Between the Sea, the City and the Countryside: The Rural Rediscovery of Matosinhos

Câmara Municipal de Matosinhos, Portugal
Câmara Municipal de Matosinhos
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
Visitor Experience & Destination Management

Summary of Good Practice Story
Matosinhos, Portugal, known mainly for its Atlantic coastline and seafood, was gradually losing visibility for a lesser-known rural landscape between Lavra and Perafita — agricultural fields, stone walls, mills and centuries-old farming paths — not through overtourism, but through neglect and disappearance into invisibility as deteriorated routes and underused scenic areas went unrecognised. Rather than creating a new attraction, the Municipality restored two priority sections of the Rural Paths of the Angeiras Agricultural Park (CR1, about 730m, completed; CR2, about 270m, nearing completion by June 2026) totalling roughly one kilometre and over €263,000 in investment, deliberately preserving existing trees, reusing materials, restoring traditional stone walls and improving drainage while keeping the paths functional for farmers and agricultural machinery alongside new walking and cycling access. This diversified Matosinhos' tourism experience beyond the coast and gave the community renewed recognition of the rural landscape as collective heritage, with future connections planned to the Rio Onda Greenway and a wider Matosinhos Rural Park. The lesson: valuing a territory doesn't require transforming it — the most lasting solutions come from listening to a landscape and revealing meaning that already exists, rather than turning everyday rural life into a spectacle for visitors.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

Matosinhos is widely known for its Atlantic identity. Its beaches, maritime gastronomy, fishing heritage and vibrant coastal front have long shaped the municipality's image. Beyond the coastline, however, lies a lesser-known but equally authentic reality: a living rural landscape of agricultural fields, watercourses, stone walls, mills and paths that have connected communities, farmlands and ways of life for generations.

This story unfolds between Lavra and Perafita, where the rhythm is different. Here, farmers still work the land, fields remain productive and the connection between people and territory continues to define local identity. Despite its proximity to the sea and the Porto Metropolitan Area, this landscape has preserved a human scale, shaped by simplicity, collective memory and a strong sense of place.

For many years, these paths were regarded mainly as functional infrastructures supporting agricultural activity.

The Rural Paths of the Angeiras Agricultural Park emerged from this context, inviting residents and visitors to discover a territory between the sea, the city and the countryside.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

For generations, the rural paths of Lavra and Perafita served farmers, connected agricultural fields and helped shape the identity of this territory. They were infrastructures of work, memory and connection between communities. However, as Matosinhos became increasingly associated with the sea, gastronomy and the coastal front, this rural landscape gradually became less visible.

The challenge was not one of overtourism. On the contrary, the greatest risk was disappearance through invisibility. Many paths had deteriorated, areas with significant scenic value remained underused, and important elements of rural heritage were often perceived merely as functional spaces between the city and the coast.

More than restoring routes, it became necessary to restore meaning. The Municipality and the local community recognised the urgency of giving visibility, dignity and recognition back to a living landscape that continues to play an essential role in local identity, community life and agricultural activity.

The change that was needed was both physical and symbolic: improving accessibility, protecting the landscape and ensuring that agriculture, heritage, nature and visitor experience could coexist in balance within the same territory.

The Vision: What you set out to do

The vision of the Rural Paths of the Angeiras Agricultural Park was born from the desire to reveal a lesser-known reality in Matosinhos. Instead of creating a new tourist attraction, the objective was to enhance an existing heritage, preserving its authenticity and reinforcing the connection between people, territory and landscape.

The Municipality defined as a priority the recovery of rural roads, improving conditions for agricultural circulation and promoting sustainable forms of mobility and enjoyment of the

territory. The aim was to create opportunities to walk, cycle, observe the landscape and understand local history, without compromising the productive function of these spaces.
The intervention also sought to reinforce the connection between the coast, the city and the countryside, diversifying the visitors' experience and revealing a complementary dimension of Matosinhos' identity. More than a requalification work, this vision sought to demonstrate that development, conservation and authenticity can coexist in the same territory.

The Journey: How change happened

The transformation began with a careful look at the territory. Existing rural paths, heritage elements, agricultural areas, water lines and places with greater scenic potential were analyzed. It was quickly realized that this network of routes could play a structuring role in enhancing the rural space of Lavra and Perafita.
The project was guided by a simple principle: minimum transformation, maximum recognition of the territory. Rather than redesigning the rural landscape, the objective was to understand how it functioned and strengthen the values already present within it.
The diagnosis confirmed that these paths were much more than routes. They formed a living system of agricultural circulation, collective memory and community connection. The intervention was therefore designed to repair, organise and reveal the territory, without compromising its identity or productive function.
Based on this diagnosis, the project focused on the recovery of two fundamental sections of the Rural Trails of the Angeiras Agricultural Park, maintaining their original function of supporting agricultural activity. The intervention sought to make the movement of farmers and agricultural machinery compatible with new safety and comfort conditions for residents and visitors who walk or cycle.
The intervention was implemented through two priority sections. The first (CR1), connecting Rua dos Caçadores to Rua do Marreco, extends for approximately 730 metres and has already been completed. The second (CR2), linking Rua do Moinho de Sol Posto to Rua do Carvalhal, covers approximately 270 metres and is scheduled for inauguration shortly. Together, these interventions represent a significant first step in the construction of a wider network of rural paths within the future Matosinhos Rural Park.
Simple, durable solutions that were integrated into the landscape were chosen. Whenever possible, existing trees were preserved, materials were reused, traditional stone walls were restored and natural and cultural elements already present in the territory were valued. The improvement of pavements, agricultural accesses and circulation areas made it possible to reinforce the functionality of the paths without erasing their rural character.
The project also included a strong environmental component, with actions to enhance vegetation, improve drainage, protect agricultural soil and create conditions for a more balanced relationship between water, soil, mobility and landscape.
Resting spaces, meeting points and landscape observatories were provided along the routes, allowing for a slower, more respectful and interpretative experience. The future connection to

the Ecovia do Rio Onda will reinforce this network, bringing coast, city and countryside closer together.
Throughout the process, particular care was taken to avoid one of the most common risks associated with rural tourism: turning local life into a spectacle. The paths were improved because they remain useful, meaningful and alive. Their value for visitors comes precisely from that authenticity.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved
Although the project is still in the implementation phase, its results are already visible in the territory. The Rural Paths of the Angeiras Agricultural Park began to restore accessibility, legibility and dignity to a landscape that for many years remained outside the main visitor routes in Matosinhos.
By June 2026, the first section (CR1) had been fully completed, while the second section (CR2) was nearing completion and awaiting inauguration. Together, the two interventions account for approximately one kilometre of recovered rural paths and represent a combined investment of more than €263,000 by the Municipality of Matosinhos.
The restoration of the routes is improving circulation conditions for farmers, residents and future visitors, while simultaneously reinforcing the appreciation of the existing natural, rural and cultural heritage. Areas previously marked by degradation or lack of use now gain new conditions to accommodate smooth mobility, leisure, contemplation and interpretation of the landscape.
The intervention also contributes to a more balanced relationship between tourism and territory. By creating alternatives to the coastal front, it helps to diversify the tourist experience and reveal a lesser-known dimension of the municipality. At the same time, the preservation of agricultural elements, traditional walls, existing vegetation and the original characteristics of the paths ensures that the authenticity of the place remains intact.
More than creating new spaces, the project is returning meaning to places that have always been part of the local identity, allowing the community to once again recognize them as collective heritage.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn
One of the main lessons learned from this project was realizing that valuing a territory does not mean transforming it. Often, the most valuable resources already exist; they just need to be recognized, protected and made accessible in a responsible way.
Throughout the process, it became evident that rural spaces should not be seen just as scenes for contemplation. They are living landscapes, shaped daily by farmers, traditions, memories and community relationships. The real challenge is to make this value visible without compromising its authenticity.
The project also demonstrated the importance of integrating different objectives into the same intervention. Sustainable mobility, nature conservation, heritage appreciation, support for

agriculture and visitor experience are no longer separate themes but become part of a common vision.
The main recommendation for other destinations is simple: listen to the territory before transforming it. The most lasting solutions emerge when they respect local identity and when they place communities at the center of decisions.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact
The Rural Paths of the Angeiras Agricultural Park represent much more than the requalification of routes. They are helping to reshape how Matosinhos is perceived, recognising that the municipality's identity is found not only along the Atlantic coast, but also in its rural landscapes, agricultural communities and everyday heritage.

The project is laying the foundations for a wider network of sustainable mobility and landscape discovery, strengthened by future connections to the Rio Onda Greenway and the Matosinhos Rural Park. By June 2026, the first section (CR1) had been completed and the second (CR2) was nearing inauguration, representing a combined municipal investment of more than €263,000.

Its most lasting impact, however, will be a change in perception. What was once seen as a transit area is becoming a place of learning, belonging and shared responsibility, where visitors, residents and farmers coexist with respect.

In a territory between the sea, the city and the countryside, these paths reveal a more complete identity and show how sustainable tourism can grow from the appreciation of a living heritage that remains part of everyday community life.

Awards or Certifications

Web Articles
https://viva-porto.pt/atencao-ciclistas-e-caminhantes-matosinhos-vai-ter-56-kms-de-percursos-rurais/

https://sapo.pt/artigo/inaugurado-o-primeiro-caminho-rural-entre-a-rua-dos-cacadores-e-a-rua-do-marreco-68b3a32a34aef4aa991c2da1

https://breves.pt/noticia/matosinhos-caminho-rural-inaugurado-em-matosinhos-para-apreciadores-de-caminhadas-e-passeios-de-bicicleta

Other Relevant Links

Quotes or Testimonials

“These paths have always been part of our daily lives. For many years, they were mainly used to work the land. Today, they continue to serve that purpose, but they also help others understand the value of this landscape and our way of life. The land has not changed; the way we look at it has.”

— Local farmer and resident