

## **Making communities a central part of tourism's future: the Maceira – Embaixadores D'Aldeia project**

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**Keywords** | Community-based tourism, Sustainable development, Cultural heritage, Maceira, Low-density territories

**Objectives** | This project defined as main objectives, the following: (1) promote sustainable development by prioritizing the preservation of the local environment and cultural heritage; (2) preserve its cultural, heritage and tourist identity and simultaneously developing solid strategies to promote tourism; (3) offer an accessible and inclusive village community tourism concept, linked to the initiatives and experiences of the resident community; (4) and integrate the tourist offer with the heritage reality of the village in particular and the region in general, by offering experiences based on the observation of the built historical heritage, interaction with cultural heritage and production.

**Methodology** | This project was implemented from September 10, 2020 to June 30, 2023 in Maceira, in the municipality of Fornos de Algodres. Based on this case study, general indicators were defined, specifically with regard to the level of participation, characterization of participants, satisfaction rate, occupancy of tourist accommodation establishments and the number of entities associated with the project. Specific indicators were also defined to each activity in order to define metrics that would make it possible to quantify and gauge the level of implementation of the project and its real impacts. The methodology adopted was quantitative and qualitative, using two types of data collection sources: primary, by the application of questionnaires in person and interviews to the participants and stakeholders, and secondary, including literature review and the analysis of pre-existing data in official documents and sources.

**Main Results and Contributions** | A total of 27 households were directly involved, with a total of 44 individuals, spread across various age groups (children, young people, adults and seniors), and in this sense, intergenerationality was promoted within the scope of the activities, bringing multiple benefits among the beneficiaries. As planned, all the work carried out had an indirect impact on other individuals, namely the rest of the population living in Maceira and neighboring towns, the

visitors who were involved in various activities, and the various institutional partners. The implementation rate of the proposed activities was over 95%. This project had a total of 27 entities providing services to the project, in addition to 5 entities as social investors, thus broadening the scope of the impact. According to the analysis of the results from the collection methods applied in the various activities, the level of satisfaction of the participants and the community was very high, a factor that reinforces the commitment made. This project fostered the transmission of local culture and heritage, enhancing and preserving it, while also promoting local development, especially in the tourism sector. The aim was to focus on genuine tourism and experiences, where visitors are invited to take part in the daily lives of the ambassadors/residents.

**Limitations** | The main limitation occurred during the project's duration period was the COVID-19 pandemic. To overcome this threat, those responsible for implementing the project were resilient and showed a high level of adaptability, restructuring the initial planning and creating very creative solutions that added value to the project. The fact that the project had a very limited territorial scope was also a limitation.

**Conclusions** | UNWTO is supporting communities as they prepare to welcome visitors back and realize the potential of tourism to kickstart recovery and drive sustainable and inclusive growth. This project has created a base of work and outreach that must be leveraged in the future, because this, like any project, must not stop or stagnate. The experience and knowledge of the Ambassadors, as well as that of the project promoter and its partners, should be used to continue the work. The active participation of the village's population, i.e. the Ambassadors, the main figures in this project. The village's most valuable asset is undoubtedly its people, who have the knowledge and wisdom, the experience and the experiences that are important to share with those who visit Maceira. This participation has given the Ambassadors a great sense of belonging. It was quite clear that the local community was particularly motivated to take part in the various activities, which led to a clear increase in their self-esteem. The presence of project content on different digital communication channels has made the project more visible and known, contributing to its success, and the participants in these actions have come to value their community and their contribution to the project even more.

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