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Social inclusion of older artisans through creative tourism

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ABSTRACT

Creative tourism has a potential role in promoting social benefits for communities and social inclusion of artisans; however, studies investigating this are lacking. This paper contributes to filling this gap in the literature by exploring the role of creative tourism in combating social exclusion among older artisans in the context of Loulé Criativo, a pioneering creative tourism initiative in Portugal. This qualitative study reveals, from the perspective of management staff and older artisans, that creative tourism reduces the social exclusion of older artisans through processes as improving social relations, fostering creativity and strengthening connections to place and community. Policy makers and tourism professionals can use creative tourism initiatives to actively engage older artisans and promote their empowerment and social recognition.

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Introduction

In today's dynamic world of travel and tourism, the pursuit of sustainability has evolved beyond purely environmental connotations into a multifaceted endeavour. Among the dimensions of sustainability, social sustainability stands as an important pillar that is intrinsically linked to the well-being of communities and individuals affected by the tourism industry. As the global travel environment continues to expand and the world becomes more interconnected, the question of how tourism affects the social fabric of destinations has taken a central role in the debate on sustainable tourism practices. Social sustainability in tourism involves the responsible management of tourism development to ensure that tourism not only provides economic benefits but also promotes the well-being of local people, respects their culture and creates a sense of community. This requires not only addressing the obvious challenges of poverty alleviation and equitable distribution of the benefits from tourism, but also exploring more subtle aspects such as community engagement, cultural preservation and enhancing quality of life (QoL).

As an extension of cultural tourism (Richards & Wilson, 2006), creative tourism has come to be seen as one of the global trends for the regional creative development of tourism destinations (Castanho et al., 2023; Duxbury & Richards, 2019). This potential of creative tourism has been discussed in the literature as “a development tool . . . a potential solution to a range of economic and social problems . . .” (Richards & Marques, 2012, p. 2). It is defined as:

tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken. (Richards & Wilson, 2006, p. 18)

Many empirical studies have been conducted since 2000 on the benefits of creative tourism in local communities. All have provided concrete insights on how creative tourism can be a tool for local development, addressing issues such as preserving the cultural heritage and transmitting traditions (e.g. Cavalcante & Fonseca, 2021), improving the local economy, enhancing tourist – local interactions (e.g. Blapp & Mitas, 2018), increasing the QoL (e.g. Ohridska-Olson & Ivanov, 2010; Svidruk et al., 2020) and promoting social cohesion (e.g. Bakas et al., 2019, 2019; Keller & Velibeyoğlu, 2021; Richards, 2019).

Given the economic and social benefits of creative tourism to society, it has been emphasized that this type of tourism has the potential to be explored in the area of social inclusion/exclusion (Costa et al., 2020; Couret, 2021). However, it is surprising that, to the best of our knowledge, no study has specifically investigated the impact of creative tourism on the social inclusion or exclusion of artisans involved in creative tourism activities (Costa et al., 2020; Genç & Genç, 2017). This gap in the literature is somewhat surprising for several reasons. First, the older-aged population, particularly vulnerable to social exclusion (Buffel & Phillipson, 2018; Walsh et al., 2017), holds a significant role as skilled craft masters (Goody, 2001). Secondly, previous research has highlighted the positive effects of older artisans' engagement in creative activities, including improved social interaction, connectedness, self-esteem, identity maintenance, increased autonomy, and enhanced learning and self-expression (e.g. Evans et al., 2022; Moody & Phinney, 2012; O'Shea & Léime, 2012; Scarlett et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it is important to recognize the potential of creative tourism in addressing United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 10,¹ reduce inequality within and among countries, which aims to reduce inequalities within societies. As demonstrated in the study conducted in Zimbabwe and echoed in prior research, creative tourism has shown promise as a means to bridge socio-economic disparities, empower local communities, and enhance the well-being of marginalized populations (Tapfuma et al., 2023). By actively engaging artisans, communities, and travellers in creative tourism experiences, there is an opportunity to foster greater economic inclusivity, preserve cultural heritage, and promote social cohesion. The multifaceted nature of creative tourism, encompassing arts, crafts, cultural experiences, and hands-on participation, aligns with the broader goals of SDG 10, which emphasizes reducing inequalities within societies.

This paper contributes to bridging this gap in the literature by exploring the potential of creative tourism to combat social exclusion (or promote social inclusion) among older artisans. It answers the following research questions: Does the participation of older artisans in the provision of creative tourism activities contribute to reducing their social exclusion? If so, to which dimensions of social exclusion does creative tourism make a positive contribution? If not, what explains the failure of creative tourism to operate in this way? The answers to these questions will not only enhance the literature in the fields of creative tourism and social exclusion in later life but also provide insights into how public or private organizations involved in creative tourism can better utilize it to promote the social inclusion of older people. Furthermore, it contributes to establishing creative tourism as an alternative intervention in the field of social gerontology, affirming the potential of older people through social projects like craftsmanship.

Literature review

The first thing that emerges when considering the benefits of creative tourism is its potential to differentiate the destination offerings (Richards & Wilson, 2006) by valuing the history, cultural heritage and cultural products of the places (Cavalcante & Fonseca, 2021; Dias et al., 2020; Richards & Marques, 2012). Therefore, this type of tourism is foreseen as a solution to the serial reproduction problem of mass tourism (Richards & Wilson, 2006), and it is defined as “sustainable small-scale tourism that provides a genuine visitor experience by combining an immersion in local culture with a learning and creative process” (Duxbury, 2021, p. 2).

The characteristics that differentiate creative tourism from mass tourism have been introduced as “the four pillars of creative tourism” (Bakas & Duxbury, 2018): “(1) active participation”, which means the physical and mental involvement of the participants in the creative process; “(2) creative self-expression”, which allows participants to express their creativity during the activities; “(3) connection to place”, which means the activities and products are derived from the cultural heritage and traditions of the place, and they foster a sense of place for the creative activity participants; and “(4) community engagement”, which is an essential element of creative tourism as it involves the active participation of local communities in creative activities (Gonçalves et al., 2020).

According to Duxbury (2021), policymakers and international organizations have started to give a greater importance to community engagement and cohesion, which is in line with the agendas of promoting sustainable development and social inclusion in urban and rural settings. In the context of small town, rural and remote areas, Keller and Velibeyoğlu (2021) stated that “small towns have potential advantages in terms of creative tourism based on their community cohesion, tangible and intangible assets and traditional ways of life” (p. 8). Indeed, we can see in previous studies that the prominent benefits of creative tourism in the rural or remote contexts are mostly related to rejuvenating the places and spatial designs (Richards, 2020); promoting the traditional way of life, tangible and intangible assets and the economic sustainability of local artisans; job creation for creative people; and social or community cohesion/engagement (Bakas et al., 2019). For instance, it was found that creative tourism workshops can operate as a social catalyser for all age groups in the small-scale festival context:

Creative tourism ... offering opportunities for persons of all ages to work together and bond recognizes varying stakeholder needs for both current and future generations, thus contributing to decreasing social division between individuals and groups and increasing equity and interaction. (Bakas et al., 2019, p. 261)

This indicates that creative tourism has the necessary potential to promote an inclusive and interactive atmosphere at the local/community level.

The weight of older artisans in creative tourism

Although there is no demographic data on creative tourism artisans in general, the available information on some creative tourism initiatives, such as the CREATOUR documentary “crea-tour.pt – creative tourism in Portugal”, and some anthropological studies (e.g. Goody, 2001) shows us that most artisans are older adults. The CREATOUR documentary clarified that most of the creative tourism workshops that take place in rural areas are given by people aged 65 and over. The documentary explained that this is because older people are the carrying stones of old values, traditions and handicraft techniques. Indeed, it was stated in the documentary that “all generations take part ... (17:03)”, and “village elders pass the knowledge to young generations, revitalise traditions... (22:11”–22:37)” (https://youtu.be/kWf__o6RfX0).

Apart from the documentary, in an anthropological study (Goody, 2001), the place of older people in handicrafts and cultural heritage was also described as the carrying stones of the old traditions as well as ancestral techniques to teach them to the new generations. Indeed, according to the information provided in the Red Book of the Artisans of the Algarve (CCDR, 2021), the number of older artisans (aged 65+) in the Algarve region was reported as 97 out of 207 local artisans. This means that in Portugal, older artisans will be in creative tourism activities in significative numbers.

Social exclusion in later life and its consequences

Social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional concept, and there is no consensus on its definition (Alemanji, 2023). The modern conceptualization of social exclusion, rooted in René Lenoir’s work in 1974, gained prominence by addressing the need to safeguard individuals at risk of

Table 1. Seven dimensions of social exclusion with definitions.

| Domain | Definition |
|---|---|
| Service provision and access | Access to everyday public and private services, both within and outside the home, and transport. |
| Civic participation | Cultural, educational, and political engagement. Factors that enable a person to connect with and contribute to their society and be involved in its decision making. |
| Social relations and resources | The importance of meaningful relationships with others, recognizing family and friends as possible sources of support and engagement. |
| Economic, financial, and material resources | Subjective and objective financial circumstances, income, housing, and assets in the form of material possessions. |
| Environment and neighbourhood | Residential environments including geographic properties, neighborhoods conditions and facilities, sense of community, crime and perceived safety, and place identity. |
| Health and wellbeing | Subjective and objective physical and mental health, health behaviors and mortality. |
| Discrimination | Symbolic exclusion: negative representation or prejudicial treatment for a particular characteristic or group membership, and identity exclusion: disregard of one's whole identity by only recognizing a single characteristic/identity. |

Source: MacLeod et al. (2019), p. 82.)

future poverty due to limited social capital. Swiftly embraced by the European Union, social exclusion, as articulated by scholars (e.g. Room, 1995; Silver, 2007), encompasses the social and psychological mechanisms that unfold when individuals face exclusion, rejection, or marginalization (Alemanji, 2023).

Levitas et al. (2007), defined social exclusion as the “lack or denial of resources, rights, goods, and services” (p. 9) resulting in the inability to participate in normal relationships and activities available to the majority in society. According to the literature, older adults are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and may experience it with more difficulties than younger populations. The reason is that the loss of spouse or friends and decreased family bonds due to life course occasions can contribute to social exclusion (Burholt et al., 2020; MacLeod et al., 2019; Scharf et al., 2005). Walsh et al. (2017) defined old-age exclusion as interchanges between multilevel risk factors, processes and outcomes, which can result in inequities in choice and control, resources and relationships and power and rights in various domains.

According to MacLeod et al. (2019), understanding social exclusion is challenging for several reasons. First, the concept cannot be measured directly, but only inferred from measurements of its dimensions. The second difficulty is linked to the first one because the indicators of these dimensions generally measure the participation of individuals, and this causes difficulties in understanding the difference between non-participation by personal choice and involuntary non-participation. The third reason is called “dynamic” (Atkinson & John, 1998), which means that the situation of exclusion can alter as time passes due to formal or individual interventions. The fourth aspect is the “relativity” (Atkinson et al., 2002) or subjectivity of social exclusion. In other words, a situation that might be seen as exclusion by one person may not be defined as exclusion by another person (MacLeod et al., 2019).

Despite these difficulties, MacLeod et al. (2019) proposed a conceptual framework of social exclusion in this stage of life, which is based on Walsh et al. (2017) scoping review on social exclusion in later life. This framework includes seven dimensions, as presented and defined in Table 1. Given the comprehensiveness of this framework, we decided to use it for the purpose of this study.

Methodology

We conducted an exploratory qualitative case study, following the framework by Baxter and Jack (2008). This approach was chosen to focus on the specific case of *Loulé Criativo*, which serves as a window into the realm of creative tourism and its role in reducing the social exclusion of older artisans. We gathered data through semi-structured interviews and direct observations from April

to October 2022, involving 17 participants: 11 older artisans (aged 65 and over) and six professionals at *Loulé Criativo*, including the Creative Tourism coordinator, Workshop Network coordinator, Workshop Network assistant coordinator, *Loulé Design Lab* coordinator, intern at *Loulé Design Lab*, and project mentor.

The interview questions were tailored to each group, covering topics such as demographic information, participants' engagement, characterization of their involvement, and its impact on social exclusion/inclusion. The first author conducted interviews with managers and designers in English due to language proficiency, while interviews with older artisans were conducted in Portuguese by a research assistant who had interned at *Loulé Design Lab*. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and, in the case of Portuguese interviews, translated into English for primary analysis by the first author. All participants provided informed consent, and the study was approved by the ethical committee of the University of Algarve.

Our approach to participant selection involved purposive sampling, both for staff within the Municipality of Loulé and older artisans. We explicitly included the staff in the Municipality of Loulé, who are responsible for Loulé Criativo programme. The initial semi-structured interview was conducted with the creative tourism coordinator, who provided valuable guidance on identifying our research sample and getting in touch with the project mentor. Subsequent interviews were conducted with the project mentor, delving into the evolution and narrative of the *Loulé Criativo*. Interviews were also extended to the workshop network coordinator, assistant coordinator, and *Loulé Design Lab* coordinator, with a focus on their perceptions regarding the impact of older artisans' participation as master artisans in creative tourism activities. An intern from *Loulé Design Lab*, recommended by the creative tourism coordinator, was also interviewed, subsequently, she served as a mediator between the research team and participants, given her strong pre-existing relationship with them. In total, six managerial staff (five females, one male, aged 20 to 49) were interviewed.

The older artisans were selected according to the following criteria: 65 years of age or older; has worked for at least 12 months in the "Workshop Network" programme of Loulé Criativo; lives in the Algarve region; and is able to give informed consent and to participate in the interviews. We were introduced to the participants by the creative tourism coordinator before the interviews began. Among the 11 artisans interviewed, nine were female and two were male. Their ages ranged from 65 to 89, and the majority were engaged in palm weaving, a collaborative activity. One artisan worked in the copper smith workshop.

The first author made multiple field visits to directly observe specific events. Event selection aimed to ensure diverse activities. In April 2022, she participated in a palm weaving creative tourism workshop, observing interactions between four local students and two older artisans. In May 2022, she attended coppersmith workshops tailored for Erasmus students in design or engineering. In June 2022, she spent approximately four hours per day in a palm weaving shop, observing the artisans' daily work. These observations enhanced the trustworthiness and reliability of the research (Golafshani, 2003).

Research setting

Portugal offers an ideal background for researching creative tourism due to its strong emphasis on this field, evident through various initiatives and projects like the CREATOUR project,² which actively promotes cultural identity and immersive experiences for visitors. For this study's empirical investigation, we selected *Loulé Criativo Turismo Network* (referred to as Loulé Criativo), an initiative of the Loulé municipal council. *Loulé Criativo's* mission is to preserve and promote Loulé's culture and identity by providing creative tourism workshops for tourists, artisan training for residents, and other innovative projects throughout the year (Duxbury, 2021). The project encompasses several programmes, including creative tourism, which allows visitors to experience local and traditional culture, ECOA (Area of Creativity Crafts and Arts), serving as an office and

training centre, and the *Loulé Design Lab*, a collaboration with the CREATOUR project aimed at supporting potential entrepreneurs' initiatives and fostering learning, training, and creativity among local artisans (Emmendoerfer et al., 2020).

Under the creative tourism programme, *Loulé Criativo* organizes a *Workshop Network programme* based on teaching the traditional heritage and the local crafts. These workshops are *Casa da Empreita* (palm weaving), *Oficina do Barro* (clay studio), *Oficina dos Caldeireiros* (copper shop), *Oficina dos Cordofones* (luthier studio) and *Oficina de Relojoeiro* (watch-maker studio) (Duxbury, 2021). We chose *Loulé Criativo* as our research setting because it was the first creative tourism initiative in the Algarve region, launched in 2015, and has since established a network of senior artisans to support its initiatives. Additionally, it will celebrate ten years of formal existence next year, providing a sufficient period for us to analyse its impact on the social exclusion/inclusion of older artisans.

Older artisans in this setting engaged in two primary types of creative tourism activities: creative residency and workshops with tourists. Creative residency offered long-term courses for locals or foreigners seeking to become artisans, while workshops were short-term programmes primarily for tourists to experience local arts or for other purposes, such as skill acquisition. These activities were often on a small scale and sometimes involved collaboration. Older artisans also had responsibilities that included meeting customer demands, teaching traditional practices and art to tourists and locals, and managing financial tasks and the store. Workshop scheduling varied, with some following a predefined weekly schedule, while others operated on an ad-hoc basis, with older artisans participating when they had free time.

Data analysis

The Framework Analysis (Ritchie et al., 2014) was used to qualitatively analyse the collected data. It consists of the following stages: familiarization, constructing an initial thematic framework, indexing and sorting, reviewing data extracts, data summary and display, constructing categories, identifying linkages and accounting for patterns. The thematic framework resulted from the reproduction of existing themes that were part of the interview script. To mitigate bias, the first author conducted an initial data analysis, which was then reviewed and assessed by the remaining authors to establish consensus on analytical procedures. After this consensus was reached, the first author proceeded with the analysis of all data, but always with the support and feedback of the other authors. The data analysis followed a deductive and inductive approach. On the one hand, the data was deductively analysed according to the predefined social exclusion dimensions (MacLeod et al., 2019). This method allowed for a focused examination within the framework of existing concepts. On the other hand, the categories in each dimension of social exclusion were created in an inductive way, in the sense that they are completely grounded in the data (they were not created based on a pre-established set of constructs). The analysis was supported by the Nvivo software.

Results

The findings are summarized in the supplementary material 1, which displays the categories and subcategories that emerged from the analysis for each dimension of social exclusion and each group of participants, as well as the number of participants in each category and the corresponding percentage (no. of participants x 100/total participants). The categories and subcategories in each group of participants and in each dimension of social exclusion account for the mechanisms through which the older artisans' participation in creative tourism activities contribute (or do not contribute) to reduce their social exclusion (or to promote their social inclusion). The presentation of the findings is organized according to the research questions.

Does the participation of older artisans in creative tourism activities contribute to reduce their social exclusion?

The results provide abundant evidence that from the perspective of managerial staff and older artisans, the participation of the latter in creative tourism activities contributes to reduce their social exclusion. Both groups of participants identified positive contributions of the participation of older artisans in creative tourism activities in all dimensions of social exclusion. It was only in the “civic participation” and “environment and neighbourhood” dimension that we found participants who did not identify positive contributions (one manager and three older artisans).

To which dimensions of social exclusion is creative tourism making a positive contribution?

Both the managerial staff and older artisans acknowledged positive impacts of creative tourism on various dimensions of older artisans’ social exclusion. However, certain dimensions received more positive feedback. From the managerial staff’s point of view, the dimensions most positively affected are service provision and access; social relations and resources; and health and wellbeing. From the point of view of older artisans, the dimensions that receive the most positive contributions from creative tourism are service provision and access; social relations and resources; economic, financial and material resources; and discrimination. Nonetheless, participant numbers in some dimensions showed minimal differences. Conversely, the environment and neighbourhood were perceived as less positively affected by creative tourism from the managerial staff’s perspective, and civic participation, the environment, and neighbourhood from the older artisans’ viewpoint.

How does the participation of older artisans in creative tourism activities contribute to reduce social exclusion?

Managerial staff and older artisans identified several ways in which the latter’s participation in creative tourism activities contributes to reduce their social exclusion. We found two or more categories in all dimensions except for the economic, financial and material resources dimensions. As the number of categories and subcategories is quite high, only the category with the most participants is described in each dimension and in each group of participants (managerial staff and older artisans). A description of the remaining categories and subcategories is provided in the supplementary material 1.

Service provision and access

Both the managerial staff and the older artisans addressed this dimension with creative tourism in mind as they focused on municipality services related to creative tourism, such as transportation for older artisans, workshop expense coverage and exhibition organization.

The managerial staff’s perspectives are condensed into two categories, with the “older artisans” recognition of municipal services and support’ as the one with the most participants. This category accounts for the older artisans’ awareness and appreciation of the municipality’s efforts in empowering local artisans:

The municipality of Loulé’s significant investment in crafts transformed the locals’ behaviour and perception positively, establishing Loulé as a role model for other municipalities. Artisans enjoy free spaces and support services demonstrating the municipality’s commitment to their wellbeing. (Project mentor)

In turn, all older artisans emphasized “access to public services”, clarifying that they have better access to these services, including “municipal support for workspace and expenses”, “preserving traditions and promoting employment”, “transportation services” and “facilitating council-related

tasks”. For example, with respect to workspace and expenses, this foresees monetary assistance from the municipality, including waived rent and bills and free promotion of advertisements and social media posts:

I think it's good that they've already offered us everything, light, telephone. . . The council has already done their part. We don't pay anything here; all the profits go to us directly. (João, 77 years old)

Civic participation

In relation to civic participation, both managerial staff and older artisans primarily mentioned “cultural engagement”, which was stimulated by participation in creative tourism activities. Managerial staff stressed the older artisans' participation in cultural activities organized by municipal or private organizations, such as concerts and galleries. From their point of view, this engagement was stimulated because the artisans have been actively involved in craft activities within the scope of creative tourism:

Many older artisans even surprise me! Sometimes we have things happening here in Loulé. In here, we have lots of cultural activities and sometimes we have things that are very alternative. Sometimes, I see them over there in public, attending. (Network coordinator)

In the words of older artisans, “cultural engagement” means their active participation in cultural events, which is often encouraged by their involvement in creative tourism activities. This engagement manifests in three different ways: “participating in all cultural activities organized by the municipality”, “taking part in events and exhibitions” organized by the municipality or other organizations and “participating in fairs to sell palm-weaved products”. These fairs showcase palm weaving skills and sell products in public marketplaces:

I still take part in fairs outside the municipality of Loulé, in two weeks I'm going to do one in São Brás. (Sofia, 65 years old)

When we have exhibitions, we like to go. We feel proud. (Olga, 81 years old)

Social relations and resources

In this dimension, the category with the highest number of managerial staff members is “social recognition”. These members all mentioned that the community and tourists appreciate the work of older artisans and recognize its social and cultural value. This category has five subcategories, including “feeling appreciation”, “gaining fame and social recognition”, “acknowledging the capabilities of older artisans”, “municipality's recognition of the older artisans' work” and “valorization of the work and childhood memories of older artisans”. This is illustrated below:

They have social recognition. Which is the important thing on this community because they are the people who have kind of important knowledge or a kind of knowledge that got to be recognised. So, these people are important on this community. There is a great respect for them, and I think socially, or a normal citizen recognises that. Even the politicians recognise that these people are important in this city. (Loulé Design Lab Coordinator)

On the same dimension, all older artisans expressed the idea that the participation in creative tourism activities led to the formation of new social connections or to improvements in the quality of existing relationships. This is encapsulated in the category “enhancing social relationships”. This category is comprised of the four subcategories of socializing, making new friends, reviving old ties and recognition from family. The most prominent subcategory is socializing, which encompasses the act of meeting and interacting with people:

Do you know what this came to bring? It came to bring to know again the people, I almost missed knowing the people of Loulé. Because I was 36 years old there, working three shifts. I only had the weekend off every seven Sundays. Because of it, I stopped getting to know the community. Now people come to see me, it's a way of socialising. Gives us another life if I were at home I would have died. (Afonso, 74 years old)

Economic, financial and material resources

Except for one member, all the managerial staff referred to the participation of older artisans in creative tourism activities as bringing them an “economic gain”. This includes “extra income”, and “helping their family members with the economic gain”. The following testimony shows the importance of extra money for older artisans:

Most of the old people depends on a very low pension. So, they need that extra money, and usually they do it with the craft. (Programme Pioneer)

All older artisans also underlined the “economic gain” they derived from participating in creative tourism activities. This extra income enables older artisans to achieve greater economic independence since their pensions may not fully meet their financial needs. This additional income can assist them in making critical purchases that their pensions cannot adequately cover, such as acquiring medication:

Thank God I don't have any illnesses, but my husband has a catalogue of illnesses. For this he needs medicine, so this [extra money] helps. If we take from our pension to pay for water, electricity, then our pension is not enough. (Anabela, 79 years old)

Environment and neighbourhood

Regarding this dimension, the most expressed categories are “connection to place” and “being proud of the place”. The first one refers to the older artisans' feelings of belonging to their neighbourhood and the city, which was reinforced with their participation in creative tourism activities as stated below:

The place where they live it gets larger. So, it's not only those six houses, now has the old city of Loulé, and what I feel in that is that they feel much more connected to the council to the region. It's a little bit like open your eyes there's so much more that belongs to you, where you belong to . . . (Creative Tourism Coordinator)

The second category refers to an increased pride in the community and neighbourhood in which the older artisans live:

They had something to make them start taking more care of their houses, and their pride increased. They became being prouder of “who I am, where I live, and I want to show that to the tourists”. It is very important for the community, for the village, for the person itself. (Programme Mentor)

For the most of the older artisans, participation in creative tourism activities promoted a “sense of community”, which is reflected in an increase in mutual knowledge and a sense of social belonging. They feel connected to their fellow artisans and to the larger community that appreciates and supports their work, as expressed in the following statement:

People know me as a local artisan working in here. It's nice when they say, “You're from Casa da Empreita!” (Anabela, 79 years old)

Health and wellbeing

In the “health and wellbeing” dimension, all but one managerial staff member saw improvements in “physical and mental activity” through participation in creative tourism activities. These

improvements are achieved through “developing a daily routine”, “keeping the mind occupied”, “enhancing communication with others”, “promoting creativity”, “acquiring new skills” and “learning”.

For example, according to the programme’s managers, the participation of older artisans instils a sense of responsibility and structure in their lives, leading them to develop a daily routine that helps them maintain an active lifestyle:

They have a routine, a specific routine, that’s not made around the house and the garden. (Creative Tourism Coordinator)

For the older artisans it is something that keep them alive. Keep them coming from their home to the centre of Loulé [in a regular basis]. Even mentally, physically they are moving. (Intern at Loulé Design Lab)

Contrary to most managerial staff who see benefits in terms of physical and mental activity for older artisans resulting from their participation in creative tourism activities, most of the older artisans themselves see benefits in terms of “emotional and psychological wellbeing”. The emotional and psychological benefits are achieved through “maintaining connection to the present”, “a reason to live”, “preventing depression”, “an entertainment” and “relieving stress”.

For example, participation in creative tourism activities enables older artisans to focus on the present rather than dwelling on their past experiences. This happens because they “keep the mind occupied”, focusing on the task at hand, and cease worrying about past events. Participation in creative tourism activities also “helped an older artisan to cope with grief”.

It helped me a lot in a time that I needed when my husband died. It was right when Casa da Empreita opened, and it was at the right time. I had already given up, I didn’t want to hear about it anymore, I wasn’t rewarded in any form. But this came along, and things changed. (Inês, 88 years old)

Discrimination

In relation to the last dimension, most of the members of the managerial staff underlined the “project’s inclusiveness”, clarifying how the programme is designed to be inclusive for seniors, without any exclusionary elements:

No, in fact, I often witness the opposite of discrimination. As designers, we engage with them in a respectful manner, and this sentiment is shared by the entire community, including tourists. (Intern at Loulé Design Lab)

In turn, most of the older artisans reported an “absence of discrimination”, as they have never been victims of discrimination during their involvement with *Loulé Criativo*. From the perspective of older artisans, “being active and working” serves as a preventive factor against discrimination:

I do not feel discriminated. I think I’m a useful person. (Afonso, 74 years old)

Conclusions and implications

This research makes an original contribution to the fields of creative tourism and social exclusion in later life by exploring how managers and older artisans perceive the role of creative tourism in their social inclusion. Both groups identified “service provision and access” and “social relations and resources” as the dimensions of social exclusion positively affected by older artisans’ involvement in creative tourism activities. Additionally, managers recognized the “health and wellbeing” dimension, while older artisans also highlighted “economic, financial and material resources” and “discrimination”. The older artisans perceived more dimensions of social exclusion positively impacted by creative tourism than the managers did. These results align with existing literature emphasizing the economic and social benefits of creative tourism for artisans (Bakas et al., 2019) and the role of community-based arts programmes in enhancing

the QoL of older people (e.g. Evans et al., 2022; O'Shea & Léime, 2012). The results also indicate that cultural activities and volunteering aspects of the civic participation dimension is not positively affected.

This study also identified the mechanism through which participation in creative tourism activities reduces each social exclusion dimension. In the “service provision and access” dimension, older artisans highlighted how creative tourism activities taking place within the municipality facilitated their access to public services. This would probably not be the case if the activities were carried out within the scope of a private entity. In the “social relations and resources” dimension, older artisans emphasized enhancing social relationships, while managers focused on social recognition. This reflects the importance older artisans place on social interaction, which can combat isolation and loneliness prevalent among older adults (Dahlberg et al., 2022). The participatory nature of creative tourism fosters social interactions, reducing isolation and promoting a sense of belonging.

Differences in opinions between managers and older artisans are also found in the “health and wellbeing” dimension. Most of the former identified physical and mental activity as the way in which participation in the creative tourism acts positively in this dimension, while most of the latter identified “promotion of emotional and psychological wellbeing”. The appreciation of emotional aspects by older artisans is somewhat different from the paradigm of active ageing, a very important paradigm in the field of public policy for older people, which focuses mainly on physical and mental activity. This finding emphasizes the role of creative self-expression and active involvement in creative tourism. The participatory nature of creative tourism provides older artisans with a platform to express themselves creatively, resulting in a sense of purpose and personal growth.

Finally, economic gain was identified as the mechanism to combat the “economic, financial, and material resources” dimension by all older artisans, and the absence of discrimination was seen as a way to combat the “discrimination” dimension. Creative tourism offers economic opportunities for local artisans and provides a space to sell their products at fair prices, contributing to their economic wellbeing. The absence of discrimination is significant for older artisans as it emphasizes their active and useful role (Moody & Phinney, 2012).

All in all, it is interesting to note that both managers and older artisans identified various mechanisms identified through which creative tourism combats different dimensions of social exclusion. Although this study provides valuable insights into implications for creative tourism research and public policy, it is important to acknowledge several limitations in the data collection process. These limitations include language barrier, interviews during specific activities, and a majority of female participants. Future research could conduct comparative analyses across different contexts or regions, address the language barrier by conducting interviews in the participants' native language, and aim for more equitable gender representation. Future research can also invest in the development of a model for promoting social inclusion in creative tourism, an objective to which this study made an initial contribution. This research opens new avenues for exploring the role of creative tourism in promoting the integration and wellbeing of artisans and its contribution to the sustainability of communities. It also emphasizes creative tourism as a tool for social intervention to combat social exclusion among older populations.

Regarding the implications for public policies, the results of this study show that creative tourism plays an important role in combating the social exclusion of older artisans and, therefore, should be considered not only as an alternative activity to mass tourism but also as a kind of social intervention for older populations with the aim of improving their wellbeing and strengthening the social cohesion of their communities. When culture and art policies are supported, creative tourism can be a tool not only for empowering older artisans but also for fostering their social recognition and acceptance by the community. Such an inclusive approach to creative tourism governance could reaffirm the role of creative tourism not only as a transformative tourism model but as a means to reduce inequality, foster social cohesion, and contribute to the overall well-being of societies (Tapfuma et al., 2023). Therefore, policymakers and tourism professionals can leverage creative

tourism to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10, which focuses on reducing inequalities and ensuring inclusivity.

The diverse perspectives of managerial staff and older artisans underscore the need for a balanced approach in implementing practices. Managers should prioritize dimensions important to older individuals rather than solely focusing on specific aspects like health or civic participation. The inherent “connection to place” in creative tourism can be utilized to highlight the significance of the environment and neighbourhood for older artisans, fostering a sense of belonging and rootedness. Engaging in creative tourism activities that celebrate local traditions and cultural identity not only preserves community characteristics but also strengthens the connection of older artisans to their environment, guiding the design of tailored activities based on their specific needs and preferences.

Notes

1. For more information on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
2. Creative Tourism Destination Development in Small Cities and Rural Areas (CREATOUR) project was an interdisciplinary research and application project in Portugal that started in the year 2016 and lasted until 2019. The main aim of the project was developing the basis of a creative tourism network in the Norte, Alentejo, Algarve and Centro regions of Portugal (Duxbury, 2021).

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