



Infopack

Road to active local participation in heritage promotion

Lessons learnt from the Côa Parque Foundation

This road is for:

CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS; MUNICIPALITIES, GOVERNMENT BODIES, AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS IN BORDER REGIONS WHICH ARE INTERESTED IN PRESERVING THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THEIR AREA, STRENGTHENING COHESION WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AND EMPOWERING THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Abstract

Prehistoric rock art sites in the Côa Valley and Siega Verde are **UNESCO transboundary World Heritage Sites**, located in a rapidly expanding tourism area known for its prehistoric rock art heritage and proximity to the Alto Douro Wine Region UNESCO site. This growth underscores **the need for well-coordinated planning measures** to ensure sustainable cultural tourism.

The Côa and Siega Verde Ambassadors initiative emerged from the work of the TEXTOUR project and its workshops with the local population. **This initiative helps foster a sense of identity with the local territory and its cultural and natural heritage.** Often, the local population is disconnected from its own architectural, archaeological, and natural heritage, undervaluing its importance. The initiative aims to create sustainable value by attracting new tourists who are interested in the unique identity of low-density, heritage-rich territories.

The Côa Ambassadors must live in one of the municipalities in the Côa Valley Archaeological Park and Siega Verde site. Aged between 12-25 or over 60, they will help **promote and preserve natural and cultural heritage among the local community and visitors.**

As well as appearing as a reproducer of narratives, these ambassadors can generate their own experiential accounts by keeping an eye on how visitors react. Depending on the space available, they improvise, mainly through words, and they must be empathetic, good communicators, reliable, concise and objective.



What to pack:

KNOWLEDGE, TOOLS, AND SKILLS REQUIRED BEFORE IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION

- 3 training sessions about the history of the area, learning about the archaeological, architectural and natural heritage and the region's culinary heritage
- A reasonable group of trained residents
- Information on the website about the training and its contents, and a consent form for parents of under 18s.



The role of Côa and Siega Verde Ambassadors in promoting and sustaining cultural and natural heritage

THE CÔA VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

The Côa Valley Archaeological Park is located in the northernmost part of Guarda district, in the region known as Alto Douro. In the final section of the Côa river, more than **100 sites with rock art and around 1400 rock art panels** are located in a territory of about 200 km², covering areas in the municipalities of Vila Nova de Foz Côa, Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, Pinhel, Torre de Moncorvo and Mêda. The prehistoric rock-art site of Siega Verde, although in Spain, has been part of the project because it has been considered an extension of the Côa Valley since 2010.

CÔA PARQUE FOUNDATION

The Côa Parque Foundation was created to manage the Côa Valley Archaeological Park and the Côa Museum. More broadly, **it manages, conserves and promotes the Côa Valley rock art and other heritage** in this region.

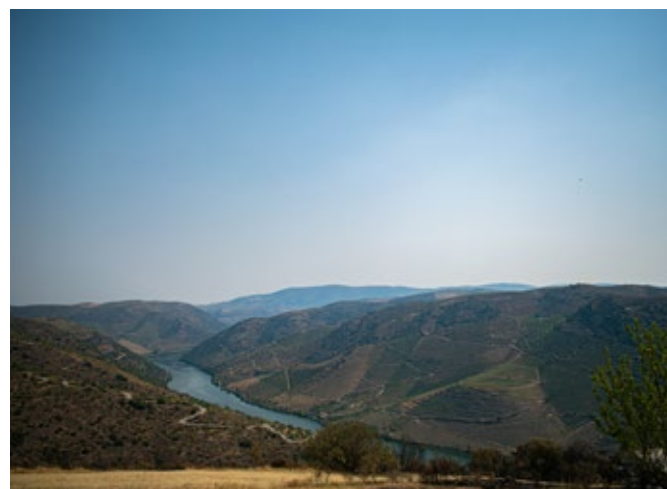
Through the ongoing cultural and natural heritage project, the major aim of the Foundation is to promote the integrated development of the region, bringing together partners and private economic stakeholders, highlighting the importance of cultural dynamics and its contribution to the **well-being of the country**.

The Côa Parque Foundation's vision is for all cultural activities to **fit into a broader plan for the economic and social development** of the Douro and the country.

The aim is to establish the Côa Valley Archaeological Park and Museum as **strategic assets** of national and international reference in the areas of heritage, science and tourism.

More specifically, this involves the following:

- Development of research and scientific activities linked to the cultural and natural heritage of the region.
- Environmental education and awareness of diverse publics, aiming at the protection and preservation of water resources, species and habitats.
- Strengthening of the region's tourism potential.
- Creation of new infrastructure and services to support economic development, favouring settlement, growth and wealth creation, with a view to reversing trends of desertification and population ageing.
- Promoting, through all these aspects, greater integration and territorial cohesion of the project and maintaining its international appreciation.



*Pic 1: The Côa Valley Archaeological Park.
Photo credits: Nicola Vuolo*

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THE CÔA AMBASSADORS

In line with this vision, the Côa Ambassadors initiative has emerged as an important asset that can contribute to the region's development plan.

The objective is to create a **strong regional identity** by encouraging discussions about their territory, designing **digital routes** to modernise the presentation of their heritage, and **valuing locals** as ambassadors.

The project also seeks to be inclusive and to appeal to young people and older people alike. The latter often forget their great value and so the project enables them to share it. And young people help to ensure the past is remembered and to foster the territory's sustainable development. This is where the project stands out: **it puts people first in protecting and promoting heritage.**

The programme was designed to train the ambassadors by promoting local heritage and gastronomy. Given the local geography, we had some difficulty in bringing together the people involved, but during the sessions it was gratifying to see the participants buying into the role.



Pic 2: A Côa Ambassador leads tourists on a boat tour in the Côa Valley. Photo credits: Côa Parque Fundação

The project needs to continue, especially with schools and colleges. We think that municipalities and cultural associations are the most interested parties. It's a way of **keeping young people busy during the school holidays and for older people to combat isolation.**



Roadmap:

THE MAIN STEPS TO EMBARK ON

- 1 MONTH 1-3**
Conduct preliminary studies on the cultural and natural heritage of the region, and analyse economic and social needs.
- 2 MONTH 3-5**
Create a working group between different stakeholders to conserve, and promote the designated area.
- 3 MONTH 4-8**
Launch a local ambassador program to engage residents in promoting and preserving cultural heritage.
Organize training sessions for ambassadors, and develop digital routes and heritage enhancement activities.
- 4 MONTH 9**
Implement activities led by the ambassadors.



Testimonials

“Côa Ambassadors are the way to learn about and take a region’s heritage further. They inspire people, they are storytellers and the best way to pass on knowledge.”

ALDINA REGALO, CÔA PARK FOUNDATION



New fellow travellers

WHO JOINED AND FORMED THE NETWORK

- Regional governments
- Municipalities
- Citizens organisations



Souvenirs

BEST ACHIEVEMENTS RELATIVE TO THE PROJECT’S IMPACTS



CULTURAL IMPACTS

- As inhabitants become custodians of local heritage, they strengthen cultural identity and pass on knowledge and traditions to younger generations.
- The initiative helps to make people more aware of and to appreciate local cultural and natural heritage, encouraging them to conserve and protect it.



POLICY IMPACTS

- Highlighting the importance of coordinated and sustainable planning for tourism, the initiative can influence heritage and tourism management policies at regional and national levels.



SOCIAL IMPACTS

- By involving people of different ages and backgrounds, the initiative can strengthen ties within the community, promoting greater collaboration and a sense of belonging.
- For the elderly, being ambassadors can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness by providing an active role in the community. For young people, it can offer a constructive activity during school holidays.
- The training programmes provide learning opportunities for all ages, enhancing participants’ communication, historical, and cultural skills.



Contact us if you want to strengthen the cultural identity of your community through cultural tourism.

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