

## **TOURISM, ECOCULTURAL HERITAGE, DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND TERRITORIAL VALORIZATION IN THE BORDER MOUNTAINS OF THE IBERIAN CENTRAL MOUNTAIN RANGE**

TURISMO, PATRIMÓNIO ECOCULTURAL, ESTRATÉGIAS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO E VALORIZAÇÃO TERRITORIAL NAS SERRAS DE FRONTEIRA DA CORDILHEIRA CENTRAL IBÉRICA  
TURISMO, PATRIMONIO ECOCULTURAL, ESTRATEGIAS DE DESARROLLO Y VALORIZACIÓN TERRITORIAL EN LAS SIERRAS DE FRONTERA DE LA CORDILLERA CENTRAL IBÉRICA

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### **ABSTRACT**

The border of central Portugal with Castilla y Leon and Extremadura in Spain, combines ecocultural resources of great value. These should be articulated in a complementary way in an integrated territorial vision, reinforcing a wider market that, due to the differences and proximity, allow the construction of a composite tourist product.

The perceptions of the past, associated with the constraints and barriers that these spaces represent, have been attenuated and nowadays figure a greater relationship, through the approximations generated by the physical and technological communication routes, as well as by the forms of formal and informal cooperation developed.

These territories, in addition to their natural value, represent their own ways of life, with systems of agricultural and forestry use, revealing a sustainable appropriation of the physical elements and their resources, allowing the construction of landscapes and ecosystems of ecoculture relevance, associated to the existing cultural heritage. At present, new opportunities are emerging as a result of tourism demand and its condition as international spaces of circulation. Mountain border areas, due to their patrimonial value and resources, require the coordination of efforts between the management entities and the various touristic intervenors.

*Keywords: Tourism, heritage, Mountain, Policies and Territorial Cohesion*

## RESUMO

A fronteira do centro de Portugal com Castilla y Leon e Extremadura em Espanha, conjuga recursos ecoculturais de grande valor, que devem ser articulados de forma complementar, numa visão territorial integrada, reforçando um mercado mais amplo e conjugando produtos que, pelas diferenças e proximidade, permitam construir um produto turístico compósito.

As perceções do passado, associadas aos constrangimentos e barreiras que estes espaços significavam, atenuaram-se e apresentam na atualidade um crescendo de relacionamento, quer por via das aproximações geradas pelas vias de comunicação físicas e tecnológicas, quer pelas formas de cooperação formal e informal desenvolvidas.

Estes territórios, para além do seu valor natural, representam modos de vida particulares, com sistemas de aproveitamento agrícola e florestal, reveladores de uma apropriação sustentável, dos elementos físicos e seus recursos, permitindo construir paisagens e ecossistemas de relevância eco cultural, associados ao diverso património cultural existente. Na atualidade, emergem novas oportunidades induzidas pela procura turística e pela sua condição de espaços internacionais de circulação. Os espaços fronteiriços de montanha, pelo seu valor patrimonial e recursos detidos, exigem a coordenação de esforços entre os organismos de gestão e os diversos atores turísticos.

*Palavras-Chave: Turismo, Património, Montanha, Políticas e Coesão Territorial*

## RESUMEN

La frontera del centro de Portugal con Castilla y León y Extremadura en España, conjuga recursos eco culturales de gran valor, que deben ser articulados de forma complementar en una visión territorial integrada, reforzando un mercado más amplio y conjugando productos que, por las diferencias y proximidades, permitan construir un producto turístico compuesto.

Las percepciones del pasado, asociadas a las restricciones y barreras que estos espacios significaban, se atenuaron y presentan en la actualidad un creciendo de relacionamiento, sea por vía de las proximidades

generadas por las vías de comunicación física y tecnológica, sea por las formas de cooperación formal e informales desarrolladas.

Estos territorios, además de su valor natural, representan modos de vida peculiares, con sistemas de aprovechamiento agrícola y forestal, reveladores de una apropiación sostenible, de los elementos físicos y sus recursos, permitiendo construir paisajes y ecosistemas de relevancia eco cultura, asociado por la demanda turística y por su condición de espacios internacionales de circulación. Los espacios fronterizos de montaña, por su valor patrimonial y recursos detenidos, exigen la coordinación de esfuerzos entre los organismos de gestión y de los diversos actores turísticos.

**Palabras Clave:** *Turismo, Patrimonio, Montaña, Políticas y Cohesión Territorial.*

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## **BORDER TERRITORIES AND HERITAGE RESOURCES**

Borders historically constitute spaces of conflict, separation and gap lines as a result of the different forms of articulation that over time have conditioned the forms of relation and articulation between countries or regions. They represent fields of forces that oscillate between cooperation and conflict, drawing a geographic space with its own social and cultural value, with a spatial dynamic that is constantly recreated, according to the political and socioeconomic moments, potentiating different forms of permeability, economic interest and resources valorization. The perceptions of the past, associated with the constraints and barriers that these spaces meant, currently present changes that translated into a growing relationship, both through the approaches generated by physical and technological communication, and by the cooperation and projects established between countries and regions.

Cooperation tends to be a vitalizing factor, generating instruments that reduce the weaknesses that the borders tend to represent and assume. These spaces, due to their historical trajectory and the eco-cultural resources they possess, stand out in the central Iberian range of international rivers, classified natural areas, nature reserves, castles and fortresses, historic villages, Gastronomy, festivities and traditions associated with both cultures, arguments with high potential for leisure and tourism activities. The development of tourism functions and services, supported by sustainability strategies, allow the creation of new opportunities for employment and socio-professional integration of communities. Each border carries its own imagery, which will only be fully understood when involved in the local atmospheres and in the tourist and cultural experiences offered. They are space for cultural exchanges and hybridisms that incorporate memories, histories and ways of life of their own. The interpretation of the frontier space by its communities assumes two dimensions, which manifestly interact in a contrary way in the perception and potential of these spaces. One in which the border region is assumed as an international territory and another where the frontier is perceived as a regional area, not including the elements that make up the frontier of the colliding countries. If we take into account that the peoples who inhabit each side of the frontier line are part of a distinct nation and that "nation is not only a political entity but something that produces

meanings - a system of cultural representation” (Hall, 1999, P. 49), we will understand that, in the mentioned cases, there is the possibility of a tension space. It should be pointed out that border regions have a dual periphery: either in terms of their geographic positioning or in decision-making centers (Lange, 2011b), thus presenting social, economic and structural disadvantages. Furthermore, these regions have been marginalized for decades in the face of decision-making centers and limited by a real and legal barrier (the frontier), aggravating their condition in such a way that in the 1960s the Raia Ibérica became known as the “frontier of underdevelopment” (Cabero Diéguez and Caramelo, 2001; Lange, 2011a, 2012). Nowadays, dynamics are designed to increase the value of its assets, to recover buildings, to preserve natural areas and to increase accessibility, thus increasing the size of tourism and the wide range of leisure activities.

On both sides of the border we have seen strategies for boundarylessness, which have promoted and facilitated mobility between the populations on both sides of the border, the increase in institutional relations, which has benefited from support and development programs and community openness and political representatives to the creation of channels of cooperation and approximation. Among these processes, it is worth mentioning:

- Increase of the accesses and circulation facilities; which have acted not as a factor of localization of productive activities but as facilitators in the access to the great cities of the coast and in particular to the capital, favoring more the exit of the territory than the entrance of people, investments and services. However, it makes the centers on the other side of the border closer constituting an opportunity to explore.
- Institutional relations increment; promoting the articulation of interests and forms of collaboration and improvement of results, acting as a lever in the increase of the relations between the private sector and the populations on both sides of the border and facilitating forms of connection and collective benefits, attending to the present context costs..
- Increase in sociocultural relations; resulting from an increase and dinamization at Cultural, educational, sport and recreational activities exchange , creating deeper and lasting effects, and contributing to the blurring of this system of borders and to the creation of an identity. Existing infrastructures and equipment can

be made more profitable by increasing the scale of users and sustaining diverse functions, qualifying the territory

- Existence of cooperation programs; which stimulated various activities between the two territories, with the constitution of territorial communities and working groups involving both sides of the border. Also, environmental and asset valuation programs are aspects of the qualification of existing resources and their allocation to tourism and leisure functions.
- Consciousness of communities to increase formal and informal partnerships and relationships; which is the first step towards changing mentalities for the development of a common and motivating project and for the joint solutions to achieve satisfactory levels of well-being for these regions.
- Increase of infrastructures to support the community; in particular to support the elderly, sports among others and that can serve both sides of the border and fill any shortages of the territory and in the capacity to organize events..
- Political effort to establish collaborative bases; which will erase the previous constraints and constitute a catalyst of long-felt needs and wants in these territories. These processes have been developed with the support of Community programs and an increasing involvement of local and regional administrative entities.
- Decrease of the mental perception of the frontier as a barrier, which facilitates the institution of the desired common and motivating project that can leverage the development of border territories, as well as the identification and definition of anchor projects, based on specificities as differentiating elements and advantages in central territories vis-à-vis the European Union, encouraging the exploitation of the endogenous resources held, such as to counteract their emptying and socio-economic and environmental disarticulation.

This set of aspects has contributed to the knowledge of the border, its permeability and mobility, to cooperation, to the promotion of leisure and recreational activities, to the dissemination and qualification of the natural and cultural heritage, to the valuation of the environment and promotion of communication activities and strategies between countries and regions.

In this context, the image of space of passage and of connection be-

tween countries, suffers new perceptions, sustained in heritage, hybridity and cultural traditions, in equipment created and the recovery of spaces for tourism and leisure activities, able to allow a permanence in these spaces and the enjoyment of existing resources.

## **ECOCULTURAL RESOURCES AND TOURISM VALORIZATION IN THE CENTRAL MOUNTAIN RANGE**

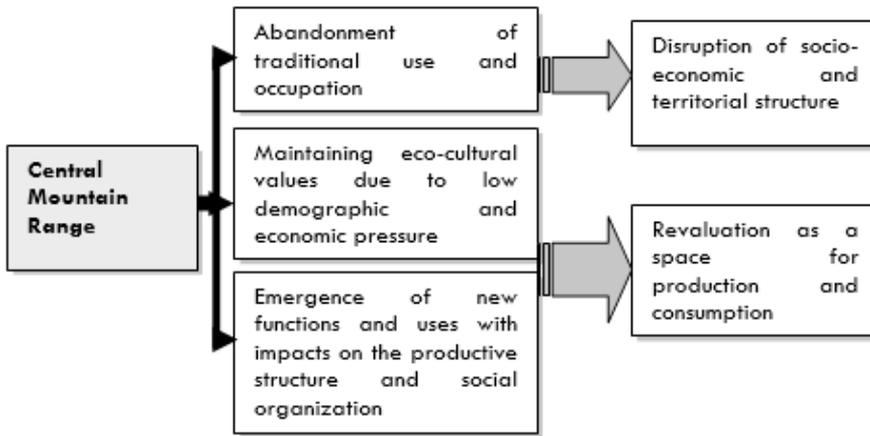
Places value their eco-cultural goods to increase their competitive profile. Heritage stands out as a resource that differentiates territories and is a strategic element in the design of new products designed to capture specific segments of tourist demand, fostering the collective identity of the host communities, reinforcing feelings of cooperation and mutual support, encouraging conservation and sustainable use. Heritage can be constituted as a factor of valorization promotion of the territories, creating brand, that enhances its attractiveness and its strategic consideration in the politics of development. Thus, it becomes a referential factor of the local development, capable of generating territorial balances in function of the attractiveness and activities that drags on its economic and social appropriation. In view of the diversity of tourist resources, the growing tendency to re-encounter nature, the valorisation of traditions and customs and the (re) discovery of past traces, the mountain ranges of the central mountain range have an appreciable touristic dynamism, whose orientations and efforts enlargement, are reaching the different spaces of the region and encompassing the most diverse practices and resources.

The western extremity of this mountain range includes the mountains of Béjar, Francia and Gata in Spain, and Malcata, Estrela, Gardunha, among others, in Portugal. So, set translates a varied morphological structure, of conjugation, of a corrugated relief with successive separations and contrasts between saws and basins. It is worth highlighting that of Cidade Rodrigo and Celorico da Beira to the north and those of Campo Amarelo, Cória - Castelo Branco - Moraleja and Cova da Beira in the south. All this territory presents a remarkable integrity of its natural and historical-cultural heritage. This patrimonial value subsists, in great part, due to the peripheral location, in relation to the coastal areas and main

urban agglomerations, and to the deficient accessibility. The structure of the landscape in the Cordillera is complex. The mountainous complex is affected by a vigorous erosion, which alternates valleys and interfluvies surmounted by surfaces of aplanation, with a marked interdependence of the raised areas with the base. This originates a spatial organization staggered at various levels, sometimes well differentiated, depending on the variation in altitude and bioclimatic conditions, imposing specific occupations and ways of life.

This territory encompasses, in a cross-way, natural spaces with others of great historical and cultural value, referring to its morphological structure, the richness of its fauna and flora, built heritage, cultural and ethnographic dimension. There are also various forms of settlement and productive systems, where agriculture and pastoralism are highlighted, which give it the genuineness and authenticity of the mountain.

Man's connection with this territory has been unevenly and precariously measured by the landscapes created and the benefits of his presence (Fernandes, 2011). Throughout the ages, the mountain range has been occupied in a differentiated way, due to political, economic and social factors that, in an integrated way or individually, give it different uses and valuations (Figure 1). The settlement, disseminated, follows specific alignments, defined by the foot of the mountains and valleys of the main waterways. These constitute the channels of connection and preferential articulation, between mountain spaces and low areas, representing for their wealth the areas of greatest human occupation. This settlement is a result of the physical constraints, that structure the economic activities present there, giving rise to spaces of great scenic value and holders of cultural values associated with the local ways of life, supported in the agriculture, forest, wool transformation and mining activity.



**Figure 1. Dynamics of use of the mountains of the Central Mountain Range. Source Fernandes (2008)**

The most contemporary phase is marked by how land use and livelihoods have been affected, which is translated into the accelerated decline of the population, especially since the middle of the last century, and the decline of traditional activities. The most striking reflections of this crisis have led to the emergence of new vocations and exploitations with different economic, social and territorial implications. These changes introduce ruptures into the existing structure and interrelationships. Alongside this process, innovative initiatives are emerging, capable of taking advantage of endogenous resources and promoting development, with emphasis on leisure and recreational activities (Figure 1). It is also worth noting the marginalization of this territory and its resources by administrative entities, which only recognize their specific characteristics in the last two decades in terms of the potential for tourism and cultural valorization

## **TOURISM PROMOTION OF THE FRONTIER SUSTAINED IN THE ECOCULTURAL VALUE OF MOUNTAINS**

On both sides of the border we have seen strategies of boundarylessness, which has promoted and facilitated mobility between populations

on both sides of the border, and increased institutional relations, benefiting from support and cooperation programs. Among these processes, the following are noteworthy for their importance: increased access and circulation facilities; increased institutional relations; increased sociocultural relations; consciousness of communities to increase formal and informal partnerships and relationships; increase of infrastructures to support the community; political effort to establish collaborative bases and decrease of mental perception of the border as a barrier.

The border areas of the Center of Portugal and Castilla and Leon, particularly the mountain ranges enclose rural habitats, population clusters and a unique eco-cultural heritage. However, abandonment, the introduction of urban planning models and the emergence of new functions and uses are beginning to call into question the secular and collective heritage of these communities. Concern for conserving biodiversity and local culture, as heritage and resource for development, is notorious, especially since the 1980s.

In both countries, this cross-border mountain range presents several hills whose physical characteristics and ecosystems reveal continuity and even some uniformity (landscape and biological), justifying joint policies for their management, in order to effectively transnational protection of their natural resources (Campesino Fernandez, 2014) . In Portugal, the Natural Reserve of the Sierra de la Malcata, which has continuity in Spain by the Natural Area of Sierra de Gata and Reserva de las Batuecas, the Natural Park of Serra da Estrela and in Spain the Park Natural of the Sierra de Francia, the reserve of Caza de la Buitrera, Candelaria Natural Park, Valle del Jerte and Tiétar (south slope of Sierra de Gredos) have protection status .

The protected areas, the diversity of natural resources (fauna, flora, water lines, geomorphology ...) and the existence of some operators / services in sport and adventure, are aspects of great interest for this market, provided they are properly ordered and promoted. This set allows the construction of a diverse mosaic of landscapes, environments and practices of tourism and leisure, where they are articulated from the observation of species, hiking, climbing, winter sports, among other sporting and recreational activities.

These territories, in addition to their natural value, represent ways of life, with systems of agricultural and forestry use, revealing a sustainable ap-

proportion, the physical elements and the resources they inhabit, allowing the construction of landscapes and ecosystems of great cultural value, associated with to the diverse existing assets. Due to their status, as peripheral (and peripheral to power centers), they have been distanced from the main development orientations of the respective states, reinforcing the depressed socio-economic profile where rural areas are deeply penalized, presenting a productive structure based on the agro-sector in a crisis and a regressive demographic trend (Fernandes, 2005 e 2008; López, 2014).

Together, the border region of Beira Interior Norte and Salamanca (BIN-SAL) has a diversity of resources that foster the development of tourism, to complement the natural and cultural resources that can be typified as follows:

- International river basins - Douro and Tagus Rivers and respective Dams
- Iberian Central Mountain Range -classified natural areas
- Bioclimatism - Air quality
- Diversity of geomorphological elements - Landscapes, geomorphology and geosites
- Hydrogeological characteristics - Spa - Termas
- Forest resources (Flora and Fauna) - Environment and biodiversity of fauna and flora
- Extension of agrarian areas (vineyard, olive groves, soutos, cattle.) - Rurality
- Archaeological remains - Engravings and patrimonial elements representing ancient civilizations
- Ethnographic traditions and representations - Fairs, pilgrimages, historical celebrations
- Gastronomy - Agro-livestock products and wines
- Castles and Fortresses - Military heritage
- Cathedrals, Churches and Religious Monuments and Festivities - Religious Heritage.

These elements provide conditions for the promotion of diversified tourist activities throughout the year, which should be complemented by a qualification of the hotel offer and an increase in the promotion and promotion of these tourist products. It should be emphasized that the

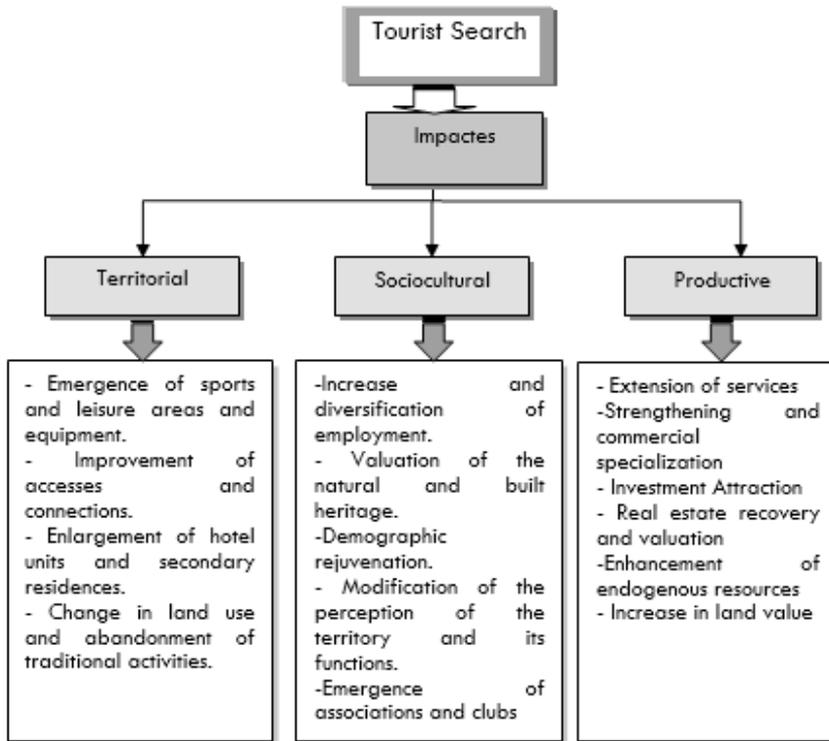
tourist seeks to access information levels that are increasingly diverse, that allow prior knowledge of the destination or enable it to collect data capable of establishing / designing its stay, the activities to be developed and the interaction with the territory and its resources. The tourist information assumes, besides a relevant role in the promotion of tourist destinations, a great influence in the creation of its image, which implies that it is assumed as a critical factor in the qualification of the destination, in the way it is diffused and in the capacity to generate attractiveness.

The image of destiny and its capacity to promote attractiveness, according to Kastenholz (2002), is formed via information acquisition and processed with the effect of eventually prioritizing an image or changing the content of it. The formation of the image is close to the process of perception, reason why the quality of the information is fundamental, understood as the technical precision, the visual quality and the detail of the explanations. The visitor is grateful to receive recommendations / guidelines from qualified technicians or entities about the places that deserve to be visited, the quality products and identity, the services provided and the best ways to access them. In this context, tourism reconstruction of borders recognizes in the mountainous areas arguments of great importance for a strategy to strengthen this function, in the sense of valorization of its resources, attraction of visitors from both countries and prolongations of stays (Hortelano Minguez, 2014).

Impacts can be assessed at three levels: territorial, socio-cultural and productive (Figure 2).

In territorial terms, there is an expansion of housing units by the reconstruction and revaluation of historic properties or economic activities (former factories and estates), improvement of connections and knowledge of resources by communities on both sides of the border, extension of tourist products and creation of sports and recreational equipment.

At the socio-cultural level, there is a promotion of new employment opportunities, heritage enhancement, greater sociability and knowledge of the cultures of both countries, broadening experiences and practices of tourism and leisure in these territories, by their communities and abroad.



**Figure 2. Impacts of the tourist sector in the mountain areas of the Central Iberian Mountain Range.**

In productive terms, there is an increase in investment, with enlargements of tourist services and commercial activity, stimulating entrepreneurial initiatives, valorization of endogenous resources and their replication through the cultural industries, promotion of activities of restoration and application of local agro-pastoral and forestry products.

The protected areas, the diversity of natural resources (fauna, flora, water lines, geomorphology ...) and the existence of some operators / services in sport and adventure are aspects of great interest for this market, provided they are properly ordered and promoted. These spaces hold a diverse mosaic of landscapes, environments and practices of tourism and leisure, where they are articulated from the observation of species, hiking, climbing, winter sports, among other sporting and recreational activities.

The forest and water resources are two of the region's main natural resources, chestnut groves, oak forests and ridges, revealing the region's

tree wealth and its occupation. There are also sporting, hunting and scientific potential associated with the forest and its ability to take advantage of medicinal and aromatic products.

Water is a vital and valued resource, both in economic and social functions, and in the role, it plays in tourism and leisure activities. These transboundary regions are delimited by the main Iberian rivers - Douro and Tejo - that define important hydrographic basins, structure the territory and somehow its occupation. The various dams, lagoons and river beaches are important play areas (water sports, fishing and outdoor recreation). Groundwater is also abundant, allowing the existence and expansion of various thermal infrastructures as well as the strengthening of health tourism.

The glacial geomorphology, constitute in the Serra da Estrela, through its valleys, morays, fluvo-glacial deposits and lagoons an eco-cultural argument of great interest, for its uniqueness in portuguese territory and for the aesthetic and cultural dimension that it introduces into the territory. On the Spanish side the Bejar and Gredos mountains give mountainous continuity and possibilities of a wide diversity of winter sports, nature contemplation and outdoor activities.

In cultural terms, the prehistoric remains, megalithic monuments, castles and fortified settlements stand out, most of them classified as national monuments and historical villages. Finally, festivals and pilgrimages, handicrafts and gastronomy, are elements of great patrimonial interest and tourist attraction, boosted by their genuineness and beauty. Agri-pastoral activities, such as transhumance and threshing / peeling of cereals, constitute tourist festivities and posters that highlight the ways of life and the traditions of these regions.

The expansion of the tourist market should be promoted within a framework that guarantees the sustainability of the values, natural resources and territorial identity, promoting employment opportunities and socio-professional integration of the communities, modernization of the agricultural sector, valorisation of authenticity and refunctionalization of the units the promotion of stable and proactive organizational networks for the development of tourism.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The valorization and dissemination of heritage, the restoration of real estate and traditions, the promotion of agricultural and pastoral products, the interest in sporting practices associated with water and forestry resources increase the potential of these destinations in the national and international context. However, they experience strategic management problems, which result from their not being valued and promoted by local administrative structures. here is a need for the development of initiatives to raise awareness of the diverse potential of these regions, to promote their space, culture and economy, to call for a specific development model in which tourism and leisure activities find favorable conditions for their expansion and appreciation of local ways of life.

In the context of the frontier regions, resources are sought to attract populations on both sides of the border, in the face of the attractiveness resulting from cultural differences and existing natural conditions, promoting those who move to the possibilities of stays with arguments enriching for leisure activities. Simultaneously as they are places of international permeability, they contain conditions for an increase in visitors who can stay in their travels and enjoy the hybridity and the existing patrimony, requiring communication formats that allow exploring these territories and find attractions of visit and stay. In this approach, it is urgent to develop joint communication channels that allow an integrated border offer from both countries, strengthening the existing offer and broadening the reasons for visiting.

In the border areas of the central mountain range, there is an increase of cooperation, strengthening territorial articulations and projects. The recovery and valorisation of thermal springs, the increase of rural tourism units, the creation of itineraries and routes encourage the attractiveness of these destinations. There are simultaneous exhibitions, fairs, gastronomic shows, sports events, publications in spanish and portuguese and sites that promote the dissemination and consequent appreciation of these mountains. Finally, classifications with spaces of international value, associated to the natura network, geoparks, reserves of the biosphere induce notoriety and recognition.

In this context, in the last decade, projects have emerged that qualify the natural and cultural heritage, along with a diversification and qualification

of the hotel offer, which allows a stay in the region, in the sense of its discovery and usufruct. It should be noted that only a structured supply and the existence of infrastructures and equipment able to meet the demand can lead to their appreciation, aspects that have been achieved with the help of funds and community programs

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