



FROM CULTURAL TO THE CREATIVE TOURISM IN LEIRIA: PORTUGAL Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development

FERNANDO MAGALHÃES (FERNANDO.MAGALHAES@IPLEIRIA.PT)¹

¹ CICS.NOVA.IPLeiria and Leiria Polytechnic University, Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Cultural tourism has been very important for the development of many places, such as the European city's historic centers. This kind of tourism, often called predatory, characterized by visitors who, massively, seek to visit cities and historical sites in just a few hours, has led to the conflict between visitors and visited people, as there is no time to fully contemplate the local cultural heritage. In recent years, there has been a call for changing this type of tourism, from passive and ephemeral enjoyment to another concept of tourism, where creativity is used as a strategic resource, giving rise to the creative tourism. Leiria is a Portuguese city located 20 km from the sanctuary of Fátima, visited annually by 5 to 6 million people, who come to the region for just a few hours, few visit the city. Can creative tourism encourage the visitors to stay longer in the region, contributing to its sustainable development?

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1. Introduction

This text presents a research carried out in the city of Leiria, located on the west coast of Portugal, about 130 km north of Lisbon, with the aim of ascertaining the importance of the creative tourism for the local sustainable, regenerative and resilient development, .

Portugal received, in 2024, around 30 million tourists, most of whom were concentrated in very specific places, such as the historic center of Lisbon, Porto, the Algarve, or the sanctuary of Fatima, where more than a million people stay overnight every year. If these places face problems such as the *over tourism*, in others, such as the city of Leiria, located 25 km from Fátima, which received less than 200 thousand guests in 2024, the challenge is to develop a qualitative tourism, than a quantitative one. The goal is to take these tourists, concentrated in very specific places, to visit and, above all, stay for longer periods, in other places in Portugal, in a culturally enriching interaction with the locals. For this reason, we argue that cultural tourism, of the masses, should take the form of creative tourism, which bets more on the active participation of tourists in the life of the local community. This tourism develops from the community itself, which, using its cultural heritage, promotes short, medium, or long-term initiatives, in which both the local community and tourists can participate, in a culturally enriching interaction between them.

We will seek not only to understand, but to propose the application of the creative tourism to the context of the Leiria city and its cultural heritage, listening to local actors about its importance for the social, cultural, and economic development of the city and its municipality.

In methodological terms, we conducted narrative interviews with these local actors, whose professional activity is related to the tourism and to the municipal cultural heritage, during the first half of July 2025.

While the local leaders must listen to the communities they represent, they are also the ones who implement local economic, social, and cultural development policies, thus serving the populations they represent (Magalhães, 2012). Therefore, we interviewed two of these individuals, who are leaders in the field of culture, which includes cultural heritage, an essential factor for the development of the creative tourism. Catarina Carvalho is head of the Cultural Action, Museums, and Tourism Division at Leiria City Hall, and Isabel Brás is a senior technician at the Museums and Cultural Heritage Division of Leiria Castle. Both were asked whether they preferred to remain anonymous or to be identified, and they responded that they had no problem being identified.

The interviewees were also selected because the city's cultural policies largely depend on them. As Kolotouchkina (2018) points out, "contemporary cities face the challenge of addressing the problems of pollution, security, and inequality in their territories in order to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for their citizens" (Kolotouchkina, 2018, p. 2). Cities, through their leaders, "play a fundamental role in the development and promotion of culture, education, and the management of the citizen talent" (Kolotouchkina, 2018, p. 2), with culture being a key factor in competitiveness and urban regeneration.

The guiding questions were the following: What do you mean by creative tourism? How can the transition from the concept of cultural tourism to the creative tourism contribute to the local development of Leiria? Do you know some examples of creative tourism in Leiria? Through this ethnographic methodology, we intend to record, read, and interpret the thoughts that inhabited their minds, from their own points of view (Geertz, 2008). An ethnographic perspective was assumed, which can be understood as "a broad approach that incorporates a variety of methods beyond participant observation. These range from the use of statistical data, opinion polls, historical archives, and the use of textual analysis, to biographies, oral histories, taped interviews, and informal conversations" (Shore, 2000, p. 7).

In this research, we also resorted to several direct and indirect documentary sources (Fernandes, 1995), namely articles about the region, produced by various authors, press and various bibliography, which guided our work, giving it greater solidity and theoretical-practical accuracy.

According to the research carried out, it was considered pertinent to divide this text into two parts. In the first, called "On the emergence of Tourism: Cultural and Creative Tourism", we contextualize spatial and temporally the concepts of tourism, cultural tourism, and creative tourism, as well as to explain these concepts.

In the second part, called "Leiria: from creative tourism to sustainable development", our aim is to understand the application of the creative tourism concept to the Leiria city, as a privileged instrument of local sustainable development. In this second part, we will also research the concepts of sustainable, regenerative, and resilient development, observing how creative tourism is integrated into these concepts. The main objective of this research is the development of a qualitatively and culturally enriching tourism in the city of Leiria and its region.

2. On the emergence of Tourism: Cultural and Creative Tourism

Travel is so old like the humanity itself, which since its appearance and throughout its history, has occupied almost of the entire earth's surface. The reasons for the human nomadism may be related to the survival strategies, but they are mainly linked to the evolution of the human beings as entities of complex thought. The curiosity and exploration of the planet resulted, in this sense, from the ability of human beings to develop a complex culture, characterized by fundamental questions for the life, such as the death or the life beyond it, which led them to create mythical and sacred spaces, distant from their place of birth. The questions about life and death, or about our place on this planet and our relationship with ourselves and the others, led to the creation of these places endowed with religious and cultural symbolism. Over the millennia these spaces have become places of visit or pilgrimage, thus fostering the first known forms of tourism. These often-long journeys involved economic resources that only the community elites possessed, in times of precarious survival. Trips for leisure, learning and religious devotion were reserved mainly for the nobility and the clergy. As Westcott and Anderson (2020) point out, from the time of the "Roman Empire to the seventeenth century, young people from high-income families were encouraged to travel across Europe" (p. 7). Ramos and Costa (2017) go even further, stating that the origins of tourism are "in times as distant as the empires of Babylon or the Egyptian empire" (p. 22).

According to Westcott and Anderson (2020),

during the Middle Ages, many societies encouraged the practice of religious pilgrimages, as can be seen in literary works such as "Chaucer's Canterbury Tales", among others. However, even before the "Hajj" or the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, increased travel for religious purposes, which has become the norm for all believers in Islam. (p. 7)

Reflecting on tourism, as the concept is known today, its implications, as well as the tourist as a category, has little to do with pre-modern travels, migrations or pilgrimages prior to the Enlightenment and the invention of the national community concept. Modern tourism emerges because of the social and political French revolution as well the knowledge, industrial, agricultural, etc. revolutions, that have characterized the Modern and the Contemporary Ages. They have granted the availability of free time and the accumulation of capital by all the citizens, to allow them to travel between times and spaces that were previously only realized through the dreams.

Travel became accessible to all the citizens living in a national community. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards these citizens had the same opportunities to enjoy distant places, for reasons of faith, leisure, or learning, according to the motto of the French Revolution. Citizens are now free to travel, in the same circumstances of equality and fraternity.

The milestone that begins contemporary forms of tourism was the "Grand Tour", a term originated in the seventeenth century. The "Grand Tour" designated "the young people of the nobility and the wealthy English middle class who began to travel around the European continent, for about two years, to complete their education and gain personal experience" (Cisne & Gastal,

2010, p. 4). It was, however, in 1772, that the word tourist appeared for the first time, referring to "someone who has travelled up to at least 80 km from his home, in the last 24 hours, whether for business, leisure, or any other" (LinkBC, 2008, p. 8).

On the other hand, the United Nations Tourism Organization (UNWTO) stated, in 1995, that tourists could be characterized as "domestic, (residents of a given country traveling only within that country), "inbounds" (non-residents traveling in a certain country), and "outgoings" (residents of one country traveling to another country)" (Wescott & Anderson, 2020, p. 3-4).

The first tourists were "English travelers who have in education and knowledge, the motive of their journey. Soon, they will also be of other nationalities. And from other social classes. And the trips ... will continue to have leisure in their reason" (Barros, 2016). According to Barros (2016), this new category is defined in Portuguese by "turistas" who do "turismo".

It is difficult to conceive of contemporary tourism without referring to the first travel agencies, which began to organize tourist excursions. The first travel agency, "Cox & Kings", was founded in 1758, "when Richard Cox became the first official travel agent of the British Armed Forces" (Westcott, 2015, p. 4). From this moment on, the term tourism began to be used in a generalized way, and this concept gained relevance in 1838, in Stendhal's work, entitled "Memoires d'un Touriste".

In Portugal, the first travel agency to emerge was the "Abreu Agency", which is still in operation. Bernardo Luís Vieira de Abreu was its founder in 1840. His first trips were destined for Brazil, due to the migratory flows from Portugal to that country, which lasted from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The "Abreu Agency" was in the city of Porto and dealt mainly with passports and other paperwork necessary for the trips of those who left Portugal towards Brazil. Later, in the middle of the twentieth century, the agency started to organize excursions and tourist trips to Europe and to the whole world.

In 1841, Thomas Cook organized the first tourist trip in history, giving rise to the first tourist package. This was not an immediate commercial success, but it allowed us to glimpse the birth of a new economic activity, with great potential for development. In this context, the "Thomas Cook and Son" Travel Agency was created in 1851. In 1867, another major step was taken in the development of tourism, with the invention of the "voucher", a document that allowed the use in hotels of some services that could be contracted in travel agencies (Westcott, 2015).

The scientific and technological development that the world has been witnessing in the last two centuries has led to the emergence of new and sophisticated routes and means of transport and communication, such as railways, the telegraph, or the telephone. These increased in individuals a desire to travel, already in the nineteenth century.

These factors, combined with the "creation of societies that encouraged tourist activity, the publication of guides, travel itineraries" (Matos, 2014, p. 1017), transformed tourism into an important factor in the social, cultural, and economic development of many countries, regions, and localities. Its importance, as a social activity, gave it a place in the academia, so there were many conferences, congresses and seminars organized at the beginning of the twentieth century. They aimed to debate the relevance of the tourism for the community development. The I and II Franco-Spanish Tourism Congresses, held in "Zaragoza, in May 1908, when the Hispano-French Exhibition of Arts and Industry was taking place there" (Matos et al., 2011, p. 395-396), and in San Sebastián, on October 3, 1909, respectively, were remarkable moments in the academic reflection on tourism. The III International Congress of Tourism was held in Toulouse, between October 10 and 16, 1910.

In Portugal, the "tourism incentive entity", called "Sociedade Propaganda de Portugal", also known as the "Touring Club de Portugal... undertook a series of actions that sought to promote and publicize Portugal as a tourism destination" (Matos et al., 2011, p. 394). This society was responsible for the organization of the IV International Congress of Tourism, held in Lisbon, in 1911. This event marked Portugal's entry into the international tourism circuit, and the foreign words "tourisme" (French) or "tourism" (English) began to be translated into the Portuguese "turismo", becoming a common concept, also in Portugal.

Henry Martinet stated, as early as 1911, that "Portugal will become one of the first countries of tourism" (Barros, 2016). In fact, more than a century later, the Portuguese National Statistics Institute (INE) revealed that Portugal received approximately 30 million tourists in 2024 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2025), about three times its population. These figures represent a growth of 5.2% compared to 2023. It should be noted that the total number of tourists received by Portugal in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, was around 27 million people (Turismo de Portugal, 2019). The year 2025 starts with a growth in tourism revenues, between 5 and 9% (Jornal de Negócios, 2025).

Throughout the twentieth century, tourism grew exponentially and expanded from Europe to all parts of the world, becoming one of the main globalization elements that has also characterized the twenty-first century. Every year marks successive records for the world tourism, encouraged by the massification of the transport and the communication means, such as the television, the radio, and the popularization of travel by car or plane, among others. The most popular train and boat travel, used in the 19th century, also became faster in the next century, more effective, and more convenient. These means of communication, transmitting idyllic images of distant or exotic places, near or far, have awakened even more the desire to travel in millions of persons. The mass production of millions of automobiles as well as the development of the aeronautical industry, made travel cheaper, making it more democratic and accessible to the emerging middle class of the twentieth century. On the other way this century was characterized by two world wars, between other tragedies. Because of these events, transnational organizations emerged, such as the extinct League of the Nations, at the end of the World War I, and the United Nations (UN), after the World War II. They came to regulate, at a global level, various political, cultural, and social sectors, as well as the tourist movements. The UN was born because of the destruction caused by the Second World War, in 1945, and has its headquarters in New York. It began by being made up of 50 countries, and currently there are 193 countries and territories, and its main objective is to contribute to the maintenance of peace among its signatories. As a UN agency specializing in Tourism, the International Tourism Organization (ITO), renamed in 2024 as "UN Tourism", was created in 1974, with its headquarters in Madrid. Made up of 158 countries, UN Tourism is a global forum where tourism policies are discussed and defined and research on tourism is developed, promoting sustainable tourism accessible to all the individuals.

UN Tourism, on the other hand, suggests the application of the World Code of Ethics for Tourism to its signatories, to promote the maximization of economic, social, and cultural development, while seeking to reduce the negative impacts of mass tourism on society and the environment. Portugal joined the ITO in 1976, after the end of the dictatorship and the reestablishment of democracy, on April 25, 1974.

If the twentieth century was characterized by the development of the mass tourism, the advent of the twenty-first century brought, in turn, new technological developments, which contributed more to the exponential growth of tourism. While many of the traditional airlines, namely state-owned ones, were struggling with problems of financial sustainability, new private companies emerged, offering international trips at a very low price. For example, in Europe, Ryanair or Easyjet offer flights to most of the European destinations, for less than a hundred euros. Of course, they do not provide services like the traditional ones, in addition to using the Internet as an asset in terms of cost savings, as online reservations represent decreases in costs. These companies, like others all over the world, contributed to the year 2024 ending with a record number of 1.4 billion tourists worldwide (Pereira, 2025).

At the same time, the emergence of accommodation companies linked to the emergence of the Internet, such as Airbnb or Booking, among others, offering accommodation experiences different from the usual hotels and at much more affordable prices, have contributed to the fact that almost 20% of the world's population has been involved in tourism in the first quarter of the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic, occurred in 2020, led to the confinement of a large part of the world's population. However, the increase and massification of the internet use around the world, related with low prices of services offered by telecommunications companies, as well as devices such as

smartphones, meant that four years later, the flow of tourists has exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The new companies, which emerged from the *world wide web*, increasing remote work, which reached its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic, have also contributed to an unprecedented expansion of the world tourism. The Internet allows to work from distant places, and without the need to share the same physical spaces, leading to the emergence of digital nomads, who originated new forms of tourism.

The massive increase in tourism throughout the twentieth century, and particularly in this first quarter of the twenty-first century, led to its study and in-depth research on the tourism phenomenon. In this sense, to better understand it, several researchers (Ibañez & Rodríguez Villalobos, 2012, Köhler, 2019) have classified it into typologies, based both on the motivations of the trip and on the perceptions and personal experiences arising from these trips, as well as on the type of offer provided by a given place.

In this sense, when we think of cultural tourism, we are not only referring to the cultural heritage as an offer, but also to the interpretations that are made of them by the visitor. We are referring to a tourist who is looking for diversified cultural experiences, but who obviously already has his own repertoire. Silberberg (1995) defines cultural tourism as the "[...] visit by people outside the receiving community, motivated in whole or in part by an interest in historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle and cultural heritage aspects offered by a community, region, group or institution" (p. 361). We consider, however, the most complete definition of Ibañez & Rodríguez Villalobos (2012), for whom cultural tourism

corresponds to trips that are made with the desire to get in touch with other cultures and their cultural identities. One of its main objectives is to know the assets that constitute the cultural heritage (...). The main activities of cultural tourism are related to different community factors, such as the artistic/monumental aspect, popular architecture, exhibitions, ethnic or folkloric facet, the customs, and traditions of a people, the religious or formative aspect, singular, festive, literary, gastronomic, and industrial events. Such activities can be developed in rural or urban areas. (p. 21)

Although they state that "there are no references in the bibliography that unequivocally establish a conversion of cultural tourism into a massive activity" (Ibañez & Rodríguez Villalobos, 2012, p. 21), this can be seen in European cities such as Lisbon, Barcelona, or Venice, to name just a few examples (Magalhães, 2021).

In fact, the definitions of cultural tourism according to the offer are based on the tourist enjoyment of equipment and attractions previously classified as cultural, and although the tourist flow may encourage the classification of heritage as cultural, it is not at all decisive. It is a definition based on the offer of cultural attractions, previously classified as such and suitable for the consumption of the tourist flow (Köhler, 2019, p. 9).

According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, 1976), cultural tourism can be defined as

that form of tourism that aims, among other purposes, to get to know monuments and historical-artistic sites. It has a positive effect on them as much as it contributes, to satisfy its own ends, to their maintenance and protection. This form of tourism justifies, in fact, the efforts that such maintenance and protection require from the human community, due to the socio-cultural and economic benefits that it entails for the entire population involved. Undoubtedly, whatever its motivation and the benefits it has, cultural tourism cannot be disconnected from the negative, harmful, and destructive effects that the massive and uncontrolled use of monuments and sites entails. (p. 2)

Reflecting the exponential increase in the number of tourists that was already being felt at the end of the twentieth century, the ICOMOS revised the charter in 1999, stressing that "excessive tourism can, in the same way as non-existent or poorly managed tourism, harm the physical

integrity and meaning of heritage. Tourism can also lead to the degradation of the natural and cultural spaces of the host communities" (p. 2).

Of note are the concerns expressed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites regarding the negative consequences of excessive tourism, or so-called traditional and mass tourism (Ibañez & Rodríguez Villalobos, 2012). The excess tourist load of a given place can damage its cultural heritage as well as cause conflicts between visitors and those visited. There are several examples of this heritage damage, such as what happened, for example, in Lisbon, in 2016. A young tourist decided to climb to the niche of the Rossio Train Station, knocking down the statue of the Portuguese king Sebastião. The event was widely reported by the Portuguese media at the time, which pointed out that the tourist knocked down the statue of D. Sebastião, made "by the sculptor José Simões de Almeida, inaugurated to the public on June 11, 1890, when the Rossio station opened. Its value and importance are also related to the fact that there are not many statues of D. Sebastião in public space" (Público, 2016) nationally. With the ascent of the young man, "the statue, a work with more than 125 years, did not hold up and gave way, being completely undone" (Público, 2016).

On a visit to museums and historic palaces in Portugal, it is also possible to see the erosion of the heritage and its deterioration due to the large influx of tourists. These factors are clearly visible, for example in the palaces of Mafra and Pena, in Sintra.

In fact, after the interregnum in the large tourist flows, imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, there was once again an exponential increase in tourist flows, with the Portuguese National Institute of Statistics (INE), demonstrating that

in 2024 (preliminary data), tourist accommodation establishments registered 31.6 million guests and 80.3 million overnight stays, reflecting annual increases of 5.2% and 4.0%, respectively. Overnight stays from external markets predominated (70.3% of total overnight stays in 2024), totaling 56.4 million, and registered a growth of 4.8%. The domestic market contributed with 23.9 million overnight stays (+2.4%), numbers that have already exceeded pre-pandemic data in 2019. (INE, 2025)

Portugal, like other European countries, has been a traditional, mass destination (Ibañez & Rodríguez Villalobos, 2012) since the twentieth century. The south of the country attracts national and foreign tourists in search of sun and sea, but in the rest of the country, cultural tourism, including religious tourism, is indeed massive. For example, the cities of Lisbon and Porto received about eight and seven million tourists in 2024, respectively (Publituris, 2025).

This large flow of tourists has brought economic, social, and cultural benefits, enriching Portuguese society. However, the mass tourism it has also raised issues related to the "conflicts between hosts and guests, in which the former see the latter as the source of all evils, blaming them for the increase in noise or pollution, as well as gentrification, among others, and visitors, often with an inclination towards practices of "exoticization" of the societies they visit" (Magalhães & Santos, 2021).

In general, these tourists spend very little time in the places they visit, as it is an ephemeral tourism. In this kind of tourism, visitors flock in masse only to the places that appear on tourist postcards as representatives of the local or national cultural heritage (such as the world heritage, classified by UNESCO, for example). Often, these tourists do not show great concern in developing a remarkable interaction with institutions (museums, libraries, cultural centers, etc.), submerging and interacting with the local community. Tourists would leave more enriched from the trip they made, while effectively contributing to the socio-economic development of the populations visited. This type of tourism is ephemeral and predatory and often has negative consequences for the places visited.

It is intended to develop a more qualitative and less massified tourism, in which the tourist

participates in recreational activities of contact with nature and the cultural expressions of rural, indigenous, and urban communities, respecting the natural, cultural, and historical

heritage of the place they visit, we propose alternative tourism. This type of tourism presupposes that the organizers are aware of natural, social and community values, and that tourists wish to interact with the local population. (Ibañez & Rodríguez Villalobos, 2012, p. 20)

The idea is to develop a sustainable tourism that means

not only the refusal of predatory activities by visitors, but also that they respect the social and cultural frameworks they visit. We understand that the key to a better, more sustainable tourism is not to control the quantity of tourists who visit a certain place, but to its quality. In this perspective, tourists and visited people must have a reflective and open awareness, learning from the intercultural encounters they carry out. Tourism can be an open window to a better world, where interculturality is recognized and practiced by each one of us. (Magalhães & Santos, 2021, p. 9)

This definition includes creative tourism. The development of creative tourism, a term developed by Richards and Raymond in 2000, presupposes that tourism 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 (p. 4). For these authors, creative tourism has the potential to draw on local skills, expertise, and traditions from many areas. For example, the creative tourism may wish to learn about: arts and crafts; design; cookery, gastronomy, and winemaking; health and healing; language; spirituality; nature and landscape; sports and pastimes (Almeida et al., 2021, p. 3). Creative tourism has added advantages for both, the tourist and the communities visited. The involvement of tourists in cultural activities, developed by community organizations, from museums, associations, libraries, folklore groups, and other cultural spaces, is an effective way to keep tourists longer in each place they visit and integrate them into the life of the community. These activities are not at all intended for mass tourism, but presuppose a more sustainable and regenerative tourism, where quality prevails over quantity. The involvement of the tourist with the community, in addition to requiring more time spent in the visited locality, with the inherent consumption, leads to a greater interaction between visitors and visited. Only by knowing the other, in his depth, can we be culturally enriched. In this way, many of the negative mass tourism consequences have been observed in several European cities are avoided.

3. Leiria: from the creative tourism to the sustainable development

In the Portuguese context, Leiria is an economically Portuguese important city, with about 135 thousand inhabitants, it was a regional capital and is the most important city located between Coimbra and Lisbon. Leiria has a privileged geographical location, characterized by the golden beaches of the Atlantic Ocean and the limestone mountains in its interior. In these mountains several rivers are born, such as the Lena River, which was important for the city, supplying it with water. This river runs through the city center and has several bridges, some historic and others bearing witness to more contemporary architecture, almost all of them are an important part of the local cultural heritage.

In the municipalities bordering the city of Leiria there are three monuments, world heritage sites, the monasteries of the Santa Maria da Vitória, located in the municipality of Batalha, about 15 km away, the monastery of Alcobaça, which is about 25 km from Leiria and the Convent of Christ, in Tomar, about 45 km away. In addition to these monuments, visited annually by thousands of tourists, there is also the Marian sanctuary of Fatima. This sanctuary is located 25 km from the city and attracts about 5 to 6 million visitors every year, most of them do not visit the city of Leiria, nor the region, staying in Fátima for only a day or two. For this reason, and even though the region in which the "leiriense" city is located, the Central region of Portugal, have received almost 5 million guests and 8 million overnight stays in 2024, Leiria was visited only by

187 thousand guests in their tourist establishments, corresponding to approximately 297 thousand overnight stays (Gabinete de Estudos e Estratégia, 2025; Turismo do Centro de Portugal, 2025).

The importance of the cultural and bathing tourism for the city is recognized, however, it is intended to develop a less massive and higher quality tourism, a creative tourism, which "in terms of tourist consumption, is more focused on the active posture (of the tourist), as opposed to the cultural tourism that is more linked to a passive attitude" (Magalhães & Santos, 2023, p. 35).

As Magalhães & Santos (2023) point out, creative tourism is located between the

popular culture and the culture of everyday life, since most of its activities, ..., are centered between these two forms of cultural experimentation. To get a sense of this link to everyday culture, it is enough to look at some of the activities proposed for creative tourism in a museum context: production of wine, bread, yogurt, cheese, honey, olive oil, etc., in an artisanal way and in search of traditional knowledge and flavors. These products can then be tasted by the participants, in what is built as an enriching experience of intercultural exchanges. Other experiences arise from traditional crafts, such as learning how to make rugs on old looms, experimenting with traditional techniques of tiles, tin smithing, pottery, etc. It is intended that, first, they learn to make with their own hands and then, that they experience and eat or drink what that participating group has produced. Today there is a whole set of attractive and varied proposals all over the world and in Portugal. (Magalhães & Santos, 2023, p. 35-36)

The main objective of developing creative tourism for the city of Leiria is since tourists can stay longer in the place, thus contributing to the local economic, social, and cultural development, as this type of tourism presupposes the active participation of the tourist in the social, cultural, and economic activities, developed by local organizations. This involvement requires tourists to dedicate more time to getting to know the place visited, while culturally enriching themselves. We will, therefore, be developing a form of tourism that goes beyond sustainability, becoming regenerative. The creative tourism is based on the human connection with itself, on the bonds that, staying longer in the visited place, creates with others, and on an integrated connection with nature (Huerta Molinero, 2023, p. 7). This regenerative action must consider imagination, innovation, and energy, where emotional intelligence and collective intelligence go hand in hand. It is an action where altruism prevails over individualism (Huerta Molinero, 2023). Regenerative tourism "...creates patterns that integrate the needs of human activity with those of the environment. On the other hand, resilience is fundamental to the connection between sustainability and regeneration" (Huerta Molinero, 2023, p. 7). In a context of sustainable development, resilience is a multidimensional concept and is based on all the capacities that allow a human being, home, family, group, environment, economic sector, community, city, region, country, state, etc., to coexist, adapt, and recover from pressures, disruptions, and crises" (Huerta et al., 2021).

Creative tourism is regenerative and promotes the resilience of the city of Leiria, as the activities carried out there presuppose a limited number of participants and require their active engagement with the community and the entire surrounding environment. As Catarina Carvalho, Head of the Division of Cultural Action, Museums and Tourism of the Municipality of Leiria, says,

Creative tourism goes beyond the traditional model of visiting, offering tourists the possibility of participating directly and meaningfully in cultural and artistic activities. This participation can take different forms, such as immersive experimentation, co-creation processes and involvement/proximity to authentic experiences, establishing a close relationship with local communities, artists, artisans, museums, heritage places, among other cultural agents. (Carvalho, personal interview, July 10, 2025)

In the same line of thought, Isabel Brás, a senior technician of the Division of Museums and Cultural Heritage | Castelo de Leiria, states that if

We understand creative tourism as a new concept of tourism that is emerging and that essentially aims to encourage visitors to a more active immersion in the realities of the territories that offer cultural and heritage potential, therefore going beyond a mere visit to places of interest. (Brás, personal interview, July 10, 2025)

In the 21st century, therefore, the creative dimension assumes an unprecedented importance as a standard of the cultural-tourism activity, where “creativity is a process, and creative resources are therefore more sustainable. Whereas physical cultural resources, such as museums and monuments, may wear out over time and become degraded, creative resources are arguably infinitely renewable” (Richards & Raymond, 2000, p. 4).

The emphasis is no longer placed on the subject/object binomial, the tourist who observes the visited passively, to focus on the local community visited by the tourist. The tourist’s active participation in the activities is encouraged by the local community, which develops them with this type of audience in mind. As Marujo et al. (2020) point out,

for UNESCO (2006), creative tourism explores, in a more meaningful and genuine way, the interaction between the visitor and the host community. In the context of the Creative Cities Network, UNESCO (2006) defines creative tourism as a journey directed to an engaging and authentic experience, including a participatory process in learning the arts, heritage, or something characteristic of the local culture of a place, providing a connection with the resident community which is responsible for the creation and maintenance of this living culture. (p. 127)

The creative tourism follows other trends today, such as the development of a creative economy or a creative culture, which are not new, as they were already explored by the new museology in the seventies of the last century (Magalhães, 2003). The New Museology defended the active participation of the local community in the different dimensions of its cultural heritage, from selection, classification, animation, and dissemination, among others. However, too much utopian intention conditioned its success, and the idea of an ecomuseum became more of a fashion than a practice (Ballart Hernández & Juan i Tresserras, 2005). In the twenty-first century it can be said that these ideas are effectively put into practice, successfully, in a symbiosis between creative culture, economy and tourism.

Just as the community dimension of creativity has developed over time, the creative dimension has also expanded in times of the emerging creative economy. Considering these aspects, in 2014 Greg Richards redefined the concept of creative tourism, initially thought by Richards and Raymond (2000) in a report for the OECD on Tourism and Creative Economy as: Knowledge-based creative activities that connect producers, consumers and places, using technology, talent or skill to generate cultural products of intangible meaning, creative content and experiences. (Richards, 2015, p. 2-3)

In the case of the city of Leiria, and regarding this issue, Catarina Carvalho states that:

Creative tourism, as an emerging practice, converges with current concerns in the fields of Museology, Museography and Cultural Mediation. These areas have evolved towards a greater involvement of local communities in the definition, interpretation, and promotion of their own heritage, promoting collaborative, inclusive and participatory approaches. In this context, it is possible to identify a clear articulation between the objectives of creative tourism and the principles that guide good museum and heritage practices, namely regarding to the enhancement of local knowledge, the promotion of cultural diversity, the encouragement of participation in meaningful experiences and the rejection of processes of

cultural trivialization, often associated with the so-called "Disneyfication" of heritage. (Carvalho, personal interview, July 10, 2025)

If we consider that tourism is, in this century, one of the forces of globalization, the awareness of sustainability at the level of the local communities visited, also becomes global. As Richards and Hall (2003) point out, today's societies express concerns about the environment, not only at the level of local communities, but also at the global level.

Local communities become not only important in terms of actions taken to preserve their own immediate environment, but also form part of wider alliances to preserve the environment globally (act local, think global. These involve the NGOs and pressure groups which, representing a membership of like-minded environmentally aware people, can themselves be viewed as communities of interest. (Richards & Hall, 2003, p. 5)

The authors Richards and Hall (2003) continue to state that sustainability is important

because communities need to support themselves based on available resources. As Jan van der Straaten, points out in his study of sustainable tourism development in Alpine region (...), economic necessity is usually the driving force behind the growth of tourism. Without tourists, spatially marginal communities that find it increasingly hard to compete in other spheres with the major metropolitan centers may cease to exist. In this sense, environmental sustainability bound up with concepts of economic, social, cultural, and political sustainability (Richards & Hall, 2003, p. 5).

The question that arises regarding the city of Leiria is not so much related to mass tourism, but to the ephemeral tourism, which contributes little to local economic development. Like other cities, close to the Portuguese capital, Leiria is a place of passage, where tourists stay only a few hours, contributing little to the creation of local wealth.

The region of Leiria, and the city of the same name, played an important role in the constitution of the kingdom of Portugal, almost a thousand years ago. Thus, from the foundation of the city and the country until today, many material and immaterial testimonies have been left by the populations, who passed through, or inhabited, the region. Many of these assets have been listed as cultural heritage.

The urban space, which emerged five thousand years ago as a community, played a fundamental role in the development of the civilizations, "offering exceptional conditions for the generation and accumulation of humanity's cultural legacy The first Egyptian and Sumerian cities invented the calendar, writing, and the division of time, which are still practiced today" (Kolotouchkina, 2018, p. 2). The cities' role as centers of the civilization and of the promotion of social, cultural, and economic activities, among others, deepened in the 20th and 21st centuries, as García Carrizo (2016) highlights, regarding Madrid, which since the beginning of the 20th century has emerged as a major global political, economic, and cultural center.

Leiria also played an important role in the past, primarily due to its contribution to the establishment of the Kingdom of Portugal, as well as to the Portuguese discoveries. These periods left a testament to the civilizational development of the country and even the world.

Mentioning a few: the Leiria castle, built on a rocky massif, dating from the twelfth century. Another cultural heritage of the city is the convent of Santo Agostinho, where the museum of Leiria is located, it was built in the sixteenth century, and the church next to MIMO, Museum of the Moving Image, is the only Romanesque example in the city, dating from the second century. Also, the old Church of Mercy, was built in 1544, on a place where there was previously a synagogue.

All these cultural spaces, visited by more than 328 thousand people, in 2024 (Leiria Município, 2025), should serve as a stage for creative tourism, where sustainability is the most important goal. Quoting Richards & Hall (2003),

the principles of sustainable tourism management (...) indicate the need to involve local communities in the process of sustainable tourism and management. Place-based communities have become central to a holistic concept of sustainability, which embraces and integrates environmental, economic, political, cultural, and social considerations. In this way there is an implicit recognition that to be truly sustainable, the preservation of the “natural” environment must be grounded in the communities and societies and societies which exploit and depend upon it. Most natural environments are culturally constructed (...), and local communities and economic systems may hold the key to their survival or destruction. (p. 5)

The creative tourism has had its development throughout this twenty-first century, identifying four phases of its path, all of them complementary to the development of this type of tourism. Richards (2015) states that “four different types of creative tourism can be identified, which also correspond approximately to the different stages of the development of creative tourism, namely: creative tourism 1.0 (year 2000); Creative Tourism 2.0 (2005); Creative Tourism 3.0 (2010) and Creative Tourism 4.0. (After 2015) (p. 3). In the first case, it is intended to mean learning activities and workshops, the second concerns what it calls destination creative experiences, the third case the links to the creative economy are valued and, finally, it proposes the phase of relational networks and co-creation of experiences (Richards, 2018), therefore, co-creation of experiences between visitors and visitors, appealing to the participation of tourists in the life of the community, which is responsible for managing its natural and cultural resources. This factor is also recognized by Catarina Carvalho when she states that:

In the context of the creative tourism, the visitor is no longer a mere spectator, assuming a close or active role in the construction of his own experience. This participation can take place both through digital means and face-to-face experiences.

A paradigmatic example are the workshops promoted at the “Moinho do Papel” museum, in Leiria, namely the artisanal paper production workshop. Other project developed by this museum is and the “knead the bread”. This project allows the participants direct contact with traditional techniques and expressions of the local intangible heritage, promoting a deeper and more sensitive relationship with the local culture.

The offer of immersive cultural experiences extends to other initiatives, such as the “Leiria Medieval Music Cycle”, whose programming is the result of a process of historical-musicological research. This cycle proposes concerts with repertoires that are estimated to have been heard in the Castle of Leiria in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They are performed with replicas of that time instruments, reconstructed based on medieval manuscripts. It is a strategy of the heritage recontextualization that gives to the visitor an enriching experience, bringing him closer to a historical experience.

In this same context, the “Experimental Archaeology” workshops promoted by the Interpretive Center of the “Abrigo do Lagar Velho/Museum of Leiria” deserve to be highlighted, where it is possible to experiment with prehistoric techniques such as lighting fire, stone carving, or cave painting. These activities exemplify an active and sensorial pedagogical approach, which values practical experimentation and the direct involvement of audiences, contributing to greater cultural appropriation. (Carvalho, personal interview, July 07, 2025)

The creative tourism “does not only emerge as a new approach to the cultural tourism. Creative tourism adds dimensions that were not yet markedly present in the tourist experience and are the result of a broader context of society”, (Almeida, Carvalho & Silveira, 2021, p. 136), underlining the interaction between the visited community and the tourist who visits it. As Catarina Carvalho says,

There is, therefore, a growing trend on the part of the cultural spaces in Leiria towards creating differentiating, engaging experiences adapted to the interests of visitors, seeking to make each visit memorable and meaningful. It is precisely in this convergence between emotional involvement, collaborative creation, and cultural enhancement that the proposal of sustainable creative tourism is inscribed, in a close connection with the contemporary museum and the heritage practices (Carvalho, personal interview, July 10, 2025).

Depending on the specific characteristics of each territory, the offer is also differentiated and "creative tourism thus plays a crucial role in the local development because it diversifies and preserves culture, contributes to job creation and develops cultural and creative industries" (Marujo et al., 2020, p. 15), bringing together individuals from different cultures (Magalhães & Santos, 2023, p. 37).

As Magalhães and Santos (2023) point out, the creative tourism development led to the establishment of networks, such as the "creative tourism network" in 2010 (Creative Tourism Network, 2025). In this network it is possible to find information and short videos about the concept, advantages, expectations of creative tourism and what creative tourists are looking for, among other subjects. The first Portuguese city to join this network was the city of Loulé (Algarve), conceptualizing and implementing the "Loulé Criativo" project (p. 37).

According to these authors, there is a

certain creative turn of the cultural tourism (which) seems to have an impact on different regions of the world, as can be seen in Richards (2018), a text in which the author deals with the dimension of the creative tourism on a global scale (Oceania, with emphasis on New Zealand where, since the beginning – 2002, creative tourism has been installed; Europe, which he considers the "cradle" of creative tourism; Asia, in which he points out the case of the creation of "creative neighborhoods" in former industrial areas of China; Africa, where this type of tourism is still very incipient; and the Americas, alluding, regarding the creative cities that are emerging throughout the continent, especially in Canada and the USA, to the Brazilian case, a country that he considers to be at the forefront of creative tourism in South America)".(Magalhães & Santos, 2023, p. 38)

In Portugal, this type of tourism is already well known and is quite widespread. As an example, we cite the

CREATOUR project (Developing Creative Tourism Destinations in Small Cities and Rural Areas), which ran from 2016 to 2020, and aimed to evaluate and monitor the implementation of the creative tourism network in our country, namely, contributing to the development of rural areas. This project has given a great increase to this type of tourism ... promoting co-creation processes. (Magalhães & Santos, 2023, p. 38)

In this sense, the concern of the Leiria city in developing differentiating activities that bring together these different cultural communities is highlighted, recognizing the local community that

Museums and heritage sites have been asserting themselves as dynamic spaces for creation, encounter, and cultural transformation. When properly integrated into exhibition narratives, museography and mediation strategies, the practices associated with creative tourism contribute decisively to the enhancement of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The creative tourism allows an active, critical and participatory education, strengthening the links between cultural institutions and local communities, as well as to develop an ethical tourism, promoting a sustainable and resilient development. (Carvalho, personal interview, July 10, 2025)

There are examples of the implementation of activities by the municipality of Leiria, with the aim of promoting creative tourism, throughout the year 2024, in addition to those already

mentioned above. Many of these initiatives, and other innovative achievements are being developed during this year 2025. Among these, we highlight

the holding of events such as the “Medieval Music Cycle”, with concerts and workshops that explored medieval Iberian culture, and the success of the “Agora initiative”, which brought to the castle a diversified program with thematic exhibitions and presentations. The commemorations of the 25th anniversary of the “Lagar Velho and Criança do Lapedo Shelter” discovery and the “José Mattoso Forum”, passing through the European Heritage Days, were events that brought together researchers and specialists from all over the world. They contributed to the enrichment of knowledge about the cultural and archaeological heritage of the region.

Leiria was the scene of several relevant celebrations and events. Example of these were the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the 25th of April, which included the exhibition “Artists in the Factory”, with works by Tereza Arriaga, Joaquim Oliveira and Manuel Filipe, 1942-45, artists who witnessed, at the time, the harsh working conditions of the factory workers, open to the public at the m|j|mo – Museum of the Moving Image.

We highlight too the Álvaro Siza's exhibition, “A Dialogue between the Past and the Present”, on display at the “BAG – Banco das Artes Galeria” opened on March 2, 2024. This exhibition materializes a mediation between the past architecture of Ernesto Korrodi and the present of Álvaro Siza, where the Paper Mill project figures prominently. (...).

Inaugurated on May 22, on the Leiria Municipality Day, the “Black Box – Leiria Artistic Creation Platform”, also deserves a prominent place in the Municipality's commitment to remain at the forefront of the cultural development.

(...)

Throughout 2024, a varied program was maintained and increased, with temporary and permanent exhibitions, shows, activities for families and thematic, danced and/or staged visits. The success of events such as the “Leiria Medieval”, the “International Composition Competition” and the “International Congress of Ibero-American Anthropology”, among others, demonstrate the municipality's ability to attract audiences from different origins, both national and international.

(...)

In 2024, the people of Leiria were increasingly interested in learning about their origins, consolidating themselves as true ambassadors.

In addition, the municipality has stood out for its support for creativity and music, as evidenced by the 35,322 participants in the events of the Leiria Creative City of Music (LCCM).

Leiria continues to be an example of cultural dynamism, consolidating itself as a reference destination on the national and international scene, offering its visitors a rich and diversified experience, and reaffirming its position as a vital center of culture and history. (Leiria Município, 2025)

There are still many suggestions given by the local community, with a view to the development of the creative tourism in Leiria. Isabel Brás says that,

if hypothetically a creative tourism program were implemented in the municipality of Leiria with the collaboration of several cultural agents, our suggestions would be for visitors to learn to dance local folklore, enroll in masterclasses in Theater Groups, Dance Academies, Music Conservatories, Philharmonics in the various parishes. Visitors and visited people could present their shows, being co-creators in workshops, artistic residencies, educational service activities in the castle and in museums. They could create pottery pieces in Bajouca, decorating a float and taking it to a party or pilgrimage, taking cooking classes and beating eggs in the making of Brisas do Lis candy, among others. (Brás, personal interview, July 10, 2025)

The creative tourism development in Leiria would be an opportunity for the city as it constitutes "a significant factor of attractiveness for visitors, which would contribute to a greater cultural and local economic dynamic. More and more people are interested in learning about the genuine traditions and culture of the places they visit, and this characteristic of active participation would result in a unique and memorable learning and leisure experiences (Brás, personal interview, July 10, 2025).

In summary, our objective was to analyze the relationships between the concept of cultural tourism and that of creative tourism, to understand a creative tourism as a form of tourism capable of contributing to the sustainable and resilient development of a local community. The creative tourism focuses mainly on quality and not quantity, providing activities aimed at the active tourist offer that reinforce relationships and emotions between visitors and visited, contributing not only to the preservation of the local cultural heritage, but also to the mutual understanding between tourists and the local communities visited.

4. Conclusions

We concluded that, despite Portugal receiving a high number of tourists for its size and peripheral situation in Europe, these tourists are concentrated in small areas of the country. The concentration of 30 million tourists, who visited Portugal in 2024, around the Algarve, the two largest Portuguese cities, and the sanctuary of Fátima, poses some problems to these places, considering their maximum capacity to receive visitors. And even in these places, the distribution of tourists is heterogeneous, concentrated mainly in the historic centers of the two large cities.

This tourist mass poses problems to these places but represents, on the other hand, great opportunities for the rest of the country, which still has the capacity to receive tourists, as is the case of Leiria.

However, before it is too late, the question that arises regarding Leiria and its municipality has to do with the tourism that is desired for the city. Is it intended to be a traditional, massified, ephemeral and passive cultural tourism? Or do we still can develop an active creative tourism, which provides communication between visitors and visited?

The creative tourism represents a great opportunity for the sustainable and resilient development of Leiria, since it presupposes the participation of the local community, as well as tourists, in common activities, carried out through the cultural heritage that is in the region and in the city of Leiria.

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