

## Chapter 4

# “All Roads Lead to Fatima”: Religious Tourism at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary

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### ABSTRACT

*In the centennial of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima, this chapter analyzes the religious tourism at Cova da Iria: historical and anthropological contextualization of the religious phenomenon; the initial stages of the pilgrimage as spontaneous occurrences without organized touristic facilities; tourism development while the rural landscape was being transformed by the construction of buildings and structures to the religious cult and host facilities appropriating icons and symbols related to the apparitions; the consolidation of the cult with the papal devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, the seers beatification, and canonization and the centennial celebrations imposing a complex management of the sanctuary activities and spaces; as well as a challenging communication of its religious meanings. Conceived as a case study, this research is based on a qualitative methodology involving a bibliographic research towards a theoretical framework, as well as anthropological methods such as direct observation.*

### INTRODUCTION

It can be said that tourism has its roots in the practice of secular pilgrimages (Cohen, 1992; Digance, 2006; MacCannell, 1999; Smith, 1992; Turner & Turner, 2011; Webb, 2001). However, the phenomenon of contemporary religious tourism has new features. Novel forms of religious mobility have combined with other types of tourism, including the cultural. Meanwhile, religious tourism has grown even as religious practice has decreased as a result of the rising secularization of societies (Santos, 2003). Nolan and Nolan (1992) identified three types of religious tourism attractions: pilgrimage shrines devoted to religious practice and with little attraction of secular tourism; shrines which are simultaneously centres

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of devotion and tourist attractions, due to their historical, artistic or performative features; and places where religious festivals are the principal attraction. Fátima is an example “of very large shrine complexes in small communities that are visited primarily by pilgrims and religiously-oriented tourists” (Nolan & Nolan, 1992, p. 71), without attracting a significant number of secular tourists or travellers. Fátima is one of the world’s most important Marian sanctuaries. It is also located at the crossroad of some of the most relevant historical and cultural heritage sites in Portugal. Furthermore, it is the location of a famous religious festival on 13 May that attracts huge numbers of visitors of all types. Fátima is recognized as a global pilgrimage centre (Jackowski, Ptaszycka-Jackowska, & Soljan, 2002; Richards & Fernandes, 2003) that brings in believers and non-believers from across the globe. Fátima is one of many sacred touristic sites, “which exist for sacred practices or are otherwise sacred in their nature, and which develop touristic attractiveness because of their sacredness” (Brayley, 2010, p. 290).

Religious tourism has an important socio-economic impact on its destinations. In 1917 Cova da Iria was nothing more than uninhabited countryside on the outskirts of Fátima. With the arrival of the pilgrims, the area began to receive settlers (Santos, 2006, 2012). “The population growth stems mainly from the arrival of workers from the surrounding area, who hope to offer their services to the pilgrims.” (Rinschede, 1992) Over the last century, Fátima has become very well known as a prominent pilgrimage centre. Four phases of development have been identified according to the Butler model of the tourist destination life cycle (Butler, 1980, 2006): in the very beginning, while the apparitions were on going, growing numbers of pilgrims braved an unspoiled area with neither infrastructure nor amenities (*exploration*); next, new residents spontaneously moved in and built informal facilities around the site of the apparitions (*involvement*), and then local and central authorities, both ecclesiastic and civil, began to advertize and benefit from the region (*development*); nowadays, coincident with the centenary celebration, there is a marked intention to consolidate a new image of the sanctuary and to reorganize the entire complex so that it might better serve the needs of both pilgrims and tourists (*consolidation*). However, despite the fact that Fátima has developed as a major tourist destination, the town itself remains relatively small (Ambrósio, 2000).

Fátima has been regularly mentioned in studies about religious tourism and pilgrimage (Fernandes, McGettigan, Edwards, & ATLAS, 2003; Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Vukonić, 1996), as well as by researchers as Rinschede (1988, 1992). Aristides de Amorim Girão e Maria de Fátima Serafim Rodrigues studied the community from the perspective of urban geography, but they portrayed its development as arising from the religious phenomenon in the second half of the twentieth century. Maria da Graça Poças Santos, on the other hand, conducted more recent research on the religious tourism at Fátima (Santos, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012). This mixed method research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), combines a theoretical approach with an broad understanding of the main issues pertaining to tourism at Fátima. It is complemented by quantitative data provided by the municipality of Ourém (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2012) and the sanctuary (Santuário de Fátima, 2017a) about organized pilgrimages as well as direct observation and informants’ contributions about tourist motivation (Creswell, 2013).

The aim of this study is to analyse the emergence of Fátima as one of Europe’s major apparitional shrines and, consequently, as a centre for pilgrimage. It looks at the interaction between religion and tourism, and reflects on the challenges of understanding the local identity, which has been constructed simultaneously with the development of tourism, and its representation, or interpretation, aimed at those who come to visit.

## FATIMA AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE APPARITIONS

The name Fátima, means “the shining one” in Arabic. It was the name of Mohammed’s most beloved daughter, Lady Fátima az-Zahra (Ordoni, 2015), who was described as a post-Christian type of Mary (Sheen, 2010, p. 204). A Portuguese legend, harking back to the time of Muslim control of the region, recounts that the area came to be called Fátima when a young Muslim woman fell in love with a Christian boy, Gonçalo Hermigues. He kidnaped her, and she converted to Christianity, taking the name Oriana, which yielded the name of Ourém which is the name of the encompassing municipal area today.

Fátima is located in the central, coastal region of Portugal. It belongs to the diocese of Leiria and the district of Santarém. It is located on the Estremenho Limestone Massif, on the flanks of the Serra de Aire Mountain. It is an arid and rocky landscape with poor soils, where only oaks, buckthorn and olive trees are able to resist the extreme climate characterized by heavy precipitation and chilly winters and hot, dry summers. Around Fátima and under its administrative jurisdiction, there are a few, widely-scattered hamlets like Aljustrel, where the three young cousins (Figure 1) were born and lived, herding their families’ sheep. They were a brother and sister Jacinta (1910-1920) and Francisco Marto (1908-1919), and their cousin Lúcia Santos (1907-2005), the oldest, who wrote her memoir (Maria Lúcia & Kondor, 2007) about the events at Fátima that they claimed to have witnessed. The story of the apparitions is based on this book.

*Figure 1. The three little seers: Lúcia, Francisco and Jacinta*  
*Source: Joshua Benoliel (1873-1932), 1917, in public domain*



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The Marian cycle mentions the apparitions of the Virgin Mary (Maria Lúcia & Kondor, 2007, pp. 175–183) between 13 May and 13 October at Cova da Iria in a pasture that belonged to Lucia’s family. Preceded by flashes of lightning, the Virgin Mary appeared to the children on a small holm oak tree, all dressed in white and shining more brightly than the sun. According to Lucia, in the first apparition, the Virgin Mary asked the three little shepherds to pray the rosary and return on the same day and at the same time for six consecutive months. In June, they were accompanied by about fifty people. The Virgin revealed that Jacinta and Francisco were going to die soon, and that Lucia was destined to begin the devotion to her Immaculate Heart. In July, with thousands of people accompanying them, the Virgin foresaw the end of World War I and requested that they take devotional communion on the first Saturday of every month. On August 13th, an ever-increasing number of people witnessed unusual phenomena and a small white cloud hovering above the holm oak where the Virgin had previously appeared, while the three visionaries were held for questioning at Vila Nova de Ourém. Upon the 19 August apparition, only in the presence of the three young shepherds, the Virgin suggested building a chapel at Cova da Iria. In September, a crowd of between 15,000 and 20,000 people gathered, witnessing once more unusual atmospheric phenomena and a luminous globe that moved slowly in the sky from the east to the west at the beginning of the apparition and in the opposite direction at the end. Meanwhile, in response to Lucia’s request, Our Lady promised the three visionaries “a miracle so that all may believe” (Maria Lúcia & Kondor, 2007, p. 182). Finally, in October, masses of people, between fifty and seventy thousand, waited in hard rain for the miracle. According to Lucia, the visionaries saw the Lady of the Rosary, who asked them to build a chapel at that site and, opening her hands, made them look into the sun, projecting her light and holding the reflection as she were ascending to Heaven. It was then that Lucia asked the crowd to look at the sun. It stopped raining, a bright clearing opened in the clouds, revealing a light-coloured disk, which began to roll over their heads and slide in the sky like a fire wheel. As the edges turned scarlet, tongues of fire shot out and penetrated the earth with bright and colourful reflections. Suddenly, the sun began to tremble and seemed to rush, zigzagging in a manner that terrified the crowd, before settling into the zenith and resuming to normal. The atmosphere, meanwhile, had suddenly become quiet and bright. In the meantime, the shepherds had a vision of the Sacred Family blessing the world, followed by Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary, who first appeared as Our Lady of Sorrows, and then revealed herself as Our Lady of Carmel.

The Catholic Church hierarchy did not immediately recognize the apparitions. However, in response to the pressure of the large numbers of people who had begun to come to Fátima, D. José da Silva, Bishop of Leiria, nominated a commission to study the events. In October 1930, he wrote a pastoral letter “The Divine Providence”, confirming that the visions at Fátima were officially “worthy of belief”. This marked the recognition of the cult of Our Lady of Fátima by the Church, and Pope Pius XII then certified the Fátima apparitions in 1940. The Portuguese government failed to give any special attention to the events, until the dictatorial regime of Prime-Minister Oliveira Salazar, called the *Estado Novo*. The regime sought to cement an alliance with the national Catholic hierarchy led by Cardinal Cerejeira so that the church might legitimize and support state policies and propaganda. Despite some tensions, the relations between Church and State strengthened, culminating, in 1940, with the signature of the Concordat, “in which the establishment of recognized spheres of intervention was designed to improve effective collaboration” (Simpson, 2007, p. 331). In 1946, the sanctuary at Fátima obtained autonomy from the State and was allowed to nominate a rector to direct all administrative and judicial matters

*Figure 2. Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima 2017*

*Source: authors' photo, 2017*



(Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 217). Two years later, a protected area was defined by Decree-Law 37008, of 11 August 1948, which authorized the expropriation of land to enlarge and renovate the entire area. The goal was to build a sanctuary worthy of the name of Fátima (Figure 2) and that would accommodate large crowds of pilgrims. Other lands were expropriated to build a road network and parking lots.

The relationship of the Popes with Fátima has become of more importance since the pontifical trip of Paul VI, on 13th May 1967, followed by the trips of John Paul II in the pilgrimages of May 1982, 1991 and 2000, when he presided at the celebration of the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta, the trip of Benedict XVI, on May 2010, and of the trip of Francis, on 2017. On 13th May 1982, John Paul II, at the Vatican, but at the feet of the image of Our Lady of Fátima brought from the shrine of Fátima, donated to Our Lady the bullet which struck him during the attempt on his life, on the same day, the year before. The bullet was later, on 1989, encased in the crown of the first image, designed as Venerable Image, of Our Lady, where it remains. Later, and again in the presence of this image, on 8 October 2000, in the Vatican, John Paul II, in the presence of approximately 1500 bishops from throughout the world and thousands of pilgrims, consecrated the Third Millennium to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, culminating the relationship of the Popes with Fátima along the second half of the twentieth century, which had been continued by Benedict XVI and Francis I.

The Marian cult at Fátima, after being officialised by the Church, was also legitimized by the State, as, over time, the place of Cova da Iria became to be referred by the name of the civil parish where it is located.

## **POPULAR INVOLVEMENT AND CULT OFFICIALIZATION**

Cova da Iria was a remote and unspoiled hamlet near Fátima with few attractions other than grazing for sheep. The 1911 census had made no mention of Cova da Iria. In the 1940s, Father John de Marchi (2009) collected statements from witnesses with detailed descriptions of the community from the time of the apparitions and subsequent years. The influx of pilgrims has changed the community tremendously. Even the holm oak has been stripped of foliage and branches by visitors who wanted a relic from the tree that had been touched by Virgin Mary (Peirone, 1970, p. 21).

At the Virgin's request, a small chapel was initially built in 1919 by local people on the very spot where the apparitions allegedly had taken place in 1917 at Cova da Iria. On the pilgrimage of 13 May 1920, pilgrims succeeded in installing a sculpted image of the Lady of Fátima in the chapel. However, the first official mass was only celebrated on 13 October 1921. The chapel was destroyed in March 1922 and rebuilt the following year with the same architectural features. The image of the Virgin of the Rosary, lying on a high plinth, marks the original site of the Marian apparitions. Despite the lack of official Church approval, pilgrims continually came to Cova da Iria.

From early on, the Fátima pilgrimage was popular phenomenon without organization or integration. This influx of pilgrims brought with it a spontaneous and deregulated hospitality sector lacking in adequate facilities that regularly blossomed on the 13th of each month between May and October. In the mid-1920s, a disordered settlement began to gradually grow, and the farmlands gave way to a economy based on tourism and associated services (Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 213). The growth continued in this mould throughout the following decades and was marked by a set of changes in the urban space: the ceremonial space was fenced in and gates and arcades were built at the main entrance. A hospital-sanatorium was built near the sanctuary so the sick could attend Mass, while the first structure began to be built in the surroundings.

With the 1926 military coup, Catholicism gained greater expression and the Marian cult new freedom (Brito, 2003, vol. 2, p. 586). On 13 May 1928, the foundation stone was laid for the first church of Our Lady of the Rosary, designed by Dutch architect Gerard Samuel van Krieken. Following his death, it was followed through to completion by a Portuguese architect, João Antunes.

In the 1930s, many private homes began renting accommodation and there was a large increase in the number of shops selling religious articles, as well as the numerous requests for construction and closing of properties, in order to protect them from vehicles and foreigners (Girão, 1958, p. 38). The first hotel, “a wooden building, with eight rooms, a kitchen, two bathrooms and a dining room” (Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 218), was built in 1928 near the main road, and, by 1932, another lower cost facility provided sleeping quarters and a dining room (Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 218). A 1934 - 1935 guide book mentioned only a guesthouse (Brito, 2003, vol. 2, p. 586).

Three decades after the apparitions, Cova da Iria witnessed rapid urban growth in a concentric pattern around the sanctuary (Peirone, 1970, p. 20). This generated a new places names inspired in the apparitions or in religious themes and people. Most buildings imitated the traditional regional architecture, whit decorative elements such as rough rock, peaked tiled roofs, pinnacles, pilasters and balconies, and while other buildings were built under other influences, not always well understood, which contributed to an eclectic and disorderly building appearance.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS

By the middle of last century, a series of events led to a new period of development. Pope Pius XII called for the celebration of the Holy Year, or Jubilee, in 1950, and he evoked the message of Fátima and asked for sanctification through prayer and penance. The closing celebration of the Jubilee on 13 October 1951 attracted thousands of people. The church of Our Lady of the Rosary was consecrated on 7 October 1953 and received the title of Minor Basilica from Pope Pius XII, in his brief *Luce Superna* of 11 November 1954. Then, on 13 May 1965, the sanctuary was awarded the Golden Rose (Simpson, 2007). These events marked the commitment of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the cult and allowed the State take advantage of these events to its political advantage.

In the 1950s, profound transformations were undertaken. Vast areas of land were acquired for the expansion of the sanctuary. The grounds of the esplanade were levelled and several structures were demolished, including the original portico and colonnade. Areas for pilgrim accommodations, facilities and services were set up. The original impromptu stalls were torn down and two squares were built, on the northern and southern sides, respectively, with forty-five shops each (Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 218) for the sale of religious articles, candles, wax *ex-votos* and souvenirs.

The sanctuary took on its definitive structure around the huge Prayer Area, a vast square built facing the basilica. The colonnade was designed by Antonio Lino and comprises 14 altars including a Way of the Cross. It was built between 1949 and 1954 to connect the basilica to the retreat houses that provide pastoral support and accommodation on either side of the sanctuary. The square is now delimited by the colonnade and is bordered by leafy trees. It consists of the chapel and the monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which covers the primitive structure of the fountain that provided water to the pilgrims, and the large holm oak which is over a hundred years in age and is the only survivor from the time of the Apparitions. The porch encompassing the chapel (Figure 3) was inaugurated on the occasion of John Paul II’s visit in 1982.

These transformations of the sanctuary space responded to the increasing religious tourism. Approximately 120,000 annual pilgrims were estimated in 1949. Roughly three million are thought to have appeared for the 50th anniversary of the apparitions in 1967 (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2012, n.p.). Due to the fact that the urban plan is centred on the sanctuary, the community is principally characterized by the presence of tourists and pilgrims and their demand for hospitality services. The nearest train station, which was old, ugly and uncluttered (Peirone, 1970, p. 18), was renamed Fátima. After 1951 it was decorated with ornamental tiles and facilities were improved. It is now able to receive all train types, including the express ones. Inter-city coach service has also been redirected towards the sanctuary (Peirone, 1970, p. 22). Furthermore, since 1951, zoning laws have required that any new hotels be built according to Portuguese traditional styles and that they provide better facilities and services (Peirone, 1970, p. 22).

Fátima has also attracted many religious institutes and congregations that have set up their provincial houses and built seminaries and convents, some of which with accommodation. “In 1987, in Fátima, there was a total of 52 various religious communities with about 500 persons and several hundred seminarists [sic, per seminarians].” (Rinschede, 1992, p. 64) The area to the north of the sanctuary was rebuilt, with new buildings, “partly for local housing, but mostly for accommodation and dining facilities, although vernacular designs have been retained” (Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 218). Except for the sanctuary, the neighbouring buildings and the Paul VI Pastoral Centre, most of the religious buildings are located almost exclusively to the north and east of the Sanctuary (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2001).

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*Figure 3. The chapel of the Apparitions and porch*

*Source: authors' photo, 2017*



The influx of pilgrims attracted a large increase in population. “The population growth stems mainly from the arrival of workers from the surrounding area, who hope to offer their services to the pilgrims.” (Rinschede, 1992, p. 63) So, Cova da Iria, or Fátima, had grown as a pilgrimage centre, obeying to a common pattern that characterizes many other touristic religious spaces, divided into the nuclear sacred area, surrounded by profane or commercialized satellite areas (Olsen & Timothy, 2006, pp. 10–11).

Building locations depend on their function. Commercial units are mostly concentrated in the central urban core. Nearby the sanctuary centre and in the middle of the surrounding religious houses and convents, there are a lot of other religious establishments, such as liturgical and devotional objects and souvenirs shops, and other commercial establishments to meet the pilgrims' primary needs and leisure (restaurants, bars, travel agencies or, even, museums). In late 1980s, Fátima had fourteen hotels, twelve guest houses, eighteen boarding houses, forty-four coffee-shops, five confectionery shops, three travel agencies, six banks and one currency exchange office (Oliveira, 1990, p. 111; Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 218).

There are three types of accommodation: the sanctuary, religious institutions, and hotels and similar establishments. The number of hotels has increased substantially, especially since the 1970s. Most of them are located to the south of the sanctuary. In the late 1990s, hotels and similar facilities were estimated to provide around 8,000 beds, while religious institutions offered another 4,300. That sums at least 13,000 beds, when taking into account those of the sanctuary itself (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2001, p. 37).

The decade of the 1980s, witnessed tremendous dynamism. The number of families in Fátima grew 23%, which was a rate well above both the national and local averages. Similarly, the number of resi-

dences grew by more than 40%, while the number of collective dwellings has increased by about 26% (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2012, pp. 28–29). This growth may be justified by the seasonal demand for housing. So, in addition to the official number of beds, we must account for the informal supply of accommodation, which often fails to provide the minimum conditions, as it is set up, sometimes, in warehouses, annexes or parts of houses. This is especially true during the periods of the greatest influx of pilgrims.

During special periods, such as the celebration of the apparitions on the 13th of each month from May to October, many traveling salesmen come to sell artefacts, religious and otherwise. All of these portray the local economy, directly or indirectly, as being based on religious tourism and pilgrimages (Rinschede, 1992, p. 65). Fátima, as is the case with most Catholic and Marian shrines, struggles with a secondary effect of this overtly religious tourism, which is the “perceived over-commercialization of a sacred site” (Nolan & Nolan, 1992, p. 71). It is frequently described the uncontrolled and increasing number of shops and stalls selling souvenirs and the improper appropriation of religious elements and symbols (Figure 4) which are massively used on kitsch products (Vukonić, 2006, pp. 249–250).

The local economy relies mostly on religious tourism, which has an impact on the demand and supply of services, such as hospitality and catering, transportation, tourist mediation, and other facilities. Fátima, as it is known nowadays, was born and developed in response to tourism. Thus, it also depends on the patterns and growth rates of this activity, which are crucial for its survival and consolidation as a pilgrimage centre.

*Figure 4. Ex-votos and Fátima souvenirs’ shop*  
*Source: authors’ photo, 2017*



## **FATIMA’S CONSOLIDATION AS PILGRIMAGE CENTRE**

Over the last decade, there has been a clear attempt to regulate the needs and impacts of religious tourism and to accompany the growth of this industry. Fátima has always attracted faithful from Europe and the Americas. Recently, however, it has also begun to receive pilgrims from the former communist nations and Asian countries, after their economic and cultural opening up.

The Church has headed up the development of the sanctuary and its surroundings. In order to handle the growing number of pilgrims, the rector of the sanctuary, Mons. Luciano Guerra, decided to build a large, new covered assembly area as part of a new pastoral program that marks the beginning of a new phase in the religious tourism at Fátima. After an international design competition, the jury choose the project of the Greek architect Alexandros Tombazis. The building, on the southeast corner of the sanctuary, was conceived to be a great covered space, with more than eight thousand seats, including spaces for people with special needs.

The church of the Most Holy Trinity was dedicated on 12 October 2007, as part of the closing ceremonies of the 90th anniversary of the Marian apparitions, and it was elevated to the status of Minor Basilica on 13 August 2012. Besides that, it was an opportunity to a bigger program of commitments to preeminent artists and to reform the urban plan. While the first basilica was faithful to the traditional, neo-classic revivalism of the late nineteenth-century, the latter project is more cosmopolitan, and its innovative modernism (Figure 5) is more in line with the new vision of the sanctuary’s mission towards the religious tourism.

*Figure 5. Southeast of the sanctuary, with the High Cross, by Robert Schad, and the basilica of the Most Holy Trinity*

*Source: authors’ photo, 2016*



In addition to the religious authorities, the municipal government is responsible for urban planning and public infrastructure in and around the sanctuary. In 2001, the urban plan for Fátima (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2001) was set up to correct the disordered growth of the previous decades, while taking into consideration the existing structures. Denser areas of residential buildings had surrounded the sanctuary to the west together with a concentration of commercial and tourist facilities. This nucleus was surrounded by a ring road connecting two large roundabouts at the north and south entrances to the city. The objective of the municipal plan was to create a new main road, by extending a pre-existing avenue further away from the centre so as to link the new buildings such as the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, and the Paul VI Pastoral Centre. The plan also foresaw a new development which would include extensive parking facilities and new hotel units, as well as two large areas for administrative and sport facilities, which would complement the place by offering secular facilities not only for residents but also for non-religious visitors. The distancing of recreational and leisure activities from the sanctuary and religious squares was intended to preserve the community’s religious character, image and reputation. Additional lines of action included: eliminating unnecessary over-densification and discrepancies between the various urban spaces; clarifying the types of buildings and their uses, in accordance with the stipulated zones; and, evaluating proposals to the general plan for new infrastructure, namely roadways. The aim of the new road network was to improve the efficiency of traffic, including that of pedestrians, and the flow of diverse types of traffic, particularly in extreme situations such during large pilgrimages. Other action lines dealt with the creation of green spaces, the preservation of all existing tree stands, the planting of trees along the roads, and the landscaping of existing public spaces.

Fátima has developed a participatory management model that involves both the public and the private sector in boosting the supply of accommodation. In 2012, within the municipality of Ourém, but mainly in Fátima, there were 58 tourist entities classified and operating, with a capacity of 6,296 beds spread over 3,350 housing units, most of which were hotels (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2012). In that year, nineteen applications were filed for tourist licenses in Fátima, which corresponded to an increase of 2,229 beds, distributed amongst 1228 housing units (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2012). Increasing the regulated and licensed accommodations aims to avoid the profits by non-commercial accommodation and informal apartment rentals.

The Central Portugal Tourism Office (Turismo Centro de Portugal) has not only followed the overall objectives of national tourism policy, it has also facilitated the development of regional tourism resources and is in charge of promoting the host region of Fátima. The goal is to disseminate a modern image of Fátima that reflects these improvements.

However, in the first decade of the 21st century, tourism seemed to be entering in a period of decline, which is predicted by the Butler model for the tourist area life cycle (Butler, 1980, 2006).

Despite the high number of pilgrims attracted annually to Fátima, numbers decreased between 2006 and 2011 (see Table 1). Nevertheless, in the municipality of Ourém, during the Papal visit in May 2010, there were a total of 35 414 guests and 66 009 overnight stays, representing a growth of 10.6% compared to May 2009 (Turismo de Portugal, M. J. Rodrigues, personal communication, 2017, 14 Jul.).

This trend reversed, however, in 2011-2016 period. The total number of pilgrims continued to rise, so that, in 2016, the numbers approximated the records in 2006 (see Table 1). This increase is due to the constant rise in numbers of domestic pilgrims, as the number of foreigners has continued to drop sharply, confirming an earlier assessment: “Fátima has a similar international catchment area, but with the character of a national religious centre, as is evident from the large number of Portuguese visitors.” (Rinschede, 1992, p. 58) From 2011 to 2016, pilgrim numbers rose by 18%, with the number of domestic

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*Table 1. National and foreign pilgrims in organised groups (2006-2016)*

<b>Years</b>	<b>Foreign Pilgrims (Thousands)</b>	<b>National Pilgrims (Thousands)</b>	<b>Total (Thousands)</b>
2006	270	428	698
2011	154	520	674
2016	124	568	693

Source: (Câmara Municipal de Ourém, 2012; Santuário de Fátima, 2017a)

pilgrims increasing 23% (Santuário de Fátima, 2017a, 2017b). According to sanctuary statistics, more than 5.3 million people participated in celebrations during 2016. Of those 5.3 million, only 693,000 were included in organized pilgrimages registered at the sanctuary’s pilgrim service. “Calculations are made by approximation, since people who visit the Shrine do not need any registration, except the organized pilgrimages that need the Shrine’s support or need to use the Shrine’s facilities” (Santuário de Fátima, 2017b).

Foreign pilgrims average about 30% of the total number of pilgrims involved in pilgrimages. In 2016, the ten most common countries of origin of pilgrims, representing about 74% of the total, were: Spain, Italy, Poland, the United States of America, Brazil, Ireland, Indonesia, South Korea, France, India and Ukraine. Spaniards and Italians accounted for about 37% of foreign visitors, with Spain clearly predominating, as it contributed more than double that of Italy. It must be kept in mind, once again, that these numbers do not account for visitors travelling by their own means or who are participating in secular tours.

Statistics for 2016 anticipated an increase in pilgrim numbers due to the commemoration of the centenary of the apparitions. In fact, when the number of pilgrimage registrations of January 2016 are compared with those of the same month in 2017, the number of pilgrims enrolled in organized groups almost doubled (see Table 2). This was largely due to the significant increase in foreign pilgrims, while the domestic numbers fell slightly.

One of the disadvantages of religious tourism is its seasonality, with great variation occurring throughout the year and with well-defined peaks in occupancy which alternate with prolonged low seasons. The greatest flux of visitors takes place on 13 May and 13 October, followed by the 13 of June and September pilgrimages. Also important is 13 August, which is known as the emigrant pilgrimage when “Fátima is the meeting place for Portuguese workers who temporarily work abroad” (Vukonić, 2006, p. 246). Weekends are also popular, especially when they coincide with pilgrimage dates.

The Fátima apparition centennial may represent a turning point in religious tourism and pilgrimage (Figure 6), if this growth trend, especially regarding foreign visitors, can be maintained. Pope Francis, who had dedicated his pontificate to Our Lady of Fátima, has continued to favour Fátima. In order to celebrate the centennial of the apparitions of Fátima, Pope Francis granted a Jubilee Year, with the inherent plenary indulgence, from the 27th of November 2016 till the 26th of November 2017, to the faithful who visit the Sanctuary of Fátima on pilgrimage and devotedly participate in some celebration or prayer in honour of the Virgin Mary. Pope Francis, who had dedicated his pontificate to Our Lady of Fátima, also came to Fátima as a pilgrim between 12 and 13 May 2017 to open the centennial commemorations. He presided over a Solemn Mass, including the traditional blessing of the sick, the canonization of the two Blessed brothers Francisco and Jacinta Marto, and the Farewell procession.

*Table 2. Pilgrims in organised groups (Jan. 2016; Jan. 2017)*

Month/Year	Foreign Pilgrims	National Pilgrims	Total
Jan. 2016	1 433	4 269	5 702
Jan. 2017	7 347	3 612	10 959

Source: (Santuário de Fátima, 2017a)

*Figure 6. Pilgrims near the chapel of Apparitions*

Source: authors' photo, 2017



According to news published in the domestic and international press, the sanctuary exhausted its capacity to welcome pilgrims and accommodations were fully booked. The sanctuary only discloses the number of groups organized by travel agencies and communicated to the Pilgrim Reception Service, which was 28,534 people. This is clearly inferior to the number of pilgrims who filled the square. The EFE (2017, 13 May) news agency quoted Vatican spokesman Greg Burke saying that about 500,000 faithful attended the 13 May mass given Pope Francis. Meanwhile, The New York Times (2017, 13 May) reported that “The main square has a capacity of 600,000 and was overflowing”. In The Guardian, The Associated Press in Rome reported: “Church groups, families and individuals have made their way to Fátima [...]. Carrying candles, rosaries and roses, many have visited the statue dedicated to Our Lady of Fátima or tossed wax body parts – ears, hearts and limbs – into a fire to pray for healing.” (The Associated Press, 2017, 12 May)

The president of the Central Portugal Tourism Office, citing data from a report on the visit of the Pope, led by the Regional Tourism Entity of the Centre and Business Association Ourém-Fátima, told LUSA that the visit of Pope Francis to the shrine had an estimated economic impact of twenty million euros: 4.5 million euros in accommodation, 1.5 million in meals, and an additional ten million in sales in Fátima and Ourém (LUSA, 2017).

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It is thought that the centennial celebration may correspond to the beginning of a phase of maturity phase, with the consolidation of the sanctuary’s pilgrim mission. In 2012, one of the most renowned religious tourism researcher predicted: “Having as temporal horizon the commemorations in 2017 for the 100th anniversary of the apparitions, Fátima should hopefully by that time be consolidated as a pilgrimage and religious tourism destination” (Santos, 2012, p. 93).

According to the sanctuary Rector (Cabecinhas, 2017), in a speech in which he presented the cultural agenda for the 2016-17 biennium, the celebrations took place throughout a septenary which began in 2010. He outlined two phases. The first years included initiatives that were part of the regular sanctuary program, while complementary projects gave substance to the Jubilee spirit. The February 2016 - October 2017 period marked the height of the events and included a more intensive and broader-based program, with a range of initiatives designed to reflect the mission of a Christian sanctuary: exhibitions, concerts of sacred music, performances related to the apparitions, summer courses, conferences, congresses and a special edition journal. Whether organized by itself or in partnership with other entities, the sanctuary has sought to broaden the offer of religious and cultural events, some of which are temporary, while others are intended to create lasting patrimony. Lasting improvements have also been made regarding guest facilities.

The municipality of Ourém, on behalf of the civil society, has put together a commemorative program that includes exhibitions, dramatic and ethnographic performances, festivals and concerts, social responsibility activities, edition of books related to the commemoration, contests. Congresses have also been organized including the International Congress on Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage, 22-23 November 2017, in partnership with the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the Portuguese Ministry of Economy.

The commemorations, their related events, and the way they have been reported may further enhance the internationalization of Fátima and promote the brand of Fátima as a major pilgrimage destination worldwide.

## **CONCLUSION**

Fátima is currently facing the challenge of how to transform the exceptional events of the centenary commemorations into a development strategy. Most relevant to the expansion of sustainable tourism in the region is the articulation between religious and civil entities, while respecting their respective areas of competence. Both the sanctuary and its surrounding community have been working towards identifying their weaknesses and dealing with them.

The sanctuary has been adapting the facilities to the needs of the pilgrims and the liturgical and devotional services in order to heighten the public’s perceptions of its nature as a place of prayer, meditation and spiritual contemplation. Long gone is that earlier period when the urban interventions were guided by merely pragmatic concerns and when form passively followed function rather than aesthetics. In recent works, the sanctuary has made a concerted effort to call on a broad range of renowned artists from all religious persuasions and nationalities, so as to ensure works of quality. They have also invested in the creation of mediation facilities, such as interpretative displays, self-guided tour materials, museums and visitor centres, so as to communicate and interpret the message of the apparitions and the religious sense of place, not only to the pilgrims, but to all visitors. “At sacred sites, these important facilities include structures, programs and services that strive to permit tourist consumption without violation of the sa-

cred space or activities of the site.” (Brayley, 2010, p. 291) As the sacred lies at the heart of the identity of Fátima, the religious atmosphere and its enjoyment by visitors must be preserved, so as to guarantee the vitality of the religious tourism experience. These efforts to protect the distinctive religious nature of Fátima, “preserving the environmental conditions favourable to the type of visitor that mostly comes there” (Santos, 2012, p. 94), may serve to consolidate the sanctuary’s image as a pilgrimage centre and as a sustainable tourism destination

The city council has been working on improving planning and land management and on providing efficient facilities for residents and visitors. “Simultaneously, one must achieve economic development through the diversification of activities and the development of activities compatible with the town-sanctuary and the creation of complementary activities in the surroundings.” (Pinho & Pinho, 2007, p. 219) On the other hand, in order to counteract the pilgrimage seasonality and considering the weak competitiveness of the region’s offer in terms of cultural and patrimonial supply, investments are being made to further develop the region’s supply of alternative historical, artistic and natural attractions that have been traditionally been neglected due to the overemphasis on religious tourism in Fátima.

When faced with the substantial growth of tourism, the sanctuary, the municipal government and other official institutions have begun to articulate their efforts so as to increase the functionality and sustainability of these religious attractions and their surroundings while communicating the practical information about local facilities in new ways and interpreting the religious history and the implicit meaning of the sanctuary.

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