

The Relevance of the Image of Inland Tourist Destination

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Abstract: In recent times, there is a huge concern to develop the images of the places to increase their demand and highlight it before the other. Bearing in mind the geographical location and characteristics of the destination, the village of Mértola has been marking a distinct position in the structure of tourism at the national level. Therefore, tourism is the main activator of the economic development of the region, it is important to study the image of the village of Mértola for the foreign market. This dimension is associated with an innovative concept in the area of marketing and tourism research, place marketing, which should be seen as a tool that plays a decisive role in the economic, social, political and sustainable progress of countries, regions or places. In consideration of the above, and bearing in mind the acuity of the place, the starting question of this study concerns "The importance of the image of the village of Mértola for visitors and tourists, as cooperation for its development?"

The aim of this study is to analyze the relevance of marketing in the study of the identity of places, highlighting as a study hypothesis the positive and favorable evaluation regarding the importance of the image of the village of Mértola for the foreign market. To this end, based on the conceptual model, a study was carried out to analyze the issue from the point of view of tourists and visitors to the locality. In the empirical study, 139 individuals were interviewed using a convenience sample.

The study investigates the importance of marketing places in the village of Mértola to the foreign market. It is examined that the perceived image of the village of Mértola by tourists and visitors, has a very positive interpretation. In the future, the research must be continuous to study another perspective, that of business visitors, analyzing the main advantages and disadvantages of it vis-end to other destinations; and another on the impact of the image of the village of Mértola from the point of view of specific tourist markets, which seek the place with specific interests (activities).

The study provides an aid to the different stakeholders of the locality, in order to meet their needs and develop the place, making the same more attractive, facilitating the development of the studied concepts and crossing them with other realities.

KEYWORDS: Marketing; Places Marketing; Image; Tourists; Mértola.

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I. Introduction

The end of the 20th century pointed out the beginning of a new era. The growing internationalization of economies has opened doors to an increasingly competitive and globalized global market. What was once a distant place is a short time away today. This fact makes the increase in tourism exponential and is considered one of the main impellers of the country's socio-economic growth. On the other hand, vigorous competition has led many places looking for different ways to stand out and highlight, the brand image becomes elementary for the place, with a concern to work the same, through strategic territorial marketing plans, seeking the economic progress of the places, that is, the development of the marketing of places. (Sousa & Vasconcelos, 2018).

Different are the academic sciences that are directly or indirectly linked to the study of the image of places, increasingly avocating prominence in the media, where one can see an authentic dispute between places to attract investments, businesses, tourists and residents.

It is noted that there are many countries, regions, and cities in the world that compete with each other to attract and retain investments, with the aim of standing out in an increasingly competitive market.

The marketing of places and territorial *branding* contribute in a conflicting way to the economic and intellectual growth of places, countries, regions, communities or cities, placing them in the most distinguished cultural and tourist itineraries in the world (Sousa & Vasconcelos, 2018).

In recent years, the village of Mértola has been taking an increasing position in the configuration of tourism in national territory. Since tourism is the main driver of economic development in the region, it is therefore important to study the impact that the 'Mértola Brand' has on the foreign market.

Taking as a starting question "The importance of the image of the village of Mértola for tourists, as a contribution to its development?", we intend to evaluate with this study the impact of the image of the village from the point of view of tourists and visitors.

This type of research emerges as an asset for the sustainable evolution of places in the medium/long term, cooperating significantly in the search for viable paths to the progress of the region. The "Mértola Brand" and the projection of its image will thus be able to meet the needs of its target audiences, position itself and stand out in the market in a very effective and positive way.

It can also contribute, in order to ensure a correct and effective promotion and valorization of the place, maximizing its potential and developing its capacities, in order to make available to the different target audiences (residents, tourists, companies and foreign markets) a positive and favorable image, promoting a strategic development for the future.

II. Literature Review

2.1. Marketing of Territories and Places

The relationship of goods, people and services has become possible successively due to more accessible information, communication and transport technology, contributing to a large extent to a current world without borders (Kotler, Kartajaya&Setiwan, 2010).

Just as marketing relates to primary exchange relationships, competition between localities is not an innovation. Localities exist and develop through their capacity to promote and create their own dynamics by acting in a delineated way to remain active, thus not being territorial marketing a recent activity (Gaio, 2011).

The concept of territorial marketing was introduced by Kotler, Haider and Rein in 1993, when the authors presented a new approach, where a comparison is made between cities and products.

Figueira (2014) states that man has always had the need to make known and/or disseminate his territory with the focus of moving and attracting people, promoting the images of the territory and associating them with promises of quality of life, this was the way used by many territories in their colonization process and their development.

The authors Kotler, Haider and Rein (2006) state that the globalization of the world economy and the rapid pace of technological change are two forces that force localities to learn, compete and think more like companies, creating products, services, markets and customers, in order to take advantage of opportunities and maintain the vitality and preference of the place with good mood.

The high supply available leads existing brands in the market to invest in marketing techniques, in order to differentiate themselves from the competition. This is also observed in localities such as cities, regions or countries to differ from the rest when the tourist decides their next holiday destination. Another goal of using marketing techniques is attracting potential investors, talents, conferences, residents or sporting events. It is understood that territorial marketing is an indispensable tool in that it contributes to the economic and local development of the regions (Gomes, 2014).

Territorial marketing emerges as an instrument of promotion that persists from the attention of the various dimensions of the localities, that is, it is a process of territorial promotion, which wants the development and local affirmation, through the mobilization of resources and competitive advantages of the region, in order to enhance its socio-economic development.

Territorial marketing has evolved over time, in a first phase it is merely operational, where territories are promoted through advertisements; in a second phase, a more strategic phase where it is now included, strategies beyond advertising to increase the attractiveness of the territory.

The competitiveness of the markets leads to a management of the territories as if they were products, always satisfying the desires of individuals and organizations, which will provide a quick accommodation to external factors as well as a differentiation from other places (Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015).

On the other hand, the need to satisfy the interests of key stakeholders while developing attractiveness to external reference audiences provides that all territories must adopt marketing agreements, techniques and tools in order to seek to analyze the needs of audiences, formulate policies to meet them and develop instruments that will provide competitive advantages (Sun, Ryan & Pan, 2015).

Territorial marketing should always seek to be ready to respond to market zeal, as well as to seek opportunities that favor communities and regions (Kavaratzis& Ashworth, 2008).

After the various researches we can realize that territorial marketing has a significant and growing importance, which gives localities the role of products/services competing with each other in the international sphere, in order to entice the target audience where the product "localities or cities" are the target of the development and promotion process.

There are different primacy, with regard to the sustainable progress of a place, which makes brand managers in the territories observe them as a stimulus to exports, attracting tourists and investment. As in

companies, countries and cities must develop their brand and bet on their differentiating and competitive potential (Fetscherin, 2010; Sousa, Casais& Pina, 2017).

The concept is segmented, with specific audiences and concern about the branding of places (image that the place transmits), crossing the limits of advertising (Kavaratzis& Ashworth, 2008). It is in this context that the concept of innovative cities emerges, as an effect of urban management models allied to socio-economic changes. Cities feel the need to affirm their identity, responding positively to standards such as quality of life, environmental responsibility, technological development, information and communication (García, 2010). The management models of traditional cities have given rise to a new current combined with urban expansion. Currently, the innovative city management model now aims to attract visitors and investors.

In this way, territories start to be seen as companies and should be conducted following marketing directives, seeking to respond to the needs of their stakeholders, developing a new era of support for the sustainable development of the territories.

2.2. The brand image

Brands are everywhere, which makes them an omnipresent phenomenon in today's societies and for this reason they are used as strategic elements. More than a physical product or a service, currently brands cover people, places, countries, artists, films, websites, radio stations, among others (Mendes, 2014). The application of the brand concept to countries and cities has become relevant, and markets and external policies compete internationally. Countries and cities compete with each other and battle to discover sources of competitive advantage in order to attract tourists, talents, professionals, companies and markets for exports (Kotler & Gertner, 2004).

According to the authors Aragonez and Alves (2012) brands are more than names and symbols, they are also a crucial element in the relations with consumers, which represent their perceptions and feelings for the product or service and their performance, that is, the meaning of the product / service for the consumer.

On the other hand, it is elementary to perceive the concept of territorial mark. For Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) the territorial mark is the promise of a memorable journey experience solely associated with that place; as it still solidifies and strengthens memories of happy and pleasant memories in the on-site experience. The promise in the case of moving to a place is a pleasant experience, which was previously guaranteed by different types of communication. After the realization of the trip, consumption of the product gives the creation of memories of the trip. Thus, we can observe that there are three phases in the concept of territorial mark, identification/differentiation, experience and recall (Gomes, 2014).

To build a brand around a locality is necessary a strategy allied to components such as images, perceptions, slogans and stereotypes. In the case of the brand of cities/villages, its management focuses on the perceptions and images that the target audience has of it, placing them at the center of a sequence of activities whose purpose is to shape the place of operation and its future (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2005).

The image of a place can be defined as the set of "beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of a place" (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993: 141), so it is the effect of the various information that the mind absorbs relative to the place and then summarizes in a simplified way these associations. Associations originate from different sources, specifically from the elements of communication or in the opinion of family, friends and third parties (Echtner& Ritchie, 2003).

In the evolution of a region's marketing strategy, it is essential to evaluate the brand image of the region, compared to that of competitors, since the goal is the attraction of tourists and companies, and there should be specific branding strategies for the different target audiences (Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015).

The image is shown to be strong in the influence of consumer choice, so it should be seen from the perspective of the target market, and the attributes demonstrated will be different for each segment, because the different market segments have distinct perceptions of the destination (Hall & Boyd, 2005). On the other hand, there are numerous reasons that have led places (region, country, city, village, etc.) to communicate their brands through branding activity, and these activities are increasingly the target of attention by companies as a marketing tool and strategy (Cadwell& Freire, 2004).

In this sense, in the design of a territorial marketing strategy one should have a notion of the destination image of tourists, bearing in mind that this image is based on the benefits expected by them, psychological characteristics and meanings felt and withdrawn, which makes it influence the positioning of the destination (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015).

Multiple places find in branding a way to create a new and restored image of them, and thus attract more tourists, talents and investments. On the other hand, it is important to understand that there are places (regions/cities) that are in need of branding strategies, otherwise they would end up in decline or even isolated. In fact, these branding strategies are not yet well developed by all localities, because we still find several cities

and localities little or nothing developed, some of them with viable resources to enhance them, but which are portrayed by negative aspects such as poverty, war or terrorism.

According to Fetscherin (2010), territorial branding can contribute positively to the sustainable development of places, stimulating exports, attracting tourism, investment and immigration. In the strategic management of a place, it is also important to develop intangible aspects such as: a) values; b) sociological aspects of the city; c) knowledge and information; d) image of the city.

The policy of a territorial brand must be worked on in all aspects associated with good organization and management, position in the face of competition and, of course, the image of the brand with the consumer or visitor (Sousa, Estevão, Fernandes, Alves, & Martins, 2018).

We can conclude that the image of a destination is part of a very dynamic reality, it is influenced by time, market dynamics, social trends and unforeseen events (Hall & Boyd, 2005).

2.3. The Target Audience of seats

The places compete with each other to attract more tourists, more business and more investments, so marketing has become one of the most important economic activities and generating local wealth. At the same time, places must find ways to distinguish and position themselves for their target markets, making segmentation their main task.

Kotler et al. (1999) refers to four distinct target audiences, **visitors and tourists; residents and workers; business and industries; export markets.**

Visitors and tourists are a target formed by two distinct groups, business visitors and visitors to the place. Due to the presence of these two audiences, it is essential that the actors of the place marketing find a specific answer for each one. Business visitors go to the place at work (participation meetings or conventions, evaluation of the place, or to market something). Visitors to the place include tourists and those who want to visit family or friends.

The second target is **residents and workers**. To entice this target, places need to develop the basic infrastructures and marketing factors that fix residents. An attractive place for those who reside there becomes pleasant for potential residents and other audiences.

The third focuses on **business and industry**, this is related to job creation for residents and workers and generating revenue. Currently, places are looking more for the service sector and expanding and maintaining existing businesses. The places need to understand what is pertinent and resolute in the process of choosing the location of a company to preserve and strengthen the economic base of the site (Kotler et al., 1999).

Finally, the fourth target market, the export **market, concerns** the region's capacity or place to produce goods and services that other places, persons or companies are willing to buy. Any locality should encourage local companies to produce and disseminate their products and brands to the national and international market, seeking to create distinctive and competitive advantages (Kotler et al., 1999).

It is important to capture investment and provide conditions to make the place pleasant and attractive, in order to improve the quality of life of the different targets and increase the implementation of new business and industry.

III. Contextualization: The case of the Municipality of Mértola

Mértola is the headquarters of the sixth most extensive municipality in Portugal. With an area of 1 292.87 km, this village is another of the many regions of interior, which fights against the imminent danger of desertification and aging population, its 7 274 inhabitants are subdivided by the seven parishes of the municipality.

Bathed by the great river of the south, the Guadiana River, and its tributary streams (Oeiras, Vascão and Chança), Mértola borders the municipality of Beja and Serpa to the north, to the east with Spain, to the south with Alcoutim and to the west with Almodôvar and Castro Verde.

The region has a predominantly Mediterranean climate with hot and dry summers and mild and unrainy winters.

"The history of the Region of Mértola can be told today through abundant evidence of early settlements, the first traces date back to the Neolithic, five thousand years ago." (CMM, 2020). This village by the planted river was sought from an early age by several peoples, throughout its history, for its privileged geographical location for trade routes. This importance would decline over time.

Already at the end of the 20th century the discovery and exploitation of the ore lode in São Domingos gave new impetus to this territory, but with the decline of mining, the region is witnessing a massive population exodus, and between 1961 and 1971 loses more than 50% of its population to never recover to this day. (CMM,2020).

Mértola is *today* 'Vila Museu' and 'National Hunting Capital', and a reference in terms of tourism and heritage, sought after by thousands of visitors annually, and is a territory full of natural and landscape wealth.

At the same time, the region is constantly fighting against the loss and aging of the population, and strategies are sought that promote the development and sustainability of the territory.

The Municipality of Mértola is the main driver of promoting the development of the region, but not the only one. I work hard other entities that aim at the same purpose, such as the Archaeological Field of Mértola, the Natural Park Vale do Guadiana, the Association for the Defense of the Heritage of Mértola, other Cultural Associations, Recreational, Sports, Social Solidarity, Schools, Producers and Local Entrepreneurs and the entire community in general. Together, they work and cooperate, in order to bring to this territory, more economic, social and environmental development, greater well-being, happiness and quality of life.

The development of the village in socio-economic terms has been quite notorious in recent years. Mértola supports families, implements local trade development strategies and supports entrepreneurs, encourages scientific research, among many others. The village also has sports/leisure infrastructures (football field, gym, indoor and discovery pools, nautical club, parks and green spaces), cultural (cine theater, amphitheater and briefly the new multipurpose pavilion), social and educational (nurseries, schools, homes, day centers, Senior University), scientific/environmental (Natural Park Vale do Guadiana and briefly the Mértola Biological Station), heritage/history (Museum of Mértola with 12 nuclei, Archaeological Field of Mértola, Association of Heritage Defense).

In terms of tourist attractions we can, among many, highlight the Guadiana River and its valences (canoeing, boating), nature (hiking, birdwatching, mountain biking), the river beach and mining complex of the São Domingos Mine, the cascade Jump of the Wolf, the museological estate, the natural beauty and biodiversity of the village and the municipality.

IV. Model Proposal

This study aims to deepen, analyze and describe the relevance of marketing tools in the study of the identity of places, through the evaluation of the impact of the image of the village of Mértola, from the perspective of visitors and tourists, that is to understand the role of the image of the locality in the choice of targets.

The objectives outlined are related to variables that characterize, describe and allow the site to be evaluated, such as quality of life; length of stay on site; transmitted image; attractions; factors involved in the site, such as: safety, transport, access, environmental quality, tourism and hospitality and catering.

The main objective of the study is to analyze the impact that the image of the village of Mértola has on visitors and tourists.

It is almost impossible to talk about observation or experimentation without certain hypotheses being proven. For the authors Quivy and Campenhoudt (2005), the hypotheses are born as a provisional answer to the question of departure from the investigation. In order to understand the value of this answer, it is necessary to prove them through facts, concluding whether the hypotheses are confirmed or infirm, that is, by carrying out an empirical verification.

As mentioned, the field of application of the research is the municipality of Mértola, so, in the hypotheses presented, are considered visitors and tourists of the same.

It is important to examine the consequence that certain variables have on the evaluation of the image of the municipality of Mértola for its visitors and tourists.

Following the main objective, the following research hypotheses have been formulated:

H1- The image mértola brand is related to the geographical characterization of the region, the Alentejo, its typical characteristics and quality of life.

H2- The village of Mértola features a set of attractions that bring you added value to visit it.

H3- Is the village well developed, betting on tourism, innovating, strengthening and attracting the place.

V. Research Methodology

As a way to collect the necessary information to study, a questionnaire was elaborated that independently evaluates the different characteristics of the relationship between the two parties, through scales of measurement. In order to collect the data necessary for the evaluation of the model and the hypotheses of the research, the questionnaire contains questions that are configured as indicators of latent variables and questions for identifying the socio demographic profile of the interviewees. The questionnaire was constructed based on the information collected through the literature review, by Kotler & Keller (2006), and was also considered an adaptation to the local reality.

Taking into account the starting question of this investigation, the target population will be all visitors and tourists from the municipality of Mértola, in Portugal and are able to answer the questions posed. After contact with the public tourism entity of the locality, we had information that there was contact of 382 visitors / tourists from the municipality of Mértola over the age of 18 years. Through the use of the sample calculation

(Santos, 2013) the sample size was obtained, where we concluded that the sample to be studied is 192 individuals. After the population to be inquired, we selected the representative sample of the village of Mértola. The questionnaires were requested from the 192 individuals, conducted through Google forms and e-mail, and 139 responses were obtained, which corresponds to a response rate of 72.4%.

The low response rate verified did not allow extrapolating the results obtained, since the 139 responses observed do not constitute a representative sample of the study population.

In order to achieve the objective planned in this research, an empirical study was carried out, the methodological aspects of which were summarized in the factsheet as set out in Table 1. This file presents the technical aspects of the collection of information.

Table 1 - Research fact sheet

Information collection process	Structured and self-administered questionnaire
Type of questions	Single response and control or filter closed
Research universe	Visitors and tourists from the municipality of Mértola, over the age of 18
Geographical scope	Mértola, Portugal
Form of contact	Google forms platform and disseminated by email and social networks
Response index	72.4% (139 responses)
Confidence level	95%
Sample error	5%
Information processing	Computer processing through SPSS Version 25.

Source: Own elaboration.

VI. Data analysis

The sample consists of 139 individuals mostly of Portuguese nationality (133 responses), characterizing the sample as internal tourism. Regarding the gender variable, the sample consists of 62 males and 77 females, aged between 18 and 65 years or older, most of them individuals with higher qualification (102 answers) and 12 th year of schooling (31 answers). The largest share of respondents is employed, followed by self-employed workers who have 29 responses and the unemployed, pensioners and students, representing 14 respondents, and it is important to mention that the majority of respondents have been working at the company for more than 3 years (101 responses) and receive a level of remuneration between €1000 - €3000.

With regard to the image and satisfaction that tourists and visitors to the village of Mértola refer to, conclusions and pleasant results were reached. As mentioned in the literature review, marketing can be understood as the delivery of customer satisfaction and this seems to be the reason for qualifying the relationship between visitors and tourists of the village.

As for the image that this target audience has of the village, it was found that the answers varied between very favorable (57 responses) and favorable (66 responses), which explained the interest and demand of it. Allied to the good image that tourists and visitors, consider it beautiful, interesting, hospitable and harmonious.

Regarding the attractions of the village of Mértola, the respondents emphasize parameters such as beauty; natural characteristics; history; heritage; security; tranquility; sports and leisure; they value the reality of the territory.

A descriptive analysis and cross-analysis of the variables were performed.

VII. Goal check

The sample allows us to realize that the village of Mértola is visited for family gatherings, friends' meetings, vacations and at work.

Moving on to the evaluation of the objective, it was found that the village of Mértola has a favorable image to very favorable (123 responses), is characterized as an enchanted, affectionate, empathic and hospitable place, all these feelings associated with the village expression, the good image of the region for tourists and visitors, noting the degree of satisfaction of them with the locality.

We can mention that the marketing applied by the municipality is being satisfactory from the point of view of tourists, obtaining satisfaction and reaching their expectations. As stated by the authors Insch&Florek (2008), the satisfaction of a place is based on the relationship between expectations and the perception of its performance.

The promotion of Mértola's image allows tourists to realize the competitive advantages of the village, as Monti (2004) says. With the good image attributed by the specific target audience, it can be a successful strategy for greater demand for the foreign market.

In this way, the conclusions assume greater consistency and coherence, completing and boosting their content.

VIII. Statistical analysis and verification of hypotheses

The statistical analysis included the descriptive analysis of sociodemographic, clinical and psychosocial variables. The questionnaire was coded, and then all of them were transformed into scores from 0 to 100. The data was entered in an electronic database using the SPSS software (v. 25.0).

It is important to highlight that the model proposed here originates from models thoroughly tested with the five-point Likert scale.

After the analysis for all variables, the different hypotheses proposed in the study are tested, which constitute the model to be analyzed.

H1 - The image mértola brand is related to the geographical characterization of the region, the Alentejo, its typical characteristics and quality of life.

When analyzing the opinion of the respondents about the brand image of the locality, it is observed that of the 123 people who consider the image of Mértola as favorable and very favorable characterize the village as beautiful, interesting, hospitable and harmonious, specific characteristics of regions located in the interior of Portugal, localities of history, bathed in river, typical of quiet places, where quality of life is a privilege.

Hypothesis confirmed.

H2- The village of Mértola presents a set of attractions that bring you added value to visit you.

This hypothesis is related to the attractions of the place. When consulting respondents it is known what beauty and natural characteristics; history and heritage; security and tranquility; sports and leisure are considered the main factors that most attract tourists and visitors (totaling 81 responses).

These factors always appear grouped by the respondents, which shows that the locality does not present one, but rather a set of added value that leads individuals to visit it.

Hypothesis confirmed.

H3- Is the village well developed, betting on tourism, innovating, strengthening and attracting the place.

The focus on tourism, through an innovation strategy and entrepreneurial attitude are generally important for the development of regions, places. When auscultating the 139 respondents it is observed that 63 people, report that there is a favorable development to very favorable of the tourism of the village, however 49 people present a neutral opinion.

The future is considered pertinent to improve and bet on an innovative tourism capture strategy, in order to capture more tourists and highlight the image of the village in the foreign market.

Hypothesis confirmed.

IX. Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to analyze the techniques of place marketing in order to meet the desires and needs of the different targets of a place. We studied in particular the case of tourists and visitors to the village of Mértola. To carry out the study, the model developed in the theoretical review was adopted, trying to understand how these theories are solid and applicable to the different actors in the marketing of places in the village of Mértola.

The overall balance of the study demonstrates, through the results, that Mértola's image has a very positive connotation in the foreign market, with a favorable and very favorable image of the destination. Respondents reveal positive feelings of fate, refer to it as enchanted, affectionate, empathetic and hospitable. Criteria such as natural beauty, the natural characteristics of the region, history and heritage, safety, hospitality, sport and leisure have very favorable opinions.

It is perceived through the study that the tourism of the locality lacks some future attention and possible improvements, in order to increase the tourist demand of the same.

It is pertinent to praise the importance and contribution of this type of study for the development and growth of places, in this case, the village of Mértola.

The satisfaction and well-being of those who visit the locality passes an image of positivity and confidence to potential tourists.

It was found that it is necessary to create a place that seeks to meet the needs of different audiences, so it is necessary to identify and value the attributes that provide added value for them.

Place marketing, through its marketing tools, is a very valid and on-the-rise resource in the country. It should be used as an elementary tool for the economic, social, political, sustainable and intellectual development of countries, regions or cities so that these places can be marketed effectively. It is clear that discipline can be

very useful to local governments by creating value and impact on the brand image of the territories and highlighting it in the face of competition.

At the end of the conclusions of this study, some future lines of research are highlighted that may complement it. Among these lines of research can be highlighted the elaboration of a study of the perspective of business visitors, analyzing the main advantages of the same before other destinations; a study on the impact of the image of the village of Mértola from the point of view of specific tourist markets, which seek the place with specific interests (activities). Another study concerns the evaluation of the image and the level of satisfaction of potential investors for the locality.

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