

Sónia Moreira Cabeça, 2022

Volume 8 Issue 3, pp. 86-106

Received: 28<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Revised: 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2022, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2022

Accepted: 28<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Date of Publication: 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2022.83.86106>

This paper can be cited as: Cabeça, S. M. (2022). Post-Pandemic Tourism: Opportunities for Creative Tourism. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(3), 86-106.

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## **POST-PANDEMIC TOURISM: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE TOURISM**

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### **Abstract**

*Tourism was one of the most affected sectors by the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 which had a devastating impact on the economy, and researchers are questioning the future of tourism in a post-pandemic world. In this exploratory text, based on a literature review, it is questioned if creative tourism can play a role in the rebuilding of the tourism industry, once it relies on place-based experiences that use local resources and involves communities and tourists in immersive activities. Creative tourism seems to be a response to the challenges, namely the tourists' perception of physical distancing, the need to avoid over-tourism, mass tourism and touristification, the desire to reconnect with other people and to have enriching emotional experiences, the increase of awareness about sustainability (for places and future generations) and the resident's needs and their living conditions. This paper relates the ongoing research on post-pandemic tourism, from several points of view – the tourist's perceptions, the communities and territories' needs, and the tourism planners' vision... – with creative tourism, addressing the opportunities for such tourism, and questioning its feasibility and potential contribution to more*

*meaningful tourism for both hosts and guests, to local economies grow, and to making tourism more sustainable.*

**Keywords:**

Post-Pandemic Tourism, Creative Tourism, Sustainability, Residents, Tourists

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## **1. Introduction: Pandemic Impact on Tourism**

In early 2020, following several reports from Wuhan city, the detection of a new coronavirus was confirmed by the Chinese Authorities. With the spread of the virus across frontiers, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared, on January 30, that the outbreak of the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV, which became known as Covid-19) constituted a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). By that time, 19 countries had related human-to-human transmissions and, gradually, such phenomenon became a reality worldwide. National authorities across the world were forced to take containment measures: safety distancing and maximum capacity in spaces were determined, remote work was imposed, services were shut and, ultimately, several countries decreed a lockdown. Travelling, especially for leisure purposes, was no longer possible.

In fact, tourism was one of the most affected sectors by the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, and the travel sector has faced a dramatic challenge, with the pandemic's devastating impact on the economy. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) report on the impact assessment of the covid-19 outbreak on international tourism, "the pandemic caused an unprecedented disruption to tourism, with a massive fall of international demand amid widespread lockdowns and travel restrictions put in place by countries in order to contain the spread of the virus". This resulted in 2020 being the worst year on record for tourism, with less 1.1 billion people travelling, which put over 100 million direct tourism jobs at risk. The numbers are notorious: 72% less travellers in 2020; 71% in 2021, in comparison to the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

Now, as the major travel impediments are dropping out, tourism seems to be recovering from the crisis (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021; Nasr et al., 2021; UNWTO). But, despite tourism increasing numbers in 2022, it remains below 2019 levels (according to the mentioned UNWTO report, whilst the 2021 travel movement was less 70% than the one observed in 2019; first results from 2022 indicate only less 43%). The recovery is slow but is taking place, especially in the domestic tourism sector.

As international tourism recovers, people are more willing to travel again: the “pandemic have not put an end to the desire to escape and travel” (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021: 411). They echo, however, new concerns, with recent studies indicating significant changes in post-pandemic planned travel behaviours (Li et al., 2020). As we will address in the literature review, the post-pandemic traveller seems to have new consumer patterns, makes the destination’s choice based on different aspects, and is more aware of safety behaviour. The fact that being around other people can be a real threat to our existence has been thought of more often after Covid. In fact, some trends seem to be related to safety concerns: the demand for open-air experiences (nature and rural vacations are popular travel choices), for authentic experiences that can have a positive impact on local communities (the awareness about sustainability needs), and for closer to home destinations (increasing the domestic tourism and the “go outside inside” movement). As addressed below, creative tourism might constitute a type of tourism that answers these travellers’ concerns and needs, responding to the challenges that actual tourism is facing, namely the changes in the tourists’ perception.

## **2. Literature Review: What is Creative Tourism?**

Creative Tourism has been studied since early 2000. As Richards & Raymond (2000) first define it, creative tourism is a type of tourism that strongly departs from (and is an alternative to) the mass tourism offers. In it, visitors have “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 & Raymond 2000: 18). Since then, creative tourism has broadened, but, even though previous definitions were narrow, they remain pertinent. New definitions emphasize new modalities of creative tourism’s implementation that weren’t considered before. In 2006, UNESCO defined creative tourism as “[to] travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place”, which “provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture” (UNESCO, 2006: 3). As Duxbury & Richards (2019) put it, we are now facing a “creative tourism 4.0”, once nowadays “a shift towards more relational forms of tourism and the co-creation of experiences facilitated through peer-to-peer networks” can be observed (Richards, 2020: 10). In fact, co-creating processes have assumed a major role in creative experiences (Cabeça et al., 2020). Visitors’ and residents’ active

participation in immersive cultural experiences is imperative in creative tourism. But more than just making use of specific features, linking the places with its territorial capital, and challenging tourists to conclude a certain task with the help of the community (make a traditional craft, participate in an event, etc.), creative tourism must consider how each place is felt (Casey, 2009), how local identity can be strengthened (Gu & Ryan, 2008), and how can tourists help to generate their own experience (Cabeça et al., 2020). It is about “being, doing, touching and seeing” (Perkin & Thorns, 2001: 189), and shifting the attention from the tourist’s gaze to his all-being (Cohen & Cohen, 2012): “To interact, to learn, to do, to self-express” (Cabeça, 2020: 19). Besides linking tourism offers with the territory, using local resources, and guarantying the community’s involvement, creative tourism must create opportunities for learning and self-expression, and arouse creativity and emotion for all the involved. “Active participation, creative self-expression, learning, and community engagement are key elements” (Cabeça, 2020: 18). More creative tourism specificities are given while addressing its potential as a response to the traveller’s demands and needs, and to the challenges that the tourism sector is now facing.

### **3. Research Issue and Methodology**

Several authors have been focusing on what tourism will look like in the future. How will the tourism industry regain the trust of potential visitors? How will each destination market its territory? What behavior patterns will tourists adopt? Though there are not much empirical data, the trends and challenges traced by the researchers are worth being analysed, using a theoretical and exploratory approach. Such an approach is better suited to meet the principles of credibility and applicability, reliability, and objectivity (Olabuenaga and Ispizua, 1989), once the texts taken into consideration have little to no statistical expression. Instead, a comprehensive reading is done, allowing an understanding of the research being made. The cross-referencing between authors also helps to validate the analysed paper’s content.

“The COVID-19 Pandemic presents as an opportunity to rethink the tourism system” (Gowreesunkar et al., 2021: 4). Can creative tourism be a response to the challenges that actual tourism is facing? Can this type of tourism constitute a valid option for those who seek to avoid overcrowded destinations, and care for the resident’s well-being and the sustainability of the places they visit? And, in the opposite way, can the constraints aroused by the pandemic be opportunities for creative tourism? These questions will be addressed by cross-referencing the

ongoing research on post-pandemic tourism with the characteristics of creative tourism, taking into account the tourist's perceptions and demands, the communities and territories' needs, and the tourism sector providers.

#### **4. Analysis: Opportunities for Creative Tourism in Post-Pandemic Tourism**

Using the exploratory approach – based on the literature on tourism in a post-pandemic world and on the characteristics of creative tourism – some areas in which this type of tourism can be constituted as a response to the current challenges stand out: well-being, immersion into local culture, responsible tourism, small-scale tourism, networks, and domestic tourism.

##### **4.1. Creative Tourism as A Well-Being Inducer, And Answer for Emotion Seekers**

It is not a novelty, but it is a growing trend: tourists are sincerely willing to engage with residents and to develop (or in search of) emotional links with the places they visit (Gu & Ryan, 2008). Becoming a part of the destination's everyday people, to break “entirely from their home lives and engage sincerely with a different way of living” (Amadeus Traveller Trend Observatory, 2015: 4) is a trend. Emotional and symbolic aspects such as ethics, spirituality, and authenticity are valued by conscious travellers (Moscardo, 1996; Guerreiro & Marques, 2017; Stankov et al., 2020; Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021; Santos et al., 2021). For mindful tourists, to travel is to engage. The story that each place tells, the emotion it might arise, the people who live there; are aspects considered when choosing a destination. After the pandemic, Stankov et al. (2020) point out that there is a certain profile of tourists that is more preoccupied with the question of happiness, and with the quality of the tourist experiences. Tourists search for memorable and valuable experiences and focus more on “why” to visit a certain place rather than “what” (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021). In fact, tourists can cognitive, affective, and social benefit from their tourism experiences, and develop the emotional links they search for (Gu & Ryan, 2008). Not just with places, though: the creation of affective bonds and the search for the humanization of relationships between tourists and residents is also a demand. In leisure behaviour, involvement and emotions are two key variables (Santos et al., 2021). It is thought, therefore, that the tourism sector and the entrepreneurs should focus more on establishing meaningful links between people and places, and the post-pandemic demand can be an opportunity for the industry to promote vacations as a means of expression (Stankov et al., 2020). That is exactly what creative tourism proposes: to establish a link between places and

people, residents and visitors, destinations and territorial assets, making each experience unique because it involves unique places and unique people. As a recent study discovered, the participants in creative tourism activities want higher levels of social and emotional interaction with the community and want to feel like part of the destination (Remoaldo et al, 2019). As a matter of fact, community involvement, which plays a major role in creative tourism, is also something that visitors are looking forward to.

#### **4.2. Engaging and Immersive Experiences with Community Involvement**

The Remoaldo et al. (2019) study mentioned above addresses a key question: who is the creative tourist? The innovative research that took place in Portugal discovered that the tourists engaging in creative tourism experiences are looking for fun, originality, and creativity, appreciate socialization with other participants and with the local community, are willing to interact with the community, learn about their culture and engage in hands-on approach activities that presuppose the use of creativity and are seen as local traditions or know-how, and demonstrate a need to socialize and share the co-creation process with others during their experience.

This general profile is aligned with the tourist's demand for active participation in their destiny's culture, and the search for authenticity, meaning, and purpose; a path of immersion and participation (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and uniqueness (Yahya & Fang, 2019). As travellers consider trips in 2022, enriching travel experiences are on at the top of their priorities, with travellers seeking out hidden gems, dream destinations, and opportunities for nature-focused activities. In this scenario, not only the local assets of a given territory but also local communities and local entrepreneurs, are indispensable.

To restart tourism in each territory, and to improve the quality of the tourist experience, post-pandemic research recommends the community's involvement in the design of authentic and engaging experiences (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021) and in decision-making (Dastgerdi & de Luca, 2022). Tourism must incorporate everyday life in the tourist product (Blapp & Mitas, 2018), rest on a genuine and mutual interest in cultural exchange, and be carried out by local communities (Galani-Moutaf, 2013) if it wants to successfully respond to the tourist's needs. Therefore, place-based tourism – mobilizing the territorial capital that is specific to each location and integrating local communities in their planning – is indispensable, once it creates unique destinations, and makes each place special. Furthermore, place-based tourism – when respecting

the “spirit of place” (Imon, 2017) – can bring economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits, as several studies indicate (Miettinen, 2005; Simpson, 2008; Thomas et al., 2013; Lazzeroni et al., 2013).

Tourists that are actually seeking immersive experiences can obtain satisfaction in co-created processes as well (Binkhorst, 2008), once co-creation (the major asset in Creative Tourism 4.0) provides unique experiences by making use of the tourist’s skills, talents, and creativity, and by creating an emotional link between all the participants – residents and visitors – that are at the centre of the experience. Both parties are involved in the design and the implementation of the tourism offer, amplifying the immersion into local culture.

Community involvement not only meets the tourist’s needs but is also essential to prevent each experience from becoming a mere touristic product. In fact, the culture demand might pressure the tourism providers to adjust the experiences to the visitor’s expectations, and to re-create the cultural aspects of a given territory solely for tourism purposes and to attract visitors (Fernandes, 2011). This “turistification” – that is to say, the process by which local traditions are performed or produced for tourist consumption – decontextualizes local culture to the point that it no longer represents the social and cultural life of a given community. The exploitation of authenticity and popular creativity assigns a price to local traditions, that become mere commodities (Cohen, 1988). To safeguard the essential aspects of the cultural practices, communities must be involved, once its endurance presupposes taking into account what the practitioners and tradition bearers consider relevant in their cultural system (Cabeça, 2016). To establish a bond between culture, territory, communities, and tourists is key in the preservation of the spirit of a place and to generate topophilia, an emotional attachment to the place (Casey, 2009) and, as we will argue below, not only responds to the visitor’s demands but also to local community’s needs.

#### **4.3. Ethical and Responsible Tourism, And Observing Resident’s Needs**

It has been recently argued that is the “active participation, socially and environmentally responsible traveling” that “can fulfil people’s ‘dreams and desires’” (Stankov et al., 2020: 706). Concerns about a place’s sustainability are no longer a suppliers and hosting communities exclusive, but a consumer’s demand. Post-pandemic travellers are thought to make ethical decisions when considering their travel destination and express the willingness to contribute to the preservation of the human, cultural and physical environment (Koščak & O’Rourke, 2021).

Tourists are more aware of the potential negative impacts of their vacations on communities' regular daily life and well-being, and of the damage they might cause to a place's heritage, nature, and culture. New opportunities for the emergence of a new type of tourism, in which socio-economic goals are paired with benefits for the communities, are created. "Responsible tourism combined with creative marketing needs to be integrated into tourism policies" (Gowreesunkar et al., 2021: 4). Tourism must be thought of as a means to sustain and develop local communities, whilst preserving historical and physical environments. For the benefit of future generations, tourism must also make judicious use of resources. According to Seabra & Bhatt (2022), the pandemic brought new arguments for suppliers to enhance the traveller's responsible behaviour, and to rethink tourist behaviour in general.

Before Covid, efforts to transform tourism into a greener and more responsible industry were not fully accomplished. With phenomena such as the pandemic and climate change awareness, achieving greener economies and generating more resilient communities were pushed back to the top of the priority. Questions such as the rising of the carbon footprint, the lack of affordable housing, and pollution and degradation of life conditions (that make some places inhabitable for host communities), made the general public aware of the challenges that have to be surpassed.

Given a greater demand for immersive experiences that imply the attachment to places, a new type of tourist, concerned with the preservation of local heritage and willing to bring prosperity to local community, emerges. By attending creative tourism offers, consumers are ensuring that they are contributing to local economies: the local community is involved and benefits from the experiences that are being provided, and local resources are being properly used. Creative tourism appears as an opportunity to reinvent the pre-pandemic tourism model and make it more sustainable and closer to the local community, contributing to the preservation of local identities, territories, and communities, and benefiting residents, visitors, and suppliers.

Responsible tourism is also about regulating tourist flows, diminishing its potential negative impact. As Corbisiero & Monaco (2021) point out, there is an opportunity for local areas to identify new and more sustainable ways of welcoming and managing tourist flows in a post-pandemic world.

#### **4.4. An Alternative to Mass and Over Tourism**

Though mass-tourism and over-tourism frequently go hand in hand, they relate to different aspects of a common cause: excessive numbers of tourists. Mass-tourism is characterized by intense flows of tourists attending the same destination; and over-tourism is related to surpassing the capacity of a destination. Both phenomena impact the quality of the tourism experience – for residents and visitors – in a negative way.

Before the pandemic, massive tourism flows and overcrowded places were common in famous destinations. During the pandemic, many places went from over-tourism to no tourism at all (Koh, 2020). And in a post-pandemic world, people are not keen on frequenting crowded spaces, fearing contagion (Koščak & O'Rourke, 2021), and avoid proximity contact, especially with the unknown (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021). Is it time to consider another type of tourism? Many authors are now focusing on preventing tourism from rebuilding its economy based on its old manners, which have brought the degradation of living conditions for local residents (Koh, 2020), affected negatively their well-being (Kim et al., 2013), and made visitors' spatial experience decline (Dastgerdi & de Luca 2022), not corresponding to the tourist's expectations. An excessive number of tourists imposed overwhelming social and environmental impacts on local communities and diminished the tourist experience. Research on strategic approaches to restart the tourism industry recommends moderating the risks by focusing on sustainability and proposes measures such as crowd control (Koh, 2020), tourist flows mitigation, and investing in cultural tourism, and conservation and environmental practices (Dastgerdi & de Luca 2022).

Some strategies that were foreseen before the pandemic (inscribed in marketing plans, smart specialization strategies, etc.) have now an opportunity to be fully developed. They include product and market diversification, use of local resources and traditional know-how, and ecological, cultural, and health goals. The actions to be taken are thought to be adequate to make regions more competitive and able to attract visitors throughout the year, qualify the territory and the environment, attenuate seasonality, and the excessive concentration on a single tourism product. To diversify a region's attractiveness can also help to safeguard its heritage and ensure environmental and economic sustainability. In fact, when the economic base of a given region is oriented towards a single product, the economic, social, demographic, and tourist differences between the locations in the same region are accentuated (Cabeça et al., 2021). Tourism concentration generates economic, social, and demographic imbalances. Seasonality, environmental damage, heritage destruction, workers' precariousness and, on some occasions, a

greater proportion of tourists than inhabitants; are some of the problems that must be overcome. Furthermore, tourism massification has contributed to the desertification of some small and rural areas, unable to compete with more attractive destinations (cultural heritage sites, cosmopolitan cities, seaside destinations, etc.).

To diversify the tourist offer strengthens the territory, as it disperses tourists across the region, improving each place's ability to endure. It is necessary to develop a territorial culture in which each place can contribute to attracting visitors by allocating their local resources. Such strategy also meets the needs of a certain type of tourist who seeks greater contact with nature and the local culture, wants to be distant from major centres, and expects unique experiences related to idiosyncratic aspects of the destination such as gastronomy, and traditions.

Creative Tourism is often seen as a reaction to the massification of cultural tourism, and a means to reinforce rural competitiveness, valorise the local cultural and natural heritage, and establish sustainable tourism practices. It is more than offering tourism experiences that appeal to a certain type of tourist. It addresses the need to diversify the tourist offer, develop tourism in small-scale places, use local resources, increase local economies... Creative tourism is attracting visitors to places outside the traditional tourism circuits, to rural and low-density territories, offering the visitors the opportunity to interact with local communities. Creative tourism contributes to territorial attractiveness and identity by allocating local resources and creativity to sustainable development processes (Barata et al., 2017). It can bring economic wealth to territories that little have benefited from tourist demand, enhance rural development, and contribute to the discovery of unknown destinations, whilst providing unrepeatable experiences that expand the number of places where "it is worth going", all year round.

However, for destinations to effectively benefit from the increase in visitor numbers, it is necessary to challenge the visitor to stay longer in the territory. The establishment of local networks that provide concerted offers (experiences plus accommodation plus services...) will be important to increase overnight stays and bring income to places.

#### **4.5. Synergies and Local Networks**

With the no travelling policies adopted during quarantines and lockdowns forced by the pandemic throughout the world, and the people's unwillingness to contact with others, the first to suffer the impact of the tourism crisis were less competitive small-scale businesses and entrepreneurs (Costa, 2021; Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021; Dias et al., 2021; Gowreesunkar et al.,

2021). Such evidence implies not only the need to make an additional rebuilding effort and to determine new approaches to boost local economies but also new crisis management models (Dias et al., 2021). Stronger networks are needed, able to capacitate human resources, promote products, inform people, and stimulate consumption. A network can qualify its offer, train, provide services, innovate, share resources, increase the representation factor of its members... To assert itself and be sustainable, it needs scale, and it must be dynamic. As Rumiati et al. point out, "Tourism development requires the support of every element such as the community, the private sector and the regional government" (2019: 846).

The advantage of collaborative and innovative processes has long been studied, and its positive outcomes remarked. When involving heterogeneous actors in collaborative processes – where creativity and entrepreneurship meet and knowledge is transferred – innovation, and community building are boosted (Schmidt, 2019). This emergent form of work shifts the emphasis from a single local project to a network that promotes trans-local value chains (Barata et al., 2016). New collaborative platforms are informational spaces in constant evolution in which the interactional practices generate new forms of social organization and new methodologies (Castells, 2001), able to boost innovation and increase the chances of each member's survival.

Synergy creation allows partners to grow within the framework of a common goal: to promote a territory, bringing prosperity to local economies, in the tourism sector case. As D'Angella & Go (2009) point out, in order to individual succeed, actors must act collectively. Cooperation brings more competitiveness. Focusing their research on the relations between Destination Management Organizations and local agents, the authors found that common strategies might, actually, achieve their goals. Addressing DMO, Dias et al. (2021), also stress the need for strategic thinking and the redefinition of networks that include local stakeholders to enhance destination competitiveness and innovation. Local communities have different capacities to embark on a development process; therefore, the creation of sustainable networks could bridge the inequalities between places (Shucksmith, 2018). In fact, strengthening local and community resilience is imperative: local communities must be able to use their resources to bring sustainability to their places, which involves the communities' adaptation to new contexts, new behaviours, new forms of communication, etc. (Magis, 2010). Micro-scale engagement is, therefore, needed (Dastgerdi & de Luca, 2022) and, once small-scale businesses are embedded in

the local communities (Dias et al., 2021), creating the conditions for the development of their competitive base implies establishing a link between tourism offers, territory and its historical, social and natural context (Thomas et al., 2013). And involve local communities as well, once they are key in the communication of a destination.

Local economies must be built by local agents (Lazzeroni, 2013), making use of their territorial capital and involving local businesses and local communities in collaborative networks that can communicate the image of the destination. This is the path to providing unique experiences that are irreproducible elsewhere. Such collaborations have been established through Creative Tourism Networks (Cabeça et al., 2021), place-based networks that are triggering creativity, linking creativity to places, improving tourism offers and tourists' experiences, and contributing to sustainable development processes (Cabeça et al., 2022). Tourism offers must be rooted in the local economy (Costa, 2021) – and creative tourism offers are rooted in the local economy – and aim for the international and domestic markets.

#### **4.6. Domestic Tourism**

After the pandemic, long-distance travels are not on many people's agendas. As Corbisiero & Monaco (2021) ascertained in a survey, in post-pandemic travelling behaviour, people are avoiding urban tourism and touristic cities. They prefer to travel by car, thus decreasing the risk of coming in close contact with other people. Public transportation is being avoided, and destinations closer to home are preferred: tourists choose destinations closer to their places of residence, not only because of some remaining restrictions but also because nearby destinations are considered less risky, allowing people to return home quickly in case of need or emergency. Potential tourists also prefer to travel with their partner or family, and less with larger organized groups.

What is a constraint for large international destinations, can be seen as an opportunity for small businesses with the capacity of attracting domestic consumers. Recent studies about creative tourism participants (Cabeça et al., 2021; Remoaldo et al., 2022) show that tourists easily move around to attend activities they enjoy or are interested in. A survey held in the Portuguese territory amongst the participants in creative tourism experiences showed that most of the participants travelled to the places where the experience was taken place – small cities and rural areas – by their means, especially by car. The majority also travelled with the main purpose of participating in the experience. From these results, it can be inferred, firstly, that the nature of

the activities to be carried out at the destination are decisive when choosing the destination itself, and secondly, and most importantly, that visitors chose their destination considering the activities they could develop there, rather than because of its exact geographical location. That is to say that, even when tourists are not in the exact location where the activities occur, they are willing to travel, by their own means, if they are nearby. Participants attending the creative tourism experiences held in Portugal travelled to the activity's site not to accompany someone or persuaded by the organizers, but because they were motivated by the cultural and original nature of the activities and the possibility of having fun (Cabeça et al., 2021). In this sense, creative tourism experiences function as an attraction factor to places.

Besides this cultural driven factor, creative tourism experiences are often placed in low-density territories, which is also an attraction factor for those who, nowadays, look for outdoor activities and socially distanced explorations (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021).

Another opportunity for the development of tourism experiences strongly connected with local communities and its territorial capital is the increasing number of local groups interested in discovering their history and in contributing to the processes of local identity construction (Fabre, 2001). People are engaged in the production of local cultural identities that have territorial roots (Cabeça, 2016), which might also increase the number of domestic tourists willing to participate in creative tourism experiences that relate to their common heritage (gastronomy, festivities, traditional know-how, nature, etc.). In fact, it might be simpler to engage in certain activities when knowing and coming into contact with the context in which they occur.

## **5. Results: Creative Tourism as a Sustainable Option**

It is clear by now that the opportunities for creative tourism development addressed above, and the definition of creative tourism itself, deeply connect creative activities with sustainable development. The potentialities listed in the processes of sustainable tourism correspond to the strategies used in (and defining) creative tourism: make use of specific features of the destinations (linking the places with their territorial capital), focus on local identity, connect and involve the local community in the tourism marketing and offerings, support local business, be environmentally responsible, avoid the excessive use of resources and the excess of people, strengthen local economies, provide immersive experiences, decentralize the tourism

offers to place them in less well-known territories, etc. Tourism must generate less pollution, be less seasonal, have a less negative impact on the environment and on the population's well-being; it must bring effective gains to the local population, meet the visitor's expectations and, above all, ensure that the next generations will not be compromised due to the misuse of the resources allocated to the sector.

In a post-pandemic world, not only local communities, providers and territories seek solutions for the growing negative impacts of the tourism industry. Mindful travellers are more aware of other people's needs and are willing to adopt more sustainable behaviours. They have become more aware of the climate crisis, are more concerned with reducing their footprint, and express the willingness to enjoy holidays responsibly. Such global awareness is important in the sustainable development process, once it refers to a development concept that meets the needs of the present without compromising the living needs of future generations (Silvestre & Țircă, 2019).

In a post-pandemic world, researchers and tourism experts see the sector's recovery as an opportunity to gain sustainability: "the historical and social moment may lend itself to repositioning and redeveloping places and structures of the territories of tourism, bringing them more in line with international criteria of sustainability, ethics and aesthetics" (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021: 412). Recommendations focus on increasing the attractiveness of some places (halting their desertification), controlling tourism flows in others (preventing them from becoming uninhabitable), investing in environmentally responsible ways of traveling and experiencing holidays, linking tourism with local economies and communities, making good use of local products and services... And overall, contribute to the local multiplier effect (Costa, 2021).

Creative tourism activities are aligned with sustainable development processes. Sustainable development must be driven by citizen needs and the specific features of a given place: natural resources, cultural norms, and geographical specificities (Barata et. all, 2016). Creative Tourism is driven by citizen needs and the specific features of a given place (Cabeça et al, 2018).

## **6. Conclusion**

With the pandemic, and tourism at a standstill, it was time to rethink the way the sector has been developed and to ascertain important lessons for future tourism planning. Despite bringing economic growth to various locations and regions (being, in some places, the major economic sector), the consequences of tourism exploitation entail many problems, and its rapid growth came with some concerns. In some popular destinations, mass tourism has become a problem, and the unsustainable number of visitors impacted in a negative way the natural environments and local communities. Thus, many studies (some mentioned here) see the tourism stall provoked by the pandemic as an opportunity to resume activity refusing its “old ways”, doing it differently. That implies mitigating the negative impacts of pre-pandemic tourism and equating how to ensure that small, local tourism companies continue to thrive and contribute to sustainable growth. It also implies equating how can local communities benefit from the responsible use of their resources (often the values that are created locally generate profits that are not going to be, or are not, allocated locally).

According to Nasr et al. (2021), it is necessary to incorporate tourism into the economic recovery plans, ensure consumers of tourism security, and increase confidence in the sector. The recovery of tourism corresponds to the rethinking of tourism. The industry of tourism embraces new challenges – such as providing more meaningful experiences and generating more positive impacts – as travellers revise their travel behaviour. A broader participatory process, involving tourism stakeholders as well as local actors, is strategic for sustainable tourism. “To relaunch and accelerate the revival of the tourism sector, collaboration amongst actors, ethical and responsible tourism is likely to adapt, develop and hopefully to succeed in the post virus world” (Gowreesunkar et al., 2021: 3).

Creative tourism is in line with this new vision for tourism: a more sustainable, responsible tourism, attentive to the needs of residents and tourists, preserving territories and making a responsible use of resources, involving local communities, increasing the attractiveness of lesser-known places, and bringing economic benefits to the places. Creative tourism can contribute to more meaningful tourism for both hosts and guests, to local economies grow, and overall, to making tourism a more sustainable industry.

With some traumas and fears caused by the pandemic still so close, the implementation of this new type of tourism faces some constraints: the fear of contagion, of contacting people outside the familiar sphere, of using public means of transportation. But, as Corbisiero &

Monaco (2021) point out, travelling, “even if on the one hand it frightens people, on the other hand, it is perceived as a necessity” (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021: 411). And Creative Tourism, as a small-scale type of tourism, can reassure travellers, by controlling social distancing and decreasing the potential risks, a measure that has been pointed out as a need (Zheng et al., 2021).

## **7. Acknowledgments**

This paper is financed by Portuguese National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation for Science and Technology through project UIDB/04020/2020.

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