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The Linkage Between Tourism and Local Development:

The Case Study of Greater Côa Valley

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ABSTRACT

Objective

This document aims to address the Linkage Between Tourism Activities and Local Development. For this purpose, the Wild Côa Network project was used as an example due to its contribution to the development of the Greater Côa Valley region. This study focused on analyzing the following propositions: (1) tourism can be the key to local development in the most isolated regions; (2) the most isolated locations, where tourism represents a large part of their economic activity, can survive without mass tourism; (3) partnerships between companies play a fundamental role in business success.

Methodological approach

A qualitative methodology was used to carry out this study, in which data was collected through interviews with 6 people linked to the Wild Côa Network project, 2 of whom were responsible for the project and the rest were members of it. The interviewees answered a series of questions related to the Wild Côa Network, tourism in the Greater Côa Valley region and local development, sharing their experiences, points of view and knowledge on these topics.

Main results

The results obtained through the interviews demonstrate the importance of this project in the region. The interviewees emphasize the importance of the partnerships and means of promotion that have been developed through the project, as the source of the region's economic dynamism. The data obtained shows that this project has created the conditions for the Côa Valley region to develop through tourism in a sustainable way.

Main conclusions

Analyzing the results obtained in the interviews, it can be seen that tourism does indeed play an important role in the development of regions, especially the most isolated ones, and that it could be the key to their development. Through the example of the Wild Côa Network, it can be seen that partnerships between companies and local businesses are essential for their success and for local development. This study demonstrates that regions where tourism represents a large part of economic activity can survive without having to resort to mass tourism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ISCAP	Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto
IPP	Politécnico do Porto
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
BCSD	Business Council for Sustainable Development
GCV	Greater Côa Valley
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
DMC	Destination Management Company
BTL	Bolsa de Turismo de Lisboa

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, tourism has become a driving force for the economic and social development of many places around the world (Yehia, 2019). The linkage between tourism activities and local development is an increasingly important topic, especially when it comes to how tourism can boost the local economy, improve the quality of life of communities while promoting cultural and environmental preservation.

By attracting visitors, tourism generates demand for services such as accommodation, food, transport, and entertainment. All of this contributes to job creation as well as encouraging investment in infrastructure, which not only benefits tourists but also the local population (Clark, et al. 2010). This interaction between tourists and the local community also has its advantages, allowing for the exchange of cultural experiences that enrich and help preserve the region's cultural and natural heritage.

It is known that tourism is a complex sector that encompasses several dimensions in its activities (Kisman & Tasar 2014), and it is a challenge to manage them, such as the need to properly manage natural resources to prevent their degradation and guarantee long-term sustainability.

On this pretext, it is essential to analyze the link between tourism activities and local development in order to understand how tourism policies and practices can be adjusted to maximize positive impacts and minimize negative ones, thereby promoting more sustainable development.

The aim of this thesis is to explore this theme, the linkage between tourism activities and local development, through the case of Rewilding Portugal, which has been developing the Greater Côa Valley region through the Wild Côa Network project.

This project is a network of companies that promote a nature-based economy whose interrelated production and consumption of goods and services promotes the conservation and regeneration of nature and benefits local communities (Rewilding Portugal, 2024). In order to achieve this goal, this project promote synergies between companies from various sectors, facilitate the marketing of the region as a whole, support local companies through the development of sustainable business models and foster partnerships between various tourism-related organizations.

Analysing this project will not only help us understand how the Greater Côa Valley area is being boosted by tourism activities but will also serve as an example for future tourism-related ventures and their activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1 TOURISM

1.1 Concept

Today, tourism plays an important role in the world economy, being one of the sectors that most dynamizes the world, creating thousands of jobs, developing infrastructures, and promoting an exchange of intercultural experiences (Yehia, 2019). Being a sector with several years of existence and impact on global society, there is no consensus among the various researchers regarding its definition.

According to Cunha and Abrantes (2013) tourism is an activity or a set of economic activities that result from the travel and stay of visitors. On the other hand, this scholar define tourism as a set of relationships and events following the displacement of people outside their residence, provided that these displacements are not made to carry out a main profitable activity. Guerreiro de Deus (2018) affirms that tourism is a vast activity that encompasses the movements of people and the relations that are established in the places visited.

For Ledhesma (2014, p. 13), tourism is “all the spectrum that is generated from the idea and/or action that involves the movement of human beings to a place different from their residence with recreational possibilities, i.e., with intentions of rest, fun and / or contact with the destination receiver”. Some people refer to tourism as travel, which is not entirely correct. According to Ledhesma (2018) to do tourism is necessary to travel, but travel is not necessarily considered the practice of tourism. We can travel to another country or locality to visit a new place, and this is considered tourism, but we can also travel to somewhere to attend a doctor's appointment and that is no longer considered to be tourism. Therefore, we must maintain the idea that travel by itself is not considered to be tourism.

There is no concrete definition of tourism and over the years various authors have presented their own version of it. Table 1 show some concepts of tourism, presented by various authors over the years.

Table 1 - Tourism Definitions

Author(s)	Definition
Neil Leiper (1979)	It conceptualises tourism as an open system, since it is influenced by external factors. For him, the system encompasses people travelling and staying away from their habitual residence for one or more nights, except for journeys whose main motivation is to obtain some form of remuneration.
OMT (1995)	"Set of activities carried out by people during journeys and stays in places outside their usual their usual environment for a

	consecutive period not exceeding one year, for leisure, business and other reasons and other”.
OMT (1999)	“Understanding the activities carried out by people during your trips and stays in places other than their habitual place of residence, by a consecutive period of less than one year, for leisure, business or other reasons not related to the exercise of an activity paid at the place visited.”
Beaver (2002)	Tourism includes the activities of people who travel for leisure, business or other purposes, and out of your habitual residence for a period of time not more than one consecutive year.
Decree-Law No. 191/2009 of 17 August 2009	“Temporary movement of people to destinations other than their habitual residence, for reasons leisure, business or other, as well as activities economic generated and the facilities created for satisfy their needs”.
Sharpley e Telfer (2014)	It is a social phenomenon that involves the displacement of people to various destinations and their stay temporary in them.
Baleiro e Quinteiro (2018)	Tourism is seen as the desire to go further, from to know more and to avoid the routine, enabling the individual, move out of their residence usual, offering the opportunity to meet and live new experiences in new spaces.
Castañeda (2019)	Phenomenon or human movement that refers to the human being's ability to move voluntarily move away from their usual location, returning to their origin after some time.
Wendt (2020)	Voluntary travel that is not only related to with the fulfilment of paid work, where the travelling away from their usual place of residence, staying at a destination of their choice.

Source: Silva (2020).

1.2 Tourism Types

Tourism, being such a broad concept, can be divided into sub-categories according to the tourist's objective: Body Tourism, Intellectual Tourist, Material Tourism and Environmental Tourism (Ledhesma, 2018). For this scholar:

(1) Body Tourism is a tourist experience that is directly related to the body of the tourist, for example health tourism where tourists travel in search of treatments and care for the body.

(2) Intellectual Tourism focuses on the intellectual and sensory processes of tourism, it is the case of religious tourism where tourists carry out their travels with the purpose of exercising religious practices.

(3) Material Tourism is related to the tourist experience that goes after the possession of objects, a good example of this is luxury tourism which is a type of tourism practiced by people with economic freedom who seek to be surrounded by brands, technology, and luxury spaces.

(4) Environmental Tourism which is the type of tourism that goes through the interaction of tourists with the environment that surrounds them, the most famous example of this type of tourism is the tourism of nature that connects the tourist with the natural elements of a certain place, such as plants and animals.

Table 2 show the different types of tourism:

Table 2 - Types of tourism according to the tourist's objective

Types of tourism according to the tourist's objective:			
1	Body	Health	Medical
			Well-being
		Of Gestation	Labour
			Abortion
		Sexual	
Active	Adventure		
	Sports		
2	Intellectual	Religious	
		Educational	Artistic/heritage
			Congresses and holidays
			Idiomatic
Scientific			
Gastronomic			
Virtual			
3	Material	Transfer	Shopping
			Selling
			Exchange
		Business	
		Corporate	
Luxury			
4	Environmental	Nature	Responsible
			Recreational
			Negative
		Social	Ethnographic
			Solidary
			Rural
			Celebrations
		Death	Pain
Terror			

			Suicide
		Universe	Astronomical
			Space

Source: Ledhesma (2018).

Through this investigation we will analyze the project Wild Côa Network which will help to understand the impact that touristic activities are having in the region of the Greater Côa Valley. Wild Côa Network is a project that within these 4 types of tourism mentioned above, fit mainly in Environmental Tourism. As mentioned in its description: “The Wild Côa Network is a network of companies in the Greater Côa Valley that share a vision of a more sustainable future. The aim of this network is to promote a nature-based economy in the region.” (Rewilding Portugal, 2024).

1.3 Tourism Impacts

Tourism “as a multi-faceted phenomenon, penetrates many aspects of human life, both directly and indirectly” (Rejowski, 1996, p.18). Throughout history, tourism has had an impact on everything and everyone it has touched, and in an ideal world we would expect these impacts to always be positive for both tourist destinations and their residents. Theoretically, the benefits of tourism should outweigh its costs (Theobald, 2002), but in practice “the negative impacts often outweigh the positive ones” (Dall’Agnol, 2012, p.3). Impacts are understood as the consequences of interactions between tourists, communities and destinations. These impacts can be positive if they bring benefits to the community, and negative if they cause damage to the locality and the population (Ruschman, 2000).

Ferreira (2009) divides the impacts of tourism into three categories: (1) environmental impacts; (2) economic impacts and (3) socio-cultural impacts. Regarding environmental impacts, this author highlights the fact that there are excesses, mismanagement and poor planning in the development of tourism and that in various destinations, due to uncontrolled exploitation, tourism ends up putting pressure on the environment, thus causing a negative impact, as, according to Alvarez (1996), is the case with the construction of infrastructures that can eventually have serious implications for the environment due to changes in landscapes and uncontrolled urbanizing effects. On the other hand, tourism can have a positive environmental impact. Ruschmann (1999) gives the following examples of positive environmental impacts: (1) the creation of programs and measures for the preservation of natural areas; (2) the promotion of unexploited natural regions; (3) the production of income from activities that make it possible

to implement preservation measures and equipment; (4) the more rational use of spaces and the appreciation of direct contact with nature.

In terms of economic impacts, Ruschmann (1999) describes the following positive impacts: (1) increased income for local communities; (2) development of the construction sector; (3) positive transformation of the economic and social structure. In terms of the negative economic impacts of tourism, the author mentions the following impacts: (1) over-dependence on tourism, where at times when tourist numbers fall, countries suffer an economic collapse; (2) the shift of investment, labor and the boosting of other activities to the tourism sector.

Finally, UNEP (2000) presents the following as positive socio-cultural impacts: (1) the promotion of pride in traditions; (2) the promotion of handicrafts and local people at cultural events and festivals; (3) a reduction in rural exodus; (4) the development of services and new infrastructures. About the negative socio-cultural impacts, Ignarra (1999) exposes the problem of excessive demand for handicrafts, which can lead to production processes being altered and this leads to a standardization of the most sought-after handicrafts and, in certain circumstances, artisans altering the original forms of the products in order to please tourists. Ferreira (2009) mentions the problem of culture clashes resulting from ethnic, religious and cultural differences. Some authors, such as Smith (1990), address more serious issues such as prostitution, alcoholism, the consumption of illicit substances and crime.

2 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Concept

Even before developing the topic, it is necessary to understand the concept of Local Development. The concept of Local Development is intrinsically associated with a multi-dimensional concept of change bringing together economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimension de local development (Kisman & Tasar, 2014).

Local development can be characterized in three ways: inputs, outputs and outcomes. The inputs can be perceived as sense of belonging, community, partnerships, and proximity. Regarding outputs we are talking about local beneficiaries, self-help, increased incomes, access to services, diversification... Finally, outcomes, it can be intended as collective and common goods, regeneration, effectiveness, social innovation, and empowerment (Jouled et al., 2010).

The purpose of local development is to empower a particular territory, usually a municipality or a region, so that it can improve economically and consequently improve the quality of life of its

inhabitants. In this way it becomes a very important contribution to the national economy and can reduce disparities between rich and poor places and increase private sector investment. (Clark, et al., 2010).

2.2 Sustainable Development

It's known that local development can also be considered sustainable development. Sustainable development is understood as a development that guarantees the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations (WWF, 2024).

To achieve global sustainable development, the United Nations has created 17 goals, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals, which "define global priorities and aspirations for 2030 in areas that affect the quality of life of all the world's citizens and those yet to come" (BCSD, 2024).

The following figure 1 illustrates the sustainable goals defined by the United Nations:



Figure 1 - Sustainable Development Goals

Source - United Nations

3 LINKING TOURISM TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

As has been said earlier, tourism is responsible for the creation of various jobs, the development of infrastructure and the promotion of the exchange of intercultural experiences (Yehia, 2019). Due to this interaction between tourist activities and localities, a set of “indirect activities that reach the most varied sectors of the economy, from industry to agriculture” (Silva, 2004, p.7) is generated. Over the years there has been an increase in tourism activities around the world thus influencing local development (Silva, 2004).

The importance of tourism varies from country to country, and in many, tourism represents a significant part of the source of wealth. Through Europe we are surrounded by examples that illustrate this idea. According to Jornal de Notícias (2020), in 2018, 20% of Croatia's GDP was due to tourism; in Cyprus also in 2018, tourism accounted for 14% of GDP. If we look at the example of Portugal it is possible to also see the importance that tourism has in its economy, having presented 9.5%, that is, significantly 10% of the Portuguese GDP in 2023 (Turismo de Portugal, 2024).

It is through these sources of revenue that tourism activities have been potentiating the development of countries, from local economy to national economy. In addition to the economy, communities also develop socially, either through local business partnerships or through proximity and a sense of belonging.

3.1 Wild Côa Network

In Portugal, it is through projects such as the Wild Côa Network of the NGO Rewilding Portugal, implemented in the Greater Côa Valley region, that several localities, mostly isolated, are able to guarantee their subsistence and development, establishing their population. The Greater Côa Valley is a region located in the northwest of Portugal, in its interior, a region far from large urban centers, and with low population density, in the district of Guarda.

The following figure 2 shows the population density distribution per km² in Portugal:

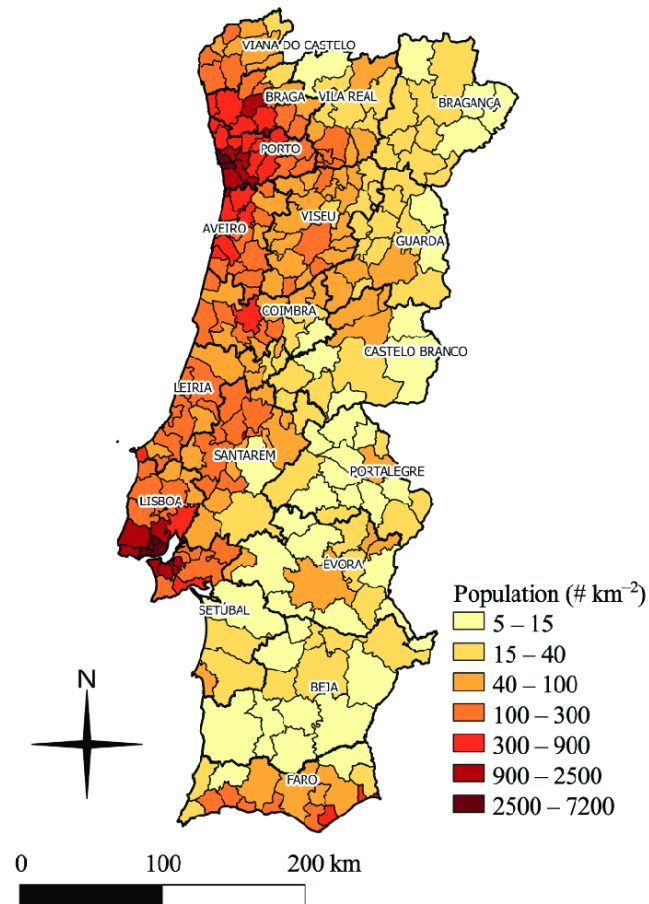


Figure 2 - Population Density Distribution per km² in Portugal:

Source – ResearchGate

Originally the landscape was dominated by smallholdings where olives, almonds and cereals were grown, but today these activities, as well as livestock farming, are being replaced by more extensive regimes (Rewilding, 2024). Over the last few years, Rewilding Portugal has been exploring this region in order to improve the connection between the natural areas and at the same time support sustainable business models in the region that stimulate local economies and bring back additional value to the communities in the area.

According to Rewilding Portugal (2024), the entity behind this project, the Wild Côa Network has the following objectives:

- “Facilitate synergies between companies from different sectors in order to promote a stronger business environment that fosters cooperation rather than competition.
- Facilitate the marketing of the region as a whole, promoting its cultural and natural values.
- Support local companies in developing sustainable business models according to the principles of rewilding.
- Promote partnerships between entities linked to tourism for the creation of new tourist packages. “

It is possible to see that these objectives are mainly business-oriented, and it is through practices that meet these ideas, that this project has contributed to the local development of the Greater Côa Valley. On the one hand, there is economic development due to the promotion of partnerships and synergies between companies from different sectors and the support to companies in creating sustainable business models. On the other hand, and as a consequence of economic growth, there is also social and cultural development in the population of the Greater Côa Valley due to the jobs that are created, the experiences that are transmitted through the partnerships and through the influence of tourism and tourists in the daily life of local society.

According to Outcome Indicator Report Form written by Teixeira et al. (2023, p.27) “a good example of Rewilding Portugal’s work to develop local communities and enterprises can be seen in the small village of Vilar Maior, close to the rewilding area of Vale Carapito. Local stakeholders have seen a new dynamic in the village since Rewilding Portugal started its work in the region. With more tourists, more stays in the village’s accommodation, more foreign nationals and new companies working in the region like WildLife Portugal and DreamOverland, two nature-based enterprises that already worked in the GCV and that now expanded their operations to Vilar Maior. Local communities point to Rewilding Portugal’s work as the driver of the new dynamic in the village.” As we can see, there is a connection between economic development and social development in this network.

4 RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

After understanding what tourism is, understanding that there are different types of tourism and that it can impact locations positively and negatively, after understanding what local development and sustainable development are, and after linking tourism to local development, presenting the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project, the following research propositions are presented:

P1- Tourism can be the key to local development in the most isolated regions.

P2- The most isolated locations, where tourism represents a large part of their economic activity, can survive without mass tourism.

P3- Partnerships between companies play a fundamental role in business success.

To address this issue, the Wild Côa Network project was taken as an example and object of study. This project, as will later be seen from the information obtained during the interviews, has been in existence for three years and is regularly monitored, making it a good source of information capable of meeting the needs of this case study.

METHODOLOGY

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Methodological Approach

This section will describe the methodology used to analyse the theme of this thesis: The Linkage Between Tourism Activities and Local Development: The Case Study of Greater Côa Valley.

This study aims to better understand the role that tourism activities play in local development, and, to this end, Rewilding Portugal's Wild Côa Network project will be used as a case study in this area. To carry out this research, a qualitative methodology will be adopted, so data will be collected by interviewing the inhabitants and businesspeople of the Greater Côa Valley, in order to understand each interviewee's perspective on the role tourism plays in the local development of the region.

This methodology allows researchers to understand the meaning and perception that people have of their world and how they experience different events (Wilson & Sharples, 2015). According to Njie and Asimiran (2014, p. 25) "it portrays that other dimension deep rooted in thoughts and not easily represented on scales and averages, that underlying meaning unearthed through the genre of thorough questioning, interaction and observation".

5.2 Sample and Data Collection

To carry out this study, a series of interviews were conducted with a few people who are linked to the Greater Côa Valley and the Wild Côa Network project with the aim of gathering relevant data that will enable a more accurate and realistic analysis of this topic.

The sample comprises 6 observations, two of which correspond to project managers and the rest to project members. On behalf of Rewilding Portugal, the entity responsible for the project, the Director of Communication and Enterprise, also the manager of this project, Fernando Teixeira, and the Entrepreneurship Technician Carlos Santos were interviewed. To complement the collection of information, some members of the Wild Côa Network were interviewed, such as Telma Lourenço responsible for Quinta Vale Tourão, Fernando Romão, responsible for Wildlife Portugal, and Daniela Aguiar and André Frade, responsible for Mercaria do Fradinho.

This data was essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the interviewees' experiences, opinions and perspectives, that in this way, helped to identify patterns and trends related to tourism activities that influence the local development of the regions.

This method was chosen because of its flexibility in data collection and the ease with which the topic can be explored through first-hand accounts and testimonies from the participants, thus guaranteeing a truthful perception that is close to reality.

5.3 Interview Script

There are three characteristics that differentiate interviews: (1) interviews carried out by a group of people; (2) interviews that cover several topics or focus on just one topic (Ruiz Olabuenaga, 1996); and (3) interviews that differ according to the degree to which the questions are structured, which can be a non-directive interview, focused interview or structured interview (Colás, 1992).

A structured interview was used for this study. These types of interviews consist of interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee using a set of pre-established questions limited to a set of response categories (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

To carry out the interviews, an interview script was created based in the content mentioned in literature review. Table 3 show the items mentioned in the interview and the authors connected to them:

Table 3 – Interview Script

Category	Questions	Authors
Interviewee Presentation (Section 1)	Q1- Can you please present yourself by saying your name, age and explain how are you connected to the project Wild Côa Network?	---
The Project Wild Côa Network (Section 2)	Q2- How do you describe the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project? Q3- How did partner companies join the project? Was there any insecurity on the part of the owners? Q4- In your opinion, have the project objectives been met?	Rewilding Portugal (2024)
The Impact of Tourism in Greater Côa Valley (Section 3)	Q5- How important is tourism in Greater Côa	Ledhesma (2018); Ruschman (2000); Ferreira (2009); Ignarra (1999); Theobald (2002);

	<p>Valley region and how is it impacting it?</p> <p>Q6- What are the most popular types of tourism in Greater Côa Valley?</p>	<p>Dall'Agnol (2012); Ruschmann (1999); UNEP (2000)</p>
<p>The Role of the Project in Local Development (Section 4)</p>	<p>Q7- How has the project influenced economic activity in the region? What have been the main improvements since implementing this project?</p> <p>Q8- How has the project influenced society in the region?</p> <p>Q9- Do you think the project Wild Côa Network is contributing to sustainable development in Greater Côa Valley region?</p> <p>Q10- In your opinion, could projects like Wild Côa Network be the key to the development of the most isolated regions?</p>	<p>Kisman & Tasar (2014); Jouled et al (2010); Clark, et al (2010); Yehia (2019); Silva (2004); Rewilding Portugal (2024); (WFF 2024); (BCSD 2024)</p>
<p>Final Thoughts</p>	<p>Q11- Any final thoughts or insights you would like to share regarding the project Wild Côa Network and its role in local development?</p>	<p>--</p>

Source – Own Elaboration

RESULTS

6 RESULTS

This section will discuss the findings of the interviews conducted with the managers and members of the Wild Côa Network project as part of the study of the linkage between tourism activities and local development. During these interviews, various perspectives, facts and first-hand information were gathered about the project in question, which serves as an example and case study on this subject. The analysis of these interviews made it possible to assess how tourism is impacting the Greater Côa Valley region, to understand how it promotes the development of the region, and finally to determine through its example and the opinion of those interviewed whether the research propositions prove to be true.

6.1 The Project Wild Côa Network

The first section of the questionnaire to be addressed is section 2, which refers to the Wild Côa Network project. The questions throughout this section aim to characterize the Greater Côa Valley region in order to understand the geographic and demographic context in which this project is located, as well as understand some of its background, such as the integration of its members and the degree of effectiveness of the project taking into account the proposed objectives.

This section shows that the Greater Côa Valley is "only now being discovered" and that it is "very natural and not yet very developed", according to Telma Lourenço. The interviews revealed that this region is dominated by a natural and rustic landscape, rich in culture and history where, unlike the coast of Portugal, there are fewer companies, less economic dynamism and fewer opportunities. As the project manager, Fernando Teixeira, says, especially in the last 20 years, the region "has lost a lot of people, it has lost economic power, it has lost a lot of companies, it has lost a lot of manpower and what I notice in this region is that there is disbelief among the local population in the future that the region can take on".

Comparing the various perspectives of the interviewees on the Wild Côa Network project, they all recognize its importance in boosting the region, reinforcing the importance of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs and the promotion of their products as one of the project's greatest advantages. Fernando Romão's perspective illustrates this opinion shared by the interviewees very well, saying that "basically what Rewilding has been doing is what neither local authorities nor public bodies or development associations have done in this territory, which is to seriously promote it in terms of branding and tourism". The application of this project has been very well regarded by its members and by the community. From the responses obtained

during the interviews, it can be seen that this project has a commercial facet, which seeks to boost the region through local businesses, attracting more tourists, strengthening synergies between businesses, André Frade, from Mercearia do Fradinho, supports these facts by explaining that the Wild Côa Network project "is very interesting and very good here for our region, since small producers who perhaps wouldn't have visibility if they went alone to the national and international market, with this network are more visible, which is an added value for all the partners". In addition to a commercial component, this project has a strong social component in which profits are used to invest in the community, as is the case with financial support and sponsorship of popular saints' festivals. This can be seen in the interview with Fernando Teixeira, when he says that "we (Rewilding Portugal) are sponsoring all the popular festivals that exist in the villages around us, within our possibilities, within our capacities, but in the villages where we have a nature reserve, where we work, we are always supporting that village's festival!" In this way, the project ends up strengthening the region not only economically, but also socially, which has helped it to continue and succeed.

The implementation of this project had its challenges, there was a lot of mistrust on the part of the companies contacted to join the network. Carlos Santos' account exemplifies this very well, he says that the first question some people asked was how much they would have to pay, and refers to "this fear that sometimes people think that in order to join an organization or association they have to pay something a year". What is certain is that over time, by sharing experiences through local businesses, and even through the media, the project has grown naturally and now has 57 members. From the information gathered during the interviews, we know that the project is at a stage where it doesn't need to look for new companies to be part of the network, at the moment it's the companies that are going after the Wild Côa Network. This information can be seen in the interview with Telma Lourenço when she says that "nowadays, I don't think it's them (Rewilding) who go looking for people, they contact them so that they can join the project", and this tells that over these three years, there has been a very positive and favorable evolution for the project.

When asked about the objectives and whether they have been met, once again the answers didn't differ much, so there was agreement that the objectives have been met. It's clear from the interviewees' words that it's not an easy path and "it's a job that takes time," says Fernando Romão, but despite the challenges, the project is well oriented and has great potential.

6.2 Tourism Impact in the Greater Côa Valley

This section aims to understand the importance of tourism in boosting the Greater Côa Valley and how it is impacting the region.

According to the information obtained from the interviewees, tourism in the region is only now being truly discovered, and there is some aversion to mass tourism, because they believe that only sustainable tourism, with smaller numbers of tourists, can truly bring benefits to the region, this statement is justified by Carlos Santos who in his interview mentions that "the Rewilding Portugal association doesn't want mass tourism (...) we don't want a large number of people so as not to cause so much impact". Both Rewilding and other members of the network offer a range of experiences and tourist packages involving various products from the region, and various activities with different members of the network, and this is how the arrival of tourists ends up benefiting and involving the local population. Bearing in mind that there will be fewer and fewer large companies in the region and that it will therefore be increasingly difficult to employ people on a large scale, everything indicates that this region will be more about visiting than living, this is the future that Fernando Teixeira foresees for the Greater Côa Valley, he says "we are talking about a region that has fewer and fewer people living, it has fewer and fewer large companies present, in other words, it's increasingly difficult to employ people on a large scale because it doesn't have the manpower for it either. We're talking about a region that's going to be, and there's no shame in assuming this, a region that's going to be more about visiting than living". In his interview, Fernando Teixeira says that, like the Greater Côa Valley, many other municipalities in Portugal will have a similar future, which is why he emphasizes the opportunity for tourism to become one of the main sectors, if not the main employer and driving force in these regions.

Following the various perspectives observed in the interviews, it is unquestionable that tourism is in fact one of the great driving forces of the Greater Côa Valley. Although it would be possible to increase the flow of tourists, it is intended that there should not be mass tourism in the region to ensure its sustainability, and to this end, they offer more complete tourist packages in order to compensate financially for local companies, but also for tourists who opt for these experiences to have a richer, more unique and personalized experience.

Of the various types of tourism that exist in the region, the interviewees' responses have in common cultural/historical tourism, religious tourism and nature tourism as being the strongest and most common in the region. Fernando Teixeira says "we currently have 3 (...). Nature tourism is already starting to be noticed, and the members of the network, in a survey, are also

starting to notice an increase, and then there are two main types of tourism, which are religious tourism and cultural tourism. We have a region full of historic buildings, castles, churches, chapels and then religious tourism, especially in the Guarda area, with the Guarda Cathedral." In this respect, Carlos Santos says that "the most sought-after tourism will always be historical tourism, because in our region, in the district of Guarda, we have many castles and many fortifications and it will always be the most sought-after. (...) Nature tourism, even when I was studying for my master's degree, we saw that it is growing more and more and especially foreign tourists."

6.3 The Role of the Project in Local Development

In this section, the interviewees were asked questions in order to understand how tourism has influenced economic activity in the region, society and what the main improvements have been since its implementation. This section also sought to understand whether this project is making a sustainable contribution to the development of the region and, finally, to conclude whether this type of project could be the key to the development of more isolated regions.

When asked about the influence of the project on the region's economic activity, it is clear from the interviews that this project has had a very significant importance for the region. Fernando Teixeira says that since the creation of the Wild Côa Network, "several businesses have sprung up that didn't exist because they started hearing about it," he also says, "we have several members of the network who have created new products because of this. We've had DMCs that have created packages just to visit this region because they saw that it worked, we've had restaurants that were very traditional in the way they cooked and started to receive a lot of international visitors and had to adapt their offer, create vegetarian dishes, create vegan dishes, create gluten-free dishes, things that for the public in this region would never happen" and from these words it is clear that this project, since its inception, has had a positive influence on the region's economic activity.

Regarding the improvements that have been felt since the implementation of the network, it is clear that the promotion of the region, the products and the producers is undoubtedly the aspect where the companies have felt an improvement. Carlos Santos supports this idea, in his interview he says "in the past our products were only recognized by their surroundings, they weren't very well known, so with the help of Rewilding, we go to fairs (...). Rewilding Portugal has done a lot of publicizing of the products and for them it's great, and with that, of course, the economy has also improved, it's not astronomical, but many of our members, even in the questionnaires we usually do, say that yes, their sales have improved."

In terms of society, the interviewees say that the population has also felt the effects of this project in a positive way. Telma Lourenço attests to this, saying: "From what I hear, the people around the headquarters, the old people and so on, love socializing with the people involved in the network. Socially, it's very positive, even for the older age groups, which is what we have most of in the region". Fernando Romão also contributed valuable information about the benefits of this project for the local population. In his interview, he said that "the local populations have a positive reflection in this respect, (...) this is noticeable, in the villages where I go with my clients, we always stop at the café or the restaurant, wherever it may be to consume, to go to the bathroom, to have a coffee, to have a drink, or whatever it may be, so people end up realizing that there is movement and they start hearing new people and get to know the faces of the people who are involved and you can see that there is a positive attitude towards it. "

When asked about the topic of sustainability in the project, opinions once again coincided, and it can be seen that this project has valued sustainability throughout its actions, trying to promote it whenever possible. During his interview, André Frade from Mercearia do Fradinho explained the importance that sustainability has for Rewilding Portugal itself, as well as for the project Wild Côa Network. When asked about the subject, he responded by saying "I think it's the main point of Rewilding Portugal, which is to develop the territory in a sustainable way, with the practices that they are introducing into the territory, therefore, both in the Rewilding areas, as well as fostering this concept among partners and populations. All of us partners have to be, shall we say, careful with the sustainability of the products we have and the businesses we have, so I think that's the main point, sustainability, both ecological and economic."

One of the most important themes of this study is whether projects like the Wild Côa Network could be the key to the development of the most isolated regions. When questioned on this subject, it is clear that everyone agrees that this type of project represents a very important part of these regions' sources of wealth. Telma Lourenço says: "Thanks to the Wild Côa Network, our region has been developed in tourism, economic, social and environmental terms". The project manager, Fernando Teixeira, puts it this way: "We think this has to be replicable, in other words, we've just been invited by Turismo de Portugal to present our work to tourism agents from other regions and I think that even Turismo de Portugal, the invitation they give us is along these lines, in other words, they recognize that there is value here that can last over time and that can allow the region to become an interesting tourist destination and from what I understand that's exactly what they did, they showed a case that went well and tried to get other regions of the country to follow suit and try to recreate a success story in more regions."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7 DISCUSSION

At this point, after analyzing the results, the research propositions will be discussed according to the perspectives gathered from the interviewees, summarized and explained in the previous point.

P1- Tourism can be the key to local development in the most isolated regions.

The information gathered through the interviews confirms and supports proposition 1, demonstrating that yes, tourism can be the key to the development of the most isolated regions. In the various points of view shared by the interviewees, it can be seen that the future of many regions will be more about visiting than living, and for this reason, tourism will be one of the main employer sectors in regions where there are not so many opportunities, nor large companies to sustain the local economy and retain its population.

P2- The most isolated locations, where tourism represents a large part of their economic activity, can survive without mass tourism.

This project, although still recent, has proved this proposition 2 to be true. The Wild Côa Network was a project designed to develop the region in a sustainable way and therefore the use of mass tourism is unthinkable, as it is associated with a negative impact. It is clear from the interviewees' responses that mass tourism is not desired. The results of the interviews show that tourism is in fact one of the major sectors driving the region's economy, and that continuing with this type of management and good sustainable practices will be enough to boost and sustain the local economy, seeking to impact the region in the most positive way possible.

P3- Partnerships between companies play a fundamental role in business success.

Although tourism has been a major driving force in the region, it has only achieved the importance it has due to the partnerships and synergies that have been created between local businesses in the light of the Wild Côa Network project. It can be said that this proposition 3 is true, and the perspectives shared by the interviewees corroborate this statement. The interviewees, in their responses, valued the partnerships that have been made with Rewilding as an intermediary, and these partnerships have worked so well that many companies have taken their own initiative to create new partnerships, which demonstrates without a shadow of

a doubt the extremely important role that partnerships play in business development. The importance of partnerships can also be seen in the new product and experience offers that have emerged between the companies. It can be seen that there is an effort to ensure that tourists get the most out of the region during their visit, including in these packages the services and products of the various local businesses.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Final Remarks

In concluding this study, it can be seen that tourism plays a fundamental role in boosting the economic and social development of the most isolated regions, where opportunities are scarce and industry is not large enough to sustain these territories. An analysis of the Wild Côa Network project showed that Rewilding Portugal has sought to boost the Greater Côa Valley through development partnerships, promoting the region as a whole and supporting local companies by developing sustainable business models. Data collection showed that this project has indeed made a very positive contribution to the region, and the interviewees all share the same opinion: that it is a project that values the region's companies and that, through sustainable practices, it empowers local businesses, thus contributing to local development and providing the region with a new form of livelihood.

8.2 Implication for Theory and Practice

This study has made it possible to gather new information and knowledge about the link between tourism and local development. By analyzing the results and taking into account the existing literature, it was possible to explore the issue and reach conclusions that could shape the future of regions, businesses and the economy. In a practical sense, this study has shown that it is possible for isolated regions to sustain themselves without the use of mass tourism, so that through partnerships they can create a network like the Wild Côa Network to support local development in a sustainable way, mitigating the difficulties and challenges inherent in isolated locations. In short, this study exposes a new window of opportunity, in the light of an existing project, with a view to local development.

8.3 Limitations

This study acknowledges some limitations, particularly due to the use of qualitative methodology. The use of this methodology implies some limitations such as the subjectivity of the data collected, the generalization of results due to small samples and the use of data from specific contexts that may not apply to other situations, the quality and reliability of the data collected, among others. Despite these limitations, this methodology is very valuable for collecting data that quantitative methodology is unable to collect.

8.4 Future Directions

The development of this study has made it possible to explore new knowledge in the areas of tourism, business and local development, opening up new opportunities for study in these same areas. Based on this knowledge, new studies can be carried out on partnerships between businesses, other local development projects similar to the Wild Côa Network can be studied, or even new sustainable business models that could be the new bet for companies. Tourism itself is an area that is constantly developing, especially sustainable tourism, and it will certainly be an area that, with the development of new technologies and new tourist offers, will have many subjects to study. It should be pointed out that new information on the subject of this thesis may emerge at any time and can be explored again in the search for more up-to-date results.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: [INTERVIEW SCRIPT]

The Linkage between Tourism Activities and Local Development: The Case Study of Greater Côa Valley.

Introduction (Section 1)

- Introduction of the interviewer and Purpose of the Interview

Hello, I'm Gonçalo Ferreira and I'm a student of Creativity and Business Innovation. At the moment I'm doing research about the connection between tourism activities and local development using as a case study the project, Wild Côa Network. In this interview I pretend to understand your thoughts and perspective regarding this project and gather information on how this project is impacting and developing the Greater Côa Valley.

- Confirmation of Consent for Participation.
- Introduction of the participant

Q1- Can you please present yourself by saying your name, age and explain how are you connected to the project Wild Côa Network?

The Project Wild Côa Network (Section 2)

Q2- How do you describe the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project?

Q3- How did partner companies join the project? Was there any insecurity on the part of the owners?

Q4- In your opinion, have the project objectives been met?

The Impact of Tourism in Greater Côa Valley (Section 3)

Q5- How important is tourism in Greater Côa Valley region and how is it impacting it?

Q6- What are the most popular types of tourism in Greater Côa Valley?

The Role of the Project in Local Development (Section 4)

Q7- How has the project influenced economic activity in the region? What have been the main improvements since implementing this project?

Q8- How has the project influenced society in the region?

Q9- Do you think the project Wild Côa Network is contributing to sustainable development in Greater Côa Valley region?

Q10- In your opinion, could projects like Wild Côa Network be the key to the development of the most isolated regions?

Conclusion

Q11- Any final thoughts or insights you would like to share regarding the project Wild Côa Network and its role in local development?

Closing:

- Thank the interviewee for their time and participation
- Confirmation of interviewee's consent for using the information gathered.
- Any follow-up procedures or additional information needed

APPENDIX 2: [INTERVIEW RESPONSES - TELMA LOURENÇO]

Introduction (Section 1)

Hello, my name is Gonçalo Ferreira and I'm studying Creativity and Business Innovation. I'm currently doing a dissertation on the link between tourism activities and local development using the Wild Côa Network project as a case study. In this interview I want to understand your opinion and perspective on this project and gather information on how it is impacting and developing the Greater Côa Valley.

Q1- Can you please present yourself by saying your name, age and explain how are you connected to the project Wild Côa Network?

So, my name is Telma Lourenço, I'm 31 years old and I'm involved in the Wild Côa network project because it's a project that gives us the opportunity to showcase the best that the Côa Valley has to offer. It's a project that develops small and medium-sized entrepreneurs in the field of agriculture and develops their potential, makes us known and shows us more. It's like a showcase for our products. In the Wild Côa Network they offer support for the environment and develop good environmental practices.

The Project Wild Côa Network (Section 2)

Q2- How do you describe the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project?

The Côa Valley is only now being discovered, so to speak. It's very natural and not yet developed. It's a little corner of Portugal that's still being discovered and only now are people discovering the potential of the Greater Côa Valley, thanks to the Rewilding project, which is doing an enormous job of projecting the Côa further afield, it's becoming more and more known and valued, it's still very rustic, it doesn't have human influence, it has enormous wildlife and a lot of potential.

Q3- How did partner companies join the project? Was there any insecurity on the part of the owners?

At first I think it was a bit unknown and people were afraid of not knowing what it was. Then, when they saw that they could only gain from it, and that it was a benefit for them, they began

to join more and more and nowadays, I don't think it's them (Rewilding) who go looking for people, they contact them so that they can join the project.

Q4- In your opinion, have the project objectives been met?

Yes, they have developed well. These objectives are being achieved with great success and it's been beneficial for all of us. We've had good acceptance from people who know about the project and are very interested and want to know more about what we do. It's been very positive.

The Impact Of Tourism In Greater Côa Valley (Section 3)

Q5- How important is tourism in Greater Côa Valley region and how is it impacting it?

Tourism in the Côa Valley, as I said, is just now being discovered. People didn't know about the Côa Valley, they knew about the Douro, but not the Côa, it was unknown and there are still many people who don't know about it. It's been publicized more by Rewilding and people come through Rewilding to get to know the Côa Valley and the producers. They're interested in what we do, they have experiences with the farmer, which is my case, I promote experiences directly on my farm, where they have a day with the farmer, experiences with the Mirandese donkeys, it's really about having contact with nature as a whole.

Q6- What are the most popular types of tourism in Greater Côa Valley?

Rural, residential and experiential tourism is starting to come into its own, but it's not yet the most developed. What I promote is experiential tourism, not residential tourism. There's also cultural tourism, which includes historic villages, some of which are in the Côa Valley

The Role of the Project in Local Development (Section 4)

Q7- How has the project influenced economic activity in the region? What have been the main improvements since implementing this project?

I'm talking about my case, I don't know about my colleagues, for example those who have housing tourism will talk about housing tourism. I can talk about products because I'm a pioneer in transforming sheep's milk into soap and they've been promoting my products a lot and this has been a positive point for the economy of all the members of the Côa Selvagem Network.

Q8- How has the project influenced society in the region?

I recognize that it's positive for everyone. They're developing very interesting projects with the animals, the people, from what I hear, the ones who are around the headquarters, the old people and so on, love socializing with the people who are involved in the network. Socially, it's very positive, even for the older age groups, which is what we have most of in the region.

Q9- Do you think the project Wild Côa Network is contributing to sustainable development in Greater Côa Valley region?

Yes, that's what they're already doing and I think it will continue. They are already taking care of economic sustainability, so that small businesses can continue to have a place in the market, environmental sustainability and in various aspects we can frame sustainability.

Q10- In your opinion, could projects like Wild Côa Network be the key to the development of the most isolated regions?

Yes, I think the regions can only benefit from this kind of initiative. Thanks to the Wild Côa Network, our region has been developed in tourism, economic, social and environmental terms. And I think that all the small regions with great potential don't have more of an echo because they don't have projects like this to promote, because if they did, more people would get to know the more unknown regions, and more people would visit and this social and economic part of the region would be more developed, as well as favoring settlement, as these inland areas are very depopulated.

Conclusion

Q11- Any final thoughts or insights you would like to share regarding the project Wild Côa Network and its role in local development?

I think we've touched on several points, and I can't think of any more at the moment.

APPENDIX 3: [INTERVIEW RESPONSES – CARLOS SANTOS]

Introduction (Section 1)

Hello, my name is Gonçalo Ferreira and I'm studying Creativity and Business Innovation. I'm currently doing a dissertation on the link between tourism activities and local development using the Wild Côa Network project as a case study. In this interview I want to understand your opinion and perspective on this project and gather information on how it is impacting and developing the Greater Côa Valley.

Q1- Can you please present yourself by saying your name, age and explain how are you connected to the project Wild Côa Network?

My name is Carlos. I did my degree in geography in Coimbra and then my master's in Tourism and Sustainability in Seia. I had been following the Rewilding project for some time and as soon as I saw an opportunity to join, I decided to try my luck and I succeeded. At the moment I'm involved in event management, i.e. tourist programs or any kind of event that takes place in the network or in the region. I'm also involved in our local accommodation in Vale Madeira, the Rewilding Center, where I and our housekeeper Alexandra try to organize bookings and events there. Then I'm also involved in finding products in the area that are sustainable or on the way to sustainability and trying to bring those products into our network so that we can develop them further, promote them more in Portugal and also in other countries. That's the aim of Rewilding Portugal, to give these products more importance and to show that we're here for them too and to help them spread.

The Project Wild Côa Network (Section 2)

Q2- How do you describe the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project?

At the moment we know that the Côa Valley is a very important region in terms of species, in terms of animals and plants. It is a corridor in the Côa Valley that is important to maintain because in a small area we have large species, so it is important to maintain these species and try to bring them back to this Great Côa Valley. Rewilding Portugal is trying to protect these species and get others to come. Of course, it's not just nature that's important in this Great Côa Valley, but also a lot of culture, a lot of history, so that's another thing that Rewilding Portugal

is interested in, not just nature but also culture. In our tour packages that we've developed this year, we try to give people, tourists, wherever they're from, a nature tourism experience.

Q3- How did partner companies join the project? Was there any insecurity on the part of the owners?

Imagine, there were some people who asked the first question: how much do I have to pay to join? That's the first question, it's this fear that sometimes people have that in order to join an organization or an association they have to pay something a year. We don't, we simply want them to be part of this Coa network and what we ask of them is that they be more developed, that they carry out activities among themselves and that they also help to publicize our Rewilding Portugal work. And with that they also benefit from being with us and we also help them develop their product.

Q4- In your opinion, have the project objectives been met?

So, it's a long road, I think we're still at the beginning, but we're on a good path because if we carry on like this we'll have more and more tourists, more people asking for quotes for tourist packages to visit our area to see our products, our animals, everything, so there's good potential for us to get bigger and bigger.

The Impact of Tourism in Greater Côa Valley (Section 3)

Q5- How important is tourism in Greater Côa Valley region and how is it impacting it?

Even when I joined Rewilding Portugal and even with what I studied, especially in my master's degree, I for example and even the Rewilding Portugal association don't want mass tourism, we don't want that, what we want is good sustainable tourism. I'll give you an example, in our tourist packages the maximum number of people we can have is 10, to visit our areas we don't want a large number of people so as not to cause so much impact, so it becomes more sustainable tourism. Then there are all the other activities, involving the members so that they can taste products that are typical of the area, all of this is sustainable and we make sure that people from the region are involved in the project and that is also sustainability. There are many people who are afraid of tourism because, you know, mass tourism is negative, but when people see this sustainable tourism trying to involve the economy and society, people start to accept tourism here in the region much more and they see that tourism is essential for our region too.

Q6- What are the most popular types of tourism in Greater Côa Valley?

The most sought-after tourism will always be historical tourism, because in our region, in the district of Guarda, we have many castles and fortifications and it will always be the most sought-after. We have historic villages that are a good route for visiting castles. Nature tourism, even when I was studying for my master's degree, we've seen that it's growing more and more and especially foreign tourists, who of course like to go to the beach, which is normal, we're known and will always be that country of sun and sea, but they're also looking for more calm and nature tourism. For example, we have the Serra da Estrela and even the Greater Côa Valley, and knowing that we're here and knowing what Rewilding Portugal is doing, many foreigners want to see what we're doing, they want to see our animals and have that experience with us. Most of our tourists who come for our tour packages are foreigners.

The Role of the Project in Local Development (Section 4)

Q7- How has the project influenced economic activity in the region? What have been the main improvements since implementing this project?

In the past, our products were only recognized by their surroundings, they weren't very well known, so with the help of Rewilding, we go to fairs or even on our website and Instagram, and we're now betting a lot on Instagram because that's what it is, we publicize their products a lot more and so people can be more in touch with those who didn't even know these products existed. For example, there are products here in the region that I didn't even know existed and I've started to discover them. Rewilding Portugal has done a lot of promotion of the products and for them it's great, and with that, of course, the economy has also improved, it's not astronomical, but many of our members, even in the questionnaires we usually do, say that yes, their sales have improved.

Q8- How has the project influenced society in the region?

They've seen that things are getting better every year, even when we go to fairs we manage to sell their products, or even with our Instagram posts, we get more and more likes and more followers and more and more purchases on our website, because we also have their products for sale on our website, so yes, this project has been accepted by society and more and more people are trying to join the network, but we also have to make a selection because, for example, we can't have 10 olive oils, it's too much, we have to see which is the most sustainable

and then do a study and then decide, but more and more people want to join the network because they see that it's working and it's being a success.

Q9- Do you think the project Wild Côa Network is contributing to sustainable development in Greater Côa Valley region?

Yes, yes, completely, what we really want is sustainability. It's like this, I often say that it's impossible to have 100% sustainability, in this day and age it's impossible, but if we can get 40%, 50% or even 60% it would be really nice and so I think that Rewilding Portugal, with the work it's doing and its commitment to sustainability, I think that yes, at the moment our tourism is sustainable.

Q10- In your opinion, could projects like Wild Côa Network be the key to the development of the most isolated regions?

Yes, for example, we have other Rewildings, not just us, we have them in Spain, Scotland, Croatia and now the other Rewildings want to do the same with their country. I think that's great and, for example, I think Croatia is starting now, they're making a list of their products and I think that's great and it shows our identity.

Conclusion

Q11- Any final thoughts or insights you would like to share regarding the project Wild Côa Network and its role in local development?

I think I've said it all, I've said that we wanted to invest a lot in tourism, knowing that tourism, at the moment in Portugal, is what makes the most money. We're always fighting and what we don't want is mass tourism. We really don't want mass tourism in the Greater Côa Valley and what we want is sustainable tourism so that we can both protect nature and promote it, but always in a sustainable way.

APPENDIX 4: [INTERVIEW RESPONSES – FERNANDO TEIXEIRA]

Introduction (Section 1)

Hello, my name is Gonçalo Ferreira and I'm studying Creativity and Business Innovation. I'm currently doing a dissertation on the link between tourism activities and local development using the Wild Côa Network project as a case study. In this interview I want to understand your opinion and perspective on this project and gather information on how it is impacting and developing the Greater Côa Valley.

Q1- Can you please present yourself by saying your name, age and explain how are you connected to the project Wild Côa Network?

Yes, my name is Fernando Teixeira, I'm 28 years old, I've been working for Rewilding Portugal for five years and I'm currently the director of communication and enterprise, and I'm the project manager for the Wild Côa Network and the person who is defining the communication and evolution strategy for the Wild Côa Network.

The Project Wild Côa Network (Section 2)

Q2- How do you describe the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project?

We're talking about a region that is extensive, in other words, a region that has 200,000 hectares that run along the entire Côa River. It's a region that starts in Sabugal, which is where the Côa River rises, and goes all the way to the mouth of the Côa River, which is near Vila Nova de Foz Côa where the river ends. We work throughout this area, in other words, we work with companies throughout this area and this region is a region that over time and especially in the last 20 years has become very deserted, we've had a huge outflow of people that has left the region in a state that we can say is very different from what it was 20 years ago, because the Guarda region specifically, the entire district of Guarda, which is where the Greater Côa Valley is located, is a region that has lost a lot of people, lost economic power, lost a lot of companies, lost a lot of manpower and what I notice in this region is that there is disbelief among the local population in the future that the region can take on, in other words, traditional businesses, traditional companies are ending, they are not being replaced and it is very noticeable even in the local communities that people don't believe in the future that this region can have because they see a very big decrease in what they are used to, so when we arrived in this territory, this

was the point, little synergy between the companies, the companies that exist that are more innovative and more focused on nature, working very much on their own, few and very small, we're talking about companies mostly owned by people who work mostly at the weekend on these projects and who have other jobs in their lives during the week, so this was the point, let's say it was the working base very early on and a region that although it's a special region, in other words, in the Greater Côa Valley region you can see that people are very proud of where they come from and there's a very strong identity with the region, with the territory, people know the points of the landscape, they know what to visit, they know the traditions, they know a lot, they have a lot of knowledge to give, in other words, it's a very rich community from that point of view, it's just that they don't believe in traditional ways and they haven't yet, at least 5 years ago, when we started working on this, and 3 years ago with the Wild Côa Network, they didn't have a clear perception of other opportunities that the territory has other than those that they are used to and that no longer work. This project has two main axes: we have a commercial axis, which in this case is commercial, but from the point of view of an NGO. This project also has the objective of financing our own conservation projects, that's always one of the objectives, in other words, in the long term, the fact that we manage one or another local lodge, the fact that we have a business network that we use to bring in tourists and do tours and complete package experiences etc, is also to finance conservation work on the ground, that's the good part, in other words, we invest 100% of the profit from these activities in conservation actions because we are an NGO, in other words, no one makes any personal profit from this work and then there's a social component which is broader than you might think, it's not just a social component of supporting the development of the region because that's clear, we've come to work in the territory, all companies must play an active role in supporting the socio-economic development of that region and especially social, in this case we're talking about, in a desertified region, We still have an extra here, we have conservation projects going on in the field and they only work if our community is with us because they are the day-to-day managers of the land, in other words, put this into very practical cases, if there's a fire, there needs to be an early warning, if we need to know who owns a property because we need to buy it to increase our number of hectares or even our area, for this we need to have good relations with the community and one way of doing this is to have projects like Wild Côa Network that support the community, they give people new opportunities, they make people feel valued, they feel empowered in new businesses and this trust, this is a relationship and trust that is built, ends up making these conservation projects supported by the community, it pushes them forward when these projects usually go wrong it's because the community turns its back on them, so it's very interesting that we're managing to keep them on our side.

Q3- How did partner companies join the project? Was there any insecurity on the part of the owners?

There was a tremendous amount of mistrust, in other words, this was a very gradual process. When we started working in 2019, our first step was to try to survey the companies we knew, in other words, we discovered them on the ground and we held an initial meeting where we presented our idea, the work we were going to do, and how they could get involved in this work, and I remember that there were 8/9 companies at that first meeting, and of those companies today, for example, only two or three are in the Wild Côa Network, in other words, the results were not very tangible at the time, but we already had some idea of that, we realized that only with time, with a lot of insistence and proven evidence could they believe in us more. We're at a time when there are networks of everything and anything, networks of clusters of companies, co-working networks that want to bring companies together to put to sleep people who come from abroad to be digital nomads, in other words, there are lots of networks that don't become effective on the ground, they're micro-terrains, sometimes even supported by Turismo de Portugal and Turismo do Centro, which then don't continue, and it's normal that when a project like ours comes along, the reaction is similar, i.e. it's just another network, it doesn't bring practical results, on top of that it's a European project and then they leave, so this resistance happened but then it was gradual. We started with 3/4 companies in the Wild Côa Network, we started with very small cases, we had a visitation area of our own in the Carapito Valley in Vilar Maior, we had a partner who was the accommodation in that village, we had a partner who was the one who made the visits inside and a partner who was the one who made the meals and that was it, we had our mini network to receive the tourist in that microclimate and it started to work. Then we bought another Rewilding area, started the same model, got a hotel, got a restaurant... We did exactly the same model and this means that we have 2 offers that work, tourists start coming, they start talking about it outside, they start setting an example, they start calling friends, they start being reported on television and this has been gaining a natural scale of results in which we then have the members of the initial network being our ambassadors, in other words, talking to other people they work with, other companies, for example with a hotel that works with 7 or 8 guides, they start saying to the guides "this is very good, maybe you should see it, meet with them, I think this could work" and we've gone from a stage where we were chasing the companies we wanted to a stage where, due to the results we've been getting, we have companies contacting us to join. This model is preferable, we're at a stage where we have 57 members, which is a lot to manage. We now have more criteria for accepting companies, not just any company is coming in like in the past, so it's easier for us if they contact us with a real

interest, rather than us knocking on the doors of companies that may not be interested in joining and it's legitimate that they don't want to, and it's easier for us to work with someone who has a prior interest in joining and this has changed the way we work. We don't go after them, we wait for them to come to us.

Q4- In your opinion, have the project objectives been met?

Yes, because we've been measuring it. We did it for the first time in a survey last year and now we want to do it every year, every year at the end of each year our aim is to do a satisfaction and impact survey in which we want to know every year, in other words, it's not something you just have to do once. For example, last year you worked with x, has that number increased? In other words, are there more partnerships between members of the network? Do you notice more clients coming from other members of the network or from Rewilding Portugal itself? Every year we want to measure the evolution of all these indicators, but we still notice a clear evolution and we noticed it in the results of the first 3 years in last year's survey. The truth is that when we arrived in the field, only 2 or 3 of these 57 members were already working with each other in some way and today I think it was in the questionnaire that 33% already mentioned that they worked with other members, we're talking about a number that is already around 18/19 companies through the members we have in the network, so it's already a much higher percentage and it's only a matter of time before Rewilding Portugal, the advantage it had as a network promoter was that when we started selling our own packages, we "forced" these members to start working together on our packages and our experiences. They began to see that this was working and they themselves, apart from Wild Côa Network or at least apart from Rewilding Portugal, began to mediate the conversation, they themselves began to develop tourist offers, in other words, it's ok that we have members in the network who are DMCs, it means, who sell complete trips to tourists, as we also do, who in the past used restaurants outside the network, or used accommodation outside the network because they simply had a partnership and nowadays, they're starting to follow that circular logic too, which is "we won't go any further if we have someone who does the same thing with the same quality here and who is part of the network" and that's where you can see the evolution, they're members who used to use other partners and they realize that there's the same within the network and they start to prefer to do it within the network, so we're trying to close the circuit, so to speak, and the results are quite noticeable.

The Impact Of Tourism In Greater Côa Valley (Section 3)

Q5- How important is tourism in Greater Côa Valley region and how is it impacting it?

Tourism is going to become increasingly important. If we're talking about a region that has fewer and fewer people living in it, has fewer and fewer large companies present, in other words, is finding it increasingly difficult to employ people on a large scale because it doesn't have the manpower for it either, we're in a region that is going to be, and there's no need to be ashamed to admit it, a region that is going to be more about visiting than living. There are several regions in Portugal that are going to go through this process in the future, in other words, there are certain municipalities in the region that are absolutely certain that in several villages they will have a greater number of annual visitors than people who live there every year and there's no need to be ashamed of that, it's the natural evolution of things and this is a potential because tourism is going to gain weight, because in my opinion, tourism, if done well, is going to become perhaps the main sector, apart from the public sector, in the private sector it will be one of the biggest sectors, if not the biggest sector to employ people and bring wealth to the territory. Then it's a question of what kind of tourism we want, this region can try what other regions have tried to become a mass tourism, but I don't think that's the way to go, it's more of a coastal route because the demand is more in that direction, so if we go for tourism, which is what we're proposing as the Wild Côa Network, which is based on nature and not on a large scale, we prefer to sell a trip that includes more things, that is longer and more expensive than a trip that is extremely affordable, cheap, very short, very short in experience, a micro-experience, so to speak, and that allows us to have lots of people in the area. We also want to have an offer that is suitable for all tourists, that is, at the moment even with our accommodation, we have a night per person costing 20 euros or 18 euros, we also want to be an accommodation that allows everyone to come, but we never want to fall into that trend where we start to have mass tourism where we start to sell anything, it's not subjective. I think that if we see tourism as selective tourism and tourism that doesn't impact or that impacts in a positive way, because if we have a few people in the territory at the same time, who contribute to the development of local businesses, who by enjoying a Rewilding experience are contributing all the money they pay for that experience, of the profit they pay is invested in conservation projects, these are people who come to the area, get to know it, leave a positive impact and leave, that's the kind of tourism we want, that's the only impact tourism should have on a region like this.

Q6- What are the most popular types of tourism in Greater Côa Valley?

We currently have 3, nature tourism is just starting to emerge, in other words, it's already gaining weight, for example the municipality of Pinhel, since it opened the Rewilding center as accommodation, has tripled the number of annual overnight stays and I think they even have indicators that 30 to 40% of these tourists are nature tourists who have stayed at the center, so they have these figures and they're interesting. Nature tourism is already starting to be noticed and the members of the network, in a survey, are also starting to notice a growth, and then there are two main types of tourism, which are religious tourism and cultural tourism. We have a region full of historic buildings, castles, churches, chapels and so religious tourism, especially in the Guarda area, with the Guarda Cathedral. Right next door, for example, there's Belmonte, which is outside the Greater Côa Valley, but people visit it because it's all about religious tourism. They're usually older people and this is the basic visitor, they're older people who are getting to know the country and want to get to know the cultural and religious heritage and they look at the Guarda district as extremely rich in that respect, it's full of castles and emblematic churches and they come for that. I'd say that nature tourism is the third force at the moment, but perhaps it's the one that's growing the most, not least because it brings in a younger and more international audience than the other 2.

The Role of the Project in Local Development (Section 4)

Q7- How has the project influenced economic activity in the region? What have been the main improvements since the implementation of this project?

Well, diversification of supply, in other words, since we emerged and the network emerged, several businesses have emerged that didn't exist because they started hearing about it, they saw the niche, they asked Rewilding Europe for financial support, because we also give financial loans, through Rewilding Europe we have a financial line for this, under advantageous conditions so that they can start their businesses as if it were a kind of incubator for them to start up, and that was immediately noticeable, in other words, those who already had an idea took advantage of this boom, this growth to launch the idea. Then we have several members of the network and I think that's a good sign of economic development, we have several members of the network who have created new products because of this. We've had DMCs that have created packages just for visiting this region because they saw that it worked, we've had restaurants that were very traditional in the way they cooked and started to receive a lot of international visitors and had to adapt their offer, create vegetarian dishes, create vegan dishes, create gluten-free dishes,

things that for the public in this region would never happen, but as the influx of visitors started to be big enough for that, they started to diversify their offer, we have restaurants that have started making field lunches and delivering them in the countryside, there are even more examples, but here we have several members of the network who had a basic business and were certainly looking, as almost all businesses do, for a way to innovate, and the Wild Côa Network and the tourists that the network brought and that Rewilding brought gave them the opportunity to test new products. The biggest socio-economic impact in the region for now, apart from the increase in the flow of nature tourists, is undoubtedly, for me, conversion. There are many businesses that have reconverted and diversified their offer because of this.

Q8- How has the project influenced society in the region?

It's getting better and better, we felt this more after we started selling local products, in other words, when we took an active role in promoting local and endogenous products from small producers, the community started to support us more, they realized that it's not just about bringing in tourists and using what's here to make a profit, because the truth is that there are still people in the community, perhaps because they don't know or understand what a non-profit NGO is, they always think that there's some kind of profit motive behind it that they don't understand and that we're using the region to our advantage, there will always be these ideas, but that's more of a lack of knowledge about how a company that isn't a company works, in essence, we work like a company but we're not one. I think that since we started using local products, it's changed a little, they've started to see that it was a structural decision on our part, that is, that we could serve any cheaper product for an experience or a lunch in the countryside, and that we choose products that have added value. It's always more expensive, and this is good to be clear, it's always more expensive to buy a local product, of sustainable origin, organic, and certified, or not, we don't demand certification as a criterion, we don't think certification says anything, basically we prefer to know the production, we go and see the production and we know whether or not it has a very negative impact on the landscape than any certification, we don't limit ourselves to certification, but it's much more expensive to buy a product like that than any other product in the same range on the national market. These producers have a very small market, they have a very small scale of production and they have to sell more expensively because they don't have a large scale and they can't lower the price per unit, so it's obvious. People began to see that this decision wasn't an economic decision, it was a decision that actually served to boost the region and what the region has. Then it's a bit of word of mouth, we have a member selling more products, we have a satisfied member, we have a member who

goes to the café at the weekend and will praise this project, we have a member who will praise his family, who are managing to make a lot more money with this type of local product and the family will take this message to their friends and there will be another producer who has a product who will want to start working with us, in other words, that although Rewilding is on the world market, because we sell products all over the world through the online store, we have a lot of international orders, about 70% of our visitors are international, but even so the scale of community support is still very much a word of mouth thing and it's worked quite well, because what we're doing is turning the members of the network into ambassadors for the network, in other words, the members of the network are the ones who promote it to the outside world. Rewilding invests very little money in online advertising, in marketing, very little, we think there are two ambassadors who have to work, the satisfied customers, who will say they were satisfied and will get more customers for sure, and the members of the network, who will bring more members and will bring the support of the community. The region, as I was telling you, is a region that although it has this whole cultural identity, is proud of the region where they live, let's say it's a pride that is very much dormant because the region is in decline from a more traditional point of view and more traditional activities, and for a person who is in a village with 50 people and starts to see tourists arriving who want to get to know their territory, sit at the coffee table and ask questions, sometimes have long conversations with local people to try to find out more about how it used to be, how their life is, it makes them feel valued, in other words, that dormant pride in the region which is, "my region is the best of all", this becomes much more prominent and much more alive when you receive people in the village and tend to speak well of the village to those who come from outside, in other words, we're bringing back that sense of belonging that these people have and I think that yes, at the moment, after a lot of work and many years of doing this, I think we're finally starting to hear it and we can already see that now the community has realized the impact it has and has embraced the project as if it were their own.

Q9- Do you think the project Wild Côa Network is contributing to sustainable development in Greater Côa Valley region?

Yes, because it's part of our premise, that is, by only using and selling products that have a sustainable origin in the region, we're promoting it, we're giving them, and we do this often and more and more, we're giving training and knowledge of sustainable practices to the accommodations in the network, to the guides, so that they have less impact on the visits they make in the field, it's a series of information and knowledge that we're trying to pass on and help them to modernize as well, we're making the whole region, Of course, when we say the

whole region, we mean the whole region that is within the network, but in the long term we want the network to grow and become more and more uniform, and what we are doing is giving the region mechanisms so that it distinguishes itself in this way, in other words, we say that we are selling the wilder side of Portugal, this is the slogan of this territory, the truth is that we don't assume it because we think it is intrinsic to what we do, we are an environmental NGO, but we also want to make this tourist destination the most sustainable from this point of view. We want those who visit the territory with the network to know that at every moment, the decision they are making to stay with a member of the network to sleep, eat and visit, they know that this person is the person who can do it in a way that has the least negative impact on the landscape of the region, we are giving that seal of guarantee on our part, so to speak.

Q10- In your opinion, could projects like Wild Côa Network be the key to the development of the most isolated regions?

Yes, and we think that this has to be replicable, in other words, we've just been invited by Turismo de Portugal to present our work to tourism agents from other regions and I think that even Turismo de Portugal, the invitation they give us is along these lines, in other words, they recognize that there is value here that can be lasting over time and that can allow the region to become an interesting tourist destination and from what I understand that's exactly what happened, they show a case that went well and try to get other regions of the country to follow the same path and try to recreate a success story in more regions and even Rewilding Portugal has this goal, Rewilding Portugal is a nationwide organization, we work in the great Côa valley because it was our initial work base and where our current fieldwork reserves are located. The truth is that we're growing, we now have a property in partnership that we're managing, hence we're also putting the bison there, which is already in the district of Castelo Branco, it's no longer in the greater Côa Valley, and this will continue to happen even more, we have partnerships planned for the Alentejo, perhaps for the Lisbon area, in other words, we're going to start working more and more at a national level, and even we have the objective of, perhaps not as project coordinators, this is something that will perhaps be more directed towards the Greater Côa Valley, which is our case study, but perhaps it will be part of our objectives, to try to energize networks of this kind and projects of this kind in other parts of the country, perhaps not us coordinating but encouraging some local entity that exists in the territory to do so, showing an example that works, making ourselves available to give whatever support is needed to make it happen. There is even this objective that there are more regions in this kind of situation, some worse, some better. Perhaps we should say that the case of the Greater Côa Valley, together

with Trás-os-Montes, are the worst cases in this sense, in other words, it's where the isolation and the departure of people and the lack of this kind of business exists more, because there is a great tendency to associate the Alentejo with this, but in reality the Alentejo continues to have large estates and massive monoculture production of everything and anything, so there continue to be large producers and people with money working the land, while in the Guarda area, the Côa Valley, in the Trás-os-Montes area in Vila Real and Bragança, we're seeing a lot of this and so I believe that if Guarda manages, on the scale we have; to do something like this, I think that in regions that are also experiencing the same problems, but not as acute as Guarda already was, I think there are many chances of even greater success than here, I say.

Conclusion

Q11- Any final thoughts or insights you would like to share regarding the project Wild Côa Network and its role in local development?

I think that, as a general rule, it's all there, I think that the only thing that perhaps, was something that in the presentation we made to Turismo de Portugal, which I also focused on and which wasn't planned for the beginning, is that I started to think about it, because the truth is that when we talk about these issues, Turismo de Portugal has given it a curious term, they call it purposeful travel, this is really the commercial term they use for trips in which the person who goes to visit a territory, visits not only for the basic purpose of getting to know that territory, of sightseeing and relaxing, which always has a purpose on top of it, which can be social, environmental, in other words, the person really has a purpose of getting to the territory, of leaving a positive impact because they know they're contributing to something bigger, be it social, be it environmental, be it in any way, be it religious, because the truth is that anyone who takes a trip to Fatima will always have a purposeful trip in their own way, so these are purposeful trips. What we're trying to do here, and this is what could be the basis for the future in terms of working with communities, is that the companies that receive these clients should also have a purpose beyond making a profit from the arrival of the clients, in other words, the companies receive clients who travel with purpose, but they also have to have a purpose in their actions that is just as important as profit, at least from the point of view of impact, in other words, Rewilding Portugal, for example, and Wild Côa Network stand out in this respect, Rewilding Portugal, as the coordinator of the network, is located in an area and in villages, such as where we have the center and beyond, where there are no large companies, it's obvious that in a village with 50 inhabitants there isn't a large company, what does this mean? It means that certain cultural and social activities in that village, for example, the annual festival of the saints, which

is something very structural in Portugal and extremely important for all the villages in Portugal, some kind of cultural activities that small associations of inhabitants want to develop, the financial support they have for these activities is very small, because they all turn to the same source, which is to ask for money from the municipality, which is the big employer in that area, there are often no businesses within the village, and if a village wants to hold a saints' festival, the only people they can turn to are the people of the village, doing those increasingly common money collections, or else asking the municipality. Rewilding Portugal is a conservation NGO, it doesn't make any profit, but we're still taking on that role, in other words, we're sponsoring all the popular festivals that exist in the villages around us, within our means, within our capabilities, but in the villages where we have a nature reserve, where we work, we're always supporting that village's festival! Also, for example, in Vilar Maior, which is where we have one of our projects, we're paying for, we're sponsoring a trail that they run in nature, because it passes through our area, because it educates people about what we're doing, in other words, it always has to have some connection to what we do, but it's our social role not to let these traditions die, that is, it's not just about exploiting people's traditions for our own benefit, we're bringing tourists here, we're showing off the village, but if we haven't done anything to ensure that they don't die out, we're just playing the role of user of what exists and we also want to maintain what exists, so we're doing that in every way possible and imaginable, as we see fit, as we're available, we're not a big company in that respect, We manage a lot of money, but since we don't make a profit we're not a big company, so I think this is the future and all companies, in the Wild Côa Network we've noticed this, we, for example, if we have any competition, the Trail is a good example, which is a member of the network and the residents' association of Vilar Maior is part of the network because of this, we accept residents' associations within the Wild Côa Network, They publicly asked the Côa Selvagem Network for help, in other words, they spoke to the members at a meeting we all had because they needed help to get the prizes to give to the winners and 10 members of the network immediately offered their products and experiences to give as prizes to people, and they don't get any benefit from it other than mere publicity, which is always difficult to calculate. So we're talking about business here and it's our way of working and we ask our members to leave a positive impact, in their own way, on their own scale, and of course a very strong wine company will be able to give away 500 liters of wine, a very small jam production company can only give away 2 jars of jam, it's a question of proportion, 1 isn't worth more than another because of that, it's worth exactly the same proportion, and what matters is exactly that attitude of leaving that positive impact on their own size and scale. This line of thinking for the network is in its infancy, but it's something we want to work on more in the future, which is to calculate with some indicators that we still have

to think about, what positive impact we leave on the local community from this point of view as well, which is not only what we profit from what we do there and the money we bring into the region, but also what else there is, because there's always a little something.

APPENDIX 5: [INTERVIEW RESPONSES – MERCEARIA DO FRADINHO]

Introduction (Section 1)

Hello, my name is Gonçalo Ferreira and I'm studying Creativity and Business Innovation. I'm currently doing a dissertation on the link between tourism activities and local development using the Wild Côa Network project as a case study. In this interview I want to understand your opinion and perspective on this project and gather information on how it is impacting and developing the Greater Côa Valley.

Q1- Can you please present yourself by saying your name, age and explain how are you connected to the project Wild Côa Network?

André: My name is André Frade and we have this Mercearia do Fradinho project in which the concept is to sell local products that then encompass the whole country, less mass-produced products, smaller producers, to help them and thus make local products known. The partnership with the Wild Côa Network already came about in another workplace but we thought it would make perfect sense to continue in this new project, as we are also close to the Great Côa Valley, in the same region, it made perfect sense, and as such, and as such we also have here many products for sale from partners who are part of the network.

The Project Wild Côa Network (Section 2)

Q2- How do you describe the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project?

André: The whole Côa Valley region, as Rewilding Portugal describes it, is the wildest part of Portugal. It's a virgin region, so to speak, slightly altered by human action, there's still plenty of nature despite the scourges of the fires. But yes, that's the description, the wildest side of Portugal, and now with the work they're doing even more, with the introduction of various species of animals, all of nature is going to return to what it was before. I think this Côa Wild Network project is very interesting and very good for our region, since small producers who perhaps wouldn't have visibility if they went out on their own to the national and international market, with this network are more visible, which is an added value for all the partners.

Q3- How did partner companies join the project? Was there any insecurity on the part of the owners?

André: Maybe there were some doubts at the beginning, as there was nothing like it in the region and they started talking to everyone, to the entrepreneurs, and there could have been some mistrust. Then, with the first partners, they started to show up, talking to each other, gaining more confidence, and now, I think there's a lot more demand to join the network than those who might want to leave. They want to stay and there are more and more partners appearing, so I don't think there will be any more mistrust, because the work is already more cemented, and people already know about it.

Q4- In your opinion, have the project objectives been met?

Daniela: I think so, and we're a good example of this, we work with various partners in the network and various partners in the network have their products here, so I think so, and more and more.

Author: So, these objectives have evolved and have been achieved successively over time?

Daniela: Yes

André: In our case, as well as having various products for sale from partners, we also have picnic and breakfast services that also include these products, and as we also have partnerships with other partners within the network, they also come to us, for example a travel agency, they come to us to do a guided tour for clients of that agency, in other words, a lot more people come from other places than here in the network.

The Impact of Tourism in Greater Côa Valley (Section 3)

Q5- How important is tourism in Greater Côa Valley region and how is it impacting it?

Daniela: Well, I have a very critical opinion on this, I think that in a way it's positive, in another way it's negative, it's positive in the sense that when they are individualized clients who come and understand the region where they are, but we are also having mass tourism that comes on excursions and this is not beneficial for the region, because the only thing they leave here is their ecological footprint, so to speak, because they don't consume, they don't generate wealth in local commerce, so this mass tourism worries me on the negative side. The individual tourism of the person traveling as a family or with a group of friends, or individually, that is positive, yes,

but there is also another less pleasant aspect, which is local accommodation, because anything today is local accommodation, and I don't think it should be. What I'm saying is, if we want to open tourism in a rural area and we have to have everything legal, with certain rules, those who now think that having a house in the countryside and decide to have local accommodation should also have those same rules, so now anything can be used for tourism, everyone wants to open tourism, and I think there should be an awareness that the region, yes, there is demand, but perhaps it won't be enough for the number of tourists that are already starting to come in, and there will end up being Community funds that will, in a way, remain in these accommodations, which sooner or later will end up closing because there won't be enough flow to fill these accommodations, and I think that this could be a negative aspect. With regard to the Wild Côa Network, I think it's undoubtedly tourism and the type of tourism they're promoting, because it's a type of nature tourism, with people who have a lot of economic power, connected to the area, who understand where they're coming from, and that's what's crucial for the region, bringing people to the region who really know where they're coming from and what they can count on, not that they come just for the sake of it without a goal, without knowing much about what the region has to offer, and then they're the kind of clients who, when they come without knowing, complain about everything and nothing, while those who come more prepared for what they're going to find are already more interesting clients, so to speak.

Author: So, this part about mass tourism and more and more competition is already external to Rewilding Portugal? In other words, they end up with other offers of mass tourism and local accommodation that Rewilding can no longer control so that they can do tourism the way they want, perhaps more controlled?

Daniela: No, they don't, they do tourism the way they want to...

Author: Yes, but they no longer have that control of being sustainable... do they?

Daniela: Oh no, that doesn't depend on Rewilding Portugal, no. And I think that in a way it's not competition, because Rewilding works in a certain way, and then this has a little to do with the municipalities in our region, which don't promote themselves in the right way, now at Rewilding Portugal level, I think they're working very well, and that's not a negative aspect in relation to Rewilding, Rewilding does an excellent job, I'm saying that the surrounding environment is perhaps not working in the best way, but Rewilding is. Rewilding in terms of tourism and nature conservation, yes, it's working well, it's everything around it that could use some improvement.

Author: Maybe follow Rewilding's example?

Daniela: Yes, exactly, because there are more associations like Rewilding and they don't work as well as they do, there are also members, there's also a network, but for example, nobody gets together, there's nothing, there's no conversation.

Q6- What are the most popular types of tourism in Greater Côa Valley?

Daniela: I would say cultural and nature tourism.

Author: In other words, when people come to visit the area, they come more to see nature, to see the heritage...?

Daniela: Yes, I think so, perhaps more heritage, and then nature, but yes, they're both fundamental.

The Role of the Project in Local Development (Section 4)

Q7- How has the project influenced economic activity in the region? What have been the main improvements since the implementation of this project?

Daniela: At least you've done something interesting that no one else has managed to do, which is to get several companies communicating with each other, and that's already an added value, so we're all winning from that point on.

Author: So valuing partnerships was the most important aspect of getting the whole region working on the same axis, right?

Daniela: Yes, because everyone talks about networking, it's the buzzword of the moment, both in the region and in the country, but nobody practices it, whereas perhaps with the Wild Côa Network, as there are always messages on WhatsApp, we have a monthly meeting, I think it makes all the difference, and it forces us in a way to be in the network and to work together, but in general, apart from the Wild Côa Network, there is no such thing as networking, so it's a fundamental point for economic development.

Q8- How has the project influenced society in the region?

André: We're not very close to Rewilding's headquarters and Rewilding's protected areas, so the impact on society here shouldn't be too great, maybe a lot of people, or 90%, don't know about the Rewilding Portugal project, but the populations that are inside the Rewilding areas should initially have the normal impact of it being new, But now I think that everything is already

interconnected and there's no problem, they already understand what Rewilding Portugal is doing on the ground, and perhaps the farmers themselves are already asking for help, about what to do on their land, what they can do, I don't think there's any more, as we were talking about earlier, there's no more mistrust and they're even asking Rewilding technicians for advice.

Author: In other words, so they feel more supported, they feel part of the project, so they've benefited from it?

André: Yes, yes, I think so.

Q9- Do you think the project Wild Côa Network is contributing to sustainable development in Greater Côa Valley region?

André: I think that's the main point of Rewilding Portugal, which is to develop the territory in a sustainable way, with the practices that they are introducing in the territory, so both in the Rewilding areas and to promote this concept among partners and populations. All of us partners must be, shall we say, careful with the sustainability of the products we have and the businesses we have, so I think that's the main point, sustainability, both ecological and economic.

Author: So, they work on sustainability at various levels?

André: Yes, on several levels, exactly.

Q10- In your opinion, could projects like Wild Côa Network be the key to the development of the most isolated regions?

André: Yes, it helps a lot, with the programs that Rewilding Portugal presents, a lot of tourists already come, and in addition to the tourists, a lot of technicians from Europe and even from all over the world come to visit, and they take a lot of things from here to their countries, to implement as well, as those from here go to other Rewilding areas around the world and bring their practices here. As far as we know, I think this Wild Côa Network project is already being implemented in other countries too, so it's an initiative that goes beyond the border, so that's great.

Author: In other words, if they take this example, and if they manage to replicate it in other regions, it could be that regions that are not so attractive could continue to be energized and developed.

André: Yes, in my opinion, yes, it makes perfect sense, because having a healthy territory that is ready to receive, not masses, but tourists, has every advantage and leverages a region, without a doubt. That's my opinion.

Daniela: I agree with André, I think so.

Conclusion

Q11- Any final thoughts or insights you would like to share regarding the project Wild Côa Network and its role in local development?

André: No, I don't think they were very well-thought-out questions

Daniela: They were assertive questions

APPENDIX 6: [INTERVIEW RESPONSES – FERNANDO ROMÃO]

Introduction (Section 1)

Hello, my name is Gonçalo Ferreira and I'm studying Creativity and Business Innovation. I'm currently doing a dissertation on the link between tourism activities and local development using the Wild Côa Network project as a case study. In this interview I want to understand your opinion and perspective on this project and gather information on how it is impacting and developing the Greater Côa Valley.

Q1- Can you please present yourself by saying your name, age and explain how are you connected to the project Wild Côa Network?

My name is Fernando Romão, I'm in charge of the tourist animation project, more focused on nature tourism, which is Wildlife Portugal, so it's a project that emerged in 2016 precisely, not from Rewilding Portugal, but at the time supported and stimulated by Rewilding Europe. Rewilding Portugal came into being later, but it ended up being an extension of this European organization, so I was already aware of this European project that is rewilding, and now it's even worldwide, rewilding is already being done worldwide and at the time when the Rewilding Europe project was launched I began to realize what it was and at the time I was developing activities in Faia Brava, in the Côa Valley, where the project began, at least in Portugal it began in 2012, the Côa Valley began to be part of this European network from that time on. In 2016, as I said, I decided to go ahead with my own project and develop specific activities that I wanted to develop on my own, because at the time I was working as a freelancer and then I had the support of Rewilding Europe and I was and am developing my activities mainly in the Côa Valley. And going back to the initial question, which was how I basically joined the Wild Côa Network, that's right... When Rewilding Portugal came along, I already knew the people who were mainly part of the hard core and there was practically no transition, basically I was already developing activities in the Côa Valley, I was probably the most active person in this respect, I know the territory best and I ended up joining immediately or partnering with this new project. The Wild Côa Network came about later on the initiative of Rewilding Portugal and, of course, I ended up thinking it was a great idea and also being a part of it. Basically, the territory is a little unfavorable in terms of the human resources that work in the territory, who work mainly in the area of tourism, so the more people we have integrated or at least in contact with, knowing what each one is doing and even being able to develop things together, the better in terms of the tourist offer, in this aspect of tourism, because there are other advantages of course.

The Project Wild Côa Network_(Section 2)

Q2- How do you describe the Greater Côa Valley region and the Wild Côa Network project?

The Côa Valley is an interesting territory in terms of... Basically... We're using the river here as a guiding axis for the territory, which is still quite wide-ranging. It crosses a territory, as I said, which is disadvantaged in terms of human population. It's been suffering some rural abandonment and not only that, even the county seats themselves are losing population, and for various reasons, rural abandonment, abandonment of traditional activities, because they're not economically profitable, young people are looking for other types of more profitable professional activities or at least looking for urban areas that are more appealing or at least at an early stage where they can continue their studies in a way that they can't in the interior. This is very complex, but it has to do with various factors that are unfavorable in the interior because they haven't been developed. The Côa Valley, in this sense, is a territory that was once very humanized, in terms of land occupation, both through agriculture and pastoralism, but has gradually been abandoned, which makes this whole Côa corridor very interesting in natural terms because what we notice, in this territory, which is even close to the border, we have nature that has been recovering itself, has been returning to its former territories and ends up being, perhaps at national level, one of the best areas to develop Rewilding actions or at least to get wildlife to return. We have a large area, we have some potential here to even attract new animal species, some larger species, or try to reintroduce some species that have disappeared and that have already occupied the territory, so this doesn't come into conflict with the local populations, as I say, a large part of the traditional activities have been disappearing, so if we have to develop actions here in the case of Rewilding, to develop actions to promote the return of the Iberian wolf, there's always that controversy around the wolf, because of that conflict with the local populations, but as it's going to be a very slow and gradual process, the work that Rewilding has been doing will allow us, perhaps, I hope, to adapt, or to make the local populations aware of this factor and basically also show or exemplify how the return of some species can be very interesting in economic terms and in terms of promoting the territory.

Author: And in terms of the Wild Côa project, how do you characterize it?

I'm not saying it's an unprecedented initiative because I think there are already similar situations at national level, but it turns out to be a pioneering idea. Basically, what Rewilding has been doing is what neither local authorities nor public bodies or development associations have done in this territory, which is to promote it seriously in terms of branding and tourism, and Rewilding began by creating the brand of the great Côa Valley and then tried to bring together people who are promoting a series of initiatives in the Côa Valley, in other words, people who are active in tourism, whether in restaurants, accommodation, local producers, etc., therefore, people who

are dynamic agents of the territory and who can really leverage this brand to have greater expression not only at national level but also abroad.

Q3- How did partner companies join the project? Was there any insecurity on the part of the owners?

I've already known, or been more or less involved in all this for several years and for me it was an almost spontaneous and immediate action, it's clear that yes, I'm in, this makes sense, there are situations that I know of that I still can't understand how they're not integrated into this network, either for lack of visibility or lack of time, I don't know, but I know of other cases of colleagues in the network who have also joined and didn't think twice about it and this obviously has no strings attached, it doesn't cost anything, we have here an entity that is promoting the territory and promoting all the agents free of charge and what more do we want? This is excellent, it's not every day, and in fact they're doing a great job, I can't complain because in fact they promote the territory a lot and now they're developing a series of activities involving various agents in the territory, so I think that in general, I don't think there should have been any major issues for the other companies in being part of this network, but as I say, there are one or two cases that I still don't understand how they're not part of it and that are in the territory and are important agents in the territory.

Q4- In your opinion, have the project objectives been met?

As I said, the Côa Valley is a brand, in fact, they ended up creating a brand some time ago, it wasn't that long ago, but it's a brand that's still in its infancy, it doesn't have much visibility, the truth is that it's not a very touristy area either, it has some handicaps, I think there's more demand internationally than nationally, so it's an inland area, it's a bit far from the big urban areas, namely Porto and Lisbon, so it's several hours away and there are added travel costs, and people often think twice before coming to a territory like this, foreigners don't, foreigners are different, when they come to Portugal, and I feel this from my clients who are mostly foreigners, they come because they've heard of the project and want to get to know it, but they still come to visit the country, but they dedicate a day or two, or more to the Greater Côa Valley and they come for that purpose. I think these are objectives that will be achieved over time, this is growing, rewilding itself has also created a series of tourist packages that are more aimed at the national market and you can see that there is demand, people are even joining in, and they also already have some reach in national terms and you can see that people are looking for them, It's not that much, it's a rather specific topic, in fact, it's a very specific area in terms of tourism,

this rewilding thing is still relatively new, so not everyone is aware of it, it's a work that's growing but there you go, goals are being achieved, that's my feeling. At the moment, Rewilding has been working on the brand at a local or regional level, taking part in some local fairs, for example, without just promoting it on social media, but I think the future is to start working on international fairs, for example, or big fairs like BTL to promote this brand, at least to get the municipalities in the area to start considering this as a brand by working together, which is what is important.

The Impact of Tourism in Greater Côa Valley (Section 3)

Q5- How important is tourism in Greater Côa Valley region and how is it impacting it?

I think it's positive, tourism has been growing gradually but sustainably, because we're not talking about mass tourism here, but low-density tourism, so to speak, I work with very small groups, usually couples, sometimes a family, they're very small numbers and my colleagues also know that they work in the same way, so we're not talking about tour buses, as I said, it's not really tourist territory, and the activity itself, nature tourism is not an activity that is conducive to this, to mass tourism, it's enjoyed almost independently or sometimes in small groups, so I work in that way, but people do come, I often do private tours, a lot, especially to foreigners, who often don't want to be part of groups, so much so that I don't schedule activities because I know I won't get any bookings, at least at national level I tried to do that in the early years and I didn't get any takers, and at the moment it doesn't justify having that job because most of the demand I get is from private individuals who want to do a day or half a day visiting one or two rewilding areas and they're not usually part of groups, it's a spontaneous thing, it can come up at any time. In terms of importance, I think that tourism is currently the most important economic activity or the one with the greatest economic potential for the region, because the region doesn't have large industries, there are very few industries or large companies, for example in the county seats, there are industrial zones with many companies, but it's nothing very significant, there is some employability on that point, the municipalities themselves employ a large part of the population, But then there's a lack of more job opportunities, particularly for young people, and tourism, in its various forms, could perhaps be the most interesting sector, not to mention the fact that tourism can trigger new business areas, it can continue to grow the area of accommodation, catering, or even local producers, or we can even have a shepherd who wants to do a differentiated activity, it can happen, it can be a precursor to some interesting initiatives.

Q6- What are the most popular types of tourism in Greater Côa Valley?

From what I know, in terms of tourism, there's cultural tourism, so it's a region that has a number of historic villages and in this respect there's a lot of tourism that comes to visit these old urban centers, villages with castles, historic villages, along the Côa Valley there are a number of old villages, of medieval and historical character, and the Côa engravings are perhaps the most significant tourist attraction, attracting thousands of people a year, in terms of more active tourism there are the hiking trails, all the municipalities in the territory have networks of hiking trails, we have the Côa Great Route and the Historic Villages Great Route, which attract some people, not many, but they are attracting people and there are some people going on these great routes, either on foot or by bicycle, and I don't think it's much more than that, apart from the people who contact us to visit the Côa valley or the Rewilding areas, and this could be nature tourism in general, another strong theme in the region with great potential is birdwatching, which is a theme that is very expressive, with great potential, and perhaps within the area of nature tourism, with the greatest potential in the region.

The Role of the Project in Local Development (Section 4)

Q7- How has the project influenced economic activity in the region? What have been the main improvements since the implementation of this project?

I've been working in tourism since the 1990s, in other regions of the country, but in the meantime I came to live in Guarda and started doing guided tours in the Serra da Estrela when I came here, it was mainly my area of work, when I got to know the Côa Valley and started doing tours in these areas and then when this Rewilding project came along, I can assure you that this happened almost overnight, I stopped having activities, I stopped looking for the Serra da Estrela or other areas of the country and started working almost exclusively in the Côa Valley, and I notice that over the years this has grown, and with Rewilding Portugal I notice that they have the capacity and are making efforts to increase the capacity to increase the offer, to create capacities here for the territory or for the agents to develop other types of offers that can attract even more tourists. In my case, yes, and I have the idea that other colleagues, depending on their area, have also felt this way, but you know that this can vary a bit. As I said, Rewilding does a lot of promotion of the territory and the agents, but I also do my own promotion and I often get direct demand because they come via my website, or social networks, and they come to me directly, but often it's through Rewilding Portugal.

Q8- How has the project influenced society in the region?

I think it's still a bit early to talk about this, because it's still a project that has been growing, but I notice that locally, at least in two communities, in two villages that are closer to the rewilding areas where there is greater development of activities either on my part or on the part of Rewilding Portugal or other agents of the Wild Côa Network, I notice that the local populations have a positive reaction to this, and it's also due to the work that Rewilding has done, the background and awareness-raising work that Rewilding has done with these local populations, it has already prepared them, It has already made them aware of what they are developing, what the objectives are and what is intended, which is basically to attract people to the region, obviously this is noticeable, so in the villages where I pass through with my clients, we always stop at the café or the restaurant, wherever it is to consume, to go to the toilet, to have a coffee, a drink or whatever, so people realize that there is movement and they hear new people and get to know the faces of the people involved and you can see that there is a positive attitude towards this. In terms of local accommodation, it's the same, they notice that there's more demand. Often people come and try to ask "so where do you come from?", "what brought you to the region?" and they answer "I came to visit the rewilding area, tomorrow I'm going on a guided tour of the Carapito Valley with Fernando Romão" things like that, it goes on and on and people realize that there really is a dynamic here that is very interesting and positive for the community.

Q9- Do you think the project Wild Côa Network is contributing to sustainable development in Greater Côa Valley region?

I'd say yes, it's a gradual growth that's adjusting, it's nothing like a boom, like, for example, a few years ago, Lisbon or Portugal won a series of tourist awards and suddenly Lisbon and Porto were full of tourists, Porto ok because it was classified by UNESCO, Lisbon because it's the capital is tourism and masses, there was suddenly a boom and it brought benefits, but it also brought problems behind it, and at the moment they're very difficult to manage. That's not the case here in this region, it's a growth that's gradual and gives us time to adapt or resolve some situations that might be problematic, of course we have to be careful when we're bringing in tourism and we're dealing with local populations that aren't zoo animals, I mean in the case of more cultural or traditional activities, you have to be careful with that, it's not the case because we're not really working with large volumes of tourists, I think yes, it's still a bit early to say that, yes there is a positive development, there is, but it's very slow, it's very gradual. At the moment too, with the human resources that exist in the area, we can't respond to everything, I think, so sometimes when I have too much demand I try to pass it on to other colleagues, but in fact there are only

a few of us working in the area, there aren't that many, and I think that somehow we're getting the job done and responding to what comes along, But that's one of Rewilding's concerns, this aspect of accompanying tourists, so much so that they've invested occasionally in some information and trying to attract other people to also start working in this area of tourism, or for example to collaborate with the companies that are already operating in the territory.

Q10- In your opinion, could projects like Wild Côa Network be the key to the development of the most isolated regions?

Yes, because as I said at the beginning, it's not a pioneering project, there are already similar situations throughout the country, but I think it's something that should be done more, this networking, there are very interesting projects that are working well precisely because of this, they are tourist projects, if you want to analyze a project more closely try exploring the Rota Vicentina for example, the Rota Vicentina project, in the southwest of Alentejo, is a project led by a group of people who, in addition to the route itself, have managed to bring together and create a network with the agents along the route and work very well, in terms of sustainability, avoiding mass tourism. They're not waiting for the municipalities to do things, they've put their own hands to the work and I think that at the moment, they're even a national benchmark in terms of sustainability projects and networking, but there are more, there are more projects. In terms of networking, there's the Aldeias de Xisto (Schist Villages) project, Aldeias Históricas de Portugal (Historic Villages of Portugal), I don't know if there's anything for the north, but I think there is, a number of things have come up, and these are already projects of some scale and they're rather large territories, but yes.

Conclusion

Q11- Any final thoughts or insights you would like to share regarding the project Wild Côa Network and its role in local development?

I don't know, maybe reinforcing one point or another, highlighting once again the work that Rewilding has been doing, unfortunately in an almost isolated way, I think there was a lack of support here or at least of municipalities and some public entities, I'm not saying to finance, but to go after and give strength to all this, because at the end of the day we're not just talking about conserving plants and animals, at the end of the day it's a project that has to do with that, sustainability and local development, which is what it represents, rewilding apparently isn't just about wildlife, but behind it comes a series of things that will benefit local populations and regions and the local economy, but I think there's a lack of vision here on the part of those in

charge of municipalities and beyond, even the central government itself, there's a lack of vision and a realization that this could be strategic for the development of the interior of the country. This is a project that can be replicated nationwide, it doesn't just have to be limited to the Côa Valley, and it doesn't have to be Rewilding, but we're using rewilding and nature tourism here as drivers of economic development and not just in the region, it can bring more jobs. Training people is very important and, of course, rewilding alone can't cover everything, but it would be important to have more initiatives of this kind. For example, I'm on my own, my colleagues and I practically have tourist entertainment companies, but it's just us, I'm on my own and so are they, and often what's missing is having collaborators, people with some experience, who may be available, preferably in the territory, which is easier, who are interested in this area and who may have this training and be able to collaborate with us, so that we can be more responsive to the activities we carry out and to the tourists who come to us.