002). The remaining few residents still produce vegetables, fruit and raise chickens.

The birth of the tourism project

In 2005, an advertising executive, António Ferreira, visited Aldeia da Pedralva to buy a holiday home. As with many other deserted villages in Portugal, Aldeia da Pedralva lay in ruins (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Aldeia da Pedralva before rebuilding



Source: Pedralva Surf Hotels

In 2006, impressed by the beauty of the place and the scenario of desertification, the entrepreneur persuaded three additional colleagues to join him in a venture to buy the abandoned houses. All but seven houses in the once-thriving agricultural community of Pedralva had been abandoned, long forgotten by their owners. It took nearly two years to find the nearly 200 owners of the 31 properties. Some families had forgotten that they even owned a house. In the task of finding the owners that now lived in different parts of the world, the entrepreneurs relied on the help of the locals. In one case, they had to negotiate the purchase of a house with 20 heirs. The owner-manager explains that 'the next phase was to start rebuilding the houses, keeping the original design, as much as possible'. Given the importance of the project for the village, in 2008, the council initiated the plan that was previously confined to the requalification of the village, authorising the investment of one million euros in roads, lightning, the drainage system and water supply, refurbishment of all infrastructures and paving the streets (Região Sul, 2008). In 2010, 24 houses had been restored to their rustic glory, each named after one of the area's beaches, along with a reception house, a restaurant and a grocery shop (Figure 3). The project continues to grow encompassing the restoration of more homes.

Figure 3
Aldeia da Pedralva after rebuilding



Source: Pedralva Surf Hotels

Designed as an active tourism village, the complex is discussed by the owner-manager:

In Aldeia da Pedralva we try not to break the value chain, and create conditions to live a unique experience. Besides staying in a rebuilt typical village, we aim that tourists become active, being part of its life, and not just observers. Throughout, the project is focused on nature-based activities, which are not all necessarily physical, but also involve learning.

Indeed, the programs encourage visitors' activity in trekking, biking, bird-watching and surfing. Special programs targeted at seniors adapt these to suit their participants' abilities. Workshops on photography, Portuguese gastronomy, and yoga classes on the beach are included in the activities, which can be also an alternative to the companions of bird-watchers, surfers, bikers or trekkers who are not comfortable with these more physical activities. Because one of the project's aims is transferring local knowledge to tourists, the program's activities feature local guides, and the local grocery shop and restaurant use regional products. Moreover, the tourists are also encouraged to interact and buy fish and shellfish directly from local anglers who teach them how to prepare it. Furthermore, the trail activities aim to provide knowledge about local history, local customs, local products, local handicraft and local gastronomy.

Sensescapes in Aldeia da Pedralva

The Aldeia da Pedralva brand identity is based on the representation of the five human senses. The logo consists of an eye surrounded by images pertaining to the senses of hearing, taste, touch, and smell (<http://www.aldeiadapedralva.com/>). In this context, the project is based upon the premise that staying overnight in a rural village and engaging with natural resources will stimulate various sensory responses. For example, the trekking program comprises four thematic routes, integrating different scenarios, such as mountain ranges, woods, pinewood, dunes, agricultural areas, cliffs and rock caves. Each scenario corresponds to different types of fauna, flora and geology. The main trekking guide, Nicolau da Costa, describes the holistic sensescapes that tourists can experience during their trails. Along with the contrasting landscapes, the natural light and the diversity of shades, the guide highlights the 'local characteristic sunlight that creates different visual atmospheres during the day and according to the weather'. Regarding the tactile sensory component, the trekking guide declares that

'being a typical windy area, the wind is an element that can be physical felt by tourists'. The trekking participants are also encouraged to touch and feel different textures: 'The wind, the sea, and the birds' sounds can also become part of the memory of the experience'. Furthermore, the guide explains that 'nature-based experiences offer diverse smellscape', from the plants or the swells. This interaction between the senses is interesting, when, for example, it is not yet possible to see the sea, even though we can smell it', adding that 'in Spring, there can be an explosion of smells'. Taste can be experienced 'in the picnic included in trekking programs with local products, but also from the lunches and dinners in the Pedralva restaurant or in local restaurants'. Indeed, activities such as gastronomy workshops provide the conditions to stimulate all of the human senses.

Implications of the project for the region

Although designed as a private project targeting tourists, the planners acknowledged its key social, cultural, economic and environmental issues. The implications for the locality and region are discussed below.

Social implications. A village on the verge of isolation was dynamised by the project under study. Indeed, before the project, the remaining villagers lived in houses surrounded by a pile of ruins. Today, they live in a renovated village. Some former residents who retained ownership of their houses witnessed an increase in their home's value, leading them to renovate them to spend their vacations or to let to tourists in collaboration with the tourist project. The Vila do Bispo council's investment in the requalification of the village has contributed to better living conditions and to making the village more appealing. The owner-manager claims that 'now the stimulus is to give continuity to the village function. Indeed, the dynamics of the village might motivate anyone to consider living here and spur the process of repopulating Aldeia da Pedralva. There are signs of this process having already begun, with the re-opening of the village grocery shop after more than 20 years, and the resurrection of its mail services. Furthermore, the organisation of events such as handicraft fairs and bike competitions boosts the village morale during the year. In addition, the creation of jobs is another objective of the project, with the establishment of a nature-based activities multi-centre in the village, explained in more detail in the economic implications section.

Cultural implications. The nature-based experiences are organised around knowledge of local history, local customs and local products and handicraft. The project includes several handicraft fairs during the year in the village and recovers traditional popular events, such as the 'Festa do Mastro'. At the handicraft fairs, several artisans from the region are invited to exhibit their crafts, and there are plans to make these exhibitions a permanent fixture, as the owner-manager explains:

This year (2011) we will open four workshops of artisans. These will be permanent and the aim is to give a life to the village of its own and attract residents from the region and other visitors, not to spend overnight but to visit. Our objective is to create ten workshops of artisans working in different materials, such as wood, fur, ceramics, painting, and regional gastronomy, for example. We are trying to give continuity to the village's history and recuperate the original function of it. Maybe reinvented it, but always on a geographical identity basis. A group of artisans may recuperate the fishing arts and reinvent it, giving new utilities to the objects. Indeed, there are different forms of keeping the history of objects alive.

Furthermore, although cottages are comfortable, there is no television and the mobile phone reception is somewhat difficult, which is an incentive for tourists to integrate the lifestyle of the village and to engage in the cultural and nature-based activities.

Environmental implications. Although all tourist activities have environmental impacts (Fons et al., 2011), Aldeia da Pedralva's tourist project acknowledges these with simple actions such as providing ecological bags to tourists to carry products purchased during their trail activities. In its restaurant and grocery shop, stocking local products is a priority. Furthermore, in nature-based activities, the maximum number of participants is fourteen, decreasing the environmental impact while increasing the tourist experience quality. Trekking guides are careful to point out that trekkers leave as little impact on the environment as possible, for example, by deterring them from picking flowers, and ensuring they use the established tracks. In the fishing programs, the 'catch and release' concept is applied. For transportation, there are camper vans available, which 'allow for the transportation of large groups of people and adapt to the slow rhythm of the region and nature', according to the owner-manager.

Economic implications. Once a week, the local products are also sold in Lisbon (capital of Portugal), an initiative that individual local producers would not have been able to develop. Moreover, tourists are encouraged to buy products from local anglers and from local shops visited during trail activities. The use of local guides in the outdoor activities is central to the project. Indeed, some local anglers who find it difficult to make a living from fishing alone have begun to diversify into sports fishing and other nature-based activities, as explained by the trekker guide, also a fisherman and a shellfish collector.

Moreover, the objective of Aldeia da Pedralva entrepreneurs is cultivating local enterprise in partnership with the local council. The nature-based multi-centre, that will be located in the village's former primary school, will initially create two jobs, with further employment opportunities in the longer term. The owner-manager explains:

We intend to invest in local companies. In the case of bird-watching, for strategic reasons and a lack of a structure of an enterprising resident specialised in this activity, we assumed that the Huelva region could add value to our offer. The idea of the multi-centre originated because we realise that the nature-based activities in this region were not organised among themselves, the firms worked individually. Bearing this in mind, the aim is also to offer activities in addition to those already in existence, such as ride donkeys, activities in the garden, diving and kayaks. We want the multi-centre to be a public space, not only for Aldeia da Pedralva, because we think that the nonexistence of this type of infrastructure is a gap in the region.

Rural tourism and nature-based activities in Algarve are an alternative that mitigates the seasonality of the '3 S tourism' in the coastal areas. Indeed, several authors affirm that rural tourism can complement and counterbalance the coastal mass tourism (Hall, 2004; Koscak, 1998; Sharples, 2002). In this regard, the first version of the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Ministério da Economia e da Inovação, 2007) does not position nature tourism as central to Algarve; it is considered a secondary motivation for travelling to the region. However, given the large, concentrated areas of natural reserve in the region, and in light of developments such as Aldeia da Pedralva, nature-based tourism is expected to be a primary activity in the document under revision (Pires, 2010). In this regard, the owner-manager states that 'the Algarve region has all the endogenous resources necessary for the development of quality nature-based tourism but there is still a lack of strategic planning, coordination, and infrastructure in

the region, essential to the sustainability of this activity, which must be ensured by the sector public'. The nature-based multi-centre is therefore an initiative that aims to address the identified gap, both in the region and at a national level (THR, 2006).

Conclusion

This study set out to describe and discuss the Aldeia da Pedralva rural tourist project as a good practice in tourism, while acknowledging the inherent economic, social, cultural and environmental implications. The aim was also to consider the Aldeia da Pedralva complex in the context of recent developments in rural tourism in Portugal. The case study described how a venture rejuvenated a deserted village and provided tourists with opportunities to experience rural life and to engage with locals and the natural resources.

Indeed, for tourists, the project aims to deliver a quality experience, satisfying the tourist's need for diverse experiences and increased knowledge (Poon, 1993). Moreover, it provides the conditions that allow tourists to have a holistic experience, by stimulating all of the five human senses in their active interaction with nature (Agapito et al., 2012; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Rodaway, 1994; Urry, 2002).

According to Lane's (1994a) requirements for rural tourism facilities, Aldeia da Pedralva fulfils most of the criteria, being a small-scale enterprise located in a rural area, maintaining its original character and trying to revive the original function of the village. It focuses on natural resources and on outdoor activities, and it is growing slowly and organically, without exerting control over all the village's houses. Being a private project, it is not controlled by local decision-makers, although it is developing some partnerships with local small companies. Hence, the project acknowledges social, cultural, environmental, and economic concerns, with long-term aims for the village's welfare. Furthermore, according to Roberts and Hall's continuum (2001), and given the active nature-based activities offered, it can be argued that the countryside environment is of primary relevance for tourists. Nonetheless, future empirical analysis, using a survey for questioning tourists' motivations, is suggested in order to confirm this assumption.

This research also allowed to conclude that the Aldeia da Pedralva project supports rural arts, crafts, and local products, and collaborates with the local council and local business (optimizing local's know-how) while pursuing its dual aims of developing nature-based tourism and creating local jobs. In its report entitled 'What Can Rural Tourism Contribute to Rural Development?', the OECD (1994) states that, given the implications from dwindling fish stocks, quota restrictions and international bans on some activities, fishing communities can successfully diversify into sports fishing and related activities. Indeed, the goal for sustainable rural tourism is to find activities that bolster natural and cultural heritage, whilst promoting the sustainable development of rural areas (Kastenholz, 2003).

Although this pioneer private project in the region does not offer an all-encompassing solution to all of the issues arising from the desertification of Aldeia da Pedralva, it provides a basis for the village's long-term development, such as the expected job generation resulting from the development of a nature-based multi-centre. As a collaborative effort with local businesses and local council, the

multi-centre represents a vision of collaborative and strategic planning for the future of nature-based tourism in the Algarve region.

Furthermore, while focusing natural and cultural resources, rural tourism offers tourists with an alternative to 'sun and sand tourism'. If considered in a broader context of a destination's system this orientation gives tourism providers the opportunity to diversify and complement their tourism offer whilst spreading the benefits of tourism more widely (Roberts & Hall, 2001; Sharpley, 2002). Accordingly, in Portugal, the National Strategic Plan for Tourism defines nature-based tourism as a strategic product (Ministério da Economia e da Inovação, 2007). Nonetheless, efforts are still required in order to create the necessary infrastructures to support nature-based tourism in the country and specifically in the Algarve (THR, 2006).

Although a full empirical study measuring the longer-term socioeconomic impact of the project of Aldeia da Pedralva in the region will inevitably prove useful in the future, this preliminary analysis illustrates the benefits of this project to the local community, and its stakeholders, boosting the dynamics of development by integrating 'win-win' and sustainable management strategies (Lambin, 2002). Indeed, Sharpley (2002) states that although rural tourism does not resolve all of the problems of depressed areas, there is no little doubt that it can be an effective vehicle of socioeconomic regeneration in rural areas.

Finally, while such cases of entrepreneurship in the so-called difficult areas can lead to further local and regional development (Mendes & Oliveira, 2007), it is unlikely that wider benefits can be realised and sustained without government support (North & Smallbone, 2006; Sharpley, 2002). Likewise, the collaborative efforts between a private investor and the local council, as illustrated by the Aldeia da Pedralva case, are a positive development. However, the support of the public sector in the creation and operation of support infrastructures and coordination are essential to the development of nature-based tourism in Algarve and in Portugal more broadly.

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