

ASERS

# Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

Quarterly

Volume XIII

Issue 8(64)

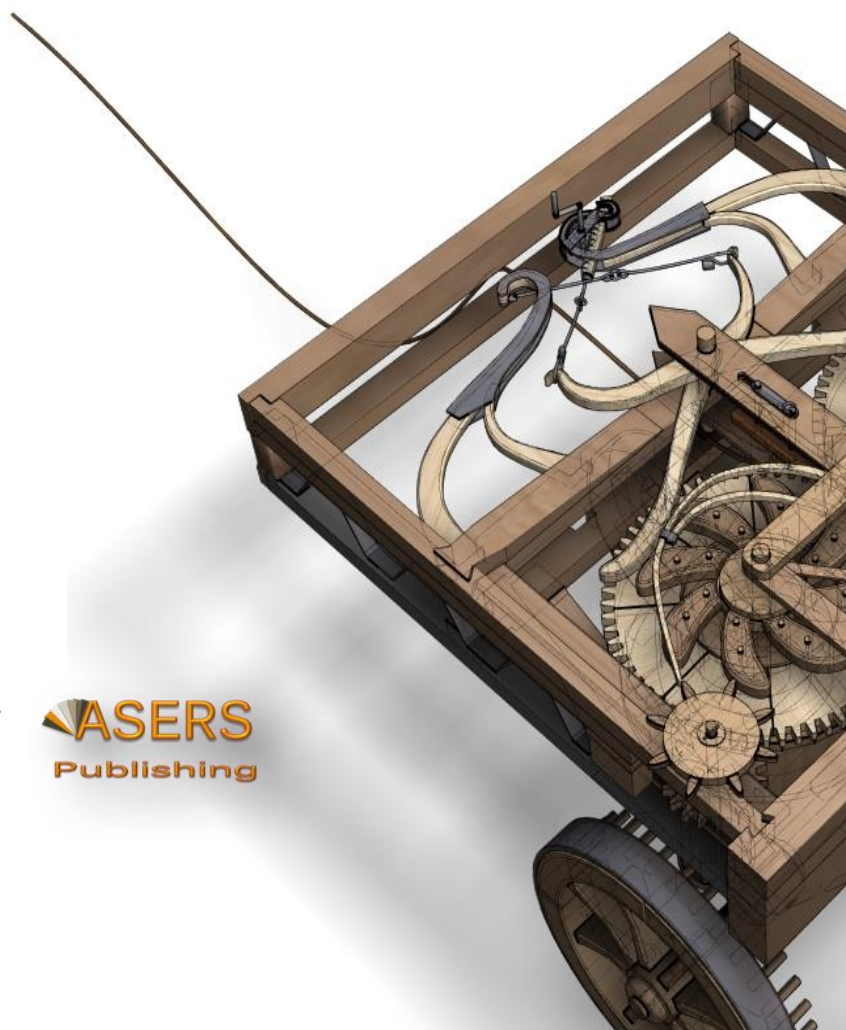
Winter 2022

ISSN 2068 – 7729

Journal DOI

<https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt>

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Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt>

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# Call for Papers Spring Issues 2023 Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

**Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism** is an interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that should contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences.

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| <b>Expected publication date:</b> | June 2023                                                                                       |
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DOI: [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v13.8\(64\).01](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v13.8(64).01)

## Tourism and Protected Areas: The Guadiana Valley Natural Park, Portugal

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### Suggested Citation:

Figueira, V., Rolha, J., Sousa, B., Vareiro, L. (2022). Tourism and Protected Areas: The Guadiana Valley Natural Park, Portugal. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, (Volume XIII, Winter), 8(64): 2085-2093. DOI:[10.14505/jemt.v13.8\(64\).01](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v13.8(64).01)

### Article's History:

Received 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2022; Received in revised form 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2021. Accepted 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2022; Published 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2022. Copyright © 2022 by ASERS® Publishing. All rights reserved.

### Abstract:

Sustainability is a topic that is currently being discussed and constantly adapting, since it is related not only to an ecologically correct posture and strategy but also economically viable and socially equitable. The present manuscript intends to understand and analyze tourism and protected areas in Portugal, namely the case of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park (Portugal). This paper presents theoretical considerations that aim to understand how “protected areas” can become a destination for future sustainable tourism trips. In the end, the limitations of the study and guidelines for future research will be presented.

**Keywords:** protected areas; tourism; hospitality; marketing; tourism product; Guadiana Valley Natural Park.

**JEL Classification:** M31; Z30; Z32.

### Introduction

The concern leads to greater environmental awareness (Ngo *et al.* 2018), which ends up influencing the purchase, that is, they verify whether a product is ecological and compatible with sustainability (Pinto da Silva *et al.* 2019; Lubowiecki-Vikuk and Sousa 2021). For instance, regarding the environment, it promotes incentives for the preservation of nature, education on environmental ethics, and the defence for the preservation with development within the environmental perspective (Roseta *et al.* 2020). Concern about the protection of nature and its resources is inherent to all societies. Respect for natural values, and their symbolism, preserves cultural issues, important for all peoples. For a long time, the most diverse sovereigns shared, according to the seasons, several of their castles integrated in true private paradises of very rich forests where nature expressed itself calmly and safely (Rolha *et al.* 2021). Concerns about sustainability and “green” development in the future are



trends that have emerged in tourism and hospitality management. Environmental concerns are a hotly debated issue in the academic community and professionals worldwide. In this context, this manuscript will be strongly focused on the concern of “slow tourism”. From an interdisciplinary perspective, this manuscript presents inputs around tourism (special forms of tourism), marketing and management (segmentation perspective) from a protected areas perspective (Sousa *et al.* 2021).

## 1. Tourism and Protected Areas

The Industrial Revolution came to boost the use of natural resources in favor of a logic of mass production and consumption, where only economic rules prevailed, with potentially destructive effects on natural resources. It is in the United States of America (USA), where this logic was most intensely expressed and, therefore, the irreparable effects caused by the aggression to natural resources are manifested earlier, leading citizens to become aware of the need to protect them, even for their own economic and personal survival.

Take the case of the rivers that were once able to purify the detritus along their flow, also more organic, resulting from the direct action of men and some manufacturing. Even if merely for sentimental reasons, man felt the need to put in place a system that was coherent in the defense and protection of nature and its resources. It is in this context that protected areas arise, having as a pioneer the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, intending to protect from the predatory actions of human, from the gigantic sequoias of California to the American bison, very close to extinction. This concept implied a very conservationist idea, visibly oriented towards the exclusive protection of species, in particular those threatened by extinction, of grandiose landscapes, and of natural monuments (Rolha *et al.* 2021). In this ideological line, human interference was prohibited almost entirely, not allowing any effective contact with elements of the fauna existing there. Driven by Yellowstone, and aware of the effective need to protect nature, several parks began to appear around the world, among which stand out: in Europe – (1914) Swiss National Park, in France (1928/private) Camargue Reserve, (1963) Parks of Vanoise, of Port-Cros and (1970) of the Western Pyrenees and Cevennes, in Portugal (1971) the Peneda-Gerês National Park, in Poland the Bialowieza Park; in Africa – (1929) Albert National Park, Garamba, Upemba and Kagera National Park, the Parks of Kenya, Uganda and Rhodesia; Australia and Asia - (1879) Royal National Park, Jorge V National Park, Kasiranga Parks in Assam and the Ujung Kulon-Panallan Reserve west of Java. In the USA, other parks and reserves were created consecutively, such as the Grand Canyon Park in Arizona, and the Everglades Park, on the edge of Florida. At the same time, the former USSR installed a region to protect its natural heritage with 93 national parks, covering around 6 million hectares (Figueira 2011).

To contextualize the options at the time, it is important to highlight the classifications used for the classification of protected areas: integral natural reserves – where the man was prevented from any intervention that could alter the natural balance; the national park - which associated the protection of the whole life of the fauna and flora with tourist activity; partial reserves – whose vocation was to protect and preserve a specific category of fauna and flora elements; and the special reserves – which had only some elements of the biological complex. It should be noted that the national parks in France have a particularity, which makes them original and that is the existence of a bulkhead, in its border area that works as a reception area and where different economic activities are authorized, in particular tourism. Another classification of regional natural parks was also created, which was intended to reconcile nature, culture, and the various economic activities carried out by rural people, including agricultural activity valued through transformation into organic farming. It was a concept that provided “an encounter between urban and rural people, which will allow the former to get to know nature through the activity of the latter” (Sisto *et al.* 2022). In Europe, the work developed by the Europarc Federation stands out, which calls itself the voice of Europe's protected areas, and which functions as a top body in the protection of protected areas. It brings together national parks, regional parks, nature parks, and biosphere reserves in 38 countries with the common goal of protecting unique varieties of wildlife, habitats, and landscapes. It is responsible for publicizing the parks and the benefits arising from them, having created the European Day of Parks in 1999. Also, within the scope of publicizing the Natura 2000 Network sites, the Green Days were created, whose objectives are related to the knowledge of natural values, classified spaces, existing legislation, and existing conservation measures at the level of this European ecological network, in each of the acceding countries.

In conclusion, it can be said that the concept of protected areas has undergone many changes until today. We started from a 1st generation in which natural values were fully defended, as a means of subsistence, symbolism, and defense of this heritage for future generations, to a 2nd generation where isolated spaces for conservation took place and in which human interference was reduced to a minimum, even because of the “malefic and devastating” effect it had had on natural resources; a 3rd generation considers the existence of

territorial connectivity in a network of conservation spaces in integration with human communities and the notion, system and need to attract urban/economic development as a source of energy for conservation prevails, where areas protected can create value (Rolha *et al.* 2021).

For there to be quality tourism, there must be good environmental quality. This imbalance was accentuated over the decades, due to the unbridled desire for consumption and income generation, especially after the Industrial Revolution. Several authors (e.g. Ruschmann 1997) present their contributions to the different evolutionary phases of the relationship between tourism and the environment. In this way, see how we can appreciate this evolution:

The first phase – took place at the end of the 18th century, when tourism as an economic activity began to develop, favored by the development caused by the Industrial Revolution. Despite the economic concept associated with this development being associated with the exploitation of natural resources, its sensitivity was different from that of today's tourists. They looked for places where industrialization had not arrived and their interests and motivations were based on unique aspects existing in certain regions such as fishing ports, the sea, a small beach. It was a phase of the «relationship» and where the first tourist facilities began to be built;

The second phase – occurs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and is characterized by «directed and elitist» tourism. Environmental concerns were non-existent and the intense demand from the tourist industry led to intensive construction, forming the current major tourist centers in Europe. It is a phase in which nature is domesticated, but where traditional populations did not lose their autonomy and relationship with nature, since tourist companies limited their products to the annual seasons and their surroundings;

The third phase – the improvement of the living conditions of the population in general in the face of industrial development, promoted the development of societies, an increase in population and an increasingly greater pressure on natural resources. This phase begins in the 1950s and reaches its peak in the following decades. “Population grew exponentially by 2.5 billion in 1950, 5 billion in 1990 and 10-12 billion is predicted by 2030” (Middleton 1998, 4). The improvement of living conditions that favored the developed countries is beginning to be demanded by other people in other regions, who seek this type of development. In this sense, tourist demand grows in an almost eccentric way, occupying and saturating areas of the coast that are not yet congested, and where nature and local communities are brutally dominated by the expansionist effects of tourism. This phase is considered the most devastating, where disorderly growth prevails, poor quality of construction and construction, lack of basic support infrastructure, as well as the creation of tourist structures without any associated study and which later ended up being destroyed by the nature itself. It was a period of enjoyment and use where tourism, in terms of economic development, was only seen as a factor that generated positive aspects. The United Nations declared 1967 as the International Year of Tourism, which encouraged developed countries to encourage even more leisure and travel tourism, in their view of the economic development of poorer countries, without any planning and studies appropriate to its feasibility. It was at this time that mass tourism truly began and with it all the associated problems such as air and water pollution, depletion of natural resources, etc.

The fourth phase (60s and 70s) - despite this euphoric phase of tourism, it was in the early 60s that the relationship between tourism and the environment began to be debated. In 1960, the IUOTO (International Union of Official Tourism Organization) agreed on a resolution that identified nature as an essential element of tourist activity, which allowed the involvement of tourist agents in environmental issues, with the IUOTO's careful observation of the deterioration of resources. There is beginning to be some public intervention and protests about the way tourism is developing. In turn, the tourist industry continues its rapid growth. From the 1970s onwards, there was a growing concern about the most visible environmental problems such as air and water pollution and the visual degradation of the environment. In this line of thought, from 1973 onwards, the first studies of environmental impacts began through various academic bodies and private institutions. This is the case of the Pacific Area Conference dedicated to the theme «Tourism Built a Better Environment», through the Pacific Area Travel Association, which allowed to change the exclusively economic perspective, definitively introducing environmental values in tourism.

The fifth phase – the 1980s is associated with serious environmental concerns such as contamination by toxic substances, acid rain, global warming, the ozone hole. The tourism industry has expanded worldwide benefiting from technological advances. This decade was particularly important for the approval of the Manila Declaration for Tourism (UNWTO) in 1980 and the Environment Program for the United Nations (1982). This declaration implied a real responsibility on the part of governments to implement concrete policies to safeguard endangered tourist destinations. The Manila Declaration for Tourism sought to respond in such a way as to put the tourism/environment relationship in its proper place, *i.e.* that tourist activity must not harm the economic and

social interests of local populations, as well as destroy natural and cultural resources. For some authors, this phase represents a phase of tourism renewal where the importance and benefit that exists for both (tourist and resident) is emphasized, in the need to conserve the natural and cultural heritage. At the end of this decade, with the growth of environmental concerns and increasing ecological awareness motivated by the action of environmental associations and governments, a new motivation arises on the part of tourists, different from those associated with mass tourism, emerging alternative tourism. This type of tourism is characterized by changing habits, values and mentalities, where people seek quality of life associated with healthy environments.

## 2. The Importance of Involving Local Communities

Protected areas (PA) cannot be seen in isolation from the communities that live and reside in them, because they have a very marked cultural component. Despite the existence of certain legislation that meets the objectives that the State intends for these areas, it cannot be forgotten that these communities were, for years, the protectors of these natural spaces and cultural resources, which are so important to them. Ignoring the communities is simply jeopardizing the very security of these areas. A large part of the communities residing in the PA is located in economically depressed regions, empty of population and some of them with high poverty rates, which thus allowed the preservation of the "more natural" aspect of these regions, many of which were created at the expense of the population, through displacements or expropriations (Rolha *et al.* 2021). The interdependent relationship between human well-being and conservation has been ensured through various international political instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, among others. On the other hand, the concern felt regarding the importance of the role of local communities has also been discussed, namely in the aspects arising from the creation and management of PAs, as well as the importance of extending the benefits of protected areas to the local population.

Recommendation 5 of the Third World Parks Congress (Bali-1982) particularly recognizes that populations in protected areas can support the management of the area if they feel that they are enjoying the benefits of it, and should be compensated appropriately for any loss of rights, and must be taken into account and taken into account in the planning and execution of operations. At the Fourth World Parks Congress, ten years later, participants in the Caracas Declaration agreed that the management of protected areas must be done sensitively, taking into account the needs and concerns of local populations, where the participation of communities, NGOs and private institutions in the creation and management of parks. This Caracas Action Plan takes into account the concerns of populations and protected areas, recommending to governments that the planning process is properly integrated with programs for the sustainable development of local cultures and economies (DeRose 2004).

The interdependent relationship between human well-being and conservation has been ensured through various international political instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, among others. On the other hand, concern A successful example of the value of human interactions with nature and the role that populations have played in the formation of many ecosystems, are the protected areas of category V (IUCN) the so-called "lived-in, working landscapes" (landscapes where people live and work) that promote and support traditional livelihoods and cultures, as well as the protection of biodiversity (Oviedo and Brown 1999). In this way, it is necessary to find a balance between what is the maintenance of the main actors of conservation - the local communities - and the conservation objectives of the State. On the other hand, it is necessary to know how to demonstrate the benefits inherent to inclusion in a protected area, which may be associated with the quality of food, pure water, medicinal plants, cultural heritage, education, protection of watersheds, etc., in addition to the possibility of resorting to a set of financial incentives that could range from the promotion of employment, as forest guards or guides, in the tourism industry, or even through the creation of a community tax fund that can revert to the development projects of these communities (Rolha *et al.* 2021).

## 3. The Natural Park of the Guadiana Valley

The Guadiana Valley Natural Park (PNVG) is located in Baixo Alentejo and occupies an area of 69,665.94 ha. It has a minimum altitude of 170m, an average of 210m and a maximum of 310m, situated in the Mediterranean biogeographic region. According to data from the ICN (2002), the climate is typically Mediterranean, with hot, dry summers and few rainy and cold winters. It is here that the lowest rainfall in the country and the highest levels of insolation and temperature occur. Its natural value is characterized by the middle section of the Guadiana River, comprising a great diversity of habitats ranging from the river subject to the tides, mud and sand banks, riparian and rupicolous formations, woods, holm oak, pine forest, agricultural areas with arable crops, cereals and pastures, the extraordinary interest from an ecological and environmental point of view, the great faunal diversity,



highlighting the groups of mammals, some rare or threatened species, birds, especially large prey and steppe, as well as several species of fish, with some endemic species being mentioned. Its symbol is a Bird of Prey (a figure taken from a plate glazed in dry rope from the 11th century, an element often illustrated in Islamic dishes from that period), which is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Symbol of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park



Source: <http://www.icn.pt>

The conservationist interest in the natural, scenic and cultural heritage of the middle section of the Guadiana Valley was demonstrated by technical-scientific works, being the subject of successive proposals for classification as a protected area by regional entities, namely by the Association for the Defense of Heritage of Mértola (ADPM), Archaeological Field of Mértola and City Hall of Mértola. Its classification proposals date from 1987, presented to the Alentejo Region Coordination Commission and the extinct National Service of Parks, Reserves and Nature Conservation, until, after the approval of Decree-Law no 19/93, of 23 de Janeiro (National Network of Protected Areas), and shortly after a new study presented by ADPM, the classification of the region as a Protected Landscape Area is proposed again. In 1995, the Institute for Nature Conservation, taking into account the protection of existing natural values, decided to classify the region as a Natural Park.

It is located in the Southeast of Portugal in the Baixo Alentejo Region, more specifically in the District of Beja and covers the Municipalities of Mértola and Serpa, including totally or partially the parishes of Alcaria Ruiva, Corte Pinto, Espírito Santo, Mértola, Santana de Cambas, S. João dos Caldeireiros / Serpa - Santa Maria and Serpa - Salvador, covering a section of the Guadiana river valley that extends from the area upstream of Pulo do Lobo (Serpa) to the mouth of the Vascão stream, on the border between the Alentejo and the Algarve. It is limited to the north by the municipality of Beja, to the west by the municipalities of Castro Verde and Almodôvar, to the south by the municipality of Alcoutim and to the east by the Spanish province of Andalusia – Figure 2.

To highlight the geographical features that predominate in this region and the natural values existing in the protected area, during the course of the research, it was necessary to carry out an in-depth study to understand the natural values and species existing in this natural park. The geographical location, the climate, and the passage of the River Guadiana as a determining element in the landscape of this natural park give it its characteristics which give rise to certain habitats in the sense of enhancing the natural values of wildlife in the protected area, during the study.

Figure 2. The geographic location of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park



Source: <http://www.icn.pt>

These include rupicolous vegetation, wetlands, aquatic vegetation, Mediterranean scrubland, montados, cereal grassland and urban habitats. For a better understanding of each of them, a brief characterisation is presented below.

- **Rúpicola:** the coexistence of various biotopes including Mediterranean scrubland, the banks and bed of the water courses and the rocky outcrops, allow, in the valleys of the water courses that flow into the Guadiana River, the presence of a high avifauna richness.

- **Wetlands:** the streams in the Alentejo, criss-crossed by the sharp relief of the eastern area, have great variations in their flow, suffering from a deep-water deficit during the summer months. At this time the water is restricted to the pools scattered along the stretch of the river. The pools are the last freshwater refuge of many species of fauna, mainly important for fish. Furthermore, the concentration of aquatic prey makes the magpies an easy source of food for certain species of waterfowl.

- **Aquatic:** in fresh waters fish occur in a wide diversity of habitats, from rivers to lakes, in masses of various sizes, at a wide range of altitudes from mountains to plains, with different temperatures and dissolved oxygen concentrations. The native fish species living in the Guadiana Basin are adapted to these conditions and are able to overcome heavy downpours, hiding in natural recesses so as not to be swept away by the current and withstanding the occasional turbidity of the water, as well as being able to resist in times of drought, the lack of oxygen and food, surviving for long periods in very small catches.

- **Mediterranean scrubland:** the zones of Mediterranean scrubland are restricted to the valleys embedded in the watercourses of the Natural Park. These species of plants form, as a whole, dense vegetation that is extremely important in soil conservation, preventing the soil from being washed away by run-off water and favouring the infiltration of water into the soil, thus enriching it.

- **Montados:** very early on, as a result of human action, the primitive Mediterranean forest gave way to the montado. Nowadays, the Holm oak, as part of the montado, is one of the residual elements of this forest. The montado is thus constituted by more or less dispersed stands of holm oak or cork oak, and in its understory rainfed cereals are cultivated, which are normally rotated with pastures.

- **Cereal steppe:** the clearing of the original Mediterranean woodland, which progressively gave way to cultivated fields, reached its peak with the wheat boom of the 1930s. This process gave rise to the main landscape unit of the Natural Park: the cereal steppe. The predominance of herbaceous plants, mainly of the grass family, and the faunal composition induces a certain similarity between the natural steppes of Central Europe and the cereal steppes. At the same time, the avifauna constitution is very similar, both consisting of species well adapted to vast visual horizons.

- **Urban:** the presence of urban settlements in this region dates back several centuries BC. Since that time certain bird species have adapted to and become dependent on these environments, occupying abandoned buildings, farm buildings (hills) and even urban areas. These types of areas are sought by birds essentially for the availability of food, nesting sites and/or protection from larger predators.

The set of these habitats highlights a large number of species of fauna and flora that currently exist in the PNVG. It was given more attention to the Iberian Lynx (*Lynx pardinus*), which was the target of a reintroduction project in 2014. Within the category of birds, which has more than 130 identified species of birds, the following stand out: the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*), the big birds of prey such as the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and the Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*). Regarding amphibians, of the 17 species that can be found in Portugal, 13 of them can be observed in the nature park, such as the Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*), which can only be found in the Iberian Peninsula. Along the Guadiana and its affluents, there are 15 fish species, 10 of which are endemic; we have highlighted the Spanish minnowcarp which only exists in this river basin. Regarding invertebrates, we highlight the “Aranha-de-Tolkien” (*Amphileorus ungoliantae*) and the “Aranha de Zodarion guadianense” since they only exist in the protected area of the Vale do Guadiana Nature Park. The park is home to an enormous variety of plants, where its landscape units are the perfect habitat for species such as the hairy water clover (*Marsilea batardae*), which can be found in the Guadiana’s affluents; or the centuries-old, huge evergreen oak at Monte Barbeiro which won the national tree award in 2017, acknowledged by the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture.

The wealth of species that occur in the PNVG is not exhausted in the examples referenced. There are more than 200 species of wild fauna, from birds (constituting the majority), fish, amphibians, reptiles and mammals, in addition to other species of flora generally much appreciated for their ability to be used as aromatic and medicinal plants.

Alongside the values abovementioned in this research, it was necessary to ensure the survey of available resources, to deepen the knowledge and reflection regarding endogenous resources, as well as the local support

structures for tourism in the parishes that are inserted in the Nature Park. To this end, work was carried out to identify the resources based on four categories - natural heritage, cultural heritage, tourism services and basic infrastructures. In addition, their dynamics were quantified based on their attractiveness, enjoyment and use. This identification work and information sorting reveals that, inside these four categories, the main tourism attraction resources of this protected area are allocated in the historical and cultural value derived from 40 years of hard work invested in archaeological and scientific research, the excellence and environmental value associated to the biodiversity in the Protected Area of Vale do Guadiana Nature Park, namely its main attractions. Some of these attractions include but are not limited to, Pulo do Lobo or the biological stations of Guadiana and Vascão, the geological and industrial mining complex of São Domingos and Pomarão, River Guadiana, and the cultural value obtained from its own identity, which is reflected on the community's lifestyle, the acknowledgement of the territory's cuisine and traditional products, having good practices of spatial planning associated to the territory's conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, which results in Mértola being sought after for its unique and natural inclination regarding cinegenic activities, etc.

These resources identified as an attractive - archaeological and historical heritage; the natural heritage, landscape and the River Guadiana; hunting and gastronomy - generate a considerable dynamic in what concerns the living of these small communities. Tourist infrastructures in the municipality of Mértola are centralised above all at the level of the town of Mértola, largely due to its historical context, as well as the impulse given by the Mértola Archaeological Site to the preservation and conservation of certain heritage, essential for the creation of existing museum centres, for the very existence of the Vale do Guadiana Nature Park and which determines the greatest attractiveness of this locality and concentration of the population and services. Tourism which serves the defence of local resources, respect the environment, considers the opinion of the residents, whose management model is appropriate to the area, improves the quality of life of the residents, values the existing heritage and fixates the younger generations, is desirable and necessary for sustainable development, especially in areas which are very fragile in economic and social terms. However, the authors identify several fragilities that are inherently linked to inland territories, such as accessibility, limitations in terms of transportation and road networks, shortcomings in public services, poor economic and business fabric, lack of investment, lack of complementary services in the sphere of tourism, etc. These fragilities are also associated with the inability of retaining the population and the high rates of population ageing. The existence of untapped resources is an investment opportunity for companies in the tourism sector. Considering sustainable development and the agreement with the local values for safeguarding and enhancing the natural, historical and cultural heritage as a starting point, the research identifies resources associated with cultural entertainment, events, sports, restaurants, gastronomy, monuments, etc., that, when promoted creatively and distinctly through a set of activities, can develop new business models associated with the tourism sector.

In the starting year of the PNVG, 1995, this protected area received national and worldwide recognition that has resulted in new dynamics associated with the tourism sector. This was due to the scenic beauty of the town of Mértola, the existence of a number of natural attractions mentioned in several research studies, the cultural identity of the people reflected on the cuisine and the art of hospitality, the territory's natural aptitude for hunting, the River Guadiana, the historical past of São Domingos mine, and the increasing strengthening and development of Mértola's musealisation project. Despite the lack of structure in tourism development and the lack of awareness towards investment opportunities in the sector, the data collected for this study show that, starting from the 90s of the XX century, the intervening entities in the territory, in particular the City Council of Mértola, started to analyse the visitor's log in the tourism information centre, already worrying at the time about dividing the visitors by nationalities. In 2004, the city council of Mértola creates a Municipal Tourism Company named Merturis and establishes a strategic plan for the territory's tourism, which goal was to promote and monetize tourism potential sustainably, promote the existing tourism development in terms of accommodation facilities, restaurants, local products and entertainment; participate in tourism fairs; organize tourism events and entertainment programs; establish strategic partnerships with tourist operators and agents. The previously mentioned plan is all based in the tourism potential associated with the surveys and studies conducted around the Park's biodiversity. At the time, the intention was to work towards outreach and raising the awareness of the intervening entities in the territory, to highlight the viewpoint of enhancing, promoting and monetizing the municipality's natural, historical, gastronomic and ethnographic heritage. The goal was to help Mértola gain some distinction as a unique and high-quality tourist destination, which has a protected area full of opportunities and a territory with excellent products; in essence, opening the protected area to tourist visitations, while enhancing the conservation of Vale de Guadiana. From 2010 onwards, the goal was to coordinate the economic side of the tourism sector, so the company established a plan of activities outlining the following challenges that they wished

to achieve: helping to draw up tenders and execute projects to improve tourism development; planning and implement actions that are in accordance with partnerships established with business associations, implementation of a promotion and training plan for local entrepreneurship, creating conditions and opportunities to retain new investors; implementation of a strategic plan for tourism development by certifying products and services. The data analysis allows us to have a comprehensive knowledge about the dynamics introduced in this region and, consequently, in the attempt to create market niches focused on the main attractions of the region. This work allowed the appearance of new agents of the sector, allowing us to affirm in these territories that the tourist activity has relevant importance, not only in economic terms but also, at the level of the necessary assumptions for the valorisation of all the components related to the natural resources and their conservation, sensitive elements of this type of territory. Hence the necessary and appropriate integration between public policies on biodiversity conservation and tourism for the affirmation of sustainable practices needs to be understood in its complexity, from a situational analysis.

#### 4. Final Considerations

Sustainable tourism is often discussed in terms of a balance between economic and environmental concerns, and this is especially the case if tourism utilizes the environment as a resource. For instance, and according to Valls *et al.* (2019), the approach to slow tourism usually occurs either when traditional destinations exhaust their life cycle with an evident reduction in sustainability, or when newly emerging destinations decide to develop in this way. Sustainability is a topic that is currently being discussed and constantly adapting, since it is related not only to an ecologically correct posture and strategy but also economically viable and socially equitable. The concern leads to greater environmental awareness (Ngo *et al.* 2018), which ends up influencing the purchase, that is, they verify whether a product is ecological and compatible with sustainability (Sousa *et al.* 2021). In this context, protected areas (PA) cannot be seen in isolation from the communities that live and reside in them, because they have a very marked cultural component. The conservationist interest of the natural, scenic and cultural heritage of the middle section of the Guadiana Valley was demonstrated by technical-scientific works, being the subject of successive proposals for classification as a protected area by regional entities. Thus, this manuscript intends to present a brief reflection on the importance of tourism and protected areas in specific contexts in Portugal. The main limitation of this manuscript is its exploratory nature. However, future studies should allow a greater generalization of results through tests of causality between proposed variables. In an interdisciplinary perspective, this manuscript presents inputs for sustainable tourism and tourism marketing in an ecological logic.

#### Acknowledgment:

This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, IP, within the scope of the reference project UIDB/04470/2020.

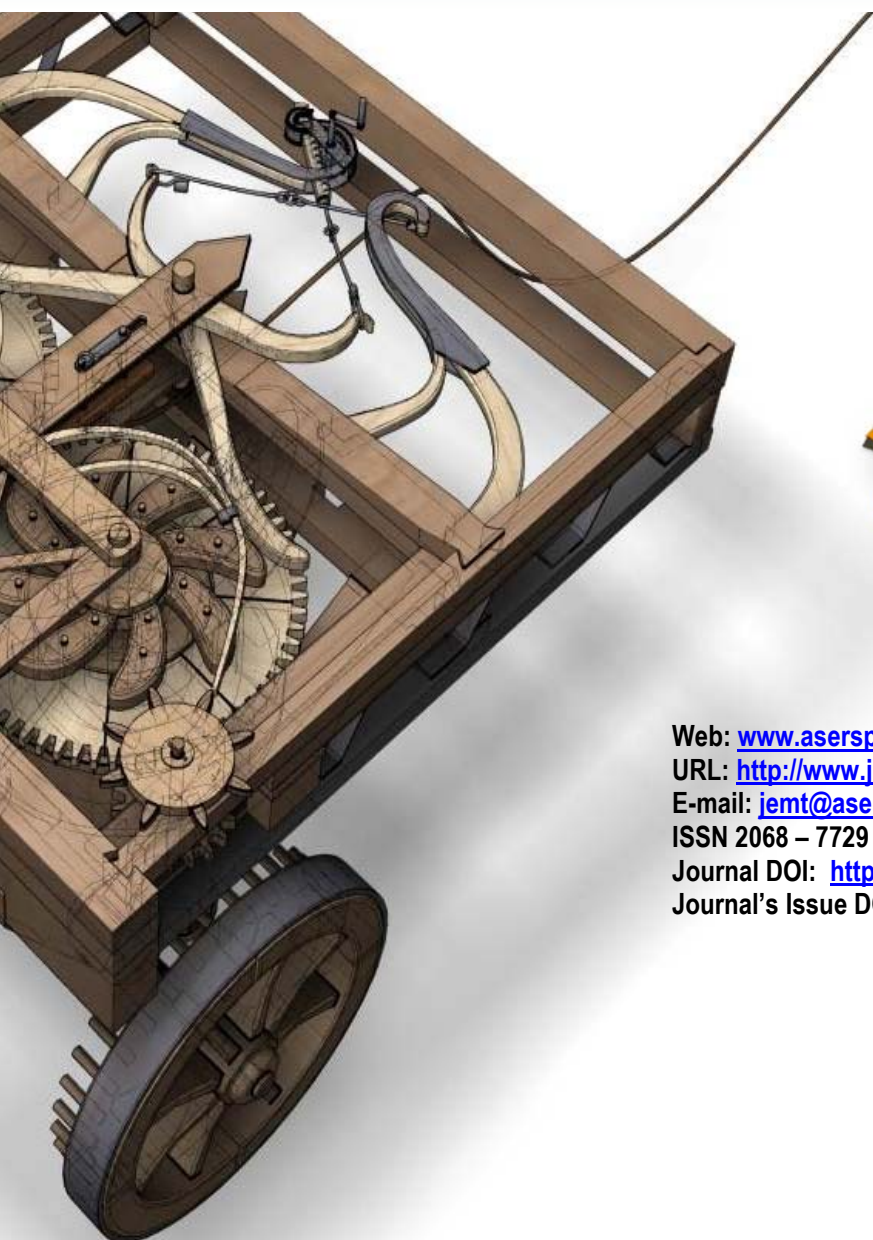
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ISSN 2068 – 7729

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt>

Journal's Issue DOI: [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v13.8\(64\).00](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v13.8(64).00)