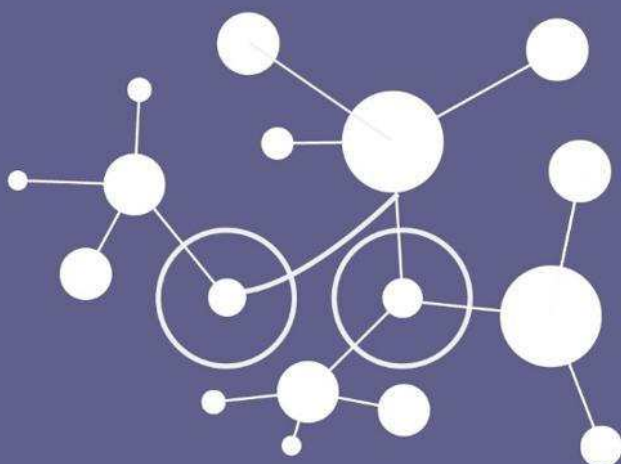




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PROMOTING AVEIRO REGION AS A CYCLING TOURISM DESTINATION: THE DEFINITION OF CYCLE ROUTES USING GIS

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Bicycles offer an important mode of transportation with a long tradition in the Aveiro region. Over the last years, it has caught the attention of the region's stakeholders, who have developed several projects about cycling. Official statistics also reveal its importance, being included or the focus of several strategies for the future development of this region, promoting cycling practice among locals and visitors. However, all concluded or ongoing projects are at the local level, lacking tourism related initiatives at the intraregional level.

Taking into consideration the social and physical characteristics of the Aveiro region, the emphasis on cycling tourism is easily understood. It constitutes an advantage and a distinctive market factor, leading the territory to attract new segments or increase the existing ones. The combination between the sport activity/cycling and tourism allows visitors to discover the points of interest in a sustainable way. The aforementioned reasons, the importance of tourism to the Aveiro region, with Ria de Aveiro as the main point of interest, and the tradition of cycling led to the development of this work, which is part of a curricular internship in the Comunidade Intermunicipal da Região de Aveiro (CIRA). It aims to define cycling tourism routes in the Aveiro region, using geographic information systems (GIS). GIS play an important role to find the best route to travel through points of interest, combining elements that influence a cycling experience. The main goals are (i) to promote the Aveiro region as a tourism destination; (ii) to show points of interest to visitors; (iii) to contribute to tourism sustainability; (iv) to stimulate the cycling activity; (v) to include all municipalities that comprise the region; (vi) to enhance the tourism supply with a new service; and (vii) to define routes for all types of cycling tourists.

In a first stage, programs and strategies about tourism in the Aveiro region and cycling tourism were considered, at national, regional, inter-municipal and local levels, so that routes could be developed accordingly. Also the webpages of the regional tourism board, CIRA and all municipalities were analyzed in order to identify what products are more relevant and which ones should be included in the routes. During this process, individual meetings with each municipality were arranged to determine, in consensus with their interlocutors, which points of interest should be incorporated in the routes, based on their importance, location and the route target profile. The routes were divided in three categories: short-haul, medium-haul and long-haul. This distinction was made in order to reach a wide range of tourism segments, through different lengths and changing the importance of each criterion according to the route category. The elements taken into account were length, slope, speed limits, road capacity, landscape and distance from industrial areas. All routes start and finish in the same place (circular) or in train stations to simplify visitors' mobility and were defined using the Network Analyst tool of the ArcGIS software. The last step was to contact again all municipalities to validate the routes. At the same time, Ciclaveiro, a group of citizens who want to promote the cycling activity in Aveiro, collaborated in the project by testing the biggest routes, allowing correcting and improving them if needed.

The results of this project are 10 short-haul routes, 6 medium-haul routes and 4 long-haul routes, which allow different market segments to visit points of interest and discover the Aveiro region in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way. The routes are available in the CIRA tourism webpage, where visitors can find a route map, a description of the route and of the highlighted

points of interest, and also information about what they can visit more during their journey. To help them during the visit, a kmz file and a route description direction will be also available.

In this paper, it will be discussed the main findings whilst methodological limitations are acknowledged. Also, it will be presented recommendations for future research concerning implementation of cycling routes.