

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING PORTUGAL'S BONE CHAPELS AS A POTENTIAL CULTURAL ROUTE

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the case study of Portugal's Bone Chapels, built within a temporal delimitation from the 17th century to the 19th century – as a potential Cultural Route.

The nine examples that still stand in the national territory, constitute a type of religious architecture that, due to their geographical location - all in the south of the territory, concentrate, in a joint articulated vision, a tourist potential as a Cultural Route, which will be explored in this investigation.

For the majority of Portuguese examples, which constitute transformed spaces for cultural tourism purposes, some strategies will be proposed that these spaces may adopt to enhance their use in an aspect (cultural and heritage protection), which assumes increasing importance in the world today. Accordingly, some digital educational products will be proposed, integrating, among others, the route, and audio guides for each of the Bone Chapels, to be made available in the properties and on the Cultural Route website, in an articulated and networked strategy of the nine architectures.

Finally, taking into account that the Bone Chapels constitute a type of religious architecture that is not exclusive to this country, we will present the geographic preponderance of these cases on an international level, to understand the geographic scale of this cultural heritage. We will evaluate the possibility of creating an international cultural route of these architectures, using as an example of success - the European Cemeteries Route, one of the Council of Europe's Cultural Itineraries.

Keywords: Bone Chapels; Portugal; Dark Tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bone Houses constitute places of worship where human bones were incorporated into the interior walls of crypts, chapels, or chambers.

They are sacred spaces established in territories found in medieval Christian geographies, which continued to be built during the Catholicism following the Religious Reforms of the 16th

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century and even in certain geographical areas until the 19th century, Portugal being an example.

Their cultural significance lies in the fact that they bear witness to a practice in which human bones were used to line the interior of sacred spaces. Human remains unearthed from burial sites near structures such as churches, cloisters, galilees, and other surrounding grounds were cleaned and arranged, stacked together, or applied to interior walls using mortar. They could be used to fill the entirety of an interior wall or to form images such as crosses and other sacred symbols.

Additionally, we observe sentences and liturgical equipment such as altars, chandeliers, candelabras, etc., made from osteological material. Examples of this practice include the Bone Chapel of Campo Maior, in Portugal, and the Chapel/Ossuary of Sedlec in the Czech Republic. The former features an altar formed by bones and various examples of inscriptions composed of bones. In the latter, we witness the same practice, along with the creation of devotional images, family crests, and other liturgical equipment such as candelabras, all made from osteological material.

Their historical and cultural interest is also revealed by the fact that the osteological material in these sacred spaces was presented and combined with other materials and symbols, sculpted or painted, associated with Christological themes, such as Christ's martyrdom - *Arma Christi*, *vanitas*, and iconographies like - the *Dance Macabre*, *the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead*, *Sister Death*, etc.²

In countries like Portugal and Italy, some of these spaces have been turned into museums, prepared to receive thousands of tourists annually from various nationalities. Examples include the crypt of the Church of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini in Rome (Italy) and the *Bone House* of the Church of São Francisco in Évora (Portugal). In the remaining Portuguese examples, except for three cases (in Monforte, Lagos, and Alcantarilha), consolidation actions have been carried out for cultural tourism purposes, such as opening the spaces to visitors and coordinating with museum spaces and tourist information centers located near the properties.

The Bone Chapels in Portugal were fully identified (totaling nine) in the year 1993 by art historian Carlos Veloso in his work "As Capelas de Ossos em Portugal. Speculum mortis no espectáculo barroco"³. In this work, the historian adds two examples of Bone Chapels that belong to the informal category of "missing" immovable property in Portugal, that is, no longer standing heritage due to demolition or extinction, or from which the bones from their interior have been removed.

Art historian Paul Koudounaris, in his work titled "Empire of Death: A Cultural History of Ossuaries and Charnel Houses" (2011), identified a third "missing" Bone Chapel⁴. Based on the information provided by these authors, we can consider that there were at one time twelve Bone Chapels still standing in Portugal.

²An example is the Ossuary of St. Stephan's Church in Leuk, Switzerland, where we observe a fresco on a wall depicting the theme of *the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead*.

³Veloso, C. (1993). *As Capelas de Ossos em Portugal. "Speculum mortis" no espectáculo barroco*. Coimbra: Livraria Minerva, pp. 12 e 13.

⁴Koudounaris, P. (2011). *The Empire Of Death. A Cultural History Of Ossuaries And Charnel Houses*. Editor: Thames & Hudson LTD, pp.55 e 63.

The nine surviving Bone Chapels in the territory are incorporated into classified properties protected by law. However, despite the classification process offering legal protection to these properties by establishing norms, rules, and guidelines to preserve and safeguard their integrity, it is important to emphasize that classification alone is not sufficient to guarantee and ensure this protection.

Regarding this matter - and according to a news article from December 4, 2022⁵, the Bone Chapel of the Igreja Matriz of Alcantarilha (Portugal) is at risk of collapse, and so far, no safeguarding or protection intervention has been carried out in that space.

Regarding the rest of these heritage cases - except for the *Bone House* of Évora and the *Chapel of Souls* of Campo Maior, it can be considered that their existence is more or less faded and without information references at the sites of the properties. All of this confirms a certain public perception of abandonment to which some of these properties are subject⁶, this makes it more urgent to study and create educational outreach content about this at-risk heritage.

Therefore, it is necessary to take action – especially in the case of the most at-risk properties, to conduct historical-artistic studies, promote dissemination, and raise awareness for the preservation and conservation of this cultural heritage (Martins, 2020). Through this path, an important step is taken towards their protection and conservation for future generations.

This article proposes the idea of creating a Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal, uniting the nine properties in an articulated vision, and highlighting their potential in promoting culture, preservation, and defense of heritage.

In this proposal, the possibility of presenting this itinerary through a digital educational product will also be discussed, which can be integrated online or, if possible, specifically applied to each location. Thus, with this contribution, in addition to the dissemination and knowledge of the cultural heritage of the Bone Chapels, we are responding to a growing tourist demand related to *Dark Tourism*⁷, as well as other potentialities that we will present.

In terms of structure, the article is organized in eight parts - the introduction, which presents the topic to be explored and some related concepts; followed by the background, where some observed needs that motivated the research and proposed development are presented. The next part contains the methodology and sources that made the development of the article possible. Then, in part four, the research results are presented, including the geographies of the Bone Chapels at an international and national level, followed by the identification of each one in Portugal and its position in the territory, a crucial step for the perception of the feasibility of the proposed Cultural Route around this theme.

This journey will allow for the proposal of the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal in the following part (five), and how it can be presented. Its potential (awareness-raising) and its tourist potential will be discussed, taking into account an audience that increasingly seeks alternative cultural enjoyment offerings in terms of education and knowledge about a particular cultural heritage from the past - in this case, within the scope of *Dark Tourism*. In point six will present some optimization strategies (presentation/dissemination/promotion)

⁵News from the *Jornal do Suplemento de Revista Domingo/CM* (04/12/2022).

⁶We also encounter the absence of references regarding their locations.

⁷Routes to places historically associated with death and tragedy (concentration camps/Holocaust, cemeteries, tours around Jack the Ripper, etc.).

that each Chapel can adopt and how the proposed educational product can be applied to each of the properties.

In the following point (seven), potential future projections of the theme and its possible international articulation will be presented, exploring as an example the European Route of Cemeteries, one of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. And finally, in the last part, some relevant conclusions obtained from the journey developed throughout the article are presented.

Figure 1. Photographic record of the *Bone House* of Évora and the *Chapel of Souls* of Campo Maior.



Source: Photographic records by the author.

2. BACKGROUND

A potential visitor to one of the Bone Chapels in the national territory who initiates a simple search (on Google, for example) about the subject will encounter various omissions, from non-existence (of Chapels) to a lot of outdated information such as identification, location, access, opening and closing hours, etc. As an example, based on a search by this hypothetical visitor, only six cases are mentioned when in reality there are nine in Portugal (Table 1.).

Table 1. Results of the search using the terms - *Capelas dos ossos em Portugal; Capillas de los huesos en Portugal; Portugal's Bone Chapels* (Google).

Capelas dos ossos em Portugal; <i>Capillas de los huesos en Portugal; Portugal's Bone Chapels</i>		
Titles of the Websites	Type of Website	Source
“6 Capelas Dos Ossos Que Você Precisa Conhecer Em Portugal.”	Tourism website with proposals for destinations, accommodation, and gastronomy in Portugal.	Available online: https://portaldeportugal.com/6-capelas-dos-ossos-portugal/ (consulted on 9 march of 2024).
“6 capelas dos ossos em Portugal que pode visitar.”	Tourism website proposing cultural, historical, gastronomic destinations, etc. Tips and pastimes (<i>Lifestyle</i>).	Available online: https://www.vortexmag.net/6-capelas-dos-ossos-em-portugal-que-pode-visitar/ (consulted on 10 march of 2024).
“Sabia que Portugal tem seis Capelas dos Ossos?”	Website <i>DESCLA</i> (sports, culture, and leisure) offers in these fields in Portugal.	Available online: https://descla.pt/capelas-dos-ossos (consulted on 9 march of 2024).
“Capillas de Huesos: Ingresamos a 6 de Ellas, ¿Aceptas el Desafío?.”	Religious tourism website.	Available online: https://www.turismoreligioso.trav-el/circuitos-turisticos/capilla-de-huesos-portugal/ (consulted on 8 march of 2024).
“Did you know that Portugal has six bone chapels?”	Website targeting writers who can share stories, knowledge, ideas, suggestions, etc.	Available online: https://medium.com/@stefangeorgeta1978/did-you-know-that-portugal-has-six-bone-chapels-6a0db74eeb98 (consulted on 9 march of 2024).

Source: Made by the author.

When searching for the terms in Table 1, our hypothetical visitor would encounter inaccuracies and gaps in the information, such as - imprecisions and omissions about potential places to visit, lack of communication and relationship between the properties, etc.

In addition, there is a lack of information related to the scale of this type of cultural heritage and historical-artistic content about each of the properties.

The only properties that have educational content on-site, at the entrance, in adjacent areas, or on the premises themselves, are the *Bone House* of the Church of São Francisco in Évora

and the *Chapel of Souls* of the Main Church of Campo Maior. The first one has informative plaques in two languages (Portuguese and English), placed on glass gates that prevent visitors from circulating, except in the center of the Chapel, and from touching the bones and mummies. The second one has an annex to the main building, a museum space entirely dedicated to the Chapel, as a result of rehabilitation works completed in 2023.

Except for these two examples - the first, the Chapel of Évora, a paid entry space,⁸ and the second with free access - the remaining seven Chapels lack any educational/informational materials in physical or digital format for a potential visitor.

In addition to the lack of public information, the absence of references regarding the number of potential places to visit stands out - which prevents a complete and accurate vision of the Bone Chapels in Portugal. Furthermore, the *Bone Chapel* of the Main Church of Alcantarilha is at risk of collapse, demanding urgent action to preserve and make this cultural heritage accessible through knowledge for the general public. The educational component is crucial to ensure the preservation and valorization of this structure for future generations.

It is crucial to investigate these heritages as a fundamental step to creating educational materials that promote, value, and preserve these sites for visitors. We propose the creation of a digital product to fill these gaps, networking the nine cases of the Bone Chapels in Portugal, united by the similarity of their cultural heritage, through the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels.

The proposed dialogue in this article would allow visitors to understand (acquire knowledge) the extent of this cultural heritage, aiming to fill the gap of educational information on the subject, thus contributing to the valorization of such important heritage.

3. METHODOLOGIES

For the development of this article, a qualitative methodology was chosen, gathering information on-site through field visits specifically conducted for this purpose, during which direct observation of each of the Bone architectures in Portugal was applied.

Additionally, research, collection, and reading of sources were carried out, including among others - the *Agiologio lusitano dos sanctos, e varoens illustres em virtude do Reino de Portugal* (1657), *Historia Serafica da Ordem dos Frades Menores de S. Francisco na Provincia de Portugal* (1656), testimonies present in travel literature and period engravings. Finally, through the critical analysis and review of the obtained data, it was possible to create two maps using the *Google Maps* platform *My Maps*: one related to the location of the Bone Chapels on an international level and another related to the location of the Bone Chapels in Portugal. The analysis of the first indicates the scale of this type of cultural heritage internationally, and the second, at the national level.

We will explore the viability of the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal, investigating how this route can be presented. Additionally, we will discuss strategies to promote the Bone Chapels in Portugal, aiming to transform them into a potential Cultural Route.

⁸The other spaces with paid access are the Bone Chapel of Faro Cathedral and the Bone Chapels of the Ordem Terceira de Nossa Senhora do Monte do Carmo, also located in Faro.

4. RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

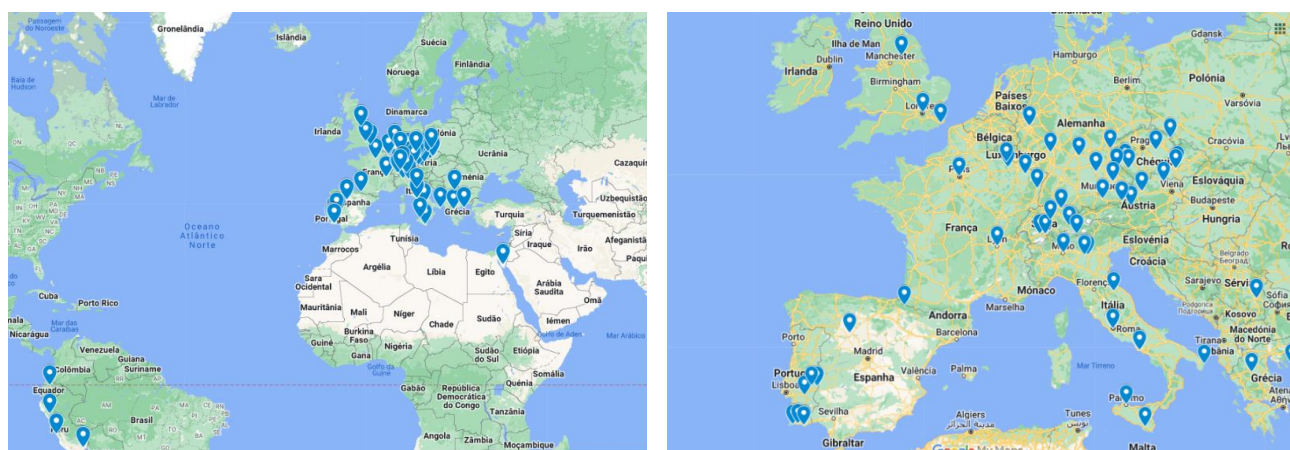
4.1. Geographies of the Bone Chapels

The Bone Houses are mainly found on the north hemisphere, with a greater number of examples observed in the European continent, specifically in territories covered by Southern Europe. In this geographical region, a total of twenty-six examples were identified, distributed as follows: thirteen in Italy, nine in Portugal, two in Spain, and two in Greece, respectively (Figure 2).

In the geographical area of Western Europe, a total of twenty-four examples were counted: eight in Germany, six in France, four in Austria, and three in Switzerland and the United Kingdom, respectively. In Eastern Europe, there are nine cases: seven in the Czech Republic, and one in Serbia and Poland, respectively.

Regarding the cases located on, or below the equatorial line, a total of four examples were counted in South America - one in Ecuador (in Quito), and three in Peru, respectively in Cajamarca, Lima, and Lampa. In the Southeast Asian area, there is one example in Cambodia, while in the Middle East and on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, there is one example located in Israel.

Figure 2. Geographies of the Bone Chapels at an international level.

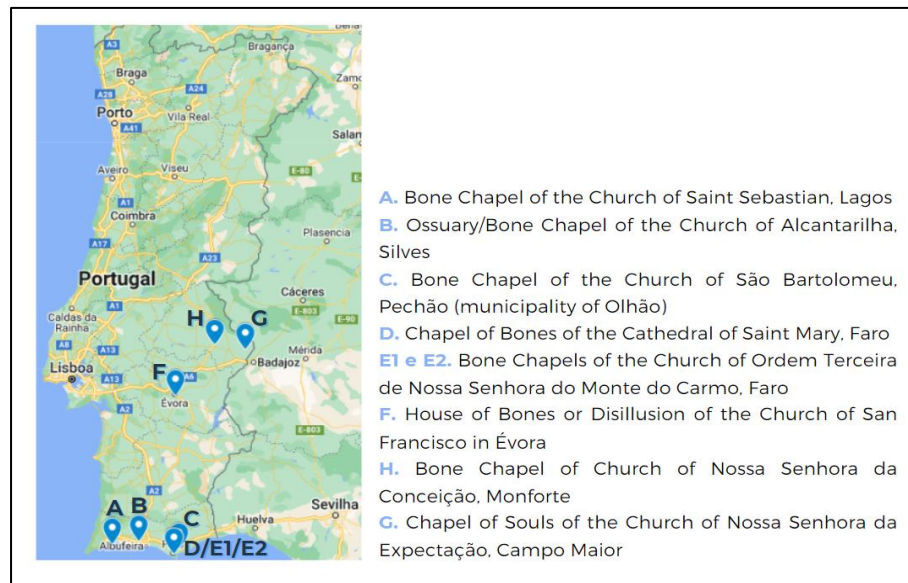


Source: Made by the author through the platform *My Maps of Google Maps*. Map available online: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1MNm0rVmF66ZrijSL0TfMmCDJs6U0i0&usp=sharing> (consulted on 10 march of 2024).

In Portugal, there are a total of nine intact Bone Chapels found south of the River Tejo (Figure 3). Two examples of this type of devotional architecture are located in Alto Alentejo, respectively in Campo Maior and Monforte. They are called the *Chapel of Souls* of the Igreja Matriz de Nossa Senhora da Expectação (Campo Maior) and the *Bone Chapel* of Igreja Matriz de Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Monforte).

In Central Alentejo, there exists the *Bone House* or *House of Disillusionment* attached to the Chapter Room of the Church of São Francisco in Évora. The remaining six bone architectures are located in Algarve (Lagos, Alcantarilha, Faro, and Olhão).

Figure 3. Bone Chapels in Portugal.



Source: Made by the author through the platform *My Maps* of *Google Maps*. Map available online: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1Rda-aiX7b9O49HT-HI9hDUzc2pCR6A&usp=sharing> (consulted on 10 march of 2024).

The city of Faro has a total of three Bone Chapels (Figure 4). Two Bone Chapels are integrated in the same convent complex belonging to the Church of Ordem Terceira de Nossa Senhora do Monte do Carmo, in Faro. Additionally, at a distance of 763m from this site, the third *Bone Chapel* of Faro is located, in the cloister of the Cathedral of Santa Maria.

Annexed to the Main Church in Alcantarilha, we encounter an *Ossuary/Bone Chapel*, and in Lagos, belonging to the Church of São Sebastião, another Bone Chapel is observed attached to that main Church. Finally, located in Pechão (municipality of Olhão), the so-called Bone Chapel of the Main Church of São Bartolomeu is located there. Although it is a niche (and not a Chapel), its nomenclature and the fact that it is a structure entirely covered with human bones - are reasons for it to be included in the list of Bone Chapels in Portugal.

Figure 4. The distance between the properties that integrate the three Bone Chapels of the city of Faro is 763.56 meters.



Source: Made by the author through the platform *Google Maps*.

Regarding the entities responsible for the construction of the Bone Chapels in the national territory, we can mention that two of these architectures were built by Franciscan friars - namely the *Bone House* or *House of Disillusionment* of the Church of São Francisco in Évora and the *Bone Chapel* of the Franciscan convent in Funchal (KOUDOUNARIS, 2011). The latter was demolished and was located in the geographic area of the Municipal Garden of Funchal, formerly known as Jardim Dona Amélia⁹.

However, this was not the only religious order to build this type of devotional space in Portugal. Other religious orders that accomplished this feat, included the Venerável Ordem Terceira de Nossa Senhora do Monte do Carmo, responsible for the construction of two Bone Chapels in the same convent complex - linked to the Igreja da Ordem Terceira de Nossa Senhora do Monte do Carmo, located in Faro. Additionally, the Congregation of Santa Cruz de Coimbra was established in the cloister of the Monastery of Santa Cruz the so-called *Capela de Ossos de Cavaleiros de Santa Cruz* (later demolished), (VELOSO, 1993).

The remaining examples belong to the Main Churches of each territory and, similar to the other cases mentioned, they appear to be dedicated to the worship of Souls, as indicated in their nomenclature, such as in the case of the *Chapel of Souls* of the Igreja Matriz de Nossa Senhora da Expectação, in Campo Maior. In addition to receiving offerings and alms, the cult of the souls persists in the bone chapels of Monforte and Alcantarilha, where votive offerings such as candles and images continue to be deposited on the altars. These three examples have also not yet been consolidated, and to have access to them, the visitor must go to the church or to the nearby Tourist Office to request that the space be opened.

In summary, these devotion places dedicated to the worship of souls and bones were integrated into the main religious centers of a parish, positioned inside or annexed to the temples integrated into the main religious centers of a parish (positioned inside or annexed to the temples), and, for the most part, were consecrated/dedicated to the heavenly protector of Christ¹⁰.

Although classified with different levels of distinction among themselves, concerning their legal status and levels of protection, the properties that integrate the nine chapels hold the same legal status and level of protection as the church to which they are physically integrated. According to their relative values, these immovable cultural heritage assets can be classified into three levels of distinction: national interest, public interest, or municipal interest.

Of the churches that integrate the Bone Chapels in Portugal, we find that the *Bone House* or *House of Disillusionment*, annexed to the Chapter House of the Church of São Francisco in Évora, holds the classification of National Monument (MN). This legal layer is interconnected with the fact that it is located in a historic center integrated into the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1989¹¹. The other chapels integrated into churches classified as National Monuments (MN) belong to the Church of São Sebastião in Lagos.

⁹Location of the "missing" Bone Chapels in Portugal, either due to demolition or removal of the bones from their interiors. Map created by the author available online: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1pgnWxrhoWnLF6-mrmlZii3o2kUzm9wA&usp=sharing> (consulted on 14 march of 2024).

Source: Made by the author through the platform *My Maps* of *Google Maps*.

¹⁰Except for two cases - the Bone Chapel of the Cathedral of Faro/Church of Santa Maria and the Bone Chapel of the Church of São Sebastião in Lagos (formerly the Chapel of Our Lady of Conception).

¹¹Classification of the historic center of Évora as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Available online: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/361/documents> (consulted on 15 march of 2024).

The Bone Chapel annexed to the walled churchyard of the Church of São Bartolomeu in Pechão holds the classification of Monument of Public Interest (MIP) and the remaining national chapels are integrated into architectures classified as Properties of Public Interest (IMP).

The phases of classification and, consequently, heritage valorization (from the oldest to the most recent) involving the examples of this type of cultural heritage that are still preserved in Portugal can be presented chronologically as follows (Table 2).

Table 2. Order of classification of the properties that integrate the Bone Chapels in Portugal.

Classification of the properties that integrate the Bone Chapels in Portugal			
Nomenclature	Location	Classification	Decree-Law
<i>Bone Chapel or Chapel of Disillusionment</i>	Annexed to the Chapter House of the Church of São Francisco in Évora.	National Monument (NM).	Decree of 16-06-1910, DG n.º 136 de 23 June de 1910.
<i>Bone Chapel</i>	Annexed to the Church of São Sebastião in Lagos.	National Monument (NM).	Decree of the Government n.º 9 842, DG, 1.ª Series, n.º 137 de 20 July 1924.
<i>Chapel of Souls</i>	Annexed to the Main Church of Nossa Senhora da Expectação in Campo Maior.	Property of Public Interest (PPI).	Decree of the Government n.º 37 366, DG, 1.ª Series, n.º 70 de 05 April 1949.
<i>Bone Chapel</i>	In the cloister of the Cathedral of Santa Maria in Faro.	Property of Public Interest (PPI).	Decree of the Government n.º 40 361, DG, 1.ª Series, n.º 228 de 20 October 1955.
<i>Ossuary/ Bone Chapel</i>	Annexed to the Mother Church of Alcantarilha.	Property of Public Interest (PPI).	Decree n.º 251/70, DG, 1.ª Series, n.º 129 de 03 June 1970.
<i>Two Bone Chapels</i>	Located in the cloister of the Igreja de Nossa Senhora do Carmo in Faro.	Property of Public Interest (PPI).	Decree n.º 95/78, Diário da República n.º 210/1978, Series I de 1978-09-12.
<i>Bone Chapel</i>	Annexed to the main body of the Igreja Matriz de Nossa Senhora da Conceição in Monforte.	Property of Public Interest (PPI).	Decree of the Government n.º 8/83, de 24 de January de 1983.
<i>Bone Chapel</i>	Annexed to the walled yard of the Church of São Bartolomeu in Pechão.	Monument of Public Interest (MPI).	Decree n.º 67/2013, Series II de 2013-04-05.

Source: Made by the author through information obtained from Portugal's Diário da República. Available online: <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/home> (consulted on 15 march of 2024).

5. THE PROPOSAL: CULTURAL ROUTE OF THE BONE CHAPELS IN PORTUGAL

The nine Bone Chapels in Portugal, due to their geographical location - all located in south of the country - concentrate, in a joint articulated vision, a tourist potential as a Cultural Route (Figure 5.).

Geographically, they are concentrated in the south of Portugal, in the areas of Alto and Baixo Alentejo, and the Algarve.

In the Algarve region, three examples can be visited on the same day, as they are located within a distance of 763.56 meters from each other (points C, D). They are close to Portugal's train line, which provides an alternative for tourists who do not want to travel by car to the location and who come from other areas beyond those encompassing the properties. This particular group is also near the Gago Coutinho Airport, providing another viable means for a tourist to travel and visit this ensemble in a single day.

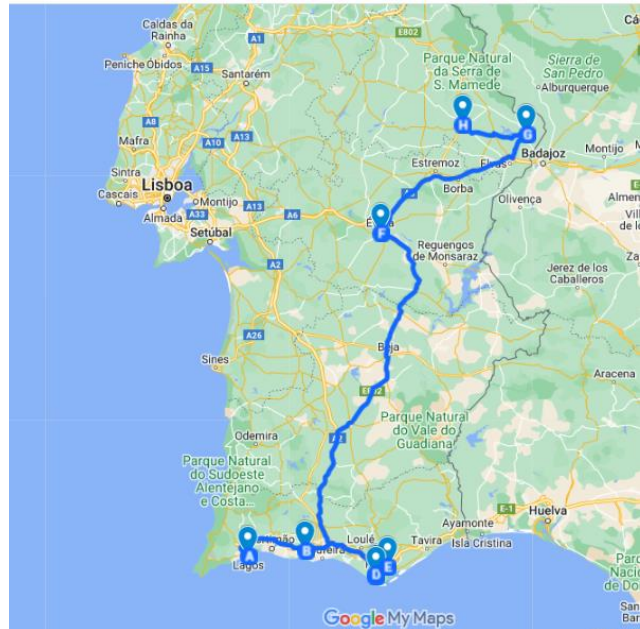
Combined with the other examples in the Algarve (points A, B, and E), they can provide a complement to the sun and beach tourism for which the region is known. Although not interconnected, the Bone Chapels in this region already receive tourist visits because they are located in the main places of worship of each city, such as Mother Churches or historic convents.

In the case of the Bone Chapels located in the Alentejo (points F, H, G), it is important to note that one of them - the *Bone House* in Évora (point F) - already receives thousands of visitors per month and is located in a historic center classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This property can serve as a key connection point for the other Bone Chapels located in Alentejo, enhancing the cultural tourism in the region, which already attracts tourists interested in local gastronomy or in visiting well-known historical monuments (such as the Roman Temple, Cathedral, and Churches in Évora; the fortified square of Campo Maior and its forts, aqueducts, castles, and churches in the city of Elvas, etc.).

The Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal consists of examples of cultural heritage with historical value, showcasing a construction practice involving human bones. This aspect not only appeals to the curious general public but also attracts a type of tourist interested in *Dark Tourism*.

Besides the general public, this Cultural Route can be particularly appealing to *Dark Tourists*. According to a 2022 study entitled "*Dark Tourists: Profile, Practices, Motivations*

Figure 5. Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal



Source: Made by the author through the platform *My Maps* of *Google Maps*.

*and Wellbeing*¹² - from the survey conducted with 993 Portuguese participants -, it was possible to understand beyond their profile and motivations (curiosity, need to see, understand, and pleasure), that this was an audience that had already heard of *Dark Tourism* and was significantly younger and more educated compared to those who hadn't.

According to the same survey, out of the 993 Portuguese participants, 38.1% were already engaging in this type of tourism (Magno, Fraiz-Berg, Leite, 2022). In this sense, this Cultural Route may cater to the interests of this particular audience.

The survey, although only conducted with a Portuguese audience, offers us a clue on how to present the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal. As it involves a younger audience and knowing that tourists usually research places and plan their trips and itineraries in advance (online), we opted to present an educational product that includes the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal in a digital format.

This map created on the Google Maps platform has the benefit of being able to be indexed on a website, not changing its presentation, which is advantageous because it is an interface already used by travelers (especially tourists) in the planning of their trips (Figure 5.)

6. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING PORTUGAL'S BONE CHAPELS AS A POTENTIAL CULTURAL ROUTE

One of the strategies for optimizing the Bone Chapels in Portugal as a potential Cultural Route would be to first provide the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in physical or digital format at each property location.

This strategy, although it may involve costs, would be less expensive than hiring technicians and providing them with the necessary training to present the historical and cultural context of the Bone Chapels, as well as the scale of this cultural heritage. Additionally, some of the spaces lack technical personnel to open the property to the public. In some cases, a request must be made to the Tourism Office or to the parish priest to open the space, so the lack of funds for hiring tourism technicians is a factor to consider.

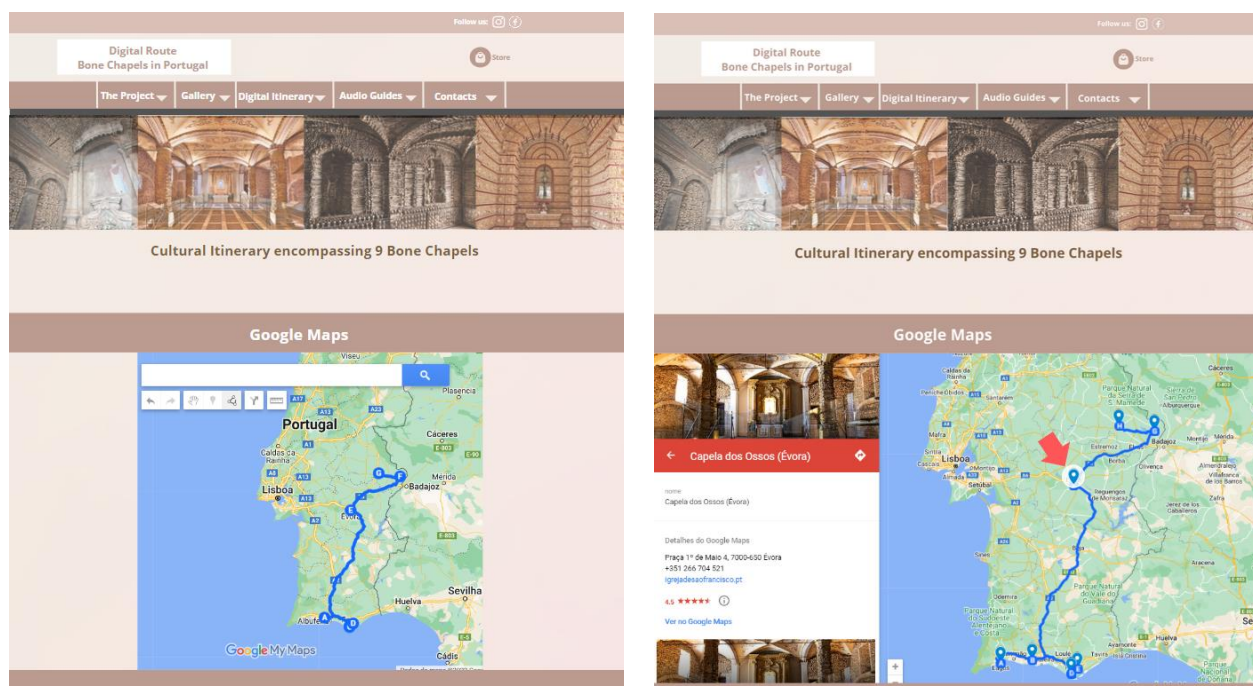
With a digital educational product of the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels, some of these shortcomings can be mitigated. This proposal is an educational tool for potential tourists that offers insight into the scale of this cultural heritage and the possible places to visit.

As optimization strategies, the map in Figure 5, became the basis of the Bone Chapels Route in Portugal, which can be indexed to a digital platform, such as a *website*, or be included in brochures distributed at each property, or be available in the form of *QR* codes at each property, allowing tourists to visit the Route's website.

The presence of the map of the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in the properties, regardless of its format, would not only connect the nine properties in a network but also possibly enhance tourist visits to various locations through the route of information.

¹²Magno, J; Fraiz-Breg J. A.; Leite, Â. (2022). Dark Tourists: Profile, Practices, Motivations and Wellbeing. *National Library of Medicine: Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 19(19), 12100.

Figure 6. Prototype of the Bone Chapels Route in Portugal presented in a digital format.



Source: Made by the author through the platform *Canva*.

The prototype presents the Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal, educational audio guides for each of the Bone Chapels, and a gallery of images showcasing interior views of four of the nine chapels (Figure 6).

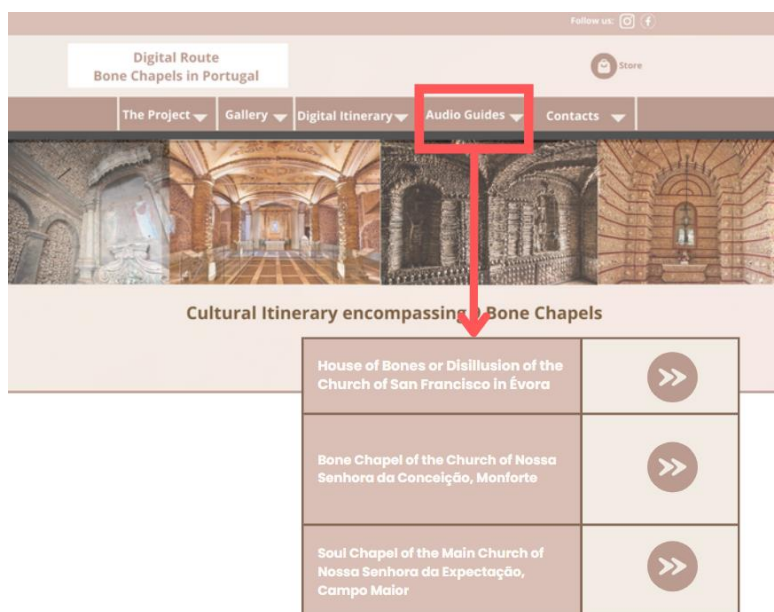
The format presentation of the Cultural Route is intuitive as it uses a map created in the platform Google Maps, which can be indexed on a website. This is advantageous because it is an interface already used by travelers (especially tourists) in planning their trips. When clicking on a point on the route, information about the location will appear on the left side of the page, along with an image of the chapel and directions on how to get there (Figure 6).

If implemented on-site using a *QR* code, the user will be directed to the website with the route. From there, they can explore a list of nine audio guides and choose to observe the property accompanied by an explanatory audio guide. The nine audio guides will be presented in a list format, and by clicking on the name of the property in question, users can access historical and cultural information, as well as interesting facts relevant to each space (Figure 7).

If a visitor is already in one of the properties, the option of audio guides is particularly interesting because it connects to a strategy of education and awareness for visitors, highlighting historical and artistic aspects of each of the chapels through audio. The visitor's experience in exploring the list of audio guides not only has an interactive component but also an informative one, allowing, for example, visitors with limitations such as total or partial visual impairment to have an opportunity to access the enjoyment of the property.

In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹³ of the United Nations (UN), this proposal would align with objectives number four (Quality Education), ten (Reduced Inequalities), and twelve (Responsible Consumption and Production).

Figure 7. Presentation of the audio guide list.



Source: Made by the author through the platform *Canva*.

It addresses objective four by promoting access to inclusive education and factual information and providing a free online educational product. It aligns with objective ten by promoting the social inclusion of individuals with total or partial visual impairment and providing access to educational content about the properties through audio guides. It integrates with objective number twelve by ensuring sustainable consumption patterns, as it does not produce waste, and the educational product consists of a Cultural Route in digital format, which can be made available on a website.

7. POTENTIAL FUTURE PROJECTION

From a micro to a macro scale, the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal could be included in the creation of a European Route of the Bone Chapels.

We can find a successful example of a European route of this scale with similar cultural values, in the example of the European Route of Cemeteries, a project/initiative of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, certified by the Council in 2010¹⁴.

The granting of the title and inclusion in the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe provided opportunities and increased visibility, connections with cultural agents, and sources of funding. And since the program was launched by the Council of Europe and not by the

¹³Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Available online: https://festquali.com.br/relacao-entre-ods-padroes-iso-e-esg/?gclid=CjwKCAjAq4KuBhA6EiwArMAw1F-5eqC7qQE-WaM5e4EGNfALXXiE518II-f8o-FJ-E_hONkO9O97UxoCvf8QAvD_BwE_, (consulted on 14 march of 2024).

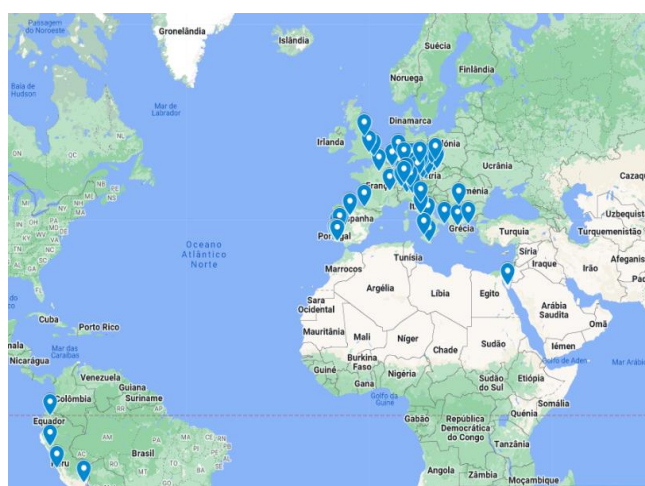
¹⁴European Cemeteries Route. Available online: <https://cemeteriesroute.eu/european-cemeteries-route.aspx> (consulted on 15 march of 2024).

European Union, it goes beyond the borders of the EU, as some of the sites covered in the itineraries involve regions such as the Middle East and North Africa.

The European Route of Cemeteries includes countries that are not within the geographical-political area of Europe¹⁵, and similarly, the potential European Route of Bone Chapels may also involve, among others, countries such as Ecuador and Peru, where Bone Chapels also exist (Figure 8).

The places with the most examples of this type of cultural heritage include Italy, with twelve examples; Portugal, with nine; Germany, with eight; Czechia with seven; and France with six. However, several countries that are part of the Bone Chapels could benefit in terms of tourism from the creation of a European Route of the Bone Chapels network (Figure 7.).

Figure 8. Potential European Route of the Bone Chapels.



Source: Made by the author through the platform *My Maps of Google Maps*. Map available online: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1MNm0rVmF66ZrjSL0TfMmCDJs6UOi0&usp=sharing> (consulted on 15 march of 2024).

8. CONCLUSION

The proposal of the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in Portugal presents significant tourism potential, especially in catering to the specific demand from individuals interested in *Dark Tourism*. The geographic concentration of the chapels in the South of the country, especially in the Algarve and Alentejo regions, provides a unique opportunity to create an alternative cultural tourism experience. Their proximity to each other, within a network of public transportation, and the already appealing cultural experiences in these locations, offer a compelling alternative to the typical Sun and Beach tourism, especially in the case of the Algarve region.

The optimization strategy highlighted in the development of the Cultural Route in digital format aims not only to overcome logistical challenges but also to provide an educational and inclusive experience. The presence of this route at the sites, whether in physical format or

¹⁵Countries included in the European Route of Cemeteries. European Cemeteries Route. Available online: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-european-cemeteries-route> (consulted on 18 march of 2024).

through QR codes, connects the chapels in a network, enhancing tourist visits through the provided information.

The inclusion of the Bone Chapels Route in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals embraces the promotion of Quality Education, Reduction of Inequalities, and Responsible Consumption and Production. By providing free and online access to inclusive educational information, the proposal seeks to be sustainable and aligned with principles of social equality.

Furthermore, the future projection of including the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels in a potential European Route highlights the possibility of increasing visibility, creating cultural connections, and attracting funding. Inspired by the success of the European Cemetery Route, the proposal aims to transcend borders, connecting countries beyond the European Union, including sites in regions such as Ecuador and Peru in the network.

Indeed, the Cultural Route of the Bone Chapels not only highlights the historical and cultural value of these monuments in Portugal but also suggests an innovative approach to tourism aligned with contemporary trends and targeting a diverse audience, from curious individuals in the general public to *Dark Tourists*. This contributes to the promotion of cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development.

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