

9. HANDICRAFT AND CREATIVE TOURISM: THE ‘MÃOS DE CÁ’ PROJECT

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Abstract:

Handicrafts play a key role in the destinations’ development and in the territories’ valorisation. The relationship between handicrafts and creative tourism is, in many locations, a strategy to attract tourists, and also a means to ensure the sustainability of many handicraft traditions that are rooted within a community.

When consuming handicrafts, the (cultural and creative) tourist is more demanding. This means that, when tourists visit a city, town or village, they are no longer satisfied with merely buying a piece of handicrafts to remember. The tourist wants to see, to participate, to learn and to take something new with him. The tourist’s participation in creative craft workshops not only enriches the tourist experience, but also contributes to the community’s pride by showing ‘others’ its cultural singularities.

This chapter aims to describe the role of CACO, the Odemira Council of Artisans Association (Associação de Artesãos do Concelho de Odemira) as a creative tourism provider.

Keywords: Handicraft; Creative Tourism; Cultural Heritage; Territory

1. Introduction

In the world of today, demand for consumption of heritage which is linked to a place's traditional arts and crafts is on the increase. Within this trend is the so-called creative tourism, the main objective of which is to provide tourists with active experiences (Richards and Wilson, 2006; Richards, 2011; Tan, Kung and Luh, 2013).

Creative tourism connects creativity to places and provides unique cultural experiences (Cabeça, Gonçalves, Marques and Tavares, 2020) to tourists who want to learn something new about the cultural heritage they are visiting. Indeed, one of the motivations of creative tourists is to experience the unique characteristics of a place. One of these particularities is the designated heritage, which functions as the main tourist attraction in many regions.

Creative tourism, if well planned, brings diversity to the tourist offer and preserves regions' cultural heritage. In fact, creative tourism can regain and re-value a place's identity. But it can also be an engine of economic development in these territories and can attract tourists who are interested in the process of learning and interaction (Carvalho, Lima and Kastenzholz, 2014).

In the Alentejo region, creative tourism is especially based on intangible processes (song, painting, gastronomy, art, handicraft, etc.) that are part of the social and cultural identity of the different communities. The aim of this chapter is to describe the role of the Odemira Municipality Crafters' Association (CACO) in offering creative tourism.

2. Creative tourism and handicraft: how are they related?

Handicraft bears witness to the life of a people (Vives, 1983). In other words, it is linked to a community's way of life and to the cultural traditions of a region. This implies knowledge and skills being passed on from generation to generation.

Handicraft plays a fundamental role in the tourism sector, as it enriches the region's tourist offer and mediates contact with cultures (Ramos, 2007). According to Santos and Silva (2016), the more genuine a crafter's work in a place, "the more visitors he/she will attract and the greater the potential impact of his/her art on the cultural and social quality of the destination" (p. 230). For Castilho, Dorsa, Santos and Oliveira (2017), artisanal art can be understood "as a genuine

expression of a culture that can be the hallmark of a local culture, because, in creating their pieces, artisans use specific techniques to express their know-how and their tacit knowledge, which have been accumulated from past generations, and the original expression that marks their culture and territoriality” (p. 193).

For Brandão, Silva and Fischer (2013) this is “... a cultural activity that is constructed, transmitted and modified over time and maintains the ways of life, knowledge and actions of a particular society” (p. 199). According to these authors, handicraft can be understood as a “creative process that generates symbolic value and has a strong relationship with the culture, tradition and identity of the place where it is produced; it can be considered a creative industry which is capable of enabling and incorporating new cultural, economic, social and technological dynamics” (Brandão et al., 2013, p.199).

There is currently great demand for the consumption of heritage related to a place’s traditional arts and crafts. Within this trend is the so-called creative tourism, the main objective of which is to provide tourists with active learning experiences (Richards, 2011; Tan, Kung and Luh, 2013). For this reason, cities and towns are increasingly turning to the culture associated with them, especially artisanal products, to offer genuine, memorable experiences to tourists. Gonçalves and Costa (2017) consider that the “essence of creative tourism is found in activities and experiences related to self-realisation and self-expression, through which tourists can become co-interpreters and co-creators while developing their creative skills” (p. 1193). The value of tourist experiences is focused on the tourist’s emotional component; therefore, it is products and services with a high symbolic and cultural content that, in a way, provide creative tourists with an experience that can be seen as enriching and unforgettable.

For Brandão et al. (2013), handicraft “is an activity that interprets the culture of a people through the senses and the webs of meanings that constitute it, while maintaining a close relationship with the traditions, ways of life and the identity of the place in which it is produced” (p. 201). According to Coriolano (2009) therefore, it can be “directed towards tourist activities, as a way of valuing cultural heritage and the people’s cultural representations” (p. 160).

Cunha (2012) states that handicraft, in addition to playing a vital role in a community’s economy and rural life, “combines the needs of consumers and preservation of the historic and natural environment, while keeping traditional skills and abilities alive” (p. 42). For Santos and Silva (2016), “handicraft is the purest manifestation of creative popular art performed by skilled hands; it

is almost always little known and it works in keeping with the taste and intuition of the innate artist, whose learning and maturity are garnered in the school of life, where the student is his own teacher” (p. 214).

Handicraft, whether local or regional, serves as a testament to a community’s cultural identity. In a way, it embodies the wealth of heritage associated with a particular place. Creative tourism presupposes active interaction between tourists and a community’s cultural declarations, and so handicrafts, given their symbolic and cultural value, hold great potential for the development of creative tourism (Brandão et al, 2013).

3. CACO and the CRIAR centre

CACO (Odemira Municipality Crafters’ Association) was formed with the objective of preserving and enhancing traditional arts and crafts associated with cultural heritage in the municipality of Odemira.

The main missions of CACO are: a) to promote activities that encourage knowledge sharing and the dissemination of artisanal activity; b) to promote professional training for artisans; c) to support the commercialisation of artisanal products, particularly the work of its members; d) to establish contact with entities at different levels which have an interest or intervene directly in the arts and crafts sector (CACO, n.d).

To promote handicraft, CACO created a space named CREATE (Network Centre for Innovation in Regional Handicraft), which consists of the following workspaces: jewellery; weaving; needlecraft; pottery and woodwork (Figure 1). The premises also include two exhibition rooms and a shop which sells the work of 42 associates.

Figure 1 and 2: The CRIAR premises.



Source: CACO (2019)

The mission of CRIAR is: a) to promote enjoyment of heritage linked to traditional arts and crafts arising from tourist activity, safeguarding its contribution to the territory's competitiveness; b) to provide qualifications for new artisans via the planning and realisation of quality training projects that can value and promote professions related to handicraft, making them attractive to young people looking for a professional career in this field; c) to establish regional partnerships with a view to valuing, organising, regulating, developing and modernising traditional arts and crafts; d) to provide guidance in the conception and development of new products and in innovation based on current trends anchored in the cultural identity of the municipality of Odemira; e) to promote artisanal products with added cultural value, combining tradition and innovation, through events, creative residences and training courses in handicraft with the aim of providing more in-depth transmission of technical knowledge and also stimulating creativity; f) to promote traditional arts and crafts: constantly working for the qualification of artisans in terms of knowledge and techniques; ensuring the promotion of quality products and services; guaranteeing the development of artisanal micro-enterprises; to value the status of artisans and centres of artisanal production (CACO, n.d).

In addition to its six principles and by means of training in handicraft, CRIAR aims to pursue the following objectives: to provide full transmission of technical knowledge and stimulate participants' creativity; to develop proposals for tourist excursions and interpretative infrastructures that include centres of artisanal production; to collaborate with regional entities with a view to promoting regional handicrafts within the scope of rural tourism, in addition to providing technical support to creative tourism projects that include initiatives for cultural and ethnographic activities (CACO, n.d).

3.1. The 'Mãos de cá' ('Hands from Here') project

Under the scope of the CREATOUR Project (Creative Tourism Destination Development in Small Cities and Rural Areas) and in order to teach people how to work with Odemira handicrafts, CACO created the **Mãos de cá** ('Hands from Here') initiative.

The creative offer **Mãos de cá** aims to be a distinct cultural tourist product in the area of Odemira. The main aim of the initiative is to promote and preserve local traditions, but also to attract tourists and provide creative experi-

ences associated with the ‘sense of place’ of the community in which they are carried out. It is of note that tourists are increasingly demanding in their acts of consumption. They no longer want to see only how handicrafts are made or buy a craft item which is representative of the region they visit. Tourists want to participate, learn to do things and take knowledge away with them.

In the **Mãos de cá** project, the following creative workshops can attract tourists:

- a) beginner sessions (1.5 to 3 hours), in which they will have a brief tourist experience that allows real contact with the traditional arts and crafts that take place at the CRIAR Arts and Crafts Centre;
- b) medium-length sessions (4 to 6 hours) that take place in the Association’s workshop area and a set of visit activities (a combination of car trips and pedestrian routes) that are particularly based on artisans’ ateliers and provide a workshop in areas such as jewellery, pottery, weaving and reuse. The activities take place in Vale-Ferro, Odemira, Boavista do Pinheiros and Longueira, which are also linked to items in the built, biological and landscape heritage.

The **Mãos de cá** project is aimed at tourists and/or visitors, but also at residents. In other words, all activities are available to the population of the municipality of Odemira. Community involvement in creative workshops contributes to the continuation of habits and customs into new generations. Indeed, only the community can maintain and preserve the true essence of the cultural heritage associated with a place. Activities can help the elderly to recall their historical roots. The participation of younger participants, in particular, means they can have their first contact with the traditional arts and crafts of their municipality and it also maintains cultural heritage. Creative activities are also available for a range of services linked to tourism (accommodation, restaurants, transport companies, etc.), as these allow them to direct their customers to undertake these experiences and thus contribute to prolonging the average stay in the municipality and make their own businesses profitable.

3.1.1. Creative tourism offer

The activities proposed by the **Mãos de cá** project advance the development of new skills/abilities for participants, particularly in terms of knowledge of artisanal techniques in pottery, weaving, jewellery, basketry, etc.

In these activities, participants can acquire skills at different levels ranging from beginner (participants have their first contact with different techniques) to a more advanced level, especially for participants with more established knowledge. The 'Be a Weaver' activity was developed as part of the CRE-ATOUR project.

3.1.1.2. The 'Be a Weaver' activity

Traditional weaving uses handcrafted tools and technologies which are characteristic of each region. Artisanal activity can only be genuine if it involves artisans who are the guardians of the host culture. In the 'Be a Weaver' creative offer (Figure 2), participants have the opportunity to get to know a unique set of circumstances that is an intrinsic part of the local culture of the municipality of Odemira. It should be noted that for Santos and Silva (2016), visitors who travel in search of cultural knowledge are increasingly interested in active experiences. According to the authors, they want to learn "from the people of that place and see these meetings as the possibility for a new experience, taking some art home with them and becoming practitioners and consumers of cultural tourism" (Santos and Silva, 2016, p. 229).

Figure 3 and 4: Be a Weaver activity.



Source: CACO (2019)

The 'Be a Weaver' activity aims to capture the interest of tourists or visitors who are seeking to learn about the experiences of other women, particularly in creative areas. Figure (2) shows that the participants join a learning process about a traditional craft (weaving) related to the Odemira community. The activity also allows social interaction between participants. This interaction pro-

vides knowledge acquisition and in a way modifies their view of the world and also adds value to the human relationship (Marujo, 2012).

4. Final comments

The handicraft produced by the artisans at CRIAR constitutes a fundamental pillar in strengthening tourist activity in the municipality of Odemira. By means of creative workshops (weaving, basketry, jewellery, etc.), tourists go on a cultural and historical journey through the heritage of the locality they are visiting. The creative workshops promoted by the **Mãos de cá** project use culture to enable dialogue between ‘us’ and ‘others’.

Handicraft is a means of communicating the culture of a community and therefore the customs and traditions of a place are a relic both for those who promote tourism and also for culturally motivated tourists (Marujo, 2012). For this author, traditions may change over time, but they do not disappear. Indeed, in some locations they flourish and stay alive because of tourism. Cultural associations, however, are also essential for these traditions to be sustainable.

Acknowledgments

This work has the financial support of Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT / MEC) through national funds and is co-financed by FEDER through the Joint Activities Programme of COMPETE 2020 and the Regional Operational Programmes of Lisbon and Algarve under the project CEATOUR (nº 16437).

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