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Creative tourism: Catalysing artisan entrepreneur networks in rural Portugal

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Abstract

Purpose: Given limited research about how artisans become integrated into tourism, this paper investigates the emergence of *artisan entrepreneur-mediators* who link artisans to tourism in rural areas and small cities in Portugal. Using social embeddedness as a conceptual framework, this paper views artisan entrepreneur-mediators as existing within an entrepreneurial ecosystem. The paper investigates their role within this ecosystem and how artisan entrepreneur-mediators connect artisans to creative tourism in a rural context.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper is based on new (2017 and 2018) empirical evidence developed through two rounds of semi-structured interviews of five artisan entrepreneur-mediators.

Findings: This paper finds that artisan entrepreneur-mediators in rural areas or small cities take on multiple roles as networking agents who organize and offer creative tourism experiences, providing the missing link between artisans and tourists. An analysis of the nuances of the operations of these artisan entrepreneur-mediators suggests that high levels of

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social embeddedness within local rural communities is important in order for these neo-rural entrepreneurs to attain their goals.

Originality/value: Originality lies in the identification of a gap in artisan entrepreneurship literature in a rural context. It is the first time that a critical analysis of artisan entrepreneur-mediators who facilitate the link between artisans and tourism, is carried out in terms of social embeddedness, their roles and connections to creative tourism, and types of community engagement.

Keywords: creative tourism, CREATOUR, social embeddedness, entrepreneurs, art, crafts, workshops, community, mediators, artisans, experiences

Article classification: Research Paper

Introduction

In response to growing interest in artisan entrepreneurship and the role of culture and tourism in its growth (Ratten and Ferreira, 2017), this paper investigates the ways in which some artisans in rural areas in Portugal are being networked and guided to develop and implement creative tourism experiences derived from artisanal activities as part of a national project on creative tourism called CREATOUR. Creative tourism tends to differ from cultural tourism in terms of focus: while cultural tourism focuses on built heritage, museums, and monuments, creative tourism focuses on image, identity, lifestyles, atmosphere, narratives, and media (Richards, 2011; Triarchi and Karamanis, 2017). The contemporary vision of creative tourism incorporates an expanded focus on interactive connections between travellers and residents and emphasizes the importance of rooting creative actions to place (OECD, 2014;

Blapp, 2015; Duxbury et al., forthcoming). With artists increasingly used to represent, market, and enhance the visual image of destinations, this is a timely investigation of the link between artisan activity and tourism (Long and Morpeth, 2016). Furthermore, there is a growing recognition that artisans as businesses and residents in rural areas can serve to diversify rural areas' economic base and thus can be highly valuable in rural development programs (Duxbury et al., 2011).

This paper views an artisan as a skilled person who creates objects of aesthetic and/or functional value, mainly by manual labour, using traditional craft techniques and/or materials (cf. UNESCO, 1997). Some authors differentiate between levels of involvement in money-making activities in which craft-makers engage, distinguishing them as hobbyists, artisans, or entrepreneurs (Bouette and Magee, 2015). However, for the purpose of this paper, an artisan is classified as someone who engages in culture-based, creative activities that have a tangible or intangible end product and also sells these products. In terms of entrepreneurship, historically, a loose definition of an entrepreneur is “someone who perceives an opportunity and creates an organisation to pursue it” (Bygrave, 1997, p. 2). While there has been some debate regarding who counts as an entrepreneur – for example, whether there is a difference between a small business owner and an entrepreneur (Morrison et al., 2010), or if an entrepreneur is just someone who, like Bill Gates, takes a new idea and creates a new industry based on this idea – this study considers anyone who operates a small business to be an entrepreneur.

This study aims to expand from the traditional research focus on tourism artisan entrepreneur typologies and production for the tourism market to explore the emergence of mediating agents to guide and steward the new activities in which these artisans are engaged.

Addressing the gap in literature on how artisans are connecting to the tourism market, this paper finds that these local connecting and mediating agents, who will be referred to as ‘artisan entrepreneur-mediators’, play integral roles in the diversification of traditional craft-based production activities by encouraging the development of creative tourism workshops and associated activities and thus also play a part in local socio-cultural and economic development.

The objectives of this paper are:

- 1) to develop portraits of artisan entrepreneur-mediators based in rural areas and small cities in Portugal, and outline the types of business products and services they offer;
- 2) to examine the ways in which the entrepreneur-mediators work with localized artisan networks to link the artisans to creative tourism;
- 3) to investigate how social networks in rural contexts may complement or constrain the activities of artisan entrepreneur-mediators; and
- 4) to analyse the role that social embeddedness plays within entrepreneurial ecosystems within a specific context (a national creative tourism network in rural Portugal).

The five artisan entrepreneur-mediators investigated in this paper are members of CREATOUR, a three-year (2016-2019) interdisciplinary research-and-application project that is developing for the first time in Portugal, a network of creative tourism packages, many offered by artisans.¹ It involves five research centres working with a range of cultural/creative organizations and other stakeholders located in small cities and rural areas across Portugal in the Norte, Centro, Alentejo, and Algarve regions. The project’s design

¹ See the CREATOUR website (www.creatour.pt) for a full list of the project’s scientific and application objectives.

builds on a twofold approach – theory and experimentation – to explicitly nurture applied experimentation and the implementation of 40 pilots that will diversify tourism offers and deepen connections between cultural/creative and tourism organizations in these regions. As a network, CREATOUR functions as more than simply a network to market creative tourism offers, but also to help its pilot projects by providing opportunities to build and share knowledge, network with others, improve their tourism offers, and create strategies to enhance community benefit. Within this shared context, the five artisan entrepreneur-mediator case studies selected for this article also share a dual focus: to develop a sustainable business enterprise and to enhance the socio-cultural and economic dimensions of their local communities. The selected pilot cases cover all four regions of the project, which comprises a wide geographical area of mainland Portugal. Viewing entrepreneurship as a blend of social and economic goals, this study aims to get close to the natural everyday settings in which entrepreneurship takes place by using qualitative research tools.

Literature review

This study is informed by research on entrepreneurship, artisans, creative tourism, and the rural development in this context. Beginning with entrepreneurship as an economic function and contextualized by growing attention to alternative conceptualizations of entrepreneurial roles, research on artisans is synthesized, including the types of entrepreneurship in which they engage and the link between creativity and economics. Following this, creative tourism is investigated as a realm of activity that can provide artisans with an avenue to remain profitable. Guided by the question of how artisans operate, the concept of the creative tourism ecosystem is introduced, wherein the functionalities of networks are explored. Finally, the rural context in which the artisans are situated within is examined, highlighting the complexity of modern conceptualizations of the rural, the blurring of boundaries between

urban and rural, and the concepts of ‘global countryside’ and ‘creative countryside’, as discursive tools to articulate what ‘the rural’ is today.

Entrepreneurial ecosystems

Since the shift towards neoliberal individualism, entrepreneurship has been increasingly perceived as the “foundation of opportunistic individualism” (Ahl and Marlow, 2012, p. 544) and simultaneously as an economic activity that offers the potential for creativity and innovation, free from organizational constraints. Researching contemporary entrepreneurship can be seen as “boundary work” (Tucker, 2007, p. 211) because entrepreneurial action is simultaneously embedded in local traditions while at the same time challenging these taken-for-granted stereotypic roles (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006). Given the diverse cultural contexts within which entrepreneurship takes place, it becomes increasingly important to move away from descriptions of entrepreneurship as an industrial process that subsumes local culture, towards viewing entrepreneurship as an economic activity derived from socio-cultural processes (Tucker, 2010).

There is growing recognition that economic behavior can be better understood within its social context as this provides individuals with opportunities and sets boundaries for their actions. The most popular application of social context in entrepreneurship research refers to social network approaches. Social networks can provide financial capital, information, potential employees, or access to clients and emotional support. Hence, in modern industrial society, economic action is embedded in structures of social relations and so entrepreneurship also is socially embedded (Granovetter, 1985). The concept of social embeddedness can be summarised as the nature, depth, and extent of an individual’s ties into a community and configures economic process. Social embeddedness can be used as an analytical tool to

illuminate the dynamism and complexity of entrepreneurial situations and research the influence of social networks on entrepreneurial action (McKeever et al., 2014). New business development processes are strongly affected by social contacts or linkages, which form the patterns of social interaction. These social linkages can also be seen as bridging ‘structural’ holes (Burt, 1992). Social ties are an important resource for overcoming liabilities of newness and smallness when starting and developing a business (Welter, 2011). Whilst in most cases, social embeddedness means access to more support during the entrepreneurial process, it can also act as a constraint, for example, when social aspects of exchange supersede economic imperatives (Uzzi, 1997).

According to the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach, entrepreneurs are important players themselves in creating the ecosystem and keeping it healthy (Stam, 2015). Just as a biological ecosystem consists of a complex interrelationship of organisms, habitats, and environmental conditions, Harrington (1990) argues that social creativity does not ‘reside’ in any single cognitive or personality process, does not ‘occur’ at any single point in time, does not ‘happen’ at any particular place, and is not the product of a single individual, but rather exists within a ‘creative ecosystem’. A recent project investigating creative development in low-density areas defined a creative ecosystem as an environment of excellence based on creative assets that generate socio-economic growth, which included people (creative class), the economy (creative industries/activities and entrepreneurs), and places (creative quarters), and was dependent on governance and connectivity (INTELI, 2011). Within a rural context, in light of the vulnerability of rural regions and the difficulty of small businesses to stay solvent, it is imperative to understand the critical elements within a small business’ operating environment or ‘ecosystem’ that support or thwart entrepreneurial activity (Cline et al., 2014). For example, research done with Irish communities shows that while entrepreneurs

have to recognise the benefits of engaging with the community, communities also need to appreciate that entrepreneurship can bring about social and economic change (McKeever et al., 2015).

Artisans

The literature on artisan entrepreneurs has outlined various types of artisan, for example, the *backpacker* artisan entrepreneur such as South Americans selling their handicrafts to the backpacker market while backpacking themselves (Broocks and Hannam, 2016), and artisan *food producers* who create specialist foods like craft beer or honey (Ramadani et al., 2017), which are increasingly being bought by people wanting ‘a return to authentic flavours’ (Tregear, 2005). There have been gender approaches to artisan entrepreneurship, such as the research done by Bakas (2017) who uses gender roles analysis to explore the ways in which feminine conceptualizations of artisan tourism entrepreneurship in rural Greece can contribute to community resilience to a macroeconomic crisis. Other artisan entrepreneurship literature focuses on the role of networks in helping artisans to become more profitable. Ortiz (2017) examines the skills and capacities of artists and artisans based in rural northern Ontario, Canada, observing that the lack of an umbrella networking organization to facilitate coordination diminishes the ability of artisans to build collective capacity and promote local sustainability and resilience. In rural environments, artisan entrepreneurship can be seen as a mechanism through which the local community can gain from the knowledge and skills of these individuals (McGranahan et al., 2010). Some artisan entrepreneurs in rural areas offer services that would not be available otherwise, such as two female felt-makers in a mountainous village in Zagori, in northern Greece, who operate a shop that sells to tourists and also teach young rural children how to weave and knit, for free (Bakas, 2014). Luckman (2012) also reports that cultural workers in rural areas in the U.K. and Australia often provide

training for local young people, in the absence of the kinds of infrastructure available in the city. This type of community-care action may affect the social embeddedness of artisans, as they engage more closely with locals by offering them something that they are missing. However, there is limited research on the role of social embeddedness within artisan entrepreneurship.

A classic dilemma of artists and artisans is the tension between commercial goals and artistic experimentation, with researchers reporting that artisans often feel that “economics crowds out creativity” (Werthes et al., 2017, p. 291). Creative entrepreneurs, such as artisan entrepreneurs, have certain characteristics that differentiate them from ‘classic’ entrepreneurs and indeed often do not think of themselves as entrepreneurs, as their primary goal is of “creative fulfilment and lifestyle” (Rae, 2012, p. 612) rather than solely profit generation. As a result, they create their own conceptualization of what entrepreneurship means to them (Bridgstock, 2013). While artists and artisans have sometimes been perceived as problematic to regional development as they possess the so-called “wrong mix of personal characteristics ... conducive to economic growth” (Tregear, 2005, p. 3), this narrow view has been debated and addressed internationally in many contexts (e.g., Duxbury et al., 2016; Suzuki, 2005) and, in the context of rising interest in culture-based development internationally, this perspective is gradually fading. When handicraft/artisanal production is paired with another industry, such as tourism, the entrepreneurial venture has a better chance of being profitable (Teixeira and Ferreira, 2018). Since artisans create their own entrepreneurial conceptualizations, more research is needed on how artisans connect to the tourism industry and what their entrepreneurial ecosystem looks like; however, limited research has been done to date, which is where this paper aims to fill a gap in literature.

Creative tourism integrating artisans

Within contemporary tourism, a societal ‘creative turn’ is increasingly observed: Beyond creative content added to tourism products, tourism itself is becoming the arena for the development of skills. Integrating culture and business, the experience economy is becoming a central element in expressing this ‘creative turn’ within tourism. In this context, all aspects of tourism are being re-visited, critiqued, and re-imagined, including the tourist experience, the creative actor, and the influence of tourism on craft/traditions (UNWTO, 2016).

Tourism used to be seen primarily as a destructive force for local crafts and traditions because of the perceived alterations in local traditions due to touristification processes (Cohen, 2001). However, this view is changing as tourism increasingly focuses on showcasing local heritage, particularly intangible heritage (UNWTO, 2016), and becoming a driver for the revitalization of cultural traditions and forms. Creative tourism is particularly aligned with contemporary trends to revive local crafts and traditions as it focuses on co-creating and co-preserving local traditions, building on the embeddedness of creative knowledge that resides in the artisan entrepreneur (Richards, 2011) while developing and sharing creative skills and engaging with the local community (Landry, 2010). Creative tourism thus provides an avenue for artisan entrepreneurs to become more profitable without compromising their values, and may help to reduce the traditional conflict between the production of art and commercial demands, a particularity that defines the creative economy (Collins and Cunningham, 2017). The CREATOUR approach to creative tourism defines it as a tourist experience that includes four dimensions: active participation, creative self-expression, learning, and community engagement (CREATOUR, 2017).

Ruralities and development through creative activities

In rural communities, the arts and creative industries are strategic sectors in regional revitalization because they can stimulate and build community cohesion and also provide tourism-based and other opportunities (Duxbury et al., 2011). The ‘rural idyll’ attracts tourists to rural areas, where they feel a ‘value of remoteness’ in which distance from urban obligations creates freedom to experiment (Matarasso, 2004, p. 25). Rural areas are increasingly associated with both ‘escape’ and ‘renewal’, fuelling the development, for example, of ‘digital detox’ camps (e.g., <http://digitaldetox.org/>) and ‘mindful travel’ strategies (Currie, 2005; Chen et al., 2017) popular among travellers from (at least) Europe and North America. This comes from the increasing realization that acquiring experiences instead of things may still be a form of empty consumerism and happiness is better pursued through meaningful, mindful experiences.

Typically lacking the mobile, economic resources of labour and money associated with large cities, the economies of rural areas tend to be more vital and resilient when based on the unique histories, culture, and social context of a place. In these economies, tourism can often play an important role, underwritten by service-based, consumer-oriented industries based on each community’s unique characteristics (Patterson, 2008). In recent decades, rural areas in southern Europe have experienced the waning importance of agriculture in their general economy, the decline of farming populations, a reduction of incomes, a greater structural complexity of employment, and the effects of transformations associated with the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (Verinis, 2011). As a result, a threefold narrative on the rural has emerged in Portuguese lay discourses: 1) a ‘pre-modernity’ discourse in which rural areas are generally portrayed as less developed and in need of change; 2) a productivist perspective, which associates the rural with agricultural modernization; and 3) a ‘rural

renaissance' vision in which the countryside is understood as a repository of traditional cultural values and in need of preservation (da Silva et al., 2016). In this context, the touristic promotion of the countryside is often based on 'global' images rather than on local features, which tends to induce a process of 'McRuralisation' (Figueiredo, 2013).

Research on rural creatives has tended to essentialize specific creative industries' activities as quintessentially rural (or urban). The concept of the "creative countryside" (Bell and Jayne, 2010, p. 210) is useful to describe contemporary perceptions of the rural, especially as urban dwellers engaging in creative occupations occupy rural spaces, becoming known as 'neo-rurals' (Rivera Escribano and Mormont, 2007). As a result, views of 'the countryside' are becoming more differentiated; until recently, however, the smaller-scale creative worlds within the rural have remained largely unexplored. The concept of the 'global countryside' (Woods, 2007) provides a discursive framework for imagining a countryside transformed by globalization and acting as a rhetorical counterpoint to the 'global city'. Defined as "a hypothetical space, corresponding to a condition of the global interconnectivity and interdependency of rural localities" (Woods, 2007, p. 492), the notion of the 'global countryside' is characterized by a flow of amenities that comprises not only flows of migrants but also flows of finance capital, property titles, cultural practices and ideas, and consumer goods.

Hence, 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 and Jayne, 2010). Research on creative industries in cities has found that artisans ('creatives') are dedicated to a new 'work hard, play hard' ethic of networking and relationship-building (McRobbie, 2002). However, within rural

environments, artisans do not necessarily have the same conceptualizations of this entrepreneurship lifestyle and are more socially embedded than the urban creative sector (Gibson et al., 2010; Bennett et al., 2015).

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework used for this paper, which adopts an interpretivist methodology, emerged from the data and a critical review of literature on creative tourism, artisan entrepreneurship, and rural cultural work. Two main theoretical concepts are used to frame the research in this paper: social embeddedness and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. More specifically, this paper uses the idea that social networks influence economic activity to frame an investigation into some of the factors influencing artisan entrepreneur-mediators' ability to catalyse links between artisans and tourists. Rather than attempting to develop a theory of social embeddedness, this research aims to explore the nature of embeddedness to gain insight into the entrepreneurial process within a specific context. Social embeddedness is hence used as an analytical tool to research the influence of social networks on artisan entrepreneur-mediators' entrepreneurial action.

In order to add to the rigour of this analysis, artisan entrepreneur-mediators are visualized as existing within an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Whilst the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems is largely used for high-growth entrepreneurship (Spigel, 2017), it is used in this paper as a concept to investigate some of the social, political, economic, and cultural elements within a locale that support the development of innovative start-ups within the context of rural creative tourism.

Methods

This study focused on five pilot projects that are part of the CREATOUR network. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the five selected pilots. These pilots were chosen because of their geographical representation (from each mainland Portuguese region) and their role as entrepreneurs who are connecting artisans to tourism.

Table 1. Characteristics of artisan entrepreneur-mediators

Artisan entrepreneur-mediator	Region	Main business	Creative tourism project	Size of artisan network
VERde NOVO	Norte: Ribeira da Pena	Tourism and culture development consultancy	<i>Linho de Cerva e Limões</i> : Offers workshops and guided tours on the cycle of linen –from sowing to weaving.	Medium – 6 weavers, linen field owner, tourism animation companies, restaurants
Cerdeira Village/ADXTUR	Centro: Cerdeira, Lousa	Cerdeira Village’s proprietor is a German sculptor who also offers luxury rural accommodation for rent in a deserted mountainous village which she helped restore over the last 30 years. She holds artistic residences in cooperation with Schist Village networking body (ADXTUR).	Offers artist residencies and artisan workshops to tourists on a variety of arts, including woodcarving and pottery.	Large and international
Quico Turismo	Centro: Nazaré	Located in the seaside area of Nazaré (also in the Centro region), is primarily a rooms-for-rent business that hosts visitors	<i>Nazaré Creativo</i> : To date, photography expeditions with a cultural-historic focus and workshops sewing key-rings in the shape of ‘carapau’ (horse-mackerel) fish, which are traditionally associated with Nazaré.	Small – 2 artisans
LOOM New.Tradition	Alentejo: Évora	A fabric artist in her 30s who promotes ‘slow fashion’ and is working towards re-building old looms as part of a cooperative. She also works in a craft shop.	<i>LOOM New.Tradition</i> : Offers workshops and guided tours related to fabric-weaving, plant stamping, and dyeing and develops creative fabric-art related trails.	Small – 4 female weavers/artisans
Proactivetur	Algarve: Loulé	Tour operator and project manager of the TASA project (Ancestral Techniques Current Solutions). Aims to bring strategic innovation to the craft industry by encouraging ancestral craft techniques to be used in modern product design.	Offers various half-day or full-day workshops on ancestral craft techniques such as cane basket weaving, palm weaving, and making traditional floor tiles.	Large – through the TASA Project, it engages with more than 40 artisans

As much of tourism research is driven by a materialist ideology (e.g., on how to be a more profitable business), this study responds to the call for more critical research that challenges hegemonies and effects social change (Ren et al., 2010). The local, context-bound knowledge produced from this research is non-generalizable, that is, it does not purport to universal positivist claims of truth about artisan entrepreneur-mediators’ conceptualizations of their entrepreneurial roles, but it is of significance in furthering entrepreneurship theory by providing a rich description of context-bound reality. The methodology used in this article entails an ontology that knowledge lies primarily in the ways in which the artisan

entrepreneur-mediators perceive themselves. In the tradition of Polanyi (1968), this research is based firmly in the reality of the entrepreneur. The present study uses an interpretivist paradigm in which social reality is regarded as the product of the processes through which social actors negotiate the meanings of actions and situations. The majority of advocates of an embeddedness perspective have emphasized the usefulness of an inductive, interpretive focus on what people experience and how it is they experience what they experience (McKeever, 2014). As social life is a result of interactions, qualitative research is useful in making visible participants' opinions and interpreting these opinions in terms of the meaning they attach to them. It allows for the co-construction of understandings of the world based on participants' opinions (Swain, 2004).

This section provides detail on the methods used in this study, responding to the call for greater transparency in the methods used within research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The research uses semi-structured interviews to develop knowledge about the operational roles and perspectives of artisan entrepreneur-mediators working within the context of the CREATOUR project. Interviews – defined as a “conversation with a purpose” by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 268) – are used to create knowledge with participants, accepting that there is no universal truth, but rather context-bound, non-generalizable truths. Interviews are often used to gather information within entrepreneurship research, including research investigating the effects of social embeddedness on the entrepreneurial process (Jack and Anderson, 2002). This study's interviews were conducted in two rounds. The first round of interviews was conducted in November 2017, as part of stakeholder analysis-related interviews conducted by the Lisbon-based CREATOUR research team. This article has used the transcripts from those interviews. A second round of interviews was conducted by the Coimbra-based research team (of which the authors of this article are members) via Skype in

four of the cases and, in one case, via email exchange. Each of these interviews was about an hour in duration and took place in February and March 2018. In both sets of interviews, pilots were provided with the interview questions in advance, but were encouraged to expand upon points that they considered to be of importance to their experience of being entrepreneurial mediators of local artisans in order to develop and offer creative tourism products. Figure 1 presents the interview question guide used in the second-round interviews.

Interview questions:

About your business and the artisans you work with

A1	Please describe your business. How long has it been in operation? What products and/or services do you offer? Etc.
A2	What creative tourism activities do you offer?
A3	How do these creative tourism activities fit into your business strategy?
A4	What is your business' operating area? (e.g., name of town(s), regional perspective, etc.)
A5	What is your attachment to this place? <i>(i.e., Are you from this area originally? Do you live here? How did you come to live in this place?)</i>

About your interaction with artisans

B1	Who are the artisans you work with? e.g., What do they make, what other types of activities do they offer? General characteristics: age, gender, economic background ...
B2	How long have you been working with them?
B3	How do you work with the artisans? What do you do? (i.e., concrete tasks, activities, services, roles you take on, etc.)
B4	Did the artisans have contact with each other before you began working with them?
B5	Is there a specific physical place where the artisans meet with you?
B6	Where do the artisans meet with tourists? Do you provide the space for this?
B7	Did these artisans have contact with tourism before you began to work with them? In what ways?

About creative tourism

C1	How do you engage with these artisans in your creative tourism activities?
C2	In your creative tourism activities, how do you engage with the wider community of residents and businesses? Who else is involved in these activities? In what ways?
C3	What are your aspirations for the next year or two (i.e., the near-term)?
C4	What are the key challenges you are facing at this time? - In implementing your creative tourism project? - In working with the artisans?
C5	Why did you join the CREATOUR network?
C6	What other networks are important to your work?
C7	Any other comments you would like to add?

Figure 1 Second-round interview question guide

Interviews were conducted in English, recorded, and partially transcribed. English-language fluency varied amongst participants, but was high for 80% of the participants. While guided

by the set of framework questions, in order to give participants the ability to express what they thought was important to them, the conversations were encouraged to follow a natural course without the researcher interrupting, a technique also employed by Lazaridis (2009) in her ethnographic research on Greek silk-cocoon artisans. As it is important for interviews to feel relaxed and enjoyable (O'Reilly, 2012), in order to enable an open exchange of views, participants were interviewed at a date and time of the day convenient them and could choose the amount of time spent engaging in the interview. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants' informed consent and their permission to record the interviews using audio-recording equipment was verbally obtained, so as not to pressure them to sign any papers, which would unnecessarily formalize the conversational exchange.

Thematic analysis of the interviews was perceived as the most suitable approach for assessing the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Data was analysed by reading the first-round interview transcripts, re-listening to the second-round interviews, and re-reading the partial transcriptions, while searching for patterns or themes. Bearing in mind the research objectives and the critical literature review, a thematic analysis was used to process the knowledge created within the interactions between researcher and artisan entrepreneur-mediators. The main principle determining the format of thematic construction was what the participants themselves perceived as important. Hence, thematic construction was informed by the ways in which participants expressed themselves and the emotions that were evoked during the second-round interviews. In this way, new themes emerged that were not directly addressed by the pre-prepared interview questions. For example, while interview questions did have an element of enquiry regarding artisan entrepreneurs-mediators' community engagement, a new theme emerging from the interviews was the significance of social embeddedness in entrepreneurial success within the researched context. Coding was

performed manually, using highlighters on the paper-version interview transcripts and by writing notes of memories of the interview experience in the page margins.

Some of the limitations of this study pertain to the limited number of participants (5), which was due to the exploratory nature of this study. Future research that includes *all* CREATOUR artisan entrepreneur-mediators would allow for a richer narrative. Another limitation to this study is linked to language. While the first set of interviews was conducted in Portuguese, the second round of interviews was conducted in English and some of the participants who were less fluent in English may have had some problems expressing themselves to the degree they would be able to in their mother tongue. As a result, interview data may not be as nuanced as it would have been if a native Portuguese-speaking researcher (who was also fluent in English) had interviewed native Portuguese-speaking participants in Portuguese, and we acknowledge the importance of using the local language in research production (Whitney-Squire et al., 2017).

Findings

Describing the ways in which artisan entrepreneur-mediators connect with their artisans, the roles they take on, and the nature of this collaborative relationship allows for an examination of how these creative tourism networks operate ‘on the ground’. We find that the artisan entrepreneur-mediators in this study take on leading roles in connecting artisans to creative tourism. They present their vision to the artisans and are responsible for advertising the events, registering participants and collecting registration fees, booking the physical space where the workshops take place, and acting as guides. The artisan entrepreneur-mediators take on these roles out of necessity. As the proprietor of Quico Turismo says, “*I deal with the*

bureaucracy so the artists can be creative” (interview, 13/03/2018), reflecting the perception that “economics crowds out creativity” (Werthes et al., 2017, p. 291).

An array of other practical reasons also exists. For example, since the majority of artisans do not speak English, translators are often needed. Creative tourism marketing, promotion, and development also rests with the artisan entrepreneur-mediators since the artisans involved have little experience with giving workshops and limited knowledge about contacting tourists, the channels through which to reach tourists, and the various funding programmes that are available to develop tourism products. Hence, the artisan entrepreneur-mediators lead the planning and implementation of the creative tourism workshops, with artisans taking on service-provider roles. In the case of Quico Turismo, the involvement of artisans within the creative tourism product design is a more inclusive process: *“The work is collaborative. I present an idea and then we discuss it (with the artisan), making alterations and suggestions of how it can best be materialized”* (interview, 13/03/2018).

A reoccurring theme among artisan entrepreneur-mediators is that since the creative tourism workshops often feature ancient techniques and the know-how lies mainly in the hands and minds of the elderly, many of the artisans are at an advanced age. On one hand, this means their transport to and from the event has to be organized by the mediators; on the other hand, they may be unable to teach on a set schedule. Also, as a new type of activity, the artisans may find delivering the workshops challenging and outside their ‘comfort zone’. The proprietor of LOOM New.Tradition says: *“Older people who know how to weave in traditional ways are unable to teach”* (interview, 05/02/2018). The proprietor of Proactivetur also mentions the age of the artisan as sometimes problematic: *“The old age of artisans prevents them from leading activities and limits creativity in local crafts”* (interview,

16/03/2018). The interviews indicate there may be a gap between the expectations of the entrepreneur-mediators and the willingness and/or capacity of the artisans.

As shown in Table 2, the creation of these artisan networks is a relatively recent occurrence. In the case of three of the five pilot projects (LOOM New.Tradition, VERde NOVO, and Quico Turismo), the link between artisans and artisan entrepreneur-mediators only occurred since their insertion into the CREATOUR project in early 2017. An introduction to the concept of creative tourism through joining the CREATOUR network seems to have acted as a catalyst for the connection between artisans and tourism. Previously, the main contact artisans in these rural areas had with tourism was through fairs, where they exhibited their products and tried to sell them. Many of the artisans within these creative tourism micro-networks perceive their occupation as that of a ‘producer of artisan artefacts’ and can be resistant to novel ideas of involvement in creative tourism as workshop instructors. As the proprietor of Cerdeira Village says, *“Artisans don’t want to try new things and so it is hard to get them to do workshops”* (interview, 05/02/2018). These artisans may be resistant to working on creative tourism products because they are used to working on their own and so find it hard to work in teams, and with strangers, which a creative tourism product requires. As the proprietor of VERde NOVO says of its artisans, *“Teamwork is not something they are used to, so it is difficult to show them how much they can get if they work in a team”* (interview, 12/03/2018).

Hence, for the various reasons described above, the relationship between artisans and artisan entrepreneur-mediators is complex, with the latter finding it challenging to cooperate with artisans on a regular basis in offering creative tourism workshops. This may be a way in which the artisans are subconsciously resisting the globalization of the countryside (Woods,

2011) which is characterized by a flow of amenities such as finance capital, property titles, cultural practices and ideas, and consumer goods – and, we would add, tourism flows. Under the logic of hypermodern consumption, new forms of symbolic production arise and rural workers are turned into living embodiments of collective natural and cultural histories (Heatherington, 2011). Further research, in the form of directly interviewing the artisans, would further explore this strand of research. As active agents living out their chosen lives and lifestyles in rural environments, the artisans and the artisan entrepreneur-mediators are gradually finding ways to work together to revitalize cultural traditions and develop new revenue streams. However, as new initiatives, this process of mediation and trust-building takes time, ongoing communication, and mutual understanding and respect.

Table 2. Roles of artisan entrepreneur-mediators

Artisan entrepreneur-mediator	Working with artisans since...	Characteristics of artisans	Did artisans have contact with tourism before?	Roles of mediator	Physical space to meet with artisans in network?
VERde NOVO	2015	Various ages from 40s to 60s, women, have other jobs, mainly agricultural	Annual linen fair in village, municipality takes weavers to tourism fairs, and museum has weavers displaying how they weave there.	They define the concept, sketch out how it should run, and then present to the artists. They are responsible for planning the activity, finding participants, and creating space for artisans to sell their products within the workshops	Not usually – sometimes they use the old village school, but mostly it is in weavers’ houses individually.
Cerdeira Village/ADXTUR	Since 2015 (she is also an artisan)	Various ages	Yes – she is the manager of a tourism business.	She organizes the events, advertises them, collects the money, and asks the artisans to fulfil her vision of the workshops.	Yes – there are studios on site
Quico Turismo	2015 (core business) and 2017 (start of CREATOUR project)	One is in his 40s and also works as Vice-President of the fisherman insurance company. The female artisan is a retired teacher, in her 60s.	No direct contact with tourism	It is a collaborative process – she presents an idea and then they discuss, suggesting how to materialize the idea. Quico finds participants, does course registration, and finds and secures the space where the workshop will happen.	No
LOOM New.Tradition	2017	Mainly elderly women (weavers)	Only through rural fairs where they exhibited their products.	She organises the events, advertises them, collects the money, and asks the artisans to fulfil her vision of the workshops.	No
Proactivetur	2012	Various ages, but the majority are over 60 and come from a rural, economically and socially disadvantaged background	Most of them through local fairs where they sold their products	They present the artisans with client requests and consult regarding time that the activity will take. They then coordinate bookings and logistics and also act as guides and translators.	No – but twice a year they are invited to TASA networking events.

Analysis: Social embeddedness in a neo-rural context

Drawing from recent literature discussing the current rural discourse can help to conceptualize creative tourism entrepreneurial ecosystems and the role of artisan entrepreneur-mediators within them. In this context, two aspects appear to be critical: connection to place and type of community engagement. These aspects underpin the level of social embeddedness of the artisan entrepreneur-mediators, which, in turn, influences their role in connecting artisans to creative tourism and contributes to understanding the key challenges they face.

This study's findings show that the majority of artisan entrepreneur-mediators have a strong connection to their place of operation in terms of them or their partner feeling 'local to the place' where they operate their creative tourism project or having chosen that place to live (as in the case of the Cerdeira Village owner). However, the majority of these entrepreneurs do not live in the location where they operate the workshops, instead commuting on a regular basis from the urban centre where they live. For example, the proprietor of Quico Turismo commutes from Lisbon to Nazaré; the proprietors of VERde NOVO have an hour-long commute from Braga to Ribeira da Pena; the proprietor of Cerdeira Village lives in the nearby town of Lousã and commutes 30 minutes to Cerdeira Village; the proprietor of LOOM New.Tradition commutes from Évora to Mértola where the weaving cooperative she works with is based; and the staff members of Proactivetur commute from Loulé to the various rural locations where workshops are held. In these patterns, we see a new version of the "creative countryside" (Bell and Jayne, 2010, p. 210) emerging, whereby urban/town dwellers engaging in creative occupations start to occupy rural spaces by becoming deeply engaged in working with rural artisans and motivating them to lead creative tourism workshops.

Despite these commuting patterns, it is observed that most of the urban/town-based artisan entrepreneur-mediators want to be a part of the community with which they work and interact. Artisan entrepreneur-mediators express engagement to ‘their’ community(ies) when conceptualizing their entrepreneurial roles. Some entrepreneur-mediators view their community engagement purely in business terms, such as co-operating with local restaurants and accommodation providers. For example, the proprietor of Proactivetur says: *“As a travel agent we are totally engaged with the local providers of inland communities, such as accommodation, restaurants, and taxis”* (interview, 16/03/2018). However, for other artisan entrepreneur-mediators in this study, perceptions of community engagement are more socially embedded. For example, VERde NOVO has a deep sense of responsibility towards the artisans in terms of helping them sell their items and improving their economic situation – this is something that is embedded within their conceptualization of entrepreneurship. As they say, *“It’s not in our DNA to just do tourism animation and leave! We want to be part of the community and get public institutions to work with us”* (VERde NOVO, interview, 12/03/2018). Hence, built-in to their conceptualization of entrepreneurship is a deep sense of responsibility towards the local community.

As part of their attempt to efficiently operate while also developing or deepening connections in the community, artisan entrepreneurs-mediators make efforts to get private and public institutions to work with them in facilitating and hosting the creative tourism workshops. For example, a local hotel has provided space for a photography exhibition VERde NOVO organized in 2017 and Quico Turismo uses *“a beautiful room in the City Hall, that is rarely used”* (interview, 13/03/2018) to host workshops. However, the public institutions seem to resist cooperation with some of the artisan entrepreneur-mediators. VERde NOVO’s attempt to involve the local government has not been very successful to date; they say: *“The public*

institutions won't even talk to us. So, we don't know if they want to cooperate" (interview, 12/03/2018). The proprietor of LOOM New.Tradition notes that the public institutions in her small city are helping her with in-kind support, but not funding. While VERde NOVO and LOOM New.Tradition feel part of their respective communities due to their connections to the place and their entrepreneurial roles, the rural public institutions seem to be resisting their inclusion. In both cases, they are new entrepreneurs in the areas they are operating in and hence have low levels of social embeddedness at the present time.

Past research shows instances in which non-local tourism entrepreneurs, who lack virilocal ties, face problems of acceptance into the rural community in which they operate because of a lack of trust of outsiders, for example, in the case of the felt weavers in Zagori, Northern Greece (Bakas, 2014). Within rural communities, which are often characterized by low population densities and where 'everyone knows everyone', social embeddedness is very important for doing business. These situations illustrate the complexities of rural communities and highlight the importance of community embeddedness for entrepreneurs operating in rural areas.

Becoming socially embedded within a rural or non-metropolitan community may be a matter of time. As the proprietor of LOOM New.Tradition says, *"I don't perceive myself as engaging with the community yet. Maybe in one or two years, I will be engaged with the community"* (interview, 05/02/2018). Whilst VERde NOVO and LOOM New.Tradition are relatively new in their respective areas, Quico Turismo and Cerdeira Village have been operating for many years in the respective areas where they involve artisans in implementing creative tourism workshops, and do not mention cooperation with public institutions as being a problem. Indeed, the latter entrepreneur-mediators note that the rural nature of the areas in

which they operate actually facilitates their entrepreneurial operations as they are not lost in the urban sea of thousands of entrepreneurs, as can happen in urban centres. The proprietor of Cerdeira Village says: *“It’s good that it’s a small place as it is easy to make things happen. Now, after being there for so long, I know all the people that make things happen”* (interview, 05/02/2018). Proactivetur has been operating as a travel agent in the area for many years and invites the artisans who are part of its network to meet twice a year as part of the TASA project networking events. The proprietor of Quico Turismo has had a rooms-for-rent business for many years and encourages the artisans in her micro-network to interact with each other by inviting them to each other’s workshops. She feels that this interaction and bonding will *“help create a community of creative people”* and that it also makes good tourism entrepreneurial sense. As she says, *“through reinforced bonds and increased collaboration, you can also attract more people to Nazaré”* (interview, 13/03/2018). Here, notably, the importance of social embeddedness for entrepreneurial success is expressed in terms of strengthening the links amongst the actors within the creative tourism entrepreneur ecosystem.

An interesting nuance regarding social embeddedness is observed amongst the artisan entrepreneur-mediators with higher levels of social embeddedness. The study finds that some of the artisan entrepreneur-mediators are increasing their social embeddedness by offering services to the rural communities that are otherwise missing. The two artisan entrepreneur-mediators that have strong connections to the non-metropolitan areas in which they operate are expanding their entrepreneurial actions to benefit the children within these communities. The proprietor of Quico Turismo created a book for children on the local history of Nazaré and the proprietor of Cerdeira Village is planning artisan workshops and an art exhibit for children in the fourth grade of a local school to coincide with International Children’s Day.

As the proprietor of Cerdeira Village says, “*Children are part of the culture that is forgotten*” (interview, 05/02/2018). Luckman (2012) and Bakas (2014) also report that artisans in rural areas often provide early training grounds for local young people, in the absence of the kinds of infrastructure available in the city. This observation opens further questions about the range of roles that artisan entrepreneur-mediators take on and how this influences the broader community within which they operate.

Table 3. Community engagement, attachment to place, and business challenges

Artisan entrepreneur-mediator	Community engagement	Attachment to place	Key business challenges
VERde NOVO	VERde NOVO has created a network of the community’s weavers, bringing them together and helping them re-design some products and modify production techniques in order to meet contemporary market needs. They want to be part of the community and get public institutions to work with them. They do not want to just do tourism animation and leave – their plan is to run a community entrepreneurship programme, but the public institutions are not talking to them.	The woman in the couple is from there but doesn’t live there now. Her parents do.	Weavers are not used to working as workshop instructors and so are often unreliable – ‘ <i>they don’t see this work as commitment</i> ’. Also, weavers are used to working alone, rather than as part of a team. Lack of cooperation of local public bodies. Also find it hard to reach target market.
Cerdeira Village/ADXTUR	The relationship to the community is important. She says: ‘Community is culture’. She employs 8 people from the locale in her business. For the fourth year, she also will organize workshops for children on International Children’s Day. She says: ‘Children are part of the culture that is forgotten’. On that day, Cerdeira Village will exhibit items of each artist in residence at the museum.	Is German but has been living there for 30 years now.	Key challenges relate to selling the courses and workshops and reaching the target market. The main problem is the promotion. Artisans don’t want to try new things and so it’s hard to get them to do workshops. Local residents are wary about showing their lives to tourists.
Quico Turismo	She has written a book for children and made a documentary on the Nazaré fishermen. She wants to help the local community by creating an image of Nazaré that is not just about the ‘big wave’, showcasing its history and art instead.	She and her family have been from there for many generations. She now lives in Lisbon, returning on weekends.	Main challenge is to reach her target market; she is unsure how to find people who are interested in creative tourism.
LOOM New.Tradition	Focused on wanting to revive the Alentejo blanket tradition and hence preserve local customs and engaging local weavers in her activities.	Was born in the place and lives there.	Workshops have limited numbers of participants. It is hard to define and reach her target market. Older people who know how to weave in traditional ways are unable to teach. Limited help from local public bodies.
Proactivetur	As a travel agency, Proactivetur engages with the local community through business connections with accommodation providers, restaurants, taxis, resorts, and tourism providers.	All team members live in Loulé where the company headquarters is located, and some are from Loulé itself.	Lack of guides and places that can receive tourists with professionalism. Old age of artisans prevents them from leading activities, and limited creativity in local crafts.

Conclusion

Artisans often create their own entrepreneurial conceptualizations and this research fills gaps in literature on how artisans connect to the tourism industry and what their entrepreneurial ecosystems looks like. The authors find that artisans are becoming integrated into creative tourism, and investigate the multiple roles of entrepreneurs that act as mediators between

artisans and emerging creative tourism initiatives. The term ‘artisan entrepreneur-mediators’ is introduced to describe this missing idea within artisan entrepreneurship literature. It is revealed that artisan entrepreneur-mediators act as networking agents by organizing and offering creative tourism experiences that link rural artisans to tourists.

The incentive for this link was largely the artisan entrepreneur-mediators’ insertion into the CREATOUR project, but their roles and challenges are influenced by their position within the creative tourism entrepreneur ecosystem and their levels of social embeddedness. This article explores the nature of embeddedness to develop richer hybrid and multilevel perspectives of the social processes shaping entrepreneurship within a specific context. It is observed that when artisan entrepreneur-mediators incorporate increased community engagement into their entrepreneurial roles, for example, by operating children’s art classes, this has observable positive effects on the rural communities in which they are situated, they are increasing their local social embeddedness and consequently their chances of economic survival.

Using the concept of the entrepreneurship ecosystem as part of the theoretical framework, this research illustrates some of the complexities of how creative processes and individuals operate in combination and are influenced in non-linear ways. For example, by organizing artisans into micro-networks, artisan entrepreneur-mediators fulfil the often-difficult role of network-organizer. In this study, artisan entrepreneur-mediators can be seen to enhance the healthy functioning of a local ‘creative tourism ecosystem’ by freeing the artisans from this role. In this way, the artisans can focus on doing what they love, for example, creating artisanal items, rather than spending their time facilitating the network’s operations.

However, as noted above, as new initiatives, this process of mediation and trust-building takes time, ongoing communication, and mutual understanding and respect.

This study finds that the artisan entrepreneur-mediators play an integral role in the formation of a new iteration of the “creative countryside” (Bell and Jayne, 2010, p. 210) that is emerging, by becoming deeply engaged in working with rural artisans and motivating them to lead creative tourism workshops. In this context, creative tourism can be seen as a novel strategy with which to help rural artisans become more profitable, to revitalize traditional artisanal techniques, and to assist with the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills. Those with strong connections to place through family connections or long-term residency in a locale can be closer to the artisans living there and more quickly embrace their priorities. This closeness is a strength and may become a strategic advantage. Those with high levels of social embeddedness have better chances at succeeding in making durable connections among the actors within the local creative tourism entrepreneur ecosystem, such as local institutions, service providers, and artisans.

Future research suggestions

Two direct lines of research are envisioned to directly extend the current study. First, considering that the artisan entrepreneur-mediators interviewed are largely in a ‘start-up’ phase in their creative tourism projects, follow-up longitudinal research would illuminate changes that occur in the evolutionary process of these initiatives. Secondly, recognizing that the current study focused on a limited number of artisan entrepreneur-mediators, an extension of this study to all 40 pilots within the CREATOUR project would add more comprehensive and nuanced insights into the variety of situations of ‘start-up’ creative tourism initiatives and their embeddedness in a variety of small city and rural contexts. In these broader-scope

investigations, researchers would ensure interviews are conducted in Portuguese as much as possible, and that specific research attention is directed to the complications of knowledge production in regards to navigating and managing the Portuguese-English translations required for publication in English-language journals.

In addition, during the interviews, many themes and questions emerged that could lead to fruitful future research avenues. For example, an important topic for continued research is deepening the research on *how* artisan entrepreneur-mediators in rural areas contribute to the formation of networks and the subsequent roles of these localized networks in tourism, cultural, and local development contexts. This research could further knowledge on how entrepreneurial ecosystems work in the context of rural creative tourism and in regards to rural culture-based and creative economies more generally. This work lends itself to comparative research involving different rural contexts internationally.

Another line of research would involve interviewing other actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystems, beginning with the artisans to further understand and analyze the relationships between the artisan entrepreneur-mediators and artisans from their perspective, and to learn more about the outcomes of these relationships for the artisans and their communities. In this ‘start-up’ phase of activity, from the data presented, the artisans seem somewhat reluctant to cooperate with the entrepreneur-mediators, as do local authorities, which is a compelling story and needs to be investigated further. Research using the concept of co-creation of tourism experiences to analyze tourists’ role within these entrepreneurial ecosystems, and especially looking at the nature of their interactions with the artisans and the artisan entrepreneur-mediators, would add a further dimension to understanding these situations.

Finally, future research that investigates the ways in which artisan entrepreneur-mediators perceive their community engagement activities and their motivations for pursuing these initiatives, including whether the entrepreneurs themselves are consciously increasing their social embeddedness, could potentially alert entrepreneurs to the added value of their actions and help ascertain the extent to which increased social embeddedness adds entrepreneurial value. An approach for this line of research could include using institutional theory to explain how institutional pressures (e.g., municipalities and local governance) affect the behavior and perceptions of artisan entrepreneur-mediators.

Implications for practitioners

For artisans, this research helps illuminate and clarify the roles of entrepreneur-mediators who can link artisans to wider market opportunities. In the context of tourism, this facilitated connection can be significant in terms of selling more artisanal products as well as in developing new avenues for revenue-generation through offering creative tourism workshops. As noted above, the entrepreneur-mediators take on an array of valuable roles, including dealing with bureaucracy, marketing to tourists, booking venues, administrating registrations, and so forth. Altogether, these assumed tasks allow the artisans to focus more completely on their artisanal work while also exposing them to new opportunities.

For similar artisan entrepreneur-mediators, this analysis provides insights on common issues and concerns so they can strategize and act accordingly. Research findings reveal that some issues involved in creative tourism initiatives appear to be associated with ‘start-up’ phases when the entrepreneurs are not yet deeply embedded in a community. This suggests that these entrepreneurs should consider various avenues through which to develop their social embeddedness. In part, this is achieved over time but, as these cases show, can be fostered

through community-centric activities such as offering free classes for children in the community, which help expand and deepen social ties.

The research also suggests that public institutional support is warranted for the kind of entrepreneurial practice that has a significant element of community involvement, which could have considerable effects on the long-term sustainable development of rural communities. Economic structures that support entrepreneurs to pursue individual rather than community goals often overlook such long-term contributions, and should be reconsidered by regional and local public bodies in non-metropolitan areas. The situations faced by the entrepreneur-mediators interviewed in this study also point to the need to create policies with sufficient scope to ease the entry of non-local entrepreneurs, with low levels of social embeddedness, into rural communities.

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