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Connecting the dots: contributions to the creative tourism dynamics in Portugal

Ligar os pontos: contributos para as dinâmicas de turismo criativo em Portugal

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Abstract

Drawing upon the implementation of an incubator and multidisciplinary collaborative research initiative – the CREATOUR project – which aims to develop a network of creative tourism initiatives in four Portuguese regions, the main purpose of this paper is to analyse the dynamics seen in the first stage of implementation of this network, trying to understand the relations and connections that have been established between the creative tourism actors operating at regional and national levels, and examining the main goals and challenges these particular actors face to implement such activities in small cities and rural areas of Portugal. Applying the methodological tools of Stakeholder Analysis and Social Network Analysis to the information collected from each of the 20 pilots involved in this stage of the project, the relationships between the various creative tourism pilot projects and other regional/external actors are represented, and the stakeholders' expectations regarding future developments of the network are analysed.

Keywords: Creative tourism, CREATOUR, stakeholder analysis, social network analysis.

Resumo

Tendo por base a implementação de um projeto de investigação-ação multidisciplinar e colaborativo, que visa o desenvolvimento de uma rede de projetos-piloto de turismo criativo em quatro regiões portuguesas – projeto CREATOUR –, o principal objetivo deste artigo é analisar as dinâmicas verificadas na primeira fase de implementação desta rede, compreendendo as relações e conexões entre os atores do turismo criativo que operam a nível regional e nacional e examinando as principais metas e desafios que os mesmos enfrentam para implementar tais atividades em pequenas cidades e áreas rurais de Portugal. As ferramentas metodológicas da Análise Estratégica de Atores e da Análise Estrutural de Redes Sociais aplicadas à informação recolhida junto dos 20 projetos-piloto envolvidos nesta etapa do projeto permitem representar as relações entre os diversos projetos-piloto e os outros atores regionais/externos e analisar as expectativas dos atores sobre o desenvolvimento futuro da rede de turismo criativo em Portugal.

Palavras-chave: Turismo criativo, CREATOUR, análise estratégica de atores, análise estrutural de redes sociais.

1. Introduction: creative tourism in literature

Creative Tourism is seen as a specific form of cultural tourism that calls for greater involvement and participation of tourists in activities that promote their creative potential, either through experiences of immersion and contact with new realities or through innovative learning. The origin of this concept is attributed to Greg Richards and Crispin Raymond (Richards & Raymond, 2000) and underlines the opportunity given to tourists to become more effectively involved in the tourist destinations they visit, through interactive and learning experiences related to their endogenous characteristics.

Recognizing the utility of the concept as a kind of benchmark change within the tourism industry, some authors (Carvalho, Ferreira, & Figueira, 2016; Gonçalves, 2008; Richards, 2002; Russo & Richards, 2016) consider creative tourism as a new paradigm, characterized by a tourism supply and demand that is more committed to the destinations and responds to the ceaseless pursuit of tourists for new learning possibilities and co-creation of authentic experiences by exploiting creativity.

This focus on creativity also replicated in the tourism sector arises from a broader orientation related to the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and a new pattern of economic development framed by a "creative turn", which combines a symbolic economy (Lash & Urry, 1994) with the leading role played by creative classes (Florida, 2003; 2005) that live in creative cities (Hannigan, 1998, 2007; Landry, 2000) via the development of creative industries (Hartley, 2005; O'Connor, 2010). Notwithstanding the considerable controversy that has surrounded this "creative turn" (Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Scott, 2006) and the strong polarization of the analysis of creative dynamics on agglomeration effects and core urban areas (Costa, Vasconcelos, & Sugahara, 2011; Costa,

2008; Markusen, 2007; Scott, 2000), some interesting research has been done on the importance of these dynamics to small cities and low density areas (Duxbury, 2011; Jayne, Gibson, Waitt, & Bell, 2010; van Heur, 2010), as well as rural areas (Bell & Jayne, 2010), which in certain conditions may also be a fertile ground for such dynamics.

Under the umbrella of this "creative turn", new perspectives have opened up to passive cultural tourism that no longer meets the requirements of more demanding tourists, both regarding the search for innovative and differentiated products, and the benefits to be gained from tourism consumption experiences (Richards & Raymond, 2000; Richards & Wilson, 2007). In a time of greater intensity and democratisation of tourism, cultural consumption has given way to cultural creation, generating important economic spin-offs in territories of different sizes and densities, searching for untapped market niches (Richards, 2002). The creative exploration of these niches may assume particular relevance at a local scale, taking into account the added value they can bring to communities in every dimension life, from economic to social, through culture and the entire symbolic load related to identity and heritage representations.

This new ability to access the symbolic dimension and the intangible heritage of local communities through experiences and creative activities can be seen as one of the key elements that not only differentiate creative tourism from cultural tourism but also challenge destinations to reinvent themselves. The terms "prosumption" and "prosumer" (Richards & Wilson, 2007; Tan, Luh, & Kung, 2014; Toffler, 1980) combine the simultaneous capacity of production and consumption that characterises this new modality of creative tourists and can be understood as an operationalisation resulting from that need for specificity. Supported by coordinated processes involving cultural and creative hardware, software, and orgware (i.e., infrastructures or spaces for production/consumption, with diverse and vibrant atmospheres, boosted by organisations, clusters, and policies committed to a creative development process), destinations are developing new ways of creating and promoting products and spaces in a multisensory shift (Richards & Wilson, 2007), while at the same time adding additional values and meanings to tourist consumption.

The way tourists are embedded in the local cultures to find out about place identities and explore the authenticity of local intangible heritage highlights not only the role of tourists as co-creators of knowledge and co-producers of experiences (Binkhorst, 2007), but also the active role that the host communities can (and should) play in the process. Focusing on local communities as key agents of transformation and co-constructers of tourist destinations, Russo and Richards (Russo & Richards, 2016) put forward a proposal to reposition tourism, where economic development objectives are relegated to the background in favour of collaborative and relational forms of knowledge and understanding local values, identities, and everyday life realities.

In line with this, repositioning is also Participatory Experience Tourism (PET) (De Bruin & Jelinčić, 2016). PET asserts itself as a new concept, which aims to take creative tourism further, insofar as it captures the participatory and creative elements of creative tourism without imposing restrictive boundaries. Described as an "organic process of co-creation of a new own lived experience"(De Bruin & Jelinčić, 2016) without specifications related to degrees of intensity, this concept advocates the engagement of tourists in the co-creation of their individual experiences, along with other stakeholders in the tourism network. To some extent, this "new concept" can be seen as an adjusted response to the most recent production and consumption models based on economic principles of collaboration, conscious interaction, and committed participation that contextualise the "social turn".

Intrinsically related to the change of values in a broad sense, the "social turn" seeks to reinforce a social awareness under the principles of collaboration and sustainability, whose echoes also extend to the tourism industry and consumption (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; Korez-Vide, 2013). In general, sustainable tourism reflects a balanced and optimised use of environmental resources, as well as respect for the values and socio-cultural identity of local communities to ensure the viability of long-term economic operations, without compromising the achievement of high levels of tourist satisfaction and meaningful experiences (Korez-Vide, 2013). The focus on creative resources over tangible products has important advantages, such as savings in physical assets, the capacity of tourist destinations to implement their creative offers easily, and the swift innovation and creation of new products. In addition to environmental issues, there is also an interest in mitigating social problems by implementing sustainable tourism solutions, also in line with moral, responsible, and ethical values (Goodwin & Francis, 2003; Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011), and framed by Cultural Ecosystem Services (Hirons, Comberti, & Dunford, 2016; Milcu, Hanspach, Abson, & Fischer, 2013) under the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment principles regarding human well-being in more balanced natural and social ecosystems (Sarukhán & White, 2005).

In short, all these complementary perspectives and new conceptual proposals can be subsumed under the label of creative tourism. Along with the participatory immersion of tourists in the creative life of places via co-created experiences and co-produced knowledge, there is an inextricable commitment – social, ecological, environmental, economic, and ethical – towards the sustainability of the places and the improvement of the quality of life of local communities, as well as towards the preservation of their cultural and intangible heritage by fostering them. Taking that into account, creative tourism development proposals for small cities and rural areas can be seen not only as a significant opportunity to add new spatial, cultural, economic, and social values to these territories, but also as an excellent opportunity to create a

national creative tourism network that can be extended to other countries.

Creative tourism is still taking the first steps in Portugal as a labelled tourist offer. However, in a national scenario marked by the strong growth of the tourism sector in recent years, where large urban centres and more conventional cultural products continue to be emphasised, the focus on creative, differentiating, and decentralising tourist offers represents an excellent opportunity to contribute to local development processes in small cities and rural areas by means of sustainable proposals based on endogenous resources. These are the main objectives of CREATOUR, a national three-year project (2016-2019) aimed at developing an integrated approach that combines a multidisciplinary research agenda with the development of a national network of pilot projects on creative tourism.

Based on the analysis of the first twenty national pilot projects selected in the CREATOUR project, this paper highlights the fundamental role that a network of interregional and transregional partnerships and key stakeholders plays for the start-up and consolidation of national supply and demand of creative tourism. Although the ambitious goal of this project is also to involve local communities as broadly as possible so that they can also benefit from the creation of added value products in a sustainable and creative way, that assessment has not been possible yet, given that the project is still at an early stage. As such, the main goals and strategic challenges of the pilot projects will be analysed employing a stakeholder analysis, and an overview of the existing networks and the potential links that will be introduced through a social network analysis will be provided.

2. Framework for the CREATOUR project and its context of analysis

CREATOUR (Creative Tourism Destination Development in Small Cities and Rural Areas) is a nationwide project that is currently being developed in Portugal (in Norte, Centro, Alentejo and Algarve NUTS II regions) by a consortium of five Portuguese research centres: Centre for Social Studies (CES) of the University of Coimbra (Lead partner); Landscape, Heritage and Territory Laboratory (Lab2PT) of the University of Minho; DINÂMIA'CET-IUL, Centre for Studies on Socioeconomic Change and Territory of Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL); Centre for History, Cultures and Societies (CIDEHUS) of the University of Évora; and Research Centre for Spatial and Organisational Dynamics (CIEO) of the University of the Algarve. This project aims to develop and pilot an integrated approach and research agenda for creative tourism in small cities and rural areas in Portugal by building strong links within and amongst regions.

More specifically, this project is informed by theoretical and methodological approaches from the cultural/creative sector development, and tourism and regional development. It is organised using key dimensions that support the added value for the creative sector development: 1) building knowledge and capacity, 2) supporting content development and linking creativity to place, and 3) strengthening network and cluster formation.

One of the innovative features of this project is the fact that it combines incubator/demonstration activities and multidisciplinary collaborative research processes. These incubator/demonstration activities consist in the implementation of creative tourism pilot-initiatives to be carried out by cultural, creative, and tourism-focused organisations, selected by the project team in the four Portuguese regions involved. This activity will be accompanied, monitored, and evaluated by the project research teams and will produce, on the one hand, valuable field information to feed the research about creative tourism in small cities and rural areas in Portugal; and, on the other hand, the desired network and agglomeration effects within and amongst regions.

3. Methodological notes

In line with the literature review on creative tourism and the accumulated experience of the CREATOUR project in Portugal, our intention is to examine whether a network dynamic exists between creative tourism actors operating regionally and those that operate nationally, and to analyse the main goals and challenges these particular actors face to implement such activities in small cities and rural areas in Portugal.

One of the specific activities of the CREATOUR project is to put into operation 20 creative tourism pilot projects in small cities and rural areas of Portugal: 5 in the Norte region, 5 in the Centro region, 5 in the Alentejo region, and 5 in the Algarve region (NUTS II level).

Figure 1 - Creative tourism pilot projects distribution by NUTS II region



Source: Own elaboration.

This particular activity was carried out in several stages between December 2016 and June 2017: launching a national call for creative tourism projects (December 2016); assessment and selection of applications by regional teams in Norte, Centro, Alentejo, and Algarve (January 2017); communication of results to candidates at the national level (February 2017; realization of Regional Idea Laboratories in Norte, Centro,

Alentejo, and Algarve (April-May 2017); consolidation of the proposed projects and preparation for their implementation (May 2017); National Idea Laboratory (31st May 2017); and finally, implementation of the creative tourism pilot projects (June-October 2017).

The stage of the regional Idea Laboratories, which were held in April-May 2017 in the four NUTS II regions covered, focused on the five pilot projects that were selected in each region (twenty in total) and aimed at creating a moment to identify common goals, means of action, and difficulties, to generate joint solutions, and to establish synergies among the pilots. This was also an opportunity to carry out interviews with the pilot project representatives. In this context, a semi-structured interview script was developed, and all the twenty pilot project representatives were interviewed in person, individually, by a research team member in the four regional Idea Laboratories (one in each NUTS II region). These interviews were recorded and analysed using two specific research methods: The Social Network Analysis (SNA), and the Stakeholder Analysis (SA).

Prospective methodologies, and in particular the SA ("Stakeholder Analysis") or the "Actors Strategy Analysis" according to the French School, play a crucial role not only in strategic planning and participation but also in building participatory democracy (Godet, 2006). Emphasizing the importance of motivation for participation in the context of participatory democracy is not an ideological issue, but rather a means to identify complex systems of relationships between different actors at different territorial scales, and to clarify strategic objectives, means of action, and the best forms to reach them to create dynamic information networks (Ackermann & Eden, 2011).

This depends on the voluntary input and involvement of the actors and the mobilisation of the resources they have to complete the action. Within this framework, the prospective Stakeholder Analysis – an action research method, involved in the process of collective learning, knowledge creation, and self-reflexivity of the social actors – has many potentialities for territorial management and for tourism (Baudet & Weill, 2017; Getz & Timur, 2005).

In the case of CREATOUR, SA allows to: a) clarify the strategic objectives, the means of action, and the best forms to achieve them; b) analyse the relations of strength and conflict, both for each pilot project and for the regional-national network; c) identify strategic partnerships to enhance the development of pilot projects; and d) characterise regions in terms of supply, enhance creativity and partnership networks. In sum, SA is a methodological tool that is quite useful to organise and systematize the strategic game between the various actors, both to meet the research objectives and to meet the objectives of the pilot projects.

The information gathered throughout the process must be systematically returned to the various actors in order to ensure transparency and that everyone involved is aware of the evolution of the strategic game. As is the case in any process of negotiation and interaction between different actors, the initially identified objectives and strategies can be modified and changed throughout the process. Nevertheless, it is somewhat difficult to apprehend the dynamics resulting from the process itself and insert it in the analysis.

SNA is an interdisciplinary research method based on formal techniques that quantify the importance of the ties (or relations) between us (or actors) that interact in a certain social context. SNA has been asserting itself as a technique used to understand the involvement of regional actors and inter-organisational relationships (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013; Newman, 2010; J. Scott, 2013). By communicating the interaction between actors and flows of information and knowledge, it is an extremely useful analytical tool for the mapping of networks formed by certain socio-economic sectors that may be important from the point of view of regional development (Fritsch & Kauffeld-Monz, 2010; Ter Wal & Boschma, 2009). This research method has been applied to tourism studies to conceptualise, visualise and analyse the complex sets of relationships that are established within the networked tourism industry (Cruz, 2016; N. Scott, Baggio, & Cooper, 2008).

In this case, and given the early stage of CREATOUR project, the SNA was used to represent the network of existing relationships between the various creative tourism pilot projects (intra- and inter-regional), as well as their relationship with other actors in each region, and to evaluate the potential to establish a formal nationwide Creative Tourism Network. SNA was executed with *Gephi* (0.9.1), an open-source software (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009).

The next section of this paper presents the results of the empirical analysis based on the interviews made to the creative tourism project pilots, and the research methods applied.

4. Empirical Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Stakeholder Analysis Results: Identifying Challenges and Constraints

During the realization of the four IdeaLabs, a total of twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted (one for each pilot project). The interview script applied to the different actors/pilots consisted in identifying the main strategic objectives, the means of action to reach them, and the constraints that they envision regarding the implementation of their projects. In these interviews, we tried to identify the actors/pilots with whom they had already established some kind of partnership in the scope of their projects and what they expected from these actors. All the actors/pilots were asked to identify potential partners with whom it would be essential to establish a partnership (see point 4.2).

After collecting the information, the interviews were analysed using a content analysis approach and an Actors Strategy Table was constructed (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Actors Strategy Table

Actor / Actor	ACTOR/PILOT A	Actor/ Pilot B	Actor/ Pilot C	Actor/ Pilot D	Actor I	Actor II
ACTOR/ PILOT A	Objectives: Means for action: Constraints / Obstacles:	Means of action: Expectations:	Expectations:	Expectations:	Means of action: Expectations:	Expectations:

Source: Own elaboration.

The Actors Strategy tables were presented at the end of each IdeaLab, discussed between all the stakeholders, and reviewed. The possibility of presenting the interview results to the protagonists was very rewarding and allowed the actors to identify possible partnerships during the IdeaLabs that had not been identified yet. The involvement and participation of all the actors in the planning process, in an effective and responsible way, was based on communication, particularly on the disclosure and discussion of the results of the SA. The various actors involved in the process should not be seen as agents who seek to use the system to achieve their objectives, which implies creating the conditions for their effective participation.

Subsequently, the information collected was processed and presented, allowing to:

i) identify the strategic objectives faced by the pilot projects;

ii) identify the strategic challenges faced by the pilot projects.

Through the analysis of the interviews, 161 strategic objectives were identified. The research team organised the different objectives into strategic challenges and achieved 16 strategic challenges (see Figure 3).

The challenges were sorted in ascending order, according to the number of strategic objectives that had been identified and contribute to each of them. Figure 3 shows the 16 strategic challenges sorted in descending order, according to the number of related strategic objectives.

The challenges were focused in the region in which they were included, such as "The attractiveness or potentialities of the region/project" (it includes 30 objectives). An example of related objectives is to increase the attractiveness of isolated regions (villages) with high creative potential; the Project is the reason for the choice of tourists, and not to be identified as "leisure animators"; improving the country's inner regions or making them known to artists and other visitors in general.

Another challenge is "The regeneration and the valuation of heritage", highlighting 6 of the 25 objectives that make up this challenge, such as renovation of the historic centre, of the villages (recovery and habitability); valorisation of territories and endogenous resources; preservation of memories and production processes; self-sustainable development and promoting sustainable tourism; defining a heritage and tourism value program and preserving the local culture.

Finally, "The revitalization / transmission of local traditional knowledge / know-how update / increased self-esteem", *ex aequo* with the previous one, highlighting 4 of the 25 objectives that make up this challenge, such as promoting training in endangered crafts; revitalizing and transmitting ancestral knowledge; knowledge production and transfer to the community; and involvement of visitors as active participants.

Figure 3 - Creative tourism pilot project - strategic challenges

Strategic Challenges (16)	Number of related objectives
Attractiveness / Potentialities of the Region/Project	30
Renovation / Valuation of Heritage	25
Revitalization / transmission of local traditional knowledge / know-how update/ increased self-esteem	25
Economic valuation / boosting the region/project	14
Territorial identity / territorial cohesion	12
Building / consolidating / enlarging partnership networks	12
Local partnerships	9
Promoting recurring visits	7
Dissemination of the project / Digital agenda	5
Credibility /Reputation / Institutional Recognition / Academy	5
Promoting artist residencies	4
Fighting / Reducing seasonality	4
Innovating / Changing image	4
Population empowerment and increased participation	3
Internationalization	1
Obtaining funding for the development of the project	1
Total	161

Source: Own elaboration.

When analysing the strategic challenges by region (NUTS II), we can find some specificities, namely the weight of some of the challenges (considering that they are measured by the number of objectives that have been identified and contribute to each of them) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Creative tourism pilot project - strategic challenges by regions (NUTS II)

Strategic Challenges (16)	ALGARVE		ALENTEJO		CENTRO		NORTE	
	PILOTS	OBJECTIVES	PILOTS	OBJECTIVES	PILOTS	OBJECTIVES	PILOTS	OBJECTIVES
Attractiveness / Potentialities of the Region/Project	4	8	3	7	3	9	2	6
Renovation / Valuation of Heritage	1	1	4	12	2	5	4	7
Revitalization / transmission of local traditional knowledge / know-how update/ increased self-esteem	3	4	4	9	3	5	3	7
Economic valuation / boosting the region/project	1	1	3	7	1	1	3	5
Territorial identity / territorial cohesion	3	4	0	0	2	4	4	4
Building / consolidating / enlarging partnership networks	1	2	2	3	3	3	4	4
Local partnerships	2	2	1	5	0	0	1	2
Promoting recurring visits	0	0	2	2	2	2	3	3
Dissemination of the project / Digital agenda	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
Credibility /Reputation / Institutional Recognition / Academy	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	4
Promoting artist residencies	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1
Fighting / Reducing seasonality	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	1
Innovating / Changing image	1	1	0	0	2	2	1	1
Population empowerment and increased participation	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Internationalization	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Obtaining funding for the development of the project	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
TOTAL		30		48		37		47

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2 Social network analysis results: a creative tourism network in Portugal?

The Social Network Analysis (SNA) carried out allowed us to map the network of relations between the twenty actors selected by CREATOUR to implement creative tourism projects in small cities and rural areas of the Norte, Centro, Alentejo and Algarve regions (NUTS II) of Portugal, but also the relations these actors established with other actors (partnerships) to put their project together. This analysis produced a network that consists of 142 nodes (actors) and 257 edges (relations between actors). Some measures of network cohesion revealed an average degree of 3.52, which means that on average each actor establishes 3.52 connections; this embodies a very low density of 0.013 - varying between 0 and 1, density network indicates the proportion of existing edges in the network out of the total possible edges - which in this case indicates that this network has little proportion of connections established; a diameter of 5, which means that the longest path between two actors in this network is 5 edges; the average path length is 2.09, which means that the average distance between two actors in the network is 2.09 edges.

Figure 5 shows the sociogram of the creative tourism pilot project network, where the actors are represented by circles and the connections between them are represented by lines. In the legend of this figure, it is possible to understand that the actors represented are differentiated by colours and dimension. Colours represent the geographic scope of each actor (Norte, Centro, Alentejo, Algarve, National, International, or Foreign). The bigger actors represent the creative tourism pilot projects and the others represent actors identified by the former as partners. Regarding the edges (lines), those represented in black are the existing connections established between actors, and those represented in grey are the connections the actors expect to establish in the short-term. Only the names of the creative tourism pilot projects are identified in the network. The other actors were not identified to preserve confidentiality. Looking at this network , we can also draw some considerations concerning (a) inter-regional connections, (b) intra-regional connections, and (c) expectations of the creative tourism pilot projects regarding external actors:

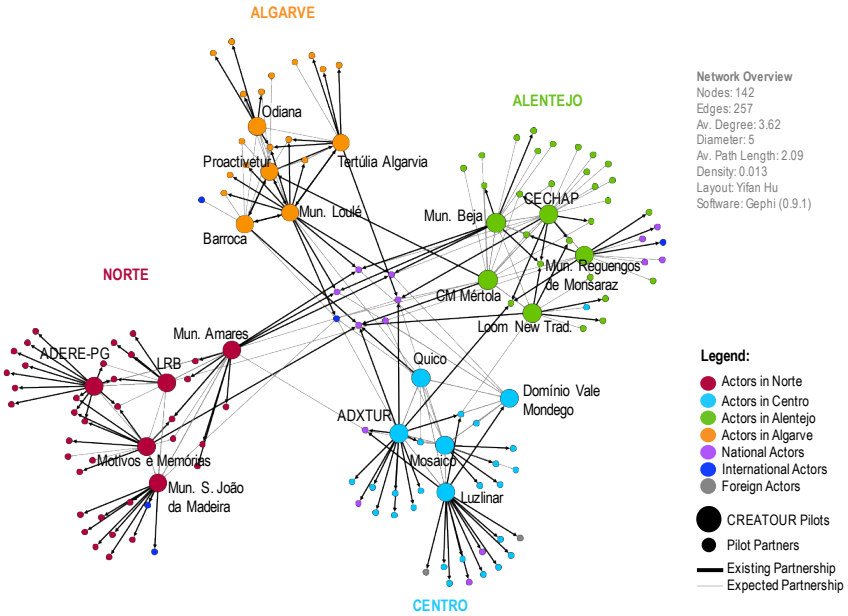
(a) One of the first things this sociogram underlines is the polarisation effect that results from the low number of connections among the actors from different regions. This is visible by the bounded borders of each region that encompass all the actors in four perfect circles that do not overlap. Thus, the inter-regional connections do not provide evidence of the existence of an informal nationwide Creative Tourism Network. The actors seem to be more focused on regional partnerships, valuing geographic proximity and maybe looking for agglomeration effects, instead of reaching partners outside their region, valuing thematic proximity. From the perspective of SNA, this network has several *structural holes* (Burt, 1982, 1992), which represent opportunities for intermediation between actors of the four regions.

(b) Although the four regions also show a low level of intra-regional connections, even as far as the connections established between the creative tourism pilot projects are concerned, some differences can be identified among the four regions. In the Norte, Centro, and Alentejo regions the creative tourism pilot projects wish to connect with the other pilots in the same region, but that has not happened yet. Thus,

currently, they only connect with other types of actors inside or outside the regions they are located in, but not with other pilots within the same region. The Algarve region shows a different dynamic, where we can see the creative tourism pilot projects already interacting with each other, except for the case of Odiana. Nevertheless, this situation may be related to the specific territorial characteristics of the Algarve; for instance, in terms of territory dimension, it is the smallest of the four regions; in terms of demography, it is the region with fewer inhabitants and lower population density; and in economic terms, it is the region with the lowest business density. During the interviews, we also noted that the Algarve creative tourism pilot projects are more tourism-oriented than the ones in the Norte or Centro regions (primarily focused on the cultural/creative offer). Given that the Algarve is the most tourism-specialised region in Portugal that has been dealing with mass tourism since the 1960s, this could explain this tendency and may have created a predisposition for the tourism actors operating in this region to cooperate with each other. Thus, even though the Algarve region has higher intra-regional connections when compared to the other three regions, this may be related to specific characteristics of the region and not necessarily because the creative tourism pilot projects in the Algarve are more dynamic than others located in different regions.

(c) Finally, the sociogram also emphasises that almost all the connections which go beyond the regional scope connect the creative tourism pilot projects to a set of seven actors located outside of all the regions that represent national or international actors, situated in the centre of the network. This is particularly relevant because these actors are the Creative Tourism Network, the CREATOUR project, the Portuguese national tourism authority (Turismo de Portugal, IP), artists (as a collective), designers (as a collective), and travel agencies. This situation probably results from the low connection among the creative tourism projects and among the different regions, which makes it difficult to achieve solutions and partnerships within the regional proximity. The creative tourism pilot projects have resorted to these actors in the hope of finding expertise and experience in the implementation of creative tourism initiatives. From the perspective of SNA, this set of actors may play an important role as *bridges* (Granovetter, 1973, 1983), fostering the increase of inter-regional connections, and the establishment of a national creative tourism network.

Figure 5 - Creative Tourism Pilot Project Network



Source: Own elaboration.

Taking into consideration that this network was mapped before the consolidation and implementation of the creative tourism pilot projects, we expect that some changes have occurred in this time-lapse regarding the density of actors, and the density of connections established among actors and regions. This analysis would benefit from a regular monitoring process to assess the evolution of this network. A second set of interviews to the representatives of the creative tourism pilot projects will take place in the following months and will allow us to update the network sociogram, identifying the main changes, and understanding the direction of its evolution.

5. Conclusions

Stemming from the empirical context provided by the CREATOUR research project, this paper aimed to inquire about the relevance that national (and international at a later stage) networks can have for the implementation of successful creative tourism initiatives that are territorially anchored and have the capacity to generate and amplify their own supply and

demand mechanisms and to embed and potentiate locally-based value addition to the products related to the immersive experience of the creative tourist in those territories.

Assuming the advantages of a demonstrative/incubator collaborative research initiative, and the multidisciplinary and multilevel research approaches it enables, an in-depth analysis of the information provided by the 20 pilots involved in the first stage of implementation of this network in Portugal was developed. This allowed us to obtain knowledge on the dynamics shown within this network, understanding the relations and connections between the creative tourism actors operating at regional and national levels and examining the main goals and challenges these particular actors face to implement such activities in small cities and rural areas of Portugal.

The information gathered from the 20 pilot projects in the four Portuguese regions was subject to a Stakeholder Analysis, where it was processed, compiled, and analysed. These results were subject to a Social Network Analysis, which delivered a mapping of the connections and (effective and potential) relations amongst all the (internal and external) actors.

Applying these methodological procedures, three main sets of results were achieved. Firstly, we performed an analysis of the players' expectations regarding the relations that were established and the ones that can be established in the future in order to develop the network of Creative Tourism. The typologies of strategic challenges achieved, both at national and regional levels, evidenced a set of factors that were the common core issues for the stakeholders (mostly related to the valorisation of the specific territorial assets they mobilise in their projects, and the capacity to promote the attractiveness of the territory to enhance the potential of their projects), but also interesting regional differentiation, with the stakeholders in some reasons privileging relatively more issues, such as heritage and the valorisation of local knowledge (e.g., Alentejo), while others value relatively more territorial cohesion and network effects (e.g., Norte and Centro), and in another region (e.g., Algarve) the attractiveness and potentials of the project were relatively more highlighted.

Secondly, we provided a representation of the relationship between the various creative tourism pilot projects involved in the project (both at intra and interregional level), as well as their relationship with other actors in each region. The network of creative tourism actors in Portugal still features a low density (i.e., the number of links is very limited compared to the potential number of relations that can be developed and their potential contribution to the enhancement of the pilots' initiative), and it is only very slightly based on networking dynamics and network logics. However, as this analysis was carried out at a time of pre-implementation of the creative tourism pilot projects, the next stage will inevitably result in processes that will undoubtedly encourage more partnerships and synergies among the various pilot projects. Thus, it is essential to repeat the analysis at a moment of post-implementation of the projects and to keep monitoring the changes that have occurred both in terms of strategic challenges and in terms of the internal dynamics of the network of actors and the achievement of the initial expectations.

Thirdly, an awareness of the added value of applying a methodology such as the Stakeholder Analysis was obtained, particularly with the process of involvement and participation of the various pilot projects on a national and international network, and the reflexivity achieved with them during this process. In fact, the results achieved so far have demonstrated the added value of applying this methodology to the process of involvement and participation of the various pilot projects. In parallel, the results achieved are also demonstrative of the complementarity of the Social Network Analysis in relation to the Stakeholder Analysis and its potential for the engagement of the stakeholders in the research process that accompanies the implementation of their pilot initiatives, adding value to the enhancement of the network and its reflexivity.

Overall, these results are in line with the reflection on the implementation of this first phase of the CREATOUR project and undoubtedly provide key-information to guide the preparation of the 2nd phase (with other 20 pilot cases), which is being developed following this demonstrative/research project. This case study has allowed us to demonstrate the relevance that national and international networks can have for the implementation of consistent creative tourism projects and to feed territorially based mechanisms to add value to tourism products and tourism experiences, particularly on low-density territories, such as small cities and rural areas.

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