

31 Policy recommendations on creative tourism development in small cities and rural areas: Insights from the CREATOUR® project in Portugal

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The CREATOUR® project in Portugal (see [Box 1.1](#) in Chapter 1) focused on the ideation, design, and pilot implementation of small-scale creative tourism initiatives that aimed to bridge culture and tourism, contributing to the enhancement of the attractiveness of rural communities and the sustainability of local populations. We learned that creative tourism development outside large cities is feasible, but challenges of distributed geography and the diversity of organizations and initiatives require additional attention to capacity building, training, and mentorship; dedicated resources for collective marketing; and more time to deepen knowledge networking and the development of partnerships.

This chapter is a synthesis of proposed recommendations to authorities and agencies at all levels (national, regional, and local) relating to the development of creative tourism initiatives in small cities and rural areas.¹ It is centrally informed by the needs of the CREATOUR® pilot organizations in Portugal, which were articulated within discussions between researchers and practitioners. We also

considered public policies related to rural tourism development and the types of public policies needed to foster and support cultural and creative organizations in small cities and rural areas. The recommendations recognize and reinforce the need to develop new structures to foster ongoing inter-connections between the cultural and tourism sectors.

What is creative tourism?

The CREATOUR® project defined creative tourism as active creative activity encouraging personal self-expression and interaction between visitors and local residents, inspired by local endogenous resources (place and people), and designed and implemented by local residents. This perspective on creative tourism includes four dimensions: active participation, creative self-expression, learning, and community engagement.

Creative tourism is conceived as sustainable small-scale tourism that provides an active visitor experience by combining an immersion in local

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culture with a learning and creative process. To distinguish ‘creative’ tourism from other types of ‘experience’ tourism, particular emphasis is placed on the creation process and capacity for the visitor to engage in the activity not only from the perspective of learning and skill development (or, alternatively, of entertainment and relaxation) but also one of potential for self-expression. These activities enable the generation of added value – economic, social, and cultural – at the local and regional level.

One of the greatest potentials of creative tourism is its transversality, complementing and extending the offers within the various types of existing tourism (such as cultural tourism, nature tourism, sun and beach tourism, gastronomic tourism, industrial tourism, military tourism, nautical tourism, etc.) to meet the diverse needs of travellers today, as well as those of cultural and territorial development. Some of the motivations of the ‘new tourist’ are linked with self-fulfilment, experimentation, emotional engagement, and the development of skills – all characteristics that are associated with creative tourism.

In Portugal, creative tourism activity is currently at a developmental phase, with creative tourism offers largely at embryonic/early stages. However, creative tourism has proven to be an inspiring perspective and direction for local culture-based development and for extending cultural tourism offers in smaller places. Both cultural/creative and tourism organizations, as well as territorial development agents, are still discovering ways to meaningfully engage with the new profile of visitors that search for authentic interactivity with locals and experiences that combine fun, learning about local cultures, and creative self-expression. Forging ongoing opportunities for inter-sectoral networking, co-learning, communication, and collaboration will be key in advancing this work.

What lessons did we learn working with creative tourism practitioners? Summarizing key development needs

Among many insights from the CREATOUR® project, we identified key areas of development needs that emerged in the course of the development of the pilot initiatives. We believe that addressing these needs is essential in order to develop successful creative tourism initiatives and that this could be incorporated in a future network supported by a creative tourism policy agenda.

Partnerships, networks, and clusters

Creative tourism practitioners expressed an urgent need to be involved in partnership approaches, networks, clusters, and territorially embedded creative milieus at both regional and national levels. Greater interconnections should be fostered between cultural/creative and tourism/hospitality professionals for different purposes (e.g. share knowledge, circulate ideas, stimulate innovation, co-develop activities, co-develop commercial strategies, attract new visitors, and link local and regional places and practitioners into national and global circuits of information and resources). At the regional level, practitioners expressed the need to develop closer relations with different types of partners/collaborators from various areas (e.g. artisans/artists, tourist animation companies, and public bodies and agencies) to co-develop creative tourism packages. Aligned with this work is the need to build distributed capacity for partnership management.

Inter-sectoral mediation

There is an expressed and urgent need to develop inter-sectoral mediation and communication skills to build bridges among the different sectors involved in this new niche of creative tourism: culture, creative industries, tourism, and local/regional development. The objective is to create mediators, knowledge brokers, mentors, and facilitators who can act as elements of articulation at two levels: at the intra-sectoral level (e.g. to identify needs, articulate priorities, and define roles) and at the inter-sectoral level, enabling and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration (e.g. to define a plan for a common vision for creative tourism in an area, explore resources and optimize uses, reach agreements on defined priorities and needs for financial and technical support, assign roles, etc.). This inter-sectoral mediation is required not only among agents working in the field, but also at the level of policy-making and regulatory agencies, where articulation and cross-fertilization between diverse sectoral policies and different levels of administration is often insufficient.

Qualified human resources

There is an expressed and urgent need to have qualified and motivated human resources involved in all cycles of the creative tourism value chain and

to promote capacity building among the different players (e.g. entrepreneurs, employees, mediators, public cultural organizations, interpreters and guides, artisans, volunteer collaborators). The objective is to acquire or strengthen skills to be more competitive and more committed to the activities, and to better understand and deal with the specific contexts of creative tourism markets, while also caring for the development needs of their community and respecting sustainable tourism principles (e.g. develop skills in collaborative work solutions, and on the design, development, implementation, and promotion of creative tourism offers). Special attention was requested by CREATOUR® practitioners concerning the need to transfer knowledge on craft work practices and other traditional and rare/unique activities from elder craftspeople to the younger generations. Training new artisans and workshop providers is also a great concern, both in the crafts techniques as well as the development of workshops for creative tourism – without these qualified human resources, capacity building for planning and commercialization, in the medium- or long-term, may no longer be necessary.

Communication systems and processes

There is an expressed and urgent need to develop improved, targeted communication and marketing approaches, with particular attention to the areas of advertising (e.g. integrated presentation and promotion of activities by theme or territory), sales promotion (e.g. market segmentation), personal selling and public relations (e.g. building customer relationships, special events and festivals, integrating successful international networks of creative tourism, and attendance at international fairs where international tour operators and promoters can get to know the offer of creative tourism in Portugal), and direct and digital marketing (e.g. online and social media, catalogues, a specialized web platform for creative tourism offers). CREATOUR® practitioners also seek solutions to facilitate communications between tourism companies, institutions, and associations that usually do not combine efforts in order to promote synergies and the competitiveness of this sector. The latter challenge can be informed by communication solutions such as the CREATOUR® IdeaLabs and workshop initiatives in which pilots and researchers, together, regularly discuss, examine, and reflect on

developments: unforeseen difficulties, challenges, and gaps as well as accomplishments and several points of improvement. The objective is to develop an integrated knowledge-building and -sharing ‘community of practice’ that can collaboratively seek solutions to pragmatic questions and reflexively discuss common concerns so that they can continuously add value to their activities, diversify markets, and attract both national and international travellers to their destination throughout the year.

Local community development

There is an expressed need for local involvement in creative tourism activities because the participation of local residents helps to create a sense of community, provides the connections with locals that visitors seek, and enables an open exchange of ideas and knowledge about the locale. At the same time, it can also contribute to preserving and renewing traditional knowledge, promote linkages with contemporary art expressions, and enhance cosmopolitanism and openness in those communities, empowering the local population and ‘refreshing’ local identities. Since culture-based creative tourism initiatives are diverse by nature, they can be designed to promote social inclusion of particular groups of residents in designing and facilitating workshops and other activities, and to foster cross-cultural learning and dialogue. Overall, the objective of closely integrating creative tourism with local development is to encourage and share mutual direct and indirect benefits more widely among community residents – including those who might not ‘traditionally’ be involved in the tourism sector.

Creative tourism, given its nature, fosters an atmosphere that is attractive for a wide variety of local interests (e.g. creating employment and commercial opportunities for local businesses and associations, designing new types of occasions and platforms for sharing cultural traditions and skills, and expanding training opportunities for marginalized residents) while also offering unique and creative experiences to tourists, altogether contributing to improve the quality of life for both local residents and visitors and building social capital within the local community. However, this potential requires attentiveness to the needs of existing artisans and ‘culture-keepers’ in communities as well as the need to train new artisans and to provide potential workshop organizers with mentorship

and training in creative tourism. Aligned with this work is the need to build distributed capacity for cross-sectoral collaboration and partnership management.

Policy framework for creative tourism development

The creation of policies and institutional frameworks can contribute to advancing the development of culture-based creative tourism in small cities and rural areas. We propose the development of an overarching national policy and programme framework with associated funding, which will provide a comprehensive structure for addressing and enabling different levels of intervention. The implementation of the proposed vision outlined in this document will require an integrated open-ended process engaging government at all levels, associations/organizations, businesses, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and consumers.

At a macro level, we recommend that tourism and cultural/creative sector policymakers:

- Define culture-based creative tourism as one of the strategic development priorities for tourism and culture.
- Develop an appropriate legal/regulatory framework to support the strategic development of culture-based creative tourism activities.
- Empower and engage practitioners from the tourism and cultural/creative sectors, local and regional development agents, communities, and government officials, both technical and political, to participate in an active and informed manner in the policy-making process concerning different levels of development of creative tourism.
- Create a governance structure to coordinate multi-level initiatives and inter-sectoral dialogue within the framework of public administration (e.g. between different ministries or different councillors). In addition, the development of national-level policies should directly involve practitioners already working in creative tourism at the regional level.
- Promote the ongoing involvement of all organizations identified in each region as ‘creative tourism’ practitioners in the development of creative tourism policies at the regional and local levels (e.g. in an autonomous consultant body, or as a creative tourism network), promoting participation

in the design, operationalization, and monitoring of all relevant policies.

Within this policy framework, we identify five main interlinked domains that should determine short and medium-term strategic planning measures:

1. Product and enterprise development.
2. Inter-sectoral co-operation, networking, and soft infrastructure.
3. Capacity building and training.
4. Communications and marketing.
5. Research, monitoring, and industry intelligence.

1. Product and enterprise development

1.1. Develop a financing programme to support the conceptualization and operationalization of new creative tourism ideas and also to support current creative tourism enterprises to become more sustainable – that is, create benefits for micro-businesses and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the cultural and creative sectors, mainly in rural and interior areas, through specialized financing and stimulation programmes of regional and local development (i.e. through regional coordination and development commissions).

1.2. Stimulate the development of bottom-up creative initiatives by supporting frameworks and spaces for creative innovation, including social innovation, social design, Fab-Labs, etc., which can contribute to strengthening ‘quadruple helix’ structures (bringing together government, universities, private sector, and civil society actors), or facilitate the development of more ‘organic’ creative milieus based on territorially embedded dynamics and specific governance mechanisms.

1.3. Encourage creative tourism initiatives that co-develop creative tourism experiences with local residents in ways that build and strengthen social connections and networks across organizations and that aim to involve marginalized populations.

2. Inter-sectoral co-operation, networking, and soft infrastructures

2.1. Integrate policy approaches between the tourism and culture sectors, fostering and enabling closer linkages among actors and resources. Define a governance model that is able to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration, at national, regional and local levels, in order to effectively address culture-based creative tourism challenges (i.e. regarding efficient and effective use of local resources and services for community benefit).

2.2. Improve governance mechanisms and interaction among cultural, tourism, and territorial development agencies and policies. Develop dialogue and articulation mechanisms between the actors/institutions responsible for the design of sectoral policies in the three fields (culture, tourism, and territorial development), at national/regional and municipal levels, for the purpose of encouraging and developing creative tourism.

2.3. Support a national network for creative tourism, involving creative producers, industry leaders, and communities, in order to build and strengthen creative clusters, promote and support entrepreneurship, and engage in capacity building, mentorship, and networking activities.

2.4. Create opportunities for making new connections, prioritizing personal and small-group exchanges, supported by appropriate technological approaches.

2.5. Nurture active collaboration and co-working between tourism and cultural sectors, supported by universities and research centres as well as local and regional tourism agencies and local/regional development agencies and organizations.

2.6. Regenerate rural areas based on enhancing cultural 'soft infrastructures' using local cultural spaces and rural creative assets.

3. Capacity building and training

3.1. Develop and promote tailor-made types of capacity-building activities spanning formal professional education, informal training and specific training programmes, as well as the fostering of a geographically distributed community of practice to ensure that practitioners continue to manage the development and evolution of their offers on a sustainable basis. At the regional level, the involvement of training institutions, schools, universities, and research centres is essential here.

3.2. Empower and develop the skills of practitioners identified as developers of creative tourism projects, at the local level, enhancing a common collective knowledge and know-how base, mediated/facilitated by regional authorities and/or universities and research centres. These entities are also essential in the promotion and sharing of that collective knowledge at an inter-regional and international level, assuring bridging between agents with similar interests in different regions.

3.3. Develop a support structure at the regional level to help SMEs and other kinds of organizations in creative tourism access and apply to financing and

training programmes available (for example, Local Development Associations can be focal points).

3.4. Provide knowledge and skill-development adapted to the different needs of the actors involved (e.g. prototyping and renewal processes, creative tourism project management, community engagement, the integration of new technologies that provide enhanced links between producers, consumers, and places).

4. Communications and marketing

4.1. Reinforce the use of new technologies and digital media solutions for B2B (business-to-business) and B2C (business-to-consumer) systems, for example, in shaping and delivering creative contents and tourism experiences, and improving connections between the different actors of the creative tourism value chain.

4.2. Define a national/regional communication plan and strategy (i.e. 'branding places and experiences' to connect creative activities with their destinations).

4.3. Integrate marketing and communications about creative tourism offers into local cultural and tourism promotional systems, information centres, and other communication products.

4.4. Enhance marketing of creative tourism (and specific activity branches within creative tourism) to generate an image at national/regional/local levels and create an atmosphere within which individual initiatives are developed to capture more producers and consumers and create a more competitive sector.

4.5. Develop an informative and awareness campaign and materials on the potential of creative tourism at the local level, communicated to local actors in tourism, culture, governance and local development sectors.

4.6. Raise consumer awareness of the nature of creative tourism experiences (e.g. through educational/promotional campaigns, setting guidelines to identify suitable creative tourism initiatives, and to choose creative experiences that truly fit creative tourism).

4.7. Encourage consumers to use local products and support the development of the local economy through consuming creative tourism products and services (e.g. specific mediation on this can be developed through local development associations).

4.8. Improve access to creative tourism experiences within traditional tourism marketing channels and also develop a tailor-made distribution system based on ICTs and social media.

5. Research, monitoring, and industry intelligence

5.1. Develop incentives in order to build up knowledge about creative tourism within the tourism and cultural sectors, both at regional and national levels, involving universities, research centres, and culture and tourism regional institutional structures. Continue to use research-and-application approaches to foster ongoing knowledge-sharing and knowledge-building between academia and practice.

5.2. Develop and promote a system of information tools (i.e. mapping creative tourism organizations, initiatives, resources, and experiences by geographical region, scale, and thematic areas) to support business and policy decision-making, involving both culture and tourism regional institutional structures.

5.3. Establish a series of core baseline indicators to collect data and information, and regularly review progress and report on changes and trends at the national level.

5.4. Develop and promote a system for assessing the territorial development impacts of creative tourism activities, collecting and monitoring information on a continuous basis in terms of the social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of these activities, and providing feedback to the creative tourism operators, raising awareness of its importance for the local communities and for those operators.

5.5. Adapt monitoring and evaluation approaches to different situations, considering the geographic region and thematic specificities of different creative tourism experiences.

5.6. Organize collective discussions and networking (locally/sub-regionally, regionally, and nationally) so that it is possible to survey the needs and expectations of creative tourism practitioners on an ongoing basis, at a local and sub-regional level, as well as to better understand local dynamics.

5.7. Create an observatory of creative tourism to conduct and manage this work.

Conclusion

This integrated set of recommendations is proposed to authorities and agencies at all levels (national, regional, and local) relating to the development of creative tourism initiatives in small cities and rural areas. It is centrally informed by the needs of the 40 CREATOUR® pilot organizations, articulated within the first national multidisciplinary research-and-application project on creative

tourism, active between November 2016 and June 2020. Through CREATOUR®, we learned that creative tourism development outside large cities is feasible in Portugal, but challenges of distributed geography and the diversity of organizations and initiatives involved require additional attention to capacity building, training, and mentorship; dedicated collective marketing resources; and more time to deepen networking and develop partnerships.

Creative tourism has the potential to develop new forms of collaboration between a wide range of partners at a destination level. Rather than proposing ready-made models, it advocates a locally sensitized approach to development that is bottom-up and collaborative. Achieving the necessary co-operation between public stakeholders, businesses, local authorities, cultural associations, and tourism agents is one of the biggest challenges.

An adequate framework that enables the effective involvement and participation of local actors is essential. To build links and synergies between culture-based creativity and tourism, we propose a creative tourism policy, programmes, and funding framework with a national approach, but attentive to regional specificities/needs. The core of this framework is a content-generation-and-development model that enables and supports the five key dimensions previously outlined in this chapter.

As a transversally applicable approach to community-sensitive tourism development, creative tourism can enable the diversification and differentiation of tourism offers in small towns and rural areas, strengthening them as tourist destinations that promote and value cultural and natural heritage and sustainable tourism practices.

In view of the challenges currently facing both the cultural/creative and tourism sectors it is vital to develop tourism in ways that will increase the potential for local economic development, social cohesion, and creative development. There is a need to view the tourism and the cultural/creative sectors as mutually dependent parts of the local ecosystem, rather than separate economic spheres. A broader placemaking approach can be developed to make creative use of local resources, to charge them with meaning for local and other stakeholders and provide the basis for innovation.

Particular attention to addressing any negative externalities of these activities is also essential, however small they may be in creative tourism compared to mass tourism (e.g. noise, environmental impacts, social impacts, etc.). Public agencies

and authorities should assume political responsibility to deal with situations that arise and manage the different public interests within the community to assure the sustainability of territorial development in all its dimensions (social, economic, environmental, and cultural).

Our ambition is not to promote creative tourism as an alternative and autonomous market to mass tourism and sun-and-beach-based offers, but to develop more sustainable forms of tourism that can generate new income for small towns and rural areas, promote the (re)valorization of cultural traditions through creative experiences, and provide networks and co-operation between different levels of actors, institutions, and businesses, ensuring the functioning of a durable creative tourism ecosystem.

Creative tourism is an option that does not require the physical development of new facilities, but more effective use of existing resources to meet current and future needs of residents and visitors. The public sector has a central role in setting an enabling policy environment to foster the networks

and cross-sector linkages. Creative tourism can add value – economic, social, and cultural – at local and regional levels, and foster inclusive, integrated, and sustainable development for greater prosperity, cohesion, and equity across the regions.

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Note

1. This chapter is based on a policy recommendations document created by the CREATOUR® project in 2020 for local authorities, regional agencies, and national ministries in Portugal.