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A conceptual model for assessing the level of development of Pilgrimage Routes

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This paper proposes an innovative conceptual model based on a hierarchical structure for the assessment of pilgrimage routes, establishing and weighting the different associated elements. Based on a holistic approach, a Diagnostic Matrix was created which structures the surveying of predefined variables and enables the evaluation of pilgrimage routes. This tool allows an understanding of both, material and immaterial elements that comprise part of pilgrimage experiences, and of the respective routes as tourism products. Based on the case of the *Portuguese Camino de Santiago*, the proposed matrix enables the diagnosis of the entire route, as well as partial analysis, which can be sector specific (e.g. accommodation), or region / locality specific (e.g. municipality level). From the diagnosis, intervention plans can emerge, identifying the needs and actions to be implemented. The Conceptual Model and subsequent Diagnostic Matrix allows the public, private and voluntary sectors, such as local authorities, associations and economic agents, to better comprehend what role to play in the overall improvement and development of the Route based on existing good practices. Although this study is based on a specific route, it is expected that the same methodology can be applied to other pilgrimage routes, after proceeding with necessary adjustments to the specificities of the respective context.

Key Words: pilgrimage route, Way, conceptual model, diagnostic matrix, Camino de Santiago

Introduction

Pilgrimage routes are widely acknowledged as relevant tourist attractions, offering privileged conditions for local and regional development. Significant efforts and investments are made, often at regional and local levels, by different stakeholders to enhance their features and elements, and to augment visitor / pilgrim experiences. But often, pilgrimage routes pass through more than one region, or even more than one country, therefore, the management of the route and the creation of adequate conditions for pilgrims poses a challenge, which most often depends on the level of development and of involvement of local, regional and national stakeholders.

The *Camino de Santiago* (or Way of Saint James in the English language) has existed as a Christian pilgrimage for well over 1000 years. It illustrates such a case in which inter-municipal cooperation is needed to foster adequate conditions for facilitating all-embracing

quality experiences for both religious and secular pilgrims. In such situations, diagnosis matrices represent an extremely useful technique to organise and structure information in multiple setting analyses and diagnoses that serve to prioritise actions or investments in a perspective of tourism planning. Bearing in mind the satisfaction of all walkers (pilgrims and tourists), the necessity of having a planning tool is highlighted, which may help private and public agents to ensure and harmonise the quality of the product as a whole, and to measure the current status of different variables.

This paper proposes a Conceptual Model and subsequent Diagnostic Matrix for the assessment of pilgrimage routes. This tool allows an understanding of both tangible and intangible elements that make up parts of pilgrimage routes. Using a holistic approach, a Diagnostic Matrix was created which structures the surveying process, establishing and weighting the different associated elements. Based on the case of the

Portuguese Camino de Santiago, the matrix enables the assessment of those elements, from where diagnosis intervention plans can emerge, identifying the needs and actions to be implemented.

The initial study, based on secondary sources, to determine the existing conditions that cover the Way in its entirety and the consultation of relevant research results previously conducted was then complemented with fieldwork. The literature review and the experience in the field, by direct and participative observation, permitted the analysis of the physical state and development needs along the Way. Such variables are the base for the conceptual model and a diagnostic matrix presented in this article.

Literature review

Literature suggests that pilgrimage routes entail the bridging of tangible and intangible elements of heritage representing a region's traditions and cultural identity. Emphasis is placed on linkages between the physical surroundings associated with the landscape and the social interaction between pilgrims and local residents as well as amongst pilgrims (and tourists) themselves in their search for aesthetic experiences to satisfy their high-order needs (Prebensen *et al.*, 2014). This entails the availability of support services (such as accommodation and food establishments) in an environment in which they feel safe (Fernandes *et al.*, 2017).

Murray and Graham (1997) suggest that the experiences obtained along the pilgrimage route are at least as important as the destination itself. Although different kinds of 'pilgrims' can be identified (Pardellas *et al.*, 2012), in general the essence of the experience is as much to travel as to arrive (Tripp, 2011). As such, apart from attracting tourists to an area, routes serve to tie-up attractions that would independently not have the potential to entice visitors to spend time and money. Using a synergy effect, it creates a greater pulling power and it also disperses visitor money among a larger number of recipients (Meyer, 2004) and stimulates activities resulting in a new tourist support system (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2011). Thus, routes seem to be a particularly good opportunity for less mature areas with high cultural resources that appeal to special interest tourists, who often not only stay longer but also spend more to pursue their particular interest (Meyer, 2004).

Amongst Pilgrimage Routes, the Camino de Santiago is one of the most cited globally, mainly due to the

emphasis placed on the journey, not the destination (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012). The Camino de Santiago is the pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain, where according to legend lays the tomb of St. James.

It is acknowledged that people started making pilgrimage to Santiago shortly after the discovery of St. James' sepulchre (Tripp, 2011). Throughout the Middle Ages, it was one of the three most important Christian pilgrimages (Secall, 2003), after the Holy Land and Rome. During this period, while war, plague and famine had an effect on motivation and increased the difficulty of making the trip, pilgrimages were encouraged by kings and the Catholic Church (Tripp, 2011). Today it is experiencing a revival, suggesting a renovation of European spirit. For many pilgrims, it represents a new feeling of culture, sport, nature, tradition, challenge, peace, but above all, it means freedom. It is a sort of personal spiritual finding, sometimes participants even find faith in God (Devereux, 2003).

From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, from the Modern Age until today, the Camino de Santiago was and still is at its core, a religious, symbolic, mystical, cultural and touristic attraction. Although for some authors (mainly ecclesiastical) there is a deep difference between tourism and pilgrimage, for others (mainly academics) the goal is to build a bridge between the two phenomena (Ambrósio, 2015). As regards to the ecclesiastical perspective, on the transformation of the designation of pilgrimage into tourism and, more specifically, religious tourism, Arrillaga (1989), without actually deploying the latter term, finds that both material (fostering the development of all types of tourism travel) and spiritual (the growing search for personal orientation) principles apply as much to tourists as they do to pilgrims. However, the fundamental reasons underlying each category enable substantial differences to be established. For example, regarding spiritual type features, the author argues that for tourists, trips are personal challenges while for pilgrims a religious trip is a way to consolidate their inner conversion, seeking to exceed oneself. Accordingly, although people may be traveling for reasons related to religion or spirituality, such as a quest for meaning, they may not see this as being directly religious (Richards & Fernandes, 2007).

As to the academic perspective, Murray & Graham (1997) verified how the pilgrimage influx to Santiago de Compostela is based upon a complex dialectic of

apparent contradictions and tensions which interpenetrate the behavioural models of the different market segments. According to those authors, the pilgrims and tourists differently feel the Camino's particularities. For pilgrims, the cathedral is a place for prayer and adoration, whereas for tourists it is a heritage attraction. Many authors (e.g. Soares, 2010; Pardellas *et al.*, 2012; Marques & Ferreira, 2012) agree about the distinction between pilgrims and tourists, the first having more spiritual motivations, and the second more leisure and culture related.

There is a close connection between cultural motivations and religious motivations, being difficult to separate them (Haab, 1996). Murray & Graham (1997) agree with Nolan & Nolan (1992) and their assertion that tourism and pilgrimage are not incompatible activities. Literature suggests that an intermediate category seems to be bringing the two phenomena together, for example, the 'pilgrim-tourist continuum' (Smith, 1992). For some, the old motivations still prevail while for others they have turned into new motivations (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012). Many analysts of religious tourism have pointed to a shift away from traditional religious activities towards a much broader view of 'spirituality' or 'holistic' reasons for travel (Smith, 2003). Consequently, pilgrims, religious or secular, and tourists, present varying motivations and behaviours. As such, for both, pilgrims and tourists, the Path itself, the signs and information available is of extreme importance. The level of organisation and quality of services provided along the Path is of greater relevance, suggesting new consumption patterns and the need for a new tourist support system, which would increase spending along the pilgrimage route (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012). Such demands increase the difficulty of stakeholders (both public and private) in adjusting the pilgrimage and tourism supply chain. Still, these difficulties should not be connoted as negative as it was tourism that reinvented the Way of Santiago and transformed it from an obsolete pathway into a resource for contemporary society.

The context of the case study – the Portuguese Camino de Santiago

The Camino de Santiago is made up of numerous Ways across Europe, with the French Way being most in demand and receiving the greatest attention. But, because in certain periods of the year it tends to become overly congested, the trend has been for pilgrims / tourists to seek alternative Ways, such as the Portuguese one. According to the Peregrino Santiago

de Compostela Workshop, in 2014 more than 25,000 people walked the Portuguese Camino. One of the main reasons given by pilgrims for the choice of this Way is related to the desire to know a new Path and the fact that it is less 'crowded' when compared to other Paths (e.g. the French Way). The natural beauty is also often referred to, and the Way is described by pilgrims as one of the most interesting, both for its historical and cultural heritage as well as for its natural beauty (Mendes, 2009). It is suggested that the Portuguese Camino has the potential to reach a higher level of demand, but will require that certain challenges must be overcome.

The main challenge lies in the lack of homogeneity and balanced commodification throughout the different Portuguese regions (Ambrósio, 2017) that have the Way crossing their territory. To date, there is not an official organisation that can be considered responsible for managing the Camino de Santiago in Portugal and coordinate all associations. There is no collective consciousness and ultimately each agency that deals with the Portuguese Camino seeks to establish its own strategies and priorities (Nadais, 2010). For decades, the discussion has not been comforting (Mendes, 2009) and there are visible differences between regions, while in recent years, the number of pilgrims who started the Way in Lisbon quintupled. Also, the northern section (between Porto and Valença) is widely acknowledged as more developed, with better commodities.

Since the 1990's, the northern section has been the subject of attention by politicians and society in general, and several initiatives were implemented, aiming at its improvement. South of Porto (second largest Portuguese city after Lisbon), certain Municipalities acknowledged the importance of the Way only a decade ago, and the level of involvement of local stakeholders is still very low (Nadais, 2010). But, in recent years, there has been increasing evidence of additional infrastructural support being created. Still, in addition to the signage, the network of infrastructure along the southern sections needs to be rethought, given the limited offer of adequate structures and the availability of few hostels (Mendes, 2009).

The lack of a well-defined policy on the part of all traversed municipalities damages its image as a whole, creates obstacles to connecting resources and attractions, hindering the pursuit of religious and pilgrimage tourism development. Overall, organisation and management of resources is required to offer the

visitor an array of facilities and products ranging from the comfort of pilgrims to the valuation of tangible and intangible heritage, as part of enriching cultural experiences.

Although there are studies on the walkers' (pilgrims and tourists) behaviours, as well as the structures and infrastructures of the Camino paths or the involvement of different stakeholders (private and public), a tool to bring all the referred items together is missing. The conceptual model presented in this article aims, on the one hand, to provide a global vision of a stakeholder involvement in the Camino (or in any other pilgrimage way) and on the other, to provide a diagnostic tool which might help all territories, and all stakeholders involved, to measure its current status and, at the same time, to draw an intervention plan to improve the conditions of the pilgrimage way. In such situations, establishing methodologies that can be applied to the diversity of territories involved is of utmost relevance.

As Cunha (2008) suggests, the tourism potential of a territory depends not only on the resources available, but also on its capacity to value what exists, and to create new attractors. In this sense, each territory has a potential that is unique and differs from another in several aspects that need to be evaluated. The term evaluation can be taken in various ways. It can be understood as the set of scientific methods that determine the effectiveness of the programs or institutions in the development of an activity or service (Deng *et al.*, 2002), or the degree of achievement of fixed objectives. It may also be taken to determine an index on which is identified the importance of one tourism resource over another or the importance they attach to visitors in the process of their travel decisions.

On its own, an inventory does not allow for systematic resource evaluation. Hence, a matrix is developed to assess the various elements and resource types, using a set of indicators, relevant to the reality being assessed. Diagnostic matrices represent an extremely useful technique to organise and structure information in multiple settings analyses and diagnoses. This technique helps to identify and organise those factors which impact directly on the competitiveness of an enterprise, an economic activity or a territory, thereby, achieving higher effectiveness levels.

Diagnostic matrices have often been used in the context of tourism, both with a broader approach (e.g. Cunha, 2008) or with a more specific focus, like natural resources and areas (e.g. Alaeddinoglu & SelcukCanb, 2011; Deng *et al.*, 2002; Priskin, 2001),

inland destinations (Santo, 2012), cycling routes (Ritchie, 1998), historical city centres (Hugony & Caldera, 2008) or cultural and heritage attractions (McKercher & Ho, 2006).

The creation of this matrix responds to the need to identify the elements which have greater potential and raise more interest on the Camino de Santiago. The combination of both factors serves to establish a priority for the resources on which one should preferably act in order to achieve higher demand and satisfaction levels and, in short, make a better use of public investments.

Methodology

The objectives of the Diagnostic Matrix are the evaluation of the territory / municipalities with respect to key attributes of the route and pilgrimage experience. In the development of multivariate matrixes it is important to derive indicators in a systematic manner (Coombes & Wong, 1994). Therefore, the assessment framework developed used both qualitative and quantitative techniques to establish levels of attraction, accessibility, presence of infrastructure and the level of institutional involvement.

The literature review and experience in the field - direct and participative observation and conversations with other pilgrims / tourists permitted the analysis of its state and contributed, on the one hand, for the creation of variables which are the base of the conceptual model, and on the other hand, for the diagnostic matrix. The creation of this matrix responds to the need to identify the elements with greater potential and increase interest in a pilgrimage route, in this specific case, the Portuguese Camino de Santiago.

The conceptual model and the diagnostic matrix are a work in progress and still subject to improvements. At this stage it is possible to anticipate, in theory, many of the variables of the model. However, only with thorough research is it possible to inventory the real variables and their weighted importance to the overall framework of the tourism product. The weighted sum model / method is an extensively used method for multi-criteria decision analysis (Kasim *et al.*, 2016) and assumes that more important factors result in higher values in the final output, and thus is helpful for classifying study sites or areas into different areas of appropriateness for a given purpose (Matin *et al.*, 2016), such as to identify the state of physical and social attributes along a pilgrimage route.

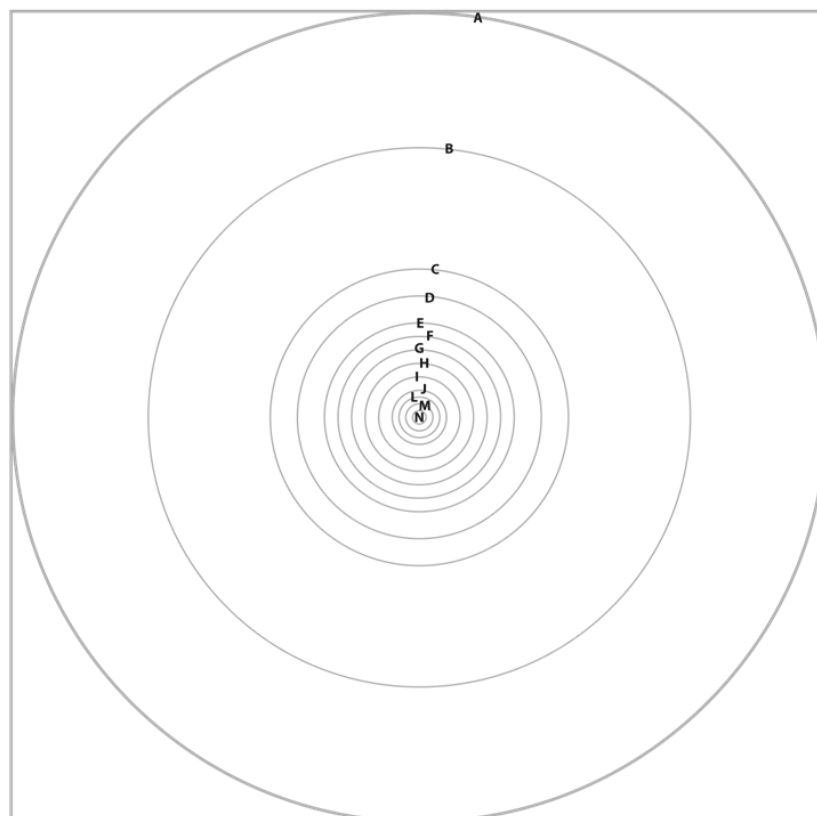
The conceptual model and Diagnostic Matrix are idealized to help private and public agents to ensure and to harmonise the quality of the product (Way), satisfying the walkers' necessities (pilgrims / tourists). They also help municipalities, associations and economic agents to increase their perception of both, the physical conditions of the Way and the infrastructure and structures inherent to the tourism product, and of the business potential arising from increased stakeholder involvement.

The first conceptual model didn't cover both tourist-walkers and pilgrim-walkers, thus, the list of variables had to be divided in two independent lists and adapted to each of the segments referred. Therefore, the base of the conceptual model is the same, but it is necessary to have a conceptual model for each segment, as will be illustrated in the next section.

The proposed model

The conceptual model is a tool which may help private and public agents to ensure and harmonise the quality of the product (Way) and will help to increase the satisfaction of all walkers (pilgrims and tourists). In a first stage, only a version of the conceptual model was created. But with the improvement of the research, the authors perceived that some changes had to be introduced. In fact, there are quite substantial differences between tourist-walkers and pilgrim-walkers. For the former, after a hard day's walk, the pilgrim / tourist wants to stay in a fine accommodation (with good facilities), while for the latter, it is almost compulsory to look for a pilgrim's hostel (with spartan facilities) keeping with the pilgrimage spirit of mind. Theoretically, at this stage it is possible to anticipate many of the variables of the model, derived from the literature review and experience in the field - the direct and participative observation including conversations with a wide number of pilgrim-walkers and tourist-walkers. However, only with thorough research can one inventory the real variables and their weighted

Figure 1 – Conceptual Model and Diagnosis, by Municipality



Source: Authors

importance to the overall framework of the tourism product. A set of variables applied to pilgrim-walkers is proposed that includes the following list and the respective hypothetical weighting:

- A - Route follows nature trails and / or rural roads (30%);
- B - Accommodation in pilgrim hostels (20%);
- C - Safety and security (11%);
- D - Restaurants with pilgrim menu (9%);
- E - Welcome from local population and varied support to pilgrims (7%);
- F - Accommodation in hotels, or similar, with discounts for pilgrims (6%);
- G - Possibility of cooking facilities (5%);
- H - Medical assistance (4%);
- I - Built heritage conservation - churches, oratories, etc. (3%);
- J - Schedule of churches, oratories, etc. (2%);
- L - Overnight washing of laundry at site (1.5%);
- M - Possibility to stamp the pilgrim passport (1.0%);
- N - Backpack transport between overnight sites (0.5%).

In the Conceptual Model, the referred variables are represented in circles (respecting their dimensions and level of importance) and are framed by a square representing the entire product in a given municipality (Figure 1). One may observe that the closer to the square, the larger the circle, and consequently the weighting of the variable in the global context.

The sum of the circles / variables is 100% and results in a complete square (framing), when all variables are met in full. This demonstrates (hypothetically) an intensive involvement of the stakeholders. As intensive

involvement is not a reality in any of the observed territories, it is necessary to have a complementary tool to provide a better perception of stakeholder involvement. As part of the Diagnostic Matrix, a table was created to classify levels of involvement, grading it from none (0%) to excellent (100%). In fact, the two extremes might be considered an illusion (as in most models) while the reality is represented by the intermediary stages – from very weak to very good (Table 1).

For the tourist-walkers, most variables are similar (in certain contexts it is slightly different), but their hypothetical weighting requires alteration. This happens due to the different motivations and interests which were observed in the tourist-walkers' behaviour. Keeping this in mind, for the tourist-walkers and given the set of variables, it seems appropriate that one include at least the following list with their hypothetical weighting:

- A - Route in nature trails and/or rural roads (30%);
- B - Accommodation in good hotels (20%);
- C - Restaurants with good gastronomy (11%);
- D - Safety and security (10%);
- E - Built heritage conservation - churches, oratories, etc. (9%);
- F - Local population welcome and varied support to tourists (6%);
- G - Backpacks transport between overnight sites (5%);
- H - Medical assistance (4%);
- I - Possibility to stamp the pilgrim passport (2%);
- J - Possibility of having the laundry washed at site of overnight stay (1.2%);
- L - Restaurants with pilgrim menu (1.0%);
- M - Possibility of cooking in the unit (0.5%);
- N - Schedule of churches, oratories, etc. (0.3%).

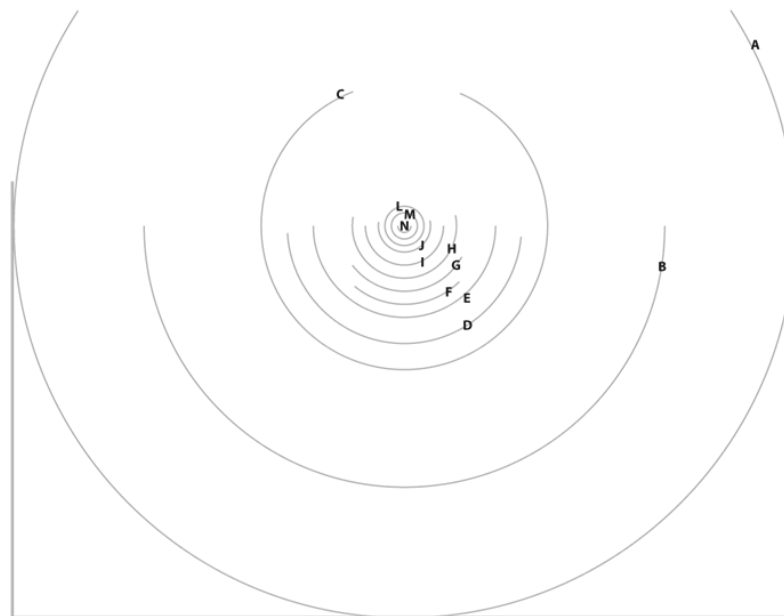
To understand how the Conceptual Model may be used, and demonstrate its potential, an example for a given municipality is shown in Figure 2. To avoid being exhaustive, the example is only for pilgrim-walkers, but the same exercise could also be done for the tourist-walkers.

Having been on the Southern part of the *Portuguese Camino de Santiago* (direct and participant observation), it is possible to confirm that this demonstrative example reflects the reality in most Municipalities between Lisbon and Porto.

As illustrated, in Figure 2, improvement is required in most variables since almost no circle is closed,

Table 1 – Stakeholder Involvement Level

Level	%
None	00
Very weak	1-25
Weak	26-50
Average	51-65
Good	66-80
Very good	81-99
Excellent	100
Source: Authors	

Figure 2 – Conceptual Model for the Diagnosis of Municipality Y

Source: Authors

therefore, also the square is incomplete. Apart from the percentages shown below some suggestions are added (just as mere examples). A summary of the results of Figure 2 include:

A - 21/30% meaning that, in that territory, about 2/3 of the Camino is along nature trails and / or rural roads and in the remaining 1/3 of it, pilgrims and tourists must walk along asphalt roads. To turn the percentage to 30/30%, the local authorities must replace the asphalt track(s) finding a solution such as the creation of bicycle and / or pedestrians paths parallel to the referred tracks.

B - 10/20% meaning that either the capacity of the existing pilgrim hostel is too small for the number of pilgrims or that the accommodation for pilgrims provided in the municipality offers facilities below expectations. To turn the percentage to 20/20%, the local authorities and / or associations of the Camino should make more effort to augment the required capacity or improve conditions in the existing accommodation.

C - 8.8/11% meaning that safety and security is generally good, but frequent incidents occur with pilgrims (usually thefts). To turn the percentage to 11/11%, it is necessary to increase policing along the

Way, possibly more public lighting and increase awareness of walking in groups while passing through more isolated areas.

D - 3.6/9% meaning that only a small number of restaurants provide the option of a pilgrim menu. To turn the percentage to 9/9%, it is necessary to sensitise restaurants owners / managers to the importance of the passing pilgrims in the municipality (not only for them but also for other economic sectors) and the need to provide adequate supply of food provision and services.

E - 3.5/7% meaning that most of the locals are not aware of the importance of welcoming pilgrims. In fact, several of the good pilgrim memories are linked to local warm hospitality. To turn the percentage to 7/7%, local associations and / or local parishes need to invite pilgrims to attend or to share their activities or even organise small events in which all can participate and make pilgrims feel welcome.

F - 1.8/6% meaning that when the existing pilgrim hostel (or equivalent) is full, the alternatives (accommodation in hotels, or similar) are quite expensive for pilgrims. To turn the percentage to 6/6%, it is necessary to show hoteliers that it is better to offer their rooms for a lower price than to leave the room

empty that night, thus, contributing to a more pilgrim friendly environment. Academic studies prove that many pilgrims come back as tourists (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2018).

G - 2/5% meaning that there are few possibilities to cook in the accommodation units; many pilgrims prefer to cook their own food and do their shopping in the local grocery stores (helping the local economy). To turn the percentage to 5/5%, increase the availability of accommodation units with kitchen facilities, be it structures belonging to the Municipality, the Church, the voluntary or private sectors. As an observation, the researchers noticed a considerable number of buildings with accommodation facilities owned by the Church that are not made available and / or communicated to pilgrims.

H - 2/4% meaning that the municipality has a shortage of medical assistance. This is probably the most difficult variable to fulfil because it depends mainly on the central government (and not local authorities). To turn the percentage to 4/4%, the Municipality needs to improve the availability of medical staff and clearly identify the locations and schedules of health centres and other health service providers. In the more rural areas, there is the difficulty that health centres usually have shorter opening hours.

I - 1.2/3% meaning that many of the built heritage is not in a good state of conservation, particularly those most cited in the pilgrim websites and travel books. Often the comments posted increase the local's awareness of the need for better conservation of their rich heritage. To turn the percentage to 3/3%, the Municipality needs to increase awareness of improving the aesthetics of its patrimony, provide incentives for the private sector to rebuild / restore its buildings and request funding from national government or EU development programs. They also need to provide examples of how the local built heritage should look like.

J - 1/2% meaning that very often churches, oratories, etc. are closed when pilgrims pass-by or stay in a town, not providing them with opportunities to pray in those temples. To turn the percentage to 2/2%, the ecclesiastical authorities need to find ways of keeping religious buildings open longer. Either through adjustable schedules to meet the needs of the locals as well as the pilgrims or by announcing where the key of the church door can be found. The latter option presents a concern for the locals as it increases the likelihood of church property theft.

L - 1.5/1.5% meaning that in the existing accommodations there are sufficient laundry facilities. Although it might be seen as a minor variable, it is not, because pilgrims tend to carry the absolute minimum in their backpacks. In fact, when that facility doesn't exist many pilgrims prefer to walk to the next municipality / hostel where one is available. No need to take measures for improving the variable's percentage, just to check that the washing machines are always in working conditions. Researchers also noted an increase in the number of laundromats in the towns, but usually information is not readily available.

M - 1/1% meaning that it is easy to find places where pilgrims can stamp their passports. To get the *compostela* (certificate of having completed the pilgrimage) the pilgrim must show (at Santiago de Compostela) the passport and the various stamps on it to certify that he / she has walked at least 100 km. No need to take measures for improving the variable's percentage.

N - 0.25/0.5% meaning that the only option of transporting backpacks between overnight sites is by taxi. Although it is not a significant variable for pilgrims, it becomes quite important for some tourist-walkers. To turn the percentage to 0.5/0.5%, encourage local businesses to provide this service, extending it to nearby municipalities and making sure that the service is well communicated. As with certain other variables, effective communication is crucial.

When summing the weight of the above variables (A to N), the final result is 57.65/100%. In figure 2, the sum of the weight of the circles / variables results in a semi square representing 57.65% of the whole square. Looking back at Table 1, it shows an average involvement of the Y Municipality in the Way, meaning that there are at least two more steps to climb in the quality ladder (good and very good). If the Municipality wants to achieve the upper grades in the Way's involvement, it must improve many of its variables—bringing together stakeholders from the various sectors.

If one would do the same exercise (for the same municipality) using the variables and their weights for tourist-walkers, the result would be different for both the circles and square and the level of the Municipality's involvement. In fact, although considering the same product – the Way in one municipality – the segments under analysis have different motivations / requests. Bearing that in mind, when implementing actions, the public and private

agents need to decide whether they want to pursue quality measures to meet the expectations of only one or both segments – pilgrim-walkers and / or tourist-walkers.

Discussion and conclusions

It is argued that the analysis of the status of a pilgrimage Way and the involvement of local stakeholders (public or private) in its management and dynamics, should be based on a structured methodology, which should allow an understanding of both tangible and intangible elements, identifying needs and actions to be implemented. Based on the experience of the Portuguese Way, a conceptual model and its Diagnostic Matrix is proposed (to be consolidated).

The development of matrices plays a determining role in strategic planning processes, enabling the definition, in a more clear-cut and effective manner, the priority actions that need to be achieved if a balanced development of the conditions is desired throughout the several municipalities / territories which the Way crosses.

A first strategic step is an inventory of resources and equipment associated with the Way. However, an inventory only shows spatial distribution of the resources in a geographical sense, and its characteristics. From the above proposed assessment, a series of analyses can be produced in terms of access, supporting infrastructure and the level of environmental quality. Therefore, an assessment of the resources and equipment, and of the conditions they offer, based on their significance, is also needed to ascertain the relative importance of certain aspects when investments have to be prioritised. Determination of resource significance can help decision-makers to allocate planning and management efforts to the most relevant resources. Based on the diagnosis, an intervention plan should emerge, identifying the actions that should / need to be implemented. The plan would, therefore, provide guidelines for local and regional stakeholders' participation in the development of the Way.

To determine the real set of variables to include in the model, it would be necessary to organise teams that would undertake fieldwork. These should be comprised of both academics (including student groups) and representatives of different institutions (located in the territories under analysis). Fieldwork should follow a common methodology in collecting qualitative data

through on-site observation, interviews with walkers (pilgrims and tourists) and interviews with representatives of entities associated with the realities of the routes. This methodology would allow data consistency and provide the same type of analysis, regardless of where the data collection is carried out.

The interviews should be semi-structured, to facilitate obtaining data on the variables already addressed and the perception of others that possibly have not been inventoried in the research study preparation. The universe of respondents (sample) should be stipulated according to the geographic extension of the route under analysis.

In parallel, other information should be analysed, such as geographic, historical, cultural, environmental, gastronomic, sport, among others. In fact, the information collected should serve not only for the satisfaction of the walkers' necessities but also for promoting (in the same physical space) other activities that would benefit the local population or the exploration of other types of tourism. Thus, the investments made (or to be made) could possibly contribute towards the diversification of tourism in terms of supply and demand, and contribute to reducing seasonality.

Special focus should be placed on a thorough literature review to identify best practice, both at theoretical levels - concerning conceptual and methodological approaches, and practical levels - concerning commodification and development strategies that could be put into practice in other pilgrimage Ways.

Applied to the entire Portuguese Way, this evaluation tool would allow, on the one hand, an exploration of the variables involved in the framework in relation to the optimised supply of the product / pilgrimage way, and, on the other hand, facilitate checking the existence and analysis of the actual state of each identified variable. Ultimately, the analysis would provide a broader perspective about the status of the entire Way (as a tourism product), and of its parts (per municipality). Based on the results of each section, a report should describe the profile, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities for, and ways of improvement. Bearing in mind the diagnosis, an intervention plan should emerge, identifying the actions that should / need to be implemented. The plan should also establish guidelines for local and regional stakeholder participation in the development of the Pilgrimage Way (in its entirety or by municipality).

The technology factor was not pursued in this research. However, the need for efficient and abundant communication is noted on several occasions. The authors agree that a technology-based tool should be developed (online platform) that would allow the storage and processing of all information related to the pilgrimage way, including the variables identified in the diagnostic matrix and the geographic scope of historical, environmental, cultural, sport and tourist (food, lodging, entertainment, etc.) data.

In summary, the Diagnostic Matrix and the reports (for each municipality) should establish a priority for the resources on which it would be preferable to act in order to achieve higher demand / satisfaction levels and to make better use of public investment. Overall, it enables a detailed analysis and vision of a pilgrimage Way and provides valuable elements for: municipalities, which would distinguish the measures to be implemented based on potential percentage increases of the deficit variables; the voluntary sector who would enrich their sites; economic agents who would develop ideas for opening / creating / improving their businesses. Also, the Church was found to be deficient in relation to its vast resources, particularly, regarding the use of its religious buildings and influence over locals to improve the support conditions for pilgrims along the Way.

Finally, it can be concluded that the application of this conceptual model and diagnostic matrix could be adapted to any kind of pilgrimage route subject to adjusting the variables to the specificities of a given Way.

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