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MIMIV

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Behavioral changes of outdoor and landscape
recreational consumption in Global Green Deal
context**

Abstract book



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Trail Running in Protected Areas. Comparative analysis of two national parks in Portugal

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Abstract

Introduction and objectives

Trail Running, according to the International Trail Running Association ITRA (<https://itra.run/>), is a pedestrian race practiced in a natural environment on paths and/or trails, with a minimum of paved surface (< 20%). It should also, ideally, be practiced in self-sufficiency or semi-self-sufficiency and respect environmental ethics. This sport emerged in the last decade as one of the most popular outdoor sports, leading to what has been called the Trail Running boom (Urbaneja and Farias, 2015).

Athletes value being closer to the natural environment as one of their main motivations for practicing this sport (Julião et al, 2018). Thus, the search for natural spaces means that many Trail Running events take place in territories of protected and classified areas, which raises new challenges in terms of their recreational use. The impacts on the most sensitive areas of these territories cannot be considered irrelevant, not so much because of the activity itself, but because of the number of participants and their concentration in a short period (Ng et al, 2017; Pickering et al, 2010).

Portugal was not immune to the phenomenon of growth in the practice of Trail Running. This paper presents the status of Trail Running in Portugal and an analysis of the practice of this activity in two protected and classified areas, the Natural Parks of Serra da Estrela (PNSE) and Sintra-Cascais (PNSC).

The PNSC is located in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, covering 14,583 hectares spread over the municipalities of Sintra and Cascais. Its delimitation as a Protected Area aimed to minimize human activity in one of the most significant natural areas of the metropolitan region. The PNSE is located in the Center region, covering 89,000 hectares. It is part of the western end of the Cordillera Central of the Iberian Peninsula and was delimited as a Protected Area due to the need to preserve unique natural values in the national territory.

Methodology

Recording and georeferencing trail running events and making a comparative analysis between the PNSE and PNSC, through questionnaires applied to more than 100 participants in events located within the perimeters of these Natural Parks, it is possible to understand that each Protected Area relates differently to Trail Running, considering its geographical location and insertion in the urban network.

Results

Considering the organization of Trail Running events, in 2018, 11 took place in the PNSC and its surrounding area, totaling 17 races. In terms of participants, around 4,600 athletes participated, only between February and October, which represents the interval between the events. Regarding PNSE there were 8 events (7 took place between May and October), totaling 18 races and 2,334 participants.

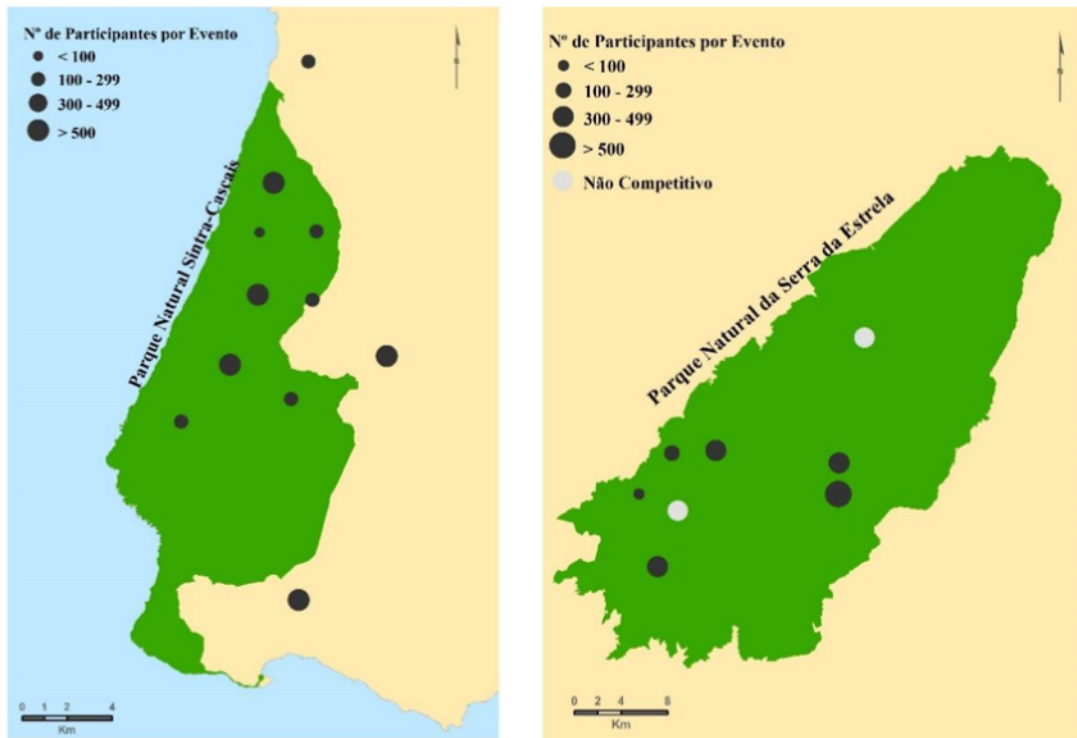


Figure 1 – Study areas and race locations with the number of participants.

Considering the answers to the questionnaires, the regional importance of the PNSC was verified where, despite the significant number of events carried out in 2018, the demand for training proved to be the main focus on a usual basis (52%). About 25% of them stated that they had visited the PNSC more than 5 times in the last 3 years. Among the main reasons for visiting PNSC, respondents most frequently mentioned participating in training, visiting Palaces, and engaging in active tourism. The PNSC assumes a more relevant role in terms of training, even though it is the most sought-after place for organizing events at the AML.

In the case of the PNSE, the scenario proved to be quite different, assuming national importance in the context of Trail Running, not only for participation in events but also for training. Events in PNSE occur sporadically and require a purposeful movement on the part of athletes, who identify this Natural Park as an area of excellence for sports, but also for the enjoyment of the singularities of its landscape. In terms of visits, these are less frequent, but also almost mandatory for athletes. About 37% of respondents said they had visited the Park between 1 and 2 times in the last 3 years and only 18% more than 5 times. Among the main reasons for visiting this Protected Area, respondents more frequently mentioned participation

in trail running events, active tourism, and snow tourism, but also participation in training, albeit with less weight compared to the PNSC (less 12%). Despite a smaller number of organized events, athletes take special pleasure in participating in races in this area, highlighting the landscapes and the uniqueness of the trails, when considering the national competitions.

Discussion & Conclusions

The results presented in the paper highlight the high demand that has been observed in terms of events and participants, which has the double effect of increasing pressure on potentially sensitive areas, but at the same time creating an opportunity to capture interest in rural areas, enhancing their values and resources.

The close relationship between the practice of trail running and the territories that integrate or are close to protected natural spaces must be analyzed carefully, considering the motivations of the event organizers, the expectations of the participants, and the carrying capacity of the natural environments. Mutual gains must be used rationally and sustainably, keeping the focus on preserving areas with characteristics of vulnerability. Garcia, J.; Alandi, C. (2016) give an excellent example of how trail running activities in natural spaces can be designed and monitored, ensuring that there is an effective positive balance between the benefits retained in the region and the impacts on natural systems.

There was a difference in the demand profile between the PNSC and the PNSE that needs to be better analyzed, namely concerning the percentage of tracks overlapping the different zoning areas defined in the respective management plans. Further work should focus on management issues and conflicts between trail running activities and protected areas.

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