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Sustainability, tourism and electric mobility – the MOVELETUR project

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Abstract

This paper looks over the perpetual fight that low density regions must face in what regards the emergence of economic opportunities, employment, income and production growth. It is known that tourism demand for nature and protected areas is increasing in this more and more urban world, what can open some doors for innovation to take place. The project we've been working on is focused on sustainable tourism practices in a protected area (Malcata Mountain Reserve), via electric mobility, which is known for its zero emission, non-polluting and noise free travelling. A broader study is taking place under the Interreg Funding Program, known as Moveletur Project. Our goals are to sponsor a model of sustainable and green tourism for visitors of natural areas, to produce a network of green tourism itineraries linking places of natural and/or cultural value using rechargeable vehicles and to encourage tourism sector entrepreneurs with a new service for their activity. Combined work with other natural areas is essential to increase outcomes. After the conclusion of project (by the end of 2018) there will be better information concerning natural and cultural values that natural areas hold and that can be used for tourists' pleasure, there will be a more dutiful way of doing tourism in natural areas, expectantly it will address job creation and improved territorial competitiveness, tourism experiences will have more quality and, finally, using technological features, will support smart villages further development.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, electric mobility, natural areas.

1. The Moveletur project

1.1. Introduction

Sustainable mobility, and electric mobility, is gaining importance in the contemporary world. Natural spaces are ideal areas to welcome this type of mobility. They allow mobility without emissions, contaminants or noise. This type of mobility also makes it possible for people with reduced mobility to have access to these areas, which would be difficult to visit otherwise.

The MOVELETUR project (logo in Figure 1) is committed to encouraging innovation in emerging sectors of the rural economy. The appearance of leisure activities in natural spaces provides the ideal set for new forms of territorial use, with strong territorial, economic and social impact. Thus, there is a dynamic that is combining important variations in land use. The challenge arises from knowing how to integrate this new use with traditional uses in a way that engenders wealth without compromising values or resources. It is noticed, then, that recreational activities have more and more meaning and socioeconomic incidence in the territory.

Figure 1 - MOVELETUR project's logo

The project is led by a Spanish partner (Fundación Patrimonio Natural de Castilla y León) and has six other institutions working together, two from Spain and four from Portugal. Its execution started on May 2017 and has a predictable investment of almost one million euros.

In short, the rural world is going through a series of significant variations and must meet original and innovative directions, new development arrangements and new activities that bring together different stakeholders.

The project pays attention to protected natural areas as areas holding economic potential. All protected natural areas that are part of the project belong to the Natura 2000 ecological network. This network was set up in the European Union to ensure the long-term conservation of Europe's most threatened species and habitats by helping to prevent threats to biodiversity (Evans, 2012; Sundseth & Creed, 2008). It is the main trans-European instrument for nature conservation.

The project addresses the development of sustainable tourism through the creation of itineraries linking natural and cultural values through an electric mobility network. In bordering territories there is a mutual ignorance of natural and cultural resources on both sides of the border. This project offers opportunities for the connection and sustainable integration of protected cross-border territories. In this way, it allows the knowledge and dissemination of points of interest existing in natural spaces on both sides of the border, involving a proposal of green itineraries, creation of visitor centres and development of sustainable tourism businesses.

Numerous heritage resources, as well as traditional architectural elements, are unexplored in tourism. Through this project, they can be valued and reactivated as potential tourist resources to be considered in the construction of green itineraries.

The project aims to promote sustainable mobility in the nature and cultural tourism sector and attract responsible and conscientious visitors when it comes to using the environment. On the other hand, tourism visitors and industry must also contribute to the natural heritage conservation. One of the ways fostered is the creation of green itineraries to promote the natural and cultural values of protected natural areas using zero emission electric vehicles (Banister, 2008).

MOVELETUR also aims to help professionals and workers to achieve new skills and jobs related to the management of electric mobility. Entrepreneurship will be encouraged through training actions related to management and maintenance services of electric mobility equipment. These training activities within a green economy will result in improved biodiversity and better cared nature. They will also contribute to adaptation to climate change and to risk prevention and management as a source of green jobs creation. The emerging economic activity of electric mobility will be promoted as part of a transition to a low carbon economy (green economy).

1.2. Geography and location

The geographical scope of the project covers seven protected natural areas of the Portuguese-Spanish border region, with the area, number of municipalities and population detailed in Table 1.

Table 2 – Project's participating natural areas

Natural Park / Reserve (Region and Country)	Protected area (Ha)	Municipalities (N.er)	Population (Inhabitants)
Arribes del Duero (Zamora / Salamanca, Spain)	106.105	37	16.514
Batuecas-Sierra de Francia (Salamanca, Spain)	32.300	15	5.578
Montesinho (Alto Tâmega, Portugal)	75.000	2	9.000
Peneda-Gerês (Alto Tâmega, Portugal)	70.290	5	9.099
Sanabria Lake (Zamora, Spain)	22.365	4	2.720
Serra da Malcata (Castelo Branco / Guarda, Portugal)	16.348	2	0
Sierra de Gredos (Ávila, Spain)	86.236	28	22.229

It is a transboundary rural territory, since the great majority of the population lives in population centres of less than 5.000 inhabitants, that is, in rural centres. In short, this region forms an extensive rural territory to invigorate, which is characterized by:

- Sparsely populated territories. In the case of Spanish protected areas, it is approximately 17 inhab/km2, compared to 97 inhab/km2 in Spain. In the case of Portuguese protected areas, it is 12 inhab/km2, compared to 118 inhab/km2 in Portugal.
- The loss of population in Alto Tâmega, Portugal is faster than the loss of population in Portugal. In the case of the Serra da Malcata Nature Reserve, the condition is even worse, once no one lives there. The municipalities of the Spanish protected areas have also suffered depopulation, a tendency that has been much more marked in recent years. Since the 60s there has been a repeatedly negative evolution in the number of inhabitants, what happens because young people are moving to cities in search of employment. Therefore, there is hardly a generational change, most of the remaining inhabitants are retired from professional activities. This deterioration in rural areas contrasts with national values.
- Grey revolution. The municipalities integrated into the Spanish protected areas have an aging rate of 29% compared to the Spanish aging rate which stands at 16%. In the case of municipalities of Portuguese protected areas, they also have

aging rates that are almost the double of the national average. The consequences of this immense migration towards more attractive areas have been, and still are, overwhelming the municipal censuses, not only due to population decline, but also due to population aging and the decrease in birth rates.

- High meaning of agricultural activity when compared with the services sector. In Spanish municipalities, 18% of the population with social security relate to the primary sector, compared to 1,14% at the state level. In the Portuguese situation, agriculture has also a high weight in the rural world.
- The activity rates are inferior to national averages. In the case of the municipalities in the border region, they stand at 37,1% and 28,4%, respectively in Spain and Portugal, compared to 55,6% and 48,4% nationwide.

For a better understanding about the MOVELETUR territory, Figure 2 shows the Portuguese and Spanish geographic region, considering the protected areas referred in Table 1.

It's a wide territory, characterized by developing difficulties issues, with different ways of looking at natural and cultural resources but that need to improve their value, using, for example, tourism activities. In such a way, the project intends to answer the challenge of matching tourism and leisure activities with local traditions and endogenous resources to help boosting the economic potential linked to natural protected areas. By promoting electric mobility, the project will also help to achieve European goals regarding climate change.

1.3. Main challenges

The MOVELETUR project has a markedly cross-border nature, which means that the actions only have meaning if approached in a coordinated and jointly managed way.

The protected spaces on both sides of the border can be described as peripheral territories. They are geographic areas characterized by depopulation, aging, weak territorial articulation, economic inertia, etc. Cross-border cooperation under the project allows the identification of new opportunities for socio-economic development and the integration of spaces on both sides of the border.

The different project partners on both sides of the border manage equipment for public use, which is sited in protected areas, related to visitor's care and information. These facilities enable communication with potential users of electric vehicles and the management of recharging stations. The implementation of green itineraries requires dialogue and coordination with hospitality or other tourist services entrepreneurs located in natural areas in both countries through which the use of electric vehicles will be managed.

Figure 2 - MOVELETUR territory

Source: Google Maps

The Portuguese and Spanish partners need to develop all activities together. Only working this way will be possible to achieve successful connectivity using cross-border tourist itineraries that provide electric mobility on natural spaces on both sides. The MOVELETUR partners have an important history and operational culture in cross-border cooperation networks (International Network of Natural Parks, Natura 2000 Network, Biosphere Reserve Network) and are perfectly aware about common problems, common objectives and opportunities detection.

Border territories are also spaces of opportunity, they are endowed with valuable natural and cultural heritage, a region where cross-border initiatives take place, and they are areas lacking territorial articulation, areas of economic cooperation, with success stories of cross-border cooperation programs (namely INTERREG).

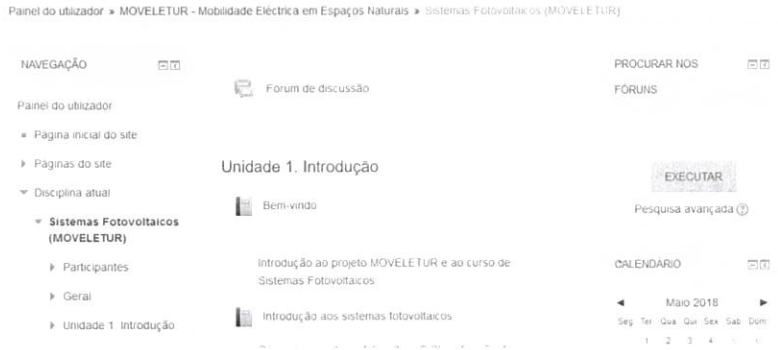
The project is included in two Cooperation Areas, Castilla y León - North of Portugal and Castilla y León - Centre of Portugal. It proposes an integrated and coordinated action in natural spaces existing in both Areas of Cooperation. This action in natural

areas supposes an important added value for the territory and, specifically, for the two Cooperation Areas involved. It proposes the design of a joint network of electric mobility itineraries and equipment, as well as the development of joint activities, such as the Electric Tour. These activities will help to enhance the image of a natural tourism destination based on environmental sustainability, sustainable mobility and low carbon economy.

In this sense, the main challenges to overcome are:

- to improve the competitiveness of territories by developing new economic activities based on sustainable tourism and electric mobility;
- the training and education of students and workers (see Figure 3) in new jobs related to a low carbon economy, through the training actions considered in the project and linked to electric mobility management and maintenance;
- natural resources efficiency and appreciation, making protected natural areas one of the main reasons for tourists to choose their destination;
- strengthen the rural areas that form most the natural border areas, bringing them new technologies and innovations, based on electric mobility, proving their viability in these territories and not only in large urban areas.

Figure 4 - MOVELETUR online training course (Moodle platform)



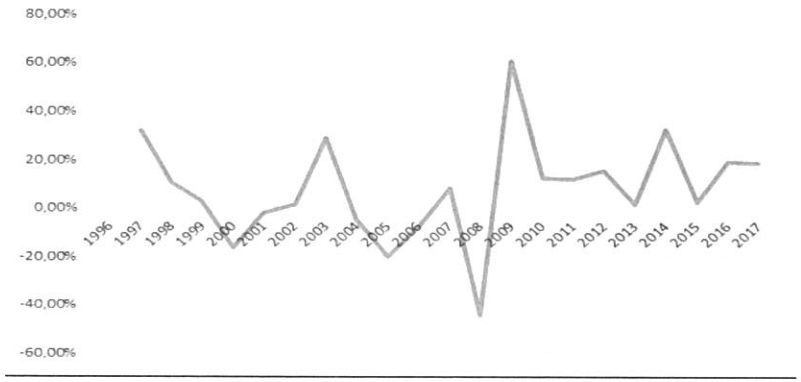
1.4. Objectives

The main challenges previously identified comprise the setting up of work methodologies contributing to the development of a concept of transboundary natural spaces, the development of added-value coming from existing natural, cultural and landscape resources, especially in the field of tourism, the development

of nature tourism, creating new employment opportunities and the use of technologies for the natural spaces management, promotion and use.

These challenges structure a set of opportunities that can increase the importance of having MOVELETUR or similar projects researching and acting in natural spaces. It is well known that natural spaces hold great potential for activities and services of nature tourism / sustainable tourism development. Tourism destinations that preserve their cultural and / or natural heritage have been noted as attractors and have better tourism facilities' quality - natural elements are valued in the market and can increase the economic capacity of territories (Boley & Green, 2016; McKercher, 2003; Saner, Yiu, & Filadoro, 2015). In Portugal, protected areas show an interesting increase in the number of visitors but are far from the full potential use of these areas, as shown in Figure 4. By 2017, more than 518.000 people visited Portuguese natural protected areas.

Figure 3 - Protected areas number of visitors' annual growth rate, in Portugal (1996-2017)



Source: Portuguese Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests

In fact, tourism activities can contribute to territorial development, but they are not harmless (Lambas & Ricci, 2014: Prats, 2005). They can have undesirable impacts and risks for territories that one must take under consideration. Some of those are: the compatibility of tourism with the carrying capacity of local ecosystems, implying an adaptation between development and market needs with natural resources preservation; local traditional economic sectors upgrading; strategic planning of locally-based development; integrated and participatory management of local tourism development, involving social actors and local population (Buckley, 2012).

To prevent them, tourism activities should be inclusive regarding local development and local economic structure. In turn, the local structure should allow the renewal of traditional sectors and the emergence of new activities, if they do not substantially alter the characteristics of natural areas. To reach this goal, new technologies offer the possibility of developing new tourism services which, on the other hand, can contribute to new economic activities and jobs.

Grounded on these challenges and opportunities, the MOVELETUR project aims to achieve the following objectives:

- creation of a tourism destination image of quality and environmental sustainability through electric mobility, which decreases the ecological tourism footprint (without noise or CO2 emissions);
- creation of a new tourism product by launching electric mobility itineraries, within specific natural areas (if using bicycles or similar vehicles) or amongst natural cross-border areas (in the case of using cars);
- innovate by using electric vehicles in rural areas and natural spaces, seen as an emerging technology especially suited for natural environments;
- to use the new technologies (ICT) to manage the new electric/sustainable mobility tourism service by creating an Intelligent Mobility App and software for the management of the whole system;
- to help technicians to adapt to a low carbon economy, namely in the case of electrical mobility equipment maintenance;
- to produce direct employment by hiring electric mobility equipment maintenance services and management.

2. Soft mobility and natural areas

Tourism is nowadays an important economic sector/industry/set of activities throughout the world and different kind of actors are paying a lot of attention to its development and growth. New, different kinds of experience-based tourism activities are being forged constantly.

In the Portuguese case, although it is a very important productive, employment and income sector of economic activity, it is still mainly focused on three major regions: Algarve, traditional summer holidays destination; Lisbon, the country's capital and cultural destination; and Madeira Island, known for its phenomenal landscapes. By attending to the number of nights spent in hotel establishments, and according to the National Statistics Bureau 2015 data, 73% of the overall number of nights spent were concentrated in those three regions; moreover, in the same year, and according

to the same source, 90% of the nights spent in hotel establishments were located in coastal areas.

Tourism is therefore helping the occurrence of asymmetries that are taking place in contemporary Portugal, although interior municipalities (low density regions) are trying to fight these problems. One of the windows of opportunity arising in these regions is its well-kept authenticity and traditions that linger throughout the time and that, in a world where tourists have thirst for real experiences, are truly competitive advantages. Furthermore, these low density areas hold an almost untouchable nature that can also be used for visitors' pleasure and enjoyment.

The Portuguese 2027 Tourism Strategy aspire to place Portugal as a world leader tourism destination and, in what regards this paper, on efforts to be a sustainable, cohesive, innovative and competitive destination. Thus, it will focus on tourism development based on cultural and natural heritage conservation and valorisation, promoting positive impacts on community.

To achieve these goals, the strategy relies on country's more distinctive assets and international emerging trends, namely: in the former case, climate, light, history, culture, identity, sea, nature and water; in the latter, well-being and living concerns.

Nature is, in this sense, an important asset that can be used to strengthen macroeconomic variables in low density regions through tourism activities. These areas hold a wide and rich natural heritage, based on unique flora and fauna formed by native species. An important part of the Portuguese territory is protected by different forms of classification (Natura2000 Network, World Heritage List, UN Geoparks Program, national protection systems, for example) turning Portugal as one of the most ambitious countries in terms of landscape and nature protection. The use of nature for tourism sake match the well-being worries that population in general, and tourists in particular, is attending. At the same time, provides an economic opportunity for entrepreneurs to develop tourism activities starting from natural heritage resources.

Nature tourism is not a term usually used by tourists. It is not seen, by visitors, to be a kind of holiday in its own right – hardly someone speaks of taking a nature-based holiday or trip. But it is a term of value to the tourism sector in the context of visitor needs, experiences and activities. Nature tourism requires the existence of natural and protected areas and these areas show an interesting development of tourism activities, both linked to preserve and protect natural heritage and take advantage of tourism flows growth (McKercher, 2003). The strength of tourism in protected areas is of such magnitude that Ballart Hernández (2005) stated that can be a ray of hope for countries' development, under the argument that important natural (and

cultural) attributes, if properly promoted, can lead to an important source of income for local communities.

Protected areas can be seen as gross natural tourism assets, holding resources and heritage that can be put into value. Its transformation into tourism products requires some public and private investment in accessibilities, signalling and information, access and control gates, museums and interpretation centres, events facilities, tours and itineraries development, among other features.

In Europe, the importance of protected areas for tourism activities stressed the need to an appropriate model of site management. The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, developed under the auspices of the European Union Commission and Europarc Federation, emphasizes the need for an environmental, cultural and social aspects alignment with economic development. Fadigas (2007) mentions that protected areas are not only habitats and natural, biological and landscape areas preservation tools; they are also tools for living spaces qualification and territorial economic and social promotion. This is a core condition for spaces to be alive and inhabited and nature preservation becomes more a tool for community development and evolution and less a tool for protection and safeguarding. A protected area aims to promote sustainable growth of territories, based on balanced economic development and social cohesion, looking at natural resources as growth factors.

Starting from this overall perception, the path to undertake can be guided towards the creation of "environmental districts" (under the Marshallian broader concept of industrial districts), where economic, social and environmental issues can be managed based on participatory involvement and inclusive processes. These processes should involve local and/or regional actors and require the coexistence between economic activities (namely tourism services) and the protected resources, fostering new, and eventually innovative, approaches (Diem-Trinh & Hall, 2014) - such as soft and sustainable mobility.

All over the so-called developed world, traditional relationships between home, work, leisure and the environment are changing. These shifting geographies and sociologies of mobility, namely an intensification in travelling throughout Europe, mostly by car, led to new risks for the environment preservation. It is consequently a key challenge for countries to implement new transport and mobility solutions, able to meet the request for a higher accessibility and, simultaneously, reduce the impact on the environment. This is especially true for touristic sites, where the high number of visitors (which is likely to grow further in the coming years) causes different social, economic and ecological impacts.

Soft mobility is defined as destination-based travel on foot and by bicycle (different from slow travel, which is considered as less travel-intensive tourism, using train, sailing or bus, for example) (Dubois & Ceron, 2006). Walking and cycling are low cost forms of travelling that can (potentially) replace a substantial amount of motor-powered voyages. This shift from motorised transport to active modes of travelling can increase the journey reliability and reduce carbon emissions. Furthermore, soft mobility has several health and wellbeing benefits that must not be neglected and can also help local economy with tourism activities development.

It is possible to go further and, instead of fully replace motor-powered for human-powered trips, consider electromobility and electric vehicles use. This can enlarge the potential number of tourists, from active visitors to other groups with displacement difficulties.

What it is possible to find, after studying different examples throughout Europe (for example: "Fahrtziel Natur", in Germany; "klima:aktiv mobil", Austria; "Stream – Sustainable Mobility for Tourism and Recreation", European Commission; "Alpmobil", in Switzerland; "Alpine Pearls", six different alpine countries; "A corporate identity and a tourist map for a cycling corridor by using old railway tracks in West Flanders", in Belgium; "Identifying and planning green routes", Lithuania; "Developing Boat&Bike and Bike&Ride systems", Portugal; among other) is that: the demand for soft mobility has increased over the recent years; E-bikes and electric vehicles are vital and open up for a larger target group; there is a high willingness to pay for luggage transport and good, local food; users value good cycling infrastructure and well developed cycle itineraries, with good signage; itineraries with nuances and good description of places to stop, options for sightseeing and cultural experiences along the itinerary and places to eat and/or stay are quite appreciated.

3. Case study: Malcata Mountain Reserve

The work carried out so far has identified several good practices related to the valorisation of natural and cultural resources (mainly in the European Union) using electric vehicles on tourist itineraries. Among them are (FPNCyL, 2017): La Metropoli Verde, Spain; Werfenweng, Austria; Gorensjka, Slovenia; Krka National Park, Croatia; Regional Natural Park of Luberon, France; Sintra, Portugal; and, the National Parks Initiative, USA. These are projects that doesn't hold much research, they are mainly applied projects that we've learn from.

From these good practices it is possible to sustain that efforts to encourage electric mobility in natural areas are disappointing, even though they are part of the political agenda. However, this situation is expected due to the land morphology, the

accessibility problems, the fact that they are areas with low number of residents and visitors, or due to problems arising from the facilities installation in protected areas, among other particularities. It is also possible to state that it is not normal (at least for now) that public funding programs related to electric mobility cover environmental institutions or organizations. Generally, public funding is used hoping that the demonstration effect will occur in communities and encourage people to adopt electric mobility.

Created in 1981, the Malcata Mountain Nature Reserve (MMNR) embraces the municipalities of Penamacor and Sabugal, in the central area of Portugal, near the Spanish border (see Figure 5). It covers a 16.348 ha area with altitudes ranging from 425m to 1078m. This nature reserve entails a set of rocky formations that stretch from northeast to southwest, divided by watercourses that stream along schist soils. MMNR is set in the middle of Coa river in the north and Bazágueda river in the south.

In this protected area, the relics of Mediterranean woods are mostly remarkable. Thus, the reserve was classified European Council Biogenetic Reserve in 1987. Brushwoods are the principal botanical species in the north region of the mountain that is characterised by a cold humid climate. The southern area is much eroded, as it has been exploited for industry, with large plantations of resinous trees, over the last decades. Its key symbol is the Iberian lynx, one of the most endangered mammals in Europe. MMNR is also famous for uncommon bird species, such as the griffon vulture, the black vulture and the black stork.

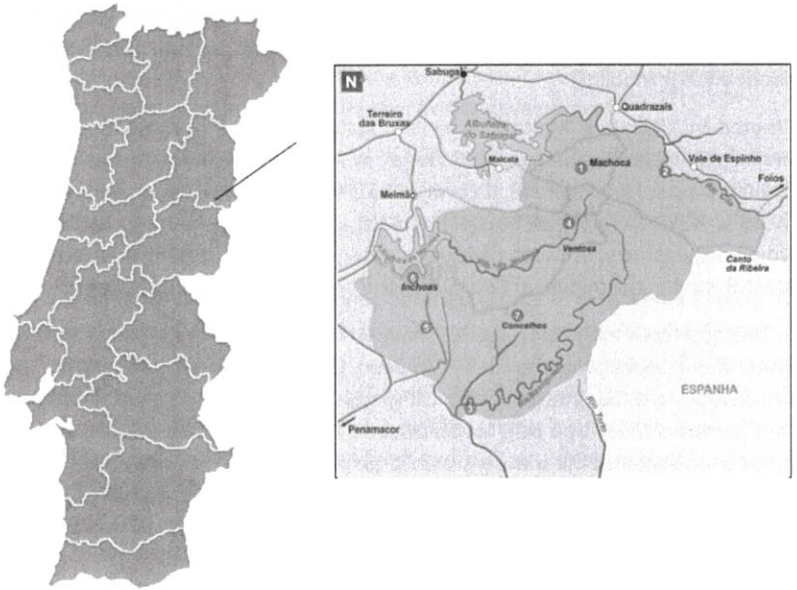
The development of the project focuses on the creation of tourism itineraries usable by electric vehicles. It considers the connection between the most important natural and cultural elements, the accessibility for different types of electric vehicles and the location of the charging stations. In this sense, an App and a management system is being developed, although this paper does not focus these issues. The territory was already the object of intervention in relation to soft mobility (walking and cycling) itineraries, enabling the accomplishment of the work. Thus, instead of creating new itineraries, it was decided (also considering the purpose of safeguard natural resources) to start from the existing routes and work from that point forward (Figure 6).

Although planned to comprise a small set of charging stations for bicycles and automobiles, near public services or accommodation facilities, it was decided to use only car charging stations (see Figure 7).

The reason behind this change is that current bicycle charging systems are (almost) plug and play systems and the distances within the MMNR are accessible for the

current autonomy of electric bicycles. In this sense, the intervention was oriented to the connectivity between the natural areas of the project.

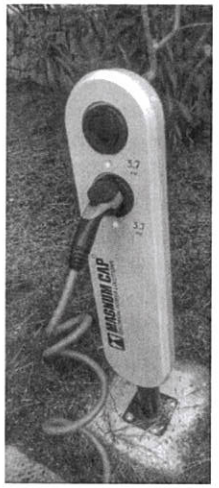
Figure 4 - Malcata Mountain Nature Reserve location



Source: Portuguese Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests

Figure 5 - Example of planned tourism itineraries (north of the MMNR)

Figure 6 - a) Automobile charging station; b) Preferred location of charging stations



a) b)

The main goals of the project meet the aims of other projects that are being developed throughout the territory related to soft mobility, which was one of the main concerns to keep the project working after completion.

4. Main conclusions and the road ahead

Halfway gone after starting the execution of the project, and due to the exchange of knowledge and practices between the partners, it is possible to say that there are differences in the system in which the electric mobility is managed, in Portugal and in Spain. These differences affect joint decisions and led to different approaches in what concerns the charging stations' location. The need for this sort of equipment is also different, since there are more charging sites in Portugal than in Spain in the project's intervention areas. Also, once the market starts growing and is changing fast, a lot of new equipment are arriving, turning more difficult the choice for the more appropriate one for the sake of the project's goals and sustainability in the future.

The MOVELETUR project proposes an opportunity for sustainable and innovative development of tourism in transboundary natural spaces. Investing in an alternative travelling model, without emission of pollutant gases, this model allows to discover and to enjoy the natural and cultural values of natural areas. This new tourism

product is based on principles of cross-border cooperation; it is also an opportunity and a formula to help keeping rural population on both sides of the border. To keep the pace in terms of team meetings is essential for a good creation of tourism itineraries between the different natural areas so they can all benefit from mobility facilities and equipment.

The MOVELETUR project intends to keep and develop the natural and cultural heritage as a support to the economic base of the cross-border region. With a focus on sustainable mobility in natural areas, MOVELETUR aims to promote a sustainable model for transboundary natural areas visitors. In this sense, a network of green itineraries is being settled, linking places of significant natural and cultural value in these areas, through electric vehicles. To collect information from all the areas and to add it to the App turned out to be a gigantic task, especially due to project's implementation time decrease (it must be finished by the end of 2018, meaning one year and a half for implementation, instead of three years). The solution reasoned to overcome this difficulty was to use information already available in the protected areas website or at the management institution website. This solution raises some other difficulties, as not having the text translated into Spanish or even English in some cases.

In addition, the project intends to empower entrepreneurs in natural areas so that they can offer a new tourism product related to electric mobility. The online, e-learning training course is focused in different contents and is focused on contributing to skills development, to contribute to electric mobility management and maintenance. Its relative importance is closely linked to services to support tourism activities, including the theme of changing a normal bike to an E-bike.

Near the end of the project an Electric Tour is being planned, which will link all the natural areas involved, using electric vehicles to prove the project's tourism added-value. Ideally, it is not a project to put in the shelf, gathering dust; it is a work in progress project, that can be continued and duly valued by local stakeholders.

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