



# Tourism, culture and creativity: The case of the CREATOUR project in the Alentejo/Portugal region

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**Abstract:** Relations between tourism and the creative industries differ from those between tourism and culture, but may have significant affinities in some territories. However, there are few empirical studies in the scientific literature that address the possible connections between them in Portugal, despite their unquestionable interest. For this reason, this article presents how the CREATOUR project put tourism, culture and creativity in dialogue in the tourist destination of Alentejo, in Portugal. We used the case study as a research strategy, followed by content analysis of several informative records which were generated meanwhile by the multiple work dynamics of the project itself. The results show that creative tourism has a significant relationship with cultural tourism and is an important instrument to enhance the development of rural territories in the region studied, provided that several premises are considered.

**Keywords:** Alentejo; CREATOUR; Culture, Creative Tourism.

## 1. Introduction

When developing a theoretical study in tourism, exploring the fundamental concepts under discussion and addressing their synergies is almost unavoidable. When concepts are about very close realities, discussion of similar and differentiating aspects can be controversial, especially in the area of their boundaries. This article presents how the CREATOUR project ‘Creative Tourism Destination Development in Small Cities and Rural Areas’ put tourism, culture and creativity into dialogue in the tourist destination of Alentejo, in Portugal. Although OECD [1] refers and justifies that the relation between tourism and the creative industries may differ from those between tourism and culture, in the present study some affinities between them will be explored regarding the project. So far, the various scientific approaches regarding this project have already demonstrated the synergies among them, as has the diversity of positive influences they have generated so far. For example, studies have been made with focus on the role of pilot organisations and projects in some regions [2], creative tourism and development of destinations [3], exploring how creative tourism can be catalysed in small cities and rural areas [4], good and not so good practices [5], how it can contribute to cultural production [6], discussing methodological approach for developing creative tourism offers (2019), how creative tourism can contribute to sustainable development [7], or how the research-practice collaboration has been explored and challenged [8]. With this article we intend to contribute to enriching the knowledge already generated in the scope of the project, with a particular focus on the

subnet created in the Alentejo. The research strategy is the case study, based on a descriptive research that explores and explains some main facts and figures regarding the regional context and provides some insights that can be considered in further theoretical or practical approaches. It involves different data sources produced by the research dynamics associated with the project. The article is organised in several sections. After this introduction, a brief literature review related with tourism, culture and creative tourism activities and dynamics will be presented. In the section three, a brief characterisation of the Alentejo region of Portugal, the territory under analysis, will be presented. The study case on the CREATOUR project will be presented, firstly providing a general view in the Portuguese national context and then in the Alentejo region.

## 2. Tourism, Culture and Creative Tourism

Tourism is correlated to the movement of citizens to places outside their usual environment of residence, generating multiple dynamics in economic, social, cultural and environmental contexts. According to United Nations & UNWTO (2010), tourism “refers to the activity of visitors” (p. 98) and “the tourism industries comprise all establishments for which the principal activity is a tourism characteristic activity” (p. 99). Several sources refer to cultural tourism as a product, but according to the United Nations & UNWTO (2010), the notion of “‘tourism product’ is not related to the concept of “product” used in economic statistics, but rather to that used by professionals in the tourism business to market specific packages or destinations” (p. 26), generating several classifications that are increasingly requested and used by tourism players as a marketing tool, such as cultural tourism. “A ‘tourism product’ represents a combination of different aspects (characteristics of the places visited, modes of transport, types of accommodation, specific activities at destinations, etc.) around a specific centre of interest, such as nature tours, life on farms, visits to historical and cultural sites, visits to a particular city, the practice of specific sports, the beach, etc.” [9]. The question is how culture-based creative tourism can be seen as a tourist product. Another interesting question is how culture has been approached by the creative tourism sector in small cities and rural areas in Portugal, specifically in the field of culture-based creative tourism. Culture can be expressed in so many different ways and contexts, as can creativity. As so, the combinations that can be made between organizations, cultural elements/assets, technologies, spaces/territories, customer profiles, and business strategies for generating tourism creative services are as wide as human and technological imagination can produce. Some concepts of creative tourism also highlight the open dynamics of this aspect of the creative economy. Creative tourism is presented by Richards and Raymond [10] as “tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are taken” (p. 18); by Raymond [11] as “a more sustainable form of tourism that provides an authentic feel for a local culture through informal, hands-on workshops and creative experiences. Workshops take place in small groups at tutors' homes and places of work; they allow visitors to explore their creativity while getting closer to local people” (p. 145); and for UNESCO [12] it is “travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative