

Literary tourism and sustainable entrepreneurship strategies in Portugal

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine how the literary heritage of the city of Beza in Portugal can be utilized for the development of literary tourism, in the context of the country's wider tourism dynamics. Through primary research, an analysis of existing perceptions and knowledge about the literary identity of Beza is carried out, exploring the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism development. At the same time, potential barriers and difficulties are identified, and existing facilities such as museums and festivals are examined. Finally, strategies are proposed to promote literary tourism in the city, enhancing the position of Beja as a potential tourist destination of literary interest.

Keywords: Literary Tourism; Portugal; Beza; Tourism Development; Marianna Alcofardo; Sustainable Development; Entrepreneurship

1 Introduction

Literary tourism is one of the most distinctive and rapidly growing sectors of cultural tourism, motivating visitors to discover the settings of literary works, learn about literary movements and delve into the lives of their creators (Roberts, 2023).

Literature lovers are often identified with the term 'literary tourist', as literary tourism is mainly targeted at a specific 'market' consisting of people who love literature, creating a 'niche market'. (Manola et al., 2024) (Tsatalbassoglou & Manola 2024)

Literary tourists are usually younger people with high intellectual level and belong to higher social classes. Literature, as a tourism product, is mainly targeted at those who visit literary venues to feel closer to authors and their works. (Manola, 2019a), (Manola, 2022), (Manola et al., 2020a), (Manola, 2019b).

Literary tourism can take various forms and has many interpretations. The main perceptions are that it either belongs to cultural tourism or heritage tourism. The prevailing view is that, due to its anthropological nature, literary tourism is part of cultural tourism, as it 'involves tourists and visitors identifying, discovering and creating cultural values through the author, his or her work and place. The focus is on the places and events described in the literary works and the lives of the authors. (Manola et al., 2020b) (Manola & Kostaki, 2024) (Tsatalmpasoglou et al., 2024) Literary tourism involves locations that appear in books, such as a hero's home, a favorite café, a hidden spot, or paths followed by the characters. Moreover, literary tourists are particularly interested in the places that inspired the author, trying to understand the environment that influenced the creation of the story (Manola & Tsatambassoglou, 2021), (Manola & Papagrigoriou, 2020), (Manola & Angelopoulos, 2020), (Manola & Gioka, 2021).

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Portugal, with its significant tourism development and rich literary heritage, has the opportunity to take advantage of this trend, and is already doing so through various initiatives and projects (Boscaglia, 2024). One of the cities that is distinguished for its literary heritage, but has not yet been exploited for tourism, is Beza in Alentejo. The city is inextricably linked to Mariana Alcofardo and the work *Erotic Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (*Lettres portugaises*). Although there are doubts about the authenticity of the work, as Lopes points out, this work has left an important imprint on literary history, making Beza a potential destination for literary tourism.

2 Literary tourism in Portugal

Portugal is one of the most popular destinations in Europe, known for its pleasant climate, cultural richness and natural beauties, attracting millions of tourists every year (Turismo de Portugal, 2020). In a country that bases a large part of its economy on tourism and that seeks continuous growth and improvement in this sector, literary tourism is gaining ground (Marques and Cunha, 2013). Portugal has one of the most important literary traditions in Europe, with literature being a key part of its national identity. From the medieval poet Luís de Camões, who praised the exploits of Portuguese seafarers in his work *Os Lusíadas*, to the famous Fernando Pessoa with his multiple personas and the Nobel Prize-winning José Saramago, Portuguese literature acts as a window into the history, culture and mores of the people (Tamen and Buescu, 2012).

Portugal has fully understood the importance of literary tourism as a means of promoting its cultural heritage and seeks to foster its continued development. The country's efforts are focused on creating experiences that allow visitors to explore its rich literary tradition. One of the most important examples is the Fernando Pessoa House in Lisbon, which has been transformed into a museum dedicated to the great Portuguese poet, offering visitors the opportunity to learn about his life and work through exhibits and activities.

Another innovative way of promoting literary tourism is the creation of the BezaLit electronic literary map. This interactive map allows visitors to explore the literary history of the city of Beza, guiding them to important sites linked to local literature and the authors who represented it. Literary tours, which are another important pillar of development, offer personalised itineraries based on the lives and works of famous authors. These tours vary from city to city, offering travellers a unique literary experience depending on the destination (Visit Portugal, 2020).

In addition, the city of Coimbra is participating in an ambitious project entitled "Literary Tourism in the University City of Coimbra". This project is being developed in collaboration with UNESCO and its main objective is to create a digital map that will bring together data on Portugal's literary tradition from the 15th to the 20th century. This map identifies various places associated with important writers and their works, such as the houses where they lived, cafés where they frequented, as well as monuments and statues dedicated to their memory. This initiative focuses, not only on the historical dimension of literature, but also on the accessibility of information, as the data will be available to the public through a virtual map that will facilitate exploration and the promotion of literary tourism (UNESCO, 2021).

The use of technology to disseminate cultural information is a modern approach that enhances literary tourism, making the cultural experience more accessible and attractive to travellers, while also contributing to economic growth by increasing interest in the Portuguese literary tradition. There are many different approximations of the use of internet and digital technologies to foster and enhance the promotion of the cultural information and activities [23-32].

3 Case study - The beza - Mariana Alcofardo

Beza is a provincial town located in Alentejo, one of the most rural and quiet regions of southern Portugal (Guilleragues, 1669). With a population of around 22,000 inhabitants, Beja has a rich and long history stretching back to ancient times, with traces of various cultures that have left their imprint on the town. The area was already inhabited by the Celts, who settled in the area before the Roman conquest. During the Roman period, Beza was renamed "Pax Julia" by Julius Caesar as a tribute to the peace imposed by the Romans on the region (Jesus et al., 2007).

The city, under Roman rule, developed as an important centre of trade and administration and maintained this importance in later years. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Beza went through various phases of domination. During the early Middle Ages, the city came under the control of the Visigoths, who left their own cultural imprint. Later, the city was occupied by the Arabs, who kept it for several centuries, adding new elements to its architectural and cultural heritage. In the late Middle Ages, Beja was reclaimed by the Christians and one of the most impressive monuments of this period is the Castle of Beja, built in the 13th century, which stands to this day as a symbol of the historical and strategic importance of the city (Visit Portugal, 2020).

In modern times, Beza remains a rural town, with its economy based mainly on agriculture. The area is known for the production of wheat, wine and olive oil, products that form the basis of the economic activity of the town and the surrounding areas. Despite the fact that Beza has important historical sites and a rich cultural background, its tourism development remains limited due to various infrastructure problems.

One of the biggest obstacles to the development of Beja is the lack of adequate access for tourists. Although the city has a civilian airport, its use is limited as it does not regularly serve large-scale commercial flights. Furthermore, Beja's connection to the port of Sines, which is an important economic hub, is poor, which limits the potential for boosting trade and tourism in the area (URBACT, 2024). Despite the city's advantages, such as its rich historical heritage and cultural attractions, accessibility problems prevent the full exploitation of its tourism potential.

The legend of the nun Mariana Alcofardo is an integral part of the cultural identity of Portugal and in particular of the provincial town of Beza, where she is believed to have lived. Mariana Alcofardo is said to be the author of the famous *Lettres portugaises* (Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun), one of the most famous and controversial works of Portuguese literature. Although her connection to the play was not present from the beginning, her identification with the letters played a decisive role in her cultural and literary legacy (Lopes, 2010).

Although Mariana Alcofardo's name was not directly associated with the work in its early editions, the theory that she was the actual author of the letters was first advanced in 1810 by the politician and writer Luciano Cordeiro. Through his own research, Cordeiro argued that the nun Mariana Alcofardo, who lived in a convent in Beza, was the person behind the letters, thus creating a powerful myth around her personality and her story. This theory has been accepted by many scholars, although the authenticity of the story and authorship of the letters continues to be a matter of debate to this day (Lopes, 2010).

Mariana Alcofardo's association with the Love Letters and, by extension, with the city of Beza, has significantly enhanced the city's literary and cultural identity. The existence of this legend creates prospects for promoting Beja as a literary tourism destination. The story of the nun and the letters offers a unique narrative context that can attract visitors interested in history, literature and romantic narrative. Such a project can be combined with events, guided tours and itineraries that highlight the places in the city linked to the legend, such as the convent where Mariana is said to have lived, thus enhancing the tourist potential of the area.

The intensely emotional narrative of the letters and the fictional nature of Mariana Alcofardo's story have made the work a timeless piece of world literature. Despite the questions surrounding the author's authenticity, The Love Letters continues to inspire and fascinate readers, keeping the memory of Mariana Alcofardo alive and enhancing the cultural and literary richness of Portugal, especially the city of Beja. (Guilleragues, 1669)

4 Research methodology

Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire designed to provide quantitative data. The questionnaire consisted of 12 closed-ended questions, which focused on knowledge of the literary heritage of Beza, evaluation of related initiatives and suggestions for the development of literary tourism.

The survey sample consisted exclusively of residents of Beza and included 120 participants. Data collection was carried out over a period of four months through online participation via the Google Forms platform, mainly with the help of the Instituto Politécnico de Beja University (ana.rodrigues@ipbeja.pt). Data were analyzed using quantitative analysis to extract statistical trends.

The survey presented some limitations, such as the relatively short duration of data collection and limited representation of specific groups, such as international visitors. Despite these limitations, the findings of the survey provide important insights into the current status and prospects for the development of literary tourism in Beza, enhancing our understanding of the ways in which the city can capitalise on its literary heritage.

4.1 Question 1. From 1 -5 how important do you consider your town's literary heritage to be?

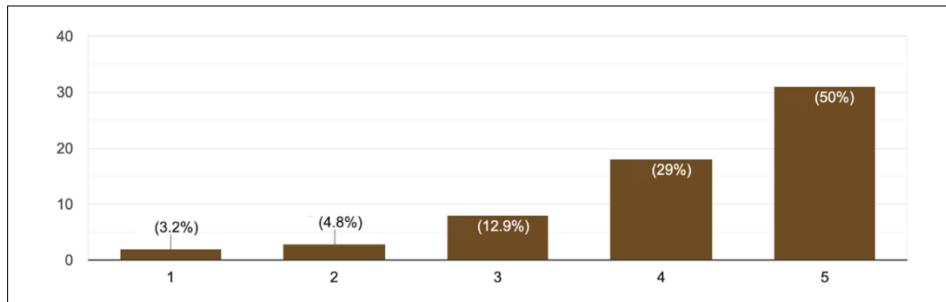


Figure 1 Importance of Literary Heritage

According to the data in Fig 4, 79% of the sample rated the importance of Beza's literary heritage with the highest scores, 4 and 5. This indicates that an extremely high percentage of residents recognize the importance and value of literary heritage to the city's cultural identity.

4.2 Question 2. Which of the following initiatives would help to engage younger generations in the city's literary and cultural heritage

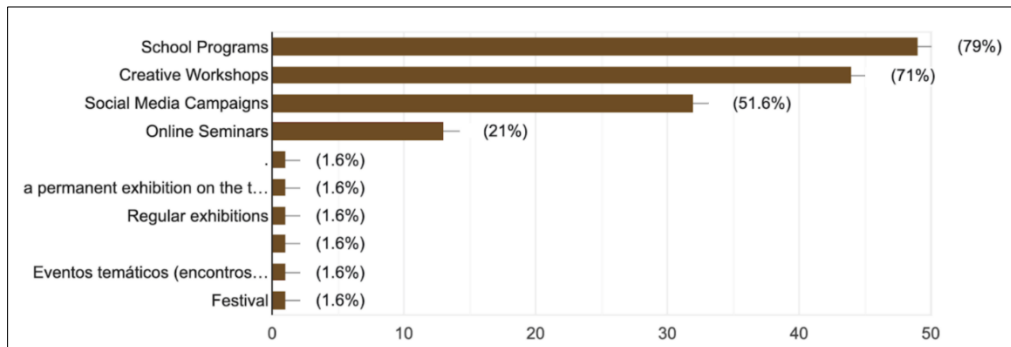


Figure 2 Interest of younger generations

Commentary :79% of participants mentioned school programs as the main option.

4.3 Question 3. Which of the following cultural resources would you choose to promote literary tourism in your city

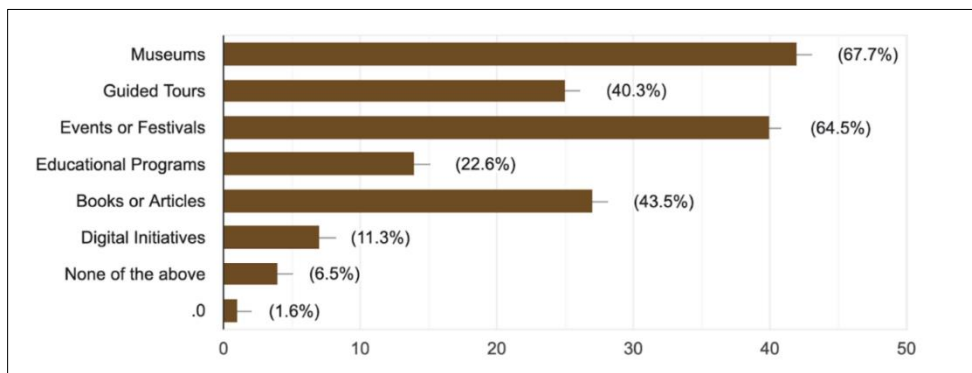


Figure 3 Promoting literature through existing resources

Comment. More than 60% of the participants selected museums and festival events in Beja as key elements for the development of literary tourism, along with guided tours, books and articles. This question was crucial as it highlighted and interpreted the existing literary foundations of the city, which can help it establish itself as a literary tourism destination. Remarkably, the option "none of the above" was selected by only 6.5% of the participants, confirming the importance of these elements for the future development of tourism.

4.4 Question 4. Which of the following do you consider to be the main obstacles facing Beja in becoming a literary tourism destination?

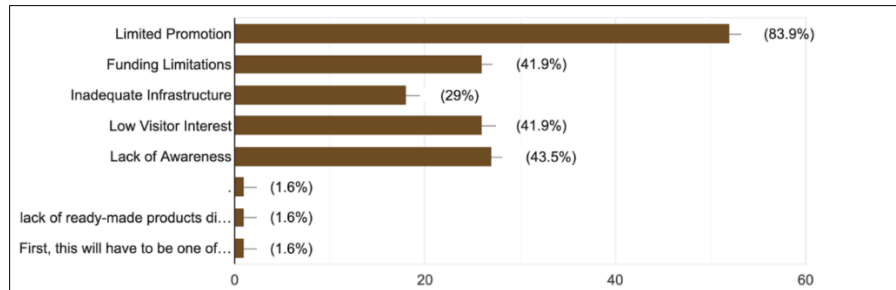


Figure 4 Main obstacles

Commentary: the results presented in Figure 12 show that 83.9% of the participants consider limited promotion as the main factor. In addition, over 40% cited funding inadequacy, low demand, and lack of awareness as major barriers, elements that are linked to previous findings regarding the limited level of knowledge about the city's literary heritage.

4.5 Question 5. Which of the following strategies do you consider important for the development of literary tourism.

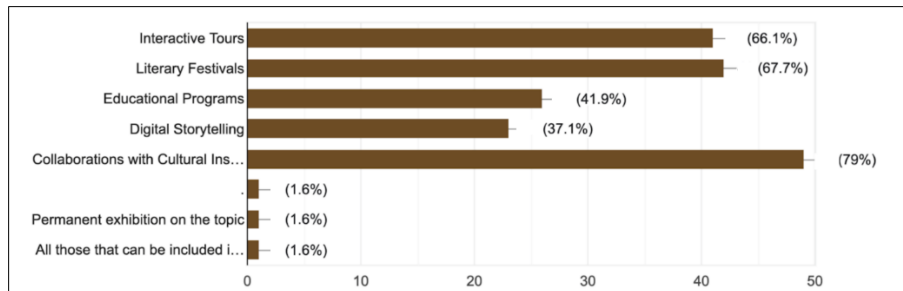


Figure 5 Possible literary actions and activities

Comment: Participants suggested strategies for developing literary tourism, with the most popular options including cooperation with cultural institutions, organising literary festivals and creating interactive guided tours

4.6 Question 6. Do you think Beja could work with other cities or organizations to promote its literary heritage?

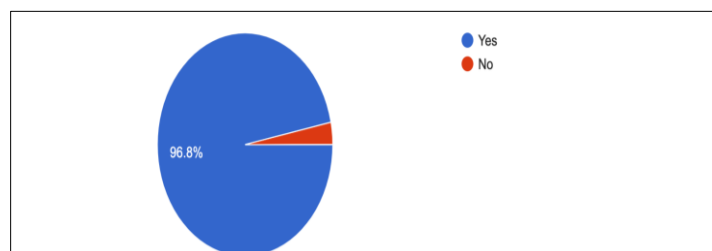


Figure 6 Cooperation with cities or organisations

Commentary: the almost universal support (96.8%) for this type of cooperation underlines the need for extroversion and strategic synergies with tourism-developed regions, which could contribute to the development of literary tourism in Beza and to the enhancement of its visibility both nationally and internationally.

4.7 Demographic results

The analysis of the demographic data of the participants is the first step in understanding the composition of the sample and assessing the diversity of opinions emerging from the results.

A total of 120 people participated in the survey, of which 43.5% were male and 56.5% female, providing a good gender balance. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the majority of respondents were in the 45-54 age group (29%), followed by the 35-44 (22.6%) and 18-24 (22.6%) age groups. The lowest percentages were recorded in the 65 and over (1.6%) and 17 and under (1.6%) age groups. The survey covered a wide age range, ensuring that there was no over-emphasis on any particular age group, which helped to gather a diverse range of views and ideas on the topic.

In terms of educational attainment (Figure 2), 37.1% of participants held a postgraduate degree, 32.3% had a university degree, 17.7% were secondary school graduates, while 12.9% had a PhD. These data indicate that the survey was mainly participated by people with high educational level, which may influence their perception and opinions about the subject of the study.

In relation to place of residence (Figure 3), 66.1% of the participants reside in Beja, while a further 14.5% visit the city on a weekly basis. This makes the views of the participants extremely useful for the study, as the aim was to explore the perceptions of local residents of Beza.

In conclusion, the survey achieved its demographic objective as it gathered responses from a representative sample with diversity in terms of age and educational level, gender balance, and adequate representation from both local residents and frequent visitors.

4.8 Survey conclusions

The results of the survey, which included participants from various age groups, educational levels and backgrounds, showed that most people recognise the connection between Beja and Mariana Alcofardo and the Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun. Despite this, a significant proportion of respondents felt that the inhabitants of Beza do not have an in-depth knowledge of the city's literary history and that the city's literary identity is not widely known nationally. This finding suggests that, although there is a basis for promoting literary tourism, there is still room for further development in Beza. Strategies to enhance local identity and attract visitors were also suggested, such as the cooperation of cultural institutions with tourist-developed cities and organisations to promote literary activities and routes.

This research offers useful insights into the potential of Beja as a potential literary destination. Future studies could focus on collecting data from larger samples and analysing other regions to enhance our understanding of literary tourism in Portugal.

5 Conclusion

Literary tourism as an ever-growing type of tourism represents a unique opportunity to highlight local history and cultural heritage. Portugal, a country with strong growth in the tourism sector, presents excellent potential for the promotion of literary tourism, making it an ideal field of study.

This research, focused on the provincial town of Beza, aimed to understand the knowledge and perceptions of the inhabitants about the literary identity of the town, while exploring suggestions for its further promotion. The results of the survey, based on a representative sample with a variety of ages, educational levels and social backgrounds, showed that the majority of participants recognised the close connection between Beja and Mariana Alcofardo and the Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun

However, it was shown that many participants believe that the literary history of the city is not sufficiently known either by locals or nationally, which limits its tourist value. Despite the existing foundations, there is significant room for improvement in terms of promoting its literary character.

Strategies such as strengthening partnerships with cultural institutions and developing routes in cooperation with already developed tourist areas can contribute to the promotion of Beja as an attraction for literary tourism, while enhancing the local identity and economic development of the region.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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