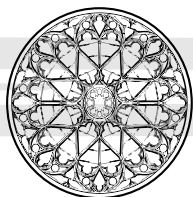


MANAGEMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND TOURISM: SOCIAL VALUE CREATION

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VOLTO JÁ – SENIOR EXCHANGE PROGRAM: FROM IDEA TO IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The general aim of *Volto Já* was the operationalisation of a Social Senior Exchange Programme between Social Economy Organisations that promotes cultural, touristic, and artistic experiences. *Volto Já* developed a set of actions with a direct impact on seniors' active ageing and social inclusion. The programme was developed between August 24, 2018 and February 23, 2021. This paper aims to present the main outputs of the programme.

Method: The *Volto Já* is an applied project. To test it, a proof of concept was developed with the participation of six Social Economy Organisations and 24 elderly people.

Findings: The main outputs of *Volto Já* were: (a) a social tourism business model in the Social Economy sector, for elderly people, notably those institutionalised in senior citizens' homes or nursing homes; (b) the implementation of a business model through a network of Social Economy Organisations that guarantees the exchange of services in the Alentejo region; (c) the stimulation of active ageing and preventing social exclusion, and endorsing the social inclusion of the elderly in the Alentejo region; (d) the implementation of an ICT platform and a mobile application to manage the registration of Social Economy Organisations, which presents the offers of available exchange services, provides access to organisations and experiences in the senior

social tourism area, specifically designed for Social Economy Organisations and their users; (e) the improvement of the quality of life of elderly people (e.g., well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, etc.).

Originality/value: A community network was created to effectively address and prevent social exclusion and promote senior mobility, using social tourism and recreational activities as a facilitator. The proof of concept enabled the testing of the social business model and the acquisition of new insights into the process associated with senior exchanges.

KEYWORDS:

Applied project; ICT platform; social business model; Social Economy Organisations, social tourism; *Volto Já*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increase in the ageing of the population in Portugal and the number of institutionalised senior citizens, many suffering from loneliness, social isolation, with reduced participation in cultural, touristic, and artistic experiences, suggests the need to promote active ageing and reduce isolation. This approach led to the following research question: What could be done to promote active ageing and combat the social isolation of institutionalised senior citizens through cultural, touristic and artistic experiences, facilitated by an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platform? In this work, we present an applied project that seeks to answer this question: *Volto Já* - Senior Exchange Program.

This article strives to: (a) present the context of the reality where the project is being developed; (b) set out the objectives of the project; (c) and briefly describe the main outputs of the project.

The article is structured as follows: first, it presents the project including its contextualisation, its objectives, and its conceptual model; it then describes the main outputs of the project organised by its underlying main areas (management, technology, tourism, and communication); and finally, it concludes and sets out limitations and suggestions for future studies.

2. PROJECT PRESENTATION

In this section, we explain the context in which the *Volto Já* - Senior Exchange Programme was developed, as well as its aims and conceptual model.

2.1. CONTEXTUALISATION

In recent decades, the Social Economy sector has experienced high growth in Portugal. The organisations of this sector play an increasingly relevant role in society due to the ageing of the population and the societal changes that have been taking place. Even though these organisations are very dynamic, their recreational activities tend to be standardised as a result of budgetary constraints. In light of these restrictions, few Social Economy Organisations can offer their users, notably institutionalised senior citizens, holidays. In addition, few senior citizens take holidays autonomously due to monetary reasons, limited physical or cognitive independence, or even family reasons (e.g., lack of family companionship for the enjoyment of holidays).

Tourism is a strategic sector for the economic development of Portugal (Turismo de Portugal, 2017). Recently, diversified solutions have emerged aimed at a broader range of audiences, namely in senior tourism and social tourism. The unprecedented ageing process and the growing number of seniors offer an opportunity for new participants in traditional tourism services. From the point of view of the senior tourist, there is a growing interest and willingness to participate in various tourist activities (González, Vila, & García, 2010). The senior tourist can take holidays outside of the high season and therefore help counter the seasonal nature of the tourism sector (Ferrer, Sanz, Ferrandis, McCabe, & García, 2016). Senior tourism contributes to healthy and active ageing by preventing addiction and improving the quality of life of seniors, which in turn reduces public spending on social and health services and the burden on informal carers (Ferri, Durá, & Garcés, 2013).

However, not all audiences have the purchasing power to access the standardised tourist offer. In this context, it is important to refer to social tourism. Social tourism is a specific type of tourism characterised by the participation of low-income individuals that offers special services, and is recognised as such (Hunzicker, 1951; Minnaert, 2014). A given tourist activity can be classified as social when (Comité Económico e Social Europeu, 2006): (a) the individual is totally or partially unable to fully exercise the right to tourism (e.g., due to lack of economic conditions or isolation), (b) someone takes action to overcome or reduce the obstacle preventing an individual from exercising his or her right to tourism, and (c) this action enables a group of people to engage in tourism in a way that respects values such as sustainability, accessibility and solidarity. Due to these characteristics, social tourism tends to be developed by organisations in the Social Economy sector.

Developing social tourism solutions for Social Economy Organisations, including those serving the institutionalised senior public, may allow these organisations to diversify their offer, with the inherent benefits for senior citizens. The *Volto Já* proposes the development of a business model in social tourism, developed for institutionalised senior citizens in Social Economy Organisations (e.g., nursing homes) in the Alentejo region.

2.2. PROJECT AIMS

The general aim of *Volto Já* was to operationalise a Social Senior Exchange Programme in Social Economy Organisations to promote cultural, touristic, and artistic experiences for institutionalised seniors. *Volto Já* developed a set of actions with a direct impact on seniors' mobility and social exclusion. The elderly taking part in the *Volto Já* could experience a recreational context, in some cases for the first time.

The *Volto Já* embraces a senior social tourism business model which targets elderly people in unfavourable economic circumstances, or who do not have family and / or friends that can accompany them, and allows them to travel and / or enjoy holidays (Oliveira et al., 2019a).

The main objectives of the project are to:

- a) promote active ageing and improve the quality of life (well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, etc.) of institutionalised seniors;
- b) develop a social tourism business model aimed at institutionalised seniors in nursing homes or day care centres;
- c) implement the business model through a network of Social Economy Organisations that guarantees the exchange of services in the Alentejo region;
- d) develop social tourism packages tailor made to the needs of institutionalised seniors, in partnership with Social Economy entities; and
- e) develop an ICT platform that allows Social Economy Organisations to join the Senior Exchange Programme, disseminate the socio-cultural experiences offered and establish partnerships that lead to the exchanges between Social Economy Organisations.

Social Economy Organisations were natural partners/ key stakeholders since they were the source of participants and also a privileged source of knowledge. The proof of concept was conducted in and with these organisations and was evaluated under the continuous supervision of an invited international expert.

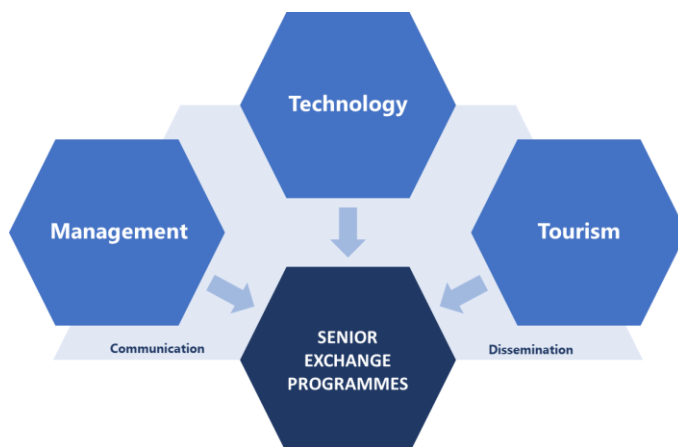
2.3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE VOLTO JÁ

The *Volto Já* was developed by a multidisciplinary team, involving collaborative work in three main areas: management, technology, and tourism (Figure 1). These areas also have the integrating role of communication and information dissemination.

The management area was responsible for (a) carrying out the needs assessment and characterising the profile of the elderly person who could participate in the Exchange Programme, (b) the development of the social business model, (c) carrying out the proof of concept and (d) involving and integrating the work performed by the other areas (including project evaluation). The technological area was responsible for the development of web and mobile platforms that allow senior exchanges to be operationalised. The tourism area analysed the market, developed social tourism packages, and handled the promotion, distribution and evaluation of social tourism

packages. All these areas benefit from the work done in the area of communication and dissemination.

Figure 1 – Conceptual model of *Volto Já*



3. RESULTS

The activities carried out and the results obtained in each of the areas identified in Figure 1 for the realisation of the Senior Exchange Programmes are presented in this section.

3.1. MANAGEMENT

The management area included two main activities: (a) diagnosis of needs and characterisation of the profile of the elderly participating in the mobilities; (b) social business model development. Although this area also streamlines the proof of concept, this activity is described in chapter 4 as it involves all the areas.

3.1.1. Diagnosis of needs and characterisation of the profile

A sample of 135 elderly people from eight Social Economy Organisations (inclusion criterion: being 55 years of age or older) concluded that (Moita, Graça, Vivas, Leal, & Oliveira, 2019):

- a) more than 90% of the respondents had less than 6 years of schooling and about half of them could not read or write;
- b) the average of the last earned salary was 227.50 euros (sd: 196.7);
- c) in relation to dependency, 48% were independent, 29% had a slight dependency, 15% had moderate dependency, 7.5% had a severe dependency and 0.7% were totally dependent;

- d) in leisure time, the preferred activities were talking (72.4%), watching television (70.1%) and walking (41.8%);
- e) around 24% had felt sad and 43% "more or less" sad;
- f) with regard to future desires, 55.2% wished to have access to walks, 33.6% to parties, and 22.4% to massages;
- g) the elderly showed a clear desire to know new places, suggesting that this could contribute to feeling happier (69.9%);
- h) 75.2% of respondents wanted to travel or take a holiday.

3.1.2. Social business model development

A business model describes the logical thinking, how the business is run and how to create value for its stakeholders (Aspara, Lamberg, Laukia, & Tikkanen, 2011). Business Model Canvas is a framework that describes the rationale of how an organisation creates, delivers and captures value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The design of the social business model of the *Volto Já* took the data obtained in the previous activity (diagnosis of needs and characterisation of the profile) and new data obtained through three focus groups into account (Table 1).

Table 1 – Focus groups of the *Volto Já*

Data and place	Participants	Methods
1 st Focus groups - 21st November 2018, Beja	Five professors and two technical directors of Social Economy Organisations	Semi-structured script to conduct the session. Tape recording and note-taking. Discourse analysis.
2 nd Focus group - 28th November 2018, Santarém	Five professors and four technical directors of Social Economy Organisations	Semi-structured script to conduct the section. Tape recording and note-taking. Discourse analysis.
3 rd Focus group - 17th April 2019, Santarém	Five professors and eleven professionals (technical directors and social educators) from seven Social Economy Organisations	Presentation of the results of the first two focus groups. Brainstorming. Tape recording and note-taking.

The first two focus groups took place independently of each other. The same script was used to present the questions to be discussed, but the participants - mainly the technical directors of the Social Economy Organisations - were given freedom to develop the themes as they saw fit. After the focus groups, a compilation of the information was made through discourse analysis. This information was used to design the first draft of the social business model, which was presented to the participants in the third focus group. The business model was designed using the Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) framework. Brainstorming was used in the third focus group to present, discuss, and improve the business model. The result is shown in Figure 2. A

detailed explanation of the Figure 2 is available in Oliveira et al. (2019a, 2019b). Social business models must not only respond to the same challenges as a business model, but also reinvent the social objective as these (social) organisations work where the market fail (Kania, Lestari, & Dhewanto, 2017).

Figure 2 – The Business Model Canvas for the *Volto Já*

KEY PARTNERS	KEY ACTIVITIES	VALUE	CUST.REL.	CUSTOMERS
Nursing homes Counties Tourist Office Parish councils Travel agencies Recreational activity companies Transport companies	Mobility programme admission	Senior exchange	Regular and close contact	Nursing home community
	Management of the sociocultural offer	Mobility		
	Management of the participants	Cultural and touristic experiences		
	Matching between supply and demand	Active ageing		
	Communication	Combatting social asymmetries		
	Assessment of the experience	Better psychosocial well-being		
	KEY PARTNERS	Social tourism (low-cost)	CHANNELS	
Human resources Technical resources Networking Reputational capital	Digital (online)			
COST STRUCTURE		REVENUE STREAMS		
Promotion activities Maintenance and upgrade of the platform		Freemium Philanthropy		

Source: Oliveira et al. (2019a)

The social business model developed was subsequently used in other phases of the project (e.g., technology and tourism areas). The proof of concept of this business model is presented in chapter 4 where a sample of six Social Economy Organisations and 24 seniors participated in Senior Exchange Programmes.

3.2. TECHNOLOGY

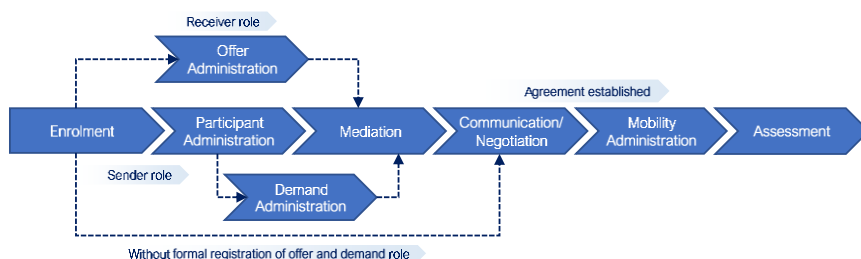
The core objective of the technology area was to develop an information system (VJIS) to support the *Volto Já* business model (VJBM) and its underlying dynamics. VJIS is composed of a web platform and a mobile application. The technology-related research was designed in line with the Framework for Design Science in Information Systems Research (Hevner, March, Park, & Ram, 2004; March & Smith, 1995) which presupposes the development of IT artefacts to fulfil business needs. The utility, efficiency, and quality of the developed IT artefacts must be assessed.

3.2.1. The *Volto Já* information system development

In the framework design cycle, the design of the software artefacts (VJIS) was guided by the Dynamic Systems Development Method framework (DSDM) (Anwer, Aftab, Waheed, & Muhammad, 2017; DSDMC, 2014). As the Feasibility study (the first step of the DSDM framework) was out of the scope of the technology area, only the (a) Business study, (b) Functional model iteration, and (c) Design and building iteration were addressed.

The Business study comprised the definition and formalisation of the Business Process Model. The Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) of the VJBM allowed the identification of some critical elements, such as partners, activities, resources, customers, and relationships, for the design of the VJIS. VJBM lies on eight core business processes (see Figure 3) and considers four key players: (a) Social Economy Entities (SEEs) that provide housing and care services to the elderly; (b) the Social Economy Entity Directors (SEED), who are the main representatives of SEEs; (c) SEE users (also referred to as participants), who are the institutionalised elderly in SEE; and (d) the SEE companions (also referred to as teammates) who are the SEE people who accompany the participants in the mobilities (senior interchanges)¹.

Figure 3 – *Volto Já* Core Business Processes



In the functional model iteration, the list of functional requirements was produced based on the VJBM and its underlying Business Processes. The consolidated list of requirements includes sixty-one items. Each requirement received an identification number, a classification (in accordance with its functional and non-functional nature; and degree of importance). The MoSCoW technique was used to identify the relevance of each requirement on the list (DSDMC, 2014). At the end of the process, forty-five requirements were identified, of which: twenty-seven were considered mandatory (Must); nine important (Should); eight suggested (Could); and only one was considered as excluded (Won't). The system was then modelled, user interfaces were designed, and the document of analysis was produced.

The first activities in the Design and build iteration were related with the design and validation of the system architecture (Barradas et al., 2019) and the construction of

¹ Mobilities and Exchange Programmes are used in this text as synonyms.

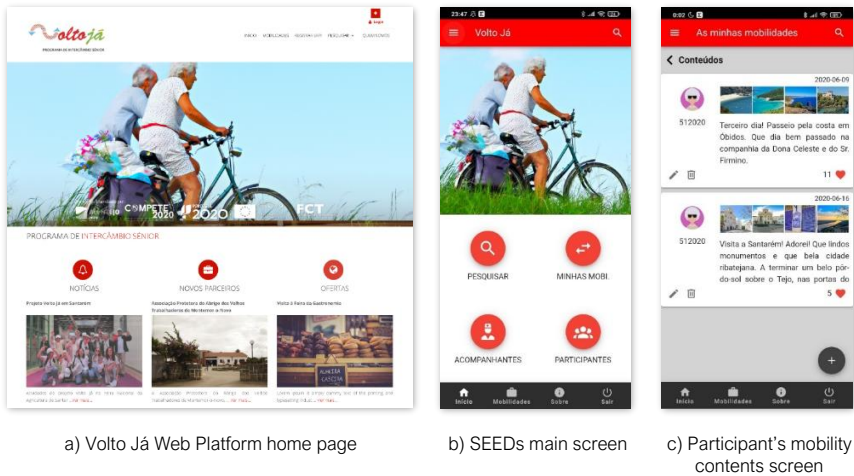
low fidelity functional prototypes of both the web platform and mobile application. These prototypes allowed the team to explore design alternatives, simulate how core tasks were performed, and identify and mitigate some usability issues. In addition, they served as leading guides for the software building.

The technology selection process involved a survey on open-source technologies for persistent data storage and for web and mobile software development, available on the market. The MySQL SGBD was naturally chosen for persistent data storage. For the development of the web platform, the choice fell on the Yii platform – a fast, secure, feature-rich, and efficient open-source PHP framework – together with the Bootstrap UI framework. The mobile application technology selection was more complex due to the multitude of app typologies, development frameworks for the two major mobile ecosystems in the market: Android and iOS. The decision-making process was designed based on three main criteria: (a) independence of the platform/execution environment; (b) time to market; and (c) familiarity with the development technologies. The choice fell on the development of a hybrid application using the Vue.js framework together with the Vuetify UI component library. The Ionic Capacitor (Huber, Demetz, & Felderer, 2020) was selected to provide a cross-platform native runtime.

The Design and Build iteration ended with the software development that involved the development of the two software artefacts (a time-consuming task) and their integration; followed by the test and validation phase. Unit, integration, and functional tests were performed to assess the quality and efficiency of the application.

3.2.2. Major outputs

The two developed software artefacts can be considered the major outputs of the technology team. While the web platform (Figure 4a) strives to provide support for the heavy work of operationalising the entire business model, the mobile application (Figure 4b, c) seeks to mediate the tourism experiences of participants during their Exchange Programmes and provides SEED and Teammates with a pocket tool to manage the Exchange Programmes in which they are involved.

Figure 4 – *Volto Já* web and mobile applications: sample views

a) Volto Já Web Platform home page

b) SEEDs main screen

c) Participant's mobility contents screen

3.3. TOURISM

The tourism area has as activity to plan and design social tourism packages.

In *Volto Já*, a tourism package is mostly conceived as a global experience with a holistic approach; it is not determined by the price but by a constant flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations that seniors experience during the Exchange Programmes. With that in mind, the team developed a conceptual model named OEC Model (Organic, Experiential and Complex Model), for the creation of tourism packages and evaluation of tourism experiences in Senior Exchange Programmes.

The OEC Model is established on the basis of a set of data collection instruments which were carefully and appropriately chosen in line with the goals of each phase of the process. The OEC model is divided into three phases: 1st phase/Organic/Pre-mobility; 2nd phase/Experiential/Post-mobility; 3rd phase/Complex/Post-mobility.

In the 1st phase, the team started with data collection undertaken before the mobility took place in order to assess the profile, motivations and perceptions of seniors. The data collection techniques were observation in loco by the researcher (inspection visit) in order to evaluate the tourism package components to be included in the mobility programme (quality and type of accommodation; location and accessibility of museums, churches and other components for seniors) and privileged information agents through contacts and conversations with the staff from the Social Economy Organisations participating in the mobilities/Exchange Programmes since they know the reality of the territory in question better than anyone.

This 1st phase is composed of five actions:

- a) Definition of the Social Economy Organisation partners (project presentation and all its assumptions);

- b) Participant selection (profile identification; motivations and interests; limitations; expectations - pre-mobility questionnaire application);
- c) Tour package planning (get feedback from Social Economy Organisations on the most valuable destinations, and most attractive places and special events (pre-programme);
- d) Tourism package design (identify and establish formal protocols with potential partners);
- e) Inspection visit (evaluation of the places to visit and ensure that everything is ensured; e.g., accommodation, meals, accessibility, transport, tickets, comfort, among others).

A total of six senior Exchange Programmes were carried out with a total of 12 travel exchanges as they did not take place simultaneously and thus allowed participants to join two exchanges (see chapter 4 for more details).

The team accompanied the senior Exchange Programmes and in this 2nd phase (Experiential/Post-mobility) data was collected during the precise period of the mobility programme. Participant-observation was the data collection technique used; - primary data were extracted through field notes based on direct observations. This method was combined with informal conversational interviews and personal experience and free elicitation technique; in addition, and to complement the data collection, visual data was also used through photos taken by the researcher during the Exchange Programme.

The 3rd phase (Complex/Post-mobility) followed each Exchange Programme (post-mobility). Considering the OEC model, the team used several techniques to obtain a clear level of responses based on: (a) 24 semi-structured interviews with elderly participants in the Exchange Programmes and observation (each interview lasted about 15 minutes on average; age of the participants 65-85); (b) Complementary information with privileged information agents after the Exchange Programme.

Crucial information was obtained here that addresses three dimensions: (a) evaluating the mobility experience by the seniors that participated in the mobility programme; (b) assessing the senior experience through models of dimensions of the experience; (c) assessing the levels of satisfaction with the tourism experience (mobility programme).

We note the following results:

- a) The best recorded memories of the seniors were the friendships that emerged during the programmes, the social moments provided, the affection generated, the good reception of the host community, the good condition of the host facilities, and the place visited and the tours associated with the visit;
- b) These visits were positive, namely due the benefits derived in terms of knowledge of the destination and its attractions and the reception of the community that received them, leaving them with a great desire to do more Exchange Programmes;

- c) All respondents showed great satisfaction with the Exchange Programmes, giving the following reasons: (i) accommodation (cleanliness and quality conditions); (ii) transportation; (iii) programme of the tour taken; (iv) use of merchandising and its symbolic value (caps and T-shirts created with the *Volto Já* logo – see section 3.4); (v) social moments provided; and (vi) the friendliness of the entire team;
- d) Senior's highly valued the experience provided, essentially because it was an opportunity for them to get to know a new place, to travel or to roam. In addition, they had no doubts about their willingness to participate;
- e) Results show that seniors mainly highlight aspects related to how the experience changed them as a person, by giving good thoughts about the way they see life; knowledge acquired about the destination and its resources; the opportunity to grow by seeing new situations; feelings of joy and happiness and tranquillity; and the opportunity to meet new people;
- f) Most interviewees wanted to repeat the experience by doing more Exchange Programmes.

3.4. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

According to Rocha and Nogueira (1995), design is the set of operations developed to shape objects, equipment, systems or, in the field of communication, messages that respond to detected needs. Moreover, according to the same authors, design projects can have several levels of complexity and require a series of steps that go from conception to realisation, involving all studies and experimental development phases that confirm the project's level of responsiveness to the target need. The *Design Council* and *Interaction Design Foundation* recommendations and the project methodology were the basis of the entire design process, the aim of which was to create the graphic identity for *Volto Já* adapted to a communication strategy and a platform that would put the project's functionality into practice. The *Design Council* describes the design process in five stages that must be followed (*first steps, research, planning, communication, and implementation*); the initial phase determines the design problem and then the implicit needs are studied with the user and his/her behaviours in mind. This leads to an effective and reasoned answer at the end of the whole process (Visocky O'Grady & Visocky O'Grady, 2006).

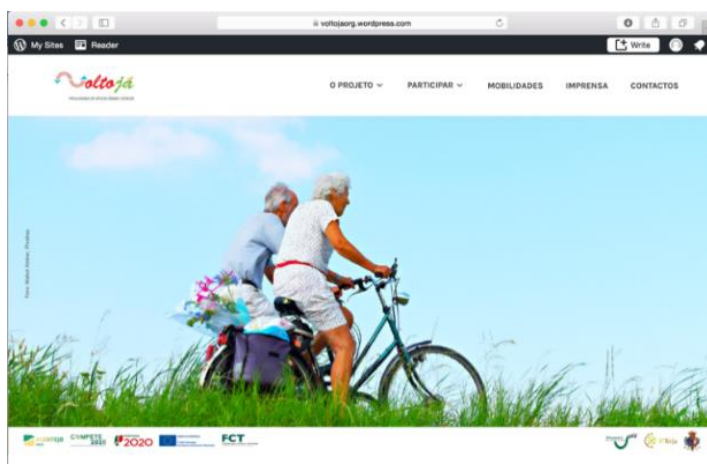
The entire communication project and dissemination of *Volto Já* will then be explained, summarising all its underlying stages and the solutions obtained. The main goal of the *Volto Já* communication is to maximise results and the communication plan must therefore be suitable for its dissemination among the main stakeholders and prioritise digital communication through appropriate channels and messages. Thus, the following activities took place:

- a) Preparation of the communication plan, which took into account the need to validate a business model to promote senior mobility in line with the Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), and the following (i) the target audience and the respective segmentation; (ii) the message to be conveyed in line with that segmentation; (iii) the schedule for the dissemination of

messages and campaigns; (iv) the purpose of that communication; (v) the means of dissemination and the communication channels to be adopted; (vi) the actors in that communication, within the project and the organisations involved in the partnership; and (vii) where the communication should take place, namely given the potential of digital communication but without neglecting the relevance of human contact for this kind of project;

- b) Implementation of communication channels, dissemination of content and management of the project's presence on the Internet as per the objectives and communication axis - The definition of a communication axis, supported by the project's graphic identity allowed a set of media and communication channels to be implemented and the dissemination of content. In light of the geographical dispersion of the "residential homes for the elderly" (that is, nursing homes) to be reached, and the objective of ensuring the "memorability" of a project supported by a digital platform, the research team invested in the *Volto Já* website (Figure 5) as one of the fundamental communication tools. With the same objective, a project profile was created in a set of social networks to foster bonds and empathy relationships between the project and its target audience. For example, Facebook was used as a privileged channel of extended communication between the project team, the nursing homes and the participants in the mobility activities as some authors consider it to be a very important social support environment for the elderly (Silva, Scortegana, & Marchi, 2018), it. Thus, through the sharing of content associated with the mobilities and tour packages developed during the pilot project, an empathetic relationship was created with the project which helped validate the recommended business model;

Figure 5 – Project website <https://voltojaorg.wordpress.com>



- c) Production of the project's promotional video for dissemination on social networks. This video (<https://youtu.be/JzJoUtljdQU>), disseminated through

the *Volto Já* social networks, not only played a relational role with the target audience but also helped validate the business model by reaching its potential "customers" as it aroused the interest of Social Economy Organisations technicians;

- d) Design of a webmarketing campaign to promote the project results to the target audience. This campaign was supported by the content produced during the mobilities and the means designed to disseminate the project's objectives with the aim of making the project known. It aimed to generate "leads" for the project's website and platform, thus contributing to the validation of the business model;
- e) Design of the project's graphic identity and production of the dissemination supports in line with the set of project activities - the graphic identity strived to convey the concepts and values associated with the genesis of the project through its logo. Thus, the project logo and *Manual of Norms for Use* (Figure 6) were prepared so that all stakeholders, recipients of the communication as well as the participants and those in charge of the mobilities could understand the graphic identity. Through the logo and consequent graphic identity created, we sought to transmit the concepts and values associated with the genesis of the project, such as mobility, change/difference, positivism/joy, and dynamism/movement;
- f) Creation of a showcase, following the definition of the graphic identity, composed of several support materials to present the project at dissemination and merchandising events, in line with the set of activities stipulated: A5 flyers (front and back - Figure 7); rollups with 80x200cm; merchandising materials to support mobilities - t-shirts and caps (Figure 8); a newsletter to send by email and explanatory schemes to support project communication.

Figure 6 - Project logo, associated with the definition of the project's graphic identity, transversal to the various activities and means of dissemination



Figure 7 - A5 flyers produced for the project



Figure 8 – Merchandising material to support mobilities (caps and t-shirts)

It was essential to define these materials at an early stage to consolidate the project's graphic identity and subsequently adapt them for the screens in the digital platform. The outlined communication strategy not only covers “physical” communication materials, to create a closer and emotional connection with all those involved, but also digital communication materials to take advantage of the internet and the associated communication channels in order to reach a wider audience.

4. PROOF OF CONCEPT: EXAMPLES OF SENIOR EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

The *Volto Já* proof of concept was implemented with a sample of six Social Economy Organisations, and 24 seniors. Six Exchange Programmes took place between June and November 2019 but the Covid-19 Pandemic made further Exchange Programmes impossible. The Social Economy Organisations that participated in *Volto Já* as partners are all from the Alentejo region: Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Santarém, Santa Casa da Misericórdia in Santiago do Cacém, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Sines, Santa Casa da Misericórdia da Chamusca, Associação Protectora e Abrigo dos Velhos Trabalhadores de Montemor-o-Novo, and Centro Social Cultural e Recreativo do Bairro da Esperança.

In relation to the 24 seniors, their mean age was 78.6 years, 58.3% were female, 50% widowed, 33.3% single, and 16.7% married, 58.3% had 4 years of schooling, 20.8% were illiterate and 20.8% had five or more years of schooling.

Each Senior Exchange Programme was planned in detail and activities and resources were meticulously described. As the *Volto Já* web and mobile applications were not yet available in 2019, the arrangements for the Exchange Programmes were made by the *Volto Já* team. The planning and designing of social tourism packages for each Exchange Programme were as explained in Section 3.3. Additionally, the Social Economy Organisations provided information about the seniors that would participate in the Exchange Programmes, about facilities available and any specific information related with the institutionalised seniors. The transportation was provided by Social Economy Organisation partners. Each Social Economy organisation and the selected seniors participated in the senior Exchange Programmes twice: once as host entity, and once as visiting entity. The seniors also participated in all activities twice, but only travelled once to a different region and stayed one night in the facilities provided (without associated payment) by the host entity. The touristic, artistic, and cultural activities took place over the two days. The seniors were accompanied 24 hours a day by two technicians from the home institution and by several professionals from the host institution (e.g., sociocultural animators).

During the Exchange Programmes, the seniors took part in cultural and touristic activities with a high level of social interaction, sharing experiences and moments of relaxation and animation (Figure 9). For some it was the first time in their lives they had had such an experience, e.g., seeing the sea, going on a boat trip or visiting a farm with exotic animals.

Figure 9 – Sample of touristic activities in the *Volto Já* Exchange Programmes



Photos: Joana Santinhos

Data were collected at various moments through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires both to assess the social business model and the interest and satisfaction of participants in the Exchange Programmes. The interviews were conducted after the exchange mobilities to evaluate the touristic dimensions characterised in section 3.3 as well as service quality, satisfaction with the exchange, and impact of the exchange for the elderly. The questionnaires were administered to all participant seniors twice: one week before the Exchange Programme and one week after the second Exchange Programme. The questionnaires assessed topics related to quality of life, satisfaction with life, happiness, and emotional well-being. The data provided evidence of the positive impact of participating in the *Volto Já* on the emotional well-being of the elderly.

The interviews shed more light on the impact of these Exchange Programmes. All participants showed positive emotions associated with participation, felt that taking part in these activities made a difference in their lives, that the four days of activities (two in each exchange) and the interaction with other seniors helped increase their levels of happiness and well-being, and that they had benefited from a holiday-like experience; they expressed strong satisfaction. They revealed sentiments such as (Figure 10): "I had the feeling I was in the right place", "I will never forget these good days", "My life became more meaningful. I would do it again", "It was an unforgettable experience". For the Social Economy Organisations, the network of partners allowed the exchange of experiences, the development of common activities and the opening of doors for future activities. The activities helped reduce the loneliness and social isolation of the elderly, and promote active ageing.

Figure 10 – Sample of participants of the Senior Exchange Programmes



Photos: Joana Santinhos

5. DISCUSSION

The main conclusions and some of the limitations, identified during the project execution, are presented below. In this context, some future studies are also listed.

5.1. CONCLUSION

This article presents the *Volto Já* applied project, which aimed to promote the active ageing and combat social isolation of institutionalised senior citizens through cultural, touristic and artistic experiences, facilitated by ICT platforms. *Volto Já* proposes the development of a social business model supported by an information system that gave institutionalised seniors access to leisure activities at a very low cost. The social business model is for implementation by a network of Social Economy Organisations that share their own resources to provide holidays both for the seniors they receive in the Exchange Programmes and their own institutionalised seniors. The business model presented could contribute to the circular economy (Patwa et al., 2021) and to the accomplishment of the sustainable development goals (United Nations, 2015).

A network of Social Economy Organisations that guarantees the Exchange Programmes in the Alentejo region was implemented. The network is made up of six organisations that implemented the Exchange Programmes, and several others that showed interest in them but were unable to participate due to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

The Exchange Programmes provided four days of leisure activities for 24 institutionalised seniors, with touristic and cultural activities (12 travel exchanges, two exchanges by organisations, two days each). Activities are provided in the region of the host Social Economy organisation over two days and in the region of the visiting organisation over two other days. All activities were organised by the *Volto Já* team in coordination with the Social Economy Organisations. The Exchange Programmes were preceded by participant selection, tour package planning, tourism package design and inspection visit. The *Volto Já* team accompanied all the exchanges and activities, and an assessment was made with all the participants after the programmes.

The Exchange Programmes *per se* and the developed activities made a positive contribution to: (a) the stimulation of active ageing, preventing social exclusion, and endorsing the social inclusion of the elderly in the Alentejo region; (b) an improvement in the quality of life of elderly people (e.g., well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, etc.). The participation on the *Volto Já* had a positive impact on the institutionalised seniors.

The social business model proposed and tested with Exchange Programmes could be enlarged through the *VJIS* that was specifically designed for Social Economy Organisations and their users. While the web platform strives to provide support for the heavy work of operationalising the entire business model, the mobile application seeks to mediate the tourism experiences of participants during their Exchange Programmes and provides organisers and participants with a pocket tool to manage the Exchange Programmes in which they are involved.

5.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

The main limitation of the present work stems from the Covid-19 pandemic. Following the World Health Organisation's declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020, some of the planned activities had to be cancelled.

The first and overriding limitation was that Exchange Programmes with the institutionalised elderly in Social Economy Organisations could not go ahead in 2020. The compulsory confinement and Covid-19 outbreaks made tourism activities and exchanges impossible. Touristic activities are in a real crisis and the future will be challenging. Given that the elderly population is the most affected by Covid-19, we anticipate even more difficulty in reintroducing tourism activities to this age group. Nevertheless, there is also an opportunity to think of creative solutions to bring some normality to Social Economy Organisations and institutionalised elderly people in the near future. The adaptation of the proposed social business model to the post-Covid-19 reality is an opportunity for future studies.

Secondly, as testing the web platform and mobile app through actual exchange intentions and their realisation proved impossible, this was done through simulation. We suggest that as soon as the Covid-19 pandemic eases and Exchange Programmes can be resumed, both tools should be tested with the participation of Social Economy Organisations and senior citizens.

As a pilot project, *Volto Já* was only applied in one region of Portugal: Alentejo. It is suggested that future studies should apply the proposed social business model across Portugal or even beyond. The business model has been tested and its replication capacity allows it to be scaled up to other geographical areas.

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