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# Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela: a tool for planning and tourism promotion

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**ABSTRACT.** *The Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela intends to be a management, promotion and revaluation tool of Serra da Estrela as a tourism destination and its products. It is therefore important to know the resources in its territorial context and how they are suitable for tourism, seeking to optimize and manage the potential impacts produced.*

*The tourism phenomenon has an inductor character, able to promote territorial resources and contribute to the development of indigenous potential. It is an activity that is the driving force of development in many regional economies, when properly managed. By its nature, tourism is a complex phenomenon that integrates political, economic, social, cultural, biophysical, ecological and aesthetic subsystems, and its sustainability comes from the symbiosis between these different fields. At the same time, it is necessary to respond simultaneously to the expectations of visitors and the aspirations of local populations. In this context, this paper aims to describe the development of the Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela, presenting a dynamic character through the application of geographic information methodologies which will be not only a tourist planning tool, but also an interactive platform to which tourists can access information.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Tourism Charter, Serra da Estrela, Tourism, Geographical Information, planning, promotion.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the International Cultural Tourism Charter, tourist translation of cultural identity is assumed as an essential design of landscape and social contexts, based on the following objectives: [...] a) to facilitate and encourage those involved with heritage conservation and management to make the significance of that heritage accessible to the host community and visitors. b) to facilitate and encourage the tourism industry to promote and manage tourism in ways that respect and enhance the heritage and living cultures of host communities. c) to facilitate and encourage a dialogue between conservation interests and the tourism industry about the importance and fragile nature of heritage places, collections and living cultures, including the need to achieve a sustainable future for them. d) to encourage those formulating plans and policies to develop detailed, measurable goals and strategies relating to the presentation and interpretation of heritage places and cultural activities, in the context of their preservation and conservation. [...] (ICTC, ICOMOS, 1999).

In this context, this article aims to describe the development of the Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela, presenting a dynamic character through the application of geographic information methodologies which will be not only a

tourist planning tool, but also an interactive platform to which tourists can access information.

In this paper, Serra da Estrela includes geographically the municipalities that have geographical and cultural specificity with Serra da Estrela. To that end, the territory will be composed of the municipalities: Belmonte, Covilhã, Manteigas, Oliveira do Hospital, Seia, Gouveia, Guarda, Celorico da Beira, Seia and Fornos de Algodres. This project will endow the Tourism Observatory of Serra da Estrela (OTSE) of a tool able to guarantee a better efficiency in the management and promotion of Serra da Estrela as a tourism destination, as well as a better relation with the different tourism agents within the Region, with OTSE focusing on the integrated tourism planning and promotion sphere.

Finally, the project goal is to provide the IPG and ESTH with a greater involvement with the community, namely municipalities, Travel Agents and Consumers. In fact, this is an essential paradigm of higher education institutions today, thus strengthening their role as the driving agents of regional development.

## 2. ASSESSING THE PERCEPTION OF SERRA DA ESTRELA

The tourist areas are often anchored in brands that position them in relation to others and offer them new markets and products. Knowing how Serra da Estrela is perceived by different individuals is a fundamental condition for any strategic project in this territory. To this end, we developed a questionnaire that aims to know the perception that there is about Serra da Estrela, before and after a visit, as well as the factors that structure it (Annex I).

A tourism brand is of great importance for a particular tourism territory, to the extent that its existence leads to a recognition and remembrance from visitors, contributing to the sustainability of its own territory. On the other hand, the land also has a key role in the creation of a brand, as it should be the identity of that outcome, being able to generate the same unique image. Such an exclusive image can only exist through the territorial ownership of the tourism brand. Therefore, the fragmentation of the tourism destination industry often results in the absence of a product brand and a coherent image (Neves, 2007).

The interpretation is defined as the art of making known, becoming accessible and explaining the meaning and significance of things (CARRIER, 1995). Within the heritage, we can identify several levels of interpretation, including interpretation applied to a specific territory, which is nothing more than a response to a social demand for heritage use and the need for each territory to position on a higher level compared to other territories. Thus, we can understand the interpretation as a planning tool within the territorial development strategies (MIRO, 2005). The interpretive process goes through the answers to three fundamental premises: what? - it aims to respond about existing heritage assets and what kind of information and message should be presented to the public, not only comprehending tourists, but also the population; how? - in order to find sufficiently compelling strategies and operating as an outreach element coupled with competitive promotion of the territory in question, sometimes resorting to territorial or heritage marketing strategies; where? - in order to identify and characterize the physical area where the interpretive process will occur, consisting in the art of revealing the significance of the natural, cultural or historical legacy to the public visiting these places, in situ (ESTRADA, 2004).

## 3. APPLYING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION METHODOLOGIES ON RESOURCES SPACIALISATION FOR TOURISM

The GIS are a powerful set of tools for collecting, storing, updating, managing, analysing and displaying spatial data. The incorporation of this technology can help improving the services offered in the tourist market, as it is

based on the ability to give information to different agents, including the community. Much of this information is inherently spatial, indicating where tourist resources are, how extensive they are and the intensity with which they are used. This suggests that GIS can be a useful and effective tool in the planning of tourism. The changes occurring in tourism, the competition between tourism products and destinations and changes in the behavior of tourists are vectors that have to be managed from the point of view of planning, strategy and development of tourist areas (Colak and Aydinoglu, 2006).

The Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela aims to be more than a project with an end, it aims to become a new paradigm of promotion and tourism (re) development of Serra da Estrela. However, the central element of this project is constituted by its technological structure based on the “Web Portal” and applications to support “Mobile” (IOS and ANDROID). In this sense, we intend that the Tourism Charter has the following specificities:

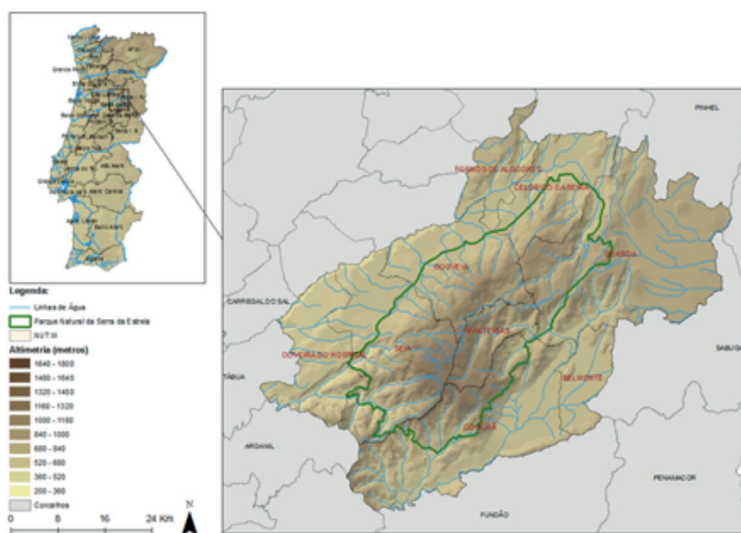


Figure 1. Demarcation of the geographical area to include in the project.

The administrative definition of the territory was based on two essential criteria. First, the fact that the nine participating municipalities are already associated with the Tourism Observatory of Serra da Estrela, in which this project is being developed. Secondly, and most important, is the fact that there is a clear geographical and cultural identity of these municipalities and Serra da Estrela.

#### 4. TOURISM CHARTER OF SERRA DA ESTRELA

The “Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela” is based on the creation of an interactive tourism platform using GIS tools for Mobile and Web support. The development and pursuit of this project will provide the Observatory of Tourism of Serra da Estrela, the participating municipalities and, above all, its visitors, with a promotional, dissemination and optimization of tourism resources of Serra da Estrela, thus being a new more holistic and sustainable approach to tourism from this territory. Thus, we can list some of the assumptions that underpin the initial idea and its own development:

**(i). Interaction between Mobile application and web platform**

This is the most innovative feature of the project. Whatever is “poured” into the “Tourism Charter” web platform is automatically replicated to the mobile application and vice versa.

**(ii). Itineraries creation in real-time**

Possibility to define itineraries due to constraints introduced by tourists, especially the time available, the visits' preferences or the means of transport. In addition to the itinerary designed by the constraints selected by the user, the system will generate more alternative itineraries, taking into account factors such as distance, user-stated interests, and scenic spots near the itinerary base.

**(iii). Export to various formats**

The itineraries in point 2 may be exported to many formats based on the technology used (for example, the mobile application will allow, by default the export to gpx but also allow the export to PDF, for example, so that the same itinerary can be used in various environments).

**(iv). Pre-backups**

Although the goal of the Tourism Charter is not to become a central booking office both the mobile application and the web platform will be able to generate an alert to accommodation/ restaurants/ museums, allowing pre-bookings (sending an email or filling a form). This pre-booking is not binding and will always require a confirmation, either by the customer or by the partner. The Tourism Charter will only be a means of communication among stakeholders.

**(vi). Innovation**

The “Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela”, in its Web and Mobile application, is innovative, dynamic and functional, ensuring a strong interactivity with the user because it is not limited to being a portal / application to show content but interacts with the user in a completely innovative way. There is the possibility, in real time, that the user can create or plan the trip to Serra da Estrela, in order to have access to reliable information with regard to its location and interests without a time limit (both platforms will be available 24 hours a day) and developed in 6 languages (Portuguese, English, Spanish, French and German) - there is also the plan to translate it to Russian and Chinese - which does not exist in any other platform.

**(vii). Interactivity**

In addition to what is provided in paragraph 6, the tourist/visitor can be an integral part of the project on his own, by contributing actively to its development. The Tourism Charter (in both versions) will allow the user to submit contributions of material and immaterial resources that are of interest and that have not yet been “offered” by the charter so that it may become a part of it. These contributions will be evaluated by the Tourism Charter team that will verify that these place are likely to be used in tourism and, if it does receive that classification, it will be marked on the Tourism Charter as a contribution belonging to the user/tourist, helping to bond and giving a sense of belonging to the project itself.

Therefore, we can see that the “Tourism Charter” is an innovative methodology of analysis and release of tourism information, a new tourism paradigm for Serra da Estrela (Figure 2).

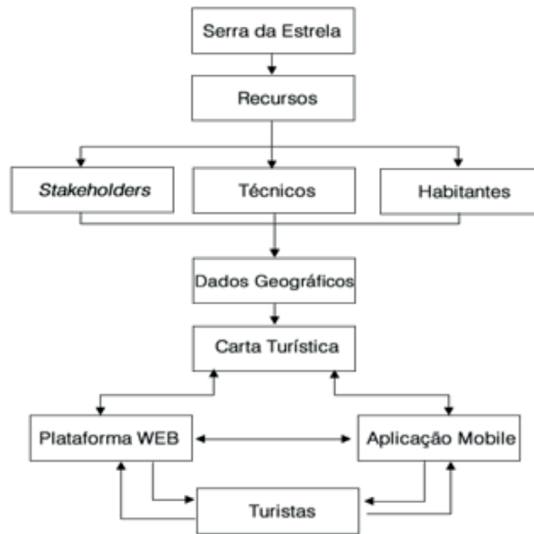


Figure 2. "Tourism Charter" Project description

In addition to the foregoing, in order to visually represent the project Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela and to assign it an identity, a visual identity was developed, which is able to position correctly the project in the consumer's mind. The central idea shows us Serra da Estrela (focal point, since it is in this territory which the whole project is based on) that is the trademark symbol, which intends to represent geographical referencing and tourism, which associated with the mountain as well, is the basis of the whole project (Figure 3).



Figure 3. "Tourism Charter" Project logo

## 5. METHODOLOGY

In order to fulfil the goals defined, the project is based on a methodological field that allows us, on the one hand, to ensure the scientific rigour of the results that are to be obtained, on the other hand, to ensure its feasibility.

In this sense, the project is structured, methodologically, in some fundamental assumptions:

- i. Characterization of the study area (Serra da Estrela);
- ii. Study about the perception of Serra da Estrela tourism brand;
- iii. Analysis and interpretation of the Serra da Estrela tourist indicators;
- iv. Establish types of classification of primary and secondary tourism resources;
- v. Field work (inventory and Geotagging);
- vi. Development of a Geographical Information System that allows structuring and modelling the data collected;
- vii. Development of a multifunctional web and mobile platform.

On the other hand, the “Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela” is more than a project with an end, it is a new paradigm of promotion and (re) valuation of the Serra da Estrela tourism. However, the central element of this project is constituted by its technological structure based on the “Web Portal” and the application to support “Mobile” (IOS and ANDROID). In this sense, we intend that the Tourism Charter has the following specificities:

- a. The Tourism Charter Portal is built on GIS Web environment, containing geographic information on the 9 municipalities associated with the project;
- b. The geographic data used corresponds to the set of tourism resources which can be used, such as: i) natural heritage; II) built heritage; III) intangible cultural heritage; IV) catering and hospitality equipment; v) cultural equipment; vi) tourism leisure companies; VII) walks, TT and mountain biking; VIII) classified heritage set (historic villages; Mountain villages; Schist villages, e.g.); IX) leisure areas and x) Facilities;
- c. The geographical data can be manipulated to different scales. For example, a historic village can emerge as a resource in itself, or, on the contrary, associated with a set of features (Castle, pillory, among others), depending on what the tourist wants to visit and how they do it;
- d. “The Tourism Charter Portal” is dynamic and interactive, allowing the introduction of new elements of interest, by users, which will only be made available after validation by the “Tourism Charter” team, and can follow the following template.
- e. It allows the permanent introduction of Ephemerides, such as fests, fairs and other events that do not have a fixed schedule, because these are already included in the classification of “intangible cultural heritage”, but given its importance it might work as a supplement or even motivation to the visit to the Serra da Estrela mountains;
- f. Each of the existing tourism elements on the platform contains a brief description, which is accurate, that is adapted according to the type of resource considered (Mobile or PC);
- g. In addition to the textual description, there are multimedia records (photos and videos) for each resource;
- h. There is the possibility to define itineraries due to constraints introduced by tourists, especially given the time available, the visits’ preferences or the means of transport;
- i. Depending on the generated routes, the “Tourism Charter “ Web Portal allows its export in a compatible format with GPS equipment, such as gpx, for example;
- j. There is the possibility of pre-booking (sending an email or filling a form) in accommodation units, catering, tourism leisure companies, museums, concert halls, among others, by the means that

are considered the most appropriate for this purpose;

- k. The "Mobile" application is constantly updated, reflecting the updates made in the "Tourism Charter" portal, including the introduction of new tourism resources or events located in time;
- l. The "Tourism Charter" application is adjusted in order to present the features described above for the "Web portal";

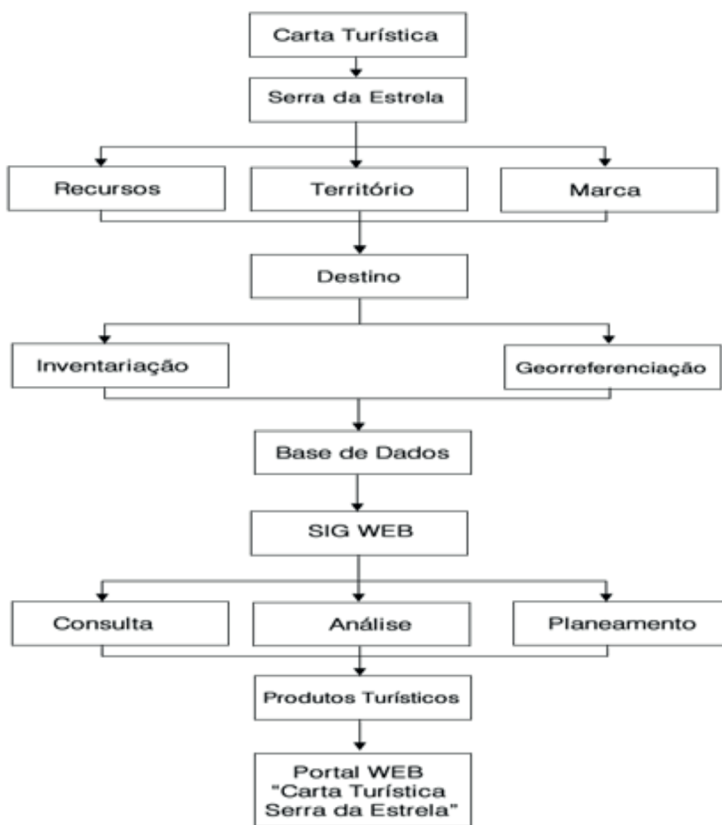


Figure 3. Project methodological sequence.

## 6. OVERVIEW

The "Tourism Charter of Serra da Estrela" has a methodological and scientific framework that guarantees consistency in its application and embodies more than just a technological design, a concept and a brand. Thus, Serra da Estrela will, with this project, be endowed with a tool, a platform and a new concept that offers a holistic view of the territory and its tourism offer.

In this sense, the Tourism Charter, plus the location of the tourism resources also allow the creation of itineraries based on the preferences, the time and mean of transport selected by the visitor / tourist. Besides allowing to "download" static tours it also enables the creation of fully dynamic and timeless tours, since the Tourism Charter will include cultural events (fairs, events, concerts), so the result will be a different tour each week/ day, since, in

addition to the tour chosen by the user through selection choices, the system will offer more alternative tours in which these events are used. In addition to this aspect, the tourists themselves can be “content developers” for the Tourism Charter, thereby contributing to a greater interactivity on the device. The Tourist ceases to be a mere user and becomes an integral part of the project, whether they are using a mobile platform or a web platform. This is another of the differentiating factors from the previous projects, since there is no such mobile element, and therefore no connection between both of them.

The fact that both the mobile application or the web platform are available 24 hours a day in 6 languages - with a prediction to extend to 8 - permanently connected with each other, in which all changes are automatically replicated in the other, is, in itself, a factor of innovation.

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