

Participatory knowledge co-production to activate culture in the development of small cities and rural areas in Portugal

Development
of small cities
and rural areas

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Abstract

Purpose – Culture is increasingly recognized as a key component of local development, but this attention is largely focused on large cities. This paper aims to focus on the ways in which the innovative, participatory action-research (PAR) methods of IdealLabs and community intervention workshops are used by two projects with solidarity economy enterprise (SEE) participants to activate place-based cultural resources for local development in small communities.

Design/methodology/approach – An in-depth reflexive analysis undertaken by researchers involved in the two projects, taking a feminist ethics of care perspective, demonstrates the ways in which these two PAR methods promote local development with the goal of fighting against the economic, social and cultural degradation of small cities and rural areas.

Findings – The PAR methods used by the two projects examined stimulate place-based local development initiatives through collaboration and knowledge co-production among participants and researchers. The projects go beyond an instrumental view of the use of culture and the arts for local development to innovate and demonstrate new methodologies for more participatory approaches.

Originality/value – This paper addresses a gap in social economy literature, presenting methods that can be used in PAR projects to catalyse the use of culture as a local development tool by local SEEs.

Keywords Place-based culture, Knowledge co-production, Collaboration, Action-research

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

There has been a rapid growth in social enterprise models across various sectors, including the creative industries, which has been spurred by a decrease in state incentives for delivery of welfare and the parallel emergence of social enterprise support programmes (McQuilten *et al.*, 2022). Although the arts and cultural sector is a “particularly fruitful field for the development of social innovation and civic engagement” (Cancellieri *et al.*, 2019, p. 79), limited research has been conducted on social enterprises in the arts and cultural sector and their capacity to catalyse place-based cultural resources for local development.

Furthermore, smaller communities, particularly those that are remotely located, are often ignored by culture-based development gazes and left outside of tourism circuits. The heritage, cultures and aspirations of residents in these areas are often latent resources not traditionally viewed in terms of innovation nor development. As André and Abreu (2010) note, “small-sized cities in rural areas may very well exhibit very favourable conditions for the emergence and consolidation of socially creative milieus” (p. 245), especially when a “broad-based, participatory approach to culture and the arts” is adopted that can “combine collective memory and collective creation” (p. 242).

In the era of the “social turn” in contemporary art, in which artistic practices have become more engaged with the lives of people and communities (McQuilten *et al.*, 2022), the participatory action-research (PAR) projects examined in this article – Creative Tourism Destination Development in Small Cities and Rural Areas (CREATOUR) and REDE ARTÉRIA – provide ways to activate culture as an important aspect of local development in smaller communities. The projects go beyond an instrumental view of the use of culture and the arts for local development to demonstrate methodologies for engaging local residents of smaller places and propelling co-designed local initiatives. They reveal approaches to support and empower local actors to add value to the visible and invisible cultural resources of their communities while also demonstrating how culture and the arts can be applied to issues of social and economic inclusion.

Aware of the problems associated with systemic exploitation of practitioners within various funding mechanisms that use the rhetoric of collaborative, participatory and socially engaged arts practice but often not following those principles in their own *modus operandi*, the work discussed here engages with the ethical qualities of research, embracing PAR methodologies that count as “good work” (Belfiore, 2022, p. 64) in socially engaged practice. These PAR methodologies include IdeaLabs, where researchers and local practitioners build closer research–practice relations and foster knowledge co-production, and Community Intervention Workshops (CIW), where municipalities, artists, local cultural associations and academic institutions (researchers and students) co-design artistic intervention projects.

The PAR methodologies enacted in these projects are theoretically framed by a feminist ethics of care perspective (Gibson-Graham, 2006). We understand this ethics of care as attending to “the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow for the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive” (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2020, p. 893). This approach reframes our understanding of researchers and those researched as interdependent, stressing the importance of reciprocity and equality as central to human life and to real world caring (O’Riordan *et al.*, 2023). Using this as a guiding concept, participatory research methodologies can democratize research partnerships by approaching the relationship in a way that builds solidarity with the aims of the community and ultimately, aims to contribute to the well-being of the community through the research process (Brannelly and Boulton, 2017).

CREATOUR is a 3.5-year (2016–2020) interdisciplinary research-and-application project that developed, for the first time in Portugal, a network of creative tourism initiatives envisioned and developed locally but connected nationally. Creative tourism is an extension of cultural tourism containing four dimensions: active participation, creative self-expression, learning and connection to the local community (both people and place) (Duxbury *et al.*, 2019). Place-based by nature, the project discovered that a creative tourism approach provides a new lens to envision and develop locally grounded culture-based initiatives that link local culture with alternate tourism trajectories in meaningful ways. It also aligns well with rural development goals of reviving traditional crafts, maintaining local socio-cultural vitality and providing employment.

REDE ARTERIA (2018–2021) is an action-research project and artistic intervention initiative that is artistically coordinated by O Teatrão, a non-profit theatre association, and scientifically coordinated by the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra. It uses cultural mapping and artistic creation as strategies of cultural participation to engage with local communities. The project involves a cluster of agents in eight medium-sized cities, where policymakers work together with researchers, creative practitioners (artists) and different types of local cultural associations. Together, over time, each cluster designed, implemented and evaluated eight original artistic intervention projects that address local development issues and place-based specificities of each locale.

The issue of knowledge co-production is profoundly important in both research projects. Co-production processes can increase trust, embeddedness and blending of roles and can recognize multiple forms of capability, expertise and ways of knowing (Campbell *et al.*, 2016). This article examines the participative frameworks and methodologies developed and used in the two action-research projects CREATOUR and REDE ARTERIA to foster knowledge co-production and locally-focused actions. In particular, we focus on knowledge co-production *arrangements* that link researchers and practitioners, rather than the co-production of knowledge *idiom*, which is concerned with how broader social, cultural and political factors shape and are shaped by the production of scientific knowledge, policy and practice.

The article's framework and methodology were developed through a reflexive process in which the author-researchers considered the relational and intersubjective processes they were involved in within the two action-research projects, giving new meaning to the processes involved (Finlay, 2002; Hadley *et al.*, 2022). The article analyses the projects' approaches from the perspective of how they encouraged and facilitated the participating social economy organizations to identify and use place-embedded knowledge and local cultural assets to develop new initiatives that contribute to local development and community benefit.

The article presents key conceptual areas influencing the two projects, followed by brief descriptions of each project and an explanation of how reflexivity was used as a method. The key collaborative components that frame and guide the interactions between participating organizations and researchers are then analysed, with a focus on three dimensions: place-based approaches, collaboration and knowledge co-production. In closing, the article reveals how these three dimensions intertwined and strengthened one another, and outlines implications for bridging research and practice arising from these experiences.

Solidarity economy enterprises and culture

In this paper, we view the field of social economy, where many cultural and arts organizations belong, to include all organizations institutionally separate from government, sharing a high degree of self-governance, with a social mission that is pursued on a

voluntary basis and profit-distribution is significantly constrained (Utting, 2015). In Europe, the “social economy” is made up of a variety of organizational types, including cooperatives, associations, mutual societies and increasingly foundations (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010, p. 232), which share the characteristics of all being not-for-profit organizations. Social enterprises in Europe combine income from sales with public subsidies linked to their social mission, plus private donations and/or volunteering (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). This contrasts with how social enterprises are defined in the USA, which are seen as non-profit organizations more oriented towards the market, in a context of decreasing public subsidies and limited private grants from foundations. Differences in perception exist among European countries too, often relating to national welfare expenditure (Defourny and Nyssens, 2017). Social enterprises within the Portuguese cultural sector, which is this study’s focus, include non-profit associations, foundations, cultural cooperatives and private companies (Ferreira *et al.*, 2023) [1]. In Portugal, social enterprises in the field of arts and culture are seen as particularly good solutions for problems afflicting the sector, addressing broader societal problems, reducing inequality and promoting local development (Rego and Borges, 2021). Globally, a myriad of social enterprises use culture and art within their scope of work such as social enterprises involving people with disabilities and marginalized communities (McQuilten *et al.*, 2020).

Of particular relevance for this research, the solidarity economy enterprise (SEE) model (Ferreira and Almeida, 2021) encompasses organizations that strongly advocate for community participation, participatory democracy and territorial development. SEE organizations and their projects have traditionally operated in disadvantaged areas and aim at local/territorial development with the goal of fighting against the economic, demographic and social decay of these areas. Within this model, new types of organizations have been emerging, with a focus on local and sustainable development and environmental protection. It is within this array of SEE practices that we situate culture-based initiatives that focus on re-envisioning and catalyzing cultural resources for local development.

In this context, culture is understood as a complex concept that includes behaviours, beliefs, stories, traditions and rituals that can be collectively and individually held and used, which aid social connections and communication (de Munck and Bennardo, 2019). These elements of local cultures are viewed as centrally important for enriching communities’ self-knowledge and for local organizations to imagine and design new trajectories and strategies for local development.

Culture in local development and place-based approaches

Cultural social economy enterprises operate within a changing societal context in which culture is increasingly strategic in the development of smaller communities and rural areas (Duxbury, 2020a). Traditionally culture in local development was linked closely with heritage and/or the arts or the “cultural and creative sector”. This perspective is widening to recognize local “ways of life” and the everyday distinctiveness of a place, with the perspectives, experiences and narratives of local residents playing an ever-greater role in defining local cultural resources (Duxbury, 2020b).

Place-based approaches focus on localized understandings and knowledge about specific sites where actions take place, highlighting the need to identify, collect, analyse and interpret information about both material and immaterial resources. Place can be defined as a set of material and social practices that enact a location (Cresswell, 2006). Researchers have been exploring place-based approaches from different perspectives, including the role of place in cultural participation and creative place-making (Gilmore, 2013) and the assessment of place for cultural planning purposes (Redaelli, 2013).

Plural perspectives and layered narratives can make visible multiple historic and contemporary relations between a community and the place in which it is embedded, influenced and defined, putting into greater relief a community's interests, memories, challenges and aspirations (Duxbury *et al.*, 2015). Place-based research approaches align with asset-based community development, an approach that starts with a community's existing *assets* rather than needs (Haines, 2009). These assets can be tangible (e.g. buildings) or intangible (e.g. skills and culture) and are raw materials that community members can harness and build on.

Place-based approaches reveal how social and ecological environments intimately shape the way microentrepreneurs operate, rather than existing as exogenous forces to which organizations must respond (Bakas *et al.*, 2021). They can help organizations link their business models more directly to the unique resources and "sense of place" associated with a particular locale (Di Gregorio, 2017). In turn, place-based enterprises, whose resources, productive activities and ownership are anchored in specific places are more likely than conventional enterprises to pursue *locally beneficial* economic, social and environmental outcomes (Shrivastava and Kennelly, 2013). Extending from this, SEE activities grounded in local cultural, social and environmental resources contribute to local holistic sustainability enrooted in the specificities of a place.

Participatory research methods and knowledge co-production

Participatory research views "researcher-as-expert" approaches as intrusive and detracting from creating knowledge. In a participatory research model, it is expected that participants are involved in the planning, implementation, analysis and interpretation of the research. This aligns with the EMES Network's approach to social enterprise, which acknowledges the multidisciplinary and participatory nature of its governance (Pestoff and Hulgård, 2016), based on principles of organizational autonomy, democratic decision-making and stakeholder's involvement. Furthermore, participatory research frameworks emphasize reciprocity in establishing non-exploitative relationships (Olsen, 2011) and generating effective working relationships to obtain "valid" knowledge (Ateljevic *et al.*, 2005). The knowledge produced is generated within and through these relationships (Diver and Higgins, 2014). Participatory methods can produce a "thick description" of local contexts, represent how local or situational populations see themselves and lead to better understandings of various worldviews (Kidd and Kral, 2005).

Community-based participatory research actively involves community members in every stage of the research process (Leavy, 2017). Cultural activities are used within community-based participatory research as both a method of public engagement and a means of knowledge co-production. Drawing on Bishop (2012), artists include "non-artist" participants in designing creative projects and reconfigure everyday actions as performances to give political power to certain social situations, problematize tensions between reality and fiction and examine the construction of collective identity. Participatory community involvement enables contextualized approaches and produces nuanced understandings of local concerns, aspirations and dynamics.

The notion of knowledge co-production points to the "constant intertwining of the cognitive, the material, the social and the normative" (Wehrens, 2014, p. 548). Effective collaboration is regarded as a reciprocal process between academic researchers and research participants that is underpinned by jointly produced research outcomes. However academic-industry research partnerships can often be inherently problematic, with poor collaborations impeding the translation and uptake of academic research (Cherney, 2015)

and challenges in converting practice-based knowledge into academic discourse (Duxbury *et al.*, 2019).

As a process of making together, co-production involves intermittent spaces of sharing and cooperation between different actors beyond and across organizational boundaries (Richardson, 2016). Through co-production processes, the individual interests of all actors are partially maintained through the shared process of making knowledge. The co-production of knowledge between academic and non-academic communities that addresses power relations and interrelates different perspectives on issues at stake is essential for research that aims at sustainable local development (Pohl *et al.*, 2010). In co-production, the process of producing knowledge takes place at the intersection of the realms of science and society, which consequently blurs the roles of academic and non-academic actors. The resulting messiness from the divided identities is a necessary condition for engaging with others (Voorberg *et al.*, 2014). The mutual learning that occurs in co-production processes also aids in establishing relationships among participants. Authentic co-production involves processes where participants can “see” the difference that they have made, and making “objects” that physically embody the co-production offers opportunities for visible impact within the project and beyond (Cooke *et al.*, 2017).

The projects

Aligning with recent research on the European concept of social enterprise (Ferreira *et al.*, 2023), the participating organizations in the two projects examined in this article are perceived as SEEs connected to social innovation to address social and societal problems in partnership with public policies relating to tourism and culture development. Each project is now described to contextualize the research.

Creative tourism destination development in small cities and rural areas

The CREATOUR research-and-application project involves five research centres working with a range of cultural/creative organizations and other stakeholders located in small cities and rural areas across the Norte, Centro, Alentejo and Algarve regions of Portugal. CREATOUR is guided by both research and application objectives. On the research side, CREATOUR aims to examine and reflect on the creative tourism activities, including development dynamics and patterns, reception experiences and community impacts. On the practice side, it aims to catalyse creative tourism offers in small cities and rural areas in Portugal, inform and learn from their development and link them with each other through the development of a national network. This project contributes to the social economy by enhancing socially-inclusive wealth creation, especially in geographical areas that are less active than urban centres in creating labour opportunities in cultural and social development programmes.

The 40 participating “pilot” projects are envisioned and implemented by a variety of types of organizations, including municipalities, cultural and local development associations and entrepreneurs (see Figure 1). Many of the participating individual entrepreneurs and associations can be classified as solidarity economy enterprises (SEEs) as their leaders state that their primary purpose is to bring positive change to the larger society. These organizations act as co-researchers in the project and are developing creative tourism initiatives as a new addition to a portfolio of other tourism, craft, cultural and other activities they pursue. The co-researcher role enables different perspectives, experiences and knowledges to be brought together in dialogue in a mutually rewarding process.

The creative tourism projects are diverse, inspired by and embedded in the specificities of each location they are developed. They range from workshops on traditional arts and crafts, for example, wool processing (from preparing to natural dyeing to weaving) to

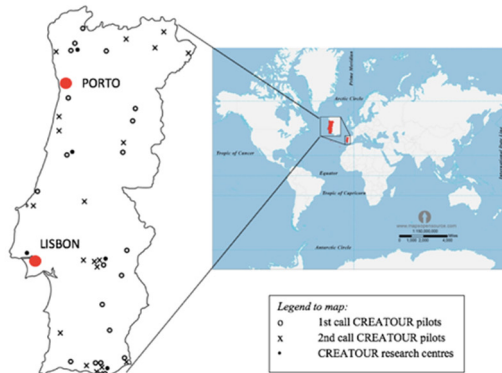
CREATOUR Network

40 participating organizations (*pilots*)

9 municipalities
11 entrepreneurs
16 cultural or local development associations
3 partnerships:
(1 national museum+2 municipalities;
1 company+3 municipalities;
1 company+1 museum)
1 informal network

5 Research centers:

CES - Centro (co-ordinator);
Lab2PT - Norte; CIDEHUS - Alentejo;
CIEO - Algarve; Dinâmia' CET - Lisbon



Source: CREATOUR

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Figure 1.
CREATOUR
network –
participating
organizations

contemporary artistic expression such as night-time photography workshops in “dark sky” areas of Portugal. Creative gastronomy workshops inspired by traditional food-related activities have been paired with innovative interpretations such as visiting and photographing key food-related local sites and using ingredients picked by participants [2].

REDE ARTÉRIA

REDE ARTÉRIA is based on the idea that to develop locally meaningful artistic intervention projects, one needs to promote collaboration among an array of different sectors of society. This approach aligns with community-based participatory research principles, where the community is actively involved in every stage of the research process (Leavy, 2017) and involves different sectors of society. In its design and implementation, REDE ARTÉRIA involves a consortium of eight municipalities, seven cultural associations, five polytechnic institutes, three universities and over 100 local cultural organizations from eight intervention territories in the Centro Region of Portugal (see Figure 2) [3]. In each territory, a municipality, a set of local cultural associations, an academic institution and an arts association collaborate to jointly develop artistic intervention projects that are community-based, participative and express the issues of the social and cultural fabric of each locale.

An action-research approach is used to mediate between different sectors (private and public) at both the local and regional level. In all the project’s activities, two goals are interwoven:

- (1) public engagement; and
- (2) experimenting and testing in practice new ways of producing knowledge.

Ultimately, REDE ARTÉRIA aims to create the foundation for a regional cultural programming network focused on place-based original artistic creation, where the arts are closely aligned with social values and local realities.

Reflexivity as a method

This article was developed through a reflexive process involving researchers in the projects. Drawing on feminist work of performativity, writing a reflexive account of the researcher’s involvement can challenge long-established power dynamics as language not only describes reality but brings it into being (Loxley, 2007). Researcher reflexivity acknowledges the agency of the researchers, researched, academic audiences and others in producing



Figure 2.
REDE ARTÉRIA
territories of
intervention in
central Portugal

Sources: CES; www.drapc.gov.pt/base/regiao_centro.php

knowledge (Tribe and Liburd, 2016) and stresses the importance of establishing non-exploitative and effective working relationships with significant others (Olsen, 2011). Reflexivity promotes the idea that researchers should expose the politics of representation implicated in research to represent their participants better (Pillow, 2003).

Using a reflexive process as a method, true learning is only perceived to occur after one has been through a learning experience and taken the time to make sense of the experience. Understanding reflexivity as a process (Finlay, 2002), the authors explore the experiences and meanings generated and shared within the research process, focusing on the situated and negotiated nature of these meanings. Drawing on lived experiences of participating within the two projects, the researchers reflect on how the participatory methods used unfolded in praxis. In using the method of reflexive process (Cheek *et al.*, 2015), this article aims to avoid sanitizing the reporting of the research process, creating qualitative research that exposes how researchers and practitioners navigate tensions in designing and carrying out culture-based and socially-engaged participatory research, together.

The author-researchers re-visited the participatory processes within each project, and articulated the main features and dynamics involved in them. Then, through iterative joint discussions, these approaches and analyses were explained in more detail, compared and contrasted. Through this alternating process of self-reflection and joint examinations of observations and emerging insights, key themes found in both projects were identified and their characteristics and variations in each context debated. This process provided a framework for further refining analyses and reflections on the processes and experiences of the two projects, and what this joint examination can highlight.

Key participatory/collaborative frameworks: an analysis

The action-research projects examined in this article centralized creative, participatory and collaborative methodologies to engage their participants and to foster cross-sector discussions towards knowledge co-production as well as local action. We re-visited the strategies and methods used in the two projects (Table 1), examining them from the feminist ethics of care perspective in terms of how they fostered and enabled place-based perspectives/approaches, participatory/collaborative research and knowledge exchange and co-production. Overall, through these methodologies, researchers attempted to even the power relations between academic researchers and other participants and to bring together diverse perspectives and insights in dialogue through co-creating, co-designing, co-complementing and co-evaluating activities.

The two action-research projects were conceived and operated independently from one another, with different objectives and dynamics, but can be viewed as interlinked in a conceptual trajectory. While in REDE ARTÉRIA collaborative research is used as a starting point for the construction of community and place-embedded cultural and artistic objects of territorial expression, in the research-and-application project CREATOUR community- and territory-embedded culture and the arts are the starting points for the development of meaningful creative tourism experiences. The ways in which the two projects approach the three central themes framing this article's analysis – place-based local development, collaboration and knowledge co-production – are now presented in detail.

CREATOUR IdeaLabs and complementary approaches

CREATOUR aims to explicitly foreground research–practice relations, centralizing the imperative to bridge research and practice. In this context, knowledge exchange and mobilization are seen as integral and interconnected dimensions to manage during the research project, with insights from practice-based experiences integrated as a valued dimension of the research. This experimental approach permits project participants to learn through the complexities of building closer research–practice relations and fosters knowledge co-production among an array of different types of organizations. From an overarching perspective, three strategic dimensions are key: developing spaces for ongoing knowledge exchange; enabling practitioners to take on the role of co-researcher; and fostering researchers' close attention to the application side of the project (Duxbury *et al.*, 2019). In promoting such hybrid roles, the project intentionally fosters different relations between research and practice, interrupting “traditional” roles, perspectives and practices. The CREATOUR IdeaLabs are central in operationalizing these strategies.

CREATOUR IdeaLabs provide regular points of face-to-face contact, with interactive exercises to support content development; sessions to discuss issues, challenges and positive surprises; and activities to articulate linkages between pilot projects and their place and to encourage stronger relations between culture, tourism and local/regional development. In the IdeaLabs, a variety of practices and methods were designed and implemented (Table 1). The challenge of diverse perspectives, operating contexts and expectations of

Project	Place-based perspective/ approach	Participatory/collaborative research	Knowledge exchange and co-production
CREATOUR	Participatory cultural mapping was used as the basis of an asset-based approach that highlighted and made meaningful tangible and intangible local cultural features and specificities of each pilot-project location Participants and researchers shared diverse perspectives and attachments to place in each region, making visible cultural traditions and embodied experiences through the cultural mapping exercise Diversity of grassroots initiatives were catalysed and designed that were locally meaningful Tourists connected to the visited place by participating in place-based creative tourism activities	Research-and-application project centralized research-practice collaboration Equalization of relationships between researchers and practitioners through time and ongoing relationship-building discussions, exchanges and experiences Within initiative-planning processes, identification of potential local collaborators and partnerships for each initiative, informed by open presentations and collective discussions to add to and further develop ideas and plans Collaborations on a regional basis are promoted National collaborations promoted Skill/art-form collaborations promoted	Mixed group discussions and collaborations reduced the power imbalances that may exist outside the project Multiple informal discussions complemented more “formal” presentations and group feedback sessions Canvas (business) model created in an open setting and then commented on by other participants Co-writers (book chapters and ePortfolios) Post-IdeaLab public events transferred project’s experiences and knowledge to local communities Participating organizations created creative tourism activities that acted as a physical embodiment of knowledge co-production with a visible impact within the project and beyond
REDE ARTÉRIA	Materials collected in cooperation with local participants inform the research team on each place’s profile During Community Intervention Workshops (CIWs), local participants are included in the reflection process, which aims to identify the social and cultural starting points for artistic intervention projects Artistic intervention projects are based on the place’s themes, issues and events Overall, project activities in each location aim to address specific issues and concerns of that place	Local/municipal residents, leaders, and local organizations are identified as privileged informants for local project connections and participate in CIWs. Organizations involved in CIWs represent different sectors and community interests, intending to be inclusive of all key dimensions of the community Interactive process – learning in interaction: During the CIW (involving academic researchers, artists, local residents, local associations and producers and the municipality), participants discuss and work together in focus groups to design the structure (starting points) that will be used by artists in their creation processes for the artistic intervention projects	Community Participatory Cultural Mapping processes, incorporating critical thinking strategies, inform the artistic creation process in joint efforts of reflection (CIW + rehearsals for artistic intervention project) At intermediate and final forums, impact assessment – stakeholders interviews: municipalities, local associations and artists evaluate artistic intervention processes in each city, and research results are presented and discussed. This includes collaborative thinking about the project’s sustainability

Table 1.
Strategies and methods of knowledge co-production used in CREATOUR and REDE ARTÉRIA

Source: Authors’ own work

participants emerged through this process, negotiated largely through conversations during different phases in the project-development process.

Place-based local development

IdeaLabs help organizations to contextualize and “make visible” the cultural and natural resources of the places where the participating SEE organizations are based and from which they are inspired. In the IdeaLabs, a participatory cultural mapping methodology promotes SEE goals of creating place-based sustainability through developing activities that are grounded in tangible and intangible local cultural, social and environmental resources (see, e.g. [Cabeça et al., 2019](#)). Two important steps towards promoting local development through cultural resource activation were:

- (1) raising awareness and explicitly recognizing the importance of local everyday life and the distinctiveness of a place in defining local cultural resources; and
- (2) encouraging the incorporation of these interpretations of local culture into place-distinctive creative tourism products.

A cultural mapping activity serves as background for thinking about how the pilot projects are embedded in their locales and developing strategies for linking creativity to place. Most participant-organizations act as place-based social enterprises whose resources, productive activities and ownership are anchored in specific places and the IdeaLabs accentuate the importance of developing activities building from local culture(s) and specificities of place. Participating organizations are encouraged to pursue *locally beneficial* economic, social and cultural outcomes by explicitly recognizing the specificities of place, local organizational networks and the importance of improving the well-being of the local communities within those places.

IdeaLabs give structure and mentorship to the development and implementation of pilot ideas and ultimately result in a diverse array of pilot projects that enable tourists to connect to the specificities of the local culture and place visited. For example, VIC//Aveiro Arts House created mobile sound sculpture workshops for visitors after participation in the IdeaLabs, enlisting an artist-in-residence, inspired by the place where the activities are located and propelled by the cultural organization’s interest in sound art ([Bakas et al., 2021](#)). When tourists take part in the creative tourism activities created as a result of numerous IdeaLabs, they are able to connect meaningfully to the place as a result of strategic design decisions taken in the development process for each initiative. Features that encourage place-connection include the local site and local resources incorporated, the place-specific activities held, storytelling about the place and socializing in the place ([Bakas et al., 2020](#)).

Collaboration

As pilot projects are launched and evolve, the IdeaLabs serve as a vessel to reunite project participants to jointly reflect on surprises and lessons learned, to present and share collectively gathered information from participating organizations, to consider individual experiences within wider contexts and to plan changes for the future. Participating organizations present and actively discuss their projects (including their aspirations and doubts) and share developments in implementation, while researchers bring in complementary research findings, contextual information, ideas and reflections to inform these plans and actions. The interactive and participatory processes within the IdeaLabs foster relationships among project participants over time and enable a more contextualized and nuanced understanding of localized concerns, aspirations and dynamics.

Twice annually, IdeaLabs have a regional scope, encouraging collaboration among actors in the same region. The annual *national* IdeaLabs bring together specifically mixed different types of organizations to encourage inter-sectoral exchanges (e.g. municipalities, entrepreneurs and cultural associations). This encourages collaboration among organizations that usually do not relate to one another on an equal playing level, thus reducing power imbalances that exist outside the IdeaLab context. At other times, creating groups of similar types of organizations or organizations that focus on specific art forms (e.g. photography, weaving and events) allows for new cross-country collaborations and partnerships to arise. Furthermore, through the application of the IdeaLab participatory framework, the “researcher-as-expert” approach is avoided, encouraging instead the production of a “thick description” of local contexts. This creates space for participants to express how they see themselves, leading to better opportunities for various worldviews to be made known to others (Kidd and Kral, 2005).

Knowledge co-production

The structure of the IdeaLab meetings allows for multiple informal discussions as well as more “formal” presentation and group feedback sessions. For example, during the process of working through activity-based exercises, such as developing a canvas model business plan, participating organizations and researchers informally discuss the information being elaborated, with researchers dropping by the posters being developed by the organizations (Figure 3), discussing ideas, posing questions and responding to doubts. Later on, each organization presents the ideas documented openly on their poster to all IdeaLab participants, which is then commented on by all participants, both researchers and practitioners. These discussions frequently provide ideas and suggestions for the participating organizations to consider in elaborating their initiative as well as additional themes for research. Mixed group discussions and collaborations reduce power imbalances that may exist outside this context.

Knowledge co-production is also encouraged through other means that complement and extend the exchanges within the IdeaLabs. For example, both researchers and participant organizations document and reflect on the pilot activities in ePortfolios, present at the annual CREATOUR international conferences, and co-write chapters in the final book about the project (Duxbury and Silva, 2020). The ePortfolios function as online diaries kept by participant organizations, detailing the creative tourism activity development processes and products, and open to all project participants (Bakas *et al.*, 2023).



Figure 3.
Researchers and
practitioners
participating in a
CREATOUR IdeaLab

Source: CREATOUR

Limitations and constraints largely relate to pragmatic challenges of managing expectations of different types of agents. It is often difficult to align organizations' and individual's involvement in the research processes with their own professional contexts.

Place-based cultural intervention

In the initial phase of cultural mapping, an extensive effort to collect materials (e.g. documents, brochures, photographs and press), involving researchers in cooperation with local participants, informs the project about the historic and social profile of the place and its cultural heritage. Jointly collected information on the cultural resources of the local and regional territory (e.g. cultural venues, organizations and heritage sites) is assembled and mapped as a resource for discussion.

In the second phase, organized sessions of reflection enable the local authority, artists, cultural and education-related associations and academics to work together to identify and discuss local cultural issues and needs. In each location, the aim is to collaboratively draft a plan for an artistic intervention project that is place-based and responds to these joint reflections. The artistic intervention project usually includes an artistic product (performance) articulated with other parallel activities (seminars, workshops and exhibitions), organized with and for the local community. Overall, the whole process brings attention to locally important themes and possibilities for social transformation embedded in that territory.

Collaboration

At the beginning, a set of community-based organizations and local cultural associations are contacted and their presence secured at the CIWs. Each set of workshops is designed in three phases. In phase one, participants share, through collective brainstorming methods, problems and needs that are directly connected to the cultural field in that territory, which are organized and synthesized. In phase two, participants elaborate questions that could orient them to address the problems and needs identified previously. In phase three, participants, in subgroups, work together to design an artistic intervention project they want to see happen in their territory. In each locale, this process is adapted to reflect the context; for example, in one location that had suffered major fires, each participant subgroup embodied a different perspective (economic, social, political, biographic and cultural) on how this event impacts the local territory, which informed the development of their artistic intervention project. This collaborative research process, involving horizontal processes of knowledge sharing and co-production, fosters stronger working relationships among research, civil society, government and cultural agents.

Knowledge co-production

Through facilitation and knowledge co-production processes based on participatory cultural mapping, place-specific issues and possible transformations are identified and discussed. Community-engaged participatory cultural mapping processes promote opportunities for collaborative critical thinking about themes and issues that emerge during the CIWs. Information collected through this collaborative cultural mapping process then informs the process of artistic creation. In each location, a designated cultural association uses the information generated to produce and present a place-specific artistic intervention project in that locale. Open rehearsals during the artistic development process enable community residents to see what is emerging and to talk with the creators at the end of the session.

At intermediate and final forums, a qualitative evaluation is presented to municipalities, funders and other local partners to evaluate the individual qualitative impact of the

participation/collaboration actions in the process of designing, creation and implementation of the Artistic Intervention Project. Results are discussed with associations, artists, policymakers and municipalities, with collaborative thinking about the project's future design occurring as a strategy to consider and help secure its sustainability.

Conclusions

The two PAR projects, CREATOUR and REDE ARTÉRIA, treat culture as an active agent in local development. In these projects culture is understood as a complex, broad concept that includes behaviours, beliefs, stories, traditions and rituals embedded in social relations and communication (de Munck and Bennardo, 2019). In this context, culture and art are used to (re)imagine, design and develop new trajectories and strategies that can impact communities and contribute to social transformation.

The projects involve participants that represent a type of solidarity economy enterprise (SEE) that strongly advocates for sustainable territorial development and community participation, focusing on culture and place-based initiatives to re-envision and catalyse cultural resources for local development. Our finding supports the idea that in Portugal, social enterprises in the field of arts and culture can be good solutions for problems addressing broader societal problems and promoting local development (Rego and Borges, 2021). Furthermore, these organizations operate within small cities and rural areas with rich (but often vulnerable) local cultural resources and specificities, but that are marginal to mainstream circuits of culture and tourism. The projects provide a platform for these SEEs to engage in intersectoral networking, build capacity and pursue new ideas.

A feminist ethics of care theoretically frames the PAR methods used in these projects to “democratize research partnerships” (Brannelly and Boulton, 2017), create conditions that help to reduce power imbalances between academic researchers and other types of collaborators (Tomaselli and Dyll-Myklebust, 2015), and foster inclusive research approaches (Igwe *et al.*, 2022). Ultimately, this contributes to conducting research that aims to positively impact society.

The two projects, propelled through close collaborations among researchers and participating organizations, contribute to the strategic utilization of cultural and place-specific resources for local development in smaller places. CREATOUR discovered that the introduction and adoption of a creative tourism approach provides a new lens to envision and develop locally grounded culture-based initiatives that link with alternative tourism in meaningful ways. REDE ARTÉRIA demonstrated a new approach to anchoring research within collaborative and participatory practices of designing, implementing and evaluating locally embedded artistic intervention projects.

In the reflexive research presented in this article, we found that PAR activities in the two projects could be viewed through three interrelated themes: a place-based perspective/approach, participatory/collaborative research and knowledge co-production. Furthermore, we found that these three dimensions intertwined and strengthened one another.

Place-based perspective/approach

A place-based perspective aims to incorporate situated knowledge about local cultural resources that could meaningfully inform the implementation of social economy projects that have a cultural and creative component. The projects demonstrate how participatory cultural mapping approaches can reveal tangible and intangible cultural traditions, embodied experiences and other specificities of locales, making them more visible and highlighting how they are meaningful. Beyond mapping, it is essential to follow-up with additional processes to collectively

reflect on and identify particularly meaningful themes, issues and events as foundational points for acting and as wellsprings of inspiration.

Building from a pluralistic knowledge base, organizations participating in CREATOUR develop grassroots creative activities that could enable others to learn and experience these place-specific connections. In REDE ARTÉRIA, participants create community-centred artistic works that enhance collective place-based knowledge and address specific issues and concerns of place. Both action-research projects make visible locally embedded knowledge, identity and other cultural resources and foster actions aiming to contribute towards inclusive and holistic local development.

Participatory/collaborative research

Participatory methods underpin creative and collaborative approaches to interlinking research, public imagination and community-engaged action in small city contexts. The projects fostered an “engagement” of culture within their SEE participants, as CREATOUR’s approach to community-based creative tourism suggests, or REDE ARTÉRIA suggests when using art to give citizens a voice, in manners that allow participants to design projects based on their own understanding of local heritage. The approaches used in both projects build solidarity with the community’s aims and its interpretation of culture.

Participatory and collaborative research methods within both projects are enacted primarily within the CREATOUR IdeaLabs and the REDE ARTÉRIA CIWs. The participants, who can be classified as social economy enterprises (SEEs), intentionally bring their plurality of interests and perspectives into shared spaces in interactive processes that help weave cross-sectoral connections. Focusing on knowledge co-production *arrangements* that link researchers and practitioners, both projects construct “safe spaces” for dialogue, co-learning and collaboration across research and practice. Beyond discussions to share and compare experiences, perspectives and insights, these occasions also involve co-planning and co-designing frameworks on which to base future actions. Centralizing research–practice collaboration as an equalizing and inclusive approach also serves to highlight this dimension of the projects, not allowing it to exist as an “add-on” in the margins.

Knowledge exchange and co-production

The projects aim to avoid the “researcher-as-expert” approach, valuing residents and practitioners as co-researchers embedded in place, bringing first-hand experiences, knowledge and skills. The mutual learning that occurs within co-production processes aids in establishing relationships among participants. A combination of informal and formal knowledge exchanges and processes involving “layering” of information, reflections and other comments throughout the project encourages collaborative knowledge development. The activities and artefacts, like the creative tourism activities and artistic performances created within the two projects, serve as physical embodiments of the knowledge co-production and development processes.

Points of collective project assessment foster continual engagement among varied participants and joint consideration of project impacts and the sustainability of efforts invested in the initiatives. The projects demonstrate that artistic practices within social economy PAR research can enable collective critical thinking and provide imaginative approaches to inform and inspire transformation.

Implications for bridging research and practice

Based on these findings, we elaborated a list of practical recommendations and insights for others interested in pursuing similar methods that aim to bridge research and practice.

Overarching elements:

- Organize regular points of face-to-face contact, with interactive exercises to foster dialogue, connections and co-developed planning, design and development work.
- Adapt activities and topics to the time period and development processes in the course of a project and to the needs of participating organizations.

Place-based local development:

- “Make visible” and contextualize cultural resources and place specificities of locales (based in participatory cultural mapping processes).
- In defining local cultural resources, raise awareness and explicitly recognize the importance of local everyday life and the distinctiveness of a place.
- Design and implement culture and arts-based initiatives that are place-distinctive and grounded in tangible and intangible local cultural and environmental resources.
- Inform thinking about how organizations and initiatives are embedded in locales and develop strategies for linking artistic and creative activities to place.
- Design guidance exercises and facilitate collective discussions that stimulate community benefit considerations from the initial stages of planning processes.
- As a result of strategic design decisions taken in the development process for each initiative, later participants (residents or tourists) are enabled to connect meaningfully to a place.
- Small projects can serve as a seed and inspiration for broader initiatives and collaborations that contribute to wider local development.

Collaboration:

- Build meaningful partnerships from the start of a project.
- Collaboration requires sharing control of processes and being open to debates and topics that emerge, the collective wisdom and will of diverse participants, and alternate ways of addressing needs as projects develop.
- Ensure information and insights shared are well documented, synthesized and clearly feed into consecutive steps of overall processes.
- Regular meetings can serve as vessels to reunite project participants to share information and observations, reflect on experiences and plan for the future.
- Interactive and participatory processes foster relationships among project participants over time and enable more contextualized and nuanced understandings of concerns, aspirations and dynamics.
- Joint sessions to discuss and reflect on place-specific findings can identify issues and needs, explore ideas and design frameworks for initiatives with the possibility to contribute to social transformation.
- Structuring and facilitating different kinds of connections among participants (e.g. cross-sectoral and thematic) expands networks and can inspire collaborations.

Knowledge co-production:

- Avoid the “researcher-as-expert” approach, valuing residents and practitioners as co-researchers embedded in place, bringing first-hand experiences, knowledge and skills.
- Structure meetings to allow for multiple informal discussions as well as more ‘formal’ presentation and group feedback sessions.
- Structure other activities to require meaningful discussion such as co-designing or co-writing.
- Physical embodiment of knowledge co-production and co-development processes can have a visible impact within the project and beyond. Opportunities to discuss projects-in-process with a wider public can mutually inform and inspire new thinking and actions.
- Knowledge exchange and mobilization involving artistic practice can provide imaginative approaches to designing strategic interventions for addressing local issues and inspiring transformation and social change.

Notes

1. In Portugal, the successive different welfare regimes of the past few decades have determined the legal and political context within which social enterprises operate. The democratic revolution, in the 1970s, was followed by the rise of the social cooperative movement, and then the emergence of entrepreneurial nonprofits. Cultural cooperatives were legally established in Portugal in the 1980s (Decreto-Lei 313/81, from 19 November 1981), which provided the foundation for the cultural sector today. Cultural cooperatives now exist in the fields of cinema, music, audiovisual, circus, publishing, visual arts, and journalism. In the 1990s, the public-policy focus was on the creation of work-integration social enterprises (WISE); later on, the solidarity economy enterprise model was promoted within the framework of sustainable local development. From 2010 onwards, the social business concept and the corresponding more entrepreneurial and commercial forms of SE started to prevail in the cultural field (Ferreira and Almeida, 2021).
2. For an overview of the CREATOUR participating organizations and their pilot initiatives, see <https://creatour.pt/en/publications/creatour-pilots-and-projects-2>
3. The core members of the REDE ARTÉRIA consortium are presented in Carvalho and Craveiro (2022).

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