

THE STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF CREATIVE TOURISM: AN EPORTFOLIO APPROACH

FIONA EVA BAKAS *

Assistant Professor, Tourism Department, Lusofona University, Portugal

ORCID: [0000-0002-5699-8178](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5699-8178)

SILVIA SILVA

Researcher, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal

ORCID: [0000-0002-3952-6160](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3952-6160)

NANCY DUXBURY

Senior Researcher, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal

ORCID: [0000-0002-5611-466X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5611-466X)

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Contributing to limited knowledge of creative tourism product development and operationalization processes in small cities and rural areas, ePortfolios were used as an online fieldnote depository for photographs and texts, which were entered by geographically dispersed researchers within the CREATOUR research-and-application project. The ePortfolios, as a type of research diary, record and examine the ways in which 48 different creative tourism activities were structured, organized and implemented. The thematic analysis of this empirical data identified five temporally distinct organizational moments that comprise the creative tourism activities and reveal the nuances of active participation, learning and community engagement as key elements characterizing creative tourism activities. Findings indicate that

creative tourism activities are fertile ground for the contemporary tourist trends of wanting to go beyond ‘gazing’ and to experience active involvement, which in these activities involved four different types of active participation. The ePortfolios also highlight the significance of the learning component within creative tourism, illustrating some ways in which learning is integrated into tourism activities. Links to the community are revealed with, for example, elderly women acting as artisan teachers, through which local participation is enabled and communication between visitors and residents is fostered. The use of ePortfolios as an ‘exploratory’ research platform and tool in tourism research is also discussed, for example, in terms of stimulating creative expression and offering researchers freedom to present discovered aspects that may not be captured in ‘pre-planned’ data forms and processes.

Keywords: *photographs, field notes, CREATOUR, Portugal, cultural tourism*

Introduction

In the context of rising attention to more community-centric and small-scale tourism development options, creative tourism activities have been identified as a possible trajectory for tourists to engage with local residents and cultures in meaningful and potentially transformative ways. At its core, creative tourism involves active learning experiences enabling creative self-expression and skill development, while also encouraging and deepening visitors’ connections with the place visited and its community. In recent years, research on the substance and structure of creative tourism activities has examined topics such as creative tourism in creative placemaking (Richards, 2020), creative tourism networks (Remoaldo et al., 2019), motivations of creative tourists (Remoaldo et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2014), creative tourism micro-entrepreneurs (Bakas et al., 2018, 2021) and creative tourism development models towards regenerative tourism (Duxbury et al., 2021).

Complementing this recent research, this article investigates how creative tourism activities are structured, organized and implemented in the context of small cities and rural areas. This research aims to create knowledge that is of value to practitioners as well as academic researchers. ePortfolios operate as a digital research diary as they facilitate online

qualitative data collection and they also function as a communication tool, enabling geographically dispersed researchers to collectively contribute and share their observations and insights within a large research-and-application project on creative tourism.

‘CREATOUR: Creative Tourism Destination Development in Small Cities and Rural Areas’ (2016-2020) was a 3.5-year project involving 30 researchers from five research centres working with 40 participating organizations located in small cities and rural areas in the Norte, Centro, Alentejo and Algarve regions of Portugal. Contextualized by a lack of knowledge on product development and operationalization processes, especially in extra-metropolitan contexts, the CREATOUR project addressed knowledge gaps while catalyzing a network of creative tourism pilot projects. The ePortfolios complemented an array of other knowledge co-creation methods, including interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation of developing creative tourism activities (for a detailed list, see Duxbury et al., 2019a).

The CREATOUR ePortfolios were online, semi-public (open only to project researchers and participants) research diaries documenting researchers’ site visits to creative tourism initiatives as they developed. The ePortfolios provided a platform and a process for making fieldnotes (a mode that is usually an invisible side of fieldwork) a more visible and reflexive exercise of generating knowledge. The ePortfolios contained text and photographs that supported the research process through recording observations, thoughts and questions as they occurred, guiding reflexive analysis of the practitioners’ own practices and experiences, and stimulating reflective thinking (Newbury, 2001). Furthermore, ePortfolios provided tourism researchers with a different kind of information about the embodied, first-hand experiences of creative tourism processes. The ePortfolios captured these observations and analyses of creative tourism development processes throughout the project’s duration. Mobilizing knowledge throughout a project’s lifetime enables researchers to provide

feedback and share project findings that could inform and assist in the development of initiatives (Duxbury et al., 2019a).

In this article, based on an analysis of 48 creative tourism initiatives in small cities and rural contexts, we examine how creative tourism activities are structured, how key dimensions of creative tourism are integrated into these activities, and how they are communicated via photographs and text within the ePortfolios. To contextualize this work, the article begins with a literature review to provide an overview of creative tourism as a research field and to place ePortfolios in context. An analysis of ePortfolio photographs and texts follows, revealing how elements of active participation, learning, community engagement, creative engagement and connection to place are expressed in creative tourism activities. In closing, the article reflects on the implications of using ePortfolios in a tourism research context.

Literature review

Creative tourism in small city and rural contexts

Creative tourism is fuelled by the new paradigm of the twenty-first century according to which tourists strive to find 'transformative' experiences, focus on self-development, are more conscious of their actions, and want to be active participants in tourism experiences rather than passive observers (UNWTO, 2016). Through creative tourism, the trend of tourists striving to find 'everyday' experiences rooted in place (Duxbury & Richards, 2019a) is fulfilled. While tourism has often been seen as a destructive force for local crafts and traditions because of the perceived alterations that occur through their *touristification*, creative tourism provides an alternative approach to address this issue. Creative tourism is an active way of both preserving and extending cultural heritage as creative tourism products are

inspired by and built locally from the distinct endogenous resources of local places and people (CREATOUR, 2017).

The touchstone definition of creative tourism by Richards and Raymond (2000) is “tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken” (p. 18). Other definitions followed reflecting the diversification of contexts and activities related to creative tourism in recent decades. Throughout, four reoccurring aspects resonate: active participation, creative self-expression, learning, and a link to the local community. These aspects constitute CREATOUR’s vision of creative tourism, with activities rooted in the talents and cultures of residents and their relations with the place they live.

Modern interpretations of creative tourism see tourist activities as co-creating and co-preserving local culture and traditions, while also providing participants with opportunities to develop creative skills and engage with the local community (Duxbury et al., 2019b). Through creative tourism, visitors can “get under the skin” (Landry, 2010, p. 37) of a place as they engage in everyday activities of locals (and with locals), which comprise the new ‘exotic’. The contemporary vision of creative tourism places importance on rooting creative intangibles to the specific place in which activities occur (Blapp & Mitas, 2018; OECD, 2014). In a time of high mobility, place-based tourism initiatives allow tourists to develop feelings of belonging (Stock, 2006), converting strange places into identifiable, familiar, and functional places. The most meaningful memories originate in the destination environment, the ‘place’, when tourists find themselves in a new environment, undertaking activities and interacting with people, all of which increase the strength of emotions and feelings and acquisition of new knowledge (Campos et al., 2018).

Creative tourism is a niche and emerging area of tourism with limited knowledge on development processes and the implementation of activities (Duxbury et al., 2021) and most studies to date focused on a few or single creative tourism activities. In a general way, the trajectories of research on creative tourism have moved “from identifying the emergence of creativity-based tourism activities, to examining creative tourist motivations and behaviours, the nature of the creative tourism experience, the general forms of organizations supplying creative tourism products, the relationships between tourists and their destination, and the impacts of this activity in the communities in which they occur” (Duxbury & Richards, 2019a, p. 4). Topics needing further research include how ‘creativity’ and co-creation are embodied in the experiences; challenges of developing sustainable business models in small-scale creative tourism; connections with cultural sustainability and inclusive community-based tourism development; and how it links to distinctive place-making processes (Duxbury & Richards, 2019b).

Furthermore, traditionally the focus of creative tourism has been on large cities, with growing attention to developing creative tourism initiatives in smaller communities and rural areas. There is a need to consider ‘the countryside’ or the ‘rural’ as a place where the creative economy is differently manifested and articulated from the now standard ‘creative script’ based on cities (Bell & Jayne, 2010). For example, in a rural and small cities context, creative tourism activities placed within small-scale festivals can be significant in creating social utility as they have the potential to periodically renew a community, demonstrate the value of local cultural institutions to the local population, and provide a platform for community involvement and cultural development (Bakas et al., 2019). ePortfolios allow for complementary views on these different processes and on the delivery of creative tourism activities in small city and rural contexts.

ePortfolios as a knowledge-building tool

Using ePortfolios responds to the call for less impersonal and more reflexive ways of knowing in tourism research (Ateljevic et al., 2013). ePortfolios, as a systematic and integrated way of collecting data and capturing some of the voices, views and lived experiences of multiple practitioners and researchers, represent a useful new tool in tourism research that can stimulate knowledge sharing and reflective thinking. The basic principle of ePortfolios is to “collect, select, and reflect!” and, in this way, they often play the role of a research diary (Newbury, 2001). While ePortfolios have not been used in tourism research to our knowledge, they can be viewed as akin to ethnographic fieldwork notes that often take the form of a research diary plus personal diary (Bakas, 2014). A research diary, is “a record of an ever-changing present” wherein a researcher or the participant regularly inserts observations to create a record which otherwise would not exist (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). A major strength of research diaries is that data is entered soon after the event, thus reducing recall errors.

ePortfolios can be similar to research diaries in terms of being a repository for recording frequent observations soon after the event and are most often found within formal educational contexts (e.g., in education and nursing studies), where they are used to deepen student learning and help students link their learning to career skills (Reljić et al., 2019). ePortfolios can contain coursework and other artifacts that the learner and others have collected over time. For example, professional health science programs, such as nursing, have used ePortfolios with students recording completed tasks and their experience of completing these tasks, which are then assessed (Garrett et al., 2013). When used as a course assignment, ePortfolios can enable more meaningful connections between theory and practice (Chittum, 2018). Tracking achievements within ePortfolios can also enhance a student’s motivation and pride in their intellectual and personal growth (Weber & Myrick, 2018). Most research on

ePortfolios focuses on their use for assessment without dealing directly with their contents (Rhodes, 2018). Studies that analyse the content of ePortfolios tend to focus on approaches to portfolio composition, rather than the textual or photographic content within the ePortfolio (Lam, 2020).

Within research projects, ePortfolios can be viewed as a tool for developing collective fieldnotes. Researchers create fieldnotes as a strategy to describe and reflect on the complexity of multifaceted phenomena. Fieldnotes can describe the physical environment, people, and their actions; record dialogue drawn from interactions; and include other notes on interactions and dynamics observed. They are used to quickly capture what researchers listen to, observe, think, and feel through their immersion in the phenomenon studied and to reflect on their observations and experiences. Fieldnotes involve critical acts of sense-making and interpretation, which inevitably have a bearing on research findings and results. Fieldnotes are deeply affected by the meaning the researcher imparts to the inquiry process, site, and fieldwork, and represent a 'preliminary analysis' of the raw data collected through the researcher's participation in an activity (Hernández-Hernández & Sancho-Gil, 2018).

The ePortfolio format allows for the inclusion of texts, photographs, and other forms of recording. For researchers, writing is a way of recording observations, thoughts, and questions and a process to stimulate reflections and reflective thinking. As Richardson (2005) states, "writing is not just the dissemination of our findings, but also a way of coming to knowledge" (cited in Lyle, 2013, p. 20). Within the writing process, narratives are important mechanisms to structure experiences and attribute meaning to personal experiences, actions of others, and the social world.

Furthermore, photographic data sources are valuable for the information they contain and how they represent things (i.e., symbolism and meanings). Photographs provide a more

direct record of the events being investigated than any other major form of data collection used by social researchers and comprise a powerful tool in thematic analysis (Christmann, 2008). However, interpreting photographs often requires more inference than other forms of data because the analytic frame that is present in an interview structure is not found in pictures (Grady, 2008). Most tourism research using photographs has involved volunteers taking pictures, used photographs as mediators in interviews (i.e., photo-elicitation techniques), or focused on readings of tourist photographs (Balomenou & Garrod, 2010; Park & Kim, 2018; Rakić & Chambers, 2011; Xiao et al., 2022). Limited research has been conducted on photographs taken by tourism researchers or practitioners to analyse tourism product development.

Methods

In June 2018, researchers within the CREATOUR project began to develop ePortfolio entries on a non-public (password protected) area of the CREATOUR website. For each site-visit to a creative tourism pilot project, researchers uploaded a text and up to 5 photos with captions of instances they felt were important. The ePortfolios were made soon after each site-visit. Creating ePortfolio entries involved selecting one's photographs and writing textual narratives, providing a means to process and record direct observations of key aspects and to reflect on fieldwork experiences while they were 'fresh', with later multiple-entry analysis supporting additional processes of reflexivity.

We acknowledge that researchers acted as a type of filter, collecting and inserting into the ePortfolios the information they perceived as important based on project objectives and literature engaged in during their involvement in the CREATOUR project. Research on acquiring and objectively presenting what one understands as the 'truth', especially when conducting qualitative academic research into tourism processes is fundamental and many excellent analyses exist on this (e.g., Goodson & Phillimore, 2004); however, this is beyond

the scope of this article. Also, the ePortfolios do not incorporate the feedback of the tourist-participants involved. These perspectives were captured through questionnaires distributed at the end of each activity, and compiled and analyzed collectively (see, e.g., Remoaldo et al., 2020).

This study reviewed 75 ePortfolio entries produced by researchers working in four NUTS II regions of mainland Portugal between June 3, 2018, and September 5, 2019. Of these, 48 entries related directly to individual creative tourism experiences, which were selected for analysis. The other 27 ePortfolio entries concerned conferences and other events attended by researchers and were not included in this analysis. In terms of geographic location, the ePortfolio entries concerned creative tourism pilot activities organized in the Norte (22 entries), Algarve (13 entries), Alentejo (7 entries), and Centro (6 entries) regions. The ePortfolio entries were written in both English and Portuguese. Excerpts in Portuguese presented in this article were translated by the authors, of which one is a native Portuguese speaker and the others are native English speakers.

A thematic analysis of the selected entries was conducted by the authors of this study, who were full-time researchers in the CREATOUR project. Thematic analysis was considered the most appropriate method to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the ePortfolio texts and photographs. Thematic analysis involves searching for and identifying common threads that extend across the data set; it is valuable in understanding and unpacking a body of rich, descriptive text; and it can also be successfully used with visual material (Walters, 2016). Working within an interpretivist paradigm, thematic analysis allows researcher to get a seeking a deeper, richer, more nuanced understanding of the empirical material and is flexible enough to allow for an inductive and interpretive analysis rather than only a descriptive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In an iterative process, the researchers independently read and re-analysed ePortfolio text and photo content, purposefully looking for material that spoke to them of the main dimensions of creative tourism and noting their observations. Data coding and analysis was based on the 6-phase thematic analysis model proposed by Esfehiani and Walters (2018) in a process of constantly moving back and forth, comparing empirical data with the codes, concepts found in research literature, and research experience in the CREATOUR project.

The analysis of the photographs within the ePortfolios used an adapted type of photo-elicitation technique among the researchers of converting visual data into text through a three-stage process (following Rose, 2006). In stage one, all details of each photograph were systematically described. In stage two, the meaning of the photograph was ascertained by employing knowledge from outside the photograph, that is, from the researcher's background and involvement with the project. In stage three, the structure of the photograph and the contextual knowledge were jointly interpreted in order to present the photograph's meaning in text form.

Analytical themes were selected after in-depth engagement with the data, with close attention to emerging themes. The researchers independently created coding categories and then discussed their frameworks before jointly deciding on the final coding categories. The coding categories were informed by: (1) the creative tourism literature; (2) the CREATOUR project's four dimensions of creative tourism (see previous section); and (3) organizational moments within the creative tourism activities, which emerged while analysing the ePortfolio data. Table 1 presents the final coding categories created for the thematic analysis of the ePortfolio entries.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Findings

Key dimensions of creative tourism activities

This section examines how photographs and texts document and reveal the themes of active participation, community engagement, learning and the organizational moments within the creative tourism activities. The article does not focus on topics addressed in other research, that is, various ways in which visitors can connect to place through creative tourism (Bakas et al., 2020) and the management of creative processes within creative tourism (Duxbury & Vinagre de Castro, 2022).

The thematic analysis of the ePortfolio entries created an analytical prism to examine how creative tourism activities are organized and implemented in small cities and rural areas. Table 2 presents examples of how key creative tourism dimensions and organizational moments are represented in photographs and text within the ePortfolios. Combining data retrieved from ePortfolio photographs and texts allows for different points of view, with different sources of information promoting a more complete and profound understanding of the social reality. Comparing the thematic analysis of each source-type, we could identify where the creative tourism-related analytical themes are represented by both text and photographic data and where this concurrence was less robust. The grey-shaded areas in Table 2 show how certain themes are communicated better through photographs than written text and vice versa.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

To complement the thematic analysis of the photographs in Table 2, five photographs are also presented: Figure 1 shows the active participation of tourists in a salt-related creative tourism activity. Figure 2 represents creative self-expression due to the variety of the finished

products (felt hats) of the workshop. Figure 3 was interpreted as relating to learning as one person seems to be listening intently to what the expert is saying to her. Figure 4 illustrates both teaching/learning and community engagement, showing a local artisan teaching traditional weaving techniques to a visitor. Figure 5 illustrates connection to place, showing participants drawing on the nature surrounding them for inspiration in the creative tourism experience.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

Active participation

In the creative tourism dimension of active participation, the ePortfolio photographs illustrated three types of active participation. The first type is of *people actively making their own object*; for example, “working on their wood sculptures,” “working on their miniature Schist houses,” and “stamping fabrics with flowers.”¹ The second type is of *people ‘trying out’ an activity* rather than being solely responsible for making their own item (Figure 1). These activities were largely related to agricultural processes; for example, photos show people “dragging the till in the field,” “having a go at sheep shearing,” or “helping to collect the wheat.” The third type is of *participants taking an assistant’s role* rather than actively creating; for example, “trying out the weaving technique under the guidance of the lady expert.” Sometimes it is challenging to tell if there is active participation; for example,

¹ In this article, the quotations relating to ePortfolio photographs are from the researchers’ textual descriptions and interpretations of the photographs.

photographs show “kids are looking at a monument and pointing at it, so maybe involved in the game” or people “touching the unprocessed wool.” These photographs capture specific moments in time which were often not described in the accompanying ePortfolio text.

Photographs quickly and easily document a moment of activity that otherwise may need a lengthy narrative to represent it.

In past research, active participation in tourism experiences has been described as physical, emotional, or mental engagement which can strengthen personal and/or collective identity as well as intensify the experience through the use of personal skills and resources (Bertella, 2014). Active participation in creative tourism experiences enables tourists to be directly and *meaningfully* involved in choreographing their activities, interacting, and co-creating their experience (Campos et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2014). Researchers studying active participation in tourism (e.g., Perkins & Thorns, 2001) draw on a dramaturgical metaphor and interpret tourism as a form of *performance* imbedded in social praxis, which contrasts with the view of tourism informed by the paradigm of *the gaze* (Urry & Larsen, 2011). While some scholars observe an increase in self-objectivizing tourism experiences where the visitors’ main goal is to take selfies with the local community just acting as a backdrop (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016) there has also been a rise in tourists taking an active role in co-creating their tourism experiences by actively being engaged in it, which increases how meaningful and memorable the experience is for the actively engaged tourist (Breiby et al., 2020).

Integrating active participation within tourism experiences is a condition for competitiveness in the face of contemporary profound changes in tourist behaviour. It is evident from the ePortfolio analysis and from recent literature that tourists today want to “*meter as mãos na massa*” (“put their hands into the dough”), a Portuguese expression used by many CREATOUR pilots to explain their activities. Tourists want to experience active

bodily involvement, intellectual and cognitive activity, and to go beyond gazing. Creative tourism activities are designed to provide exactly this combination of activities. Active participation can *generate personal value* through interactive experiences that use tourists' personal resources such as knowledge, time, and creativity (Eraqi, 2011). In these experiences, one's own performances are seen as authentic and memorable (Mathisen, 2013). Active participation in an activity can also promote 'learning through doing', an innovative pedagogical approach called 'active learning' (Howell, 2021), facilitating a more in-depth and long-lasting learning experience for people engaging in creative tourism activities.

Learning

Increasing numbers of people in Western society, particularly those with the discretionary income to spend on tourist experiences, appear to have a growing appetite for lifelong learning (Falk et al., 2012), hence the emerging new model of tourism and leisure involves learning about people and places. Travel offers one of the few contemporary opportunities outside of the education sector where explicitly designated, non-vocational learning about other times, places, and peoples takes place (Werry, 2008). Research on an Australian ecotourism destination, shows that 'fun learning' through tourism experiences can also contribute to a positive destination image (Li et al., 2021).

The ePortfolio text entries show that learning is an integral part of the creative tourism experiences, such as learning a new skill and learning about local history, as seen in the following statements: "We got to know the history of the place by walking through its streets. And we (re)interpreted what the experience evoked to us" (case 31, Algarve) and "We learned many tips from the photographer Vítor Pina to improve the way we communicate using images" (case 32, Algarve). This knowledge sharing is place-based, highlighting traditions, stories, and culture through an inter-generational dialogue:

“The activity was very well structured and organized with a great cultural and historical framework and ambiance.” (case 7, Centro)

"The final phase of milking the sheep stimulated the socialization, the learning and the possibility of ‘getting our hands dirty’.” (case 10, Algarve)

"The purpose of the workshop was intrinsically linked to knowledge-sharing, allowing the young participants to have contact with pottery.” (case 20, Norte)

While it is challenging to assess when learning is taking place in the ePortfolio photos, participants are photographed in poses that indicate they are listening and paying attention, often taking notes. For example, photos show participants “listening to the sheep-shearer” (see Figure 3), “listening to the guide”, “watching older ladies make couscous, so maybe learning something” and “taking notes.” Attention leads to learning and is a psychological phenomenon occurring in on-site co-creation, thus a strategic dimension to enhance the tourist's state of mindfulness and involvement (Ooi, 2010). Often, the participants are in the sitting position when learning is taking place, as in some photos “people are sitting in chairs listening/watching something” or the “teacher is standing and the boys are listening.”

The nexus between learning and travel remains a relatively under-researched field and despite the fact that almost every textbook on cultural tourism includes visitor learning as a critical component of such experiences, there are few descriptions of what this learning might actually look like and how it might be designed for tourists. Our findings indicate a few ways in which learning is incorporated into tourism activities.

Community engagement

In the majority of ePortfolio entries, it was very difficult to ascertain from the photographs whether community engagement was occurring, as identifying ‘community members’ from ‘visitor-participants’ was challenging. In the instances where it seemed that community members could be identified, it was elderly people (often shown in a teaching/training role) who were identified as community members. For example, the photos showed community members represented by elderly ladies acting as artisan teachers: “old ladies dressed in authentic village clothes showing how the bread is made,” “elderly ladies showing how wool is processed,” “elderly ladies making couscous,” and a couple of photo interpretations noted that “elderly trainers seem to be local” or that the “elderly artisan is local” (see Figure 4). The ePortfolio entries reinforce the idea that handicrafts are gendered (Kokko, 2009). Mainly female artisans are seen working with wool, jute, and other fibres², while male artisans are seen working with copper and pottery, which are traditionally male-dominated crafts. Indeed, the ePortfolio entries only show a few male teachers/trainers: one is a “male trainer making beautiful copper bracelets” and the other is a male “teacher blindfolded and potting.”

In addition, tourists’ engagement with local community members and local artisans is described in some ePortfolio text entries. For example:

“The activity was conducted by Mrs. Maria José who lives in the proximity of the village and said she was “very fond of spinning the wool.” [... She] shared songs about Montalegre and also her joy at that moment in being able to teach people who came from so far. [This] tourism and creative activity ... aroused such enthusiasm in

² Since ancient times, spinning and weaving were considered part of women’s social reproductive duties and textile-making was considered appropriate for women as it was interruptible and could be easily resumed and did not place children in danger (as, for example, silversmithing would) (Barber, 1994).

the participants and collaborators to discover more not only about wool, but about Montalegre through the eyes and experiences of Mrs. Maria José, who carries with her a family and cultural tradition about the wool cycle.” (case 19, Norte)

“The participants were very interested in the whole visit and in particular by the contact with the shepherd (Nuno Coelho) and the shepherd dog (Pipoca). Also, the flock of sheep, very affable and sweet, all of them with their own names, gathered many followers who interacted directly with the animals, even giving them food and petting them on their lap!” (case 10, Algarve)

The texts address the theme of community engagement by describing how interactions between participants, the local community, and the artists/artisans provide special experiences for both tourists and local residents. These interactions enhance the feeling of immersion in local culture that enables communication between visitors and residents—as one ePortfolio text notes, “these initiatives allow cooperation, to know and to be known” (case 28, Algarve).

Organizational moments

Each ePortfolio text tells the story of a creative tourism activity, including an array of contextual elements surrounding the activity. The ePortfolios allow researchers to express themselves, offering freedom to reflect and an ‘exploratory research’ platform with few guidelines (compared to a more rigid observation grid to be completed for each site-visit).

This free format of presenting and discovering data provided a creative platform for insights that may not be captured in ‘pre-planned’ data forms and processes. The ePortfolios also allowed us to view site-visit experiences collectively and, in that frame, we were able to

identify patterns. One of these unanticipated findings was the identification of organizational moments within the creative tourism activities.

Through detailed thematic analysis of the written texts in the ePortfolios, we observed that within small city and rural contexts, creative tourism activities include various temporally and spatially defined organizational moments within the broader activity. For example, a creative drawing activity in Pitões contained four components:

“First Moment: in a circle, all the participants had a moment for relaxing and stretching, next to the old school of Pitões. It was a way for the participants to get to know each other and to interact. Second Moment: The group of adults practiced the line drawing with circles; the children's group drew the face of the colleague who sat in front of them. Third Moment: The two groups were invited to observe the landscape of Pitões from different perspectives. First they used the crayon technique and then with colored inks. [... Fourth Moment:] The activity ended around 19:30 with a snack organized by the Pitões das Júnias Parish Council, with cakes and breads from the local bakery.” (case 27, Norte)

Overall, in reviewing the compilation of ePortfolio entries, five common organizational moments were identified: (1) receiving visitors, (2) visiting a museum or other place of interest to learn about the locale, (3) a moment to enjoy some local food, (4) the creative workshop, and (5) a moment for socializing at the end (Figure 6). As the activity progresses, connection to place (both physical and cultural), visitors' active participation, and engagement between visitor-participants and residents progressively increase.

INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE

Implications and conclusion

This research revealed a number of interesting findings about the tourist-engagement elements included within creative tourism activities and also explored the use of a new research tool, that of ePortfolios.

Creative tourism

Through the analysis of 48 creative tourism activities developed within the CREATOUR project, several important findings relating to the development of creative tourism activities in small cities and rural areas were revealed. In particular, this research identified different types of active participation, the importance of learning and community involvement as integral elements of creative tourism, and how creative tourism experiences are organized with multiple activities and “moments”.

First, we discovered the existence of three ‘types’ of **active participation** in creative tourism activities – 1) actively making; 2) trying out and 3) taking an assistant’s role. This active participation was perceived and intentionally enabled by activity organizers in these various ways, representing various levels of activity. Based on these findings, it is suggested that a more precise understanding of these variations of ‘active participation’ could help creative tourism organizers better design their products to meet tourist expectations, by including different types of moments when tourists actively engage in the tourism activity and ‘get their hands dirty’. As a follow-up to this research, a guide for creative tourism organizers could be elaborated based on these insights, including examples of different participatory possibilities that can be embedded in creative tourism activities. Defining active participation levels within a creative tourism activity in marketing material would reach the

right target market more efficiently, increase consumer satisfaction, and potentially increase positive word-of-mouth recommendations among appropriate participant segments.

Learning is not, as it is often envisioned, merely a collected store of knowledge in our heads, but is simultaneously also a process of constructing meaning. Past research shows that learning resulting from tourist experiences is likely to be highly personal and strongly tied to individual interests, motivations and prior knowledge (Falk et al., 2012). This research reveals that **learning** is an essential dimension of creative tourism both in terms of learning skills and the specificities of place-based culture. Within the ePortfolios, many participants are seen to be learning through attentive listening, by doing and by creatively engaging with cultural activities of a place. Many well-intentioned tourism organizations simply provide access to their resource, accompanied by a presentation from a knowledgeable expert, thus enhancing knowledge (*episteme*) but cultivating only minimally practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Creative tourism incorporates both of these modes of learning. In addition, reflective engagement, which involves both cognitive and affective processing of the experience, is strongly associated with lasting learning outcomes and memorable moments, and thus we suggest this also should be included in creative tourism activities.

The ePortfolios of creative activities being developed revealed that the members of the **local community involved** were mainly engaged as trainers and workshop leaders. In addition, the research highlighted the gendered nature of traditional crafts. Our findings indicate that it is often elderly women who are the community members involved in creative tourism activities as instructors. Elderly trainers are particularly valuable in introducing creative tourism participants to the broader narratives and features of local culture and tradition. The ePortfolios also highlighted the gendered nature of traditional crafts, that is, how femininity/masculinity is associated with particular crafts, which points to how these gender stereotypes are perhaps perpetuated by creative tourism instructors.

This research finds that creative tourism activities in small cities and rural areas are organized as a multi-stage programme that will be attractive to visitors who often must travel a long way to reach the location where the activities take place. The five **organizational moments** built into creative tourism activities include: (1) receiving visitors, (2) visiting a museum or other place of interest to learn about the locale, (3) a moment to enjoy some local food, (4) the creative workshop, and (5) a moment for socializing at the end. This indicates the importance of ‘place immersion’ and connecting to place in multiple, meaningful ways when designing creative tourism activities. The five organizational moments can provide stepping stones to designing creative tourism initiatives that enable informed and meaningful experiences as well as social connections to be generated. They remind us that designing a creative tourism experience, especially in non-urban areas, involves more than preparing a workshop, and might even be viewed as crafting ‘immersive’ experiences. Furthermore, the organizational moments can be seen as a framework that also supports creative processes within these experiences (Duxbury & Vinagre de Castro, 2022).

ePortfolios as a tourism research tool

As a multimedia research method used to create meaning in tourism research, the ePortfolios, which are part of a larger array of complementary research methods used in the CREATOUR project (Duxbury et al., 2019a), create meaning from the fusion of photographs and text inserted into a shared digital platform. One of the ePortfolios’ functions was as an online field-diary that linked geographically dispersed researchers visiting 48 creative tourism activities being developed across four regions in Portugal and enabled collective analysis of these records.

The ePortfolios’ format, allowing for the free-form addition of pictures, videos, and text, supported the creation of knowledge about creative tourism activities that differed from

that created through more formal, text-based methods. Including photographs and accompanying text created a representation of what the researchers experienced and visually captured how they expressed their experiences. As an innovative way of recording fieldnotes, ePortfolios act as a research diary and represent a space where researchers are encouraged to create meaning using various types of media, which yielded some unexpected results, for example, providing insights about the organizational moments of creative tourism activities. We acknowledge that this study is context-bound and thus does not encompass all creative tourism experiences, nor does it 'regulate' processes of organizing all creative tourism experiences, but helped to reveal the organisational moments designed into some of the CREATOUR creative tourism activities.

Close attention must be paid when choosing various media to research specific topics, as well as to ensure that the selected media(s) used act in complementary ways to provide information on these topics. For example, ePortfolio photographs were good at capturing tourist involvement in creative tourism activities by showing moments of 'active participation'. Photographs are increasingly seen as 'legitimate' and reliable sources of data within tourism research (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019) and in this current research, photographs provided a means of summarizing situations and revealed patterns of social interaction and spatial relationships. However, analysis of ePortfolios also highlighted the limitations of using photographs to reveal community engagement which was more strongly expressed in the text, because it was almost impossible to distinguish community members from visitors.

Future research

This research revealed the importance of active participation, learning and community involvement as integral elements of creative tourism. This highlights the importance of examining the connection of learning to various types of active participation in a creative tourism context. As well, further research would be valuable on how the meaningful involvement of community members in creative tourism activities can be fostered. The gendered nature of traditional crafts, which are often used as the basis for creative tourism activities, is also an under-researched topic.

Extending from the current research, ePortfolios as a research tool could be used in a systematic way to capture the voices of creative tourism activity organizers, participants, and researchers (especially when there are over 10 participants and researchers who are geographically dispersed over rural territories). For example, we envision the following possible uses of ePortfolios in tourism research contexts:

- Expand observations on creative tourism activities to incorporate brief multimedia recordings (e.g., short videos, recorded sounds, voices, informal conversations, drawings and maps) to further deepen the reporting on and sharing of these experiences;
- Collect activity organizers' voices directly, adding their insights and reflections based on their own perspectives and experiences of each event they organize, and including lessons learned from each activity;
- Allow participants (i.e., visitors, local residents) to enter and share their perspectives and images from the event, enabling these perspectives to also be captured;
- Use ePortfolios to intentionally support communications with non-academic publics by enabling selected posts to be made public, with some perhaps written specifically with this broader audience in mind.

To conclude, this research recognizes the benefits of using both photographs and text in research methods and highlights that carefully assessing data obtained from these methods *in tandem* contributes greatly to making sense of a fragmented reality and some of its underpinning interactions and relationships. Integrated research-and-practice projects like CREATOUR can enable learning from experimental situations and approaches to build knowledge, provide insights for strategic design approaches, and improve the operationalization of creative tourism initiatives going forward. This research highlights the importance of active participation, learning, and community engagement in the creative tourism activity implementation process to reveal nuances about creative tourism development in small cities and rural areas.

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Tables

Table 1. Categories created for the thematic analysis of the ePortfolio entries (photographs and text)

Photograph coding categories	Text coding categories
Active participation	Community involvement
Community engagement	Connection to place
Connection to place	Creative involvement
Crafts shown in photos	Creative tourism
Creative self-expression	Creative tourism product
Emotions	Organizational moments (aspects of activity)
Landscape	Participants
Learning	Partners
People-age	Transport
People-gender	

TOURISM, CULTURE & COMMUNICATION

Table 2 . Examples of ePortfolio photographic and textual analysis

Analysis theme	Example of text interpretation of ePortfolio photograph	Example of ePortfolio text entry
Active participation	There is “lots of active participation” and “people being active” (Figure 1), while other images show less active participation, with participants “relaxing in a salt-lake” or “singing in a circle”.	Limited mention. Some entries do mention participation, e.g., “The final phase, milking, stimulated conviviality, learning and the possibility of «getting your hands dirty” (case 10, Algarve).
Creative self-expression	The photographs that do show creative self-expression show variety in the final product created by the participants, e.g., “lots of different types of felted hats” (Figure 2).	“Creative,” “creativity,” and “creation” are, in fact, the most used words to talk about the activities developed, e.g., “Many enjoyed the creative element of the festival and there were creative workshops for all tastes” (case 3, Centro).
Learning	Participants in poses that indicate that they are listening and paying attention, often taking notes, e.g., some ePortfolios show participants “listening to the sheep-shearer” (Figure 3) or “watching older ladies make couscous.”	Various text entries spoke about learning “by doing,” e.g., “We learned many tips from photographer Vítor Pina to improve the way we communicate using images” (case 32, Algarve).
Community engagement	In the majority of cases, it is very difficult to ascertain from the ePortfolio photographs whether community engagement was occurring, as identifying ‘community members’ was sometimes challenging. What does a community member look like? Oftentimes, the elderly teachers were identified as the participating community members (Figure 4).	The involvement of the local community was also referred in some texts, e.g., “the ladies from the village of Castro Laboreiro” (case 26, Norte), as well as international collaboration, e.g., “Iberian collaboration with the Escuela de Arte y Superior de Diseño de Mérida” (case 48, Centro).
Connection to place	Many of the activities show a connection to the place where they happened, e.g., “Activity is taking place where the salt is produced” or “Drawings are of the nature around there - so strong connection to place” (Figure 5), although for intangible heritage-related activities, it is harder to see a connection to place through photographs, e.g., “Taking place in the museum of a small mountainous village which <i>probably</i> has sheep from where the wool comes from.”	In most ePortfolio text entries, place is presented as key to promote local identity as a differentiating element, e.g., “The tour started at Parque D. Carlos I, where they introduced us to the life and work of Bordalo Pinheiro, his family and the impact they had on Caldas da Rainha. Here we witnessed another performance where we met a Marchesa lady who in the past had been courted by Bordalo...” (case 7, Centro).
Organizational moments of activity	No visible display in photographs	The text entries revealed that some of the activities had different ‘moments’ and therefore, special attention to the order and times of each was central.

Note: These dimensions are selected from a broader ePortfolios analysis that covered additional variables (see Table 1). The shaded rows highlight themes that were communicated better through photographs than written text or vice versa.

Figures

Figure 1. Active participation: Salt collecting as part of creative tourism activity (Source: Odiana)



Figure 2. Creative self-expression: ePortfolio photograph showing 'lots of different types of felted hats' (Source: Fiona Bakas)



Figure 3. Learning: ePortfolio photograph showing 'Listening to the sheep-shearer' (Source: Liliana Gavioli)



Figure 4. Community engagement: ePortfolio photograph showing local artisan teaching traditional weaving technique (Source: Liliana Gavioli)



Figure 5. Connection to place: ePortfolio photograph showing people drawing local nature (Source: Liliana Gavioli)



Figure 6. Organizational moments within creative tourism activities (authors' own elaboration)

